

**DISTANCE EDUCATION AND TEACHER DEVELOPMENT, PERSPECTIVE
FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST.**

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ABSTRACT

Over the last decade, there has been an increase in the establishment of Distance Education Unit in both public and private Universities in Ghana. Students' enrolment in the countries Distance Education Units constitutes a considerable percentage of the total enrolment of students in Ghanaian Universities.

At the Universities of Cape Coast and Education (Winneba), Students' enrolment on the distance education programmes is over 2100 and 8000 respectively.

This paper reports on a study that explored the extent to which the University of Cape Coast, model of distance education is being used as a tool for the development of teachers for the basic schools in Ghana.

Based on the result of the study, this paper argues that the University of Cape Coast's delivery is comparable in every respect to the conventional mode of developing professional teachers. Our argument is further based on a critical examination of the prospects, and challenges associated with the dual mode of delivering distance education in the country. It concludes with recommendations on strategies for improving the use of the University of Cape Coast's distance education model as a tool for developing professional teachers in the country.

INTRODUCTION

Conceptualization of 'distance education' is critical in an attempt to establish its linkage with teacher development. This paper therefore begins with an attempt to understand the distance education concept.

Distance education may simply be defined as a process of education that involves independent study or open learning based on self-instructional material. According to Hall and Manett (1996), a major feature of distance education is that distance and time separate the teacher from the student. The UNESCO (2002), however looks at the phenomenon as "an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and or time from the learners" (p).

From the foregoing definitions, it could be deduced that distance education enables individuals yearning for education to stay in the comfort their homes, work place and almost everywhere to participate in formal education and obtain, diplomas and degrees. It is also clear from the definition that distance education does not involve a mere publishing and mailing of learning materials but a mechanism which utilizes a variety of media such as conferencing, radio, videos etc. in a structured way to offer learning assistance to distance learners. One major advantage of distance education is that it reduces the barriers that prevent and obstruct people's access to and participation in formal education. It also provides a learning environment that promotes self-learning through self instructional materials. Distance education opens up opportunities for access to education and provides chance of successes (Laymaman 2001).

In benefiting from the strengths associated with Distance Education, however there is the need for teacher development. It is in this context that this paper examines University of Cape Coast's model of linking distance education with teacher development.

Distance Education aims at reducing the barriers that prevents learners form attending formal education.

The Ghanaian Context

In Ghana, successive government have since the early 1990's initiated programmes aimed at ensuring that no child of school going age is denied access to school education. Article 38 (Clause 2) of country's constitution guarantees the educational right of children "the Government shall draw up a programme for" the provision of free compulsory and universal basic education". Similarly, section 8 (sub-section 1) of Ghana's children Act, (Act 560), provides that 'no person shall deprive a child access to education' (Ministry of Education, Science and Sports (MOESS) (2005) Preliminary Education Sector Performance Report, Accra: (Ministry of Education).

In pursuit of this, the country's Education Strategic Plan 2003-2015 identified the development of teachers as critical in implementing the Millennium Development Goal and Education for all (EFA) initiatives. Thus, developing teachers for achieving the Education for all agenda is a challenge for the nation. It is only through this that the nation could ensure that every child in the classroom get the attention of a well trained and developed teacher. Yet the teacher development agenda of the country grapples with a number of challenges in that the existing regular structures are not able to provide the requisite number trained teachers.

In Ghana, ensuring that every child in the classroom get the attention of a well trained and developed teacher has been challenging.

The case of one district in the central region of Ghana: Komenda-Edina-Eguafo-Abrem (KEEA) district, as illustrated in Table1, exemplifies the problem related to primary school teacher supply in the country:

Table 1: Primary School Pupil-Teacher Ratio by Circuit in KEEA District, 2002/2003

Circuit	Pupil's Enrolment	Total No. of Teachers	Pupil Teacher Ratio
A/Agona	2866	61	47:1
Ayensudo	2508	58	43:1
Elmina	4981	126	40:1
Kissi	2435	59	41:1
Komenda	2975	70	43:1
Ntranoa	1635	49	33:1
Total	17400	423	41:1

Source: UNICEF & Republic of Ghana, 2004:98 (cited in Oduro, 2008)

As shown in Table 1, PTR in this district is 41:1 which is far above the national norm of 32:1. According to Oduro (2008), trained teacher retention across the country, especially in disadvantaged districts is a problem because rural communities lack decent accommodation, social services like electricity, hospitals and other social amenities. As a result, a great number of untrained teachers are recruited to fill teaching vacancies. Table 2 presents a regional distribution of trained and untrained primary school teachers in the 10 regions of Ghana in 2004/2005:

Table 2: Regional Distribution of Trained and Untrained Teachers in Ghana.

