

Investigating the Role of Supported Teaching in Schools (STS) in Improving Teaching of Foundational Literacy & Numeracy in Ghana



Draft Report on Interviews with Mentors and Lead Mentors of STS Practising Schools

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Executive Summary

Since 2015, Ghana has introduced comprehensive system-wide reforms to address a set of challenges in Initial Teacher Education, including poor quality of entrants; content-heavy examinations-oriented Diploma in Basic Education (DBE) curriculum; lack of practical exposure to teaching; lack of specialisation and limited resources, policies and procedures for quality assurance in the Colleges of Education (CoEs) among others.

The starting point of the reforms was the production of the National Teachers' Standards (NTS), which sets out a common expectation of Ghanaian teachers' knowledge, behaviour, and practice. This led to the review and replacement of the DBE with a 4-year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) in Initial Teacher Education commencing in 2018.

The B.Ed. was aligned to the National Teacher Education Curriculum Framework (NTECF) and required specialisations for Early Grade (KG–P3), Upper Primary (P4–P6) and Junior High School (JHS 1– JHS 3). To better develop teachers on the new B.Ed. programme, the original teaching practice component of the DBE was extended and revised to form the new practical Supported Teaching in Schools (STS) component within the B.Ed. curriculum. The new STS represents one of the distinctive features of the new curriculum and provides a significant opportunity for student teachers to learn within different practical settings over the four years of the B.Ed. to enhance their professional development.

Since its introduction, there is little evidence to ascertain the impact of the new STS on teacher professional development in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN). This report presents findings from a qualitative study examining the perspectives and experiences of 41 purposively selected mentors and lead mentors involved in the STS programme in Ghana. The aim was to understand how these school-based actors perceive and engage with the STS programme.

While the STS has created key opportunities for embedding practice into training, building student teachers' confidence, strengthened mentor-student teacher collaborations, enhanced task-sharing, engagement with new teaching ideas introduced by student-teachers, and at the same time, created critical opportunities that can be leveraged to provide more learner support in under-resourced schools, as well as build mentorship capacity through continuous professional development, key implementation gaps remain.

The STS is faced with multiple challenges notably, limited infrastructure and inadequate teaching and learning resources (TLRs) which constrain effective delivery; short practicum durations which reduce opportunities for sustained professional growth; limited knowledge and inconsistent application of the NTS thereby limiting alignment with professional standards; and varying levels of stakeholder support including parental involvement.

Overall, sharpening the focus on these gaps and opportunities can ensure that the STS achieves its full potential as a cornerstone of Ghana's teacher education reforms, especially in improving foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes.

Background

Since 2015, Ghana has introduced comprehensive system-wide reforms to address a set of challenges in Initial Teacher Education, including:¹

Poor quality of entrants and consequent focus on remedial content. The three-year DBE, offered by CoEs as the standard entry qualification for new teachers entering public basic schools until 2018 attracted applicants who did not have the required Senior High School grades to enter university. The academic content knowledge of many of these applicants was poor, particularly in English, Mathematics, and Science, meaning that tutors in CoEs had to spend much of the first year of the DBE doing remedial teaching to address gaps in content knowledge.

Content-heavy and examination-oriented DBE curriculum. This lent itself to rote learning by student-teachers.² Tutors predominantly used the **lecture method of instruction**. There was little explicit link between the content of the teacher education curriculum and the pre-tertiary curriculum that student-teachers were expected to teach in basic schools.

Lack of practical exposure to teaching. Student-teachers only gained hands-on teaching experience during the third year of the DBE where they would spend an extended amount of time across two semesters in partner schools. The quality of mentoring and supervision within these partner schools was variable. Tutors did not consider some teachers as adequate role models. There was often no formal oversight agreement of roles and responsibilities between the district, metropolitan, and municipal education offices, which oversee basic schools, and the CoE.

Lack of specialization. Along with the content-heavy nature of the curriculum, lack of specialization meant that tutors had difficulty in preparing teachers who might on the one hand be teaching reading to Primary 1 pupils or who could be teaching English Literature to junior high school (JHS) 3 pupils once they were posted to basic schools after completing the DBE.

Limited resources and lack of appropriate policies and procedures of CoEs. Quality assurance, management and assessment processes within institutions were often inadequate and the quality of teaching and learning was variable. Many tutors lacked the required academic qualifications to teach at the tertiary level. This combination of factors meant that most CoEs were really ‘tertiary’ in name only.

¹ These findings are taken from *Teacher Training in Ghana- Does it Count? Multi-Site Teacher Education Research Project (MUSTER)*, Kwame Akyeampong, 2003; *‘Girls Unite and Pass (Participatory Approaches for Student Success) Business Case’*, DFID, 2012; *‘Girls Participatory Approaches for Student Success G-PASS Programme in Ghana- Technical Proposal’*, Cambridge Education, 2014

² For the purposes of this report ‘student-teachers’ are the young people in training in the CoEs of Education undertaking the B.Ed. who will become teachers when they graduate, ‘tutors’ are the staff in the Colleges of Education who are responsible for training the student-teachers, ‘teachers’ are what the student-teachers become once they have graduated and start working in basic schools. The term ‘mentors’ is used to describe the teachers working in partner schools who play the role of mentors to the student-teachers during the practical, classroom-based elements of their training, which is known as Supported Teaching in School (STS).

The combined impact of the factors outlined above meant that, in 2014, “Teachers coming through Ghana’s CoE have limited hands-on practical exposure to good teaching methodology and fall back on familiar rote-learning (DFID, 2012:9).”

It was against this context that Ghana’s Initial Teacher Education reforms were supported by a \$34 million six-year (2015-2020) package of support from the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) through Cambridge Education’s Transforming Teacher Education & Learning (T-TEL) programme.³ The starting point of the current reforms was the production of the NTS,⁴ which sets out a common expectation of Ghanaian teachers’ knowledge, behaviour, and practice. The NTS provided the foundation for subsequent reforms as they established a common set of agreed requirements which formed the foundation for teacher licensing, which was introduced for all new entrants to the teaching profession in 2018, and a review of the DBE initial teacher education curriculum. This review concluded that the DBE did not provide adequate training for beginning teachers to enable them to meet the requirements of the NTS.

Following the curriculum review, the Ministry of Education decided to replace the DBE with a new B.Ed. degree in Initial Teacher Education, commencing in 2018, which became the new minimum qualification for anyone aspiring to enter the teaching profession. The B.Ed. is aligned with a NTECF⁵ which set out the mandatory requirements that any B.Ed. in Initial Teacher Education programme would need to meet to be accredited by the National Accreditation Board (NAB). The NTECF required specialisations for Early Grade Education (KG–P3), Upper Primary (P4–P6), and JHS 1–3. These are the B.Ed. courses currently run by CoEs affiliated to Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), the University of Education Winneba (UoE), the University for Development Studies (UDS) and the University of Ghana (UG). CoEs affiliated to the University of Cape Coast (UCC) run a slightly different system with B.Ed. Early Childhood Education (KG-P3), Primary Education (P1-P6) and JHS 1-3.

The new B.Ed. degree was introduced across Ghana’s 46 public CoEs in September 2018 with the first cohort of 16,000 student teachers graduating in October 2022. The new B.Ed. in Initial Teacher Education represents a major shift in how teacher education is conceptualized and delivered in Ghana with the intention that it:

- i. fully prepares student teachers to teach the basic school curriculum, concentrating on relevant subject and pedagogic knowledge and introducing specialisms (KG-P3, P3-P6, JHS education);
- ii. equips student teachers to develop learners’ languages (Ghanaian Languages and English) and literacy so all can access the curriculum;

³ The Transforming Teacher Education & Learning (T-TEL) programme ran from 2015 to 2020 and was implemented by Cambridge Education. The Ghanaian team responsible for implementing T-TEL then established a Ghanaian-registered not-for-profit organization called Transforming Teaching, Education & Learning (T-TEL) in July 2020 which is completely independent of Cambridge Education. Further details of T-TEL’s work can be found here: [Our Work - T-TEL](#)

⁴ National Teachers’ Standards (NTS): <https://t-tel.org/download/national-teachers-standards/?wpdmdl=3301&refresh=64297217d167a1680437783>

⁵ NTECF: <https://t-tel.org/download/national-teacher-education-curriculum-framework/?wpdmdl=3287&refresh=64298d37878271680444727>

- iii. gives higher status to practical teaching experience through supported and assessed teaching in school, called Supported Teaching in School (STS);
- iv. widens the focus of assessment to include in-school learning and assignments as well as examinations, with students being assessed against the NTS;
- v. emphasizes a more interactive, learner-focused approach to training, modelling good teaching; and
- vi. is explicit in addressing vital cross-cutting issues: equity and inclusivity, assessment, core skills, professional values, action research and reflection.

