

Accounting Teacher Trainees' Perception of the Importance of Field Experience in Teaching: A Case of the University of Cape Coast

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Abstract

This was primarily designed to find out Accounting teacher trainees' perception of the importance of field experience in teaching. The study was conducted at the Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education, University of Cape Coast. A descriptive survey was used as research design. Simple random sampling technique was used to select Eighty-five (85) Accounting teacher trainees from the department. A set of well-structured and self-developed questionnaires were used to solicit data from the respondents and the instrument was administered personally. Data were analysed with the use of descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages). The study established that Accounting teacher trainees perceived field experience in teaching positively. It was also found out that Accounting teacher trainees engage in various activities apart from the teaching and learning of Accounting. The study also established that, field experience in teaching had benefited Accounting teacher trainees by helping them to decide whether or not to take on teaching as a profession, to build proper confidence, to plan, prepare and present lesson topics and to broaden their knowledge of the subject matter. However, despite the thorough preparation, students were faced with challenges which significantly affected their ability to accrue maximum benefits from the experience. Accordingly, it has been recommended among others that the Teaching Practice Unit should educate teacher trainees who are yet to embark on field experience in teaching on its benefits and should grade extra-curricular activities.

Keywords: Mentors, Mentee, Lead mentors, Teacher trainees

1.0 Introduction

Teaching is an activity intended to promote learning. Quality Teaching is nursed through proper training, proper planning and professional dedication. Aggarwal (2001, p.8) sees teacher education as a means to kindle the teacher's initiative, to keep it alive, to minimize the evils of 'hit and miss' process in teaching and to save time and energy. In this regard, Aggarwal believes that teacher education is not about teaching the teacher how to teach.

Teacher education or development as it is used by many teacher educators (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992, p. 2) is a complex, multi-faceted process, made up of initial teacher training, in-service training (or continuing education) and lifelong education. In some places, teachers go through an additional process of induction and licensing. These processes cannot be carried out in isolation from one another. A strong relationship among the different elements especially between the practical experiences and the theory is required for quality teacher education. Currently, the major institutions that collaborate to provide teacher education in Ghana are: Ghana Education Service (GES), University of Education, Winneba (UEW), and University of Cape Coast (UCC). The Ghana Education Service provides initial teacher education through thirty eight (38) Teacher Training Colleges located in various parts of the country. Teacher education plays a crucial role in empowering a group of people to assist 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. It is said that "if they (teachers) acquire the professional competence and attitudes that enable them to effectively perform their multiple tasks in the classroom, in the school and in the community, teachers become the single most important contributing factor in ensuring quality educational provision" (Dave & Rajput, 2000, p.324). A critical aspect of this professional competence is the practicum (field experience in teaching). It is the heart of teacher education and an inseparable aspect of any professional training.

The term 'practicum' is used basically to refer to the different types of school attachment; namely, school experience, teaching assistantship, teaching practice and so forth that pre-service students will be undergoing as part of their initial teacher preparation program. In the early 1960s, micro teaching was invented at Stanford University by Dr. Dwight Allen (Cruickshank, 1996). The school-based practicum was designed to enable student-teachers to observe a teacher's real work, to apply and refine the knowledge and skills acquired through course-work in classroom teaching. Student-teachers are to use the opportunities during the practicum to integrate educational theory and practice and to widen their practical experiences.

In the context of teaching practicum, student-teachers are expected to apply what they have learned theoretically. To maximize the utility of practicum, it is important that teacher trainees actively promote the effective learning during the practicum period. Effective learning should be concerned with the learning of organized wholes of knowledge. It is a process that involves developing the ability to identify the objectives one seeks and within a flexible framework, optimizing a program to meet these objectives in line with individual learning attributes. According to Robotham (2003), effective learning also needs to achieve transference of knowledge from the artificiality of training course to practical application where the trainees adapt acquired knowledge to the perceived needs of a particular problem or situation.

According to Desmond and Nacirno-Brown (1990), “a medical surgeon and an engineer had to put into practice at some point in their training what they had learnt in theory before they could be considered qualified for their profession”. In the same way, most educationists agree that a teacher trainee has to practice before he/she can be considered qualified for the teaching profession.

Teaching practice is inevitable for any student undergoing a professional course in education. Teaching practice denotes the period of time when the student-teacher is exposed to real teaching experience as part of his/her initial training program. The principal rationale behind the teaching is the production of professionally well-equipped and efficient teachers for all levels of education (Menter 1998).

