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PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST DISTANCE EDUCATION ON TEACHERS' PERFORMANCE IN THE BASIC SCHOOLS OF KWAHU WEST MUNICIPALITY

JOYCE KWAKYEWAA DANKYI, LYDIA AFRAMEA DANKYI

Assist. Lecturer, College of Distance Education, University of Cape Coast

E-mail: jdenkyi@ucc.edu.gh, lydia.dankyi@ucc.edu.gh

ABSTRACT

The study investigated the perceived effects of University of Cape Coast Distance Education on teachers' performance in the Basic Schools of Kwahu West Municipality. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods with descriptive survey as a design. Stratified and the purposive sampling methods were used in selecting 201 respondents, comprising 46 headteachers, 154 junior high school teachers from the seven circuits within the municipality and the coordinator for the centre. The instruments used were questionnaires and an interview schedule. Data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

The results revealed that the distance teacher education programme of the College of Distance Education of the University of Cape Coast is fulfilling its purpose of upgrading the academic and professional competencies of a large number of teachers in the basic schools in the Kwahu West Municipality, raising their performance level in the area of their subject matter knowledge, their instructional planning and strategies for lesson delivery as well as assessment of their students. These impacts are not without constraints such as those related to effective time management skills and the ability to combine work and study successfully. The study recommend to management of the programme that guidance and counselling units should be established in every study centre to provide support services to students in the form of guidance and counselling.

Keywords: *Teachers' Performance (TP), Distance education programme (DEP), Teachers professional development (TPD)*

INTRODUCTION

Globally, in every school, the teacher is the one who helps students to learn. He or she contributes to the learning of the students in a number of ways and in some instances serves as a role model to the student. The teacher's role goes well beyond information giving, with the teacher having a range of key roles to play in the education process. According to (Biggs, 1999), what one sees as good teaching depends on what conception of teaching one has. Basically, there are two concepts of teaching strategies, namely teacher-centred and student-centred education. If students are to learn desired outcomes in a reasonably effective manner, then the teacher's fundamental task is to get students to engage in learning activities that are likely to result in their achievement of those outcomes (Harden & Crosby, 2000). The teacher is thus, the one that translates educational philosophy and objectives into knowledge and skills that students require.

For the teacher to play his/her role of teaching efficiently and effectively there is the need for him/her to have requisite knowledge and skills. This is because, the teacher is seen as an expert who is knowledgeable in his/her field and conveys that knowledge to students usually by word of mouth. In transmitting the knowledge, the teacher may also assist the student to interpret the knowledge using one of a variety of educational strategies by which the teacher explains the subject matter to the student.

The importance attached to the role of the teacher calls for continuous and proper development of the teacher (Darling-Hammond, 1998). This makes the quest for knowledge for teachers to be on the increase. The teachers' desire for development and the acquisition of new knowledge have necessitated them to seek ways of acquiring them through distance learning. The limited classrooms and lack of other facilities in most institutions have made providers of teacher education to realise that they can cater for learners who do not gain admission

into regular university systems, through distance learning. This is because most institutions of higher learning have realised that distance education could be used as a vehicle to meet the demand for higher education in all aspects of study (Owoeye, 2004).

The development of teachers is critical in implementing the Millennium Development Goal and Education for All by 2015 (Sekyere, 2011). It is only through the development of teachers in the country that could ensure that every child in the classroom gets the attention of a well-trained and developed teacher who possesses the current pedagogical skills and strategies to impart knowledge to the pupils. Thus, developing teachers for the achievement of the 'Education for All' agenda is a challenge for the nation. Yet, the teacher-development agenda of the country through distance education grapples with a number of challenges such as inadequate facilitators, lack of funds, lack of teacher motivation and commitment (Nkrumah, 2012). This is because the existing structures are not able to provide the requisite number of trained teachers.

Distance education is seen by all as an opportunity offered for teachers to develop themselves and also to upgrade their knowledge and skills. Currently, there are over thirty thousand teachers pursuing both Diploma and Post-Diploma programmes in Basic Education (Dankyi, 2013) at the University of Cape Coast (UCC), College of Distance Education (CoDE). Distance education is used as a form of support for formal education directly or as an in service training on the job development. Distance education has been used effectively for the development of both the professional and unprofessional teachers in other countries, including Ghana.

