

Perceived Effects of Tutors' Pedagogical skills on Academic Performance of Pre-service Deaf Teachers at the Presbyterian College of Education, Akropong Akuapem

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the perceived effect of tutors' pedagogical skills on the academic performance of pre-service Deaf teachers at the Presbyterian College of Education, Akropong Akuapem. The research design used was phenomenology where eight pre-service Deaf teachers were purposively sampled for the study. Data was collected by using face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data. The results of the study showed that tutors' way of presentation makes it difficult for pre-service teachers who are deaf at the Presbyterian College of Education, Akropong Akuapem to understand what is taught. Again, it was found out that most tutors in the College could not use the Sign Language effectively; therefore, they were not able to effectively communicate with pre-service teachers who are deaf. Furthermore, it was revealed that pre-service teachers who are deaf preferred practically oriented and demonstration lessons to the theoretical style of learning to understand concepts taught. The paper concludes that some tutors' way of teaching negatively affect the academic performance of pre-service Deaf teachers at the Presbyterian College of Education.

Keywords: Pedagogy, Pre-Service teacher, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

INTRODUCTION

The United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (2006) revealed that it is always domineering that the voices of consumers of academic programmes be heard by the service providers and all other stakeholders to improve the support services provided to the consumers. Teaching methods comprise the principles and techniques used by teachers to enhance learner's learning and are predetermined partly on the subject matter to be taught and partly by the nature of the learner. For a particular teaching method to be appropriate and efficient, it must satisfy the learning style of the learner. Some learners are visual learners, auditory and kinesthetic by nature. Teaching methods must consider not only the nature of the subject matter but also how learners learn (Westwood, 2008). Accordingly, in designing teaching approaches for pre-service teachers who are deaf, tutors must consider the opinions of the learners. The teaching methods must be adapted to suit the learning needs and style of the learner. For example, in academic disciplines such as adapted Physical Education, Differentiated Teaching and Assessment the teaching methods, resources, approaches and the environment are adapted to meet the needs of the learners.

Pre-service teachers who are deaf have peculiar needs when compared to other groups of learners with special needs. In Ghana, for instance, learners who are deaf access academic information mainly through the Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL) across all levels of education. However, Kalabula (2007) affirmed that most teachers and for that matter tutors who teach learners who are deaf have little or no training in education for the deaf. This implies that learners who are deaf struggle to go through academic work under the tutelage of such tutors. Tutors' inability to use sign language effectively might affect their teaching especially, when teaching the Deaf. In the preparation of pre-service teachers who are deaf, there is always the need for frequent classroom support services if they are to realize their academic potential. Academic support that could enhance the understanding of pre-service teachers who are deaf in relation to instructions in the classroom includes sign language interpreting services, note-taking services, and accessibility to internet facilities (Roe, 2008). O'Brien (1998) argues that learners who are deaf must have complete access to all academic facilities to enhance their learning outcomes.

Although Agomoh and Kanu (2011), Hauser et al. (2008), and Marschark et al. (2013) advised teachers to be literate in sign language to be able to assist students who are deaf, it may still not be enough to effectively educate students who are deaf, and teachers have to go beyond being literate in sign language. Marschark, Sapere, Convertino, and Seewagen (2005) recognized that even with interpreting and note-taking services provided for students who are deaf at the tertiary level, they still receive less information from lectures and tutorials than their hearing peers. This assertion is confirmed by Marschark et al. (2005) when they conducted a study on deaf students' experiences on sign language interpreting services at Rochester Institute of Technology in the United States of America. Their study found out that participants that were students who are deaf did not acquire as much information from lectures as their hearing peers, even with experienced interpreters who were familiar with the students.