Teaching practice being an integral part of teacher education as an introduction to the realities of the situation is an essential part of effective professional training. Teaching practice gives the student teacher opportunities to integrate the theory and practice, work collaboratively with and learn from the experienced teachers who are already in the teaching field (Musingaf 2004). It also seeks to develop the competency in the aspect of content and methodology in teacher-trainees (mentees). Most educationists agree that every professional teacher should be of some appreciable qualities (Lisky 2004).

In Ghana, the universities that offer education programs, use the first year for content, the second and third year is also used for the study of methodology. In the same third year, student undertake on-campus teaching practice where they teach their peers. The first semester of the fourth year is for off-campus teaching practice and this is where the real teaching commences. During this period, mentees are supervised by their mentors, lead mentors and tutors from the university. With this innovation, more responsibility has been placed on the university teachers who are the assessors of the mentees.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Darling-Hammond (2010) noted that “one thing that is clear from current studies of strong programmes is that learning to practice in practice, with expert guidance, is essential to becoming a great teacher of students with a wide range of needs” (p. 40). Most teacher education institutes prepare their student-teachers for teaching in the real classroom contexts through “the practicum”, that is, a teacher education course unit consisting of both theoretical and practical aspects.

Barry and King (2002) noted that, “teaching practice [practicum] provides the opportunity to apply the principles of teaching and learning that have been studied during course work” (p. 35). Teacher trainees believed that the practical experiences of expert teachers who observe their lessons, receiving feedback and practicing various teaching strategies during the school experience are the most important factors in their professional growth (Tisher, as cited in Aputhasamy, 2005). For many, the practicum is the time to reflect whether or not teaching is the career for them (Barry & King, 2002). From this perspective, the practicum has the power to critically shape the student teacher’s perception of the teaching and learning (Gustason & Rowell, as cited in Grootenboer, 2006). It also seeks to provide trained teachers with the variety of factors that affect teaching behaviour, skills and performance during the actual classroom section.

Samaras and Gismondi (1998) noted that “the practicum has been viewed as an unmediated and unstructured apprenticeship which lacks work and adequate supervision” (p. 716). Unless structures are in place to promote reflection and evaluation, the practicum can become an experience of uncritical practice that can work against quality teacher education (Burnt & Kirby, 2002; Moore, 2003).

It had been observed that teacher trainees panic when they undergo teaching practice because of their perception that teaching practice is meant for grading. Student-teachers therefore focus on obtaining the best grades than to obtain the skills which will have a great impact on their teaching profession. This situation can be attributed to the fact that students are not aware of the role field experience plays on their profession as teachers. This study attempts to fill this gap in the literature and thereby contribute to the evidence on accounting student-teachers’ perception on the importance of field experience in teaching.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study was to find out accounting teacher trainees’ perception of the importance of field experience in teaching. Specifically, this study sought to;

Find out the perception accounting student-teachers have about field experience in teaching.

- Identify the activities accounting student-teachers are exposed to during field experience (practicum).
- Outline the extent to which accounting student-teachers perceive field experience in teaching as beneficial to their training as teachers.
- Identify the challenges faced by teacher trainees in the course of field experience in teaching.

1.3 Research Questions

To guide the study, the following questions were developed.

How do accounting teacher trainees perceive teaching practice?

What activities are accounting teacher- trainees exposed to during their field experience?

To what extent do accounting teacher-trainees perceive field experience in teaching as beneficial to their training as teachers?

What are the challenges faced by teacher trainees in the course of field experience in teaching?

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The quantitative research design was adopted for this study because it is more reliable, objective and can use statistics to generalize the finding. The research design chosen for this study is a descriptive survey. According to Gay (1992), descriptive research involves collecting data in order to answer concerning the current status of the subject of the study. This study adopted an interpretive methodology using a case study approach. The study wants to find out Accounting teacher trainees' perception of the importance of field experience in teaching. The intention and adoption of this approach was to gain insight into the views of respondents and to describe their perceptions and reactions to a certain phenomenon (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). A descriptive survey generally provides a descriptive picture of a situation to establish norms and base line data for consideration by researchers. It was found useful because it described some aspect of a population sample in an unbiased way. It also determines and reports things the way they are. Case study allows a lot of details to be collected that would not normally be easily obtained by other research designs. Also the data collected is normally a lot richer and of greater depth than can be found through other experimental designs.

