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Challenges and Prospects of off Campus Practicum: The Experience of the Physical Education Student Teacher

Thomas Hormenu

Department of Health, Physical Education and Recreation, University of Cape Coast

Michael Agyei

Department of Health, Physical Education and Recreation, University of Cape Coast

Prosper Narteh Ogum

Department of Health, Physical Education and Recreation, University of Cape Coast

Abstract:

Teaching practice is one of the major ways in teacher preparation. It therefore enhances pre-service teacher preparation and provides opportunity to beginning teachers' to real life situation of teaching and to become socialized into the profession as they put together subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge into lesson delivery. Teacher training institutions year after year put in so much on teaching practice; however, it seems elusive whether the purpose of practicum is harnessed as students take longer time to settle in their various school of practice. The focus of this paper was to investigate the challenges and the prospects of the off campus teaching practice as experienced by the Physical Education (PE) student teacher. The research made use of descriptive survey design. PE student teachers on teaching practice during the 2013/2014 academic year were purposively selected and responded to 3-point Likert Scale questionnaire. Student teachers were asked to respond to statements either they agree, undecided or disagree. It was found that majority 41 (93%) of PE student teachers on practice have positive attitudes towards the practicum. We also found that poor learning environment, lack of teaching equipment, facilities and materials 31(70%), uneasy accessibility of some of the locations by supervisors 25 (57%), mentors not having time to guide the student teacher were some of the major challenges encountered by the PE student teachers. We recommended that orientation should be given to heads of institutions and mentors on their role of teacher preparation and also the new knowledge that only supervisors with PE background 22 (50%) should supervise PE lessons and only lecturers in the Faculty of Education should supervise teaching practice 34 (77%).

Keywords: Teaching Practice, PE student teachers

1. Introduction

Teacher education plays a critical role in empowering trainee teachers' capacities in content knowledge and pedagogical skills in order for them to equip the greater majority of individuals to adapt to the rapidly changing social, economic and cultural environment to ensure the development of human capital required for the economic and social growth of societies (Anamuah, 1997).

Teaching practice is one of the major ways in teacher preparation. Teaching practice therefore occupies a key position in the programme of teacher education and preparation. It is a culminating experience as it enhances pre-service teacher preparation and provides opportunity to beginning teachers in real life situation of teaching and to become socialized into the profession as they try to put together subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge in lesson delivery (Furlong, Hirst & Pocklington, 1988). Performance during teaching practice provides some basis for predicting the future success of the teacher as he/she prepares to occupy numerous vacancies created at pre university levels of education.

During teaching practice, student teachers find an opportunity to apply the acquired content and pedagogy knowledge, especially in the areas of psychology, teaching methods, teaching principles and teaching techniques in real life situations in the classroom and on the field. This put student teachers on teaching practice in a valuable position to increase their knowledge, do experiments on the basis of acquired knowledge and to solve the problems related to teaching (Gujjar, et al., 2010). They further explained that student teachers who are on teaching practice, if they are aware about their lacking experience and need of more learning, as well as willing to learn and gain, then they can learn practically much more from experienced teachers and teacher educators. During teaching practice, the student teachers do not only have opportunity of teaching, but they also have the opportunity to observe inside and outside of the classroom. It is clear from the foregoing that the role of the teacher in sustainable development cannot be quantified, especially in training personnel in various areas of the workforce. However, the teacher needs to be properly educated

and trained for professional efficiency and inculcated with a positive attitude that will enable him/her go through the training properly and come out well equipped for the responsibility ahead.

The term practicum embraces all the learning experiences of student teachers in schools (Ashraf, 1999). Teaching practice has three major connotations: the practicing of teaching skills and acquisition of the role of a teacher; the whole range of experiences that students go through in schools; and the practical aspects of the course as distinct from theoretical studies (Stones & Morris, 1977). Views regarding the experience of teaching practice suggested that it had created deeper awareness of a disjunction between the prescriptive teaching methodologies presented at the university, and the real life demands of teaching encountered in schools.