Despite the benefits of distance education as a tool for teacher development, in Ghana the programme is heavily criticised by individuals and stakeholders of education. The distance education programme is considered by people as a mediocrity type of developing teachers and in most cases blame teachers for the failure of pupils as a result of their behaviour. The recent criticism levelled against the programme is poor Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) results. Among the critics was the Deputy Eastern Regional Minister, who expressed concern about the negative effect the distance learning system was having on pupils as a result of which most of them performed poorly at the

BECE. The Deputy Regional Minister has therefore called on the Ghana Education Service to have a second look at the distance learning initiative (Kofoya-Tetteh, 2012).

The distance education learners are criticized for using class hours to learn in order to pass their examinations while the pupils who should be guided in their lessons by teachers had been neglected and "if this behaviour goes on, then the BECE results will continue to be poor" (Kofoya-Tetteh, 2012, p. 23). The varied views expressed concerning teachers' development through distance education calls for a study to be conducted into the usefulness of the programme to the teachers, the pupils and the general improvement of education in the country and particularly, Kwahu West Municipality, in the Eastern Region of Ghana. This study therefore examines the perceived effects of the UCC distance education on teachers' performance from the perspective of head teachers and teachers who have enrolled in the Distance Education programme of the UCC.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to assess the perceived effects of the UCC distance education on teachers' performance in the Kwahu West Municipality in the Eastern Region of Ghana. Specifically, this study was designed to:

- 1 Examine the perceived effects of the UCC distance education programmes on teachers' performance.
- 2 Assess how the head teachers of basic schools see the performance of the teachers on the programme before and after enrolling.

Significance of the Study

The outcome of this study would create awareness among the teachers pursuing the distance education programmes. They would have fair knowledge about the effect of distance education on their performance. This would help them to continue to do their best in pursuit of their duties. Information from this study would help the planners and implementers of the programme with regard to the situations on the ground so that they can improve the model in order to make it a success. The recommendations that would be provided would help the universities also to reorganise and structure the programmes to meet the needs of the student teachers and the society at large.

In addition, the study would help the organisers of the programme to schedule time for examination for the end of semester to coincide with the time on which basic schools are on holidays to create more time for the teachers to study their course materials for the exams not to the detriment of other learners who are not teachers. Finally, the results and findings of this study would serve as literature and source of reference materials for other researchers who may want to embark on similar studies related to distance education.

Methodology

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods with descriptive survey as its design. The target population used for this study were public junior high school teachers in Kwahu West Municipality who have been enrolled in the distance education programme of the UCC. Also, headteachers of public junior high schools in Kwahu West Municipality in the Eastern Region of Ghana and the course coordinators representing the UCC in the municipality. From records obtained from the Kwahu West Municipality office and the study centre, this consisted of 255 teachers, 53 headteachers from 53 public junior high schools as well as one centre coordinator. The Kwahu-West Municipality is made up of seven circuits.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

The sample size for the study was 201. This consisted of one centre coordinator, 46 headteachers and 154 junior high school teachers pursuing the University of Cape Coast distance education programmes. The choice of the 46 head teachers and the 154 teachers was decided because according to (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970), the corresponding sample size for a population of 255 and 53 is 154 and 46 respectively.

The centre coordinator is the manager of the various distance education centres for UCC in the Kwahu-West Municipality. He represents the university as implementer of institution's policies on the running of distance education programmes. The second category was headteachers. These were the managers of the various schools for which teachers on the distance education programmes are found. As part of their responsibilities they appraise their teachers at least every academic year. The last category was junior high school teachers pursuing the UCC distance education

programmes. These are teachers who are currently benefiting from the programme.

The choice of the 46 junior high schools in the study area was by simple random sampling and the table of random numbers method was used. Teachers in the sampled schools were stratified into seven circuits, and proportional sampling technique was used to select the required number of teachers from each circuit. The choice of the headteachers of the 46 sampled schools was by purposive sampling procedure. This is because, the heads are the right subjects who can give appropriate assessment of teachers in their schools and also give correct responses to the questions that was used to collect the data for the study. However, the simple random sampling technique was used to select at least three teachers each from the schools that made up the circuit. Where the number present was less than three, all the teachers were used for the study. With respect to the centre coordinators, the only coordinator for CCE in the municipality was purposively selected because of his richness in the information about how distance education is organised at the study centre.

