

Perspectives of teacher trainees about difficulties in teaching social studies in Ghanaian basic schools

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Abstract

Teachers are important in the delivery of quality education. Accordingly, the teaching profession requires people who go through training to acquire the needed knowledge, skills and experience for the teaching job. This study, conducted in Colleges of Education in Ghana, found that teacher trainees could face instructional challenges in Social Studies curriculum implementation in Ghanaian basic schools after training primarily because of the conflict of teaching Social Studies as social science. There are also challenges associated with using learner-centred interactive instructional approaches such as cooperative learning and project techniques during teaching. The researcher used simple random and purposive sampling techniques to select 143 teacher trainees from two (2) Colleges of Education. The data collected via self-developed questionnaire (Cronbach's alpha = 0.73) and semi-structured interview guide were analysed quantitatively using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage), and qualitatively through thematic analysis—responses from respondents were categorized into themes. There is the need for the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Ghana, Ghanaian universities and Colleges of Education (CoE) to review the content of the current Social Studies syllabus of Colleges of Education, and arrange or harmonise it in such a way that it aligns with the Social Studies curriculum for Ghanaian basic schools.

Key Words: Quality education, teacher trainees, Social Studies, curriculum implementation, instructional challenges

Introduction

To become a professional teacher, it is necessary that one goes through training in order to acquire the needed knowledge, skills and experience for the job. It is for this purpose that Ghanaian Colleges of Education and some universities are mandated to train teachers for the nation. The Colleges of Education train teachers for the basic schools level, while the universities prepare teachers for all levels. So, how well do Ghanaian Colleges of Education prepare teacher trainees to teach Social Studies at the basic school level?

Although teacher trainees may be well-prepared in Ghanaian Colleges of Education to teach Social Studies at the basic school level, they are likely to face instructional challenges or difficulties. For instance, there is a misalignment in structure of the basic school Social Studies syllabus vis-à-vis the contents of the Social Studies curriculum for Colleges of Education in Ghana. This mismatch or incongruence in Social Studies curriculum content at both levels is a threat to Social Studies curriculum implementation at the basic education level in Ghana. This buttresses the views of Bekoe and Eshun (2013) that the Social Studies curriculum has feuding and

implementation challenges in Ghana. This could undermine teacher trainee efficacy in Social Studies instruction at the basic level.

Statement of the Problem

Teacher trainees in Ghana are likely to face instructional challenges during Social Studies curriculum implementation in Ghanaian basic schools, after training. This is because of the differences in the scope of content of the Social Studies curriculum for Colleges of Education and basic schools in Ghana. Documentary evidence on the Social Studies curricula of Colleges of Education and basic schools in Ghana shows clear conceptual difference in what the subject is. The nature of the content of Social Studies at the basic school level does not fall in line with that of the Colleges of Education in Ghana as noted by the Curriculum, Research and Development Division [CRDD](2007) of Ghana. This confusion could pose difficulty or threat to trained teachers and teacher trainees in Social Studies curriculum implementation at the basic school level. This implies that teacher trainees would not be efficacious in Social Studies curriculum implementation in basic schools, after training. This raises the question of whether teacher trainees in Colleges of Education will be well-prepared and efficacious in teaching the subject in basic schools after training.

Purpose of the Study

This study investigated the difficulties teacher trainees could encounter in teaching Social Studies in Ghanaian basic schools, after training.

Research Question

The following research questions guide this study: What are the difficulties that teacher-trainees could encounter during teaching of Social Studies in Ghanaian basic schools, after training?

Theoretical Framework

The social cognitive theory by Bandura (1997) is applied to interrogate the preparedness, ability and efficacy of teacher trainees, who are trained in Ghanaian Colleges of Education, to teach Social Studies in basic schools. A fundamental assumption of the social cognitive theory is human agency. According to Bandura, “change in perceived efficacy results from cognitive processing of the diagnostic information that performance conveys about capability rather than the performance per se” (p. 81). Stated another way, individual’s perceptions of self-efficacy for various pursuits arise from cognitive and metacognitive processing of relevant information. Goddard, Hoy and Woolfolk-Hoy (2000) argue that the sources of efficacy information postulated by Bandura’s theory identified teacher efficacy as a type of “self-efficacy”- the product of a social cognitive process in which people form beliefs about their own capacity to perform at a given level of competence (Henson, 2001; Goddard et al., 2000). The work of Bandura has developed into various viewpoints about teacher abilities and effectiveness in educating students.

Literature Review

Teacher education is defined by Moyles and Robinson (2002) as the process for the preparation of those individuals who want to practice in the teaching profession. Teacher trainee preparation entails equipping prospective teachers with subject matter content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, relevant skills and attitudes to educate learners. Equipping teacher trainees with both the subject matter as well as pedagogical content knowledge position their sense of preparedness to perform well when they go to the field to practice. This is because training of teachers helps them to acquire the professional competence with which to impart knowledge that will be useful to the individual and society as a whole as stated by Afful-Broni and Ziggah (2006).