Akbar (2002) also posited that the objective of practicum is to provide the prospective teachers with an opportunity of establishing an appropriate teacher pupil relationship, provide an opportunity for evaluating the student potential as a teacher and suitability for the teaching profession, develop personal relationship with others: administrators, teachers, parents and students, provide the future teacher with practical experience in school to overcome the problems of discipline and enable him or her to develop method of control. Akbar (2002) further enumerated the following as the benefits of teaching practice;

- It provides an opportunity to put theories into practice and to develop a deeper understanding of educational principles and their implication for learning.
- It enables the student teachers to effectively plan and prepare lessons.
- It helps to develop skill in the use of fundamental procedures, techniques and methods of teaching.
- It provides an opportunity to develop desirable professional interests, attitudes and ideas relative to the teaching profession.
- It enables student teachers to acquire desirable characteristics / traits of a teacher and to display appropriate behaviour.
- It provides student teachers with an opportunity to have teaching evaluated and to gain from the benefits of constructive criticism.
- It also provides an opportunity for self-evaluation and to discover own strengths and weaknesses.
- It aids in developing teaching skills in future teachers such as fluent speaking, meaningful reading, using black or marker boards and other teaching material effectively.
- It provides an opportunity to liaise with the functioning of the school environment and with community and its resources.
- It also helps to provide for the exchange of ideas and methods between practicing school and teacher training institutions, by teacher training institutions' staff and students perceiving new ideas, effective use of material and equipment in practicing schools and introducing new ideas, materials and equipment into the school.

Despite these benefits, teaching practice is doing nothing to serve the purpose and is working on adhoc basis. Those schools in which teaching practice is being conducted are not taking active part in preparing the teachers for future but only tolerating this activity. The administration and teachers of the participating schools are not aware of the required information for evaluation techniques, which are to be used during teaching practice. Physical education is a highly technical subject that requires technical expertise to supervise or assess the teacher, unfortunately all lecturers from all institutes, faculties and schools in the university irrespective of their knowledge or background in Physical Education are asked to supervise PE practical lesson. They thus make very little impact on the advancement of the PE student teacher. Based on these issues of teaching practice, the questions that could be asked "are student teachers harnessing maximum benefits from the practicum?" "If they are getting the benefit, are there challenges hindering effective acquisition of the culture of teaching?" The study therefore sought to investigate the challenges and the prospect of the off campus teaching practice as experienced by the Physical Education student teacher.

2. Methodology

The study made use of descriptive survey design to describe the current challenges and prospects of off campus teaching practice as experienced by the Physical Education student teacher. The target population for the study consisted of all University of Cape Coast student teachers on teaching practice for 2013/2014 academic year numbering about 1,500 student teachers, however, the accessible population for the study consisted of student teachers from Department of Health, Physical Education and Recreation who were purposively selected using census sampling procedure which comprised all the 47 student teachers. The research adopted a three point Likert scale questionnaire based on the attitudes of student teachers towards teaching, challenges of teaching practice and the way forward.

The student teachers were visited in their schools of practice, briefed of the study and given copies of the questionnaire to respond to. Those who could be not be reached easily because of their location or distance had the questionnaire either mailed or sent to them through other students. Data was collected from the later part of November through December 2013 during the UCC teaching practice period.

Data on attitudes of student teachers towards teaching practice, challenges and way forward were analysed using frequencies and percentages.

3. Results and Discussion

This section deals with the presentation of the results and making inference into the result through discussion.

3.1. Research Question 1: What are the Attitudes of PE Student Teachers towards Teaching Practice?

This question was asked to find out student teachers' attitudes towards lesson preparation, school attendance, and punctuality, use of teaching and learning materials. The results are discussed under Table 1.

