Student Teachers' Perspectives on Supported Teaching in School Programme in Colleges of Education in Ghana

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Abstract: The main purpose of the study was to seek student teachers' perspectives on the practices of Supported Teaching in School Programme in Colleges of Education in Ghana; particularly, Colleges in the northern sector of Ghana. The population of the study consisted of all student teachers in Colleges of Education in Ghana. The target population was all student teachers of the three (3) selected Colleges of Education in the northern sector of Ghana namely; Tamale College of Education, Gambaga College of Education and ST. John Bosco College of Education. The sample size was ninety (90) third-year student teachers comprising thirty (30) student teachers each, who were conveniently chosen based on proximity. An opportunistic sampling technique was used to select student teachers for the study. A cross-sectional survey was adopted with an exploratory design. Results of the study indicated that there exists a communication gap between some Colleges of Education and partner schools; thereby resulting in unfriendly receptions given to student teachers by authorities of partner schools and mentors. The study also indicated that the Supported Teaching in School Programme (STS) is adequately assisting student teachers to develop professional skills, attitudes, and values of teaching including knowledge of inclusivity, equity, and support for learners learning progress in the classroom. Based on the results of the study, it is recommended that policymakers (Ministry of Education and Ghana Education Service) should strategically provide enough resources such as syllabi, Teachers' Handbooks, and logistics for effective practice of the programme since it adequately develops student teachers' teaching professionalism. It is also recommended that improvement needs to be considered by some of the Colleges of Education to close and strengthen the communication gap existing between them and partner schools by pre-informing them before assigning student teachers to them.

Keywords: Supported Teaching, Perspective, Professional, Partner School

1. Introduction

Education and training has undoubtedly become a major tool for facilitating individual, societal and national developments. Education brings positive changes and improvements in the life of people who have passed through it. It develops great and advanced societies [1]. This implies that an investment in education enables individuals to integrate productively into society while contributing to their personal development. Ghana's educational system has seen the most ambitious and comprehensive set of reforms to initial teacher education for many decades [2]. These reforms are aligned to the National Teachers' Standards (NTS) which were developed through a joint process spearheaded by the National Teaching Council (NTC) and involved many stakeholders and educationists [2].

The entire process of education is modeled by many important agents, and the teacher is a key stakeholder. Teachers play a critical role in inspiring and challenging the learners they teach to achieve their potentials and for that matter; their training and development require the highest possible standards in knowledge, conduct, and practice in schools. Developing effective teachers in Ghana will require developing the professional skills, attitudes, and values, spirit of inquiry, innovation, and creativity that will enable them to employ inclusive strategies and engage in lifelong learning practices.

The development of professional attitudes and values and the demonstration of professional behaviour are vital influences in the practice of teaching [3]. A professional attitude is defined as a predisposition, feeling, emotion, or

thought that upholds the ideals of a profession and serves as the basis for professional behaviour [4]. Teacher professional development means teachers' learning: how they learn to learn and how they apply their knowledge in practice to support pupils' learning [5]. Teacher professional development is how they will learn and apply their knowledge in practice to support pupil learning [6]. Avalos maintained that student teachers can learn through participation in various courses in school, observation, and reflection on others' teaching as well as in co-operation with colleagues. Student teachers can learn from unplanned conversations with other colleagues before or after teaching, or in parent-teacher meetings. This implies that learning can occur in various ways, both formally and informally.

Student teachers are required to have a zeal and passion for teaching, leadership skills, engage with members not only in the school community but also in the wider community, and act as agents of change [7]. It is right therefore for student teachers to receive adequate and quality education and professional training to equip them adequately with the needed knowledge, skills to teach effectively. This necessitated the introduction of the B.Ed Basic Education programme in Ghana's Colleges of Education in 2018 requiring all Basic School teachers to have Bachelor's Degrees. The vision for the B.Ed. curriculum is "transforming initial teacher education and securing the training of highly qualified, motivated teachers who can inspire their learners to achieve better results in basic education [7]." The B.Ed. The programme also aims at turning out teachers who are effective, engaging, and fully prepared to teach the basic school curriculum [8] Achieving inclusivity and equitable access to education for all learners is also incorporated in the programme.

The Supported Teaching in School (STS) Programme forms part of the four pillars of the B.Ed curriculum. These pillars set out the knowledge, skills, and understandings necessary for effective teaching. These include Subject and Curriculum Knowledge, Literacy Studies: Ghanaian Languages and English, Pedagogic Knowledge, and Supported Teaching in School. In this programme, student teachers are well assisted during their school-based components in each year of their training. Student teachers are expected in the first year to focus on school-based, organized, and directed learning experiences in school where they reflect on teachers' teaching and children's learning. Student teachers progress on school-focused training where they are supported by their lead mentors and mentors to take increasing responsibility for planning instructions and assessing learners in their care alongside classroom inquiry. Within the four years, student teachers will be allowed to observe and deliver lessons in a range of schools enabling them to comprehend how learners develop and learn in diverse contexts. Student teachers under the programme are expected to spend 30% of their training in the field [8]. This gives credence to the adage that "practice makes perfect".

