Presentation of paper

The Contribution of Distance Education in Meeting the Challenges in Teacher Education in Africa - The Ghanaian Experience

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Abstract

With the view to achieving the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals, the Government of Ghana has put in place certain interventions to promote accelerated growth in the education and health sectors. The introduction of the capitation grant and the school feeding programme, for instance, are to ensure that by the year 2015, children everywhere in Ghana, boys and girls alike will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

The phenomenal rise in school enrolment over the past few years has brought to the fore the need for a corresponding demand for qualified teachers. The conventional approach to teacher education in Ghana that restricts teacher education to college or campus-based model has not been able to meet the increasing demand for teachers with effective pedagogical competencies and in their right numbers in a sustainable way.
The paper therefore discusses the roles being played by the University of Cape Coast and the University of Education, Winneba, in meeting the demands for the training of teachers through distance education. Among other things students enrolment, mode of delivery, the establishment of study centres and learner support services, quality assurance, etc are reviewed. Finally, challenges being faced by these institutions and the way forward as far as training qualitative teachers in Ghana through the distance mode are addressed.

**Introduction**

In Ghana, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are embedded into the Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS). The GPRS is in turn the basis of such international development initiatives as the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC), Enhanced HIPC (eHIPC) and Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI)..

The same MDG inspired plan also underlies bilateral initiatives such as the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) programme in Ghana funded by the United States. The HIPC debt relief created substantial savings to allow for substantial increase in poverty related spending from 4.7 percent of GDP in 2001 to 8.5 percent in 2005 [1]. Following this, the Education sector contribution to National Social Protection Policy has increased through the introduction of:

- Capitation Grant;
- School Feeding;
- Scholarship Schemes to disadvantaged children especially girls;
- School Uniform in some remote disadvantaged areas in Ghana [1].
By the introduction of the capitation grant, the Government of Ghana has absorbed fees paid by basic school pupils in public schools, thereby making basic school education virtually free in Ghana. The school feeding programme, which is on pilot basis, ensures that a decent meal is provided for each pupil of beneficiary schools (the public basic schools).

The capitation grant and school feeding programmes have increased enrolments tremendously. At the Primary school level, for instance, children in age group 6 – 11 years increased from 69.2 percent in 2005/06 to 81.1 percent in 2006/07, an unprecedented increase [2]. Enrolment at feeding schools increased 16 percent more than it did at schools without school feeding programme. Similarly attendance increased 15 percent more at treatment schools than at control schools.

The number of primary schools increased from 16,628 in 2004/05 to 17,881 in 2008/09. The increase is 11.6 percentage points over the four year period. Enrolment in Primary Schools has also been increasing. It rose from 3,077,489 in 2004/05 to 3,710,647 (i.e an increase of 20 percent). Admission into Primary One has been increasing steadily over the period. From 693,665 in 2006/07, it increased to 729,931 in 2008/2009.

Further, the number of junior high schools increased from 8423 in 2004/05 to 10,213 in 2008/2009.

Junior High School enrolment correspondingly increased from 1,048,367 in 2004/05 to 1,285,577 in 2008/09 representing an increase of 22.6 percent.

**Teacher Demand and Supply**
The phenomenal rise in school enrolment over the past few years has brought to the fore the need for a corresponding demand for qualified teachers. The dire need for qualified teachers is made worse by the presence of high percentage of untrained primary school teachers.

The picture is made clearer if one takes a look at the Pupil-Teacher Ratios at the Primary School level in Ghana.

They are as follows:

- Pupil-Teacher Ratio ➔ 35:1 (Trained and Untrained)
- Pupil-Trained Teacher Ratio ➔ 94:1. [3]

The figures above show a rather gloomy situation since quite a substantial number of basic school teachers are without any academic or professional training.

Even majority of the trained teachers as of now are those with the Teacher’s Certificate ‘A’ (4-year and Post Secondary). Viewed against the current requirement that the minimum qualification of the basic school teacher should be the Teacher’s Diploma the situation becomes very precarious. What it means is that even majority of the trained teachers in the system are under qualified.

**Training of Qualified Teachers**

The Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2003 – 2015 set the goal of 95 percent trained teachers by 2015. In 2003, the baseline figure was that 21.2 percent of teachers at the primary level and 12.8 percent of teachers at the junior high school level were untrained [1]. The Teacher Education Division (TED) of the Ghana Education Service (GES) aimed at reducing these figures to 5 percent by 2015 through the regular pre-
service 3 –year Diploma Programme for teachers and through the 4-year Untrained Teachers Training Programme (by distance).