A number of curriculum implementation challenges have been identified by researchers to impede the teaching of Social Studies by teachers. Some of these challenges include negative past experiences with Social Studies, lack of interest in teaching Social Studies, confusion over the nature of Social Studies (Bekoe & Eshun, 2013; CRDD, 2007), and conflicting/conservative sociological beliefs. Teachers’ negative perception of their past

encounters with Social Studies presents a serious challenge. Research indicates that students often perceived Social Studies as a boring subject (Shaughnessy & Haladyna, 1985).

Methodology

This descriptive research adopted quantitative and qualitative paradigms using the mixed-methods sequential explanatory design. The target population for this study was 700 final year students in the Akropong Presbyterian College of Education in Ghana. Stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used to sample 143 final year students (teacher trainees) for the study, and this represented 20% of the study population. The aim was to sample for representativeness, heterogeneity and higher statistical efficiency. This ensured fair representation of the teacher trainees from the colleges by sex and programme of study. Maximum diversity or variation purposive sampling technique was also used to select six (6) teacher trainees by sex and programme of study for interview. This ensured representativeness and eliminated sampling bias.

The data collection techniques for this study were administration of questionnaire and face-to-face interview. Thus, questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide were used as data collection tools to gather data for the study. The questionnaire which contained closed-ended items was used to collect data from the teacher trainees. The semi-structured interview guide was also used to collect data from the six (6) purposively sampled teacher trainees. They contained items on the socio-demographic data, teacher trainee preparedness to teach Social Studies in basic schools, and Social Studies Curriculum implementation challenges vis-à-vis post-training instructional difficulties for the teacher trainee.

For face validation, the instruments were given to colleague Social Studies tutors and students for peer review. Regarding content validation, the instruments were given to experts in the fields of Social Studies education as well as the research supervisor for review. In order to ensure reliability of the research instrument, it was pilot tested on twenty (20) final year teacher trainees from Asokore SDA College of Education. The response from the pilot test was subjected to Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 which yielded a reliability coefficient (r) of 0.73. This indicated that the instrument was reliable as noted by Tavakol, Mohagheghi, and Dennick (2008) who stated that the acceptable values of alpha, ranges from 0.70 to 0.95.

Results

The data is presented and analysed under two/three basic themes. These are: socio-demographic characteristics, teacher trainee preparedness to teach Social Studies in basic schools, and Social Studies Curriculum implementation challenges vis-à-vis post-training instructional difficulties for the teacher trainee.

Demographic Information

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents (n = 143)

Variable	Variable category	Freq	%
Sex distribution	Male	55	38.0
	Female	88	62.0
Programme of study	Science	7	5.0
	Social Sciences	36	25.0
	Vocational/Technical	56	39.0
	Other	44	31.0
Number of terms teacher trainees had taught Social Studies during teaching practice	One term only	36	25.2
	Two terms	35	24.5
	Three terms	29	20.3
	More than three terms	43	30.0

Source: Field data (2017).

Table 1 shows that the sampled respondents comprised more female teacher trainees (n = 88, 62%) than their male (n = 55, 38%) counterparts. The majority (64%) of the teacher trainees studied social science and vocational/technical programmes in the sampled Colleges of Education.

Social Studies curriculum implementation challenges vis-à-vis post-training instructional difficulties for the teacher trainee

This theme explored the research question: *What are the difficulties that teacher-trainees are likely to encounter during teaching of Social Studies in Ghanaian basic schools, after training?* The data reveals that teacher-trainees were likely to face Social Studies implementation challenges such as the conflict of teaching Social Studies as social science, difficulty of using learner-centred interactive instructional approaches such as cooperative learning, role play, fieldtrip and project methods.

Table 2: The difficulties that teacher trainees are likely to face in the teaching of Social Studies, after training (n = 143)

Statement	HE		LE		NE	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Confusion over the nature of Social Studies	36	25	68	48	39	27
Conflict of teaching Social Studies as social subjects Science	73	51	51	36	19	13
Inability to effectively teach some concepts or topics	69	48	58	41	16	11
Challenge of using instructional approaches like cooperative learning, role playing, simulation, inquiry fieldtrip, group and independent projects	71	50	62	43	10	7
Lack of/inadequate teaching & learning materials	70	49	38	27	35	24
Large classes/overcrowded classrooms	65	45	72	50	6	5
Other challenges	13	9	61	43	69	48

Source: Field data (2017). **Key:** F = Frequency; % = Percentage; **HE** = High Extent; **LE** = Low Extent; **NE** = No Extent.

In Table 3, the findings show that teacher trainees could face the following Social Studies curriculum implementation challenges in Ghanaian basic schools after training (in rank order): conflict of teaching Social Studies as social science subjects – 51% (1st); the challenge of using learner-centred interactive instructional approaches like fieldtrip and projects methods - 50% (2nd); lack of/inadequate teaching and learning materials - 49% (3rd), inability to effectively teach some Social Studies concepts or topics - 48% (4th), and large/overcrowded classes - 45% (5th). During the interview, some of the teacher trainees had these to say:

There is lack of/inadequate teaching and learning materials. In fact, encountered same problem during teaching practice. Another problem would be large class sizes to be handle by one teacher. This could be a source of work overload and stress. Yes, my fear is that there will be inadequate teaching and learning materials to boost learning of the subject. Also, it will be difficult to get relevant TLMs for specific topics. Again, a possible hindrance is organising educational or fieldtrips (Teacher trainee # 1).

