A Phenomenological Study of Pre-Service Teachers' Lived Experiences of Professional Development in Ghana

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Abstract
The lived experiences of pre-service teachers during teaching practice are often neglected in scholarly literature or if considered, not much emphasis is placed on other socio-cultural contexts that affect these practices. To address this knowledge gap in literature, a phenomenological qualitative study into the lived experiences of pre-service teachers was explored. The sources of data comprised semi-structured interview and focus group discussions. Final-year pre-service teachers who had returned to the university after completing their pre-service field expedition were used for the study. A purposive sample was used in selecting 115 participants from the readily available population of pre-service teachers, of which 25 of the participants were interviewed and 80 participated in a focused group discussion. The data was analysed using open coding and axial coding. It emanated from the study that there were differing propositions for formulating purposeful lesson objectives, selecting appropriate content, deciding on the best method of presentation, and writing actual lesson plans. Also, it was revealed that while some mentors contribute to the professional development of their mentees, most mentors abandon pre-service teachers in the course of their mentorship programme. It is recommended that during teaching practice, regular conferences and workshops should be held to address some possible hurdles that the mentors and their mentees might be going through to enhance their professional relationship.

Keywords: *Pre-service teachers, teaching practice, challenges, professional development, mentors, lived experience*

Introduction

Empirical evidence suggests that pre-service teachers' effectiveness spikes sharply after the first few years in their professional development. Research (Okon & Ibanga, 1992) shows that many of these pre-service teachers attempt to exit prior to attaining this level of expertise in their career developmental agenda due to some hurdles. Therefore, there is a need for pre-service teachers to become more knowledgeable and skilful in connecting the curriculum to their students' lives, particularly, with the help of outcomes-based education through simulation teaching. As the role of teachers has grown to include consultation, collaborative planning and other kinds of joint work (Hargreaves 2000, 2012), there is a need for effective pre-service and in-service teacher education of which teaching practice plays a critical role.

It is important to recognise that the power of an influential teacher is undeniable, but hinges on proper professional development activities. Fond memories are held for a lifetime for those who have received the gift of effective classroom teaching during the pre-service period. In an effort to enhance students' achievement, educators, researchers, and policy

makers are advocating that student learning be facilitated through effective teaching through sufficient preparation (Masunga & Lewis, 2011). Given the great sacrifice that this unique student population is making to pursue a calling, pre-service teacher education programmes would be setting pre-service teachers up for failure if they did not paint a realistic image of what 21st century teaching encompasses.

Teaching practice, like any other professional activity, is plagued by challenges, some of which are quite glaring and conspicuous while others are hidden, yet to be unveiled. Experience has shown that teaching is not as easy as some people would want to believe because the lived experiences of some of the pre-service teachers have not been palatable. Teaching is regarded as a busy job (Samuel, 2010). As such, development of appropriate skills is a necessity for meaningful knowledge to be imparted to students. Paramount in this impartation is the role of mentors towards the professional development of their mentees.

Teaching practice is a period during which pre-service teachers are given opportunity to try the art of teaching before actually getting into the real world of the teaching profession. In spite of the observed relevance and purpose of the teaching practice exercise in teacher preparatory programmes in Ghana, a number of challenges appear to hamper the optimum realization of its objectives in the professional growth of pre-service students undergoing training. It is worthy of note that many pre-service teachers get agitated about entering the classrooms to take up teaching tasks in unfamiliar environment due to some obstacles. According to Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009), such mixed feelings can contribute to the making or discouraging of a pre-service teacher. It is in the light of this that this paper sought to assess the lived experiences of pre-service teachers by critically focusing on the challenges and mentors' role in ensuring the attainment of teaching practice objectives.