One of the main criticisms is that data collected can not necessarily be generalized to a wider population. This leads to data being collected over longitudinal case study not always been relevant or practically useful. It is also very difficult to draw a definite cause/effect from case studies.

2.2 Participants

The accessible population comprised level 400 education students in the University of Cape Coast (Ghana) who majored in Accounting. The accessible population was one hundred and ten (110) accounting teacher trainees. In line with the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for choosing sample size, a sample size of eighty-six (86) Accounting teacher trainees was recommended. The respondents comprised of both male and female students of different age range, ethnic and geographical background. Out of the 86 questionnaires administered, 85 were returned and this constitute 98.8% return rate.

2.3 Outcome Measure

A questionnaire was the main instrument used in the study. The questionnaire was designed by the researchers. The sections of the questionnaire consist of items that were used to elicit information to answer the research questions. The degree of the response determines whether the teacher trainees' agreed or disagreed to the items on the questionnaire.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data collected were checked, edited and coded. The data gathered were statistically analysed using frequencies and percentages with the version 22 of the SPSS software.

3.0 Results

Research Question One: How do accounting teacher trainees perceive teaching practice?

Research Question One sought to find out how accounting teacher trainees perceive teaching practice. Items 3-7 of the questionnaire under section B were designed to assist in finding answers to this research question. Table 1.0 presents the result.

Table 1. Perception of Field Experience in Teaching

Statement	Agree		Disagree	
	Freq.	(%)	Freq.	(%)
I consider field experience in teaching as helpful.	79	92.9	6	7.1
I feel field experience in teaching is stressful.	25	29.4	60	70.4
I consider field experience in teaching exercise as part of my training for life career.	79	92.9	6	7.1
I enjoyed my period of field experience in teaching exercise	79	92.9	6	7.1
I feel field experience in teaching is a mere academic exercise	23	27.1	62	72.9

Table 2.0 shows that 79 (92.9%) of the respondents considered field experience in teaching as helpful while 6 (7.1%) disagreed. Also, 79(92.9%) considered field in teaching as part of their training for life career while 6 (7.1%) disagreed. In contrast, a total of 23 (27.1%) felt that field experience in teaching is a mere academic exercise while 62(72.9%) disagreed.

Research Question Two: What Activities are Accounting Teacher- Trainees Exposed to during their Field Experience?

Research question two sought to find out the activities are accounting teacher- trainees exposed to during their field experience. Item 8-13 of the questionnaire under section C were design to assist in finding answers to this research question. Table 3.0 presents the result.

Table 3.0. Activities during Field Experience in Teaching

Statement	Agree		Disagree	
	Freq.	(%)	Freq.	(%)
I observed the work of other teachers.	77	90.6	8	9.4
I engaged in professional conversation with experienced teachers	76	89.4	9	10.6
I provided guidance to pupils dealing with their personal and educational background	79	92.9	6	7.1
I attended staff meeting.	79	92.9	6	7.1
I engaged in school extra-curricular activities.is a mere academic exercise.	80	94.2	5	5.9
I planned for teaching, learning and assessment.	85	100	0	0.0

From the Table, 77 (90.6%) of the respondents stated that, they observed the work of other teachers while 8 (9.4%) disagreed. Again, 79 (92.9%) stated that they provided guidance to pupils in dealing with their personal and educational issues while 6 (7.1%) disagreed. A total of 80(94.2%) agreed that they engaged in school extra-curricular activities while 5(5.9%) disagreed. Also, all the respondents indicated that they planned for teaching, learning and assessment. This shows that majority of teacher trainees observe the work of other teachers, attend staff meeting and all teacher trainees plan for teaching, learning and assessment. From the Table above, it can be seen that majority of the teacher trainees engaged in various activities daring field experience in teaching apart from the teaching of Accounting in their allocated classes.

Research Question Three: To what extent do accounting teacher-trainees perceive field experience in teaching as beneficial to their training as teachers?

