Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies
2023; 8(3): 153-159
http://www.sciencepublishinggroup.com/j/tecs
doi: 10.11648/j.tecs.20230803.16
ISSN: 2575-498X (Print); ISSN: 2575-4971 (Online)

The Challenges of Mentors of the Student's Teachers (Mentees) Under the Supported Teaching in Schools (STS) Program

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To cite this article:

Salifu Yakubu, Haruna Abdul Karim, Zibreal Sandawey Salifu, Shaibu Issah Abdulmumin. The Challenges of Mentors of the Student's Teachers (Mentees) Under the Supported Teaching in Schools (STS) Program. *Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies*. Vol. 8, No. 3, 2023, pp. 153-159. doi: 10.11648/j.tecs.20230803.16

Received: July 6, 2023; **Accepted**: July 20, 2023; **Published**: August 9, 2023

Abstract: This paper highlighted the challenges of mentors of the student's teachers (Mentees) under the Supported Teaching in Schools (STS) program that has been introduced into the Colleges of Education in Ghana as part of the new B. Ed. curriculum. The study employed a descriptive survey to find out the perception of mentors in partner schools towards the STS program and some of the challenges affecting the mentors in the East Mamprusi Municipality in the North-East region of Ghana. A sample of 66 mentors, comprising 33 of each sex, was selected from the partner schools of Gambaga College of Education and surveyed using questionnaires. The data was analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings, among other thofgs, revealed that even though the STS program is rated highly across the ranks in GES, mentors with higher ranks rated the STS program higher than their juniors. The findings also further revealed that some of the challenges affecting the mentors include a lack of financial and other incentives, a lack of TLS, and a lack of proper orientation. Consequently, it is recommended that stakeholders offer mentors the necessary incentives and also create an avenue to educate mentors to embed STS program as part of their routine professional discourse. Periodic orientation must be provided to the mentors, and the partner schools must be equipped with appropriate TLMs.

Keywords: Supported Teaching in Schools, Ranks, Mentors, Partner Schools

1. Introduction

Education is the most powerful weapon that any country can use to arm its youth against challenges such as diseases, poverty, social inequalities, tribal wars, etc. in the 21st century. This has become eminent, especially in third-world countries where the aforesaid challenges are very pervasive. Consequently, governments, realizing the importance of education in the development of youth, have dedicated chunks of their scarce national resources towards improving the educational system of their respective countries. This has called for the need to constantly re-evaluate the structure of the current educational system in order to make the necessary adjustments to meet the needs and challenges of the time.

A study conducted by Lewin, K. M., and Stuart, J. M., into the cost of educational programs for teacher training in some selected third-world countries highlighted some problems, such as unpredictable and irregular teacher education program arrangements, which culminated in an unstable learning environment for teacher training [14]. In view of this, the search for new models to improve the quality of teacher training has taken place in many third-world countries [6]. In view of this, a new program known as the Supported Teaching in School (STS) was introduced as one of the key components in the new B. Ed. curriculum to replace the teaching practice

in the previous In-In-Out system.

The new B. Ed. curriculum introduced in the colleges of education in Ghana under the Colleges of Education Act 847 in 2012 is to, among other things, transform teacher education and secure highly qualified, motivated new teachers who are able to inspire their learners to achieve better outcomes in basic education [20]. A key point of emphasis in the B. Ed. curriculum is for teacher trainees to be well supported during school-based training in each of the four years of their training. A study conducted by Lewin, K. M., and Stuart, J. M., into the cost of educational programs for teacher training in some selected third-world countries highlighted some problems, such as unpredictable and irregular teacher education program arrangements, which culminated in an unstable learning environment for teacher training [14]. In view of this, the search for new models to improve the quality of teacher training has taken place in many third-world countries [6]. In view of this, a new program known as the Supported Teaching in School (STS) has been introduced as one of the key components in the new B. Ed. curriculum to replace the teaching practice in the previous In-In-Out system. The functionality and success of the STS program require that there be trained mentors in all the Colleges partner schools who will be able to support and assess student teachers' progress to meet the National Teacher Standard (NTS) [20, 30].

In the context of Colleges of Education, mentoring can be thought of as the quality of guidance given by the trained mentors to the student teachers [12]. The trained mentors in the partner schools will mentor the student teachers and take them through professional skills development and competencies as part of their teacher training program to make them professionally competent as 21st-century basic school teachers [17]. According to the National Teacher Education Curriculum Framework, mentoring is a key strand of Transforming Teacher Education and Learning in Ghana under the new curriculum for the B. Ed. program run by the colleges of education [30]. Mentors have a core responsibility for developing and shaping students' key attributes, such as creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, among others [16]. The development of these key attributes among the trainees is crucial, as it will empower them to nurture honest, creative, and responsible citizens with the requisite skills for national development [3].