Evidence in the literature confirms that much is not known about the experiences and challenges learners who are deaf at the Colleges of Education in Ghana. For instance, Oppong and Fobi (2016) conducted a study about the gender differences in mathematics achievement of learners who are deaf at the basic level, and another study by Oppong et al. (2018) focused on the academic experiences of students who are deaf in a public university in Ghana. Other studies elsewhere reported negative findings concerning academic experiences of learners who are deaf who find themselves in the same learning environment as their hearing peers (Bell, 2013; Magongwa, 2008; Mantey, 2011). It is against this backdrop that this study is conducted to explore how tutors' methods of teaching affect the academic performance of pre-service teachers who are deaf at the Presbyterian College of Education, Akropong Akuapem.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The study employed qualitative-phenomenological design. Phenomenological design was chosen because the researcher sought to explore lived experiences of pre-service teachers who are deaf as they are taught by tutors who are not deaf themselves. Due to the characteristics design, it provides detail information on the lived experiences of the research participants (Gall et al., 2007). According to Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, and Razavieh (2010), phenomenological studies are meant to explore participants' perspectives and experiences of a phenomenon. The view of Ary et al. was supported by Creswell (2012), that the primary purpose of

phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the general essence, thus grasping the very nature of the things. Moreover, a qualitative approach was considered relevant due to its nature of providing data from the respondents in the natural settings (Creswell, 2009; Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Since different people hold different opinions and views about the world, it was ideal to get their individual views and opinions regarding the pre-service deaf teachers' academic interactions and experiences in the College.

Study Sample and Inclusion Criterion

The sample for the study was eight pre-service deaf teachers (Creswell, 2018). The pre-service deaf teacher participants were drawn from the four year Bachelor of Education Programmes (Visual Arts, Technical, Mathematics, and Home Economics) mounted by the college. Through purposive sampling, two pre-service deaf teachers were handpicked from each of the programmes of study in the College. This selection procedure was informed with the hope that pre-service deaf teachers different programme backgrounds would give diverse experiences as they interact with their tutors. The selection of the participants regarded gender as a key variable, hence both male and female pre-service deaf teachers' opinions were sought.

Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

The researcher collected qualitative data using semi-structured interview guide. The interview guide was developed from literature. The reliability and validity of the interview were ascertain by experts in qualitative research. The period for each interview session was an average of 30 minutes. Prior to the day for the interview, the research described the purpose and steps being taken to maintain confidentiality and their anonymity were made known to them. Moreover, the researcher sought the interviewees' consent to tape record and took brief notes in the event of tape recorder malfunctions. This was useful for gathering in-depth information on the subject under investigation.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data was analysed qualitatively using suggestions of Braun and Clark (2013). Braun and Clark (2013) proposed six steps for qualitative data analysis and each step was duly satisfied according to the steps discusses below:

Step 1: Data Transcribing, Reading, and Familiarization

Before proceeding to the analysis of qualitative data, the researcher prepared for the transcription. The recorded audios were played, typing was done for what was heard. This process was carefully done in other to avoid making calculated and unplanned mistakes.

Step 2: Process of Coding

Coding was done by the researcher by identifying all relevant pieces of data within the entire dataset to answer the research questions. Coding was done manually where these codes were both data-derived and researcher-derived. The data-derived codes provided to the researcher a concise summary of the explicit content of the data while the researcher-derived code helped in identifying implicit meanings within the data.

Step 3: Identifying Patterns (Codes to Themes; Sub-Themes)

After the coding was completed in the entire dataset, it was time to look for patterns appearing within the data by the researcher. In identifying which patterns are the most relevant for answering the research questions, the frequency of appearance of particular codes were important. However, consideration was given to codes that did not frequently appear but are meaningful for answering the research questions. At the end of this stage, the researcher looked at them carefully without considering frequency because certain codes that did not appear often may support the answer some research questions demand.

Step 4: Searching, Reviewing, and Finalizing Themes

The next step the researcher task was to identify the broader patterns of the data that could be used to answer the research questions as themes and sub-themes that could be identified following the patterns of the data. It is possible that these patterns may look broader than the codes because they may contain many facets.