The Preliminary Education Sector Performance Report, 2009, gives the trend of intake and enrolment rates in the Colleges of Education as well as the number of teachers produced per year. The enrolment figures of the Colleges of Education are shown on table 1.

**Table 1 Colleges of Education Enrolment**

<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intake</td>
<td>8,980</td>
<td>8,989</td>
<td>8,538</td>
<td>9,401</td>
<td>9,033</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Enrol.</td>
<td>23,999</td>
<td>25,116</td>
<td>25,534</td>
<td>26,025</td>
<td>26,400</td>
<td>26,962</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From table 1, the 38 Colleges of Education charged with the mandate to train teachers, turn out just about 9000 teachers per year. With this trend, it can be observed that the conventional approach to teacher education in Ghana that restricts teacher education to college or campus-based model would not be able to meet the increasing demand for teachers with effective pedagogical competencies and in their right numbers.

It is evident that if Africa is to meet the challenges of supplying adequate numbers of teachers needed to provide quality education for all children, then, it must exercise a shift in the conventional approaches to teacher training, to move teacher training out of the walls of training institutions to reach larger audience [4].
The need for an alternative mode of educational delivery to augment the conventional face-to-face system of training and re-training of teachers cannot be over-emphasized. The alternative that comes to mind is distance education.

**Training and Retraining of Teachers through Distance Education**

Distance learning is a formal approach to learning in which the majority of the instruction occurs with the instructor and students separated by geographic distance or/and time. Distance learning courses offer students the flexibility of completing some or all of the course work and assignments without having to regularly attend classes on a campus [5]. In other words a substantial proportion of the interaction between the teacher and the learner takes place without their physical presence.

The conventional face-to-face system of training teachers is beset with numerous constraints. Among them are access, quality and costs.

Distance education provides a solution to the constraints facing conventional education.

First, it facilities and enhances access to education, in particular, tertiary education, through removing two key barriers to learning, namely, lack of funds and location. In this regard, it enables people to learn while they continue to earn, irrespective of whether they are close to an institution, which is critical for people in rural areas. [6]

Secondly, it is cost-efficient and is able to achieve significant economies of scales as it enables institutions to increase enrolments without increasing staff levels and associated physical infrastructure.

Next, distance education enhances and promotes quality through the development and provision of learning resources which can be used by teachers and learners, irrespective of their location [6]. Finally, it facilitates and promotes access to life long
learning, in particular, ongoing professional development to those who have obtained formal qualifications, but who are required to upgrade their knowledge and qualifications.

The Roles of the University of Cape Coast and University of Education, Winneba in the Training of Basic School Teachers

The two institutions in Ghana which have tasked themselves to train and retain basic school teachers through distance education are the University of Cape Coast and the University of Education, Winneba. The Centre for Continuing Education, University of Cape Coast (CCEUCC) is providing lifelong learning for all categories of students in Ghana. The Centre, by the dual mode package, has mounted all the viable programmes of the University on distance. Two such programmes are the Diploma and Post-Diploma Degree Programmes in Basic Education for the training and retraining of basic school teachers by distance.

In a similar vein, the Institute of Education Development and Extension (IEDE), is in charge of the distance education programme of the University of Education, Winneba.

From a humble beginning of enrolling 712 students (Male 474; Female – 238) for the Diploma in Basic Education Programme in 2001/2002 the Centre for Continuing Education, UCC increased its enrolment to 2522 in 2002/03. The figure rose to 3331 (Male – 1918; Female – 1413) in 2003/04. The enrolment figures for the Diploma in Basic Education Programme since its inception in 2001 are provided on table 2.

Table 2: CCEUCC Enrolment Figures for Diploma Basic Education Programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

7
Enrolment into the Post-Diploma Degree in Basic Education Programme started in the 2005/2006 academic year. The figures for the period 2005/2006 – 2008/09 are as shown on table 3.

**Table 3: CCEUCC Enrolment Figures for Post-Diploma Degree in Basic Education Programme**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005/06</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>537</td>
<td>1,287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006/07</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007/08</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008/09</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cumulative Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,013</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,582</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,595</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is worthy of note that students on the Diploma and Post-Diploma Degree in Basic Education Programmes are enrolled from all the 10 regions of Ghana.

In the case of the Institute of Education Development and Extension (IEDE), of the University of Education, Winneba, the number of students enrolled to pursue the Diploma in Basic Education Programme from the 2002/2003 academic year is as shown on table 4.

