



THE ROLE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION IN PROMOTING QUALITY AND COMPETENCE OF TRAINED TEACHERS: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST, GHANA.

Peter Brown, University of Cape Coast. Ghana.

Co-Author: Albert K. Koomson

Summary

“The Role of Distance Education in promoting quality and competence of trained teachers: the Experience of the University of Cape Coast” describes the experience the University of Cape Coast has in promoting quality and competence of teacher trainees via Distance Education in Ghana. Distance Education is described as a viable avenue for developing countries to use in providing educational opportunities to their people. A developing country like Ghana, which often lacks resources, must seek to use innovative and low cost strategies for delivering effective distance education programmes.

The paper describes a viable distance training programme developed to upgrade about two hundred thousand Basic School teachers in Ghana: doing so without the traditional brick and mortar institution. It is presented as an empirical/case study of successful good practice.

With an initial enrolment of 750 students, the Centre has increasingly admitted not less than 2,000 Basic School teachers yearly since 2001 when its maiden programme was launched. By implication, distance education can work also in developing countries, particularly with visionary leadership, administrative support and faculty commitment, set up as a dual-mode institution with sufficient autonomy to plan curricula, select students and develop its own study materials and delivery systems.

INTRODUCTION

Distance education in Ghana is being used by the University of Cape Coast as a crucial tool for providing Basic School teachers with in-service education in the subjects they teach and for expanding tertiary education more cheaply than by conventional means. The University of Cape Coast established the Centre for Continuing Education in 1997 to embark on the dual-mode distance education programme and mount all popular on-campus-based programmes on distance.

Living to its mandate, the Centre is working to:

1. specifically train and retrain all categories of teachers of the Basic Schools in Ghana to obtain diplomas and degrees in Basic Education and thereby raise their academic and pedagogic competencies
2. make teachers in the basic schools enjoy higher professional privileges
3. eliminate completely the problem of looking for replacement where teachers leave their schools for further education by sending university education to the very doorstep of teachers.

In the light of these objectives, the Centre launched the University's maiden distance education programme in Teacher Education in October 2001. Nearly one thousand basic school teachers were offered admission, though 750 accepted the offer. The Centre now runs seven programmes including a Diploma in Basic Education (DBE) and Post-Diploma Degree in Basic Education (PDBE). Patronage has been high with the Centre offering not less than 2,000 admissions per year into its programmes. The Centre's activities have opened the floodgates for training of teachers whose academic and pedagogical competencies were seriously questioned owing to the introduction of Ghana's 1987 educational reforms.

As Moore (2001) notes that distance learning is a programme of the 21st Century, our programme is being presented as a successful model that achieves results without the use of the traditional brick-and-mortar institution and which may be of particular interest to those seeking to implement distance education in other developing countries. We wish to describe our design and implementation structure, problems faced, future plans and conclude by summarizing some lessons learned during our few years of existence in Ghana.

MAIN BODY

Teacher Education Programme Design

In Ghana, the primary school teacher, by convention is trained to teach all subjects on the time-table. At the Junior Secondary School level, however, teachers teach subjects they have specialized in. Our programmes in Basic Education have been designed to reflect the pattern.

The structure of the Diploma in Basic Education (DBE) is such that:

1. The teacher trainee on the programme takes courses in all the subjects taught at the primary level: English, Mathematics, Ghanaian Languages, Elementary Science, Environmental Studies, Religious and Moral Education, Physical Education and Music.
2. Professional training in Education is being offered through courses in Educational Studies, Methods of teaching the Primary School subjects, Project Work and Teaching Practice.
3. Both the content and methods of teaching the subjects are emphasized so as to strengthen the teacher trainee in content and pedagogy.
4. Students who complete the DBE with a 2nd Lower and above qualify automatically for the post-diploma programme.

The structure of the Post-Diploma degree in Basic Education (P-DBE) is such that:

1. Teacher-trainees specialize in two subjects – a major and a minor – from English, Mathematics, Pre-Vocational Skills, Social Studies, Integrated Science and French.
2. Six courses are mounted for major subjects and three for minor subjects of specialization.
3. Students are required in addition, to take all the University core courses in: Communicative Skills, Liberal Studies, African Studies, Information Retrieval plus all the Professional courses in Education.
4. Both the content and methods of teaching the subjects are emphasized

Entry Requirements

The Centre requires that all applicants be practicing teachers in either public or private basic schools with at least one year's teaching experience.

There are two modes of entry: direct applicants and Special Entrance Examination candidates.

Fees

Fees are determined by the Centre's Advisory Board chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor and approved by the University Council. Depending on the year level, students pay between GHC 150 and GHC200 (or the equivalence of between \$ 150 and \$200) per year to cover cost of modules, examinations, script marking, tutorials and overhead costs.

Training Requirements

Students are required to remain in their respective stations and schools throughout the training period to facilitate easy monitoring.