Supported Teaching in School in the new B.Ed. curriculum

The extension of the practical STS component within the B.Ed. curriculum provides a very significant opportunity for student teachers to learn within different practical settings and is arguably the most important change brought about in Ghana's Initial Teacher Education reforms.

STS accounts for 30% of the total marks in the B.Ed. and takes place across all 4 years of the B.Ed. In the first year there is a greater focus on school-based, organised and directed learning experiences in school where students reflect on teachers' teaching and children's learning. This takes place one day a week for 6 weeks in Semester One and again in Semester Two. Subsequently, in future years, there is a greater focus on school-focused training where the student teacher, with the support of a mentor (a classroom teacher in a partner school), takes increasing amounts of responsibility for planning teaching and assessing the learners in their care alongside classroom enquiry and action research. During the four years student teachers teach and observe teaching in a range of schools to understand how children develop and learn in diverse contexts.

The structure of the STS over the four years of the B.Ed. is set out below.⁶

Year One: Beginning teaching – Provides support for the transition from school to college and recognizes that many student teachers will have come from school level education and from a wide range of backgrounds and experience. It introduces: the nature and core knowledge of subjects; supported teaching in school experiences; cross-cutting issues such as inclusion and equity in education; the school curriculum and approaches to teaching and learning, and the expectations for the learning and progress of learners in different subjects. Year One enables student teachers to be able to see their specialism within the wider curriculum.

⁶ Detailed information on the STS is taken from the official STS Year 4 School Placement Handbook (GTEC, NTC & T-TEL 2020) which can be accessed here: https://t-tel.org/download/supported-teaching-in-school_year-4_school-placement-handbook/?wpdmdl=8128&refresh=67b0878a919921739622282

STS Year One

By the end of the beginning placement student teachers, under the close guidance of a mentor, will be able to:

1. Work collaboratively, with 2-4 student teachers per class, to plan for and work with a small group or individual pupils, beginning to acquire the ability to consider children's learning, backgrounds, and experience.
2. Discuss features of the school curriculum, specifically focusing on English (literacy), Mathematics, and Science.
3. Undertake child studies focused on children's learning and progress.
4. Begin to identify the traits of the profession and qualities of a good teacher.
5. Reflect on and record their experiences in their professional portfolios – through this student teacher will begin working towards meeting the NTS.
6. May work towards 10-15% of class responsibility with a small group.

Duration 32 days: day visit and 4-week placement, in vacation, across 2 semesters.

Year Two: Developing teaching – student teachers select one of the three specialisms whilst key features from Year One continue to be developed as relevant to each specialism. The second year prepares student teachers to identify and assess weaknesses and barriers to learning for learners and carry out small-scale classroom enquiry under the guidance of mentors.

STS Year Two

By the end of the developing placement, under the close guidance of a mentor, the student teacher will be able to:

1. Teach, motivate, support, and manage (working individually and in pairs) the learning of small groups of pupils in the core subjects of English (literacy), mathematics, and science, and other subjects as appropriate to their specialism.
2. Begin to identify, assess, and analyses the needs of children, taking into account any issues of background and experience.
3. Discuss key features of the school curriculum, including issues of continuity and progression both within their specialism and across all the subjects they will teach.

4. Undertake small scale classroom enquiry focused on children's learning and progress, demonstrating an emerging ability to reflect on their developing understanding of teaching, learning, and assessment.
5. Demonstrate a high standard of professional conduct and positive professional values at all times and act as a good role model for pupils.
6. Those preparing for early grade or primary specialisms will have begun to develop knowledge of teaching the speaking, listening, reading, and writing of one Ghanaian language.
7. Demonstrate a growing understanding of the requirements of the NTS in terms of professional practice, knowledge, values and attitudes, in particular their professional role as a teacher, and be able to reflect on, record, and discuss evidence of their progress towards meeting the NTS.
8. May be working towards 30% of class responsibility with the small groups they are planning for and teaching.

Duration 32 days: including day visits and across 2 semesters and in vacation.

Year Three: Embedding teaching – student teachers will continue to build skills, knowledge, and understanding in their chosen specialism. They will co-plan and co-teach groups of learners and whole classes, carry out small-scale classroom enquiries, and provide evidence of working towards meeting the NTS. Year Three includes preparation for Year Four, semester one: final supported teaching in school (internship), and for significant classroom-based enquiry and action research projects.

STS Year Three

By the end of the embedding placement the student teacher, with mentor guidance and support, will be able to:

1. Teach, motivate, manage, and extend the learning of classes with increasing consistency and independence, whatever their socio-cultural and linguistic background and regardless of age, aptitude, and ability. This will involve co-planning, co-teaching, and co-assessment with mentors and their ongoing presence in the classroom.
2. Plan for and teach sequences of lessons across all required subjects with regard for cross-cutting skills and issues of equity and inclusivity.
3. Undertake small-scale action research, evaluate, and reflect on their teaching and on pupils' learning to support students in improving their teaching and assessment.
4. Demonstrate emerging leadership qualities in the classroom and to contribute to wider school life, being guided by the legal and ethical codes of conduct required by a professional teacher.

5. Provide evidence and discuss how, with support from their mentor, they are able to meet the Teachers' Standards through much of their teaching and all of their professional conduct. They will be able to agree and act on targets to further improve their teaching.
6. May work towards 50-60% of class responsibility with agreed classes and periods in accordance with agreed placement requirements.

Duration 36 days: including day visits across 2 semesters.

Year Four: Extending Teaching: Following a supported teaching in school internship in Semester One, during Semester Two students will return to school to complete some courses. By the end of the fourth year, student teachers will: plan, teach, and assess their learners independently and with increasing consistency; exhibit the ethical codes of conduct, values, and attitudes expected of a teacher; carry out extensive action research projects; and provide evidence of meeting the National Teachers' Standards in full.

STS Year Four

By the end of the extending placement the student teacher, with mentor guidance, will be able to:

1. Intently and independently plan for teaching, motivate and extend the learning of all children whatever their socio-cultural and linguistic background and regardless of age, aptitude, and ability.
2. Provide evidence in their planning and teaching of a comprehensive understanding of the school curriculum and of the age-related expectations before, during, and after their specialism.
3. Undertake an action research project to improve the learning opportunities of an agreed group of pupils to promote greater inclusion; and through this develop their teaching, classroom management, and organization strategies.
4. Demonstrate effective, growing leadership qualities in the classroom and in the wider school community and be guided by the legal and ethical codes of conduct required by a professional teacher.
5. Reflect on, discuss, and provide evidence of how they meet the NTS in full and identify targets for further development.
6. Have the qualities and attributes expected of a good teacher and fully meet the NTS.
7. May work towards 80% of class teaching responsibility with agreed classes and periods in accordance with agreed placement requirements.

Duration 60 days in school: these can be either residential or non-residential. 60 days in college working on action research project and professional portfolio and preparing for viva as appropriate.

The STS has proved the most challenging aspect of the B.Ed. to implement effectively, as evidenced by the findings of a comprehensive Fidelity of Implementation (FoI) assessment carried out by GTEC, with support from T-TEL, across all 46 CoEs in 2022.⁷

We currently have limited evidence to assess the influence of student teachers' experience of STS on their competencies, skills and behaviour. In response to this gap, Transforming Teaching, Education & Learning (T-TEL), in partnership with the University of Cape Coast (UCC) and Education Sub-Saharan Africa (ESSA), seeks to conduct research in CoEs and partner schools across Ghana to investigate the role of Supported Teaching in School (STS) in improving the teaching of Foundational Literacy & Numeracy for student teachers in Years 3 and 4 of their Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) in Initial Teacher Education (KG-P3 specialism).

This report therefore presents a detailed account of the perspectives and experiences of mentors and lead mentors involved in the STS programme in Ghana. Within the STS framework, mentors (basic school teachers) and lead mentors (typically headteachers of basic schools) play a pivotal role in supporting and guiding student-teachers during their practicum in designated practising schools.

The report focuses on their views and experiences regarding key aspects of the STS, including preparatory approaches, the use and availability of TLRs, understanding and application of the NTS, the impact of the programme, challenges encountered, and recommendations for improvement.

This study forms part of Phase II of the research project investigating the role of the STS in improving the teaching of foundational literacy and numeracy. While Phase I centred on stakeholders from Colleges of Education, such as principals, vice principals, STS coordinators, literacy tutors, and numeracy tutors, this segment of Phase II focuses on school-based implementers. Through in-depth interviews, the study captures the perspectives and lived experiences of mentors and lead mentors to complement earlier findings and build a more holistic understanding of STS implementation.