Step 5: Developing the Analysis

In the developing the analysis, each provisional theme and related data collected through codes were presented to tell the story of the data in relation to the research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the analysis, the following themes emerged. They include the tutors' class presentation, the pre-service teachers' lecture participation, and the additional support given to pre-service teachers by tutors. The respondents were asked during the interview to describe the extent to which tutors' methods of teaching influence their academic performance. From their responses, it was observed that the tutors' methods used to teach the pre-service teachers who are deaf were not effective in enhancing learning for learners who are deaf.

Tutors' class presentation

From the analysis of the data, it was realized that one of the themes under the extent to which tutors' methods of teaching influence the academic performance of pre-service teachers (PST) who are deaf was the tutors' class presentation. For instance, PST1 commented this way:

Sometimes tutors teach one lesson for more than an hour or two. That makes it difficult for us to remember the major points in the lesson. When the duration is short, we are able to remember. When we get the major points with examples, it is okay for us. I want tutors to explain concepts, give examples, and sometimes support with pictures. This method helps us to understand lessons taught.

Another pre-service teacher stated:

My experiences with tutors in the lecture room are many. Firstly, when tutors come to class to lecture, sometimes it is difficult for all the students to understand. Also, some tutors don't teach for full time; they lecture for a short time and then leave the class. Some tutors too don't follow the time allotted for their lessons. Even most tutors also come to class late. (PST3)

A pre-service teacher added:

It is not too good/fine because sometimes we do not get deeper understanding of what teachers teach in class. Most teachers don't consider the capability of the Deaf in relation to what they want to teach. The teachers always speak instead of signing when they are teaching. Thus when interpreters are not around it makes it difficult to understand since we are deaf. (PST3)

Another pre-service teacher also reiterated:

In the first place, sometimes, when tutors come to class to teach, they don't use the sign language well. Many tutors use speech a lot which makes it difficult for the pre-service teachers who are deaf to understand. Sometimes when tutor are teaching, I read my book because of the poor sign language of the tutor. (PST4)

Still, in their attempt to say that the teaching methods of teachers did not enhance their academic performance, a pre-service teacher also commented:

Most of our tutors are not experienced in the use of sign language.

They write lesson notes on the board and use English language or orals to explain. Most students (DEAF) don't understand it. We expect the tutors to use sign language to explain things in class for us to enable most of us to understand lessons in class.

*Again, I prefer tutors who use sign language to teach and explain things with examples. When tutors use TLM during teaching, it helps us to understand lessons. A topic like **"elements and principles of design"** without TLM and demonstration, will be difficult to understand. The supports given to us by our tutors are not enough. I want my tutor to be using videos and examples from the internet (PHONE) to explain difficult concepts to help us understand lessons. The pre-service teacher added. (PST7)*

In contrast, one pre-service teacher stated:

For me, I understand when tutors come to class to teach. But without reading, it is difficult for me to understand lessons. If I don't read first before the tutor teaches me, it is difficult to understand the lesson. But when I read first, and the tutor teaches me, I am able to understand and remember easily. (PST6)

A pre-service teacher added:

When tutors come to class to teach, sometimes my colleagues do not understand, so I help by interpreting to other pre-service teachers because I easily understand what the tutor teaches. This helps them to understand the lesson. I usually read the topic to be treated at home before going to class. So, it makes me easily understand what the tutor teaches, but it becomes very difficult when I do not learn/read the topic before the lesson. Tutors' methods of teaching with my experience is fine. They write the notes on the board and discuss them using body movements and gestures. (PST6)

The pre-service teacher further stated

Most tutors do not know the sign language; they always speak instead of using sign language. This makes most of my mates uncomfortable. They do not understand those tutors in class. I am good at lip-reading. So, I pay attention when those tutors are teaching. (PST6)

Comments from pre-service teachers who are deaf revealed that they hardly understood the contents taught. Most of them indicated that they struggled to make meaning from what they are taught. Those learners relied on their peers who had grasped the content for help. These indicate that the tutors' method of teaching do not satisfy the entire group, and the teaching approach is not universally designed for learning (UDL). Furthermore, tutors lacked the principle of multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression.

