

Perceptions of Frontline Supervisors on the Performance of Teachers Trained through the Regular or Distance Modes of Tuition

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Abstract

From the pre-independence times through the independence era, the main mode of training pre-tertiary education teachers in Ghana had been the regular “brick and wall campus” system. But in the last two decades, the distance system of education has also featured prominently in the training of teachers in Ghana. However, there seem to be some perceived discrimination against teachers trained through the distance mode of education with the citing of unsatisfactory professional effectiveness as the reason, which is not backed by any evidence. A descriptive mixed methods research design was used to examine the perceptions of frontline supervisors, who are likely to be more familiar with teachers and their performance, about the professional effectiveness of pre-tertiary education teachers trained through regular and distance modes of education. Questionnaire and semi-structured interview schedule were used in collecting the data. A total sample size of 108 comprising all the 98 Headteachers, six Circuit Supervisors and four Deputy Directors of a municipality in the Central Region of Ghana was used for the study. Findings from the study indicate that generally, the frontline supervisors perceive teachers trained through regular mode of education to be professionally more effective than teachers trained through the distance mode of education. The study concludes that even though the study participants’ perceptions do not suggest that distance education trained teachers are not professionally effective, they do indicate that teachers trained through the regular mode of education are considered as better options for deployment in classrooms or teacher assignments. The study suggests that further research is required to validate these perceptions through direct measurement of professional effectiveness and also to identify the variables that account for the possible differences in professional effectiveness among the teachers.

Introduction

Quality education has undoubtedly been embraced by all as the bedrock of individual and national development. Andrés and Shavez (2015) explained that education can improve the capabilities of a person to enable him/her bring positive social change in the society. Khalid (2012), cited in Somani

(2017), also noted that education has a great influence on changing society. Quality education, is however, dependent largely on quality and effective professional teachers. Teachers are the heart of providing quality education to children. They take learners through not only book knowledge, but also social norms and acceptable behaviours to become reliable characters in society. According to Kadingdi, cited in Adu-Agyem and Osei-Poku (2012), the quality, effectiveness and attitudes of the teaching force rest heavily on two factors: the type of person recruited to the service and the quality of the pre-service and in-service training they receive. Teacher education or training is one of the ultimate means of ensuring the availability of quality teachers in schools. Teacher training institutions are established with well-planned and structured programmes to accomplish this very crucial desire of producing quality and effective professional teachers for quality education delivery in the society.

Teacher education started in Ghana in 1848 by the Basel Missionaries at Akropong-Akwapim (Pecku, 1998, cited in Cobbold, 2010). According to Akyeampong (2003), teacher education has continued since Ghana's independence in 1957 with strong government commitment aimed at producing adequate numbers of teachers for the nation's education system. With the continued expansion in school enrolments, more teacher training institutions have been established. The conscious efforts by government to train teachers for the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education have included the establishment of teacher training colleges, now colleges of education, and universities (University of Cape Coast and University of Education, Winneba) with the mandate to train professional teachers.

Until the last two decades, teacher training in Ghana had predominantly been executed through the regular "brick and wall campus" system. This appeared to be limiting the capacity of the training institutions to produce the required numbers of teachers due to limited facilities on campus. Ultimately, in spite of all the conscious effort by government, the country continued to experience acute-shortage of professional teachers to meet the national goal of providing universal basic education to all children of school going age, and thus offer all Ghanaians the opportunity to have access to all forms of education and training regardless of where one lives. It was against this background that the government of Ghana initiated the idea of distance education to augment the regular education system to train sufficient professional teachers for the education system.

The usefulness of distance education has been globally acknowledged

in recent years as one of the strategic means of increasing access to tertiary education through effective use of human resources, space and time of the various training institutions. This view is supported by an assertion made by Sam-Tagoe (2007) that distance education is uniquely seen as a tool for widening access to higher education and bridging the gap between those who have the opportunity to gain admission to study directly in the various tertiary institutions and those who have the ambition for schooling but are challenged because of limited infrastructure or their peculiar financial, social or occupational circumstances.