Learner Interaction with Content

Students are expected to use study guides alongside modules. The guides contain topics to be studied and the sequence in which to study them. Depending on the assigned credit load, a student studies either a 2-credit module comprising 4 Units of 24 sessions or a 3-credit module comprising 6 Units of 36 sessions. At allotted times, they report for tutorials at self-chosen Study Centres. Three quizzes are written per semester, weighted 75% and 25% for assignments. Owing to problems connected with assignments, CCE places much emphasis on writing of quizzes, which are written under strict examination conditions and supervision.

Modules have been well designed to help students to learn. Having a table of contents, unit overview, session introduction and content following in a consistent format with advance organizers, in-text questions, self assessment questions, answers and incorporating a glossary of terms, the student is guided to apply study skills in digesting the material in an interactive manner. As Duchastel (1988) notes, well-designed modules lead to more organised study and better learning by the student.

Faculty Role

The success of our distance education effort rests squarely on faculty who are involved in the work of the Centre. They are the instructors responsible for assembling course content by the team approach. Instructors whose courses are being mounted are responsible for their own course. They set examination questions, and see to the selection and training of Course Tutors with co-ordination from the Centre. Our faculties

thus functions as skilled facilitators and content providers for modules production and are also examiners and examination supervisors.

By processes such as described, the student teacher is gradually led to apply himself to serious study and acquire quality education by distance.

Teaching practice

Teaching practice forms the practical component of our teacher education programme. It is a period of internship and apprenticeship during which they undergo training and acquire practical skills to become effective teachers.

A network of local centres

For Teaching Practice delivery to be possible, a critical need of distance education is the establishment of a network of local centres which remain the main contact point for learners in a designated district/region. CCE thus has a network of 33 Study Centres distributed across all the ten regions of Ghana. Special collaborative arrangements have been made with institutional heads of Polytechnics and Senior Secondary Schools whose premises are used for face-to-face tutorials. The University pays fees for the use of the academic facilities of host institutions.

Face-to-Face Sessions

The Centre organizes face to face sessions for students thrice in a month for each year level of learners. Face to face is organized at the week-ends. The first two meetings are for revision and to write a quiz the third time round.

Preparation for Teaching Practice

Teaching Practice is organized during the revision periods for learners in the final years of their programmes.

Two types of Teaching Practice are organised: On-Centre and Off-Centre.

The On-Centre Teaching Practice are preparatory sessions towards the Off-Centre Practice which comes off in the learner's own school.

Historical lessons

Certain historical lessons informed our choice and mode of Teaching Practice organisation.

Low Qualifying Grades

Many entrants did not qualify after completing secondary education and needed to re-sit some examination subjects to meet academic entry requirements.

The implication is that teacher training in Ghana is unable to attract better academically qualified candidates. This shortcoming needed to be offset by their enrolment on our programme.

Attracting and retaining teachers

There was the need to attract and retain teacher candidates from the regions in which they were located. Teaching Practice was thus to be done by teachers in their own classrooms for supervision and guidance.

Reducing the backlog of untrained teachers

There was the need to help reduce the backlog of untrained teachers in the system. 2007 figures indicated that there were 21,788 serving untrained teachers enrolled in the Diploma in Basic Education (DBE) programmes by distance in Ghana (GNA, 06/10/2007)

Stemming Attrition rates

A report on the government's free Compulsory Universal Basic Education reform initiative indicated that the reform had led to demand for more trained teachers with numbers rising from about 24,000 to 39,000 at primary and from 28,000 to 44,000 at Junior Secondary School over the period from 1998 to 2010 (MUSTER report, March 2003). Translated into annual additional demand, something like 7000 more new teachers would be needed each year at primary and JSS. This implied a total annual demand of 22,000 to 29,000 teachers depending on the attrition rate. The implication was to begin improving access and participation requiring more teachers to be trained.

The CCE response was to replace traditional practices with greater emphasis on continuing professional development programmes provided through structured institutionalised in-service training (INSET) and a mandatory internship programme for teachers on distance.

Teacher training and teacher quality

In the World Bank's supported Primary School Development Project (PSDP) report (1999), the study reached the conclusion that the management and use of instructional time was a fundamental problem which undermined quality of education in public schools. It revealed that high teacher absenteeism, frequent loss of instructional time, poor instructional quality, poor management and inadequate textbooks were major problems (Fobih et al, 1999).

Main areas of poor pupils' learning were: inefficient system of teacher training and inefficient teacher and school supervision. These had led to poor Criterion Referenced Test (CRT) results for public schools as against that of private schools. (MOE PREP, 1996)

Dissatisfaction with initial teacher training

A National Commission of Teacher Education (1993) report also indicated that teacher training had not placed sufficient emphasis on developing teaching expertise from a school-focused orientation. Awuku, a respected Ghanaian teacher educator, saw the problem as an overemphasis on trainees' academic knowledge instead of focusing on methods of teaching (Awuku, 2000).

Learning on the job

A significant observation also is that initial teacher training in Ghana now is the change from the 3year "in" college training to 2years in college and one year "out", suggesting the need to make teacher training more practically focused.

Insights

Insights from these issues indicated the need for a new teacher with high academic qualification; properly trained and possessing both academic and pedagogical competence, residing in the locality and regular at school, who could manage and use instructional time well to benefit pupils.

This is the hallmark of the CCE student teacher under training by distance.