Objectives of the STS Phase 2

The main objective of this phase 2 was to explore the perspectives and experiences of mentors and lead mentors involved in the STS programme in Ghana. The core research questions guiding this section of the study were:

⁷ GTEC FoI Report : https://t-tel.org/download/report_fidelity-of-implementation-foi-of-b-ed-programme/?wpdmdl=8130&refresh=642c12e4634d01680610020

1. How do mentors and lead mentors experience and perceive the Supported Teaching in Schools (STS) programme, particularly in relation to mentoring practices, performance, the National Teachers' Standards (NTS), and the use of Teaching and Learning Resources (TLRs)?
2. What is the perceived value and impact of the STS programme on school-based actors (mentees, mentors, schools, and learners)?
3. What are the key challenges and gaps faced by mentors and lead mentors in the implementation of the STS programme?
4. What are the recommendations to strengthen the design and implementation of the STS programme?

Methodology

A qualitative descriptive design was adopted to explore the perspectives of mentors and lead mentors involved in the STS programme. This approach enables researchers to provide comprehensive accounts of phenomena situated within their natural contexts, emphasising close engagement with the data and prioritising interpretive summaries over abstraction. The design's flexibility also accommodates multiple data collection methods, making it suitable for capturing context-rich educational experiences.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews guided by a semi-structured protocol. Participants were drawn from 41 practising schools, primarily at the basic level, which serve as service stations for student teachers undertaking their STS. To ensure geographical diversity, participants were purposively selected from the Coastal, Forest, and Savannah ecological zones, reflecting the distribution of Colleges of Education across Ghana.

In total, 41 participants were interviewed, comprising 21 mentors and 20 lead mentors. Background characteristics collected included role (mentor or lead mentor), sex, years of teaching experience, school ownership (public or private), and ecological zone. Of the participants, 51% were male. Teaching experience ranged from 2 to 16 years, with an average of approximately 12 years across participants. Most mentors and lead mentors sampled were based in the Forest Zone (46%), followed by the Coastal Zone (34%) and the Savannah Zone (20%).

These diverse characteristics, summarised in Table 1, provide the basis for understanding the perspectives shared in this study.

Table 1: Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Participants

Participant Characteristics	Frequency (<i>N</i> = 41)	Percentage %
Role		
Mentor	21	51
Lead Mentor	20	49
Sex		
Male	21	51
Female	20	49
Duration of Practice		
2-5 years	10	24
6-10 years	16	39
>10 years	15	37
Zone		
Coastal	19	46
Forest	14	34
Savannah	8	20

Data Analysis and Results

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically using NVivo version 11. Reporting of qualitative findings followed the consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research. Both inductive and deductive techniques were applied to the text data.

Analysis of the transcripts revealed seven (7) main themes: training approaches, experiences and student teacher performance, TLRs, national teachers' standards, delivery challenges, perceived value and impact of the STS programme, and recommendations for improvement. These themes and the corresponding thematic framework are presented below.

Theme 1: Student Teacher Training Approaches

This theme centred on the training approaches provided to the student teachers as part of their training in the STS schools. The results are presented under five (5) sub-themes which were orientation; mentorship and instructional guidance; integration through supervised observations; feedback, monitoring, and evaluation; and emotional and social support.

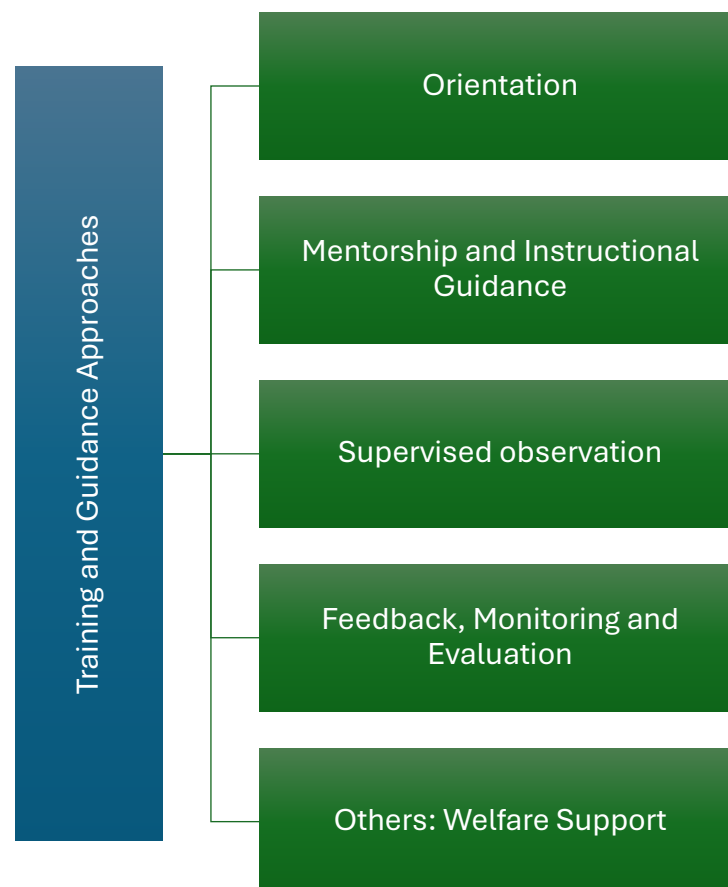


Figure 1: Key approaches adopted by mentors and lead mentors to train student teachers during the STS.

The Use of Orientation to Build Mentors and Mentees Relationships

This sub-theme captures how student teachers were received and integrated into the STS schools. Participants reported that upon arrival, student teachers were oriented to the school's environment, including its rules, culture, and operational routines. As part of this process, student teachers were provided with basic institutional information and introduced to the learning context:

“We took their details, and we also took them through a short orientation. The name of the school, the date it was established, our time of reporting and closing, the dos and don'ts, and then one or two things that they need to know about the school.”
(Lead Mentor, Male, Forest Zone)

Following orientation, student teachers were assigned to classes and mentors. This assignment process was based on factors such as student teachers' subject specialisation, the expertise of mentors, or, in some cases, random allocation. Some placements were also pre-determined by the Colleges of Education. Explaining how student teachers are allocated to mentors in his school, a participant noted:

“They usually come with their electives, and they have their major. So, I inquire from them in which subject they majored. ... Then, through that, I allocate them to their respective mentors handling such subjects.” (Lead Mentor, Male, Coastal Zone)

Training through Mentorship and Instructional Guidance: The Guiding Practice

Mentorship and instructional guidance were central to the STS experience, as mentors played an active role in supporting student teachers' professional development. A major area of focus was lesson planning. Mentors noted that many student teachers struggled to align their lesson plans with the curriculum and often relied on online materials without adapting them to the local classroom context. As one mentor noted:

“Their lesson notes... some will be writing notes as if they are writing an essay... Then I will guide them to write a good lesson note.” (Lead Mentor, Female, Coastal Zone)

Mentors worked collaboratively with student teachers, reviewing lesson notes and providing step-by-step guidance to ensure quality and relevance. According to a lead mentor, “*They [student teachers] prepare a lesson plan and show it to their mentor before it comes to me... working with the mentor, we guide them.*” (Lead Mentor, Male, Forest Zone)

Beyond lesson planning, mentors trained student teachers in the use of teaching and learning resources (TLRs) and appropriate pedagogical strategies. These included classroom management techniques, the preparation of contextually relevant TLRs, and the adoption of activity-based learning methods. Play-based methods were especially encouraged under the

new curriculum, particularly in numeracy, to reduce learner anxiety and improve engagement. Some participants noted:

“We go through classroom management, using TLRs and making TLRs.” (Mentor, Male, Coastal Zone)

“When we use play-based or games methods to teach ... it helps the learners develop a love for the subject.” (Lead Mentor, Female, Forest Zone)

Mentorship also involved supervision and reflective practice. Mentors regularly observed lesson delivery, provided feedback, and engaged in co-teaching when necessary. These activities were complemented by training and support from the Colleges of Education and participation in Professional Learning Community (PLC) sessions. A lead mentor shared her experience as follows:

“They join our PLC sessions... anything that is bothering you, we’ll have time for it to be sorted out.” (Lead Mentor, Female, Coastal Zone)

At the start of their placement, student teachers typically observed mentors' teaching for one to two weeks. This helped them understand classroom dynamics, learner behaviour, and effective delivery. The process was reciprocal, with mentors later observing and guiding the student teachers as they taught. For example, a mentor noted: *“I will teach, she will observe... next time she teaches, and I will observe”*. (Mentor, Male, Coastal Zone)

Building Mentee Competences through Feedback, Monitoring, and Evaluation

The results indicate a continuous review and provision of constructive feedback by the mentors and lead mentors to their student teachers. The participants revealed that they provide feedback to the student teachers following their performance of an assigned task. The lead mentors also provided feedback to the mentors. When explaining the issue of feedback, some participants had this to say:

“I mark her activities, then I sit down and discuss the things she is supposed to do right.” (Lead Mentor, Male, Forest Zone).

