

An Evaluation of the University of Education, Winneba Student Internship Programme

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Abstract

In recent years, school-based mentoring for student teaching interns through School-University partnerships has become an increasingly important aspect of the process by which teacher trainees learn how to teach. However, sustainable partnerships require careful consideration and thoughtful research if they are to be effective and efficient in the long-term. This paper reports on the evaluation of the University of Education, Winneba, (UEW) Student Internship Programme (SIP) based on a 'school-university partnership' approach. The data were collected through questionnaires completed by 226 mentors and 443 mentees (i.e. student teaching interns) throughout the ten regions of Ghana; and also through semi-structured interviews in a sample of 24 schools in the Ashanti, Greater Accra and Central regions involving 120 mentors, 250 mentees, 24 Heads of schools and 40 UEW lecturers. The evaluation revealed that: (1) all stakeholders believe that the internship programme is a more effective method of preparing teachers than the traditional teaching practice; (2) the internship is contributing towards a change in the culture of schools and in the role perception and professionalism of teachers; (3) the programme is impacting positively on the professional development of practising teachers in the partnership schools. Suggestions for future modifications to the programme are also offered.

Introduction

School-University partnerships have the potential for both schools and teacher education institutions to engage in renewal and professional development by working together in a collegial manner in the preparation of student teachers. Moreover, successful partnerships can successfully challenge the gap that frequently divides the theory and practice components of teacher education programmes. Some of the recent innovations in teacher education have come from the recognition that teacher education is a shared endeavour that links teacher education institutions in partnership with their colleagues in Basic and Secondary schools (Goodlad, 1990). There is, in fact, world-wide trend in teacher education through partnership between universities and schools/colleges in the professional preparation of teachers.

It is based on this that the University of Education, Winneba (UEW) in the 2002/2003 academic year established partnerships with a cross section of public and private schools and colleges that share mutual interest in improving and advancing education. The partnership involves rural, urban and metropolitan schools; large and small, regular and special, geographically spread throughout the ten regions of the country.

Yet, sustainable partnerships require careful consideration and thoughtful research if they are to be effective and efficient in the long-term. For example, Bullough, Birrell, Young, & Clark (1999) and Teitel (1994) warn that some partnerships are conceived in a hasty and haphazard manner, driven by short-term rather than long-term gains and engage in little research into the costs and benefits to all stakeholders. In recognition of these, one year after the implementation of the Student Internship Programme (SIP), UEW found it necessary to evaluate the programme and use the results as the basis for a comprehensive review.

Methodology

The findings reported in this paper are drawn from data gathered through two methods of data collection. First, *self-complete questionnaires* were completed by 226 mentors and 443 mentees throughout the ten regions of Ghana. The questionnaires were designed to elicit responses to a range of themes such as:

- preparation by UEW – (1) mentor training; (2) mentee pre-internship orientation
- Mentee induction into partnership schools
- school-based educational and professional activities
- monitoring and assessing mentee performance
- reporting on mentee performance
- visits by UEW tutors
- any other comments.

The questionnaires were developed using three types of questions:

- open-ended, requiring short answers
- multiple choice questions, requiring respondents to choose from several alternate responses, and another type that used a Likert-style responses that required respondents to choose their level of agreement to various statements.

In addition the mentor questionnaire requested data on gender, length of service and position/responsibilities in school, while the mentee questionnaire requested data relating to gender and number of years of teaching prior to starting their degree programme.

The second method was a semi-structured interview conducted using a sample of 24 schools in the Ashanti, Greater Accra and Central regions. The sample was a representative mix of public Junior Secondary Schools (JSS) and Senior Secondary Schools (SSS), involving 120 mentors, 250 mentees, 24 Heads of schools and 40 UEW lecturers. Analysis revealed a high degree of consistency in and between the responses of individual stakeholders, suggesting that the views expressed were representative of the overall population.

Summary of the principal findings and recommendations

The results which follow are presented as an amalgam of the quantitative data from the self-completion questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews of the mentors, mentees, heads of partnership schools and colleges and UEW lecturers so that where possible, comparisons could be made between the responses of the different stakeholders.

Stakeholder perceptions of the Student Internship Programme (SIP)

The most important finding is that all stakeholders (mentors, mentees, heads of partnership schools and colleges and UEW lecturers) believe the SIP is a more effective method of preparing teachers than the traditional teaching practice.

Without exception, the mentors considered the extended placement to be more effective as it helps to provide an accurate profile of the mentees' abilities and suitability for teaching. They also felt that the programme represented a means of imparting new methods of teaching and learning to schools. It also contributes towards a change in the culture of schools and the role of teachers.

Based on their previous experience, all mentees considered the SIP to be a more effective means of training than the traditional model of teaching practice as the experience enabled them to develop both their subject knowledge and a range of teaching strategies.

Heads of partnership schools considered the programme to be a more effective method of preparing teachers, the most common reason being:

- they (the mentees) are more confident
- they introduced new methods of teaching with variety of teaching aids and are activity oriented
- they are part of the school participating in all activities just like the regular teachers
- they cannot simply act or pretend to impress when the University supervisor comes around.

There was also a widely held belief that the mentees benefited from an understanding of the school culture and, as a consequence, teaching was more effective as teachers had better understanding of the needs of pupils, both of which take time to assimilate.

