

## **Sixty years of teacher education in Ghana: Successes, challenges and the way forward**

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### **Abstract**

This paper was a presentation made at the launching of the 60th Anniversary Celebration and the Annual Graduation Ceremony of Peki College of Education, on Friday, 13th June 2014. The paper examined the history of the development of initial teacher training institutions in Ghana since 1835 when the first (i.e. Presbyterian Training College [PTC]) was established by the Basel Mission at Akropong in the Eastern Region. It explains that currently there are 38 public and 3 private colleges of education in the country producing teachers for basic schools. It argues that even though the 41 colleges of education have been elevated to tertiary status to offer programmes leading to diploma in basic education, they are still being run like the old missionary teacher training schools. These and several other factors had led to concerns about the quality of the products of the colleges in terms of the generic and subject-specific competences as well as the capacities of the institutions to meet the increasing demand for basic school teachers. It is therefore suggested that the boarding system in the Colleges of Education be scrapped, and instead, few (about 10) of the colleges selected for development and upgrading into Teacher Education Universities. It is further suggested that special incentives are introduced to attract the top candidates to the colleges of education and also the institutions should review their programmes and study modules to ensure pre-service teachers develop practical skills in teaching the core competencies in basic education.

Keywords: development of initial teacher training; initial teacher training programmes; social life in teacher training institutions;

### **Background**

National educational systems are not static. They have changed in response to national development plans and will continue to do so, so long as governments continue to search for new schemes and initiate policies that will improve the living conditions of their people. In Ghana, such changes in the educational systems have over the years influenced the growth of educational opportunities, which have resulted in expansion in teacher education institutions.

The first teacher training institution (i.e. Presbyterian Training College [PTC]) in the country was established by the Basel Mission in 1835 at Akropong in the Eastern Region, after that several missions followed and by 1937 (i.e. a century after the establishment of PTC) there were only six teacher training institutions (Aboagye, 2000). The location and years in which the five other colleges were established during the period, according to Aboagye (2000), are Amedzofe, 1894; Wesley College Aburi, 1922, later Kumasi, 1924; OLA Cape Coast, 1928; Hohoe St Francis, 1930; Navrongo, John Bosco, 1937.

Before 1950 there were twelve teacher training colleges with only two (i.e. Kommenda and Tamale) being established by the Central Government (Aboagye, 2000). The Government Training College (GOVCO) at Peki, which was later named Peki Training College and now called

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Peki College of Education was one of the colleges established by government in 1954 following the implementation of the Accelerated Development Plan for Education (ADPE) in 1951. Today, there are 38 public and 3 private colleges of education in the country producing teachers for basic education, indicating the number of colleges had doubled in the past sixty years.

In spite of the rapid growth of the teacher training system in the last six decades, concerns have been raised about the quality of its present products in terms of the generic and subject-specific competences required by the basic school teacher. These concerns emanate from the fact that over 90 percent of children are now in school in Ghana (MOE-EMIS, 2013) and in many developing nations (UNESCO, 2014) but are learning very little (MOE, 2014a; Whelan, 2014). A recent national literacy assessment given to early grade primary school pupils indicate over 95% of them are unable to read neither the Ghanaian language (L1) nor English language (L2) with comprehension by the age that most children are expected to be able to do so (MOE, 2014b). This is a great hindrance to their future learning in the primary school years.

Whelan (2014) has pointed out that only a few of our children are getting the education they need to access the opportunities that the 21st century offers them. There is therefore the need for us to re-examine the contents of our teacher education programmes to reinforce what can work best for Ghana. The question then is “how can Ghana transform her teacher education system to meet these challenges?”

The first institutions which became the model for teacher training institutions in many developing countries including the then Gold Coast were originally started by the early Christian missionaries. The pattern, that is, organisation, content and method of the training programmes offered by these institutions were identical to the pattern then in Europe. Therefore, what became the accepted (or conventional) pattern for training teachers in Ghana in the post-independence era was a slight modification of the traditional nineteenth century European pattern of training teachers. In her book, *The Development of Training Colleges in England and Wales: 1800 - 1975*, Dent (1977) produced an account on how the early nineteenth century teacher training college establishments in Europe could be described today as teacher training schools. She observed that the general culture, way of social interaction, and the structure and organisation of work in training colleges at that time reflected many characteristics of the early seminaries or small mission boarding schools of the twentieth century.

For a long period, many training colleges in Ghana preserved most of the characteristics of such seminaries or small mission boarding schools in terms of curriculum and social life (Mereku, 1998). Training colleges in Ghana were largely boarding institutions located outside communities giving trainees very little opportunity of mixing with people in the broader environment outside the college. Discipline was strictly enforced with rules and regulation over attendance, dressing, exeat, response to bells and punctuality, doing keep-fit exercises, and punishments. Life in the colleges was highly controlled giving students very little opportunity to be responsible for their own affairs.