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Mentors have a crucial role in nurturing and developing the professional skills of students' teachers under the STS program, which is one of the key pillars of the new B. ED. curriculum in the Colleges of Education in Ghana [30, 17], and [3]. A number of studies on STS so far Abudulai, I, Akama, F., and Keenan, Chinbuah, B. A., Dankwah, A. E., Nyarko, A. I., and Mensah, D. D., Mensah, O. F. and Amankwah, F., Oti-Agyen, P., and Sam, K. F. focused on the tutors, managers, and students, highlighting the perceived benefits and challenges of the program; none of them incorporated mentors into their studies [1, 3, 4, 7, 9, 17]. His study therefore intends to access the perceptions of the mentors of various ranks in the Ghana Education Service (GES) regarding the challenges of the STS program in the East Mamprusi Municipality in the North East Region of Ghana.

1.2. Research Objectives

The study intends to find out the perception of mentors in the Supported Teaching in Schools (STS) program in the Gambaga College of Education partners' schools in the West Mamprusi Municipality in the North Region of Ghana. Specifically, the study was to achieve the following objectives:

1. To ascertain how the mentors of various ranks in the Ghana Education Service (GES) perceived the STS program in the East Mamprusi Municipality.
2. To ascertain any significant differences in the perception of STS among various ranks of GES in the Municipality.
3. To identify the challenges affecting the smooth implementation of the STS program in the Municipality.
4. To ascertain whether there are any significant differences in the perceptions of mentors in the STS program regarding the challenges affecting them in the Municipality.

1.3. Research Questions

The study was guided by the following questions:

1. How do mentors of various ranks in GES perceive the STS program in the East Mamprusi Municipality?
2. Do the perceptions of the mentors regarding the STS program differ across the various ranks of GES in the Municipality?
3. What challenges do mentors perceive affecting the smooth implementation of the STS program in the Municipality?
4. Does the perception of mentors regarding the challenges affecting smooth implementation of the STS program differ across various ranks of GES?

2. Literature Review

The Supported Teaching in Schools (STS) program is one of the new programs introduced in the new B. Ed. curriculum in the Colleges of Education in Ghana under the Colleges of Education Act 847 in 2012. The STS programs, which are one of the four pillars of the curriculum, replaced the previous teaching practices in the old system. According to The National Teacher Education Curriculum Framework, Every Initial Teacher Education (ITE) program must include teaching practice that will inculcate in the Student Teachers the necessary professional skills and competencies, as well as instil in them a positive attitude towards the teaching profession [30]. To achieve this objective, Student Teachers are required to be placed under the supervision of qualified education professionals (Mentors, College Tutors, District Education Officers, etc.) during their teaching practice. This will provide an ideal atmosphere for student teachers to learn

from these professionals and become familiar with all of the procedures of the educational setting.

Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies states that the purpose of the STS program is to expand, direct, and assess training that enables student teachers to use their expertise to improve their instruction [29]. The program requires colleges of education to have well-equipped schools as partners for effective teacher development. Teachers in partner schools should receive specialized training and suitable incentives. This has necessitated the formation of an ongoing professional development program that will offer mentors, educators, and other professionals proper rewards. " Achieving the Teachers' Standards through Supported Teaching in School Placements requires the presence of well-equipped schools, well-prepared mentors, and effective links between colleges, universities, and schools [29].

The word mentoring is coined from the Latin word mens," which means pertaining to or occurring in the mind [26]. According to Mensah, S. K. E*,* mentoring is an interactive process that helps teacher trainees acquire teaching skills based on lesson designs, methods of delivery, stimulating interests in the subject, and motivating students to learn more effectively and efficiently, thus improving teacher effectiveness [19]. Ogwang, T. H., & Wafula, W. S. opined that mentoring guides mentees to develop their talent, skills, and knowledge and to change attitudes towards teaching; it is also about a liberating approach to teaching embedded in an act of cognition, not necessarily in the transfer of information from mentor to mentee [24]. According to them, mentoring makes mentees do critical and creative thinking that is geared towards making them reasonable and reflective practitioners. Ogwang, T. H., & Wafula, W. S. viewed mentoring as a problem-posing and dialogical methodology process through which the mentees are supported on the job to gain more courage and continuous learning to perfect their skills in teaching and become more effective [24]. Mentoring is a powerful tool with the potential to influence a range of educational beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviours, including self-esteem, school connectedness, school engagement, and positive attitudes toward school [15].