Instruments

Questionnaire and interview schedule were the main instruments used for the study. Two sets of questionnaires were used, one for teachers who are offering Distance learning programmes and the other for headteachers. In this study to make it attractive and interesting, the choice of close-ended format was adopted because they were easier to be completed since they did not need any extensive writing. The items were also easier to be administered, coded and analysed. The likert-type scale of structuring items was adopted for the closed ended items. The items were constructed based on five, four and three point likert-type scales. The headteachers' questionnaire contains 34 items whilst those of the student teachers were made up of 37 items.

The centre coordinator for the UCC distance education in the municipality was interviewed. The interview was a structured form where the specific questions to be asked and the order of questions were predetermined and set by the researcher.

Data Collection Procedure

The data was collected mainly by the researcher using the instruments designed for the data collection. A familiarisation visit was first made to the schools to explain the intent and purpose of the study to the respondents and established rapport with the respondents. Two weeks was used in locating and seeking the involvement of heads and their teachers. During the rapport establishment weeks, a date was fixed for the administration of the instruments. This was done in order to curb the incidence of absenteeism on the part of the subjects on the day when the questionnaire was administered.

During the actual administration of the instrument, in each school the respondents were called to a meeting and the purpose of the study was explained to them. The respondents were also assured of anonymity and confidentiality. After the briefing, the questionnaires were distributed to the respondents. The researcher went through each of the items on the questionnaires with the respondents. The respondents were allowed time to seek for clarification on the questionnaire, after which they were allowed time to complete the questions. In the case of the head teachers, the questionnaire was given to each to be completed in their offices after the briefing. This procedure was followed in all the schools visited for the collection of the data for the purpose of the study. The completed questionnaires were collected the same day immediately after completion and this was to avoid any external influence and also ensured high return rate. The procedure was replicated in the rest of the schools selected.

To obtain information about the organisation of the UCC distance education programme at the only study centre within the municipality, an appointment was booked with the coordinator. On the day of appointment, an interview guide containing structured items was used to interview the coordinator where the responses were recorded on a sheet of paper.

Data Analysis

The retrieved questionnaires were first edited, coded and converted into the actual variables of interest. The number of questionnaires retrieved was 200, 154 from student teachers and 46 from head teachers. After that, the data were inputted in the Predictive Analytic Software (PASW) Version 19.0, they were transformed into tables

and extracted for analysis. Specifically, frequency and percentage distribution, and the paired-sample t-test were used to analyse the data in order to tackle the objectives.

Results and Discussion

This section of the paper presents the findings emanating from the data collected from the self-administered questionnaires and an interview schedule. The discussion includes the interpretation of the findings in reference to previous findings. Data were collected from 154 student teachers, 46 headteachers and one of the centre coordinators in the Distance Education Programme of UCC.

Perceived Effects of the UCC Distance Education Programmes on Teachers' Professional Development

The first objective focused on the effects of the UCC Distance Education Programme on teachers' professional development. Closed-ended multiple items were used to elicit data from the respondents. The issues were measured on a discrete three-point scale ranging from one to three where one represents the least agreement to the issue while three represents the highest agreement to the issue. The results are presented in Table 1.

As depicted in Table 1, 96.8 percent of the student teachers agreed that the distance education has improved their subject matter knowledge in the subject they teach. Majority (94.2%) of the student teachers were of the view that through distance education programme they understood better their students' human growth and development. This means that teachers are attracted to their professional development because they want to expand their knowledge, skills and abilities because of the various reforms that take place in the education sector. Teachers therefore do not want to be rusty but rather update their knowledge in the subject they teach to be abreast with the current educational issues and pedagogical processes of imparting knowledge to learners. Teachers therefore see distance education as one of the avenues through which they could develop themselves professionally. The participants of this study therefore perceived the University of Cape Coast distance learning programme as a programme worth pursuing because of the positive effect it has on their professional development.

Table 1: Perceived Effects of Distance Education on Teachers Professional Development

Statements	Disagree		Uncertain		Agree	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Distance education has improved my subject matter knowledge in the subject I teach	2	1.3	3	1.9	149	96.8
Through distance education programme I have understood better my students' human growth and development	5	3.2	4	2.6	145	94.2
My instructional planning is improving since my enrolment in the distance education programme	0	0.0	5	3.2	149	96.8
My strategies for teaching are improving since my enrolment in distance education programme	3	1.9	9	5.8	142	92.3
Assessment of my pupils has improved since my enrolment in the programme	0	0.0	17	11.0	137	89.0
Distance learning is improving my ability to create conducive learning environment for my pupils	3	1.9	11	7.1	140	91.0
My communication strategies in the classroom have improved since I enrolled in distance education programme	3	1.9	12	7.8	139	90.3
My uses of TLMs are better now than before I enrolled into the distance education programme	5	3.2	13	8.4	136	88.4
I am able to develop new instructional materials as a result of distance education	9	5.8	27	17.5	118	76.7

Source: Field Data, 2012.