“I observe them... then I give corrections or advice.” (Lead Mentor, Male, Forest Zone)

Beyond Academics: Welfare and Social Support for Student Teachers (Mentees)

The results further show the social support, particularly welfare support, that mentors provide to the student teachers in the practicing schools. In explaining the support, a female lead mentor in the coastal zone, for instance, reported that *“We normally give them free accommodation. So, everything about the accommodation is done by the school and the community. Their light bulb, water issues, everything. And the rent and everything is done by the school and the*

community”. Also, in some rural areas, the provision of foodstuffs to student teachers was reported. “Every Monday, they bring food for them. Food stuffs”. (Lead Mentor, Male, Forest Zone)

Theme 2: Experiences of Mentoring Student Teachers and their Performance

The second theme highlights mentors' and lead mentors' experiences of mentoring student teachers and their performances. The results show that the mentors and lead mentors had positive experiences in mentoring the student teachers. The results were organized around three sub-themes: student teacher teaching experiences, student teachers' performance, and mentors' performance.

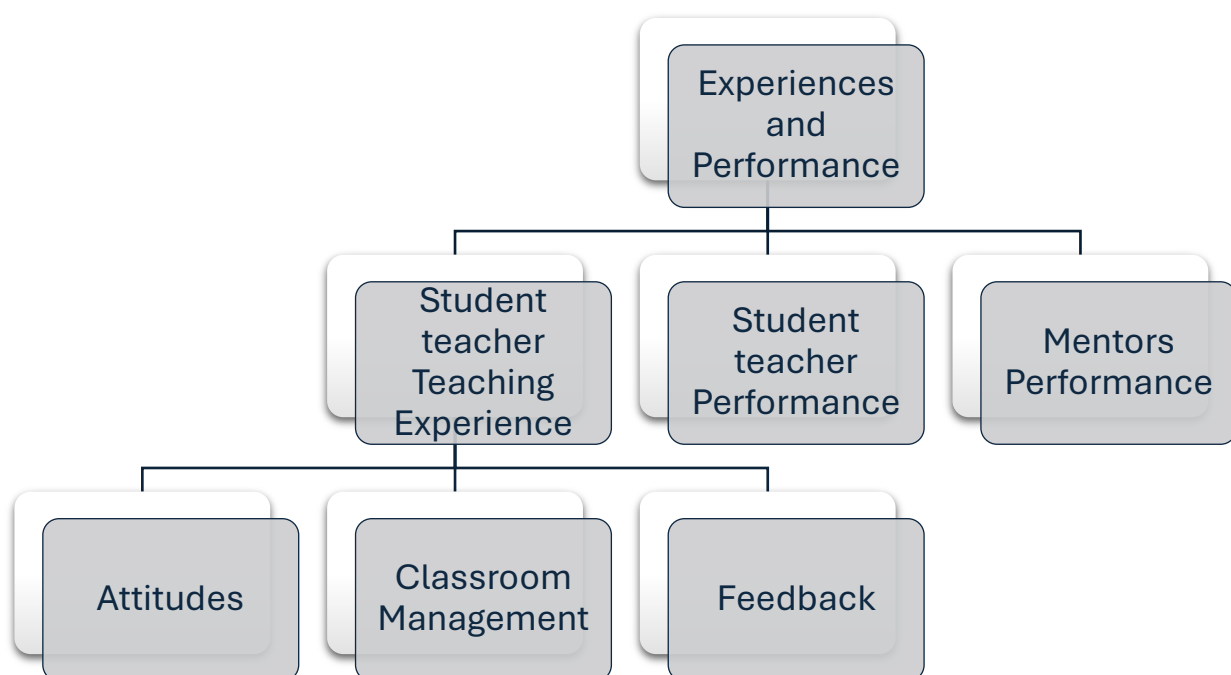


Figure 2: Experiences of mentoring student teachers in the practicing schools

Learning to Teach: Early Classroom Experiences of Student Teachers

Mentors generally described student teachers as respectful, punctual, hardworking, and eager to learn. They interacted positively with staff and pupils and were open to feedback. As one mentor noted, “the student teachers demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviors, including respectfulness, hard work, and punctuality” (Mentor, Female, Forest Zone).

However, classroom management posed early challenges. Due to limited experience, some student teachers struggled with class control, though many improved over time with guidance. One mentor explained, “student teachers often face initial difficulties in class control due to their lack of experience...” (Mentor, Male, Forest Zone).

Student teachers also showed growing competence in using questioning techniques to engage learners and check understanding. Mentors supported them in refining these practices. Feedback played a key role, as student teachers actively sought advice on difficult topics, and mentors addressed areas such as lesson delivery and professionalism. As noted by a participant, *“Student teachers sometimes seek feedback from mentors on instructional challenges...”* (Lead Mentor, Female, Coastal Zone).

Time management was another area where support was needed. While some student teachers adapted well, others had difficulty sticking to the timetable or pacing their lessons. As one mentor noted, *“some student teachers face difficulties in adhering to the school timetable...”* (Mentor, Female, Forest Zone).

Performance Variations of the Student Teachers

The results show that while the STS programme generally promotes meaningful engagement between student teachers and learners, as well as fosters professional growth, the quality of experiences remains uneven. On one hand, mentors observed that many student teachers positively impacted pupils’ behaviour and learning outcomes, often coming well-prepared and demonstrating initiative in their instructional roles.

“Some student teachers positively influence pupils’ behaviour and academic engagement and show strong professional growth.” (Lead Mentor, Male, Forest Zone)

“Student teachers generally demonstrate preparedness for their lessons and provide necessary materials for instruction.” (Lead Mentor, Male, Forest Zone)

On the other hand, not all student teachers adjusted smoothly. Some struggled with the demands of the school environment, showing inconsistent levels of commitment, which occasionally resulted in performance below expectations or compared unfavourably to past cohorts.

“Other student teachers face challenges in areas such as adapting to the school environment, demonstrating consistent dedication, and maintaining the same level of performance as previous student teachers.” (Lead Mentor, Male, Coastal Zone)

These contrasting experiences underscore the importance of differentiated support, ongoing mentorship, and clear performance expectations to help all student teachers navigate the transition from theory to practice more effectively.

Mentors Self-appraisal of Personal Performance

Mentors and lead mentors generally viewed themselves as performing competently in their support roles during the STS programme. They described offering guidance on key areas such as lesson planning, TLR preparation, and classroom supervision. Experienced mentors expressed confidence in their ability to support student teachers, often relying on their years of

classroom practice and familiarity with pedagogical standards. The following were typical observations:

“...the mentors provide valuable support to student teachers in areas such as lesson planning, preparation of teaching and learning materials, and preparation for supervision visits ...Mentors with more experience feel well-equipped to guide student teachers effectively, drawing on their accumulated knowledge and understanding of best practices.” (Lead mentor, Male, Coastal Zone).

“We [mentors] are perceived to be performing well in our roles, with positive feedback on our availability and guidance.” (Mentor, Male, Coastal Zone)

Notwithstanding this, the findings also suggest some variation in how actively mentors engaged with student teachers. While some were consistently available and proactive, others were less involved, pointing to the need for more standardised expectations and perhaps refresher training to ensure consistent support across all partner schools.

Theme 3: Teaching and Learning Resources

The third theme focuses on teaching and learning resources (TLRs) from the perspective of mentors. The findings reveal that most STS schools lacked adequate TLRs, and while some student teachers could develop their own, many relied on external craftsmen due to limited skills. These are presented below under two sub-themes: availability of TLRs and capacity to develop them (see Figure 3).

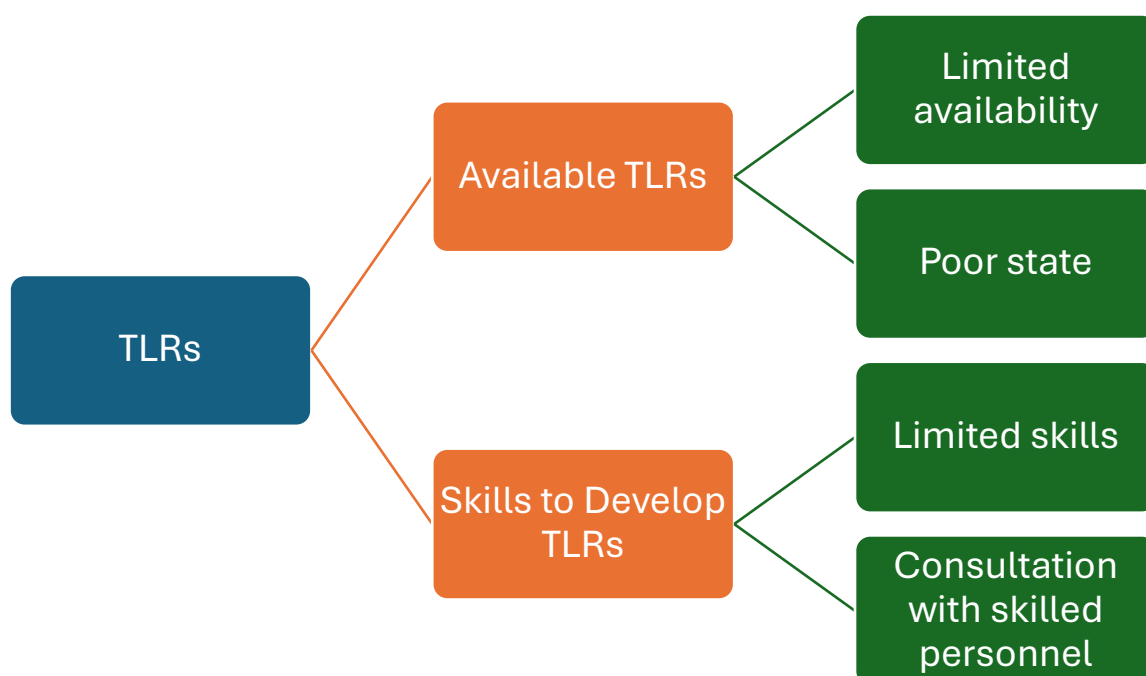


Figure 3: Availability and skills to develop teaching and learning resources

Availability of Teaching and Learning Resources (TLRs): Constraints and Improvisations

