

Access to learning for development: Using DL to address the educational need of the Ghanaian basic School Teachers.

Authors names: William Owusu-Boateng (Rev.) wowusuboteng@yahoo.co.uk
Rebecca Essel (Mrs.) Beckyhays2000@yahoo.com,
Joseph A. Mensah adiajoe@yahoo.com

Centre for Distance and Continuing Education
Institute of Distance Learning
Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology
Kumasi-Ghana

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to find out the acceptability of Distance Learning (DL) to Basic School Teachers in Ghana and how they are availing themselves to DL programmes in the country. It was also found out the opportunities available to teachers who opt for DL programmes and how they finance their education.

A questionnaire was administered to 320 Basic School teachers pursuing DL programmes in four study centres of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. The study revealed that: Basic school teachers have accepted DL programmes as they allow them to study at their convenience, pace and to enjoy the comfort of the home. It also affords them access to lifelong education.

This paper makes recommendation on the need for Ghana Education Service (GES) to financially support teachers who opt for DL. It also recommends some other incentives that GES could give to teachers pursuing DL programmes to attract them to opt for DL programmes, as this will go a long way to solve the problem of shortage of teachers at the Basic level and to drastically reduce the high turn over of teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Education has been recognized from time immemorial to be the bedrock for national development. Many people use education to enhance their prospects for promotion and self actualization. Teachers are a group of people who always seek to update and upgrade themselves through education. Access to conventional education is increasingly becoming competitive and expensive. Hall (1996) is of the view that industrialized and developing countries alike require education systems, which are flexible, accessible and cost effective and give life-long access, and this is what distance education is offering to most teachers. Until 2002, Ghanaian teachers had opportunity to go on study leave with pay after three years continuous service on attaining their Teacher's Certificate "A". Moreover any teacher who qualified for study leave with pay and gained admission in the tertiary institution was granted study. According to Prof. Asabre-Ameyaw (2008), fifteen thousand teachers were leaving the classrooms each year for further studies prior to the introduction of distance education in the country. In 2002 the Ghana Education Service (GES), who employs Government basic school teachers, came out with measures to reduce the number of teachers leaving the classroom every year for further studies thereby creating shortage of teachers at the basic level. This reduced the number of teachers granted study leave with pay each year drastically. Many basic school teachers were getting frustrated as they did not have the opportunity to further their education. They then looked for an alternative to conventional education. Currently, two universities in the country run distance learning courses for teachers. These are the University of Education, Winneba and the University of Cape Coast. Both universities are dual mode institutions and run courses in Diploma in Basic Education and Post Diploma degree in Basic Education at distance. At the moment the two universities have a student population of over forty thousand at their distance streams. This study was conducted to find out the acceptability of Distance Learning (DL) to Basic School Teachers in Ghana and how they are availing themselves to DL programmes in the country. It was also to find out the opportunities available to teachers who opt for DL programmes and how they finance their education.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted at the University of Cape Coast as it has greater number of students of over 28000. Moreover whereas University of Education, Winneba admits only trained teachers for their programmes, University of Cape Coast admits both trained and untrained (associate) teachers for her programmes. The pre tested questionnaire was administered to 320 basic school teachers pursuing the University of Cape Coast DL programmes in four (4) study centres out of the seventeen (17) study centres nationwide. The study centres chosen are Sunyani and Kumasi for the Northern Sector and Takoradi and Koforidua for the Southern sector. These centres were chosen as they had greater number of students in their sectors. The four centres have over 60% of the students' population. A questionnaire was also administered to the centre co-ordinator and eight (8) tutors in each of the centres.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

For easy understanding, percentages were computed and statistical values were used to interpret the results. Where necessary, the views of the course tutors/centre co-ordinators were analysed to reinforce the general views of the students to find out whether there were similarities or differences between the two groups of respondents.

Tables were drawn to depict the responses more clearly and to offer quick assimilation of the results. All prioritised responses were rank ordered, the highest being 5 and 4. The details of the results and the analyses are presented next, along with the discussions of the findings. In the discussion, more light was thrown on the implications of the findings and ideas behind certain responses were also highlighted.

This paper is in two parts: the first part deals with the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the second part deals with the analysis of the main results of the study.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The characteristics of the respondents are depicted in Tables 1-5, which show the demographic distribution in relation to sex, age, grade, qualification and how they (students) gained admission to the programme.