### **Changes in pre-service teacher education system**

Sixty-years ago, Peki Training College began offering a 2-Year Post Primary Certificate ‘B’ programme. Following changes in the nation’s teacher education system and through gradual expansion of its facilities, the institution has in the last six decades, offered a range of programmes including

- i. 2-Year Post Primary Certificate ‘B’ Programme
- ii. 4-Year Post Primary Certificate ‘A’ (conventional) Programme

- iii. 4-Year Post Primary Certificate 'A' (modular) Programme
- iv. 2-Year Post-Secondary Programme
- v. 2-Year Specialist Training (Geography and Visual Art Education) Programme
- vi. 3-Year Quasi Specialist Post-Secondary Programme
- vii. 3-Year Post-Secondary Programme (Generalists)
- viii. Untrained Teachers Diploma in Basic Education (UTDBE) Programme
- ix. College of Education Programme.

These show that in an attempt to ensure pre-service teachers are well equip with the academic and professional capacity to perform proficiently and competently as teachers, the pre-service teacher education system in Ghana has undergone a number of changes in the last six decades. These changes influenced not only the structure of the programmes but also their contents and organization.

### **Successes in pre-service teacher education in Ghana**

#### *Tertiary education status for colleges*

The 38 public and 3 private colleges of education in the country have been elevated or upgraded to tertiary status to offer programmes leading to diploma in basic education. This is not only to enhance the quality of teacher education, but also to increase the status of the products of the programme.

#### *Increased school experience*

The structure of initial teacher education is based on a model known as the 'IN-IN-OUT', where teacher trainees spend first two years on academic and pedagogical theory on campus. The last year is spent on practical teaching attachments to schools to provide trainees with hands-on experiences in professional teaching. The 'IN-IN-OUT' model is also to promote cooperation between the colleges and schools in order to ensure school actors (teachers, district education officials and parents) become partners in the education and training of the nation's basic school teachers. (Agbeko, 2007).

#### *Increased enrollment*

The colleges of education admit an average of 9,000 trainees and turn out at least 8,500 trained teachers each year (MOE-EMIS, 2013). The majority of trainees (about 60%) that are admitted are males. In fact, the capacity of all the colleges to enrol students has improved from about 6,000 by the year 2000 to over 8,500, a decade after.

#### *New/specialist programmes*

Some of the colleges have been mandated to train mainly science and mathematics teachers for basic schools, a few have also been mandated to offer programmes in Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) for kindergarten level teachers; while the majority continue to offer generalist programme for basic school teachers.

#### *Untrained Teachers' Diploma in Basic Education (UTDBE)*

The college also runs the UTDBE programme, which was introduced in 2005, to give opportunity to untrained teachers to be trained as professional teachers, since they are predisposed to teach in the deprived districts where there is the challenge of sending qualified trained teachers. This has become an alternative route of training qualified teachers to fulfil teacher demand, especially in the deprived areas (Asare, et. al. 2012).

### *Quality assurance mechanisms for colleges*

Mechanisms for assuring quality in the colleges of education are now well developed. There is a handbook for the purpose and internally the colleges assure quality in their performance through their Academic Boards (Asare, et. al. 2012).

### **Challenges in the Ghanaian pre-service teacher education system**

Though the changes in the nation's teacher education system had been aimed at ensuring an adequate supply of qualified and motivated teaching force, that is, quality teachers who have a strong commitment to teaching and are broadly educated, there are still concerns about the quality of teachers trained in our colleges (Awuku, 2000; Mereku, 2000; Akyeampong, 2002; MOE, 2002; Akyeampong, Lussier, Pryor & Westbrook, 2013; Mereku, 2014). Some of the challenges leading to these concerns are summarized in the next five paragraphs.

### *Social life in tertiary institutions*

Since the colleges have been elevated or upgraded to tertiary status it is important pre-service teachers are made to experience not only the conditions that apply to tertiary education students such as taking student's loan to pay fees but also to enjoy the social life that their counterparts in other tertiary institutions experience. Many colleges of education in Ghana today are still boarding institutions located outside communities giving trainees very little opportunity of mixing with people in the broader environment outside the college. Though the colleges are tertiary, the seminarian-type discipline is still enforced with rules and regulation over attendance, dressing, exeat, response to 'bells and punctuality, doing keep-fit exercises, fetching water, weeding and cleaning compound, etc. Thus, even though the colleges are now tertiary, life in the colleges is still highly controlled giving students very little opportunity to be responsible for their own affairs.

### *Demand for teachers*

Even though there have been phenomenal increases in pupils' enrollment rate over the decade, there have been very little increase in the rate at which teachers were produced. At the close of the last decade before 2000, the colleges were annually training on the average a little over 6,000 teachers (Mereku, 2000). Between 2000 and 2010, the capacity of the Colleges of Education improved very little (i.e. at an annual increase of 8% (Asare, et. al., 2013)) bringing their total output in 2012/2013 to about 8,500 (MOE-EMIS, 2013). That is, though pupil enrollment at the basic level increased by over 60% in the last decade, the increase in the rate of teachers at post during the same period was very low leading to an excess of demand over supply of teachers.