Region	Trained Teachers		Untrained Teachers	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Ashanti	4,999 (66.3%)	4,201 (94.0%)	2,543 (33.7%)	270 (6.0%)
Brong Ahafo	3,453 (55.1%)	1,350 (80%)	2,813 (44.9%)	322 (19.3%)
Central	2,300 (54.6%)	2,012 (85.3%)	1,916 (45.4)	347 (14.7%)
Eastern	4,355 (71.7%)	3,515 (93.1%)	1,715 (28.3%)	260 (6.9%)
Volta	3,997 (84.0%)	2,367 (94.0%)	759 (16.0%)	152 (6.0%)
Greater Accra	1,502 (90.7%)	3,733 (98.9%)	154 (9.3%)	40 (1.1%)
Western	2,463 (49.1%)	1,645 (79.6%)	2,588 (50.9%)	422 (20.4%)
Northern	2,550 (47.4%)	754 (72.9%)	2,830 (52.6%)	281 (27.1%)
Upper East	1,152 (64.2%)	643 (84.7%)	642 (35.8%)	116 (15.3%)
Upper West	916 (74.2%)	508 (87.6%)	318 (25.8%)	72 (12.4%)

Source: Ministry of Education, Science and Sports, EMIS Project, 2005

Challenges such as these, are critical in any efforts towards achieving education for all by 2015. In an attempt to address the challenge of teacher shortage, Distance Education (D.E) has become critical. Distance Education refers to some form of independent study or open learning based on self-instructional material. Distance and time separate the teacher from the student (Hall and Manett, 1996). In Ghana, Distance Education has been accepted as a strategy through which education of all forms can be made accessible to all. In terms of teacher education, the University of Cape Coast and the University of Education, Winneba have both introduced Distance Education programmes that aim at training and retraining teachers.

On the average, student enrollment in all Distance Education Centres (departments) constitutes a considerable number of the total enrollment figure in some Universities in the country. The total number of teachers on the University of Cape Coast Distance Education is 14,000 and that of University of Education, Winneba is 8,000. The number of teachers on the conventional programme at the University of Cape Coast is lower than those on the Distance Education programme.

The primary purpose of the study was therefore to examine how distance education could be a viable alternative model for developing teachers at the basic school level. The key

The Historical Context of Distance Education in University of Cape Coast.

The introduction of Distance Education into the Educational sector is more than a century old in the western world but in Africa it is very current. Distance Education in Ghana started in the regional capitals by the University of Cape Coast, to offer education to teachers who could not have access to the regular system but needed further education for degree and promotion.

The University of Cape Coast was established in 1962 to train graduate teachers for second cycle institutions. As the first Teacher University of Africa the University was to create unlimited opportunities for the over hundred thousand teachers throughout the country to upgrade their knowledge and develop themselves professionally. The desire prompted the University of Cape Coast to establish the Centre for Continuing Education in 1997 to absorb teachers and other professionals who could not be admitted due to limited facilities in the University.

The mission of Distance Education programme in Ghana is to make quality education and the professional development of workers/teachers at all levels more accessible and relevant to meet the learning needs of Ghanaians so as to enhance their performance and improve the quality of their lives.

In Ghana, about 15,000 certificates 'A' teachers leave the classrooms each year to develop their knowledge both in content and pedagogy, thereby creating vacancies too difficult for the

government to fill, because the number of teachers who gain admission to the Universities is greater than those turned out by these institutions annually.