The programme has since been implemented in 2018 with the government increasing expenditure on training workshops, seminars for lecturers/tutors, stakeholders, and the provision of logistics for the success of the programme. This study, therefore, seeks for the perspectives of student teachers who, as part of their training, directly go through the Supported Teaching in School Programme; thus, its contributions in shaping their future teaching professionalism. This study also attempts to seek the perspectives of student teachers on the challenges they face before and during their practice of the programme and the way forward in making the programme better in shaping their professional careers.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Supported Teaching in School Programme as indicated early, is one of the key pillars of the Bachelor of Education Degree (B.ED) Programme. As a pillar, Supported Teaching in School would enable student teachers to acquire practical competencies and experiences to become effective teachers in the future. Student teachers under this programme are expected to use some time in partner schools throughout their four (4) years of study rather than just in their third year as was previously practiced in the Diploma in Basic Education programme. As the core of the B.Ed programme in Colleges of Education, the Supported Teaching in School (STS) has received much attention from the government and Non-governmental Organizations like T-TEL, through the Ministry of Education in terms of training and provision of logistics. The efforts of the government and other stakeholders are to enhance student teachers' development of skills and knowledge required for their future teaching profession. The kind of training given to student teachers arouses them to become effective, engaging, inspirational, and fully prepared to teach the basic school curriculum and also to improve their learning outcomes and life chances. These training given to student teachers are also in line with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 which talks about ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all. Government and Non-governmental Organizations have spent resources on training workshops and seminars as well as provided logistics such as handbooks for student teachers to make the STS programme more effective and purposeful. Despite the huge investment made into the programme, there has not been any evidence on student teachers' perspectives of the programme on their professional development since it was implemented in Colleges of Education in 2018. Although some studies have been done on some aspects of the programme [8, 9, 10, 11] none of these has targeted student teachers' perspectives on the STS programme. It is this gap that this study seeks to fill.

1.2. Research Questions

1) What are the perspectives of student teachers in the selected Colleges of Education of the Supported Teaching in School Programme?
2) What are the challenges student teachers' in the three Colleges of Education encounter before and during the practice of the Supported Teaching in School programme?
3) What are student teachers' suggestions on the way

forward for the Supported Teaching in School programme in Colleges of Education in Ghana?

1.3. Theoretical Framework of the Study

This research is based on the constructivist and social constructivist paradigm. In this paradigm, the student teacher is perceived as active in the learning process. In the constructivist perspective, knowledge is perceived as the construction of meaning and understanding within social interaction; the social environment is seen as decisive for how the individual learns and develops. Individuals construct knowledge and learn through mediated acts in their encounters with one or more individuals and the environment in which they Leanings should be purposeful and related to real-life situations [12]. These theories are appropriate because student teachers need to construct their knowledge as well as freely interact among themselves and their environment which includes partner schools. Student teachers when actively involved in the Supported Teaching in School programme are exposed to community resources; retain the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they have acquired. In this context, the role of the coordinators, supervisors/tutors, and mentors in constructivists' and social constructivists' perspectives is only to guide student teachers in constructing reality by themselves and to allow student teachers to elicit and address misconceptions of issues in education as well as in society.

2. Review of Literature

Brief Overview of the Supported Teaching in School Programme

The establishment of the National Teachers' Standards has brought to light the need to prepare a 21st-century teacher who would be able to implement the basic school curriculum to improve the chances of learners [13]. Supported Teaching in School as stated earlier, is a major pillar among the four pillars of the B.Ed. curriculum that outlined knowledge, skills, and understanding as relevant for effective teaching. The rest of the pillars of the curriculum include Subject and Curriculum Knowledge; Literacy Studies: Ghanaian Languages and English, and Pedagogic Knowledge. The rationale of the Supported Teaching in School is to extend, guide, and assess teaching which supports student teachers to employ their knowledge to enhance their teaching [3]. With this, the professionalism of student teachers will be developed. The development of teacher's professionalism focuses on the development of professional identity, social norms, ethics, and practices of the school and teaching profession, and also involving reflective practice as well as a commitment to lifelong learning [3]. The pivot to effective training and support in school and college is a rigorous continuous professional development (CPD) structure with an award system for the full range of stakeholders involved in teacher preparation [3]. Supported Teaching in School is represented by extended periods of school-based placements across the four years of training. For the KG-P3 and P4-6 specialisms this training period will be spent in schools with the support of mentors. For TVET this part of the training will be divided between TVET schools and industry. Figure 1 below presents the role that STS plays in the B.Ed curriculum:
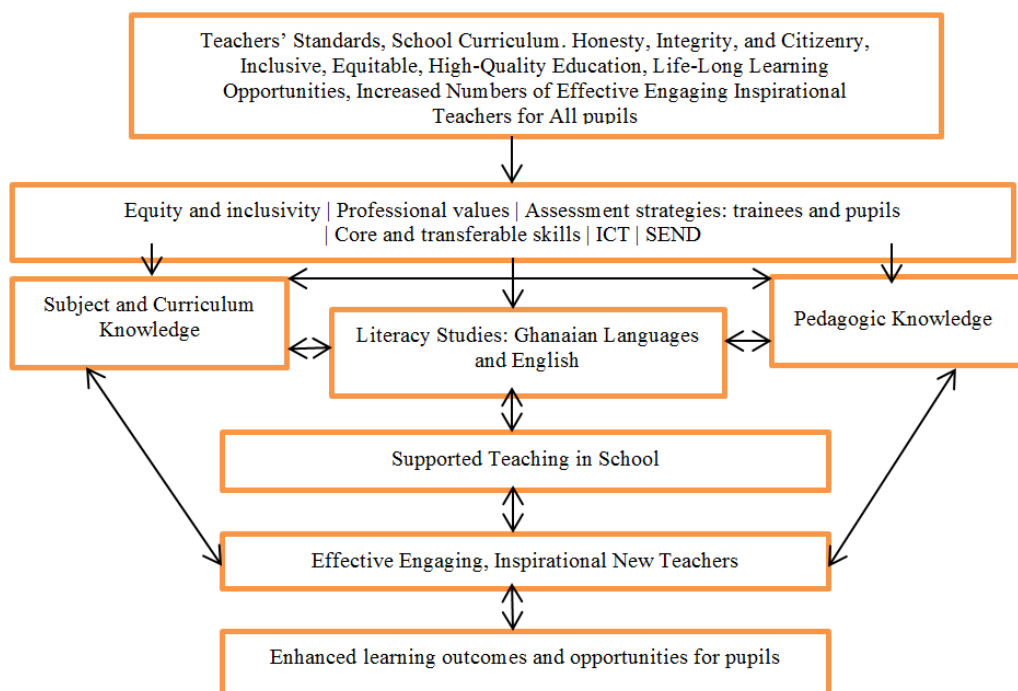
Source: Adopted from T-TEL, 2018.

