

Full Length Research Paper

Examining the purpose of teaching practice: Student teachers', mentors' and university supervisors' perceptions and experiences at the university of education, Winneba, Ghana

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The current study investigated student teachers', mentors' and university supervisors' perceptions of the purpose and experiences of teaching practice. The data for the study were collected from 65 student teachers, (44 males, 21 females), 55 school mentors and 15 university supervisors. Questionnaires both structured and non-structured were used to collect data. The study found that the both mentor and the university supervisor were well committed to their duties and provided useful feedback to the student teachers. Further findings revealed that student teachers had positive perceptions of the teaching practice exercise, teaching practice supervisor's treatment, and the supervisor-student feedback provision style. The mentor and university supervisor perceived strongly that the student teacher became more serious when she/he had *wind* (knowledge) that their university supervisor was on visit; most of them also tried to wind up their practice after they had been supervised by the university supervisor. The study found significant difference in perceptions between the student teacher and the university supervisor of the purpose of teaching practice. There was also observed significant differences in perceptions of the purpose of teaching practice between the mentor and the university supervisor. The study revealed that the main purpose of teaching practice was for improvement of student teachers' skills and craft of teaching before they leave for the actual work. It was also discovered that demographic variables such as qualification and professional background had a slight influence on participants' perception on essence of teaching practice programme. It was recommended that, there is a need to strengthen the collaboration between university teaching practice office and the teaching practice-host institutions so as to minimize the challenges emanating from miscommunication during the teaching practice exercise. There was also the need to extend the duration of the teaching practice period from the current one term to two terms of the SHS academic or teaching calendar.

Keywords: Teaching practice, student teacher, mentor, university supervisor, perception, improvement, assessment.

INTRODUCTION

Learning to teach is a complex activity which is assessed often in close connection to the context in which teaching practice takes place (Smith, 2007; Grossman, 2006). In most professions, field training is a crucial aspect with an attempt of testing and assessing the skills attained by

learners before the actual consumption in the world of work (Sahalberg, 2010).

This fact stand as vital to the teaching profession where teacher-trainees need to attend field training for the purpose of assessing their teaching skills and testing the

theories learned in classrooms in actual school context. This field exercise which is responsible to orient teacher-trainees in their learning process in colleges and universities is called teaching practice. Scholars such as Kirbulut, Boz, and Katucu (2012), Al- Mahrooqi (2011), Ngidi and Sibiya (2003) in Kiggundu (2007) emphasise that teaching practice course provide an opportunity for preservice teachers to apply the theoretical learning offered by university teaching programmes in the real life of school settings. It helps the trainee to develop and improve his/her professional practice in the context of real classroom, usually in the form of guidance and supervision (Azeem, 2011).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Need for teaching practice among teacher-trainees

Teaching practice is the name that denotes the preparation of student teachers for teaching by practical training (Nwanekezi, Okoli, and Mezieobi, 2011; Al-Mahrooqi, 2011; Kiggundu, 2007). It represents a range of experiences to which student teachers are exposed when they work in classrooms and schools during internships (Marais & Meier, 2004). Teaching practice is key to developing knowledge, skills and dispositions related to professional and personal competence (Margetts and Ure, 2007) of the teacher. The school context provides opportunities for pre-service teachers to take responsibility for their professional development and growth including adopting a set of beliefs, and behaviours that lead to proactive changes in the educational environment, his or her professional and personal competence and improved student achievement (Tillman, 2005 in Margetts and Ure, 2007). For instance, preparing effective teachers for school systems require that those teachers are competent in content, theoretical and practical aspects and reflective. Nwanekezi *et al.* (2011) add that during teaching practice, student teachers feel engaged, challenged and even empowered. The exercise represents the range of experiences to which student teachers are exposed when they work in the classroom and school (Marais and Meier, 2004 in Kiggundu, 2007).

During teaching practice, it is expected that the student teachers observe subject teachers at work so as to learn about teachers' skills, strategies, classroom control and time management (Komba and Kira, 2013). They are assessed and feedback is given to the students. They reflect on the feedback and try to improve upon their practice teaching. This is the ideal but in practice subject teachers may not avail themselves in the class for interns to observe them.