. Most studies (Tomlinson, 2015; Cunningham, 2007) on teaching practice have focused on institutional challenges rather than personal or human challenges, as well as, specific mentors' roles. Also, much research has been done about the importance of teaching practice on the education of pre-service teachers (Marais & Meier 2004; Quick & Sieborger, 2005). Sadly, a component which received little attention is about the lived experiences of pre-service teaching practice, with a focus on mentors' role and generic challenges. Also, previous studies (Hargreaves 2000, 2012; Tomlinson, 2015; Cunningham, 2007) had focused on the use of quantitative approach to collection and analysis of data, but this paper used the qualitative approach, hence, the adoption of the phenomenological design. It is in this direction that the study sought to investigate the lived experiences of pre-service teachers with special attention on the role of mentors, as well as generic challenges during teaching practice.

This paper is organised into four parts. Following this introduction, literature was reviewed where the concept of teaching practice was elaborated coupled with supervisor's role and challenges. Next is the methodological procedures followed by the researchers. The findings from the study are then presented and discussed, after which conclusions are drawn and recommendations made.

The research questions driving the study include:

1. What are the actual roles of mentors with regard to the lived experiences of pre-service teachers?
2. What are the challenges encountered by pre-service teachers during teaching practice?
3. What strategies can be proffered to improve teaching practice?

Literature Review

Theoretical Review

Theoretical review or framework serves as an epistemological guide that help to interpret the knowledge presented in a study. The theory that guided this study is Hudson's five-factor model of mentoring for effective teaching (Hudson, 2010, p. 31-33). These factors in this model are appropriate for the study because the lived experiences of every pre-service teacher are influenced by existing teachers, who serve as mentor teachers to these "green-horn" pre-service teachers. Looking at the variables, it is required of every mentor to have a great sense, and skills of these attributes in order to serve as an effective mentor to enable the pre-service teacher have good living experience during their teaching practice. According to Agherdien (2009), studies that were theoretically developed yielded data that could be interpreted in more depth while, on the other hand, a substantial majority of authors who employed their theoretical frameworks in a very limited way ended up presenting findings that were simply descriptive in nature. These factors in Hudson's (2010) model are summarised as follows:

Personal Attributes: This includes being supportive of the mentee (pre-service teacher), comfortable in talking about teaching practices, and attentive listening to the mentee (pre-service teacher). The mentor's personal attributes are used to encourage the mentee's (pre-service teacher's) reflection on practices, and instil confidence and positive attitudes in the mentee.

System Requirements: In its simplest form, the mentor needs to articulate the aims, policies, and curricula required by an education system. However, the complexities of implementing system requirements may be noted in the pedagogical knowledge that mentors need to articulate for effective teaching.

Pedagogical Knowledge: Effective mentors articulate how to plan for teaching, prepare timetables, or schedule lessons for the mentee (pre-service teacher). Preparation for teaching needs to be discussed, particularly with the location and use of resources. Mentors can assist with problem solving, teaching strategies, structuring of lessons and pedagogic knowledge about curriculum and assessment.

Modelling: The mentor's enthusiasm as a teacher can present desirable teaching traits. Importantly, the teacher-student relationship is central to teaching and demonstrating a positive rapport with students can show the mentee (pre-service teacher) how these behaviours can facilitate learning. The mentor also needs to model appropriate classroom language suitable for teaching, effective teaching, classroom management, hands-on lessons and well-designed lessons.

Feedback: Effective mentors articulate expectations, and provide advice to the mentee (student teacher), they review lesson plans, observe how the mentee (student teacher) teaches, and provide oral and written feedback. These factors are particularly useful in surveying practical experiences in and with teaching practice.

Conceptual Review

Concept of Teaching Practice

According to Ezewu, Okoye and Onyekwelu (1994), the term "teaching practice" has been accepted almost universally and uncritically by all concerned with the preparation of teachers, and its use has embraced all the learning experiences of student teachers in schools. This concept has been handed down from the earliest days of the development of training

colleges. After carefully assessing teaching practice, one can observe that the underlying principles of the current practice of student teaching are probably of extremely ancient pedagogical culture. Bruner (1996) discussed the way in which "bushmen" pass on adult skills to their children. There is very little explicit teaching — what the child knows is what he or she learnt from a direct imitative interaction with the adult community. These primitive practices are not dissimilar to those typifying our current approaches to student teaching. Samuel (2010) expands on the culture, and refers to teaching practice as far back as the first model of teacher education, the master-apprenticeship model, in which the novice teacher learned best through behavioural modelling, and through imitating the expert teacher. The recent and universally accepted terminology of teaching practice forms part of the dominant model of teacher training in South Africa established prior to the demise of apartheid, namely, the applied science model which states that the novice teacher must first learn the theoretical basis of the discipline and then seek the context within which he or she will enact and apply the theory in practice (Samuel, 2010). This model is also dominant in many other professions. According to Lewin and Stuart (2003), the model presumes that knowledge of the discipline base will provide the foundation for practice.