UEW lecturers also considered that the SIP represented a more effective means of preparing teachers, primarily as a result of the confidence the mentees gained from the extended practice. Confidence was defined not simply as the ability to stand before the class, but the ability to successfully utilise a variety of pedagogical strategies based on an understanding of the needs of the learner.

Mentor preparation by UEW

Eighty percent of all mentors attended mentor training workshop prior to the arrival of the mentees. The extent to which the mentors had undergone formal mentor preparation, however, revealed a wide regional variation, the proportion attending mentoring workshops varying from as low as 55% in Ashanti region to as high as 100% in the Volta region. Mentors in most regions felt that the training workshops had prepared them sufficiently for mentoring (52% very well, and 34% well). The greatest degree of satisfaction was expressed in the Eastern and Greater Accra regions, and the least satisfied came from the Ashanti and Upper West regions. In Ashanti, the degree of satisfaction might have been much greater if a significant proportion of the 455 of those who offered no response had answered in similar vein as the 55% who did. Generally, a little over 10% of the mentors thought that their mentor training was inadequate.

There was also a consensus that the training they had received had focused exclusively on the generic aspects of mentoring and they considered the absence of a subject-specific component a serious omission.

Mentee preparation by UEW

Only 5% of the mentees claimed not to have received any preparation for the SIP. Those who received preparation, 255 thought that they were very well prepared, But 17% thought that they were not very well prepared, while a further 11% felt the preparation was of very little help. Clearly, the degree of satisfaction with the preparation was not as high as for the mentors.

In group discussions, evidence emerged of differences in preparation provided on the Kumasi and Winneba campuses, mentees from Kumasi having had the benefit of a seminar based on the Out-Segment Handbook.

Induction by the school

Quantitative data suggested that most mentors had organised a suitable induction programme for their mentees, the programme lasting predominantly an hour or half a day. Talks from Headmasters/mistresses/Principals on school/college policy, discussion of the roles and responsibilities in the school of the mentees, meeting with teachers in the mentees subject departments and discussion of syllabuses and schemes of work featured particularly strongly.

School-based educational activities

The mentors generally indicated that they had planned a programme of activities which related to professionalism and the specific aspects of their roles and responsibilities as a classroom teacher, thus establishing the parameters within which the mentees were to operate. There was no single frequency with which these sessions took place, though they suggested that they occurred once a month (34%), or once a term (27%), and nearly half (45%) suggested that they lasted an hour or so. The mentees suggested that these sessions took place somewhat less frequently, only 15% saying that they occurred once a month compared to 58% who said once a term.

School-based tutorials

Most mentors indicated that they regularly met their mentees to discuss their progress once a week (53%), and once a month (39%). Sessions tended to last about half an hour (70%) and an hour (27%). Eighty percent of mentees accepted that their mentors regularly had meetings with them to discuss their progress. The findings suggest that school-based mentors were seen by mentees as effective in assisting them develop relevant and important capabilities and knowledge in using a range of teaching methods.

Monitoring and assessing mentee performance

Most mentors (87%) and mentees (79%) said their school used a standard mentee observation schedule prepared by UEW. The vast majority of the mentors (87%) received instruction on how to use it. Almost half of the mentors thought that the standard schedule provided a very accurate picture of mentee performance (44%) and almost as many again (42%) thought that it provided an accurate one. The mentees agreed, figures of 34% and 38% respectively.

Quantitative data suggested that most mentors carried out formal observation of mentees, either on their own (64%) or in conjunction with other teachers (23%). The mentees tended to agree with response rates of 50% and 24% respectively. These formal observations were mainly conducted on a weekly basis (56%), but sometimes and more often 16% and sometimes less often 22%. Again, there was confirmation by the mentees, judging from the response rates of 48%, 15% and 23% respectively.

Reporting on mentee performance

Almost three quarters of the mentors (73%) indicated that they regularly completed reports of their mentees performance.

Visits by University Tutors

According to the mentors 25% of the mentees were observed by university tutors once (17%) and twice (28%) and more frequently (52%). The mentee broadly agreed to the figures.

Recommendations

Bullough, Birrell, Young and Clark (1999) observed that it is easy to underestimate long-term costs and overestimate benefits when starting off on a school-university partnership. Commitment from all stakeholders is required to embark on a school-university partnership. After the initial energising period problems begin to emerge as staff begin to get tired, roles become rearranged and the initial commitment is reconsidered. Partnership programmes often prove to be more labour intensive and expensive than initially anticipated.

In the case of UEW's programme questions have resurfaced regarding the realities and challenges that surround it. The next stage of the programme is for stakeholders to engage in open and honest communication to evaluate the cost and benefits of the programme. Government must consider funding this final component of the 4-year B.Ed programme run by UEW.

In conclusion, the following questions require consideration:

- How can classroom teachers be adequately acknowledged and recompensed for the time and energy they devote to the preparation of student teachers?
- How can university lecturers engage in an added role of developing a partnership with schools when they are also required to maintain an active research profile both nationally and internationally; lecturers engage in community service, prepare and teach courses, and how easily can they be available for student consultation?

Consideration of these questions will guide the next stage of the UEW's school-university partnership model in an effort to achieve the quality teaching outcome so clearly articulated by Masters (2001).

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