

CHALLENGES THAT COLLEGE TUTORS ENCOUNTER IN DELIVERING GEOGRAPHY LESSONS IN SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM

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Abstract: Teachers all over the world encounter some problems in the course of discharging their professional duties. The success or failure of the teacher depends largely on how they handle these challenges. A lot of articles have been devoted on the teacher and teacher related issues, but little research has been done on college tutors and the subjects that they teach. This article tries to fill that knowledge gap by looking at the challenges that college tutors encounter in delivering geography lessons in social studies curriculum. This descriptive study used a cross-sectional survey in which aggregated data were collected from different participants at different points in time. The study used a sample size of sixty-two (62) and was non-experimental in nature. Self-developed questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection.

Keywords: M=mean, SD=standard deviation, Tutor, Curriculum, trainees.

1. INTRODUCTION

Once teachers in general enter the workforce, they face a host of potential problems. The ability to deal with these problems often decides the teacher's success or failure in their given profession. Considerable article has been devoted to the situations faced by classroom teachers. This article seeks to enlist some of the challenges tutors at the various colleges of education in Ghana are faced with in the course of discharging their duties. Cumbersome application process, layers of bureaucratic measures, inadequate customer service, poor data systems, late budget timetables, seniority-based, teacher transfer rules etc. all undermined the ability of the colleges in Ghana to place qualified tutors in classrooms (New Teacher Project, 2004).

Farrington (1980) found that beginning teachers had moderate problems with the high number of students with low academic ability, adapting instruction for students with low academic ability, motivating students and keeping them interested. Although beginning teachers experience several challenges, different resources are used to sort out different types of problems. Jarvis and Algozzine (2006) stated five major challenges beginning teachers are likely to encounter as: (1) workload, time management, and fatigue; (2) content and curriculum knowledge; (3) relationship with students, parents, colleagues, and supervisors; (4) evaluation and grading; and (5) autonomy and control.

On the other hand, Yalçinkaya (2002) proclaimed the early problems of newly qualified teachers as: (1) inexperience, (2) conflicts between pre-service training and in-service applications; (3) pressures on new teachers; (4) effort to be able to finish more tasks, (5) fear of inspection, and (6) adaptation to school and environment. However, beside all these common challenges, there are also specific problems encountered in different settings by different groups or individuals. Wang, Strong, and Odell (2004), in a study with teachers from US and China, defined the three most pressing challenges emerged from the interactions and conversations between novice and mentor teachers as: (1) teaching, (2) subject matter, and (3) students or a combination of those three. The cases in U.S. had a dominant focus on teachers and students,

particularly individual students and their behaviours; whereas subject matter content or students' understanding of it received little attention. The most striking finding was that the conversations focused mainly on teachers and students, especially individual students (90% in each case).

The problem of specialised pedagogic knowledge and specialised subject knowledge also takes attention in different situations. For example, while the teachers in secondary and higher education have specialised subject knowledge that puts them in a distinctive position relative to teachers of younger children, the complicated nature of learning and class management with young children makes the practical pedagogic task much more demanding to acquire (Winch, 2004).

Workload Challenges; I

One of the biggest challenges in the work-related concerns and even one of the most difficult tasks tutors face is the "workload" or "lacking of spare time." Novice tutors often feel inability in learning how to manage all the duties successfully and express hopelessness in carrying out all the work that is assigned. Workload is claimed to take tutors away from their friends, which results in lacking personal connections and social time spent out, and as a result leads to some depression. For example, one tutor, in the study reports that they have had a high level of stress the whole year just in terms of worrying about planning, grading, and things like that. Walsdorf and Lynn (2002), attracts the attention to "lack of spare time" in tutors' life, by pointing out the fact that tutors outside of the classroom, must spend many hours with clerical work, paperwork, lesson planning, evaluation of student work, and additional challenges.

According to Britt (1997), tutors experienced "frustrations due to lack of time to complete all their 'mundane' chores and paperwork" (p. 1), which was reflected in these quotations: "Paperwork takes up too big portion of my day"; behaviour problems eat up a lot of time, paperwork eats up the rest; it all must be done after school and on my own time; there is an unbelievable amount of paperwork, reports, lesson plans, SRJ, notes taken home to parents concerning discipline, grading papers, conferences, etc. (p. 4). Similarly, Smith and Sela (2005) predicated that the most often mentioned problem discussed was lack of time, and argued that the multiple roles during this period made it very difficult for them to find time to devote to article. Having too much workload and feeling obliged to finish the things on time forced them to bring things home after work and resulted in the complaint of paperwork taken home.

Gilbert's (2005) open-ended question "what was your biggest surprise?" generated many comments about paperwork and non-instructional duties as well as general laments about the lack of time to get everything done. In 2003, 35% of the comments fell into this category, and the percentage rose even further in 2004, to 45%. The novices expressed their desire of time to spend with other tutors and of fewer meetings.