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (1996), since the establishment of training colleges in the middle and late 19th century, teaching practice in one form or another has remained an unchallenged, essential element in the preparation of generations of teachers. Unchallenged, that is, until quite recently, the concept of teaching practice has been subjected to close scrutiny and found to be somewhat anachronistic and ambiguous. In the ambiguity of teaching practice, it has three major connotations: the first is the practice of teaching skills and assuming the role of a teacher. This embraces the whole range of experiences that students go through in school and the practical aspects of the course as distinct from theoretical studies which we presumably have in mind when we first speak about a student's teaching practice mark; the second is when we describe a student as being on teaching practice; and the third is when we encourage the need to integrate theory and practice in the education of teachers. It is evident that the ambiguous meaning of teaching practice is not simply philosophic-linguistic. It has practical implications which address critical and outstanding issues in education.

Role of Mentor Teachers in Teaching Practice

The very complex forms of skills possessed and practiced by human beings (e.g. speaking, writing, social interaction, deployment of formal understanding) cannot be learned in isolation, but require input from others. Assistance is often informal, but is nonetheless active (Tomlinson, 2015; Cunningham, 2007). With a professional tutor on the school staff (to lead the school's professional teacher-education) and a mentor teacher in each subject where student teachers are being placed, one has the basis for 'school practice' to become an institution for 'school-based initial teacher education' (McGee and Fraser, 2001). The great advantage of mentors as teacher educators is that they are full-time practicing teachers who, in effect, are standing right next to the student teacher (McIntyre, 1997). Ideally, every student requires at least one mentor. Some schools have found it useful to identify a main mentor and several subject or phase specific mentors.

There are many ways of viewing this very distinctive relationship, and mentoring is not the kind of skill that can be broken down into clear components and steps (Windsor, 1995). In fact, mentoring depends on craft knowledge that is accumulated through experience and practice. Its central distinctive quality is that, like teaching, mentoring is a very subtle and sophisticated kind of knowledge which is enacted and performed, but which cannot be 'transmitted' as a concrete and a clear guide for action (Windsor, 1995).

According to Tomlinson (2015) and Hsu (2005), mentoring also seeks to help student teachers to analyse and reflect systematically, not just after the teaching session or series of sessions, but also during the teaching itself (in other words, while they are close to the action). Student teachers need help not just to monitor, but also to explore, interpret and explain the how and why of what went on. This then flows naturally into the next phase of the teaching cycle, namely, the replanning of the next piece of teaching (Tomlinson, 2015; Husbands, 1995).

Frick, Carl and Beets (2010) concluded in their research on PGCE students that, one can deduce that reflection is indeed a process where student teachers learn about the self in context, and that mentoring can act as a catalyst that enhances this reflexive teaching process. According to these authors, a mentoring system is valuable because it not only focuses on developing appropriate competencies, but also because it has a strong humanist element as it concentrates on the person of the student teacher(Fletcher & Barrett, 2004). Mentoring is where teachers and prospective teachers meet within school settings. Indeed classroom teachers in their roles as mentors have a significant role to play in developing pre-service teachers (Hudson, 2010).