The exodus of teachers into the Universities to upgrade themselves is due to the government's directives that the minimum qualification for teaching in Ghanaian basic schools by 2005 should be at least Diploma certificate. Up till 2002/2003 academic year, there existed a policy which enables over 3000 teachers to pursue higher education each year and this has been reduced drastically due to the difficulty in replacing those who leave the classroom (1st meeting of National Co-ordinators for UNESCO TITISSA 7th to 9th March 2006, Breda, and Dakar, Senegal).

Profile of the Centre for Continuing Education.

The Centre for Continuing Education was established in the year 1997 it became vibrant in 2000/2001 academic year with an initial intake of seven hundred and fifty basic school practicing teachers to pursue a three year Diploma in Education to develop their professional skills.

Currently, the Centre is the most viable and leading institution offering distance education programmes to over 20,000 teachers, accountants, administrators, secretaries, bank officials etc. in Ghana. There are twenty-six study centres all over the country to cater for the distance learners educational needs in their localities. The centre for continuing education, University of Cape Coast is an affiliated member of the West African Distance Education Association. (WADEA) and sustains an active relationship with other Universities in Ghana and Simon Fraser University of Canada.

Primarily the centre for Continuing Education was established to:

- Provide opportunities for teachers and other professionals to pursue higher education in the comfort of their homes to develop themselves professionally.
- Develop teachers professionally for all levels of Education in the Ghana Education Service and private schools.
- Train high caliber personnel for national development.

- Develop the professional competence of serving teachers and personnel of the Ghana Education Service as well as accounting and secretarial personnel in civil/public service, commerce and industry through continuing education.
- Provide opportunities for applicants who though qualify for admission, fail to enter the University due to constraints in physical facilities.

Contemporary Practice of Distance Education and Staff Development

As a prelude to the discussion on the issue of teacher development the concept “distance education” is to be explained. Distance education is a sub-set of open learning.

As we earlier mentioned in the introductory section, the primary agenda of distance education is to reduce the barriers that prevent students from gaining access to formal education.

The distance education modes have developed since 1980’s. It has moved from what used to be the correspondence study whereby study materials were mailed to students to a combination of audio and video technologies, satellite base delivery system, internet and web-based systems with delivery for student support mechanism (Renwick W, 1992). It should be well noted that distance education is not simply publishing and mailing learning materials, but also a mechanism which utilises a variety of different media in a structured manner. There is a clear system of feedback in distance education which ensures that educational goals are met.

Distance education extends education beyond the walls of school building into the homes or work places of those for a reason or the other have not gained access to the conventional system. If distance education programmes are well planned and structured, it offers a method of education far different from that available in a formal education.

Within the context of the University of Cape Coast Centre for Continuing, Distance Education is used as a form of support for formal education directly, through courses in school or indirectly by helping teachers gain access to in-service training or on the

job development. Distance education has been used effectively for the development of both the professional and unprofessional teachers in the country. Steward and Thomas (1996) articulate the effectiveness of distance education based teacher development programmes is seen in terms of its access and effects on learning as well as classroom performance.

At the University of Cape Coast, Centre for Continuing Education, the main focus is to develop teachers at the basic school level at a distance to upgrade the content, knowledge and teaching skills to make them more competent and efficient.

The mode of operation is through the print media (modules) monthly face-to-face in all the twenty-six study centres scattered nationwide. Officials from the main University and the Centre visit the study centres every week to monitor the face-to-face sessions, offer counseling to the students and organise quizzes.

The modules used are written by professors at the University of Cape Coast and other Universities. Aside from University of Cape Coast and University of Education Winneba which train teachers in Ghana, other African countries also use the distance education programmes to develop teachers professionally. Prominent among them are Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Zimbabwe etc. (Chivore 1993). The aim of these countries is to improve the academic and professional skills of basic school teachers.

A clear example is that learners at the Centre for Continuing Education of University of Cape Coast use the polytechnics in the country, some second cycle institutions, a few teacher training colleges for the face-to-face sessions. Distance education again unlike the conventional system is flexible in terms of time, place, pace of study and techniques of imparting knowledge.

The conventional system has already fixed infrastructure that students enjoy, for instance face-to-face sessions with their lecturers, enjoy well stuffed library facilities, interact with colleagues every day to share ideas and socialize, unlike distance learners who enjoy these facilities occasionally or none at all.