In a duo study of McCann and Johannessen, (n.d.), the phrases of "sleepless nights," "overwhelming workload," and "fatiguing tasks" were encountered in different interview scripts. Some novice tutors reported that workload was the most stressful part of the job, as they were spending their evenings and weekends by grading papers, responding to the students' writing, completing administrative paperwork, and planning lessons. Two striking quotations from the interview scripts of the novice tutors who left the profession were: "Time consuming burden of grading papers, night after night and planning lessons was one of the worst aspects of the job;" and "I don't like all the work I have to take home" (p. 142). These support the fact that much of what tutors do takes place outside the classroom, like planning, assessing students, choosing and adapting instructional materials, and working with colleagues (Stodolsky, 1990, as cited in Uhlenbeck, Verloop, & Beijaard, 2002). It is not doubt "if we limit teaching to performance in the classroom, we leave out much evidence about a tutor's work (Uhlenbeck, Verloop, & Beijaard, 2002, p. 246), as duties and issues that took time away from instruction are being expressed more by many novice tutors. They have frustrations with long-hour meetings, planning time, over-abundance of paperwork, over-shadowed classroom management issues, non-instructional duties, and time pressures (Gilbert, 2005). A daily management of duties becomes more stressful, so they feel overwhelmed by the daily grind of planning, grading, supervising, and meeting. What is more, the beginning tutors often have a larger number of preparations and a greater share of extracurricular duties. Beside all extracurricular activities that take much of tutors' time, difficult teaching assignment gets other attention, and "fatigue and illness often take a toll" (McCann, Johannessen, & Ricca, 2005, p. 32).

Instructional Challenges; II

In classroom practice, some challenges that a teacher might encounter can be listed as: how to diversify instruction to improve education for all students, how to create and maximize opportunities for students to learn, how to conduct the best use of personal strength, how to present an effective material, how to broaden and deepen learning through

diversified instruction like cooperative learning, experimentation, discovery method, non-teacher-centred learning modes, how to assess students' levels of development accurately in relation to criteria, how to articulate what the students know or do not know, how to assess instructional strategies and methods, how to develop assessments, how to meet the expectations through student work, what to do with the results, how to use previous assessment to plan the next lessons, etc. (Athanasios & Achinstein, 2003).

Concerns consistently included among new tutors are curricular planning and instruction, student academic and emotional growth, resources and instructional materials, student assessment and technology assistance (Lundeen, 2004). The domain of general pedagogical knowledge includes many other things besides understanding the individual students' needs. These are skills, strategies, methods, and techniques for teaching students and for guiding themselves. Instructional challenges compose the core of teaching profession and so they vary across in dimensions like before class challenges, in-class challenges, and after-class challenges. Curriculum planning can be a striking problem, in other contexts, as tutors being obliged to adopt a pre-prepared curriculum and materials. However, tutors are to "construct curriculum as well as develop it", which means that "the future tutors cannot rely on pre-packaged curricula and materials" (Grinberg, 2002, pp. 1439-1440). As Wyatt and White (2007) defined, "one of the most productive tools to be used in teaching career is the lesson plan... whatever the design style, a good lesson plan is your friend" (p. 55). Although creating lesson plans seems hard, a well-designed lesson plan enables not only to teach the material covered but also fill the class with meaningful activity.

To exemplify another instructional challenge, learning style of pupils bring out particular difficulties (Holmes, 2003). Difference and diversity in classrooms or school context could cause some more challenges in the concerns of tutors. As any teacher, a novice teacher might also encounter diversity in culture, class, ability, interests, and learning styles among the students. A mismatch of background experience of new tutors and their students can challenge them to learn about diversity and equity (Athanasios & Achinstein, 2003). Students' cultural differences from the teacher's own might be a hindering factor to focus on teaching. Here, the necessity of multicultural education appears as an important issue. There must be specific strategies that can foster children's learning in multicultural classrooms and new tutors need to learn them.

Classroom Management Challenges; III

Classroom management pertains to everything a teacher does to organize the time, the space, and the students in such a way that effective instructions can take place everyday (Howard, 2006). Beginning tutors often feel that an inability to manage a class is a sign of weakness, so they are often afraid to ask for help. Diverse and hard students and the tutors' lack of confidence in the ability to teach different ethnic, racial, linguistic, and socio-economic groups can result in lowered expectations and limited practice. On the other hand, being over-prepared and overplanned for class will reduce the amount of time spent on behavioural issues (Howard, 2006).