Table1: Distribution of Student teachers by sex

Sex	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	187	61
Female	120	39
Total	307	100

Sex of the Respondents

The majority of the students who participated in the study 187 (61%) were males and the female respondents were 120 (39%). The admission pattern is not strange as this follows the trend of admission at tertiary institutions in the country.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Age.

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Below 30	34	11.1
31-35	59	19.2
36-40	65	21.2
41-45	83	27
Above 45	66	21.5
Total	307	100

Age of Respondents

The majority of the teachers (69.7%) were above the age of 35 (table 2). This shows that the teachers who could not leave home to pursue residential tertiary courses due to family or other commitments were taking advantage of the distance education programme to upgrade and update their knowledge. As older teachers make use of the distance education programme, their knowledge and competencies will improve, and this will reflect positively on their pupils/students' performance. This confirms what Magagula (2003) asserted that distance education caters for all types of people regardless of their age, gender, citizenship, social standing, commitment, and social responsibility and geographical location.

Magagula (2003:9) says “evidently, workers who wish to upgrade and update their professional qualifications and cannot often give up their jobs to attend face-to-face learning in conventional institutions make use of distance education”.

Table 3: Grade of Respondents

Grade	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Teacher	80	26.2
Superintendent II	15	4.9
Superintendent I	63	20.5
Senior Superintendent	108	35.2
Principal Superintendent	25	8.1
Assistant Director	13	4.2
TOTAL	304	100

Greater number of the students of the programme (68%) (Table 3) are experienced teachers from the grade of Superintendent I upwards. As more experienced teachers take advantage of distance education programme and upgrade themselves they would improve their teaching skills and this will eventually reflect in students'/pupils' performance. This confirms the observation made by Hall (1996) that, distance education is playing an increasingly important role in both formal and non-formal education.

Table 4: Distribution of Students by Qualification

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Four-Year Certificate 'A'	65	21.7
Four- Year Cert. A with O' Level	76	25.4
Post Sec.Cert. 'A'	83	27.3
Post Sec. Cert. with 'A' Level	29	9.7
Four- Year Cert. 'A' with 'A' Level	9	2.9
G.C.E.'O' Level/SSCE	37	12.4
TOTAL	299	100

Out of the number that participated in the study only 12.6 % (Table 4) of the respondents had General Education Certificate Advanced (GCE 'A') Level qualification to qualify them for admission to the conventional university courses. This meant that most of the teachers would not have gotten the opportunity to pursue tertiary courses even if they wanted. Magagula (2003) contended that distance education is appropriate for people who for variety of reasons cannot attend conventional higher education institutions. These people include, secondary school graduates who failed to gain admission to universities, students with limited financial means, married people with responsibilities, geographically isolated or uprooted students (eg, refugees), economically and physically challenged people and nomads (Rumble, 1992).

Table 5: How Students Gained Admission.

Type of admission	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Direct	136	44.6
Access/Remedial	169	55.4
Total	305	100

How the Students Gained Admission

It was clear from the study that over half of the respondents (55.4%) gained admission through access/remedial courses. Such teachers lacked the requisite qualification to enable them access conventional university courses. For example, the Four-Year Certificate 'A' holders and a few holders of GCE 'O'Level, who could not have had access to conventional university courses, formed 59.5% of the respondents. A greater number of students gained admission through access/remedial course and this collaborates with Dodd's (1991) assertion that distance education is a great equalizer of educational opportunity and provides large numbers with the chance to continue their education. Rose (1995, p.6) has also observed that, "in various forms, distance education has proven that it has the capability of educating groups of people who would not probably attend higher education otherwise" and this was true of many of the teachers pursuing the Centre for Continuing Education distance programme.

Acceptability of Distance Education to Teachers

The research question discussed in the section is 'How acceptable is distance education to teachers?'

Table 6: Choice between Conventional and Distance Education

Choice	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Conventional	218	71.6
Distance	86	28.4
Total	304	100.0

The majority of the respondents (71.6%) answered that, given the option they would have opted for conventional education. The respondents' option for conventional education does not mean they had not accepted distance education programme. They cited reasons such as students of conventional education are given many privileges which are unavailable to distance education students. For example, teachers who are given study leave to pursue conventional residential courses are relieved of teaching and yet they are given the opportunity to access the Student Loan Scheme (formerly Social Security and National Insurance Trust (SSNIT) loan Scheme). Some other reasons they gave for their preference

for conventional education are job stress and restriction on private life. Rose (1995) says the reasons many people prefer conventional education to distance education are job stress, lack of time, restriction on private life, the course taking too long and stress on the family. Rose (1995) gives the other reasons as the desire for social contact with other students, the inability to combine studies with suitable working style and the perception that universities did not fully support external or distance students.