Figure 1. *Role of Supported Teaching in School within the National Teacher Education Curriculum Framework.*

Under the Supported Teaching in School Programme, Colleges of Education are expected to have high-quality practice or partner schools for teacher preparation. Teachers in these schools should receive special training and appropriate incentives [3]. This calls for a continuous professional development structure for mentors, tutors, and others with appropriate incentives [3]. "The attainment of the Teachers' Standards through Supported Teaching in School placements depends on: the existence of well-equipped schools, well-prepared mentors and effective links between college and university, and schools [3]. Also, colleges of education are expected to ensure cordial relationships with partner schools; ensure that mentors are well trained with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that will assist them to support the student teachers they mentor, provide continuous professional development (CPD) for the mentors, lead mentors, link tutors and other stakeholders concerning their roles and responsibilities, new developments, among others. Mentors, for instance, are supposed to be free and open to mentees and see themselves as coaches assisting student teachers to apply their experiences in practical classroom settings [10].

Equally important is the provision of adequate instructional materials in the demonstration schools who will teach student teachers on how to use them efficiently; the colleges of education ensure effective assessment of the development of student teachers' teaching against the Teachers' Standards through their portfolios and according to the stage of training; orientate students on their roles and responsibilities within the schools and communities; draw up programmes for first and second-year student teachers to spend their vacation for observations in the Basic Schools. This should include detailed observation guidelines and report submission.

Student teachers' who have gone through the supported teaching in the school programme are expected to: impact on the progress and learning of learners; show accurate content, pedagogical and curricula knowledge to be able to teach the school curriculum; draw on the social and cultural settings of the learner to scaffold their learning to make teaching relevant; take decisions in the classroom that are influenced by relevant philosophies of teaching and learning, and have appropriate values and attitudes towards teaching and learning [3]. The National Teachers' Standards set out the minimum levels of practice that all student teachers must reach by the end of their pre-service teacher education course to play such critical roles [7]. These expectations of student teachers need to be achieved for them to exhibit that they have met the National Teachers' Standards. Students will build towards meeting the Teachers' Standards through extended Supported Teaching in years one, two, and three of their training:

"the Supported Teaching in School tries to solve issues of student teachers' application of their learning in a range of supported and extended school experiences; observing, planning, teaching, and assessing their impact on pupils'

learning progress and wellbeing; assessment through a portfolio of evidence of the quality of teaching against the Teachers Standards (TS), pillars and Cross-Cutting Issues (CCI); and there should be frequent collegial interaction with mentors to support mentees by the link tutors or supervisors from colleges of education to provide them with the support they need."

In the demonstration schools, student teachers are assisted to participate in the interaction with learners, experience with educational resources, observation of classroom instructions, and a chance for self-reflection. All practice schools are to serve as avenues for student teachers to develop a repertoire of professional skills such as learner's thinking; also, partner schools are supposed to give little chance to enable student teachers to undertake self-directed activities such as analysis of school curricula, and textbooks to test their appropriateness among learners at different levels; again, demonstration schools are supposed to provide space for the student teacher to carry out their individual personal and psychological enhancement through engaging in their aspirations in becoming a teacher, developing their philosophy of teaching, and their opinions on gender and inclusivity.