Challenges of Pre-service teachers during Teaching Practice

Tomlinson (2015) stated a lack of sufficient preparation in many college education programmes as a strong reason why teachers entering the field of teaching are ill-prepared to prepare good lesson plans and cater for the variations involved. In a 1996 report from NCTAF, it was stated that "What teachers know and can do is the most important influence on what students learn" (p. 10). The report further stated that one of the major flaws in assuring that all students receive instruction from a qualified teacher who is prepared to meet the needs of all students is the lack of teacher preparedness. If beginning teachers are to be successful in providing instruction that is differentiated to fill the needs of diverse learners, they should receive training and be prepared sufficiently to meet the needs of these learners prior to entering the classroom. In a report for the National Council on Teacher Quality, Putman, Greenberg, and Walsh (2014) stated, "The challenge of training for the classroom must commensurate with the challenge of effectively teaching within it" (p. 35).

A study conducted by Renick (1996) found out that beginning teachers face many challenges in transitioning from the role of student teacher to that of teacher. One such area of consideration, according to Renick, is in the area of differentiated instruction. Renick stipulated that university preparation programmes provide instruction to pre-service teachers in adapting their instruction for individual learning needs of their students who exhibit exceptional strengths or weaknesses. Renick's research study was an attempt to determine if first-year teachers use their knowledge of differentiated teaching learned at university in their classrooms. The study was guided by three questions: How did beginning teachers in the study determine the individual needs of their students; what strategies did beginning teachers use in providing for individual ability levels; and, what support did beginning teachers receive for incorporating differentiated strategies? He found out that very little of what is learned by pre-service teachers at the university level is transferred into the classroom setting.

The lack of transfer from university learning to classroom setting is due primarily, according to Renick, by a "washing out" of what is learned at university which occurs during the student-teaching experience (p. 13). Of the many challenges beginning teachers face, one of the most prevalent is managing a classroom and engaging students effectively. Most teachers struggle from time to time to keep a class of students purposefully engaged (Hudson, 2010). For beginning teachers, however, the struggle can be especially daunting. "We are the authors

of what happens in the classroom. Students follow our lead and behave in ways that we unconsciously allow" (McGee & Fraser, 2001, p. 105).

McGee and Fraser (2001) contended that the key to effective classroom management is to be conscious of student actions and behaviors and of the actions teachers present to the class, to develop and follow procedures routinely, and to maintain consistency in acceptable versus unacceptable behavior. Greenberg, Putman, and Walsh (2014), in their report for The National Council on Teacher Quality, stated that most teacher preparation programmes are not preparing beginning teachers effectively for the demands that await them in the classroom. They further stated, "New teachers deserve better. It is time for teacher preparation programmes to focus on classroom management so that first-year teachers are prepared on day one to head off potential disruption before it starts" (Greenberg et al., 2014, p. 2). Darling-Hammond (1999) suggested that when beginning teachers lack initial preparation, they are more likely to leave the teaching profession (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). In a survey conducted by Farkas, Johnson, and Duffett (2003), 45% of the teachers they surveyed said beginning teachers need more training on effective strategies to assist them in handling problems with student disciplinary issues. In the same survey, 42% of the teachers surveyed reported that new teachers need a lot of help in finding effective ways to help struggling students (Farkas et al., 2003).

According to Anderson (2012), (who is a nationally recognized speaker on effective classroom management, a former classroom teacher, and a responsive classroom consultant for the Northeast Foundation for Children), classroom management is one of the most common reasons why beginning teachers leave the profession. Anderson contended that it generally takes 5 years for beginning teachers to establish viable classroom management routines, but about half choose to leave the profession during these first 5 years. He further stated that beginning teachers fail to establish essential classroom management routines and procedures, struggle to find a balance between the fun and friendly approach to teaching and that of the firm disciplinarian, and they generally lack the basic skills and strategies necessary to communicate effectively (Jenkins, Garn and Jenkins, 2005).

Method

Research Design

This phenomenological research has been conducted in an interpretive qualitative paradigm underpinned by Hudson's (2010) model. The study adopted the phenomenological approach in order to collect data on the lived experiences (Creswell, 2013) of the pre-service teachers regarding their challenges during teaching practice. The rationale for the choice of this research design is that within this methodological framework come numerous avenues and flexibility for exploring lived experiences of research participants. It also gave the researchers the chance to have transformative experience through which we make sense of our own being in and through the transformative experiences of others so that we end up becoming nourished beings. Creswell (2013) said that phenomenology is unique to each individual, and is only understood by that individual. Phenomenology as a methodology makes this study qualitative in nature and invites unique and independent interpretations of lived experiences.