Table 7: Course Acceptability

Question	N	Mean	SD %	D %	U %	A %	SA %	General Remarks
DE gives the opportunity to upgrade oneself.	303	4.3795	1.0	1.3	0.7	52.8	44.2	Agree
Many teachers prefer DE to traditional education.	299	2.7592	26.4	20.1	14.4	29.4	9.7	Vary
DE gives the comfort of the home to pursue a course.	299	3.021	19.4	21.7	-	35.8	13.4	Vary
DE enhances prospects for promotion.	296	4.1655	0.7	5.1	6.1	55.4	34.8	Agree
I am using DE as basis for further studies.	286	4.1294	4.2	4.21	2.1	53.5	36	Agree

The key to the headings of tables 7 & 8 is found below.

N = Number of respondents SD = Strongly Disagree
U = Uncertain A = Agree

D = Disagree
SA = Strongly Agree

Almost all the student respondents (95%) agreed to the fact that distance education gives the opportunity for one to upgrade one self. If it had not been for distance education most of them would not have had the opportunity to update knowledge and upgrade career advance. As reported in SAIDE (1995,p.iv) "Distance Education (DE) is the largest sector of formal teacher development in South Africa, with more than a third of existing teachers involved in some form of distance education. The majority of these teachers' are in-service teachers studying to upgrade themselves, and the most rapid expansion in enrolments is teachers upgrading 'above the line' to Certificate in Education".

On the issue that distance education gives one the comfort of the home for the one to pursue a course, the respondents varied in their responses. Whilst 50.8% either disagreed or were uncertain, 49.2% agreed to the fact that distance education gives the comfort of the home for one to pursue a course. According to Ravhudzuho (2000), distance education enables one to study at one's pace, as there is no time limit for one to study and here lies the comfort.

Most of the respondents (88.1%) agreed to the fact that distance education enhances prospects for promotion. In the Ghana Education Service, without a first-degree qualification one cannot be promoted above the rank of Assistant Director of Education. It can, therefore, be inferred that the majority of the teachers enrolled in the distance education programme were motivated by the desire for professional development and the enhancement of their career opportunities.

The majority of the respondents (89.5%) acceded to the fact that they were using distance education as the basis for further studies. Rose (1995) has observed that not all dropouts of distance education could be viewed as failures since some of them used distance education as preparation for further studies.

Course Financing and Course Affordability

This section looked at how students finance their education and whether the education was affordable to them. In this section we sought to answer the research question 'How affordable is distance education to teachers?' The discussion was done with reference to Table 8.

Table 8: Programme Financing and Affordability

Question	N	Mean	SD	D	U	A	SA	Remarks
			%	%	%	%	%	
Tuition is affordable.	289	2.4567	34	36.3	4.5	26.6	7.6	D/agree
Stationery is affordable to me.	294	2.9592	18.7	25.2	4.4	44.9	6.8	Vary
Transportation is affordable to me.	290	2.2103	36.6	34.1	6.2	17.9	5.2	D/agree
Books are affordable to me.	288	3.0035	18.1	23.3	9.4	38.9	10.4	Vary
Cost of accommodation during face-to-face sessions is reasonable and easy to get.	289	1.8824	55.7	22.5	4.8	11.8	5.2	D/agree
Option should be given for fees to be paid in instalments.	291	4.5430	1.4	.3	39.5	-	58.8	Agree
As an incentive for teachers who opt for DE courses GES, should pay part of the fees.	294	4.6088	3.1	1.7	21.8	-	73.5	Agree
Teachers who opt for DE should pay part of the fees.	291	3.4914	19.1	10.7	.3	38.5	30.6	Agree

The majority of the students (78.5%) found the fees charged to be within their means. Lawton (1996) says there is the need to offer financial support for distance learning students. UNESCO Teacher Education Guidelines (2002) suggest sources of funding teacher education; include students' fees, community support, private and nongovernmental sector. The UNESCO guideline cites China and Nigeria as countries that fund their teacher education partly by government and partly by students' fees.