The trained and motivated mentors play a crucial role in helping student teachers put their knowledge gained at the college and partner schools into real-world teaching situations effectively [8]. The mentors play an important role in helping student teachers relate the knowledge of educational theory that they learn at the college level to the real classroom environment [19], effectively implement the knowledge in the areas of classroom management [20], and manage their self-regulatory learning for adaptation to the authentic learning environment in schools [21].

Student teachers placed more value on the opportunities and the real classroom teaching activities implemented by the mentors and considered them useful guides and very valuable experiences in the teacher education program at the Colleges. Thus, student teachers view their mentor teachers as important subjects capable of influencing their future teaching philosophies [18, 22]. More so, according to Nwanekezi, A. U., Okoli, N. J., & Mezieobi, S. A. mentoring gives credence to the fact that the transfer of knowledge from the more experienced mentors to the student teachers throughout their teaching practice has an overwhelming positive impact on the mentees teaching styles [23].

However, there appeared to be a complex situation between the mentor and the link tutors from the colleges in the mentoring process that affected the mentors discharge of their core mandate as mentors during the teaching practice. In most cases, what the mentor teachers intend may conflict with the intention of the college, which is represented by the link tutor. The mentor teachers feel obligations towards meeting the set target by their schools rather than developing the mentoring process that will be tailored towards the needs of the mentees [5]. Even though mentoring the trainees is a very crucial element in producing the quality of prospective teachers, some of the important challenges identified in this matter should be given serious attention [10].

Illustrating further some of these problems, Simpson, E. S. C., & Weiner, J. A. elucidated that the student teachers often expressed their regret regarding the guidance provided by their mentor during the teaching practice that encompasses the areas of providing timely feedback, co-planning, co-teaching, poor tutoring on the implementations of the assessments and the mentor, as well as failure on how to give guidance on how to build good teacher-pupil relationships [27]. Supposedly, the mentoring process in the practicum is the best avenue to exhibit their competencies before embarking on their journey to become real teachers in the near future [26]. As a matter of fact, mentors have the onerous responsibility of being the best role models and giving all the necessary support needed by the mentees in all areas of teaching [27, 28].

Ministry of Education opined on the aspect of the challenges affecting the mentees of receiving quality mentoring that some mentor teachers have not been offered adequate training on their role as mentors and seem to exhibit negative attitudes towards mentoring in the partner schools [21], and that teachers continue to develop the habits of absenting themselves from schools, and even when they are present, they do not honour their assigned lessons regularly, despite being timetabled to be teaching [12].

3. Methodology

The research used a descriptive survey design to analyse the perceptions of the mentors of Gambaga of Education partners' schools on supported teaching in schools (STS) in the East Mamprusi Municipality in the North East region of Ghana. This method is economical and extensively used in educational research to generate accurate results [13]. A sample of sixty-six (66) respondents (mentors) was selected for the study, and the data from the respondents was collected using questionnaires. Questionnaires are easy to administer, friendly to complete, and fast to score; hence, they take relatively little time from both the researchers and respondents [10]. An in-house survey method was employed to administer the questionnaires to the mentors in their homes. According to

Okumu, J. B.; Tom Henry Ogwang, T. H.; and Wafula, W. S, more focus on the questions can be gained from the respondents when this approach is employed to solicit information from them [25].

Subsequently, a 25-item self-designed questionnaire made up of three sections (A, B, and C) was developed. Section A elicited demographic data from the respondents (e g., gender, rank); Section B of the questionnaire had eight items that sought the respondents' views on the perceived benefits of Supported Teaching in school; and Section C had five items that focused on the challenges facing the mentors. The items on the questionnaire were measured on a five-point Likert scale with the following weighting: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, and 3 = neutral. 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree for sections B and C.

To measure the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach's alpha was used to objectively measure the reliability of the instrument. The reliability of an instrument refers to its ability to consistently measure what it is supposed to measure [28].

The simplified formula for Cronbach's alpha is given as:

Where N is the number of scale items, is the average inter-item covariance among the scale items, and is the average variance. Cronbach's alpha typically ranges from 0 to 1. Values closer to 1.0 indicate greater internal consistency of the variables on the scale. The acceptable values of alpha range from 0.70 to 0.95. Graham J. The reliability coefficients of 0.893 and 0.868 were obtained for sections B and C using Cronbach alpha analysis [11]. These values exhibited excellent internal consistency, which was considered by the researcher for the study.