Unlike University of Cape Coast and University of Education Winneba who develop teachers with the basic certificate in teaching the National Teachers Institute (NTI)

Kaduna in Nigeria, offers programmes for the basic school pupil's, second cycle students and further training for basic school teachers. Tanzania, Sierra Leone and Kenya have also utilised Distance Education to develop professional teachers for their basic schools. For instance, Tanzania government aimed at achieving Universal Primary Education by increasing the number of children at the basic school level and this meant equal number of teachers to teach (Mahlek and Temu, 1989). Distance education teacher development programme was launched and within five years, a total number of 37,998 primary school teachers were developed professionally and this made a great impact in Tanzanian primary education (Mahlek and Temu, 1989).

As a way of teacher development in Ghana the Ministry of Education developed the Education Strategic Plan (2003-2015) to serve as a long term plan that will provide a strategic framework to guide the education sector in attaining education for All and the Millennium Development Goal by 2015

The preparation was mainly informed by the Education for All Convention, the Millennium Development Goal and the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy. The main target for the Education Strategic Plan are the attainment of 100% Kindergarten Gross Enrolment Rate by 2015, 100% Primary Gross Enrolment Rate by 2012, a Primary Gross Completion Rate of 100% by 2012 and a Junior High School Completion Rate of 100% by 2015. Added to this is the quality target of 95% trained teachers at the basic is notable and decisive. It is a well known fact that to achieve the fore mentioned depends extensively on the availability of adequate quality and a large number of teachers.(credit Kofi Asare).

Currently, teachers who are developed professionally and teaching at the KG level is 42%, primary or Basic School level is 59% and Junior High School is 76% and this is woefully inadequate to sustain the vision of MOE by the year 2015 (Credit Kofi Asare, National Programme Officer, Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition)

It is worse off in rural areas where teachers who have gone through the professional development at the expense of the tax payer refuse posting back to the villages because of poor social amenities and other necessities of life.

As a way of teacher development and teacher retention especially in the rural areas the government had adopted a policy dubbed the District Teacher Training Sponsorship Scheme. Under the policy the district assembly sponsors Senior High graduates from the locality to access teacher education. Those sponsored are then posted back to the district to teach after the course.

For instance, in 2009 the Ellebelle District Assembly and the Agona Nkwanta District Assembly sponsored ten and fifty Senior High graduates with good grades to teacher training colleges respectively. (Credit kofi Asare)

The Untrained Teacher Training Diploma in Basic Education is another avenue adopted by the government to develop teachers in content knowledge and methodology.

The untrained teachers programme is under the supervision of the institute of Education, University of Cape Coast and the Ghana Education Service. With this programme the untrained teachers in the system attend classes in some selected training colleges during the vacation to access the programme.

Generally, a teacher is said to be someone who is developed or trained professionally to teach, and is equipped with instructional skills.

This makes the provision of opportunities necessary for the development of the capacity of teachers very vital in providing quality basic education in Ghana.

The study leave with pay which the government is still grappling with is another alternative for teacher development in the country.

Approximately 3,000 teachers receive study leave with pay annually. In 2007 alone the ministry spent Gh¢ 40,200.000 on teachers on study leave with pay (credit Kofi Asare).

Most of the teachers who enter the universities and other tertiary institutions do not go back to the teaching profession to put their expertise at the disposal of the basic school pupils and the communities but seek employment elsewhere. A prominent alternative that has been embraced by all especially teachers for professional development is the Distance Education Programme which the University of Cape

Coast is very vibrant with over 20,000 teacher learners on the programme in about twenty –six study centre’s all over Ghana.

Assessment of Students

For quality education the student-teachers are assessed by the Centre for Continuing Education using the mode of examination used at the University of Cape Coast with the help of invigilators from the University. The centre uses the semester system to run the programme. In all, about fourteen thousand teachers are on the programme pursuing Diploma and Post-diploma in Basic Education course. In order to assist the students to write their examinations, there are support services. These include, residential sessions for revision toward the end of the semester examinations and library services. Student-teachers are assessed by a combination of continuous assessment and end of semester examinations. The continuous assessment is based on assignment and three quizzes every semester.