Teaching practice assessment

Teaching practice assessment is used to describe the activities undertaken by the school mentor and university

lecturer to obtain information about the knowledge, skills and attitudes of student teachers on teaching practice in assigned schools. This activity can involve the collection of formal assessment data or informal data with the use of observation checklists. The assessor typically assigns a grade or mark for work undertaken by student teachers (Marsh, 2009). According to Chase (1999), the main reasons for assessment in teaching practice includes diagnosis of learning and monitoring process, grading students, predicting future achievements, motivating students and diagnosis of teaching process for improvement. In order that students improve upon their weaknesses, they need timely and quality feedbacks from their supervisors during the programme period through assessments.

These assessment motives can be met through intensive discussion between the mentor, the university supervisor and the student teacher. The discussion is guided by questions, answers and explanations which help the teacher-trainee to understand his or her weaknesses and areas that need improvement. In grading students, sufficient evidence needs to be collected by the mentor or supervisor to enable the person assign deserved grades. It should be noted also that the corrections and feedback provided should be evident and informative so as to help students towards improvement in their teaching. This calls for the need for making this exercise effective so as to give individuals chances for improvement and growth in various educational and professional assignments.

Azure (2013) posits that since the assessor must communicate to the participant how to make instruction more effective, it should be formative to allow trainees to build upon their weaknesses; this is because assessment is an integral and prominent component of the entire teaching and learning process. Generally, teaching practice exercise is geared towards accomplishing need for understanding teacher-trainees achievements and informs of the areas that need improvement for further rectification.

Teaching practice at the University of Education, Winneba

Teaching practice forms a fundamental component of the teacher education programme of the University of Education, Winneba (UEW). In its current form, it takes about 12.5% of the entire UEW four-year degree programme. Formerly it took 25% of the training programme. It was reduced to 12.5% as a result of the findings of a committee which revealed that most trainees of UEW had initial practicum experience at Colleges of Education. The teaching practice takes place in partnership schools throughout Ghana in the seventh semester of the four-year programme. The student teachers

are supervised throughout their practicum by UEW-trained mentors in the subject areas of the student teachers. However, they are assessed and graded by both the mentors and the university supervisors during their practicum. The assessment of the mentor takes 70% of the grading. The teaching practice is designed to prepare students for maximum practical and professional development training in the field of education (Student Internship Handbook, 2009). It is emphasised, however, that the success of teaching practice must be seen in its educative function; where the student teachers learn and ultimately develop the required professional skills and shape their personalities and attitudes with reference to six broad areas (a) planning and preparation, (b) instructional procedure, (c) teaching strategies, (d) classroom organisation and management, (e) communication and (f) evaluation (Student Internship Handbook, 2009) and getting along with colleagues on the job, and hard work. This can only be achieved through active and friendly cooperation between the student teachers, partnership schools, the university and the ministry of education.

The problem and context

Majority of student-teachers have problems in classroom management and organisation, class control, student-teacher interaction, selection and effective use of teaching methods, useful and timely use of teaching materials and confidence in teaching. These challenges have caused some countries to place more weight on teaching by adding time, or changing from block teaching practice to internship. For instance, in Finland teaching practice constitute one third (33%) of the teacher education curriculum (Sahalberg, 2010). The thinking is that, increasing time for teaching practice in teacher education curriculum is expected to enhance teaching skills and support the argument that no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers (Nwanekezi *et al.*, 2011). In UEW-Ghana, teaching practice constitute 12.5% of the teacher education curriculum. As a teacher preparation university, this 12.5% is rather small (Azure, 2013). The present study was triggered by teaching practice experience where the researcher noted that student teachers' perception of their supervisors influenced their performance during classroom assessment. Additionally, when university supervisors were marking student teachers' teaching portfolios for 2012/2013 post internship seminar, they noted that students had mixed experiences and concerns about their assessment. In their reports one student wrote: *"my supervisor was so harsh, her comments discouraged me to continue with teaching profession"*. Another said: *"our supervisor did not spend up to 40*

minutes with us. He hurried to get to my colleague interns. No time for feedback. I was disappointed". Some interns expressed their concerns during portfolio discussions as: *"it looks like the schools are fed up with us. They just sit in and give you a grade"*. Other studies have also commented that supervisor - supervisee relationship have had great influence on student teachers orientation, disposition, conception, practice and overall professional development (Quick and Sieborger, 2005 in Kiggundu, 2007). The study therefore sought to find out stakeholders' views of student teaching practice. It is just for grading for the purpose of certification or developing the skills of the mentee?

Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate student teachers', mentors and university supervisors' perceptions and concerns of teaching practice exercise conducted by the University of Education, Winneba.

The objectives of the study was to analyse student teachers', mentors' and university supervisors' perspectives of teaching practice as a programme for grading and certification or for improving the skills of novices; assess student teachers' perceptions of university supervisor's and mentor teacher's treatments. Another objective was to examine student teachers' perceptions of the university supervisor's comments during post-lesson observation discussions.

Research questions

1. Do student teachers perceive the teaching practice programme as a tool for grading or developing and improving their ability to teach?
2. Do school mentors perceive the teaching practice programme as a tool for grading or developing and improving the student teacher's ability to teach?
3. Do university supervisors perceive the teaching practice programme as a tool for grading or developing and improving the student teacher's ability to teach?
4. What lessons did student teachers learn from the teaching practice programme?
5. What are student teachers' perceptions of teaching practice supervisors' treatment during teaching practice supervision?
6. What are student teachers perceptions of supervisors' comments during student-supervisor discussion after classroom assessment?

METHODOLOGY

Study area and design

The study was carried out at University of Education, Winneba, Ghana, and covered seven regions of the country

where student teachers from the university went for their teaching practice. Descriptive design was employed to investigate student teachers', mentors' and university supervisors' perceptions of student teachers' practicum. Descriptive studies are concerned with behavioural attributes like opinions held, processes and effects (Best and Kahn, 2006; Mugenda, 2008). The focus of this design was to describe the nature or the current status of things as far as teaching practice supervision and assessment are concerned. It was chosen over other designs because it avoided the researcher the best opportunity to collect data from the participants and examine the perspectives of the participants on the purpose of teaching practice.

Participants of the study

Participants of the study comprised of 65 fourth-year students (out of an accessible population of 97) who had just completed their teaching practice for 2014/2015 year in senior high schools of Ghana; 55 science mentors in partnership schools and 15 lecturers in the Department of Science Education, UEW. These participants were purposely sampled. Among the 65 student teachers, 75% were males and 25% were females. Majority of them, (80%), practiced in public schools and only 20% of them practiced in private senior high schools. The study was conducted during the first term of the senior high school academic year 2014/2015.

Research instruments, validity and reliability

The data for this study were collected using two different questionnaires. The first questionnaire contained nine items that sought to investigate participants' perception and experiences of how the current teaching practice reveals itself as an exercise for grading or improvement of the intern. This questionnaire was responded to by all the three (student teachers, mentors and university supervisors) groups. The second questionnaire contained 23 items and was responded to by only the student teachers. The first six items asked students what they learned from the teaching practice in general, the next seven items sought to know how student teachers' felt they were treated by their supervisors, five of the items examine students' feeling of written comments received from supervisors and another five items asked student teachers views on how to improve student teacher-supervisor feedback and discussion. A semi-structured interview schedule contained four questions on participants' opinion of the teaching practice.

Part one of the questionnaires dealt with demographic information; all other parts were arranged in a format of frequencies and percentages. Some of the items in the

scale were negatively worded to prevent response bias. The interview questions generally required respondents' to provide a range of responses sometimes not anticipated by the researcher and using respondent's own words based on the objectives of the study. The questionnaires were administered to student teachers and mentors by university supervisors who went on visit to assess the student teachers. They were retrieved on the spot to ensure high rate of return as suggested by Nwanekezi *et al.* (2011) and Best and Kahn (2006). The university supervisors responded to their questionnaire and returned same to the researcher. The interview guide was openly discussed with university supervisors.

At the formal level, validity was established through checking the variable items for consistency, relevance, clarity, and ambiguity of items in the instruments.

Then pre-tests were carried out with 25 students of the Department of Mathematics Education of UEW with similar characteristics to the targeted students within the study area, so as to detect any challenge likely to arise from the research instrument before it was applied. The instruments' reliabilities were evaluated using the Cronbach's Alpha method. The scales reached the minimum acceptance value for Cronbach's alpha .70 (Gardener, 2001 in Ahamad and Sahak, 2009; Nunnally, 1978 cited in Pallant 2005). Questionnaire one (meant for all participants) had Cronbach's alpha of 0.78, and questionnaire two (for student teachers only) had an alpha value of 0.83. The respondents were asked to respond to the questionnaire by choosing agree or disagree. Then frequency counts were taken and converted to percent agree and disagree.