Statement on Attitude	Agree		Undecided		Disagree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
I have mutual understanding with my students and the school authority	44	100	0	0	0	0
I like to teach my lesson than watching the regular teacher use my period	44	100	0	0	0	0
I am always ready with my lesson notes	44	100	0	0	0	0
Teaching practice is a very good experience and should be allowed to continue	41	93	0	0	3	7
I teach some of my lessons with teaching and learning materials	41	93	0	0	3	7
I am always at my school location whether I have a period to teach or not	40	91	0	0	4	9
I have never been absent from my school location since I was posted	30	68	0	0	14	32
I prefer being supervised by lecturers from PE department	23	52	6	14	15	34
Most often I am tensed when supervisors come around	15	34	0	0	29	66
Teaching practice is boring	1	2	0	0	43	98

Table 1: Attitudes of Student Teachers towards Teaching Practice

Table 1 show that almost all the PE student teachers had positive attitude towards teaching practice. This is evident from the fact that all PE student teachers were always ready with their lessons notes and ready to teach during their period as attested by 44(100%) respondents. Student teachers would not sacrifice their periods for other teachers to use as agreed by all respondents 44(100%). This notwithstanding, they had mutual understanding with their school authorities and their students 44(100%). Because of their positive attitude and commitment to teaching, PE student teachers prepared in advance 41(93%) and stayed in the school premises all day 40(91%). Also, attesting to the positive attitude of the PE student teachers was the fact 43(98%) disagreed to the notion that teaching was boring and 41(93%) commended the exercise. This means to them, teaching practice is interesting. The respondents indicated that they preferred being supervised by lecturers PE department (52%) to supervisors from other departments (34%), however, (14%) were undecided. Their indecision might stem from the fact that their PE lecturers would look at their lessons with a technical eye and award them scores which would reflect their actual performance. Some also taught that the non technical lecturers would award them very high marks because they would not know the technicality involved in teaching PE practical lessons. This is in support of Wanekezi, Okoli and Mezieobi (2011) in their study conducted on attitude of student-teachers towards teaching practice in the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria, where they found that student teachers have positive attitude towards teaching as Sharafaddin and Allison (1969) also posited that when trainee teachers have positive attitude towards practicum, they see themselves growing through experience and they begin to link to a culture of teaching. Also good attitudes towards practicum challenge pre-service teachers to engage in the exploration of their beliefs and expectations or what may be termed their 'native theories' (Anamuah-Mensah, 1997).

3.2. Research Question 2: What are the Challenges faced by PE Student Teachers during Teaching Practice?

This question was asked to find out the pertinent challenges facing teaching practice as experienced by PE student teacher. The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 reveals that the top most challenges faced by PE student teachers during teaching are student teachers inability to access mark score just after supervision or the supervisors' refusal to show them their marks to indicate how they fared in the lesson (96%) and lack of the needed equipment, facilities and materials required for teaching (70%).

Statement on Challenges	Agree		Undecided		Disagree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Inability of student teacher to see their assessment score just after supervision	42	96	0	0	2	4
Lack of necessary equipment, facilities and materials for the student teacher	31	70	2	5	11	25
Uneasy accessibility of some school locations by supervisors	25	57	8	18	11	25
Poor learning environment in the practicing schools, such as class congestion, poor ventilation, poor facilities and equipment	21	48	2	4	21	48
Mentors do not have time for the student teacher	21	48	5	11	18	41
Inadequate content and pedagogical knowledge	3	7	2	4	39	89
School authority lacks knowledge about the teaching practice	8	18	0	0	36	82
Inadequate preparation of students for teaching practice	11	25	2	5	31	70
Supervisors lack knowledge in the physical education lesson	16	36	4	9	24	55
Less number of required period of teaching	20	45	0	0	24	55
Short practicing period	18	41	2	4	24	55
Most supervisors fail to comment student teacher for lesson well taught but only dwell on the mistakes committed	12	27	0	0	30	68

Table 2: Challenges of Teaching Practices

During teaching practice it is the duty of supervisors to supervise student teachers' lessons, other assigned activities, guidance and counselling as well as provide the student teachers with feed back and to enable them so that they can criticize and reform themselves. The outcome was in affirmation of a study conducted by Gujjar, Naoreen, Saifi and Bajwa (2010) on teaching practice problems and issues in Pakistan, where they posited that supervisors do not provide proper guidance to student teachers and even if they do the information given to student teacher about their performance is rare and inadequate. Gujjar et al. further opined that due to lack of adequate teaching and learning materials available for student teachers, their competencies are sometime impeded in the classroom.