Participants

The sample of final year pre-service teachers used for the study had returned to school to complete their final semester as a requirement for obtaining their first degree certificates in their respective subject areas. They were students of the University of Cape Coast. This offered the researchers an opportunity to uncover different perspectives on the meaning of, and some critical (Creswell, 2013) developmental challenges of trainees' lived experiences that

confronted these pre-service teachers in their quest to gain experiences for their future career development agenda.

Sampling Technique

A purposive sample was used in selecting the final-year group of students, while the convenience sample was used in selecting the individual participants from the readily-available (Leedy & Omrod, 2013) population of pre-service teachers. The choice of purposive sampling technique was to elicit authentic information from participants believed by the researchers to have in-depth knowledge of the issue under study. A sample of 115 participants from the readily-available population of pre-service teachers, 25 of whom were interviewed and 80 participating in a focus group discussion, were used for the study. For the focus group discussion, 8 groups of participants with a membership of 10 each from each group were used. The essence of sub-dividing them into groups was to allow for deeper probing in order to have deeper insights into the challenges of pre-service teachers. Participants were serving as pre-service teachers in a classroom setting under the supervision of an assigned cooperating teacher.

Data Collection Instrument

A semi-structured interview guide and a focused group discussion protocol were used to elicit data from participants. This was to enable the researchers probe for in-depth information from respondents for a comprehensive analysis.

Data Collection Procedures

Prior to conducting the study, the researchers submitted the proposal to the Institutional Review Board of the University of Cape Coast for approval (Creswell, 2013). Permission was obtained from the Department of Business and Social Sciences Education through an introductory letter through the Department Head. Upon approval, a 3-week period (2nd to 25th May, 2018) was used to collect the qualitative data through interview. The interview was conducted by the two researchers with the aid of a tape recorder. The data was then transcribed for analysis. The interview was conducted in an uninterrupted environment in which participants' responses were audio-taped in order to obtain undiluted data.

Data Quality Measures

Member checking was used as one of the means of ensuring the collection of reliable data. Data quality was validated in triangulation of multiple and different sources of information (Creswell, 2013). A major asset of data collection for a phenomenological study is the opportunity to use a variety of sources of evidence. This methodological triangulation provided the researchers with an opportunity to check one piece of evidence against another to see how the documents provided supported a single conclusion, thus reducing the risk of drawing conclusions based on the researchers' own biases (Maxwell, 2013). In an effort to avoid personal biases on the part of the researchers, bracketing was used to guard against personal biases (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

Data Processing and Analysis

The researchers applied thematic analysis during data analysis. Applied thematic analysis requires that the pertinent strands of data be identified and sorted from the data in response to the research questions. The constant comparative approach (Axial Coding), supported by Open coding, resulted in a recurring process of reading, coding, comparing, contrasting, sorting, and aligning the segregated data (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). The coding process commenced with the open coding where the researchers looked for distinct concepts

and categories which formed the basic unit of analysis by breaking down chunks of data. The Axial coding then followed by re-reading the text to confirm that the concepts and categories accurately represent the interview responses and also explore how these concepts and categories are related (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were maintained throughout the course of the study. Data was reported honestly, from multiple perspectives, with the identities of the participants concealed (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, Shenton (2004) outlined four criteria for ensuring trustworthiness of data collected under the qualitative approach to research. These include credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability which were adopted by the researchers to ensure the reliability of the data collected. The researchers also took part in an ongoing discourse on teaching practice within their department, and this allowed an opportunity for the researchers to refine the methods of the study, develop stronger methodology, provide greater explanations and add an invaluable strength to the conclusions of the study (Shenton, 2004).