Participants highlighted that STS schools require a wide range of teaching and learning resources (TLRs), from traditional tools like textbooks and cardboards to digital technologies such as computers and projectors. They emphasized the role of TLRs in deepening learner understanding. As one lead mentor explained:

“...when more teaching and learning resources are used in the classroom, the learners have a feel of it and how it is used, it makes them comprehend more than just listening and talking” (Lead Mentor, Savannah Zone).

While some materials, such as cardboards, markers, and textbooks were available, mentors noted frequent shortages that required improvisation.

“Cardboards, markers... sometimes you will be there and they will come, ‘Sir, I need the globe, I need a football.’ We provide their needs... the resources that they need for them.” (Lead Mentor, Male, Coastal Zone)

In resource-limited contexts, mentors often used personal devices or relied on learners to bring items.

“We are still lacking, but we improvise. Sometimes, we ask the learners to bring them... I use my phone to show them videos and pictures... Sometimes I go to the café to download materials to support the learners.” (Mentor, Female, Coastal Zone)

Limited Mentee Skills to Develop TLRs

Mentors shared mixed views on student teachers’ ability to develop their own TLRs. They indicated that while a few student teachers demonstrated initiative and creativity, most lacked the practical skills for TLR development. Mentors indicated that some student teachers made attempts to prepare TLRs aligned with their lessons, though this was often challenging.

“They are doing it, they have started doing it, so, in all their preparation, we ask them to find every TLR that suits the teaching... yet this is not always an easy thing for them.” (Mentor, Male, Forest Zone)

Barriers such as a lack of drawing skills or difficulty interpreting design ideas limited what student teachers could produce on their own. Some mentors attributed these challenges to limited field exposure and practical experience, especially for those encountering classroom realities for the first time. In many cases, mentors had to step in to guide the process, sometimes even searching for appropriate materials alongside the student teacher. These views are expressed in the following quotes:

“Some are able to do it... but the problem is where maybe the person doesn't know how to draw. And then other things. That's where the problem is.” (Mentor, Female, Forest Zone)

“It’s their first time. Even though they have been going out to campus, getting full-time with them... comes with a little bit of challenges... As time goes on, they will be learning.” (Mentor, Female, Coastal Zone)

“At times when they find difficulty and I prompt them... then I say, okay, let’s search and look at it... then we say, oh, okay, this one is fine... we are okay now.” (Mentor, Female, Forest Zone)

Theme 4: National Teachers’ Standards (NTS)

The study found that knowledge and application of the NTS were generally low among participants, especially among mentors. While some reported adherence to general teaching practices, they struggled to demonstrate how these aligned with the NTS. These findings are summarised under the themes of knowledge and application of the NTS (see Figure 4).

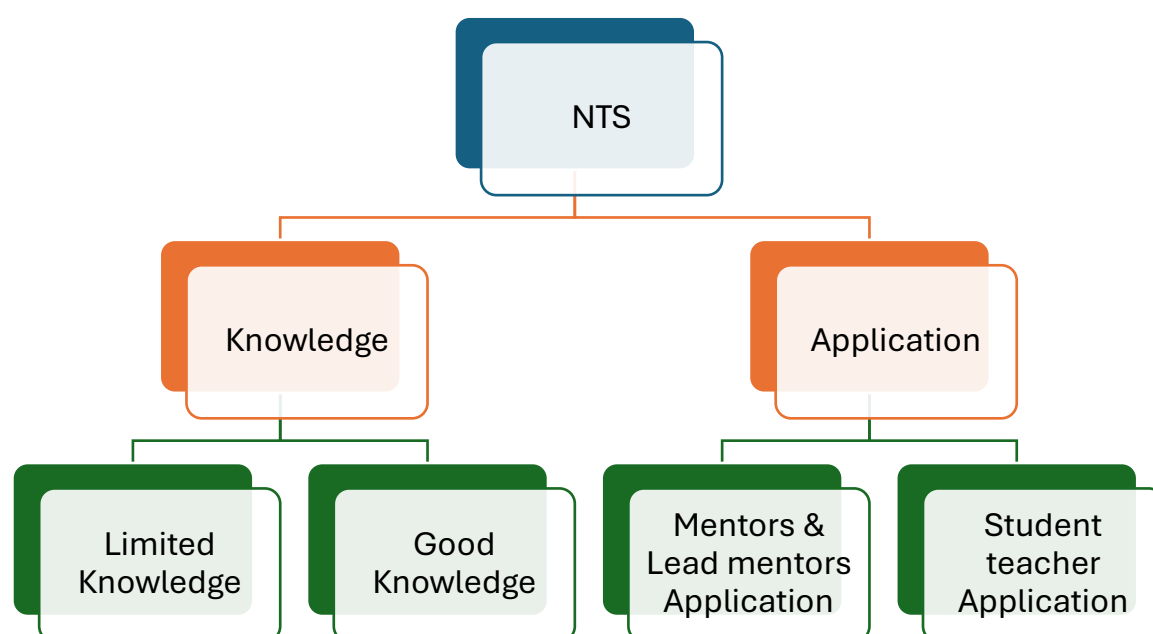


Figure 4: Knowledge and Application of the National Teachers’ Standards in the Supported Teaching in Schools Programme

Limited Knowledge of the NTS among Mentors

The findings revealed that most participants had limited or superficial knowledge of the NTS, often confusing it with the STS programme or general teaching practices. This limited understanding was particularly evident among mentors. As one explained, “*We didn’t have the chance to study it in school... I don’t have any in-depth knowledge of it*” (Mentor, Male, Coastal

Zone). Another admitted, *“I don't really know anything about the National Teachers' Standard”* (Mentor, Female, Coastal Zone).

Only a few participants demonstrated even a vague understanding of the NTS and its implications for professional accountability. As one mentor described, *“It alerts you on what you are doing... it always awakens you; ... you have to do the correct things so you're not found wanting”* (Mentor, Female, Forest Zone).

Limited Application of the NTS

The application of the NTS by mentors and lead mentors was often linked to classroom practices such as the use of TLRs, maintaining class control, modelling professional behaviour, and promoting learner engagement. While a few demonstrated structured application, some described how their teaching aligned with aspects of the NTS.

“The use of TLRs is what I normally use... I open the gate for the learners to express their thoughts... that's how I use the NTS.” (Mentor, Male, Forest Zone)

Another mentor highlighted the importance of being a role model and applying questioning strategies in line with professional expectations:

“I always have to set a good example... align TLR with what I'm teaching... I also apply questioning skills... and avoid using non-verbal insults. The NTS helps to align and not go contrary to what the teaching field requires.” (Mentor, Female, Forest Zone)

Mentors also expressed expectations regarding how student teachers should apply the NTS in practice, particularly in fostering inclusive participation and connecting with learners.

“They are supposed to apply the NTS by introducing learners to what they are doing... bringing them closer so they feel involved and happy.” (Mentor, Female, Forest Zone)

Theme 5: Challenges of the STS Programme

Mentors and lead mentors reported several challenges affecting the STS programme. These included inadequate resources and infrastructure (e.g., broken-down buses, lack of TLRs and FLN materials, and insufficient classrooms and furniture). They also cited poor attitudes among some student teachers (e.g., absenteeism, especially among pregnant students or those with children, and phone use during class). It was also reported that mentors, in some cases, also exhibited these attitudes, particularly, absenteeism and low motivation. Structural challenges such as labour strike actions and timetable clashes with school activities were also noted. Additionally, concerns were raised about impromptu visits by supervisors. These issues are summarised in Figure 5.