Lundeen (2004) designated that classroom management problems outnumbered adult relationship problems two-to-one during the first half of the year. Overall findings were consistent with the literature reporting "discipline and

classroom management problems to be the most prevalent problems of the tutors, warning as the year progresses" (p. 555). The analyses, in the same study, revealed subdivisions under the heading of classroom management and discipline problems as problems with individual students and group behaviours.

Holmes (2006) argued, no two schools are the same in the way children behave, and no two tutors are the same in the ways they respond to their pupils acting, because the social dynamics between a teacher and his/her students will be unique. That is why it is so important to acknowledge that behaviour management is as much about knowing oneself as it is about knowing students. One's own feelings and emotions on any day will impact the way in which the students respond to the teacher and vice versa. Nothing happens in the classroom in isolation; it is possible to see connection in everything.

Mentoring Problems; IV

Mentoring programs, where more experienced tutors support novice tutors, have become commonplace in many schools worldwide. The main impact of the mentoring process is both a professional development and a personal support from their mentors, which requires openness and confidentiality (Lindgren, 2005). New tutors benefit from a variety of opportunities to work with more experienced tutors, especially by observing others in their classrooms. As Athanasios and Achinstein, (2003) pointed out, mentoring often provides buddy support, technical advice, and classroom management

tips to meet novice teacher-centred concerns of survival. Mentors lead new tutors, but they are not to transform only their own understanding and ask threatening questions. Instead, they are to be co-tutors by sharing information, welcoming mentees' opinions, providing new understandings, and identifying solutions.

Trenta, Newman, Newman, Salzman, Lenigan, and Newman (2002) depicted that, the record keeping paperwork was considered to be too much time consuming and irrelevant to performance improvement in novices. There are also situations when the mentors are unavailable most of the time or badly matched that they cannot offer much help. Or there might be occasions where a novice from a certain school is matched with a mentor in another school, or with a mentor from a different field. For example, in the study of Stanulis, Fallon, and Pearson (2002), one of the novices expressed that her placement with a mentor created more anxiety for her. Misapplications cause bigger problems than the real problems do. As they stand for solutions to the problems, they have to carry a mission like improving or curing the illness. If they do not serve their basic purpose, then it is more harmful than the problem itself. It is better for a school to have no mentoring program at all than to have a bad mentoring program. This observation is supported by the reactions of tutors in the study who experienced ineffective mentoring. One of the first-year tutors noted: "instead of being a support mechanism, the mentoring program at his school was another three hours a month of wasted time...it is the most ridiculous thing I've ever participated" (McCann, Johannessen, & Ricca, 2005, p. 32).

Mthiyane (1989) argued, beginning tutors, exposed to proper and adequate induction programs, may demonstrate higher performance and skills in classroom management, expected instruction, discipline problems, human relations, and leadership activities. According to him, most schools in the Chicago metropolitan area do not provide comprehensive orientation programs for beginning tutors and there are many tutors who have not had an opportunity to take part in any induction orientation program during their very first year of teaching. It is therefore imperative that administrators at the planning level should lead up to orientation programs for the newly started tutors. Learning from other people is one of the most important dimensions of improvement, but it should serve for self-development rather than simple imposing of rules, regulations and applications of others. The best way is, always, to offer them both "learning" and "teaching" opportunities at the same time. Mentoring is not only a proficient method for supporting novice tutors and not only satisfactory for the persons involved, but it can also have a vital effect on the educational organization's growth, stability and leadership.

As Uhlenbeck, Verloop, and Beijaard (2002) stated, teacher evaluation is a controversial and complex issue, because existing teacher evaluation procedures are criticized for assessing elements which are not relevant to teaching and for ignoring the real nature of teaching. Instead, it is needed to be more knowledgeable on how the tutors learn and develop, and what tutors really need to know. According to Jax (2006), mentors are known as the ones who seek to guide and inspire others and expected to be kind, attentive, and empathic. They have the mission of helping others being skilled at "tapping into empathy and employing individualized support" (pp. 103-104). Since they are so comfortable in restrictive environments and when controlling others, they are faced with the danger of becoming counter-productive and limiting one. However, they should prefer "a balance between rigidity and flexibility, between rules and freedom, and between teacher control and student control" (p. 106)

2. METHODS

This article which was non-experimental in nature sought to explore and describe the factors that affect the teaching of geography component of the social studies curriculum at the Colleges of Education in the Central, Eastern and Ashanti Regions of Ghana. The descriptive survey design was employed to help observe and describe the state of affairs regarding the teaching of the geographical aspect of the social studies curriculum. This descriptive study used a cross-sectional survey in which aggregated data were collected from different respondents at different points in time. A survey design was used because of its flexibility. Babbie (2007) states that surveys are flexible and hence allows many questions to be asked on a given topic. This design helps to produce a good amount of responses from a wide range of people. A descriptive survey involves asking a large number of individuals by mail, telephone or in person. It provides a more accurate picture of events and seeks to explain people's perception and behavior on the basis of data gathered at a point in time. The target population for the study comprised 62 social studies tutors in the 12 Colleges of Education in the Ashanti, Eastern and Central Regions of Ghana. Out of the total number of 62 tutors, ten social studies tutors were teaching in three private institutions while the remaining fifty-two social studies tutors were teaching in nine public Colleges of Education. The target group was made up of both male and female social studies tutors who have been teaching the subject in their various colleges for more than ten years and hence constituted the sample size and are deemed to possess

relevant information on factors that affect the teaching and learning of the geography component of the social studies curriculum at the college level.