Results and Discussion

Mentors' Role in the Lived Experiences of Pre-service Teachers

Mentors, also commonly called cooperating teachers, are generally considered to be the holders of more knowledge, and are supposed to share that with student teachers. But this does not mean that they too cannot learn about certain aspects of teaching from student teachers. Of course, real teachers are lifelong learners. That is why mentors are supposed to create a rapport with students that will ease a two-way communication. Frick, Carl and Beets (2010) say that "mentors are expected to promote the confident practice of student teachers and acknowledge themselves as learners". McGee and Fraser (2001) in their working with teachers in practice, assert that "mentor teachers are responsible for the instructional programme and also for guiding the activities of the student teachers" (p. 6). Therefore to function as a mentor, one must be qualified and experienced in the teaching field. Although, some participants affirm that mentor teachers are effective in the undertaking of their roles of guiding, directing and providing professional and emotional support to student teachers during teaching practice, the findings further reveal complaints that mentors are ignoring and abandoning pre-service teachers to themselves while on teaching practice, thus increasing their workload. Below is an excerpt:

Respondent 1: *In fact, my mentor has been very instrumental and supportive to my learning process. I will always remember him. I really learnt a lot from him. (sic)*

Respondent 2: *My mentor abandoned me even the time I needed her most. I felt too bad and neglected. It really affected my performance. (sic)*

Respondent 3: *I wasn't so happy because I felt I had been left alone. My mentor had totally ignored me and I couldn't find his where-about, only to be told he had travelled. (sic)*

Some respondents also indicated that most teachers (mentors) applied for and were granted study leave while pre-service teachers were practicing in the schools of the mentors. This indicates that pre-service teachers are seen as relieving some of the workload at no extra cost. An informal discussion with university assessors/supervisors indicated they hardly met mentors when they visited the schools to assess students on practice. Notwithstanding, this paper further reveals that mentors are stereotyped and subjective in allowing student teachers

try new teaching strategies in their classrooms, especially those that they are not knowledgeable about. It is for this same reason that some mentors indicate that student teachers are contributing to the drop in performance in their schools. According to Hsu (2005), this is because of a lack of agreement on teaching strategies and classroom management strategies as student teachers and mentors blame each other for being ineffective.

According to Tomlinson (2015), mentors are supposed to oversee student-teachers' daily activities, including assisting them to solve classroom problems when they arise, holding conferences with them and evaluating their performance over time. Hence, they have first-hand knowledge of their supervisees' skills, immediate access to dialogue, and opportunities for observing whether any improvements are being made (or are still to be made) (Fletcher & Barrett, 2004). Effective teacher mentors may become a source of advice, and sounding boards for concerns about teaching that confront beginning teachers to think more broadly about their practice (Greenberg, Putman, and Walsh, 2014). The findings further confirm that some mentors are still practising the craft apprenticeship system of teaching practice which requires student teachers to do exactly as they are told by their mentors and what they see their mentors do.

Some participants also intimated that their mentors rarely offered assistance to them. In confirmation, one participant indicated that:

Respondent 4*: My mentor did not do anything to help me; he was hardly around while I presented my lessons. He abandoned the class and his entire workload to me when I arrived. It was the principal who from time to time assisted me. (sic)*

The view of this participant was further confirmed when the researcher assessed the portfolios of most of the student teachers which contained assessment forms to be completed by mentors. This revealed that most portfolio files had uncompleted by mentors. Another participant respondent portrayed some mentors as not qualified for the role.

Respondent 5: *My mentor did not seem to know what she was doing; she instead helped to frustrate and confuse me; she even embarrassed me in front of the learners when I tried out something she was not familiar with in the learning area; we never had any constructive discussions after my lessons; all she did was criticise everything without orientating me as to how to do it properly. (sic)*

Respondent 6: *The first week was very remarkable for me because I worked with my mentor and the class was full. The learners were so happy to have me and I was happy to be there. Truly speaking, I did not present any lesson this week, as my mentor wanted me to observe first. In the second week, I was alone without the mentor and I noticed that teaching is impossible without preparation although being prepared cannot guarantee that there will be no challenges. Despite the preparation made, I encountered another serious challenge, which was the learners' interaction during the lesson. (sic)*

Hsu (2005) mentions that weak mentors deny pre-service teachers the opportunities to learn potentially powerful lessons. Combined efforts of key mentors, a supportive environment, a reflective mentoring process, and peer support contribute to the overall success of student teachers. The great advantage of mentors as teacher educators is that they are full-time practicing teachers who, in effect, are standing right next to the student teacher (McIntyre, 1997). Ideally, every student requires at least one mentor. Some schools have found it useful to identify a main mentor and several subject or phase specific mentors.