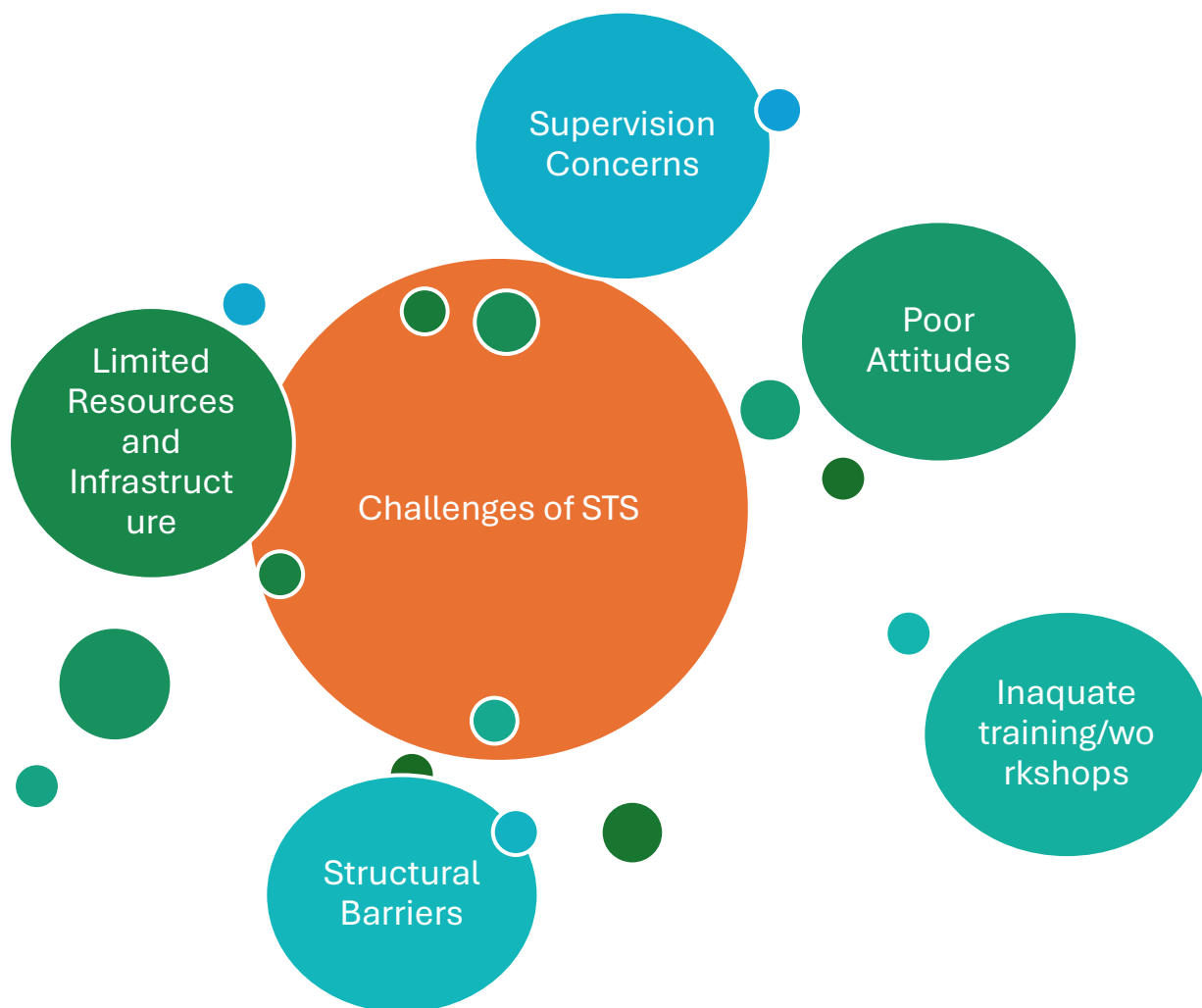


Figure 5: Challenges of the Supported Teaching in Schools Programme

Mentors and lead mentors highlighted several pressing challenges related to resources and infrastructure that hindered the effective delivery of the STS programme. Transportation was a major concern, with schools relying on old or insufficient vehicles to convey student teachers. As one mentor noted, *“Their transportation system is a problem... the number of cars is too small, and they are too old. Sometimes the College has to rent buses just to transport them”* (Lead Mentor, Male, Forest Zone).

Inadequate TLRs further compounded the challenge. Participants described a lack of essential materials, particularly textbooks, many of which were damaged or outdated. *“The textbooks are not there... and those that are available, the first 10–15 pages are gone. It takes years before new ones come,”* a mentor explained (Lead Mentor, Male, Coastal Zone).

Compromised school infrastructure also made it difficult to receive and support student teachers. Classrooms were overcrowded, and appropriate seating arrangements for both student teachers and mentors during observations were often lacking. As noted by a lead mentor, *“The facility is not conducive... sometimes there’s no place for them to sit and observe. Even mentors have nowhere to sit during lessons”* (Lead Mentor, Male, Savannah Zone).

Accommodation shortages posed additional challenges, especially in urban areas. Without dedicated housing, student teachers were forced to share spaces with friends, relatives, or church members. As one mentor observed:

“Getting rooms is very challenging... they perch with friends or relatives because there are no staff bungalows or housing for them” (Lead Mentor, Male, Coastal Zone).

Finally, the issue of limited or absent incentives was raised. While some schools had previously received support, others reported no assistance despite increased responsibilities. For example:

“For the past two or three years, our school hasn’t received anything, even though our workload has increased” (Lead Mentor, Male, Forest Zone).

Another added, “The allowance is not enough... we try to support them with food and let them know they can come to us with any challenge” (Mentor, Male, Forest Zone).

Commitment Challenges: Absenteeism and Excessive Use of Mobile Phones

Absenteeism emerged as a notable challenge arising from both student teachers and mentors. Some student teachers were frequently absent or arrived late, undermining the structure and intent of the STS programme. At the same time, a few mentors admitted to relaxing their responsibilities or reporting late, particularly when student teachers were present, assuming they could manage on their own. These attendance issues were further complicated by weak communication between mentors and supervisors, making it difficult to track absenteeism or intervene effectively. These experiences are reflected in the quotes below:

“Some of the student teachers don’t want to learn. They come for a week and break for a week... some don’t come to school early despite this being a programme that goes with time.” (Lead Mentor, Male, Coastal Zone)

“I expect to hear something from the mentor when a student teacher is absent... but sometimes the mentor cannot give accurate information.” (Lead Mentor, Male, Forest Zone)

“At times, we say the student teachers are there, so I will not come to school early or I will not do my job.” (Lead Mentor, Male, Savannah Zone)

Unregulated phone use among student teachers was also reported as a distraction, often limiting their engagement in classroom activities. Mentors noted that without close supervision, phone use could interfere with the purpose of the programme, as noted as in the following quote:

“Some of them, when they come, they always stay on their phones... if you don’t monitor them, they’ll end up doing different things from what they came to do.” (Lead Mentor, Male, Coastal Zone)

Additionally, some student teachers had difficulty adapting to the school environment or building rapport with staff and pupils, which negatively affected their participation.

“Some do not relate well with the people they are going (working) with. Some have issues adjusting to their environment.” (Mentor, Female, Forest Zone)

Inadequate Workshop and Weak Feedback Structures

Training opportunities for mentors and lead mentors involved in the STS programme were reported to be inadequate. Many participants indicated that they had never received formal training for the programme, while others noted that any prior training had taken place several years earlier. Consequently, most relied on personal experience or peer support to guide student teachers. One lead mentor shared:

“I haven’t had any workshop concerning this program, so I’m just using my experience... apart from the PLC, I’ve handed them (student teachers) over to class teachers to guide them.” (Lead Mentor, Male, Savannah Zone)

Even those who had previously attended training sessions expressed concern about the lack of continuity of such opportunities and the lack of engagement when supervisors visited. For example:

“Some years ago, the college had (organised) a workshop for us... but recently, they’ve stopped. When they come now, it’s just to assess; they don’t listen to grievances. If we had regular workshops, we could also suggest improvements.” (Mentor, Male, Forest Zone)

These accounts point to a critical need for consistent, structured training and more participatory engagement between STS coordinators and field mentors.

Structural Barriers Undermining the STS Programme

The implementation of the STS programme was undermined by several structural challenges, notably lecturers’ industrial strike actions, programme scheduling conflicts, language barriers, and limited parental involvement. Mentors highlighted that frequent strike actions in Colleges of Education disrupted the academic calendar, leaving student teachers underprepared for practical teaching. As one mentor explained, “*Their frequent strikes are one of the major problems. ... You may say it has no effect, but you’ll feel the impact later. There are things you’re supposed to learn in school but miss due to the strikes, and when you come here, you’re expected to apply what you haven’t fully grasped*” (Lead Mentor, Male, Forest Zone).