Participation of learners in class

Another theme that emerged regarding the extent to which tutors' methods of teaching influence the academic performance of pre-service teachers who are deaf, was their participation in class activities.

A respondent indicated:

I only sit and read from the board or the textbooks. I am not happy about this method at all because when I read from the board or textbook, I understand only few words and concepts. I wish my tutors are able to use sign language to explain the challenging words and concepts to me. (PST2).

Another remarked:

I pay attention in class but what I learn is not always enough for me, so I concentrate on my books after the lesson. I cannot make it if I depend solely on the tutors' lesson in class. Although, sometimes I answer or ask questions during lessons in class. (PST 6)

One respondent also described his participation in class by saying:

I will say my participation in class is not 100%, but 50%. This is because the tutors will teach many things in many hours, but in the end, we don't understand anything. We can't absorb many things in several hours being taught. We want our lesson to be short and containing the important points. (PST1)

Additionally, another pre-service teacher noted:

Through constant reading, when tutors come to class, I involve myself by raising my hands to ask questions and that helps me. My involvement gives me more experience. Through the reading, I am able to participate in class discussions. I also sometimes explain difficult things (concepts) to my mates who don't understand to support that of the tutor. (PST4)

One respondent also said:

I am not fine with the way some tutors teach. Sometimes tutors use some words that are not important to the students. I sometimes ask tutors to explain the big words they use, but I still don't understand it after their explanation. (PST3)

The comments revealed that tutors did not use methods that engaged all pre-service teachers in the class. It appears that tutors did not know the pre-service teachers and their specific abilities. They employed teacher-centered methods of teaching, where the individual needs of the learners were not considered. Where learners were supposed to be at the center of activities, the reverse was the case.

Extra support from teachers

Another sub-theme that emerged from the analysis of interview data was the extra support that tutors gave to pre-service tutors who are deaf during class activities to enable them to participate in class activities effectively. Regarding this theme, the pre-service teachers commented in the following ways. One of the respondents noted:

Yes, tutor support us; for instance, when a student do not understand a particular concept, the tutor attends to the fellow, gives him examples, and uses comparisons and other means to help the fellow understand. My Art tutor, for instance, will call you to the board and points things to you on the board for you to understand. He always prepares well before coming to class. So, he helps us to focus on the important points in the lesson, unlike most of the hearing teachers. They teach many things, but in the end, we understand very few. (PST 5)

Another respondent also said:

When the concept is difficult, the teachers repeat it over and over until we understand it. Sometimes the teachers use their phones to search for information on the internet to help us understand some concepts. The tutors at times ask pre-service teachers to go to the board to present their answers to questions. That helps the tutors to know how far the student has understood the topic. (PST4)

However, one pre-service teacher was of the view that teachers should allow them to look for their own information and make presentations, instead of the tutors giving them notes all the time and stated:

Personally, I wish the tutors introduce the topics and ask us to do our own research for more information about the topic and present. Tutors giving us lesson notes all the time is not helping. The tutors should allow us to have group discussions. (PST6)

Another respondent further noted:

I think the tutors should not be harsh on us. They should not rush when teaching; assuming that we already know. Sometimes during teaching, we answer. "Yes" to the tutors' question: "Do you understand?" Meanwhile, for a fact, we do not always understand anything, but due to shyness or fear, we say Yes Sir/Madam. If they are soft on us, that will help us to learn from ourselves. We also want tutors to prepare well before they come to class. This will help them go straight to the point and stop going around.