Challenges of the Lived Experiences of Pre-service Teachers

Respondents were also asked about what was not working well in the school's mentoring programme. Some participants reported destructive or depressing experiences. Several participants also reported that different supervisors gave different guidelines for the presentation of lessons and this was a source of frustration and confusion. If we compare this response with Hudson's (2010) theory, this is not a good example of modelling by a mentor and a supervisor. Another respondent pointed out that her mentor was also a class teacher and therefore did not have enough time to mentor her. One participant implied that pre-service-teachers are misused when teachers are absent. Personal attributes are also one of the factors mentioned by Hudson (2010) where mentors are supposed to support pre-service teachers, and contribute towards a positive attitude. These are the excerpts that reflected the above implications.

One of the most crucial factors in the teaching practice situation for the pre-service teacher is preparation. The key findings with regard to the challenges during teaching practice are different propositions for formulating purposeful lesson objectives, selecting appropriate content, deciding on the best method of presentation, and writing actual lesson plans. This stage is considered crucial but can be much easier if a pre-service teacher has studied teaching concepts effectively while in school.
Below are excerpts from respondents:

Respondent 1: *Am always confused whenever I have been supervised by a different supervisor due to the different comments issued regarding the structure for preparing lesson plans which at times conflicts with what I have been taught in school. (sic)*

Greenberg, Putman, and Walsh (2014) observed and recognised teaching practice, and confirmed that all practice teaching, as far as student teachers are concerned, is in a sense experimental and as such requires thorough preparation beforehand if it is not to be a waste of time. And this preparation starts off with observation. In the case of teacher professional development in the institution where the study was conducted, most of the participants indicated to have had theoretical lessons and on-campus teaching practice, coupled with exposure to university modules that oriented them regarding professional studies toward becoming teachers before going out on teaching practice. Moreover, they indicated to have been to practising-schools for preliminary visits and observations before the actual teaching practice exercise. This indicates that preparation is done before teaching practice. A participant indicated that,

Respondent 2: *We were taught in modules in the university on teaching strategies, portfolios, and how to design a lesson plan before we went out on teaching practice."* Another participant indicated that *"after being taught in the university on the theory of how to teach, my first outing for teaching practice was for close to a month in which I only did observations in my practising school. I only started teaching during my second outing. (sic)*

Supporting this view, Jenkins, Garn and Jenkins (2005) confirm that preliminary observation is essential for effective planning of teaching practice as this affords the pre-service teacher a quick means to get acquainted with his or her task and then to know how to tackle it effectively and efficiently.

Despite the indication of a variety of strategies used to prepare pre-service teachers for teaching practice, some of the participants still felt that the preparation was not enough for the

experience in the field. A participant expressed dissatisfaction with the preparation of teaching practice. Thus,

We were actually taught in the university before going out on teaching practice, but what I saw out there was completely different from what we were taught; the theory does not match the practice. In support of this assertion, ***Respondent 3 intimated that:*** *I was embarrassed. I think we are not properly oriented as to the expectations in the practicing schools. Worse still, I did not even have time for preliminary visits and observations."* Supporting this contention, many of the participants responded thus, *Yeah!! He is right. (sic)*

To make this opinion clear, another participant indicated that,

I was asked to start teaching on the second day I stepped my foot in the practicing school without having enough background information on what was going on in the school. (sic) ***(Respondent 4)***

To emphasise the need and importance of observation in preparing for teaching practice, Tomlinson (2015) stated a lack of sufficient preparation in many college education programmes as the reason teachers are entering the field of teaching ill prepared to prepare good lesson plans and cater for the variations involved. He further mentioned that a pre-service teacher can learn a great deal from such expert knowledge and personal experience while on observation. Renick (1996) confirms that observation provides students with ingredients for the preparation of lesson plans and lesson notes.