Table 3. Benefits of Field Experience in Teaching

Statement	Agree		Disagree	
	Freq.	(%)	Freq.	(%)
Field experience in teaching has helped me to decide whether or not to take on teaching as a profession.	76	89.4	9	10.6
Field experience in teaching has helped me to master professional skills.	76	89.4	9	10.6
Field experience in teaching has provided me with the ability to try out new and different teaching strategies and reflect on my lesson development.	79	92.9	6	7.1
Field experience in teaching has helped me to build proper confidence.	85	100	0	0.0
Field experience in teaching has helped me to plan, prepare and present my lesson topics.	82	96.5	3	3.5
Field experience in teaching has helped me to acquire valuable personality attribute associated with outstanding teachers.	77	90.6	8	9.4
Field experience in teaching has helped me to perfectly use instructional materials when teaching.	79	92.9	6	7.1
Field experience in teaching helped me to broaden my knowledge of the subject matter.	85	100.0	0	0.0
Field experience in teaching gave me the opportunity to reflect on my understanding of teaching as a profession and modify my-self perceptions about teaching careers.	82	96.4	3	3.5
Field experience in teaching provided me with the hands –on experience needed to develop an understanding of students’ needs within the classroom.	85	100.0	0	0.0

From the Table, 76 (89.4%) of the respondents indicated that field experience in teaching has helped them to decide whether or not to take on teaching as a profession while 9 (10.6%) disagreed. All the respondents

indicated that field experience in teaching has helped them to build proper confidence. A total of 82 (96.5%) indicated that field experience in teaching has helped them to plan, prepare and present their lesson topics while 3 (3.5%) disagreed. Also, 85 (100%) indicated that field experience in teaching helped them to broaden their knowledge of the subject matter. Also, 82 (96.4%) of the respondents indicated that field experience in teaching gave them the opportunity to reflect on their understanding of teaching as a profession and modify their perceptions about teaching careers while 3 (3.5%) disagreed. A total of 85 (100%) indicated that field experience in teaching provided them with the hands –on experience needed to develop an understanding of students’ needs within the classroom.

Research Question Four: What are the challenges faced by teacher trainees in the course of field experience in teaching?

Table 4. Challenges faced during Field Experience in Teaching

Statement	Agree		Disagree	
	Freq.	(%)	Freq.	(%)
Some schools reject teacher trainees.	58	68.2	27	31.8
Permanent teachers are not friendly.	15	17.6	70	82.3
Teacher trainees face accommodation problems in places they are accepted.	58	68.2	27	31.8
Some schools lack instructional materials for effective teaching.	77	90.5	8	9.4
Teacher trainees meet some rudely behaved student.	76	89.5	9	19.6
Time for the field experience in teaching exercise is short.	58	68.2	27	31.8
Inadequate teaching practice orientation before the commencement of field experience in teaching.	45	52.9	40	47.1
Poor relationship between teacher trainees and school based teachers.	30	35.3	55	64.7
Too much workload or responsibility for teacher trainees in schools.	45	52.9	40	47.1
Teacher trainees excluded from the staff meetings.	17	20	68	80
Teacher trainees are faced with poor learning environment and overcrowded classrooms.	31	36.5	54	63.6

From the Table, 76 (89.4%) of the respondents indicated that field experience in teaching has helped them to decide whether or not to take on teaching as a profession while 9 (10.6%) disagreed. All the respondents indicated that field experience in teaching has helped them to build proper confidence. A total of 82 (96.5%) indicated that field experience in teaching has helped them to plan, prepare and present their lesson topics while 3 (3.5%) disagreed. Also, 85 (100%) indicated that field experience in teaching helped them to broaden their knowledge of the subject matter. Also, 82 (96.4%) of the respondents indicated that field experience in teaching gave them the opportunity to reflect on their understanding of teaching as a profession and modify their perceptions about teaching careers while 3 (3.5%) disagreed. A total of 85 (100%) indicated that field experience in teaching provided them with the hands –on experience needed to develop an understanding of students’ needs within the classroom.

4.0 Discussions

The study found 79 (92.9%), majority of teacher trainees perceive teaching practice as helpful while 6 (7.1%) disagreed. This is in line with Benton-kupper (2001), who discovered in his study that overall students’ perception of the microteaching was very positive. The student indicated that the hands-on approach provided them with excellent opportunities to gain knowledge and skills in their area of teaching. In this study, the findings of Adedayo (2013) on the perception of students towards participation in teaching practice exercise may not totally hold since almost all the statements in Table 2.0 turns to exhibit positive response. However, it confirmed his claim that teacher trainees consider teaching practice as part of their professional training.