3. Methodology

A cross-sectional survey was adopted with an exploratory design. A research design is simply the plan for a study that is employed as a guide in gathering and analyzing data [14]. Exploratory research design is used when little is written on an issue that is studied [15]. This design was considered appropriate for the study since the Supported Teaching in School Programme is the first of its kind in Ghana. The population for the study was all student teachers of Colleges of Education in Northern Ghana. The population is the parent group from which a sample is to be taken [14]. The target population was all student teachers of the three (3) selected Colleges of Education in northern Ghana. The sample size was ninety (90) third-year student teachers who were conveniently chosen from the three (3) Colleges of Education. The sample size was adequate to reach the standards of thematic saturation in quantitative research. A convenient sampling technique was used to select thirty (30) student teachers' from each of the three (3) selected Colleges of Education. No special considerations were taken for the selection of student teachers. Both Likert-scale questionnaires of three-point scale and open-ended questions were self-designed for student teachers. Likert-scale questionnaires were intended to provide insight and elicit information from student teachers on their perspectives about the Supported Teaching in School Programme on their professional development; the challenges they encountered during the practice of the programme. The open-ended questions further elicited information on challenges faced by student teachers in the practice of the programme and suggestions for the way forward for the programme in Colleges of Education in Ghana. Data collected were

analyzed using descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies, tables and percentages. Views indicating high frequencies and percentages were treated as the emerging opinion on the study. Frequencies and percentages were used because it gives a quick visual impression of the issue under study and is also easy to interpret.

Table 1. Colleges and number of student teachers selected.

School	Number of Student Teachers (Respondents)
Gambaga College of Education	30
ST. John Bosco College of Education	30
Tamale College of Education	30
Total	90

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1. Research Question 1: Student Teachers' Perspectives on Supported Teaching in School Programme

This research question focused on exploring how the Supported Teaching in School in the B.Ed. the curriculum is manifesting its outcomes on student teachers in practice. Thirty (30) third-year student teachers each from three selected colleges of education were administered with Lirket-Scale questionnaires and table 2 below indicates their shared perspectives the Supported Teaching in School offers for their development as 21st-century teachers-to-be.:

Table 2. Student teachers perspectives on Supported Teaching in School Programme.

STATEMENTS ON STUDENT TEACHERS PERSPECTIVES ABOUT SUPPORTED TEACHING IN SCHOOL (STS) PROGRAMME	D	%	N	%	A	%
Supported Teaching in School programme (STS) has prepared me to develop professional skills, attitudes, and values of teaching.	10	9	10	9	70	63
The STS programme has equipped me with knowledge of inclusivity, equity, and support for learners learning progress in the classroom.	7	6.3	8	7.2	75	68
My misconceptions/misunderstanding in assessment for, of, and as of learning to address learners' progress have been cleared through field experiences gathered from the STS programme.	15	14	26	23.4	49	44.1
The STS programme has prepared me adequately for my teaching role	8	7.2	16	14.4	66	59.4
Having gone through the STS programme, I can now practically reflect and enquire about my lessons individually and even with my colleagues	9	8.1	18	16.2	63	57
Overall, this is an excellent programme for student-teachers	12	11	13	12	65	59

Source: Field data (2021)
Where D = Disagreed, N = Neutral, and A = Agreed.

Table 2 revealed that ten (10) Student Teachers (9%) in the three Colleges of Education disagreed that the Supported Teaching in School programme (STS) has prepared them to develop professional skills, attitudes, and values of teaching; another ten (10) Student Teachers (9%) were neutral (undecided) while seventy (70) student teachers (63%) agreed with the statement that their professional skills, attitudes, and values have been developed. Results from Table 2 suggested that seven (7) Student Teachers (6.3%) disagreed that the STS programme has equipped them with knowledge of inclusivity, equity, and support for learners learning progress in the classroom; eight (8) of the Student Teachers (7.2%) were undecided with the statement; but, seventy-five (75) Student Teachers (68%) agreed with the statement that STS programme has equipped them with knowledge of inclusivity and equity for imparting knowledge in the classroom. Again, fifteen (15) Student Teachers (13.5%) from Table 2 disagreed with the statement that their misconceptions/misunderstanding in assessment for, of, and as of learning to address learners progress have been cleared through field experiences gathered from the STS programme; twenty-six (26) Student teachers (23.4%) were undecided with the statement; but, forty-nine (49) Student Teachers

(44.1%) agreed with the statement that their misconceptions about assessment for, of, and as having been cleared following observations made during the practice of the STS programme. The findings also revealed that eight (8) Student Teachers (7.2%) have disagreed that the STS programme has prepared them adequately for their teaching role; sixteen (16) of the student teachers (14.4%) were undecided or neutral with the statement; sixty-six (66) of the student teachers (59.4%) however, agreed with the statement that they have been prepared adequately for their future teaching roles. Further, the result from Table 2 indicates that nine (9) of the student teachers (8.1%) disagreed with the statement that going through the STS programme, they can now practically reflect and enquire about their lessons individually and even with their colleagues; eighteen (18) student teachers (16.2%) were neutral/undecided with the statement; that notwithstanding, sixty-three (63) student teachers (57%) agreed with the statement. Finally, on student teachers overall perceptions about the Supported Teaching in School programme, twelve (12) of them (11%) disagreed with the statement that Supported Teaching in School is an excellent programme for student-teachers; thirteen (13) of these student teachers (11.7%) were undecided, and sixty-five (65)

student teachers (59%) completely agreed that Supported Teaching in School programme is an excellent programme that has prepared them professionally towards their future teaching roles.

4.2. Major Findings

From table 2 indicating student teachers responses to research question 1, the findings are that Supported Teaching in School (STS) is developing student teachers professional skills, attitudes, and values for their teaching since seventy (70) of the student teachers (63%) agreed that Supported Teaching in School programme (STS) has prepared them to develop professional skills, attitudes, and values of teaching. This resulted in sixty-five (65) of student teachers' (59%) from table 2 agreeing that Supported Teaching in School is a good programme for them. This supports research findings that the Supported Teaching in School programme is developing the professional skills and achievement of student teachers [11].