Data analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Science version 16.0 was used for data analysis. The data was coded then frequencies and percentages were computed. High percentage indicated positive perception towards the supervisors, students-supervisor discussion and the teaching practice in general. Additionally, t-tests were computed to compare perception differences between student teacher and mentor, student teacher and university supervisor and mentor teacher and university supervisor respectively. Before computing the mean scores and t-tests, all negatively worded statements were reversed accordingly.

RESULTS

Student teachers' perception of teaching practice

The student teachers' perception of teaching practice can be influenced by factors such as finance, geographical distance, accommodation, uneven posting of student teachers,

supervisors, and the institutional environment. The first objective of the study sought to analyse participants' perception and experiences of how teaching practice is currently revealing itself as an exercise for either grading for certification or improvement of teaching skills. The results indicated that 76.92% of the student teachers viewed teaching practice as mainly being for improvement of skills and not grading. Conversely, 23.08% of them perceived that teaching practice is for grading and not improvement (Table 1).

Student teachers also held the following views: 84.62% opined that interns become more serious only when they know that a university supervisor is on visit; 26.0% had the opinion that student teachers leave teaching practice just after assessment; this implied that 74.0% of them did not support that statement and only 20.0% had reasoned that the teaching practice duration was too short for professional skills development (Table 1). Hence 80.0% of them reasoned that the teaching practice time was not short but rather adequate for professional development and growth. Student teachers (84.50%) did not agree that they became serious with their work only when the mentor sat in class for observation and assessment. A significant number, 38.46% of them, some supervisors' comments did not help them much. On the statement that some schools gave students few periods for practice, they were almost equally divided on the issue (49.50% agreed as against 50.50% disagreed).

Question two also sought to know the mentor teacher perception of the teaching practice. The mentors responded to the same items as the student teachers (See Table 2). Approximately 64.0% of the mentors perceived that student teaching practice is for developing the professional skills of the student teachers. Thirty six percent of them said that the programme was for grading the student teachers. This meant 64.0% felt the programme is for improvement. Also 92.73% of them said the teaching practice exercise was for improvement of the skills of the intern. By these two statements, they perceived that teaching practice was meant for improving their skills and for the purpose of grading. The implication is that student-teachers place much value on teaching practice as a professional development programme. Their feelings about grading were based on what they have heard, that "unless they were graded they would not be able to graduate."

Eighty-two percent (82.0%) of them were of the opinion that the duration of the programme was too short for novice teachers to learn how to teach and improve upon their skills. They also disagreed (83.64%) that feedback from supervisors was not helpful to student teachers. The mentors also refuted the statement that student teachers were only serious when the mentor was present in the class with them. Only 18.18% were of the opinion that

mentees became serious when the mentor sat in to assess them. However, 96.36% of the mentors asserted that the interns became more serious whenever they were made aware of the visit of their university supervisor. Majority of the mentors (89.09%) supported the feelings that mentees left the classrooms after the visit of the university supervisor. This might be so because university supervisors visit the student teacher in the last two weeks or one week to the end of the programme; when students might have been winding-up to go back to the university campus. The survey indicated that mentors have a positive view of the practicum and mentoring programme. Majority of them (72.73%) rejected the view that some students were awarded grades they did not deserve by their supervisors (mentors/university supervisors). However, a significant number of them (27.27%) held that view that some benefited of grades they actually did not deserve during the practice. Only 20% of the students were of the view that their schools gave some of them few periods for practice. If such cases actually existed, then such students would suffer from insufficient experience of the culture of practice makes perfect.

Question 3 sought to solicit university supervisors' perception of the purpose for organising an internship programme for student teachers. They reasoned that the main purpose is for the improvement of the student teachers' teaching skills. Their responses to some of the items suggested this conclusion. For example, 100% of the supervisors perceived that the purpose of teaching practice was for improvement of professional skills, for grading rather than for development (40.15%); 73.33% of them thought the duration of teaching practice is too short, none said that comments of supervisor are not helpful (0.00%). All of them (100%) rather felt comments/feedback were very helpful to interns. They thought that things were not going the way they expected. For example, 66.67% of the supervisors consented to the statements that: some supervisors awarded grades to student teachers who did not deserve such scores; also 66.67% of the supervisors felt that student teachers were only serious when their mentors sat in to assess them, and that the interns were more serious when their supervisors visited them (100%). The university supervisor opined that the students left their classes and do not learn to practice after the visit of the university supervisor (80.0%) (Table 3); thus ending the programme unofficially by such behaviours.