Many of the respondents (69.1%) accepted the fact that they should contribute towards their education. However, they considered it as incentive for Ghana Education Service to contribute towards their education. They based their argument on the fact that the government pays allowances to initial teacher trainees and grants study leave to some teachers to pursue residential conventional university courses and employs other teachers to replace them.

The UNESCO (2002) guidelines on funding of teacher education state, "In some instances the expectation is that the government should meet the full cost of teacher education because of its importance for quality of education service as a whole". Consequently, in order to encourage more teachers to opt for the distance education course and remain in the classroom, the government should pay part of the teachers' fee if not absorb all of the fees.

The direct cumulative costs the students incurred went beyond the payment for the course materials. The other direct cost the students bore included the cost of transportation to and from monthly weekend sessions, cost of textbooks and accommodation during face-to-face sessions as most of them lived outside the town where the study centre was sited.

The respondents, apart from calling on the Ghana Education Service to pay part of their fees as incentives, also asked that they should be given the option to pay their fees in instalment by the Centre for Continuing Education. One of the requests the respondents made was that they be given the opportunity to access the Students loan Scheme as their counterparts pursuing conventional residential courses at the universities. Koomson (1998) suggests that there should be a nationally designed financial support package for teachers who study by distance education.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion so far on acceptability of distance education to teachers, it could be said that teachers have really accepted the distance education programme. In so far as distance education gives opportunity to access tertiary education, most teachers who lack the requisite entry qualification into conventional university courses would take advantage of it. Moreover, as distance education allows teachers to upgrade themselves and enhance their promotion prospects, many teachers see the programme as a golden opportunity and would not allow the opportunity to slip by. It has been observed by Rose (1995) that teachers accept distance education whenever and wherever it is introduced as it has great potential.

It could be concluded that distance education was affordable to the teachers and that they did not find it difficult to finance their education. They, however, called for fee subsidy from

the Ghana Education Service to serve as an incentive. The above drawn conclusions suggest the need to motivate more teachers to opt for distance education programme and this will go a long way to solve the problem of shortage of teachers in our schools and the Ghana Education Service can cut down the number of teachers granted study leave with pay every year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It came out from the study that basic school teachers in the country have accepted distance education. It is recommended that Ghana Education Service (GES) should give teachers who successfully complete distance courses rapid promotion. Instead of doing five years continuous service before a teacher is assessed for promotion those who successfully complete a distance course should be assessed for promotion to the next grade whether or not the person has done five years after his/her last promotion. This will serve as a motivation for more teachers to opt for distance education courses.
2. One of the findings of the study is that the students are not happy they are not given the opportunity to access the Students Loan Scheme as their counterparts who are granted study leave with pay to pursue conventional courses in the tertiary institutions. It is therefore recommended that distance students are given the opportunity to access the Students' Loan Scheme as they would eventually pay back the loan. The loan will help ease their financial burdens.
3. In order to motivate more teachers to opt for distance education courses and thereby solve shortage of teachers at the basic level, GES should absorb all the fees of teachers pursuing distance courses relevant to the teaching profession.

References

- Asabre-Ameyaw, K. (2008, February 12). 1500 Teachers leave classrooms every year-Study. Daily Graphic (No.150279). p.31
- Dodd, T. (1991). The development of distance education, a historical perspective. In Jenkins, J. and Koul, B.N. (Ed). A Review, India National Open University Extension College.
- Hall, Y. (1996 July-Sept.). Distance learning strategies examined. IIEP News.
- Koomson, A.K. (1998). Distance Education as a strategy for training Teachers in Ghana: Problems and Prospects. Journal of Institute of Education 4 (1) pp59-68
- Magagula, C.M. (2003). Distance Education: Is it a solution for Higher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa? www.2.ncsu.edu.
- Ravhudzuho, M.A. (2000). NADEOSA Conference papers. www.2.ncsu.edu.
- Rose, A. (1995 September). Expanding the Potential of Distance education. Adults Learning, 7 (1) pp5-8
- SAIDE (1995 April-November). Teacher Education offered at distance in South Africa: Report for national Audit. Mazazim, Boleswa: SIADE/Macmillan.
- UNESCO, Teacher Education Guidelines (2002). <http://www.UNESCO.org>.