The distance education programme has for the last two decades become an integral part of the training of teachers for the primary and secondary education subsectors in Ghana. However, a number of concerns have been raised about the quality of teachers produced from distance education programmes in recent times particularly in respect of their professional effectiveness (Yarboi-Tetteh, 2014). Consequently, there have been issues with the acceptance of these teachers into the Ghana Education Service (GES) as qualified and well-trained teachers imbued with professional competence. A former Provost of the College of Distance Education (CoDE) of the University of Cape Coast was reported to have expressed concern over alleged cases of some District Directors of GES discriminating against diploma and graduate teachers of distance education programmes (Yarboi-Tetteh, 2014). Another reported case had to do with the selective recruitment by GES, where in 2017 graduate teachers from the distance mode of training were not permitted to apply for recruitment (Ansah, 2017).

The perceived discrimination against teachers trained through the distance mode of education has been argued on the grounds of their professional effectiveness being unsatisfactory. However, the arguments for the discrimination appear only anecdotal and not backed by any evidence particularly as shared by frontline supervisors who work closely and regularly with these teachers. The frontline supervisors in this study context are the headteachers and officers of the district/municipal/metropolitan education directorates. The argument of this study is that without the views of these two categories of frontline supervisors, conclusions on the professional effectiveness of teachers would be incomplete. Thus, the objective of this study was to examine the main difference in the professional effectiveness of teachers trained through distance education and teachers trained through regular education, from the standpoint of frontline supervisors of the teachers.

Flowing from the overarching objective, a hypothesis formulated for the study was that, “There is significant difference between the professional effectiveness of teachers trained through distance education and teachers trained through regular education.”

Study Methods

A descriptive convergent mixed-methods approach was adopted for this study because the aim of the study requires in-depth narrative and numeric data to be collected and analysed separately and merged in order to adequately address the phenomenon of professional effectiveness of teachers from the standpoint of frontline supervisors (Wisdom & Creswell, 2013; Guetterman, Fetters, & Creswell, 2015). Convergent mixed methods help researchers to present participants’ point of view comprehensively by capturing their voices in addition to statistical representations. It is for this reason that the convergent mixed methods design was considered appropriate to expansively examine the difference in professional effectiveness between distance education trained teachers and regular education trained teachers, from the standpoint of frontline supervisors of these teachers. The mix methods design relies on the complementary strength of qualitative and quantitative research designs. The characteristic of flexibility in the design as emphasised by Wisdom and Creswell (2013) became relevant in this study since the content demanded a more flexible approach that would examine both qualitative and quantitative indicators. Perception is highly subjective and should not only be quantified and hence requires qualitative techniques that could adequately address most relevant issues concerning the professional effectiveness of teachers trained through regular and distance education modes. On the other hand, some of the variables under teachers’ professional effectiveness are standards and can be measured through quantitative techniques.

According to Best and Khan, as cited in Amadehe (2002), descriptive research concerns itself with conditions and relations that exist. These include practices, attitudes and opinions that are held by research participants. Supporting this assertion, Nassaji (2015) stated that descriptive research involves the study of a phenomenon in its naturalistic characteristics. Thus, an attempt is made to study the phenomenon in its natural setting without any manipulations of variables.

The population for the study was made up of all headteachers and

municipal education officers in one municipality in the Central Region of Ghana. The target population consisted of 98 headteachers and 33 municipal education officers, making a total of 131. Out of this target population, a total sample size of 108 was used for the study. This represents 82 per cent of the population, comprising all the 98 headteachers and 10 municipal education officers (six Circuit Supervisors and four Deputy Directors of Education). The 82 per cent of the population used as the sample size was based on the assertion by Nwana (1992) that if the population is in hundreds, 40 per cent and above could be used as the sample. The Headteachers and Municipal Education officers were chosen because they are the category of supervisors who have regular and consistent interaction with the teachers in their day-to-day activities.