Furthermore, independent samples t-tests were computed to find out whether there was a significant difference in perceptions between student teachers and mentors, student teachers and university supervisors and mentors and university supervisors of the purpose of teaching practice (Table 4). Based on student teachers and

Table 1. Student teachers’ perception of the purpose of teaching practice.

	Statement	F	%
1	The way teaching practice is conducted by students and supervisors is more for grading than development	35	53.85
2	Some supervisors do provide grades to students which do not reflect their work	22	33.85
3	Some students are given few periods by their schools to practice teaching	32	49.23
4	Some supervisors’ comments do not help students to improve	25	38.46
5	Teaching practice is for improvement	50	77.70
6	Teaching practice duration is too short for skills development	13	20.00
7	Students are only serious when the mentor sits in for assessment	10	15.50
8	Students become more serious when they know their supervisor is on visit	55	84.62
9	In most cases students leave teaching practice just after assessment	17	26.15
Total		M = 569.97/9 = 63.33	44.37

* F= Frequency; % = Percentage.

Table 2. Mentor teachers’ perception of the purpose of teaching practice.

	Statement	F	%
1	The way teaching practice is conducted is more for grading than development	20	36.36
2	Some supervisors do provide grades to students which do not reflect their work	15	27.27
3	Some students are given few periods by their schools to practice teaching	11	20.00
4	Some supervisors’ comments do not help students to improve	9	16.36
5	Teaching practice is for improvement	51	92.73
6	Teaching practice duration is too short for skills development	45	82.00
7	Students are only serious when the mentor sits in for assessment	10	18.18
8	Students become more serious when they know their supervisor is on visit	53	96.36
9	In most cases students leave teaching practice just after assessment	49	89.09
Total		M = 565.64/9 = 62.85	53.26

* F= Frequency; % = Percentage.

Table 3. University supervisor’s perception of the purpose of teaching practice.

	Statement	F	%
1	The way teaching practice is conducted is more for grading than development	9	59.85
2	Some supervisors do provide grades to students which do not reflect their work	10	66.67
3	Some students are given few periods by their schools to practice teaching	5	34.00
4	Some supervisors’ comments do not help students to improve	0	00.00
5	Teaching practice is for improvement	15	100.00
6	Teaching practice duration is too short for skills development	11	73.33
7	Students are only serious when the mentor sits in for assessment	10	66.67
8	Students become more serious when they know their supervisor is on visit	15	100.0
9	In most cases students leave teaching practice just after assessment	12	80.00
Total		M = 519.18/9 = 57.69	64.50

* F= Frequency; % = Percentage M= 57.69% (all for items stated positively).

mentors, the results indicated the means scores for student teachers ($M = 63.33$, $SD = 3.25$) and mentors (M

$= 62.89$, $SD = 3.53$) were very close. When the differences between student teachers and mentors were

Table 4. T-tests comparing mean differences for student teachers, mentors and university supervisors on perception towards the purpose of teaching practice.

Category	Mean	SD	Md	df	t	Sig
Student teacher	63.33	3.25	.44	118	1.58	.31
Mentor	62.89	3.53				
Student teacher	63.33	3.25	5.64	78	4.45	.00
Univ. Supervisor	57.69	2.51				
Mentor	62.89	3.53	5.20	68	4.56	.00
Univ. Supervisor	57.69	2.53				

compared, the results showed a $t = 1.58$ with a $p = .31$ (2-tailed test) suggesting that there was no significant difference in perception between them on the purpose of student teacher practice. Likewise, the mean scores for student teachers ($M = 63.33$, $SD = 3.25$) was compared with the mean score of the university supervisor ($M = 57.69$, $SD = 2.53$). The computed t-value was $t = 4.45$, $p = .00$ (2-tailed). This suggested that there was significant difference in perception between the two participants towards the purpose of teaching practice. Interviews result indicated university supervisors' disappointment at the current state of the internship exercise which they said was geared towards just awarding grades for student teachers to graduate.