Sixty-six (66) copies of questionnaires were personally administered to the mentors, and 100 percent (100%) response rates were recorded. Hence, the analysis of the data was based on the 66 respondents, made up of 33 of each sex. Descriptive and inferential statistics (confirmatory tests) were employed to answer the research questions. For descriptive statistics, the average rating for each category was computed for the mentors' respondents. Thereafter, each computed average rating was compared with the theoretical mean rating of 3.0 to determine whether or not respondents agreed with the statement on the aspect of the STS. A mean score of above 3.0 indicates agreement with the statement, while a mean score of below 3.0 indicates disagreement with the statement.

For the confirmatory test, a non-parametric test (the Mann-Whitney U-test) was used to legalize the results. The available literature on inferential statistics advocates that the appropriate inferential statistical tools for non-normal ordinal data are those employing non-parametric tests, such as the Mann-Whitney U-test (for two groups) and the Kruskal-Willis Test (for more than two groups), since parametric tests require data at the interval or ratio level.

Hypotheses of Kruskal-Willis Tests

Null hypothesis: There is no statistically significant (in terms of central tendency) difference across the groups in the population.

Alternative hypothesis: At least one group is statistically significantly different from the other groups (in terms of central tendency) in the population.

4. Findings and Discussions

The findings from the study were presented based on the research questions posed above.

Research Question 1: How do the mentors of various ranks in GES perceive the STS program in the East Mamprusi Municipality?

This question intends to find out how mentors of various ranks in GES perceived the STS in the East Mamprusi Municipality on the basis of the program developing the professional skills of the mentees under their supervision. As enshrined in the STS policy document. The findings are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. *Mentor's Rating of STS by Ranks of GES.*

S/N	Rank in GES	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median
1	Superintendent II	3.82	1.168	4
2	Superintendent I	4	0.816	4
3	Senior superintendent II	3.5	0.85	3.5
4	Senior Superintendent I	4.22	0.441	4
5	Principal superintendent	4	0.953	4
6	Assistant director II	4.56	0.527	5
	Total	4	0.894	4

Source: Fieldwork, 2023.

From Table 1, it can be seen that the STS program is ranked higher than the theoretical mean mark of 3.0 across all categories of the five ranks in the study. Also, the level of perception of the program seemingly increases with the seniority of the respondent, and this is evident in the highest average rating by the Assistant Directors II (4.56), with the least rating being the least rank in the survey, Superintendent II (3.82).

Research Question 2: Do the perceptions of the mentors regarding the STS program differ across various ranks of GES in the Municipality?

To verify the authenticity of the results of the perceived higher ranking of the STS program across the ranks, the Kruskal-Willis test was used as a confirmatory test, and the results from table 2 below clearly indicated that there is no significant difference among the various categories of ranks (p =.166 >.05). Hence, the null hypothesis of no statistically significant difference across all categories in the GES cannot be rejected.

Table 2. *Hypothesis Testing for Rating of STS by Ranks of GES.*

	Null Hypothesis Test Sig. Decision
1	Distribution of Mentor's Ratings of Independent-Samples Retaining the null STS is the same across categories of Rank Kruskal-Wallis Test. 166 hypothesis

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.
Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Research Question 3: What challenges do mentors perceive affecting the smooth implementation of the STS program in the Municipality?

This question seeks to find out any perceived challenges that affect the mentors and may hinder the smooth implementation of the STS program. The results of the perceived challenges are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics of the Perceived Challenges Facing Mentors.*

Perceived Challenges	Mean	SD
Lack of financial and other incentives for mentors	4.55	0.931
Lack of cooperation between Link tutors and mentors	3.21	1.342
Lack of proper orientation	3.49	1.356
Inability of some link tutors to visit schools	3.23	1.31
Inadequate time for STS	3.36	1.172
Insufficient teaching and learning resources	3.53	1.292
Late arrival by the trainees	3.24	1.29
Mentees showing no commitment to STS	2.76	1.203
Trainees refusing orders from mentors	2.48	1.218
Valid N (listwise)		

Source: Fieldwork, 2023.