In addition, a respondent further commented in three (3) different ways:

When I don't understand some concept during a lesson, I ask the tutor. The tutor uses examples, and directs me to some pages in the textbook for further readings. Sometimes tutors repeat their explanations over and over again. Other tutors sometimes use their phones to search the internet to help us understand lessons

easily. Some also call students to the board to answer questions. Tutors explain to students when they are wrong. This helps us to understand the lessons.

Also, when I don't understand a concept in class, I go to tutors who know Sign Language for them to explain the concept to me. For example, if today a science teacher taught me, and I had a challenge, I will go to the tutor after the lesson so that he can use pictures and other materials to teach me again.

Some of the tutors sometimes discuss questions with us before giving them to us as group assignments or individual assignments. The group work helps me to remember what the teacher taught. I also get support from my friends. (PST7)

Another respondent remarked:

Sometimes the tutors use pictures or drawings and videos to help explain concepts to us. This support is good. It helps clarify concepts for us, but they don't use it all the time. The pictures are always very few too. Sometimes they show pictures, drawings to help us identify the word they are teaching. However, the support is not good because the pictures and drawings that teachers show us are not many, only few. Also, some tutors don't come to class early, and others don't prepare well before they come to class, and it makes it difficult for us to understand what they teach. (PST1)

The comments from the learners indicated that they were supported by their tutors in one way or the other during lessons in class, which enhanced their academic activities. Though the pre-service teachers commented that the support was not adequate, their comments indicated that they received some support from their teachers by way of their tutors' repetition of the explanation of concepts, Tutors also used pictures or drawings and videos to help explain certain concepts. Again, the teachers sometimes placed pre-service teachers in mixed ability groups for them to be assisted by their peers. Other tutors provided and used their mobile phones to access information from the internet to support the learning of pre-service teachers who are deaf.

FINDINGS

In terms of how tutors' teaching methods influence pre-service teachers' academic performance, the learners' responses pointed to three themes: the tutors' class presentation, the learners' class participation, and the additional support given to pre-service teachers by tutors. The results of the study showed that tutors' way of presentation makes it difficult for pre-service teachers who are deaf at the Presbyterian College of Education, Akropong Akuapem to understand what is taught. It was also revealed that some tutors taught for only short periods. Other tutors did not follow the time allotted for their lessons because they came to class late. Again, it was found out that most tutors in the College could not use the Sign Language effectively; therefore, they were not able to effectively communicate with pre-service teachers who are deaf. Furthermore, it was revealed that pre-service teachers who are deaf preferred practically oriented and demonstration lessons to the theoretical style of learning to understand concepts taught.

It was revealed that tutors' choice and usage of words during lessons afford learners little opportunity to participate in class and that the few learners who participated actively in classroom discussions were the ones who always studied on their own. It was further noted that tutors repeat their explanations for the pre-service teachers as well as use pictures or drawings and videos to help explain certain concepts. Finally, some tutors came to class late, while others do not also prepare well before coming to class, and so rushed lessons, making it difficult for the learners to understand what was taught. However, it is noteworthy that tutors in the school encouraged peer tutoring and mixed ability grouping, and cooperative learning because tutors allowed higher achieving learners to teach their colleagues. Tutors also released their mobile phones to learners to access information from the internet to support their learning.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that some tutors' way of teaching made negatively affect the academic performance of pre-service deaf teachers. Some of the reasons given were that, tutors were not skillful in using sign language, other tutors used the theoretical style of teaching, inadequate preparation by tutors, and tutors' choice and usage of words during teaching.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

The College's management should organize continuous professional development (CPD) training for tutor in sign language on how to handle pre-service teachers who are deaf. Also, the management should liaise with the Special Education Division of the Ghana Education Service and the University of Education Winneba, to recommend professional teachers, who are specialized in the education of the hearing-impaired for recruitment. Tutors should try to explain keywords used during teaching and learning to enable pre-service teacher to understand every lesson. Tutors for the deaf should liaise with the Ghana National Association of the Deaf to develop sign concepts for some vocabulary that have no sign language.

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