Another recurring issue was the clash between STS activities and other school programmes, particularly sports and extracurricular events, which often disrupted teaching schedules and delayed observation visits:

“At times they are supposed to come, but you don’t see them because of sports and other activities. ... You wait all morning, and when you call the school, they say there was a programme. That affects the smooth running of the STS” (Lead Mentor, Male, Savannah Zone).

Language barriers also created difficulties, especially in regions where student teachers were unfamiliar with the local language. This was particularly problematic at the lower primary level. For example,

“Most of them who are here are not Ewe-speaking, but they’re placed in lower classes... it’s not helping us in terms of lesson delivery. Those who can’t speak the L1 should be moved to upper primary” (Lead Mentor, Male, Coastal Zone).

Parental support was reported to be weak in many partner schools, especially in rural areas. Mentors noted that parents were often unwilling to provide basic supplies or engage with the school. For example,

“When you ask a parent to pay even 1 cedi, they won’t. Apart from the morning food they give their wards, they won’t support anything. They believe everything is free – uniforms, books, everything” (Lead Mentor, Male, Coastal Zone).

A few participants noted that disciplinary practices occasionally created tension between schools and parents. Some mentors reported that student teachers’ use of corporal punishment, such as caning, and strict classroom management approaches often triggered complaints from parents.

“One of the challenges is the use of the cane... when they use it, parents begin to pursue them, and sometimes the derogatory statements from parents are so bad” (Lead Mentor, Male, Savannah Zone).

Collectively, these structural barriers point to the need for better academic continuity, improved coordination between institutions and schools, more context-sensitive placements, and stronger partnerships with parents and communities to support the goals of the STS programme.

Uncoordinated Supervision Visits

Mentors and lead mentors expressed concern about the lack of timely communication regarding supervision visits. Supervisors were often reported to arrive unannounced, disrupting scheduled lessons, extracurricular activities, and leaving student teachers unprepared. These unplanned visits interfered with the schools’ regular operations and placed additional strain on both mentors and student teachers.

“They (supervision visits) are helping, but they are also eating into our time... for them, you must give all the space to teach and achieve their goal for the day.” (Mentor, Female, Savannah Zone)

“When they come impromptu, maybe the person has not prepared. ... You must stop the lesson for supervision before continuing.” (Mentor, Male, Savannah Zone)

“We were supposed to be on the field doing sports, but because of the visit, we had to keep the children in class for supervision.” (Lead Mentor, Forest Zone)

These accounts underscore the need for improved coordination and advanced communication between supervisors and practicing schools to minimize disruption and support more effective observation.

Challenges in Foundational Literacy and Literacy (FLN)

Mentors reported key challenges affecting foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) instruction, including poor learner background, weak parental support, and low learner readiness. Many learners entered basic school with limited exposure to English, often due to non-literate or absent parents. Student teachers also struggled with early-grade learners who lacked basic reading and writing skills. These challenges are reflected in the following quotes:

“Their background mostly is very poor... the only place they hear English is in school. Getting them to speak it becomes a bit of a problem.” (Lead Mentor, Forest Zone)

“They are now coming from KG2... they don’t know how to read, don’t know how to write. Last time, I faced a lot of challenges because they couldn’t write.” (Mentor, Female, Coastal Zone)

Parental neglect further compounded these issues, with reports of children arriving at school tired, hungry, or emotionally unsupported. Sharing her views on the issue of parental neglect, a mentor noted:

“Some parents are not responsible. ... You find children sleeping in class or going hungry. Sometimes you have to feed them yourself. That becomes a challenge to the student teachers.” (Mentor, Female, Forest Zone)

These conditions made it difficult for student teachers to deliver effective FLN instruction and required them to provide both academic and emotional support beyond their expected role.

Theme 6: Perceived Value and Impact of the STS Programme

Mentors and lead mentors who participated in the study expressed strong support for the Supported Teaching in Schools (STS) programme, highlighting its importance in shaping competent, confident, and professionally grounded teachers. Their narratives revealed both their perspectives on the value of the STS and its practical impact on key stakeholders – student teachers, mentors, schools, and learners.

Value and Perceived Benefits of the STS Programme

The STS was widely viewed as a vital mechanism for bridging the gap between theory and practice. Participants described it as essential in providing student teachers with real classroom exposure and helping them internalise pedagogical practices. This practical immersion allowed student teachers to better understand learner diversity, the demands of lesson delivery, and the nuances of learner engagement.

“It’s a program to give the students a practical experience in their field. So that when they finish school, they will not be found wanting where they will be posted.” (Lead Mentor, Female, Coastal Zone)

“I think this also gives an opportunity for the students to come and observe and also take part in teaching, which gives them a fair idea of what they are going to meet in the real world after they are done with their training.” (Lead Mentor, Male, Forest Zone)

Mentors also saw the STS as a tool for reinforcing professional standards. It facilitated mentorship, guided practice, and the development of essential teaching skills such as lesson planning, classroom management, and differentiated instruction.

“By the time they leave... they are perfecting their lesson notes, delivery skills, and interactions.” (Lead Mentor, Female, Coastal Zone)

“It is aiming to achieve the national standard of teaching that we want... in line with the National Teaching Council.” (Lead Mentor, Male, Savannah Zone)

The programme also allowed student teachers to better understand the day-to-day realities of school settings, including school norms, routines, and community relationships, which helped ease their transition into full-time roles. This understanding, mentors noted, was crucial for developing practical teaching confidence and building effective learner-teacher relationships.

“It gives them a fair idea... of the norms of the school, the rules, and all other things.” (Lead Mentor, Male, Forest Zone)

“Without STS, they don’t have a feel of the school or how to interact with the children... but with STS, they build on these before they go out.” (Lead Mentor, Male, Coastal Zone)

Impact of the STS on Student Teachers Performance and Professional Development

Student teachers were reported as the primary beneficiaries of the STS. Mentors reported that the programme significantly improved student teachers’ teaching competence, confidence, and use of Teaching and Learning Resources (TLRs). It gave them the opportunity to apply

theoretical knowledge, adapt to different learner needs, and experiment with a range of teaching methods.

“The STS provides trainees with hands-on experience, exposing them to the realities and challenges of classroom environments.” (Lead Mentor, Male, Forest Zone)

“Through STS, trainees come prepared, having reviewed their lesson notes and TLRs. They demonstrate strong content knowledge.” (Mentor, Male, Forest Zone)

The programme also helped student teachers develop confidence, particularly in managing early-grade literacy and numeracy instruction. Through classroom engagement and feedback from mentors, trainees refined their delivery methods and improved their ability to cater to diverse learning needs.

“The practical experience gained through teaching helps build confidence.” (Lead Mentor, Female, Coastal Zone)

“She finds numeracy very interesting. With counters, sticks, and other tools, she engages learners well.” (Mentor, Female, Forest Zone)

Furthermore, the STS supported the formation of professional relationships between student teachers and their mentors. These interactions frequently extended beyond the practicum period, providing lasting networks for support and knowledge exchange.

“Student teachers maintain contact with us, seeking advice and sharing strategies.” (Mentor, Male, Coastal Zone)

“The interactions form supportive communities and networking opportunities within the profession.” (Lead Mentor, Forest Zone)

Impact of the STS on Mentors Professional Development and Workload

Mentors also experienced professional benefits from the STS. They appreciated the mutual learning that occurred through their engagement with student teachers, which often introduced them to fresh perspectives and newer teaching strategies. In some cases, these interactions reignited mentors’ own reflective practices and commitment to their role.

“We learn new teaching methods and ideas from the trainees; it’s a mutual exchange.” – (Mentor, Female, Forest Zone)

Additionally, student teachers eased the workload of mentors by helping with teaching, marking, and classroom activities. This task-sharing element allowed mentors to focus more on instructional quality and individual learner support, especially in settings with high enrolment and limited staff.

“The trainees help with teaching, marking, and supporting students; it reduces our workload.” (Lead Mentor, Male, Forest Zone)

Impact of the STS on Practising Schools: Essential Support Staff especially in Deprived Schools

Schools, reportedly, also benefit from the additional human resource support the STS provides. Student teachers help address understaffing issues and contribute to both academic and extracurricular activities, improving the overall learning environment. Mentors described them as valuable supplementary staff who added capacity and enhanced learner supervision.

“Teacher trainees assist teachers, especially in situations where there are many children and few teachers, providing crucial support in the classroom.” (Lead Mentor, Male, Forest Zone)

“The presence of teacher trainees helps to fill gaps caused by understaffing and improves the teaching and learning environment in the school.” (Lead Mentor, Male, Forest Zone)

Impact of the STS on Learner-Centredness

Mentors noted that learners responded positively to the presence of student teachers. The added instructional support led to improved learner attitudes, better engagement, and enhanced academic performance, particularly in foundational skills. Learners benefited from more individualised support and a diversity of instructional styles.