Table 4: IEDE Enrolment Figures for Diploma in Basic Education Programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002/03</td>
<td>584</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>1,096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003/04</td>
<td>833</td>
<td>1,210</td>
<td>2,043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004/05</td>
<td>923</td>
<td>1,336</td>
<td>923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005/06</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>961</td>
<td>1,491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008/09</td>
<td>4,092</td>
<td>6,280</td>
<td>10,372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative Total</td>
<td>6,962</td>
<td>10,299</td>
<td>17,261</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For the Post-Diploma Degree Programme, 524 males and 923 females, totaling 1447 were enrolled during the 2008/2009 academic year.

Hence, put together CCEUCC and IEDE have offered the opportunity for 35,544 basic school teachers to pursue the Diploma in Basic Education Programme since 2001. For the Post-Diploma Degree Programme in Basic Education 5041 have had access to pursue the programme.

**Implementation of the Programmes**

The institutions operate through a network of Regional Offices established across the country to promote effective communication with all stakeholders. The Regional Offices are headed by Regional Co-ordinators. Policies regarding the management and administration of programmes emanate from the headquarters and are channelled through these offices while feedback reaches headquarters through the same channel.

Study centres have been established by CCE and IEDE throughout the country. These study centres are hosted by Polytechnics some Colleges of Education and selected Senior High Schools throughout the country. Students meet for face-to-face during the weekends and during vacations. Part-time tutors have been recruited from the Colleges of Education to provide tutorials. They also assist with supervision of quizzes and end of semester examinations.

The Centre for Continuing Education has 23 study centres for the Basic Education Programmes. The Regional Co-ordinators have oversight responsibility over the study centres in their respective regions. Among other things, they take oversight responsibility for students’ and course tutors’ affairs, monitor face-to-face sessions,
organize and supervise quizzes and end semester examinations, supervise students’ project work and teaching practice, and offer guidance and counseling services to students.

**Mode of Delivery**

The Institutions rely mainly on the use of print-based materials written by lecturers of the respective Universities. The course writers (lecturers) train the course tutors to assist with tutorials at the study centres. They also serve as chief examiners and are responsible for the setting of questions for quizzes, assignments and end of semester examinations. The course materials are designed in a didactic form, taking into consideration the fact that learners on the programmes are on their own most of the time and learning at their own pace.

In addition, study guides and students’ handbook and information booklets on all aspects of the programme are printed and distributed to students on registration of courses. Fresh students are taken through orientation so as to help them manage their new roles as adult learners and workers.

By the dual mode package, parity of esteem is ensured by providing qualitative programmes comparable to courses being pursued by students on the conventional programmes of the Universities.

**Challenges/Prospects**

Course materials are prepared, printed and distributed at high costs to the respective institutions. More often than not, conference writing is the strategy adopted, whereby resource persons assemble at designated points to work on their assignments over a period.
Again, the wide area covered by the programme and the dependence on road transportation for distribution of course materials require a large fleet of vehicles which are maintained at huge costs. In addition staff of the two institutions travel all over the country every weekend to monitor face-to-face sessions and to supervise the quizzes and end of semester examinations. All these activities are carried out at great risks and costs.

Next, some students default in fee payment, thereby affecting revenue to the Institutions.

Further, students are faced with accommodation problems when they report at the study centres for face-to-face sessions.

In spite of these challenges, the Institutions hope to set up study centres in all the administrative districts of the country.

There are also plans by the University of Cape Coast to construct regional complexes in all the regions of the country to serve as offices, and classrooms as well as provide accommodation for students during face-to-face session.

Further, plans are underway for the University of Cape Coast and the University of Education, Winneba to collaborate in their efforts at training and retraining Ghanaian teachers through distance education. Collaboration between CCEUCC and IEDE would provide opportunities for resources sharing and exchange of ideas. This would enhance capacity building of the two institutions for distance education delivery.
Conclusion

This paper has established that the number of teachers that Ghana and for that matter Africa needs to train and retrain cannot be achieved by conventional methods and institutions.

It has been noted that through distance education, opportunities are being offered for the training and retraining of basic school teachers in Ghana. Both the unqualified and the semi-qualified teachers are given access to upgrade themselves through Diploma and Post-Diploma Degree Programmes.

It can be said that through the contribution of distance education the need for highly qualified teachers in their right numbers which is critical to the human resource development of Africa could be met.

References