3. INSTRUMENT

Self-developed questionnaires and attitude a scale was used for the study. The questionnaire was made up of both closed and open-ended items. The closed ended items provided check-mark responses which were structured with the use of 5-point Likert-type scale. The use of the questionnaire also allowed the respondents to complete it at their own convenient time, and they were offered a greater assurance of anonymity with regard to whatever information they provided. Although the questionnaire did not offer any opportunity for probing and motivation on the part of the respondents, the instrument tended not to be “affected by problems of no-contact” (Sarantakos, 1998, p.224).

4. RESULTS

The study sought to find out the problems tutors face in teaching the geography part of social studies. To find out their difficulties, tutors were asked to respond by agreeing or disagreeing to each statement. The mean score(M) and Standard deviation (SD) scores were computed for the four point likert-type scale was used to provide an in-depth understanding of tutors responds .with mean of means score of 2.83, average standard deviation of 0.84. the values assigned to the various mean scores are as follows; 1.0-1.4 strongly disagree, 1.5-2.4, disagree, 2.5-3.4 agree, and 3.5-4.0= strongly agree. The results indicate that geography tutors who are the principal agents responsible for teaching the geography curriculum are beset with several challenges. Tutors strongly agree that most of their students did not do geography in the senior high schools (M=3.58, SD=0.64) was their major problem in their attempt to translate the objectives of the geography content into learning experiences for learners to acquire. It is also clear from the figures that other problems hinder the smooth teaching of geography include unavailability of geography base teaching materials e,g maps ,globes, charts ect; makes students not to understand most geographical concepts and ideas; (M=3.21, SD=0.81). the study also revealed that most the syllabus for first years are overloaded, (M=3.11, SD=0.87), the overloaded nature of the syllabus suggest that there should be enough time time to unable tutors complete the syllabus for students to understand concepts and ideas in it well. These recent findings confirm what Smith and Sela, 2005 said. ”the most often mentioned problems teachers encounter was lack of time”, and argued that multiple roles during this periodmade it difficult for them to find time to article. Tutors admitted that class sizes poses a challenge to them as represented by (M=3.13, SD=0.83) The results of the study are indicative of the facts that colleges in the three study areas have large class sizes. Large class size do not augur well for effective teaching and this might have negative impact on the academic performance of students in geography. This study confirms what Farrington (1980) said “begging teachers have moderate problems with high number of students with low academic ability, adapting instruction for students with low academic ability, motivating students and keeping them interested. Tutors also consented that lack of classroom specially designed for the teaching of geography is also another challenge they face in the teaching and learning process as represented by (M=3.26, SD=0.68)

There are no special rooms designed and equipped with relevant instructional materials to support the teaching and learning process in geography. The study also revealed that many administrative responsibility is a challenge to tutors in the teaching and learning of geography. Biddle(1982), Ojo(2008) alluded to this facts and said that administrative difficulties in schools hinder the smooth implementation of educational programs and projects. They found that some schools administrators were not reform-minded and consequently felt lethargic to release the little financial and material resources that were necessary to the process of curriculum implementation. However, it emerge from the study that tutors were not in favor that students do not participate actively in geography lessons and that they have not had any in-service training as social studies tutors who teach the geography content in colleges of education. The above illustrations supported the findings of this study by (M=2.40, SD=0.86 and M=2.23, SD=1.00) respectively.

5. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that;

1. Time, teaching learning materials and overloaded syllabus, are among the many challenges tutors face in teaching geography in social studies curriculum in colleges of education in Ghana.
2. The study revealed that students not participating in geography lessons, unqualified geography tutors, difficulty in selecting the appropriate teaching methods are not problems the hinder the performance of tutors in their teaching.
3. Tutors as principal agents of change in colleges of education admit that they are beset with several challenges.

4. Most of the students admitted into the colleges of education to pursue “General Arts” Program do not have geography background which is pre-requisite qualification for admission.

6. RECOMMENDATION

There is the need for the Curriculum Research and Development Division (CRDD) to review or reform the content of the current geography curriculum to make its content suitable and relevant to both tutors and students. The review or reform exercise will make the overloaded course content not to be difficult and could be completed within the stipulated time

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