(N = 154)

Majority (96.8%) of the student teachers admitted that their instructional planning had improved since their enrolment in the distance education programme. Majority (92.3%) of the student teachers again indicated that their strategies for teaching had improved since their enrolment in distance education programme. With regards to the assessment of pupils, 89.0 percent of the student teachers were of the view that their assessment of pupils improved since their enrolment in the distance education programme. This agrees with the findings of Nkrumah (2012) that UCC distance education programme had helped to improve basic school teachers' assessment of their students and instructional planning and strategies.

Table 1 further depicts that majority (91.0%) of the student teachers agreed that distance learning has improved their ability to create conducive learning environment for their pupils. Similarly, 90.3 percent of the student teachers agreed that their communication strategies in the classroom have improved since they enrolled in the distance education programme. Majority (88.4%) of the student teachers further admitted that their use of teaching and learning materials are better now than before they enrolled into the distance education programme. Similarly, 76.7 percent of the student teachers consented that they were

able to develop new instructional materials as a result of distance education. This finding is in line with the views of the coordinator who believed that *successful distance teaching and learning fall back on proper chances for sufficient dialogue, properly structured learning materials, and the extent to which learners may determine their own learning in addition to an effective educational delivery system and effective use of teaching and learning materials on the part of the learners who themselves are teachers* (June 13, 2012). He is of the that *professional development of teachers are means of bringing changes in the classroom practices, attitudes of teachers, their beliefs and learning outcome of students* (June 13, 2012).

Observations of the Heads of Basic Schools on the Performance of Teachers before and after Enrolling on the Distance Education Programme in Their Study Areas

Assessing how the headteachers of basic schools see the performance of teachers on the distance education programme before and after enrolling was examined as the second objective of the paper. Specific issues examined covered six criteria on the performance of teachers. The criteria were lesson planning, lesson presentation

and knowledge of subject matter. Other criteria examined were evaluation of learner ability, punctuality and attendance and relationships and

co-curricular activities. The results are depicted in Table 2.

Table 2: Headteachers Assessment of Basic School Teachers Performance as a Result of the Distance Education Programme

Teachers Criteria on Performance	Time of Enrolment	Mean	Std. Dev.	t-value	p-value	η^2
Lesson planning	BE	3.50	0.73	-9.213**	0.000	0.654
	AE	4.54	0.44			
Lesson preparation	BE	3.71	0.60	-11.918**	0.000	0.759
	AE	4.65	0.45			
Knowledge of subject matter	BE	3.53	0.78	-10.032**	0.000	0.691
	AE	4.83	0.37			
Evaluation of learner ability	BE	3.79	0.57	-8.751**	0.000	0.630
	AE	4.46	0.51			
Punctuality and attendance	BE	4.03	0.82	3.418**	0.001	0.206
	AE	3.57	0.84			
Relationships and co-curricular activities	BE	3.78	0.73	2.056*	0.046	0.086
	AE	3.59	0.90			

Source: Field Data, 2012.

**p<0.01

*p<0.05

(N = 46)

Where N = sample size, M = mean, Std. Dev. = standard deviation, η^2 = eta square, BE = before enrolment and AE – after enrolment.

A paired-sample t-test was conducted to evaluate headteachers assessment of basic school teachers' performance as a result of their participation in the distance education programme. There was statistically significant increase in the performance of teachers lesson planning before enrolment (Mean = 3.50, SD = .73) and after enrolment (Mean = 4.54, SD = .44), [t = -9.213, df = 45, p = .000]. Based on Cohen (1988) guidelines on the interpretation of the eta square, the magnitude of the difference in the means with regard to headteachers view on their teachers lesson planning is very high (η^2 = .654), meaning 65.4 percent of the variances in teachers lesson planning in the schools is explained by their participation in the distance education programme. Similarly, the headteachers admitted that lesson presentation of the teachers had improved when compared from before enrolment (Mean = 3.71, SD = .60) to the after enrolment (Mean = 4.65, SD = .45), [t = -11.918, df = 45, p = .000]. The eta square statistics (0.759) indicated a large effect size with regard to the effect of distance education programme on teachers' lesson preparation. The results show that distance education programme has improved teachers performance with regards to lesson planning and presentation.