Another finding from the above responses to the research question 1 in Table 2 is that the Supported Teaching in School has equipped student teachers with the knowledge of inclusivity, equity, and support for learners' progress in the classroom. This is because seventy-five (75) of student teachers (68%) respondent in affirmative to the item: The STS programme has equipped me with knowledge of inclusivity, equity, and support for learners learning progress in the classroom. This finding is in line with curriculum provision which talks about equipping student teachers with the strategies for identifying and remedying learning barriers posed by disability and the social, cultural, and linguistic background of learners [3]. For instance, Special needs students, learners' diversity and mixability, gender, the vulnerable, and the excluded.

4.3. Research Question 2: Challenges Student-Teachers' Faced During the Practice of the Supported Teaching in School Programme

Research question 2 focused on gathering student teachers' perspectives and views on the challenges that impeded their smooth practice of the Supported Teaching in School in their institutions of learning and partner or demonstration schools using both Lirket-Scale questionnaire and open-ended questions. The open-ended questions were analyzed based on themes. Tables 3 and 4 respectively were student teachers responses:

Table 3. Challenges Student Teachers face during Supported Teaching in School Programme.

STATEMENTS ON CHALLENGES OF THE STS PROGRAMME	D	%	N	%	A	%
The time and days allotted for the programme were unfavourable to me	26	23.4	13	12	51	46
The objectives/expectations of the STS programme were made known to me before I started the visits to schools to practice.	61	55	11	10	18	16.2
Materials (e.g. students' handbook, audio-visuals, and record journals) were given to me to guide my practice.	56	50.4	3	3	31	28
Lead tutors and tutors were inaccessible (not available) to guide and direct me in my practice.	20	18	25	23	45	41
My lead Mentor was not harsh and unfriendly to me.	66	59.4	15	14	9	8.1
Transportation from my institution to practice school was easy and comfortable.	70	63	10	9	10	9
I was unfairly assessed for my practice.	56	50.4	17	15.3	17	15.3

Source: Field data (2021)
Where D = Disagreed, N = Neutral, and A = Agreed.

Results from Table 3 revealed that twenty-six (26) student teachers (23.4%) disagreed that the time and days allotted for the programme were unfavourable to them. This could imply they were comfortable with the time of visits to schools and the whole programme schedules. Thirteen (13) of these student teachers (12%) were undecided with the statement; but, fifty-one (51) of them (46%) agreed with the statement that the time and days allotted to them for the visits to partner schools were favourable to them. This could also imply the entire schedule of the programme within a semester was not in their favour. Student teachers before starting the Supported Teaching in School practice are expected to be oriented on the expectations of the programme to them as teachers to be. But, results from Table 3 indicates that sixty-one (61) student teachers (55%) said that the objectives/expectations of the Supported Teaching in School programme were not made known to them during their orientations before they started the visits to schools to practice; eleven (11) of these student teachers (10%) were neutral about the statement, and eighteen (18) of them (16.2%) agreed with the statement that

they were oriented well about the objectives and activities of the programme. The results also indicate that fifty-six (56) student teachers (50.4%) disagreed with the statement that materials (e.g. students' handbooks, audio-visuals, and record journals) were not given to me to guide my practice. This implies that the stated materials were given to student teachers to guide them in their practice of the programme; three (3) student teachers (3%) indicated they were undecided; and thirty-one (31) student teachers (28%) agreed with the statement, indicating they were not given the said materials to guide them in their practice of the programme. More so twenty (20) of the student teachers (18%) disagreed that their lead tutors and tutors were inaccessible (not available) to guide and direct them in their practice. This could imply after the return from school visits to their institutions of learning most of their lead tutors/tutors were available to correct and guide them; twenty-five (25) of these student teachers (23%) were undecided about the statement; but, forty-five (45) student teachers (41%) however, agreed with the statement that most of their lead tutors/tutors do not

always avail themselves after their return from school visits to correct and guide on their practice of the programme. Table 3 again, indicates that sixty-six (66) student teachers (59.4%) disagreed that their lead mentors and mentors were harsh and unfriendly to them. This implies some of the student teachers were been mentored in a friendly manner; fifteen (15) of the student teachers (14%) were undecided in their responses, and nine (9) student teachers (8.1%) agreed with the statement that leads mentors and mentors were harsh and unfriendly to them during their STS practice. In addition, table 3 indicates that seventy (70) student teachers (63%) disagreed with the statement that transportation from their institution to practice schools was easy and comfortable; ten (10) student teachers (9%) were undecided, and ten (10) student teachers (9%) agreed with the statement that the means of transport to their practiced and back was easy and comfortable for them. Finally, in terms of assessment, fifty-six (56) student teachers (50.4%) disagreed that they were unfairly assessed for their practice; seventeen (17) student teachers (15.3%) were undecided, and seventeen (17) of them (15.3%) agreed with the statement that they were unfairly assessed during the practice.