A combination of purposive and census sampling techniques was employed in this study. The Municipal Education Officers were selected purposively because they were deemed “information rich” on supervision issues and could provide in-depth information about the professional performance effectiveness of the teachers. This is based on the submission by Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016) that purposive sampling technique is the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses. Additionally, Kumar (2005) stated that the basic consideration in purposive sampling is the judgement of the researcher as to who can provide the most needed information to fulfil the objective of the study. One of the merits of purposive sampling is that it ensures that at least some information from the respondents who are crucial is obtained (Aina, 2002). The census technique was used to select all the eligible headteachers because unlike the Municipal Education Officers where only the Circuit Supervisors (C/S and Deputy Directors (D/Ds) have regular and consistent interactions with the teachers, all Headteachers have regular and consistent interactions with the teachers on the teachers’ day-to-day functions. Thus, all the headteachers in the public basic schools were selected as participants of the study.

A questionnaire and semi-structured interview schedule were used in collecting the data. The questionnaire was used to collect data from the headteachers while an interview guide was used to elicit responses from a selected few of the headteachers. While the Headteachers were considered to have in-depth knowledge of the specific teachers under them, the Circuit Supervisors and Deputy Directors were considered to have more general information on all teachers in the municipality.

The quantitative data was analysed with descriptive and inferential statistical techniques including: percentages, means and t-test. The study's hypothesis was tested at a 5 per cent level of significance. On individual basis, the respondents rated the two categories of teachers independently on percentage point on the indicators of professional effectiveness. The ratings were analysed on criterion-reference basis; thus, the two categories of teachers were scored independently against professional effectiveness indicators. This implies that each indicator was scored as a percentage for each category of teachers. The Means of all the indicators were also determined and used to run a t-test to establish the overall differences in perceptions across all the indicators of professional effectiveness. This was done with the help of SPSS software. The second subsection dwelt on the qualitative data which was analysed thematically with the help of NVivo software. The qualitative data was analysed thematically to explore emerging themes and existing indicators on the professional effectiveness of the two categories of teachers under consideration in this study.

Findings

This section presents the findings of the study, which are put into two subsections. The first section focuses on quantitative data regarding the perceptions of the frontline supervisors about the differences in professional effectiveness of teachers trained through regular and distance modes of education.

Findings of the Quantitative Data

The quantitative findings involved five indicators of teacher professional effectiveness by which respondents compared teachers trained through regular and distance modes of education. Table 1 presents the collective responses of Headteachers with regard to the professional effectiveness of teachers trained through the two modes of training, namely: regular and distance education.

The results from Table 1 indicate that the assessment was higher for the regular education teachers than the distance education teachers in Instructional Planning Skills (Lesson Plan). The supervisors rated the regular teachers as high as 85.2 per cent as compared to 71.8 per cent for their distance education counterparts. On Teaching Methodology and Delivery,

the rating was 86.8 per cent and 79.1 per cent for the regular and distance education teachers, respectively. This means that the Headteachers perceived the teachers trained through the regular mode comparatively better in their delivery methodologies than the teachers trained through the distance education mode. In terms of Classroom Organisation/Management skills of the two groups of teachers, the respondents rated the regular teachers with 85.1 per cent as against 76.2 per cent for the distance education teachers.