The mean scores between the mentor and university supervisor were also computed. The mean scores for mentor ($M = 62.89$, $SD = 3.53$) and university supervisor ($M = 57.69$, $SD = 2.53$) showed a mean difference of 5.20 suggesting a significant difference in perceptions between the two stakeholders. The calculated $t = 4.56$, $p = .00$ was greater than the critical $t = 1.96$, $p = .05$. Whilst mentors thought things went on well with the practicum process, the university supervisors felt things did not go on well with the execution of the programme.

Question 4 sought to find out the lessons that student teachers learned from the teaching practice. Majority of the student teachers (80.0%) believed that teaching practice is very important because a person cannot be a good teacher without practising teaching (Table 5). Furthermore, 81.5% of them disagreed with the statement that teaching practice is very frustrating; and if possible they could avoid it. When student teachers were asked what they learned from teaching practice, 86.2% of them indicated that they learned a number of issues such as classroom management, handling of students' question, lesson plan preparation and putting theory into practice.

About 75.4% of the students indicated that teaching practice assessment was fairly done and they liked it.

Approximately 74.0% of them said they enjoyed the practicum but the time was short. Another item required students' opinion on whether the current one semester teaching practice should be changed into one year internship. Sixty-six percent (66.0%) of them agreed with the statement. Arguably, for student teachers to agree with the statement has two implications: (i) student teachers perceived the current one semester teaching practice conducted for eight weeks does not provide enough practical experience and (ii) some may think that an internship will provide them more time for their professional development.

Student teachers perception of teaching practice supervisors

The second objective of the study sought to find out student teachers' perception towards teaching practice supervisors' treatment/behaviour. The findings indicated that majority of supervisors who participated in the teaching practice supervision in 2014/2015 were perceived positively by student teachers. To understand student teachers perception of teaching practice supervisors, frequencies and percentages were computed. The results of Table 6 indicated that 92.0% of the respondents agreed that supervisors intended to help them improve their teaching, 88.0% of them agreed that supervisors were dedicated and committed to their work, and 86.2% agreed that supervisors were friendly and supportive during teaching practice assessment.

Conversely, 75.4% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that "our supervisors invaded us (went in the teaching practice station without notice) and left just after classroom assessment". This implies that supervisors provided prior information before actual visit and spent some good time for discussion with student teachers after classroom assessment.

These findings are consistent with the reports of Albasheer, Khasawneh, Abut, and Hailat (2008) who found that student teachers had similar perceptions regarding

Table 5. Student teachers’ perception of the lessons they learned at teaching practice.

Statements	Agree		Undecided		Disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
1 I learn a lot from the school mentor teacher	56	86.2	4	6.1	5	7.7
2 A person can be a good teacher without TP	9	13.9	4	6.1	52	80.0
3 Teaching practice (TP) is very frustrating if possible I could avoid it	8	12.3	4	6.1	53	81.5
4 In reality teaching practice(TP) assessment is fairly done and I like it	49	75.4	7	10.8	9	13.8
5 I enjoyed the teaching practice (TP) a lot but the time was too short	48	74.0	8	12.3	9	13.8
6 Teaching practice (TP) of one semester should be changed to internship of one year	43	66.1	10	15.4	12	18.5

* F= Frequency, % = Percentage.

the effectiveness of university supervisors, school principals and co-operating teachers participating in the teacher education programme offered by the Hashemite University in Jordan. The results from Table 6 indicate that 92.2% of respondents liked the way supervisors advised them in all aspects of classroom teaching (lesson plan and scheme of work preparation, use of teaching aids and classroom management and supervision), 89.2% of them liked the way supervisors interacted with them suggesting it was professional and helpful to them and 89.2% of the students opined that supervisors were serious during teaching practice assessment. These findings are consistent with those observed by Albasheer *et al.* (2008) in which student teachers believed that university supervisors trained them effectively to plan comprehensive daily lesson plans, combine the theoretical perspective with practice in the instructional process, provide appropriate instructions to improve performance, provided immediate feedback at the end of each class, and conducted meetings to discuss student teachers’ performance and progress individually and collectively. Other studies have shown that student teachers value a supportive, interactive classroom environment especially with respect to the process of learning to teach (McNally & Inglis, 1997 in Kiggundu, 2007).