To authentic student teachers' responses to the Likert-scale questionnaire administered on the challenges they face during the practice of the Supported Teaching in School, an open-ended question was also asked: *Do you have any other challenges apart from the above?* This was to allow student teachers to state the challenges they faced which were not on the Likert-scale questionnaire administered to them. Thematically these were their responses:

Table 4. Emerging themes from student teachers responses to an open-ended question on the challenges of the STS programme.

THEME	FREQUENCY
Partner schools/Mentors give less attention to student teachers because they were not pre-informed	13
Mentors absenteeism	5
Delays in breakfast before school visits	6
Assigning many student teachers to a mentor	4
Inadequate orientation received by student teachers; their lead mentors and mentors about the STS programme.	13
Student teachers overcrowded when being transported to their practice schools	13
Days of visits to schools do not match with what is to be observed in the practice school timetable	8
Inadequate instructional materials in the practiced schools	10

The above themes in Table 4 emerged in student teachers' responses to the open-ended question. Thirteen (13) of the student teachers stated that most authorities of partner schools/mentors always show signs of unpreparedness to receive them any time they visited their schools. On this issue, student teachers blame some of the Coordinators in their institutions of learning for not officially pre-informing the partner schools about the intended posting of student teachers on the STS programme to their schools. This makes student teachers' initial observation and gathering of relevant information from partner schools difficult. It has been revealed through this study that some student teachers in the sampled colleges in their first visits to partner schools go there without official introductory letters introducing them to the partner schools.

Five (5) student teachers stated mentors absenteeism during their practice as a serious challenge in their practice of the programme. For them, the mentors are those oriented by the programme Coordinators to guide and assist mentees to develop professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of effective teaching. Student teachers claimed most of the mentors in partner schools always absent themselves the days of their visits. This attitude of mentors wastes much of their time in their visitation sessions. Sometimes the rest of the teachers in partners willing to offer helping hands are handicapped to guide and assist since they were not trained to handle student teachers on the programme.

Six (6) student teachers also stated that a delay in breakfast before school visits was a serious challenge they encountered during Supported Teaching in School sessions. The delays in breakfast during these visitations period affect their early arrival in partner schools enough to observe morning routines. Sometimes student teachers arrive late in partner schools when classes had already commerce. The worse, being that some student teachers sometimes go to practice without breakfast.

Four (4) student teachers stated that a situation where five or more student teachers are assigned to one mentor does not encourage the effective practice of the Supported Teaching in School Programme. Most of the student teachers are of the view that assigning more than three student teachers to a mentor does not allow the mentor to have enough time and attention to each mentee and sometimes too it is too uncomfortable for more than three student teachers to site in one class observe the mentor deliver his/her lessons. Laziness among student teachers would be encouraged under this situation.

Thirteen (13) student teachers mentioned that some of them and their mentors have not received enough orientation from Colleges of Education about the activities of the Supported Teaching in School Programme. For instance, most mentors always find it difficult to guide student teachers on how to fill Mentor's Evaluation Forms and other services they need from them. Student teachers on their part, find it difficult to fill their reflective practice journals and prepare a checklist for their observation.

Thirteen (13) student teachers seriously stated transportation as a major challenge during the practice of Supported Teaching in School Programme. Most student teachers were assigned to schools far away from their colleges without any vehicle to convey them to their practiced schools. Student teachers, who were privileged to

be transported by school vehicle, were always overcrowded amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. This was as a result of the movement of the vehicle only twice in conveying student teachers to their practice schools.

Eight (8) student teachers indicated disparities between the college timetable and that of the partner schools. Most of the partner schools have on their timetable certain days meant for the teaching of the core subjects and other days for the teaching of the elective subjects. But, under the Supported Teaching in School Programme, student teachers are expected to observe and collect information on the core subjects. Sometimes the days some colleges assigned to student teachers for the visits to partner schools are days that the core subjects are taught on their timetable.

Ten (10) stated that most of the instructional materials mentioned in student teachers handbook such as syllabi, textbooks, among others, to be observed and use to guide student teachers by lead mentors and mentors are not always available in the practice schools. This makes mentors handicapped in assisting and guiding student teachers.

4.4. Major Findings

The emerging themes from student teachers responses to the open-ended question and questionnaire on the challenges of the Supported Teaching in School in Table 4 confirm student teachers' responses to the questionnaire in Table 3 on student teachers' perspectives and the following findings have been deduced.

From Tables 3 and 4 above, the findings are that curriculum materials are not available in partner schools to enable mentors to use to guide student teachers in practice. This is supported by Fifty-six (56) of student teachers' (50.4%) disagreement with an item: Materials (e.g. students' handbook, audio-visuals, and record journals) were given to me to guide my practice in table 3. Their responses could imply curriculum materials for teaching and learning were not there to be used by both mentors and student teachers. This finding is a variant to the guidelines which require the provision of enough Teaching and Learning Materials in partner schools and exposing student teachers to their efficient use [3].

Also, from Table 3 it is realized that most student teachers start the Supported Teaching in School without being fully aware of the objectives of the programme practice because sixty-one (61) of student teachers (55%) disagree with the statement: The objectives/expectations of the STS programme were made known to me before I started the visits to schools to practice. This implies that little orientation is given to student teachers about the rationale and purposes of the Supported Teaching in School Programme. This issue contravenes the roles of colleges of educations concerning the orientation of student teachers of the programme [8].