The distance education programmes have provided skilled manpower, knowledgeable well developed teachers in content and pedagogy. In other words distance education programmes also serve as an in-service course to develop teachers

Challenges

Like any other human initiative, the distance education programmes are faced with diverse problems and challenges in some areas as follows:

- Financial burden on student learners is quite enormous since most of them are parents who have wards to cater for and sponsor themselves.
- Social problems such as attending organizational meeting, family, community meetings, funerals etc. coupled with workload at the work places of learners at times hinder their academic work.
- Some people see the distance education programme as inferior and sub-standard so, some potential applicants have negative perception about the programme.

- Lack of classroom accommodation at some study centres. Most of the institutions offering distance educations do not have accommodation facilities and so depend on other educational institutions who also have large numbers of students. In some instances distance learners are stranded when the facilities are being used by students of the host institutions.
- Stress on Centre for Continuing Education staff and the university due to large numbers.
- Weekly traveling by staff to the study centres to monitor face-to-face sessions and quizzes pose some risk to them.
- Programmes are not online, no video and teleconferencing to enhance adequate interaction between tutor-students and students-students.
- Lack of office equipment to enhance administrative work etc.

The Way Forward

In spite of the challenges associated with utilizing the dual mode of delivering teacher development within the distance education programme, the practice is yielding great benefits for those who participate in it. In this light, the challenges need to be addressed. Based on the study, therefore, the following recommendations are proposed as the way forward:

- For the distance education programmes to move forward, there is the need for organizers to plan, collaborate, co-ordinate available resources, create networks of support and database for effective work.
- There is also the need to emphasize on quality materials used by learners and make use of the little resources at hand.
- Information Technology should be encouraged for easy access to information from the head offices.
- The use of video and teleconferencing should be encouraged to beam live lectures from the main centre to all study centres and this would cut down cost on facilitators.
- All study centres should be networked to enable the main centre to send assignments and quizzes questions to co-ordinators to cut down on the weekly travel of staff.

- The distance education programme, unlike the conventional system requires systematic planning, support, reaches a large populace than the face-to-face education techniques and can cater for a wider population. The distance education programme may not be cheaper than the conventional system, but it allows for the allocation of costs and resources in different and sometimes more beneficial ways. For instance, students on the distance education use facilities of other institutions which are already fixed
- The universities offering distance education programmes should put up their own structures to minimize the problem that both learners and officials encounter in some of the study centres.
- As earlier mentioned, the success of any decentralized teacher development policy depends on the administrative efficiency of the district. Administrative inefficiencies have weakened the veracity of bonds signed by teacher trainees to return to teach in their parent districts. There is the need for a coordinated institutional and inter agency collaboration between District Assemblies and all Ministries Department and Agencies. The proposed computerized human resource network/database should make it easy for tracking labour within the educational sector and other state and para-statal institutions within civil and public service. This should be backed by a cross cutting civil and public service policy that prohibits the unconditional employment of bonded teachers.
- Teacher attrition, especially after study leave is a global phenomenon and not peculiar to Ghana. Even in America, between 40-50% of teachers leave the profession before their fifth year. This however doesn't make the issue invincible to solutions. The MoE should give a practical meaning to the advice by National Education Reform Implementation Committee (NERIC) in 2007, to the effect that the paid study leave system is not sustainable and should be phased out immediately. The MoE in collaboration with the key partner should set up a teacher training support fund from which teachers will access loans (1% to 3% per annum) to support their further studies. With an effective guarantee system in place, repayment should not be an issue, whether the teacher returns to teach or not. By so doing, we would have saved some GH¢ 40,200,000 and invested it into the slim infrastructure budget of the MoE. (Credit Kofi Asare).

Conclusion

Distance education has emerged as a reliable alternative for teacher development. In spite of some challenges associated with the operations of the distance education programmes run by the University of Cape Coast's Centre for Continuing Education, Distance Education cannot be dispensed with. The authors are of the belief that it is a tool that needs to be supported by all stakeholders of teacher education and development. In doing so, the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education service need to develop more interest in liaising with the two teaching Universities in the country to ensure that quality is not compromised in the delivery of distance education programme in the country. Staff of the various distance education centres should be given intensive refresher training programme in assessment to enable them enhance their capabilities in supporting teacher development through distance education.

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