Participants' responses reveal, without a doubt, that the preparation of student- teachers for teaching practice has its challenges seen to originate from the different stages of the process, i.e. from the university to the practicing schools. The content of the modules in the theoretical preparation is lacking as regards teaching practice as a core topic. General orientation to teaching practice which is different from the theoretical preparation is inadequate. The next stage of the process which is at the practicing schools is also challenged. Staff in practicing schools lack orientation in the activities and procedures to be undertaken by pre-service teachers on teaching practice. Fletcher and Barrett (2004) confirmed that this is the reason why pre-service teachers are allowed to teach immediately they arrive at school without having experienced observation. An analysis of records of lessons taught confirms that pre-service teachers start teaching upon arrival at practicing schools.

Implications for Theory, Policy and Practice

1. Pre-service teachers should be given the opportunity to observe good lessons from mentors through simulated teaching and model lessons. Thus, pre-service teachers should be exposed to techniques such as micro-teaching, team-teaching and interaction analysis to serve as a preparatory ground for them to kick-start.
2. Teaching Practice Units in the various universities should consider critical, but often neglected, issues such as determining the adequacy of duration, weights to be attached to the different teaching activities and competencies, liaising with host schools and actually posting students to these schools.
3. Efforts should be made by Teaching Practice Units to allow subject specialists to supervise students in their respective fields of study. Where this is difficult, subject-field specialists should be engaged to ensure optimum realization of goals.
4. Intensive training programmes should be regularly organised by authorities in charge of teaching practice for supervisors to improve the quality of supervision, and promote uniformity in evaluation.

5. During teaching practice, regular conferences should be held between supervisors and pre-service teachers and between students and mentors. This is necessary for purposes of counselling, directing, educating and guiding the trainees in their work. To achieve these purposes, the supervisor should exhibit good human relations to allay any fears of the pre-service teachers and assure them of some level of confidence.
6. Feedback from supervisors and mentors should be immediate after the conclusion of the lesson, using dialogue, counselling, written comments and analysis form to point out the strengths and weaknesses of the lesson and suggestions for improvement. This feedback should equip the student-teacher to identify the stages of professional development and progress involved in learning to teach, and to lead him/her to a realization of self, and his/her competence to continue his/her development in the profession.
7. Government should provide adequate instructional materials and resources to public schools, so as to enhance teaching. This will also give pre-service teachers opportunity to practise the use of instructional materials during pre-service training.
8. The Teaching Practice Unit in the University of Cape Coast should organize effective and adequate orientation for pre-service teachers before they go for the teaching practice since it was revealed in this study that majority of the pre-service teachers complained that they were not given adequate teaching practice orientation. Organizing such a programme will equip pre-service teachers with the requisite knowledge to undertake the task ahead of them.
9. Lecturers and mentors have to work as a team, and coordinate their efforts to enhance mentorship in schools.
10. Mentor teachers should concentrate on the significant impact that the personal attributes of mentors had on the mentoring relationship that impinged on the effectiveness of the mentor-student teacher interaction.

Conclusion

It can be discerned from the findings that effective teaching practice is in constant practice. It is, therefore, the foundation for teaching. Hence, a teacher who had practised teaching skills while on teaching practice is likely to teach better. However, inadequate preparation on the part of all the key players - mentors, supervisors and pre-service teachers themselves, serve as a paramount hurdle for their professional development. Teaching practice is real professionalism in the training of teachers. It is the avenue to what is referred to as active learners' participation in problem-solving in outcomes-based education. Learners encounter live experiences in teaching in reality. Experience during teaching practice helps to link theory with practice. To develop desirable teaching skills therefore, there must be thorough and adequate exposure of "would-be" teachers to school situations, through micro-and macro-teaching practices. Consequently, effective supervision of teaching practice is vital in helping pre-service teachers to capitalize on their strengths and minimize their weaknesses. The acquired teaching skills are then transferred to teaching in schools after certification.

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