Uneasy accessible of some school locations by supervisors was another challenge that received a substantial amount of responses (57%). This is an indication that some of the schools are located in the hinterland with very poor road network making driving to such places a very difficult task for the supervisors. The supervisors may not visit those at all culminating in the student teachers not receiving the minimum required number of supervisions at the end of the teaching practice period. Eighty nine percent and 70% percent disagreed that students received inadequate knowledge in content and pedagogy and thus are not adequately prepared for teaching practice respectively, as a challenge. The result show that teachers were adequately prepared in terms content and pedagogical knowledge in the university, hence, PE student teachers' ability to deliver lessons with confidence. This is in confirmation of Shulman's (1987) proposition that to teach all students according to today's standards, teachers need to understand subject matter deeply and flexibly and pedagogically so they can help students create useful cognitive maps, relate one idea to another, and address misconceptions. However, the outcome was in opposition to JUSSTEP reformers proposition in 1993 that 'learning [in training institutions] was heavily examination-oriented. Students were largely the passive recipients of "content" and "theory" while appropriate teaching methodology (student-centred pedagogy) and practical teaching strategies were largely ignored (Ghana Education Service [GES], 1993, p. 1). In all cases, the level of indecision was between 0-18%. This indicates the students' uncertainty about the true representation of some of the variables in the schools of practice. What might be true in one location might not be the case at another school.

Way forward	Agree		Undecided		Disagree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Students should be well prepared pedagogically before posting to schools	44	100	0	0	0	0
Orientation on requirements of teaching practice should be given headmasters and mentors of the various schools of practice before the arrival of student teachers	44	100	0	0	0	0
The school authority should liaise with far school locations to arrange accommodation for the students	42	96	0	0	2	4
Lecturers should inform the students when they want to visit each school for supervision	40	91	0	0	4	9
Lecturers who are not in the Faculty of Education should not supervised teaching practice	34	77	0	0	8	18
PE should be supervised by PE lecturers only	22	50	4	9	18	41
Teaching practice should be done at different locations for two (2) terms	20	45	0	0	24	55

Table 3: The way forward of teaching Prospect

Table 3 elaborates the views of the student teachers on the way forward of teaching practice. All the students agreed that orientation on the requirements of teaching practice should be given to heads of institutions and mentors in the various schools of practice prior to the practice section 44(100%). The outcome confirmed the proposition of Gujjar et al. (2010) that those schools in which teaching practice is being conducted are not taking active part in preparing the teachers for future but only tolerating this activity. The administration and teachers of the participating schools are not aware of the required information for evaluation techniques, which are to be used during teaching practice and therefore needs to be oriented on the intricacies of practicum. This will adequately resolve them on the areas of assessment and the skills to be expected of the student teacher. The system where students are just posted to schools for the mentors to assess should be a thing of the past. All the respondents were also of the view that they should be given proper tuition or prepared well pedagogically before they are posted to schools to teach 44(100%). This was in support of Iroegbu and Opara (1998) that for PE teachers to be competent, they must be adequately equipped right from training period. By this, they will have the repertoire of teaching methods at their disposal to employ the right ones at different stages of lessons and teaching different topics. From Table 3 half 22(50%) of the respondents indicated that they want PE to be supervised by PE lecturers only. Forty one percent did not hold this assertion. They believe any lecturer from any department should be able to supervised PE practical lesson irrespective of the technicality involved. Nine percent were however, uncertain about this notion. A greater number 40(91%) also agreed that any time lecturers wanted to visit a school for supervision, the student teachers need to be given proud information so they could prepared well. The remaining 9% thought otherwise.