4.3. Student teachers’ perception of comments after classroom assessments

The third objective of the study sought to examine respondents’ perception and concerns of supervisor’s comments provided during discussion before and/or after classroom assessment. During teaching practice assessment, supervisors are supposed to provide educative and informative comments on student teachers work. These comments will guide student

teachers in their reflection and in the proceeding teaching exercise (Student Handbook, 2009). The comments are provided in oral or written form during consultation that take place between one student and supervisor or a group of students before and/or after classroom assessment. Prior classroom assessment student-supervisor discussion is very important as it orients student teachers on basic issues of interest to supervisors.

Thereafter, student classroom assessment is done followed by a discussion which is mainly reflective with the intention of highlighting student’s strength and weaknesses during lesson presentation. Student teachers’ perception of supervisors’ comments are illustrated in Table 7. The findings (Table 7) indicate that 84.6% of the student teachers agreed that supervisors’ comments were effective and helped them improved their teaching, and 80.4% agreed that supervisors comments were educative and helped them (Table 7) much to improve upon their methods of teaching.

The results in Table 8 indicate that majority of students (73.8%) had the opinion that the time for student-supervisor discussion should be increased,73.8% of them also suggested that during teaching practice supervision, supervisors should use polite and friendly language during student-supervisor discussion, and (87.7%) commented that supervisors should be fair and encourage students rather than discouraging students.

Approximately fifty one percent of the students said the university should sit in with the mentor teacher to assess them. They (84.6%) were also of the opinion that the university supervisor should inform them of their visit in order for them to get well prepared for the visit. They suggested an increase of the number of supervisors’ visits to them at their school. Almost 85% of the students said they should be informed by the supervisor of his/her date of visit. This will enable the trainee-teacher to prepare

Table 6. The aspects which student teachers liked from their supervisors.

Statement	F	%
1 The supervisor was friendly and supportive	56	86.2
2 Supervisor stayed in the class all the time and provided feedback	58	89.2
3 The way the supervisors interacted with me was professional	60	92.0
4 Supervisors were seriousness and committed in conducting their duties	57	88.0
5 The way he/she showed me on how to plan the lesson was good	51	78.5
6 The comments I was given were very effective	63	96.9
7 The supervisors invaded our classes	49	75.4

* F = Frequency, % = Percentage

Table 7. Students experience and perception towards students-supervisor discussion.

Statements	Agree		Undecided		Disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
1 The comments were understandable without discussion with supervisor	23	35.4	4	6.1	38	58.5
2 Supervisors comments were educative and helpful	52	80.0	4	6.1	9	13.9
3 The comments were effective and improved my teaching	55	84.6	3	4.6	7	10.8
4 I learned nothing from the supervisor written comments	16	24.6	5	7.7	44	67.7
5 The oral comments were self explanatory and useful	44	67.7	7	10.8	14	21.5

* F = Frequency, % = Percentage.

Table 8. Student concerns on how to improve student-supervisor discussion.

Statement	F	%
1 Supervisors should use friendly and polite language	48	73.8
2 Should be fair and encourage rather than harsh and discourage students	57	87.7
3 Supervisor should see the mentor before assessing the student	39	60.0
4 Supervisor should sit in with the mentor to see the student's class work	33	50.7
5 Supervisor should increase time for discussion with students	48	73.8
6 Supervisors should inform them of the dates of their visits	55	84.6

* F= Frequency, % = Percentage.

well in advance for the visit of the supervisor. This result could be attributed to varied nature of supervisors' personalities and level of education as people vary on the way they advise student teachers in the process of nurturing professional behaviour. Literature reveal that, some supervisors are strict and that student teachers have to follow how their supervisor tell them to teach instead of experimenting with new teaching strategies (LaBoskey and Richert, 2002 cited in Kirbulut *et al.*, 2012; Beck and Kosnik, 2002).

Regarding the discussion itself, 84.6% of students indicated that student-supervisors discussions were very and/or after classroom assessments; implying that supervisors departed just after classroom assessment and therefore students are expected to learn from the comments written on the assessment paper provided. These findings are consistent with the findings by Christie

useful and they liked them. Majority of them (84.6%) had opined that, supervisors should find time to discuss the strength and weakness observed during classroom teaching. Majority (96.9%) of respondents indicated that they had discussion with supervisors before and/or after classroom assessment. Time for discussion varied and ranged between 20 and 30 minutes. This variation is influenced by a number of factors some of these include: number of student teachers in the school or college, time table, total number of student teachers per supervisor and supervisors' level of education. Some students reported that they had no discussion with supervisors before *et al.* (2004) cited in Kirbulut *et al.* (2012) who found that pre-service teachers in Scotland could not receive any constructive feedback from their supervisors related to their teaching practice instead they were just told that their teaching was fine, even if it was not.