It has been revealed by the study that, majority 77 (90.6%) of teacher trainees observe the work of other teachers; attend staff meeting and all teacher trainees plan for teaching, learning and assessment. it can be seen that majority of the teacher trainees engaged in various activities daring field experience in teaching apart from the teaching of Accounting in their allocated classes. These results is buttressed by Stratemeyer (1969) who in his study found out that student teachers were engaged in observing the work of other teachers , attending regular faculty meetings in school, providing guidance to pupils in dealing with their personal and education problems. It also confirms the findings in the study of Johnson and Deprin (1971) where they revealed some activities student’s teachers engage in during teaching practice which includes observing the teaching procedures followed by the cooperating teacher, taking note of the general routine and making daily plans and unit plans.

The study has again shown that, majority of the respondents representing 76 (89.4%) have benefited one way or the other from field experience in teaching. Prominent among these benefit is that it has helped them to build proper confidence while 9 (10.6%) disagreed

These results are confirmed in the study conducted in Singapore by Noonis and Jernice (2011), where

teacher candidates reported that their practicum experience provided them with the hands-on experience needed to develop an understanding of students' needs within the classroom and those who participated in the practicum reported that an essential link between the conceptual framework of theoretical underpinnings and 'real world' classroom practice was created through authentic situations and hands on experience.

A total of 76 (89.5%) indicated that teacher trainees meet some rudely behaved student. Moreover, a total of 58 (68.3%) indicated that the time for the field experience in teaching exercise is short. On the contrary, 70 (82.3%) of the total respondents disagreed that permanent teachers are not friendly. Also, 68 (80%) disagreed that teacher trainees were excluded from staff meetings. Moreover 55 (64.7%) disagreed that they were faced with poor learning environment and overcrowded classrooms. This is in line with some findings by Okobia, Augustine and Osagie (2013) on the analyses of the perceived challenges faced by student teachers during teaching practice exercise which revealed the following the time for teaching practice exercise is short, inadequate instructional materials and resources in schools but contradicts some challenges that there is inadequate teaching practice orientation before the commencement of teaching practice exercise, student teachers were faced with poor learning environment and overcrowded classrooms.

Whereas these results contradict some problems which were particularly identified by Diab (1999) in his study conducted on student teachers. Among the problems were student teachers not being invited to staff meetings, inability to access the school library, lack of interaction with colleagues and principals hence trainees feeling that they are strangers in the schools. In spite of these contradictions this finding confirms the problem of lack of teaching aids in the cooperative schools as identified in his study.

These results also affirms the study conducted by Andabai (2012) on the impact of teaching practice in the Nigerian tertiary institutions, which showed that trainee teachers benefited greatly in participating in teaching practice because they were able to build proper confidence in lesson preparation and developed skills and attitude of a teacher during the exercise. It was also revealed that teaching practice helps trainee teachers to learn how to keep records of assignment and also participating in school activities. It also exposed trainee teachers to the reality of effective teaching and help them to try out methods of teaching and gain practical classroom experience under expert supervision.

5.0 Conclusions

The focus of the study was to find out accounting teacher trainees' perception of the importance of field experience in teaching. After a thorough research conducted, the following were the conclusion reached as per objectives set. On the issue of accounting teacher trainees perception towards field experience in teaching, it came out that the Accounting teacher trainee viewed field experience in teaching as helpful and beneficial. This conclusion is supported by the fact that majority of the responses were positive and 79(92.9%) of the respondent indicated that field experience in teaching is helpful.

The study also revealed that, teacher trainees are involved in various activities during field experience in teaching apart from the teaching and learning of accounting. These activities include observation of the work of other teachers, provision of guidance to pupils, attendance of staff meetings and engagement in school extra-curricular activities.

Moreover, the study established that, field experience in teaching had benefited accounting teacher trainees by helping them to decide whether or not to take on teaching as a profession, to build proper confidence, to plan, prepare and present lesson topics and to broaden their knowledge of the subject matter. However, despite the thorough preparation, students were faced with challenges which significantly affected their ability to accrue maximum benefits from the teaching practice. These experiences also negatively influenced the student teachers' perception of and attitude towards the teaching profession. These included some school rejecting teacher trainees, accommodation problems, inadequate instructional materials, rudely behaved students, too much workload and responsibility for teacher trainees and the time of field experience in teaching being short. Apart from these conclusions, some recommendations were also made.

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