Yes, the challenge will be on getting TLMs for some topics like migration in the Social Studies syllabus. Another problem is teaching overloaded curriculum. The Social Studies syllabus is very loaded, and teaching it put

much stress on the teacher and learners. This shifts teacher's attention on teaching learners to cognitive or intellectual abilities, rather than teaching for holistic development (Teacher trainee # 2).

It will be difficult to teach social science subjects as Social Studies. This is because we were rather taught individual social science subjects by different Social Studies tutors in the college of education. So, it will be difficult to single-handedly and effectively teach these subjects using the integrated approach. More so, I am not so grounded in subjects like economics and geography(Teacher trainee # 3).

Very little attention is paid to affective learning or education in the Social Studies curriculum, and assessment in the affective domain is totally neglected by majority of Social Studies teachers. This is mainly because at the end of the course, learners will not be examined in the affective domain by teachers and the West African Examination Council (WAEC). So, it will be difficult for me to focus on teaching for attainment of affective outcomes in the syllabus (Teacher trainee # 4).

It will be a big challenge to use instructional approaches like, cooperative learning, role-play, simulation, inquiry, fieldtrip, group and independent projects. This is because the syllabus is loaded, large class sizes and there is no time as well as resources to efficiently apply these pedagogical approaches. Seriously, it will not be easy to get teaching and learning materials for certain topic(Teacher trainee # 5).

Lessons on concepts such as directions, location, etc. cannot be effective without globes and large-scale maps for students to manipulate. The Social Studies syllabus covers areas which call for many activities, but because materials are not available, very few Social Studies activities are actually done. The lack of resources will hamper the use of some techniques such as small-group activities, and some skills will not be properly taught. Students will be deprived of opportunities to manipulate due to inadequate resource materials and the difficulty of access to them when needed (Teacher trainee # 6).

This result suggests that teachers' conception of a subject, curriculum or contents/topics could influence their choice of instructional approach. This means that teachers' conception of the subject Social Studies, in turn affects the way they teach and transmit knowledge to students. This observation corroborates the view of Kember and Kwan (2000) who stated that teachers' conceptions of curriculum, and the nature of the curriculum may influence approaches to teaching. Other studies by Almarza (2001), Chiodo and Byford (2004), Bekoe and Eshun (2013), Quashigah, Eshun and Mensah (2013) put forward that the pedagogical content knowledge of Social Studies teachers do influence the way they assess their lessons. This also confirms the views of Lindblom-Ylanne and Trigwell (2006) who explained that teachers who experience different contexts may adopt different approaches to teaching in those different contexts.

Key finding

The main finding of this study is that teacher-trainees could experience two major Social Studies curriculum implementation challenges in Ghanaian basicschools after training: conflict of teaching Social Studies as social science; and the challenge of using learner-centred interactive instructional approaches like fieldtrip and projects methods.

Conclusion

The evidence gathered from this study signifies that there is a controversy surrounding Social Studies with regard to how it is conceptualised and taught. This has implications for teacher preparedness in the institutions that train teachers for Social Studies education in Ghana. Even though most of the teacher trainees were well-prepared and had sufficient repertoire of strategies for teaching integrated Social Studies at the basic school level, they are likely to face a number of difficulties in teaching the subject at that level after training.

Recommendations

In view of the above findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

- i. The Ministry of Education (MoE) in Ghana, universities and Colleges of Education (CoE) in Ghana should review the content of the current Social Studies syllabus of Colleges of Education, and arrange it in such a way that it aligns with the Social Studies curriculum for Ghanaian basic schools. This situation calls for a guideline for integrated Social Studies education in Ghana, and the need for alignment of Social Studies curriculum at both tertiary and pre-tertiary institutions.
- ii. Social Studies tutors in Ghanaian Colleges of Education should prepare Social Studies educators in the use of learner-centred interactive methods such as group work or cooperative learning, demonstration, field trip and project methods of teaching (instruction) and learning. This would encourage active learning of the subject with application to life outside of the classroom. This could offer opportunities for learners to construct and discover knowledge.
- iii. The issues raised in this study have been thoroughly analysed and conclusions drawn from it suggested that the current study should be expanded to cover both public and private Colleges of Education and universities that offer Social Studies programme, and prepare or train Social Studies educators for pre-tertiary institutions in Ghana. A study to investigate the instructional efficacy of Social Studies tutors in pre-tertiary institutions is also suggested.

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Contributions

- Rosemary Originator of topic, introduction, and review of literature.
- Bernice Collection of data and the analysis.
- Bernard.....Discussion of findings.
- Adams..... Conclusion, recommendations and reference.