Moreover, supervisors did not allocate enough time for giving feedback: they gave feedback during limited periods, such as at the end of the lesson or during break times.

Apart from the respondents' perception of the students-supervisor discussion they had also varied perception on the comments (feedback) provided by supervisors. All the student teachers perceived the timeliness and quality of feedback that they received was more important than the quantity of feedback for their learning in the programme. Mentors' feedback was rated as most important during the programme because it was given in good time as mentors sat in class to observe the student teacher. This observation was also reported by Kumar, Kenney, and Buraphadeja (2013) in their study of peer feedback for enhancing student project development in on line learning.

DISCUSSION

The majority (54.5%) of students had opinion that supervisors' feedbacks play a great role on student teachers' professional development. Respondents opined that the supervisor's feedback helped them improve their teaching. However, some few individual students indicated that they were discouraged by the comments from supervisors. Generally all the participants (student teachers, mentors and university supervisors) agreed that 8 weeks of teaching practice was inadequate for preparing the student teacher. The findings are similar with those of Quick and Siebörger (2005) and Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009) in which majority of respondents both supervisors and students felt time for teaching practice was not enough and students wished to spend more time in schools. Additionally, 100% of the students opined that they should be provided with accommodation in schools. Student teachers (76.92%), mentors (64.0%) and university supervisors (100.0%) held the view that student teaching is for the professional development of the pre-service teacher. The three stakeholders agreed that the teaching practice period should be increased from eight weeks to 16 weeks to allow interns gain much experience. This supports Margetts and Ure (2007) view that teaching practice was key to developing knowledge, skills and dispositions related to professional and personal competence of the teacher.

CONCLUSION

The outcome of the study indicate that student teachers had positive perceptions of the support given them by their mentors and university supervisors. They value the teaching practice component of their preparation highly, seeing it as a gate way to their profession. Mentors and university supervisors felt that

student teachers became more serious when they knew that their university supervisors would be around to assessment them. This they felt ought not to be so and need to be redressed to improve practice and effectiveness of the programme. Student teachers, however, had some concerns and challenges that need to be looked into. It will be helpful if university supervisors visit them more that once as the current situation was. It will also be helpful if supervisors sit the whole day with them and discuss issues of their lesson notes with mentors, personal challenges they face on internship, issues on portfolios, teaching philosophies and their project or long essays. When these concerns are properly addressed, it would help positively affect quality of teaching practice in the country and elsewhere.

The current study is significant because it would go a long way to contribute significantly to knowledge within the teacher education and preparation in Ghana and countries in the West African sub-region by providing useful insight into stakeholders' activities in the organisation of teaching practice. This paper will serve as a useful source of information for mentors, university supervisors and administrators to improve upon their work practice and provide directions on how to improve their supervisory activities. It will also added to the stock of literature on teacher internship and stimulate further studies on the subject area.

The study had its limitations in the following areas. There was limitation in generalising its finding to a larger population of Ghana and its neighbouring West African countries who run similar teacher training programmes because of the small sample size that was used for the study.

It is also possible that student teachers may refuse to provide true answers to questions they view to be too personal, especially on their relationship with mentors and supervisors who matter so much in their assessment and grading. Furthermore, the study is prone to error and subjectivity because when a researcher designs a questionnaire, items are predetermined and prescriptive. These are likely to influence the outcome of the research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The communication between the university and the schools should be strengthened so as to minimize the challenges and problems resulting from misinformation between the two institutions. The university supervisors should visit student teacher much earlier during the practice.

Students in a school should be paired with subject specific mentors only. Extend the duration for teaching practice to two terms of the SHS academic calendar because the current crops of student teachers are mainly senior high school graduates and have no initial practicum experience. The college and host institutions should be strict to make sure student teachers who are laissez-faire fulfill their responsibilities in the classroom. There is the need to harmonise the lesson formats used by the school and university. Schools should provide accommodation for student teachers for easy contact.

University calendar should correlate with that of senior high school to avoid contradictions. Increase the number of visits by the university supervisor to student teachers for adequate assessment and feedback for interns to develop the necessary skills they need in the teaching profession. There was also the need to extend the duration of the teaching practice period from the current one term to two terms of the SHS academic calendar.

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