From Tables 3 and 4, some mentors and lead mentors in partner schools exhibit unaccommodating attitudes towards student teachers who are supposed to guide or direct student teachers for their successful development of professional skills and attitudes. Some mentors are always available to guide and direct student teachers under their mentorship. Those who happened to be available, according to the responses, are always harsh on them. This resulted in sixty-six (66) student Teachers (59.4%) disagreeing with the statement: My lead mentor was not harsh and unfriendly to me. The disagreement of student teachers implies that mentors were harsh on some of the student teachers under their mentoring which is contrary to the guidelines set for mentors in the student teachers handbook [8].

Further, student teachers can now practically reflect and enquire about their lessons individually and even with their colleagues. This is because sixty-three (63) of the student teachers (57%) have agreed that having gone through the STS programme, they can now practically reflect and enquire about their lessons individually and even with my colleagues [3].

Finally, transportation was a major challenge to student teachers in commuting to and fro from their institution of learning to partner or demonstration schools. This view is showed in their response to the statement: Transportation from my institution to practice school was easy and comfortable. Seventy (70) student teachers (63%) disagreed with the statement implying it was a challenge to them affecting their practice and successful implementation of the programme.

4.5. Research Question 3: Student Teachers Views on the Way Forward of Supported Teaching in School Programme in Colleges of Education

In an attempt to seek the views of student teachers on the way forward of the STS programme, student teachers were asked in an open question: *Suggest two (2) ways you think should be done to improve the STS programme.* These were the responses from student teachers to the question:

Nineteen (19) of the student teachers want their colleges to strengthen and close the communication gaps that exist between them and partner schools. Colleges of Education should always make a point to write officially to partner schools pre-informing them about the intended posting of student teachers to their schools. Better still; Colleges of Education that do not issue introductory letters to their student teachers, introducing them to partner schools should see it as a core responsibility. Some student teachers encounter poor reception from partner schools because they are not duly informed.

Twenty-three (23) student teachers suggested the need for the motivation of mentors and lead mentors in partner schools. Most mentors in partner schools sometimes express their feeling of not being motivated by the colleges for handling their student teachers on the Supported Teaching in School Programme. This discourages them from taking their time to assist and guide student teachers on the information needed to develop the needed experiences expected of a professional teacher.

Twenty-three (23) student teachers suggested the need for

colleges to organize periodic and adequate training or orientation to lead mentors, mentors, and student teachers on Supported Teaching in School Programme. This is relevant because most mentors exhibited a lack of adequate knowledge about the purpose and focus of the programme. Most mentors even find it difficult to fill Mentors' Evaluation Form. Most student teachers also find it hectic filling the Activity Log Form, reflective journals as well as preparing a checklist for observation. Lead mentors and mentors should be re-oriented to be abreast of the new educational curriculum in Ghana, hence, enabling them to answer questions on it.

Three (3) student teachers further suggested that they wanted at least three student teachers assigned to a mentor for adequate attention to be given to them by their mentors especially activities that demand individual assistance and guidance of the student teachers and for student teachers to be more effective since they are keenly monitored.

Five (5) student teachers suggested to the college authorities to ensure that breakfast is served early enough so that student teachers would break their fast and report to their practice schools on time to enable them to observe completely the daily routine activities of the schools. For instance, cleaning of the compound and conducting morning assemble. When the break is delayed student teachers arrive in practiced schools at the time when teaching and learning had already started and does not give a holistic professional development of student teachers.

Fifteen (15) student teachers suggested that colleges that do no convey the student teachers to partner schools for practice should see the need to do that to ensure the effective practice of the programme by student teachers. Colleges that are already conveying their student teachers to and fro from the partner schools should try increasing the number of times they convey student teachers to partner schools at least more than three times depending on the number of student teachers involved. This will reduce student teachers being overcrowded in the vehicle amidst the Covid-19 pandemic.

Six (7) of the student teachers suggested that the Ghana Education Service in collaboration with the Ministry of Education should see to the provision of curriculum materials in schools in Ghana such as syllabi, Teachers' Handbooks, or Coursepacks, Textbooks, among others. Most of the public schools' student teachers normally sent to practice lack these curriculum materials which affect the ability of the mentors to provide them with the needed professional experiences.

Seven (7) student teachers are of the view that they have acquired a lot of experiences about the teaching profession and their misconceptions about teaching have also been cleared through the Supported Teaching in School Programme. They, therefore, suggest and recommend that the programme should be sustained and strengthened. However, only one (1) of student teachers (1%) out of the ninety (90) sampled suggested that the Programme should be discontinued.

5. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions have been drawn:

Supported Teaching in School programme (STS) is adequately assisting student teachers to develop professional skills, attitudes, and values of teaching including knowledge of inclusivity, equity, and support for learners learning progress in the classroom. This is in line with the findings where both mentors and mentees express positive views on the significance of T-TEL activities in the development of teachers from colleges of education for the classroom [11].

Student teachers can now practically reflect and enquire about their lessons individually and even with their colleagues. This supports the views expressed that student teachers can learn through participation in various courses in school, observation, and reflection on others' teaching as well as in co-operation with colleagues [6, 3].