Table 1: Headteachers' Ratings of Distance and Regular Education Teachers' Professional Effectiveness

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<i>Core Areas of Comparison</i>	<i>Distance Education Teachers (%)</i>	<i>Regular Education Teachers (%)</i>
Instructional Planning Skills (Lesson Plan)	71.8	85.2
Teaching Methodology and Delivery	79.1	86.8
Classroom Organisation/ Management	76.2	85.1
Teachers' Knowledge-Based Attitudes	58.9	88.5
Teachers' Response to Support and Suggestions	66.1	77.8
Mean	70.42	84.68

The supervisors graded distance education teachers quite low when it came to their Knowledge-Based Attitudes (Content knowledge). Indeed, they rated the teachers trained through the distance mode 58.8 per cent, while on the other hand, they rated the teachers trained through the regular education mode 88.5 per cent. Similarly, regular education teachers were considered to be more responsive to support and suggestions from their supervisors than the distance education teachers. The rating was 77.8 per cent versus 66.1 per cent in favour of regular education teachers. On the whole, the mean rating of the regular education teachers was 84.68 per cent, while their counterparts had 70.42 per cent with variability of 4.09 per cent and 8.09 per cent, respectively. A visual comparison indicates that the teachers trained through the regular mode had a higher professional effectiveness rating from their frontline supervisors (Headteachers and

education officers) than the teachers trained through the distance education mode.

Hypothesis

The study tested the null hypothesis that: “There is significant difference between the professional effectiveness of teachers trained through distance education and teachers trained through regular education.” at a .05 significance level.

Table 2: Summary Statistics of the T-Test

<i>Statistic</i>	<i>Value</i>
T	-3.52
df	8
p-value (2-tailed)	.008
Mean (Regular)	84.68
Mean (Distance)	70.42
Lower Limit (95% CI)	–
Upper Limit (95% CI)	23.61
Level of significance (α) = .05	-4.91

For the test of statistically significant difference, the t-value of -3.52 with an associated p-value of .008 required that the null hypothesis (H_0) of no significant difference should be rejected at a .05 alpha level. Therefore, it can be concluded that, from the perceptions of the frontline supervisors of this study, there was a significant difference between the professional effectiveness of teachers trained through distance education programmes and those trained through regular education programmes. The implication of this result is that regular education teachers were, on the average perceived to be performing better as compared to their colleagues trained through the distance education mode, according to the frontline supervisors.

Findings of the Qualitative Data

The qualitative data collected also explored in-depth the same areas examined with the quantitative data. Thus, Instructional planning skills, Teaching methodology and delivery, Classroom management skills and

content knowledge. However, additional themes also emerged. This section presents the findings of the qualitative data.

Instructional Planning Skills — Lesson Plan Preparation

With regard to the effectiveness of the two groups of teachers, the supervisors indicated that there was a vast difference in the instructional planning skills, especially in the area of lesson notes preparation. For instance, a Circuit Supervisor with nine years' working experience indicated that distance education teachers had challenges in terms of lesson note preparation. He recounted, *"Though some teachers trained through regular education also have problem with lesson note preparation, however, most teachers trained through distance education have a lot of problems"* Similarly, a headteacher with a decade experience also reported that teachers from distance educational institutions had some difficulties in the preparation of scheme of work, *"some of them even did not know what scheme of work was about"* said, a headteacher. Another Circuit Supervisor said, *"most regular education teachers prepare detailed and good lesson notes compared to those teachers trained through distance education mode"*. In a similar vein, a Deputy Director in charge of Supervision and Monitoring with 15 years working experience made a defined distinction between these groups of teachers. He said, *"There is a vast difference. Regular education trained teachers are far better than distance education teachers."*

Teaching Methodology and Delivery

The study also sought the difference in performance among the two groups of teachers in their methods of teaching and delivery. It was centred on how they taught and interacted with pupils, used teaching and learning materials and posed questions to pupils in class. The frontline supervisors generally stated that regular education teachers were better in this regard compared to distance education teachers. A circuit supervisor contended that there was a difference between these teachers when it came to classroom delivery. He said, *"the confidence level of distance education teachers was lower than those trained through regular education."* Similarly, another Circuit Supervisor revealed that in terms of classroom delivery or methodology, distance education teachers lacked a lot compared to regular education

teachers. He indicated that, *“the aspect of teaching methodology depends more on the individual teacher’s commitment level. However, teachers from regular education institutions are slightly ahead of teachers from distance education institutions.”*