From table 3, there is a higher degree of difference in the perception of the challenges facing the mentors, as shown by the high values of the standard deviations with respect to each perceived challenge, except for the construct relating to "Lack of financial and other incentive to mentors," which has the smallest value of the standard deviation (.981). Nonetheless, the greatest challenge facing mentors in the East Mamprusi Municipality is "lack of financial and other incentives for mentors," as indicated by the highest average rating of 4.55 with the lowest standard deviation (.981). This finding was also highlighted by Akama, F., and Keenan, J., as a major problem affecting teaching practice in the colleges of Education [3]. The second challenge facing the mentors is "Teaching and learning resources," confirming the findings of [9, 2, 18, 22]. Also, the mentors have the view that the one day per week allocated for the STS program is not enough, and this is perceived as the third highest challenge confronting the mentors in the Municipality with an average ranking of 3.36, which is in conformity with the findings of Dankwah, A. E., Nyarko, A. I., and Mensah, D. D. when a similar study was carried out in Akrokerri College of Education (CoE) in Ghana on the factors affecting the STS program [9]. However, challenges relating to constructs such as "Trainees refusing orders from mentors and mentees showing no commitment to STS" are the least challenging factors affecting the mentors in the municipality, with lowest average ranking scores of 2.48 and 2.78, respectively.

Research Question 4: Does the perception of mentors regarding the challenges affecting smooth implementation of the STS program differ across various ranks of GES?

Table 4. *Kruskal-Wallis test for respondents mean score differences.*

S/N	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distribution of the lack of monetary and other incentives for mentors is the same across categories of Rank in GES.	Independent-Sample Kruskal-Wallis Test	0.856	Retain the null hypothesis.
2	The distribution of Lack of cooperation between link tutors and mentors is the same across categories of Rank in GES.	Independent-Sample Kruskal-Wallis Test	0.245	Retain the null hypothesis.
3	The distribution of Lack of proper orientation is the same across categories of Rank in GES.	Independent-Sample Kruskal-Wallis Test	0.515	Retain the null hypothesis.
4	The distribution of the inability of some link tutors to visit schools is the same across categories of Rank in GES.	Independent-Sample Kruskal-Wallis Test	0.06	Retain the null hypothesis.
5	The distribution of insufficient teaching and learning resources is the same across categories of Rank in GES.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	0.222	Retain the null hypothesis.
6	The distribution of lateness among the trainees is the same across categories of Rank in GES.	Independent-Sample Kruskal-Wallis Test	0.625	Retain the null hypothesis.
7	The distribution of Trainees showing no commitment to STS is the same across categories of Rank in GES.	Independent-Sample Kruskal-Wallis Test	0.384	Retain the null hypothesis.
8	The distribution of Inadequate time for STS is the same across categories of Rank in GES.	Independent-Sample Kruskal-Wallis Test	0.16	Retain the null hypothesis.
9	The distribution of Trainees refusing orders from mentors is the same across categories of Rank in GES.	Independent-Sample Kruskal-Wallis Test	0.477	Retain the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significance is displayed. The significance level is 0.

Based on the confirmatory test in Table 4 above, it is obvious that there are no significant statistical differences with regards to the perceived challenges affecting the mentors of the STS program in the municipality. Hence, the null hypothesis of no significant differences in the rating of the perceived challenges confronting the mentors of the STS program in the municipality across the ranks of GES cannot be rejected.

5. Conclusion

STS is one of the new programs introduced in the new B. ED. program in the curriculum of the colleges of Education in Ghana that is aimed at developing the professional skills of the trainees through assigning the trainees to well-trained mentors in the partner schools who will serve as coaches to the mentees. The STS program is rated highly across all ranks in GES, and mentors with higher ranks rate the STS program higher than their junior counterparts in the East Mamprusi Municipality. The mentor's perception of the STS program as the right tool for shaping the professional skills of the teacher trainees for the 21st century is a very welcome and heart-warming development since the success of any educational reform largely depends on the commitment of the classroom teacher to the program. Even though the mentors are fraught with many challenges in mentoring the

mentees, the most prominent among them include challenges such as a lack of financial and other incentives for the mentors, a lack of teaching and learning resources in the partner schools, and a lack of periodic orientation on the STS program.

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings of the research:

1. Colleges and other stakeholders must provide mentors with the necessary incentives and provide an avenue to engage mentors in the partner schools to educate them about core mandate of the STS program and encourage them to embed the program as part of their daily routine activities.
2. Partner schools must be equipped with appropriate teaching and learning materials, and mentors must be properly trained on how to incorporate some of the resources, especially their ICT tools, into their lesson delivery.
3. Periodic orientation must be organized for all teachers in the partner schools since every teacher in the partner school is a potential mentor for the STS program. This is also necessitated by the fact that there is an annual inflow of new teachers into the municipality, and these new teachers might lack knowledge of the STS program.
4. Further studies should be expanded to include more partner schools from other COEs in different parts of the country.

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