Teacher education and policy: Emphasise both Content and Methodology

Armed with such insights and informed by the knowledge that

teacher education refers to the policies and procedures designed to equip teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and skills they require to

perform their tasks effectively in the school and classroom, (Wikipedia,07/16/2008)

CCE began to operate on the policy of equal emphasis on both content and methodology in its teacher training.

Teaching Practice Organisation

In organizing teaching practice for distance learners, two modes are followed: On-Centre and Off-Centre.

On-Centre

Study Centre Co-ordinators and Course Tutors meet the students for briefing which covers skills to be observed during the actual practice teaching. These include:

1. Lesson preparation
2. Introduction
3. Mastery of subject matter
4. Subject delivery
5. Teaching/Learning resources
6. Classroom Management and Organisation
7. Student participation
8. Communication
9. Closure
10. Lesson Evaluation and
11. Appearance

These constitute the competency areas that the student is expected to demonstrate. Students then prepare lesson notes for vetting. The On Centre Teaching Practice (OCTP) starts with peer teaching and participants are open to criticism. Course Tutors give the final remarks and score the teaching which becomes the initial Teaching Practice (TP) score for the student.

Off-Centre

Off-Centre TP is organised for final year students and is done by trained mentors and Senior Members (Academic) of CCE. The mentor is expected to supervise each student at least twice. At the supervision level, the mentor looks out for demonstration of the competencies earlier discussed. A counseling session follows after each supervision. Whilst mentors supervise on their own, Senior Members come in pairs. At the end of it all, scores are recorded and collated.

Problems faced

1. Initially, Central Administration had to loan money to the Centre with reluctance and huge misgivings for modules production and payment of course writers. It takes a leadership with entrepreneurial ability and foresight to turn austerity into plenty.
2. The Centre: the backbone of the distance learning programmes has no buildings of its own. It is parasiting rooms belonging to the Faculty of Social Sciences till her own complex structure is ready by 2010.
3. Owing to the scattered nature of distance learners, tracing them to their schools become cumbersome.
4. The risk involved in traversing the country for supervision saps a lot of energy of senior members who are again expected to supervise face-to-face sessions and conduct quizzes every week-end.

5. The rate of return of marked scripts from the field demands constant monitoring and tracking; inputting of scores for hordes of students is time consuming and release of examination results can delay.

Future Plans

1. To develop a package for training science teachers
2. Set up study centres in all the 110 districts in Ghana
3. Provide library services as an essential support for distance learners
4. Mount a 2-year's Masters' Degree in Basic Education Administration and Supervision.

Lessons learned :

1. The dual-mode which uses the conventional face-to-face and distance teaching with student-support is the best. Given sufficient autonomy to plan the curricula, select students, develop study materials and their own delivery systems, a new educational mode can be made to grow effectively without the traditional brick and mortar institution.
2. The dual-mode can work only if within the institutional values and culture, distance education also gets parity of esteem with the regular programmes.
3. Huge economies of scale can be won by targeting particular learner groups whose size is large enough and packaging programmes to meet their needs.
4. Providing a modular structure of programmes enable multiple points of entry and exit which enable potential learners choose what best satisfy their perceived needs.
5. Faculty require equitable incentive and compensation packages to induce them participate in distance education work - including teaching that counts for promotion and monetary inducement.

CONCLUSION

Visionary leadership is essential for a successful and effective distance education provision; a leadership capable of studying and analyzing present issues and challenges borrowing heavily from past experiences to formulate and implement workable policies and strategies that can withstand unexpected threats and shocks in the future. By it, distance education can be used to break barriers and promote quality teacher education in any country.

Bibliography

- Awuku K (2000) "Current Structure and Development in Basic Teacher Education" Paper presented at Institute of Education Test Development workshop, Saltpond, Ghana, (January)
- Duchastel, P. 1988. "Toward the ideal study guide." *The British Journal of Educational Technology* 14(3), pp. 216-220.

- Fobih, D. A., Akyeampong, K., & Koomson, A.K. (1999) "Ghana Primary School Development – Final Evaluation of Project Performance" Report Commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Ghana.
- Fobih, D. A., Akyeampong, K., & Koomson, A.K. (1999) "Ghana Primary School Development – Final Evaluation of Project Performance" Report Commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Ghana.
- Ghana News Agency, posted on the www 06/10/07: Madam Faustina Gyeketey is National Best Teacher/ Ghana Official Portal
- Jenkins, J. (1989) "Some trends in distance education in Africa: An examination of the past and future role of distance education as a tool for national development: Distance Education 10 (1): 41-44, 46-48.
- Moore, M. G. (2001). "Brazil's teacher education programme. International Council for Distance Education world Conference. Dusseldorf, Germany.
- Ministry of Education, (1993) *Report of the Education Commission on Teacher Education in Ghana*, Accra. (June.)
- Ministry of Education/Primary Education Project (PREP) Ghana (1996) "1996 Report on the Administration of Primary 6 Criterion-Referenced Tests"
- Misanchak, E.R. (1994). Print tools in distance education. In B. Willis (Ed.), *Distance Education strategies and tools* (pp. 100 – 129). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational technology Publications