The results show that through distance education teachers can develop higher self-efficacy which will make them more certain that they will be

able to work through classroom educational problems with time and effort. Their lesson planning and presentation skills will improve in line with their level of self-efficacy. In addition, through distance education teachers are able to make teaching and learning materials conversational and interesting in style, present them in the form of a dialogue with a friendly and encouraging tone. They are able to clearly structure teaching and learning materials with content divided into small sections with appropriate headings. The findings are in line with the assertion of (Dankyi, 2013) and (Nkrumah, 2012) that through distance education, teachers are able to clearly state objectives, provide advice about how to study the materials, get learners actively involved in the lessons by asking questions and reflecting upon what they are learning and finding useful answers on their own.

With regards to the knowledge and subject matter of teachers, the headteachers were of the view that the distance education programme has improved teachers performance after enrolment (Mean = 4.83, SD = .37) more than before enrolment (Mean = 3.53, SD = .78), [t = -10.032, df = 45, p = .000]. The eta square statistics (0.691) indicated a large effect size with regard to the effect of distance education programme on teachers' knowledge of subject matter.

The headteachers indicated further that teachers evaluation of learner ability has improved after enrolment (Mean = 4.46, SD = .51) into the distance education programme than before enrolment (Mean = 3.79, SD = .57), [t = -8.751, df = 45, p = .000] into the programme. The eta square statistics (0.630) indicated a large effect size with regard to the effect of distance education programme on teachers' evaluation of learner ability. Meaning, through distance education programme and other non-conventional education system, teachers develop the goals, the learning experiences, the evaluation decisions of the learning programme and learning ability of their students appropriately.

Table 2 further indicates that with regards to punctuality and attendance, the headteachers admitted that teachers were more punctual and attends school as expected before enrolment (Mean = 4.03, SD = .82) as compared to after their enrolment (Mean = 3.57, SD = .84), [t = 3.418, df = 45, p = .001] in the distance education programme. The eta square statistics (0.206) indicated a large effect size with regard to the negative effect of distance education programme on teachers' punctuality and attendance.

The Table again shows that the headteachers view teachers' relationships and co-curricular activities higher when they were not enrolled (Mean = 3.78, SD = .73) in the programme than after their enrolment into the programme (Mean = 3.59, SD = .87). [t = 3.418, df = 45, p = .001] in the distance education programme. The finding is incongruent with the submission that teachers' self-efficacy coupled with curriculum content-knowledge and skills possessed through distance education programmes would have a positive effect on their punctuality, interpersonal relationship and performance as a whole (Owoeye, 2004).

Conclusions

The distance teacher education programme of the CoDE of the UCC is not fulfilling its purpose of upgrading the academic and professional competence of a large number of teachers in the basic schools in the Kwahu West Municipality of the Eastern Region of Ghana, raising their performance level and equipping them with skills for lifelong learning. The gap between these objectives and the programme's performance, as perceived by students in the programme, coordinators, and headteachers, is not so big that

it cannot be closed. Constant monitoring of performance as well as support services in the form of guidance and counselling is needed to completely close the gap by fulfilling its purpose of upgrading the academic and professional competence of a large number of teachers in the basic school fully. Further, this programme would be able to enhanced teachers performance in the area of punctuality and attendance, as well as participation in co-curricular activities if student teachers are taught time management skills.

The programme has proved beyond reasonable doubt that it is capable of improving the effectiveness and the efficiencies of teachers in the areas of understanding their students' growth and development, subject matter knowledge, instructional planning and strategies, assessment of students, creating supportive learning environments, communication strategies, collaboration abilities and improvisation. Moreover, the UCC distance learning programme is meeting the policy of Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports to promote quality teacher education as a way of achieving the 2015 Education for All (EFA) agenda. Therefore UCC distance learning programme cannot be attributed to poor BECE results as perceived by some stakeholders of education since the findings have proved that the programme has positive effect on basic schools teacher performance in the Kwahu West Municipality.

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