While the general perception of a majority of the frontline supervisors was that regular trained teachers perform better than their distance education counterparts on their methodology, some frontline supervisors rated the two groups of teachers on the same level pegging. Thus, some headteachers and Circuit Supervisors found no marked difference in their methodology and delivery skills. *“For classroom delivery it is a 50–50 affair. Thus, the two groups of teachers are at par. This stems from the fact that a teacher’s ability to deliver in the classroom depends on the individual’s own intensions, regardless of the training given,”* a Circuit Supervisor responded. A headteacher also said, *“there is no significant difference between the two groups of teachers in the area of teaching methodology.”*

Classroom Management Skills

A circuit supervisor revealed that there is a gap between the teachers trained through the regular mode and the teachers trained through the distance mode in terms of classroom organisation and management. He stated, *“distance education teachers have challenges in this regard.”* A headteacher also indicated that there was a difference in the classroom management strategies between the two groups of teachers. He noted, *“Comparably, regular education teachers do better than distance education teachers when it comes to classroom management due to the fact that distance education teachers did not have much contact with their tutors while regular education teachers had more and continuous contact with their tutors.”* According to a Circuit Supervisor who has seven years’ experience working with teachers, teachers trained through regular education controlled and managed their classes better than distance education teachers. To support this observation, she said, *“Regular education teachers are taken through thorough and intensive teacher training as against those from distance education. This is evident in the duration and the programme of activities for teaching practice.”* On the other hand, an Assistant Director in charge of Finance and Administration said that he did not see any difference in the classroom

management skills particularly in terms of class control and pupils' involvement in lessons between the two categories of the teachers.

Subject Matter Delivery

The level of a teacher's knowledge based on the subject content to be facilitated is equally crucial for effective teaching and learning. In this regard, the supervisors' views were sought about the two categories of teachers. The study participants appeared to show preference for teachers trained through the regular education mode when it comes to subject content delivery. Generally, they indicated that the teachers trained through the regular education mode were relatively more knowledgeable in their subject matter than their colleagues from the distance education mode. For instance, one headteacher said, "*the regular education trained teachers are better than their distance education colleagues in terms of knowledge.*" Another headteacher responded, "*the subject matter or the knowledge-base of distance education teachers is below expectation.* Similarly, a Circuit Supervisor noted, "*in terms of content or knowledge level, regular education teachers are better than distance education teachers.*"

However, there were some of the respondents who were of the view that both categories of teachers had equal level of knowledge. One of the Circuit Supervisors said,

Both teachers possess the same level of knowledge and content level. However, distance education teachers lack the exposure to put what they know into practice. Distance education teachers are not given the opportunity to do more teaching practice to enable them have much exposure like their regular education counterparts.

Another Circuit Supervisor stated, "*For the content and knowledge level of the teachers, I will rate them 50–50. That is, both groups of teachers are at the same level, considering their areas of specialisation or interest.*"

Teachers' Response to Support and Suggestions

This area was aimed at seeking the views of the frontline supervisors on how readily these two categories of teachers take the technical or instructional support offered them. The qualitative data suggests that distance education

trained teachers readily embrace supports and suggestions offered them by their supervisors. The respondents attribute this to the fact that teachers trained through the distance education mode see themselves to be unceasingly learning and hence are always ready to accept suggestions to help them improve.

The headteachers and education officers had these responses to support the above assertion on teachers' response to support and suggestions. One headteacher had this to say, "*teachers from distance education are ready to accept the support offered them unlike those from regular education who feel proud and think that what they have been taught in school is the best.*" A circuit supervisor with over ten years working experience also said, "*those from distance education know they do not know. Thus, they know they are still in the learning process. Most regular education teachers think they have got enough training and that they do not need support.*" Most headteachers and officers made similar comments during the interview session to support their view on how the teachers respond to supports offered them.