4. Conclusion

PE student teachers on teaching practice have a positive attitude towards the exercise, thus enhancing the prospects of off campus practicum. Student teachers' attitude is however, affected by the fact that their performances are not relayed to them at the end of the supervision, hence, they proposed that that PE lessons should be supervised by PE lecturers only as a way of positioning the subject and further enhancing their attitudes as a way of delineating the challenges associated with off campus practicum. Based on this conclusion, it is recommended that more resources should be pumped into teaching practice in order to support student teachers in terms of teaching and learning materials needed for practice and also orientation should be given to heads of institutions and mentors on their role of teacher preparation. Also teaching practice should be supervised lecturers in the Faculty of Education should supervise teaching practice.

University of Cape Coast
Faculty of Education
Department of Health, Physical Education and Recreation

5. Questionnaire

Dear Valued Student,

We are lecturers from the Department of Health, Physical Education and Recreation conducting research on the Challenges and Prospect of One Semester off Campus Practicum of UCC Student Teachers: The Experience of the Physical Education Teacher. You are kindly requested to read through this questionnaire thoroughly and respond to the items as frankly as possible. You are reminded and assured that this research is purposely for academic purposes and confidentiality of your responses will be highly protected, therefore, do not write your name please.

Thank you for helping create knowledge to improve pedagogical and content skills of the Physical Education teacher.

Thomas Hormenu
0244-213-465

Michael Agyei
0244-815-886

- Instruction: Please tick (√) in the box under either Agree, I cannot tell or Disagree

	Student teacher's attitude	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
1	Teaching practice is a very good experience and should be allowed to continue			
2	I have never been absent from my school location since I was posted			
3	Teaching practice is boring			
4	I am always at my school location whether I have a period to teach or not			
5	I am always ready with my lesson notes			
6	I like to teach my lesson than watching the regular teacher use my period			
7	I prefer being supervised by lecturers from PE department			
8	I have mutual understanding with my students and the school authority			
9	I teach some of my lessons with teaching and learning materials			
10	Most often I am tensed when supervisors come around			

- Challenges of Teaching Practice

	Statements	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
11	Inadequate preparation of students for teaching practice			
12	Lack of necessary equipment, facilities and materials for the student teacher			
13	Inadequate content and pedagogical knowledge			
14	Supervisors lack knowledge in the physical education lesson			
15	Less number of required period of teaching			
16	Poor learning environment in the practicing schools, such as class congestion, poor ventilation, poor facilities and equipment			
17	Short practicing period			
18	Uneasy accessibility of some school			

	locations by supervisors			
19	Mentors do not have time for the student teacher			
20	School authority lacks knowledge about the teaching practice			
21	Most supervisors fail to comment student teacher for lesson well taught but only dwell on the mistakes committed			
22	Inability of student teacher to see their assessment score just after supervision			

- Way forward for the Teaching Practice

	Statements	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
23	Students should be well prepared pedagogically before posting to schools			
24	Teaching practice should be done at different locations for two (2) terms			
25	PE should be supervised by PE lecturers only			
26	The school authority should liaise with far school locations to arrange accommodation for the students			
27	Lecturers should inform the students when they want to visit each school for supervision			
28	Orientation on requirements of teaching practice should be given headmasters and mentors of the various schools of practice before the arrival of student teachers			
29	Lecturers who are not in the Faculty of Education should not supervised teaching practice			

Thank you for being part of the study.

Teacher preparation could encounter many challenges as university lecturers seem more interested in ensuring that trainees applied prescriptive teaching strategies, or demonstrated specific teaching behaviour taught in the university, without raising equally the value of adaptive behaviour in teaching. The National Commission on Teacher Education set up by the Ministry of Education in 1993 was of contention that teacher training had not placed sufficient emphasis on developing teaching expertise from a school-focused orientation (Ministry of Education 1993). Professional educators commenting on the problem of teacher quality also echoed this point that teacher preparation in Ghana focused on overemphasis on trainees' academic knowledge instead of focusing on methods of teaching (Awuku 2000). According to the JUSSTEP reformers 'learning [in training institutions] was heavily examination-oriented. Students were largely the passive recipients of "content" and "theory" while appropriate teaching methodology (student-centred pedagogy) and practical teaching strategies were largely ignored (GES, 1993, p. 1).

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