“Teacher trainees provide individualized guidance to children, correcting their pronunciation and assisting with numeracy skills.” (Mentor, Female, Forest Zone)

“They [student teachers] build positive relationships with learners, creating a comfortable environment that encourages students to express themselves and improve their academic performance.” (Lead Mentor, Female, Forest Zone)

Theme 7: Recommendations to Improve the STS Programme

Following discussions on what needs to be done to improve the STS, the participants reported several issues. These issues were reported under six (6) sub-themes as shown in figure 6: increased STS duration, resources and infrastructure to support the STS, incentives to mentors and lead mentors, regular training and supervision, improving the STS fidelity, and improved welfare of student teachers.

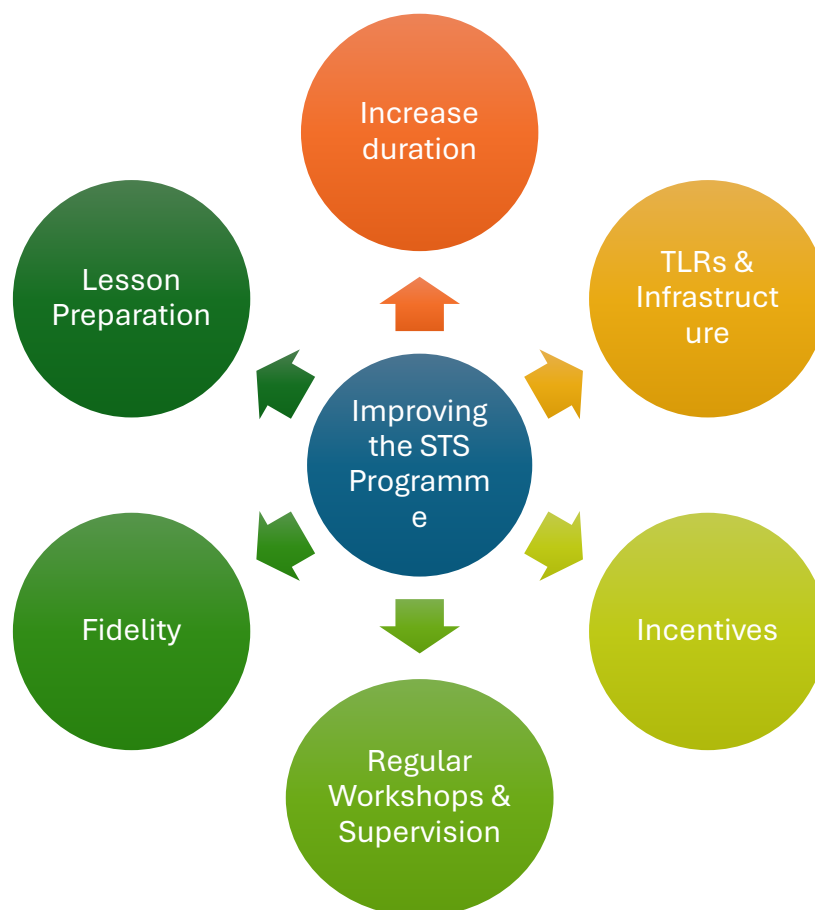


Figure 6: Recommendations to Improve the STS in Ghana

Extend STS Duration for Improved, Varied Engagement, and Deeper Learning

Mentors expressed concern that the current duration of teaching practice is too short to adequately prepare student teachers. While earlier cohorts spent up to a year in schools, recent placements lasting only four weeks or a single term were seen as insufficient for developing essential teaching competencies.

“The duration should be increased... it’s too short for effective preparation.” (Lead Mentor, Female, Forest Zone)

“It used to be eight months to a year. Now it’s just four weeks; they don’t get enough time to build skills.” (Mentor, Female, Savannah Zone)

Participants emphasized that extended attachments allow for deeper engagement, greater confidence, and more meaningful learning, which are critical for transitioning into full-time teaching.

Improved Resources and Infrastructure for Teaching and Learning

Participants strongly recommended improvements in teaching and learning resources, infrastructure, and incentives to enhance the delivery of the STS programme. They called for

the provision of adequate and up-to-date TLRs, especially foundational literacy and numeracy materials, to reduce over-reliance on improvised tools and to support effective instruction.

“We improvise, but there are things we know would help the child understand better; we just don’t have them.” (Mentor, Female, Forest Zone)

Accommodation support for student teachers was another key recommendation. Mentors suggested the construction of hostels or the provision of rental support in partner communities to ensure student teachers have a safe and reliable place to stay during their practicum.

“They need hostels... when it’s time for their service, they should have proper places to stay.” (Mentor, Male, Forest Zone)

Mentors also emphasized the need for modest financial incentives and logistical support to acknowledge their contributions and sustain their motivation. They highlighted the personal effort involved in guiding student teachers and noted that even small stipends could be meaningful.

“We are the ones helping the schools... even GHC 50 a month would motivate us.”
(Lead Mentor, Male, Forest Zone)

Additionally, where institutional support is limited, some participants recommended community-driven initiatives to provide interim support to student teachers, including food contributions or welfare support.

“Their allowances weren’t coming, so we mobilized food from parents to support them.” (Mentor, Female, Forest Zone)

These suggestions reflect the need for multi-level stakeholder collaboration to ensure that both mentors and student teachers are well-supported throughout the STS experience.

Continuous Training/Workshops and Supportive Supervision

Consistent professional support and development for the mentors and lead mentors was another recommendation to improve the STS. This was reported to play a critical role in motivating teachers, reinforcing good practices, and ensuring alignment with national expectations, including the NTS. The discussions on training and supervision are supported by the excerpts below.

“All that I would add is that there should always be more, either the T-TEL or the STS team should try to organize some refresher courses for mentors and lead mentors so that when the student teachers come in, they can also have the full knowledge to help them.” (Lead Mentor, Savannah Zone)

“...they only come here when they are coming to supervise. But that shouldn’t be the case. They must come around them, to motivate them, and to train as from time to time.” (Mentor, Male, Forest Zone)

Ensuring Fidelity to Learner-Centred Approaches

Mentors observed that many student teachers still default to lecture-based methods, despite training in learner-centred approaches. This gap highlights the need to strengthen practical pedagogy and assessment aligned with the National Teachers’ Standards (NTS).

“Sometimes you enter a class, and they’re doing the lecture method again... we are no more lecturers but facilitators; pupils should be doing more of the talking.” (Lead Mentor, Male, Forest Zone)

Concerns were also raised about declining performance standards and leniency in certification.

“Now, even those who don’t do things well or miss parts of training are awarded certificates... what do you expect?” (Lead Mentor, Male, Forest Zone)

Mentors called for stricter enforcement of standards to ensure graduates meet professional expectations in both content and pedagogy.

Consistency in Lesson Notes Planning and Preparations

Lesson planning was recognized as essential for effective teaching, yet mentors reported inconsistencies between the approaches of student teachers and their supervisors. Many trainees copied lesson formats, often from the internet, without fully understanding the underlying pedagogical methods, leading to confusion and misalignment with curriculum standards.

“They copy lesson plans but don’t know the methods they’re using... they need to understand strategies like discovery or play-based teaching.” (Lead Mentor, Female, Forest Zone)

“Some even copy from the internet. The confusion partly comes from having different tutors using different approaches.” (Lead Mentor, Male, Savannah Zone)

Participants recommended clearer guidance and greater consistency in lesson planning to ensure alignment with curricular goals and teaching standards.

Conclusion

The STS was widely recognised by mentors and lead mentors in practising schools as a valuable platform for equipping student teachers with practical skills, enhancing their readiness for full-time teaching, and fostering meaningful professional relationships. In addition, the programme supports mentors through collaborative learning opportunities and task sharing, while also benefiting schools by alleviating staffing pressures and contributing to learner development.

However, these benefits are tempered by several critical challenges that undermine the full potential of the programme. Key among these are the limited knowledge and inconsistent application of the National Teachers' Standards (NTS), which reduces coherence and accountability in teaching practice. Resource and infrastructure deficits, including insufficient teaching and learning materials, poor accommodation, and overcrowded classrooms, also hinder effective implementation. Additionally, mentors expressed concern over uneven lesson planning skills among student teachers and the brevity of the practicum period, which many considered inadequate for developing professional competence. A further constraint lies in weak stakeholder engagement, particularly from parents and community actors, which affects learner support and undermines broader school participation in the STS process.

Taken together, these challenges point to the need for targeted interventions. Strengthening training on the NTS, ensuring adequate resourcing and infrastructure, standardising lesson planning expectations, and extending the duration of the practicum could significantly improve the effectiveness of the STS. Enhancing coordination among schools, colleges, and community stakeholders would also be critical in deepening the programme's reach and impact.