The above areas of consideration in connection with the assessment of the teachers' level of effectiveness as in instructional planning skills, teaching methodology, classroom management and content knowledge of the teachers conform with Gurney's (2007) and Hunt's (2009) description of an effective teacher. According to Gurney and Hunt, the effectiveness of a teacher is evident in his or her content and pedagogical knowledge level and how they are applied to facilitate students' learning processes.

Discussions

It was hypothesised that there is no significant difference in the professional effectiveness of teachers trained through distance education and those trained through regular education, from the standpoint of frontline supervisors. It is noteworthy that the two categories of frontline supervisors generally perceive teachers trained through regular education mode to be relatively more effective than their counterparts trained through the distance mode. This is in agreement with Attri's (2012) research findings which indicated that universities and outsiders do not equate the products of distance education with products of traditional educational system in spite of their better achievements in the same examination. The perception of the respondents is, however, in contrast with the research findings by Koomson (1998),

Sam-Tagoe (2000) and Bampo (2008). According to these studies, there is no significant difference in the professional competence between teachers trained by distance and those trained by the regular system. However, on the singular issue of receptiveness to suggestions, the perceptions were mixed; whereas the headteachers' quantitatively elicited perceptions generally favoured teachers trained through the regular mode of education, the municipal officers' perceptions elicited qualitatively favoured teachers trained through distance mode of education. The nuance in this divergence of perceptions may stem from the perceived authority differences between the headteachers and the municipal education officers where the headteachers are seen to have lesser authority than the municipal education officers. In this sense, it is plausible to argue that teachers are likely to be more receptive to suggestions from the municipal education officers than from the headteachers.

The various contributing factors noted to account for the perceived differences in the two categories of teachers regarding professional effectiveness go to support an observation made by the University of Mumbai (2008) about the characteristics of teacher education. It was noted that the crux of the entire process of teacher education lies in its design, structure, organisation and the transactional modes as well as the extent of its appropriateness. Additionally, Mireku-Gyimah (1998) stressed, as a factor for the acceptance of distance education system, that the entry requirements, lecturers, syllabus, course content, examinations and grading system for the distance education system should be the same as the regular educational system.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The effectiveness of teachers is important for quality education delivery for learners at all levels of education including basic schools. Headteachers and officers as frontline supervisors of basic schools in Ghana assess this from several perspectives, including instructional planning skills (lesson plan), teaching methodology and delivery, classroom management skills, teachers' knowledge-based attitudes, and how teachers respond to support and suggestions. Based on these, it was discovered in the current study that the supervisors perceived distance education teachers to be different from regular education teachers with regular education teachers seen to be more professionally effective than the distance education trained teachers. These

perceptions, however, do not suggest that distance education trained teachers are not professionally effective. Indeed, the mean rating of the regular education teachers of 84.68 per cent and 70.42 per cent for distance mode trained teachers suggest that both categories of teachers were rated far above average. Again, the study used norm-referenced criteria and not standard-referenced criteria. Finally, the study was conducted in only one district and that cannot be used as the basis for generalisation for the entire nation.

The aforementioned findings point to the fact that the organisers of distance education programmes are doing their best; however, there is more room for improvement. It is also to be noted that professional effectiveness of teachers is dependent on a number of factors apart from the mode of training. In view of these observations, distance education institutions on one hand and supervisors of basic schools on other, need to do more in order to bridge the perceived gap between the effectiveness level of distance education teachers and that of regular education teachers. The teachers are admonished to be ready to learn and change their attitudes towards the profession to reflect the efforts of their educational institutions and their supervisors at their work places. Teacher professional effectiveness undoubtedly is a collective responsibility of all stakeholders irrespective of the mode of training and therefore, it behooves on all and sundry to contribute their quota. The study suggests that further research is required to validate these perceptions through direct measurement of professional effectiveness and also to identify the variables that account for the differences in the teachers' professional effectiveness.

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