There is a communication gap between some Colleges of Education and partner schools in terms of correspondences; thereby resulting in unfriendly receptions given to student teachers by authorities of partner schools and mentors. The study revealed that most partner school authorities and mentors are usually aware of the visits of student teachers. This is a variant to the stated guideline and quality of a mentor in attaining the Teachers' Standards through Supported Teaching in School which calls for effective links between college or university, and schools as well as coaching [3, 10].

Curriculum materials such as students' handbooks, audio-visuals, and record journals are not available in partner or demonstration schools to enable mentors to use to direct student teachers in their practice of the programme. This finding is a variant to the statement on the requirements for school partnership and reflective practice which emphasize among others the provision of enough instructional materials in the practice schools and exposing student teachers to their efficient use [3].

Student teachers, lead mentors and mentors do not receive enough and effective orientation on the objectives/expectations of the Supported Teaching in School Programme before mentoring and practicing. This contravenes requirements set out for colleges of education to orientate student teachers, mentors, and lead mentors on their roles and responsibilities within the schools and communities [3]. Lead mentors, mentors, and student teachers need to be abreast with the new changes to Ghana's educational system and on the Supported Teaching in School Programme.

Mentors and student teachers usually do not receive enough orientation or training about the Supported Teaching in School Programme before being asked to mentor and practice. This explains why some mentors find it cumbersome to fill Mentor's Evaluation Forms and some student teachers' inability to prepare a checklist for observation and fill Reflective Journals. This contravenes Teacher Education Institutions' requirements for school partnership and reflective practice which demands orientation

of student teachers on their roles and responsibilities within the schools and communities [3].

Mentors and lead mentors in partner schools need to be motivated. Most mentors and lead mentors sometimes express their feeling of not being motivated by the colleges of education for mentoring their student teachers. This discourages them from putting much effort in guiding and assisting student teachers on the information needed to develop the needed experiences expected of a professional teacher. This finding is contrary to NTECF's (2017) guidelines on how mentors and lead mentors in partner schools should receive special training and appropriate incentives.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations have been made:

Since seventy (70) of student teachers (63%) agreed that Supported Teaching in School (STS) has equipped them with professional skills, attitudes, and values of teaching, it is recommended that the policymakers (Ghana Education Service and Ministry of Education) should see to the provision of curriculum materials in basic schools in Ghana such as syllabi, Teachers' Handbooks or Coursepacks, visual and audio-visual materials for mentors to lay hands on to be able to guide and direct the effective professional development of student teachers.

Since, sixty-three (63) (56.7%) of student teachers indicated that they can now practically reflect and enquire about their lessons individually and even with their colleagues, it is recommended that The Supported Teaching in School should be strengthened and sustained in colleges of education in Ghana.

Since fifty-six (56) of student teachers (50.4%) indicated that curriculum materials were not available in partner schools to enable learners and be guided by their mentors, it is recommended that materials such as students' handbooks, audio-visuals, and record journals, among others should be adequately provided by the government and other stakeholders like T-TEL to colleges of education and partner schools to enhance the attainment of the purpose of the Supported Teaching in School Programme and the professionalism.

Since fifty-six (56) Student teachers (50.4%) disagreed with the statement that Materials such as students' handbooks, audio-visuals, record journals, among others were given to them by their institution of learning and partner schools, it is recommended that Government and other stakeholders like T-TEL should ensure the provision of these instructional materials for the achievement of a successful implementation of the Supported Teaching in School Programme.

Since sixty-six (66) of the student teachers (59.4%) complained that most of their lead mentors and mentors were harsh and unfriendly to them, it is recommended that improvement needs to be considered by some of the Colleges of Education to close and strengthen the communication gap existing between them and partner schools by way of corresponding or pre-informing them about the intended assigning of student teachers to their institutions. All Coordinators of the Supported Teaching in School in Colleges of Education should be proactive by issuing introductory letters to their student teachers introducing them to partners.

Since sixty-one (61) of the student teachers (55%) indicated their disagreement with the statement that the objectives/expectations of the Supported Teaching in School Programme were made known to them before they started the school visits; implying they were not properly oriented about Supported Teaching in School and some of their lead mentors and mentors exhibited inadequate knowledge about the programme, there is the need for Colleges of Education with support from the government and Non-Governmental Organizations to organize effective orientation for student teachers before practice and also periodic re-training, workshops, seminar, among others to lead mentors, mentors about the programme for them to be abreast with the new changes to Ghana's educational system and on the Supported Teaching in School Programme.

Since twenty-three of the student teachers (20.7%) indicated most mentors and lead mentors in partner schools sometimes express their feeling of not being motivated by the colleges of education for mentoring their student teachers, it recommended that the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Colleges of Education design a semester remuneration packages for mentors and lead mentors guiding and directing student teachers on the Supported Teaching in School.

7. Suggestions for Further Research

This study considered Student Teachers' perspectives, the challenges and the way forward of the Supported Teaching in School Programme from student teachers' perspectives. This study did not consider other stakeholders' (e.g. Principals, Tutors, GES officials, Coordinators, etc.) perspectives of the programme and the administrative challenges of the programme. The study was not also able to consider more regions and schools. The researcher, therefore, suggests that future researchers should consider covering more regions and schools and further research on other stakeholders' views about the Supported Teaching in School Programme.

Conflicts of Interest

The author sdeclare that they have no competing interests.

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