### *Down-grading of the emphasis given to methodology courses*

Another critical challenge is the lack of serious attention to the teaching methodology during the training of teachers for basic schools. In a recent study on 'improving teaching and learning of basic mathematics and reading in Africa' (Akyeampong, Lussier, Pryor & Westbrook 2013), it was found that even though initial teacher education programmes had impact on newly qualified teachers, they induced misplaced confidence leading to standardized teacher-led approaches that failed to engage learners. They also observed that 'learning to read was divorced from meaning while mathematical activities were not linked to learning concepts' (p272) in the newly qualified teachers' classroom practice. These are due to the fact that the programmes continue to place too much emphasis on personal development studies and subject studies as observed a decade ago by Akyeampong (2002). These have resulted in the down-grading of the emphasis that should be given to methodology and the over reliance on the lecture approach by tutors in order to cover the subject content in preparation for external examinations administered by the Institute of Education of University of Cape Coast.

*Flexibility to incorporate changes in the education system in the colleges' curriculum*

The curriculum of the colleges has been found to lack the flexibility to incorporate changes in the basic school curriculum as well as innovations recommended by the Ghana Education Service. Mereku (2013) observed that the curriculum for the colleges lack the flexibility to incorporate such emerging concerns from the educational system as

- dealing with students with reading, comprehension and writing difficulties;
- teaching problem solving;
- setting challenging school-based assessment (SBA) tasks;
- using results of national assessment (NEA & SEA) data to improve instruction;
- preparation of School Performance Improvement Plan (SPIP).

*Attracting the nation's top candidates for teaching*

A study conducted by Ossei-Anto, Fletcher, Annang-Nunoo, and Korankye (2013) on behalf of the Professional Board of the Institute of Education, University of Cape Coast, identified the weak qualifications of entrants to colleges of education as one of the major factors of the prospective teachers' poor achievement in the end of training assessment as well as their overall preparedness to teach during their internship. They observed that out of the 99 students whose records were sampled, only 30 had better grades than Grade D7 in integrated science and/or mathematics. College of education is the fourth choice of most senior high school graduates wishing to further their education at the tertiary level. The choice to at the college of education is made only after the candidate has failed to gain admission to university, polytechnic or nursing. There is the need for the ministry of education to institute measures to attract the top candidates to colleges of education.

**The way forward**

*De-boardinisation of the colleges of education*

Much as I agree with the government that there is the need to increase the supply of teachers from our colleges, I do not think establishing 10 new colleges throughout the country is feasible in the immediate future considering the huge costs involved. One key option open to the government for meeting the increasing demand for teachers in the face of current economic difficulties the nation is facing is to consider de-boardinising the colleges of education. This will allow some parts of the halls of residence (or dormitories) to be converted into classrooms, libraries, laboratories and other parts into offices for both staff and administrators.

De-boardinisation of the colleges can tremendously expanding the capacity of the existing colleges to double or treble their in-take of pre-service teachers in the next ten years. Besides, de-boardinisation will not only put the pre-service teachers at par with their counterparts in other tertiary institutions with regard to social life experiences, but also allow them develop into more responsible adults who will be taking charge of their own life and that of the children they will be teaching after the programme.

*Review of the programmes for the colleges of education*

The teacher education institutions should review their programmes and study modules so as to incorporate emerging concerns from the educational system as well as emphasise the processes of learning that will enable the development of core competencies that are valued globally in education – literacy, numeracy, creativity, and innovation. The existing open educational

resources (OER) on teacher education can be very useful in revising the programmes and study modules for effective training of Ghanaian basic school teachers.

The MOE should ensure colleges of education are supplied with teaching/learning materials (i.e. manipulatives, kits and equipment) and textbooks to make pre-service teachers experience their use. In addition, DVD/MP4 video clips on best practices in teaching key subjects (i.e. literacy, numeracy and science) in basic schools should be developed for use in both pre-service and in-service training basic school teachers.

#### *Recruitment well qualified high school graduates*

Colleges should recruit well qualified high school graduates to train to become excellent teachers who can prepare and inspire pupils. The admission criteria should ensure strong passes in the core subjects - science, math and English language. In addition to the student's loan, there is therefore the need to introduce special incentive to attract the top candidates to the colleges of education.

#### **Conclusion**

Today, even though all 41 colleges of education in the country producing teachers for basic schools have been elevated to tertiary status to offer programmes leading to diploma in basic education, they are still being run like the old missionary teacher training schools. These and several other factors had led to concerns about the quality of the products of the colleges in terms of the generic and subject-specific competences required by the basic school teacher as well as the capacities of the colleges to meet the increasing demand for basic school teachers. It is therefore suggested that the boarding system in Colleges of Education should be scrapped, and instead, some of the colleges selected for development and upgrading into Teacher Universities. It is further suggested that special incentives should be introduced to attract the top candidates to the colleges of education and the institutions should review their programmes and study modules to ensure pre-service teachers develop practical skills in teaching the core competencies in basic education.

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