

Challenges Facing Teacher Trainees on Teaching Practice: The Case of Maasai Mara University Students, Narok County, Kenya

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Abstract

Teacher education and training forms one of the fundamental pillars that will see Kenya achieve Vision 2030 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Indeed, one of the main contemporary issues in teacher education and training in Kenya is on how teachers are prepared in order to effectively perform the demands of the teaching profession and resolve the various challenges they face in their roles as professional teachers. Teacher training institutions, including universities, achieve their objectives of training effective and competent teachers by exposing them to a wide range of courses focused on the profession including subject areas and professional courses. Of more significance is the field experience or rather internship (attachment) that these teacher trainees undergo during the training; commonly referred to as teaching practice. Teaching practice exposes the teacher trainees to the realms of actual teaching as it takes place in various educational institutions and school settings that these very teacher trainees are being prepared to assume after graduating from colleges and universities. However, as new and beginning teachers, experiences on teaching practice may be quite challenging to these prospective teachers. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges facing teacher trainees on field attachment, focusing mainly on curriculum resources, professional and academic issues, mentoring and supervision and socio-economic and health issues. The main findings indicated inadequate curriculum resources in the schools of attachment and lack of some social amenities, particularly accommodation, water supply and road network. Recommendations were made with the need to increase funding for curriculum material to schools by the Government, Donors, NGOs and the Community concerned.

Keywords: *Challenges, Teacher Trainees, Teaching Practice*

Introduction

Research has shown that high student achievement is most strongly linked to high quality training of teachers (Bishop, 1985; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2006). Indeed, current global technological and socio-economic advancement as well as political developments have made quality education a policy priority for governments and humankind all over the world. As Adentwi (2002) posits, the belief in the potency of education to enhance a people's life style, prosperity and happiness compels governments and citizens to invest heavily in formal education. Kenya, as a developing country, is no exception in this direction. The teacher, the vehicle on which education thrives, is therefore indispensable. Teacher Education is critical in nation building because it produces the right caliber of teachers to deliver quality education for national development. Hence, the quality of teachers' education in schools and the quality of Teacher Education and training are inseparable (Adentwi, 2002).

Bishop (1985), long said that of all the educational problems that beset African countries, none is as persistent or as compelling as the one relating to the training of competent teachers. This old comment still remains true about teacher training in Africa generally and in Kenya, in particular today. If we are to have quality education, we need sufficient teachers who are well trained and motivated professionals. Professionalism is one of the most important characteristics that should identify teachers. Thus, the professionally qualified teacher is one of the most influential school-based factors in improving student learning (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2006). Given this influence, it is essential for the Ministry of Education in Kenya to ensure that teachers are recruited, trained, and retained in a manner that gives all students access to the most effective teachers possible. To improve teacher quality, policymakers need to address the preparation of teacher candidates. However, the research base in this area is quite weak, offering no particular formula for an effective teacher training program.

Drawing from the report on the findings of the first Annual Learning Assessment undertaken by an organization called Uwezo in Kenya in 2010, there are five key elements to consider in the development or evaluation of teacher preparation programs as given by Perry (2011): program purpose; requirements for subject-matter knowledge; requirements for professional knowledge; clinical and field experiences; and faculty qualifications. Of interest to the current study was the focus of teacher trainees'

field experiences which dawns to them the realities of the teaching profession. Indeed, teaching practice is important in teacher education as it generally aims at providing opportunities for student teachers to develop and evaluate their competences in the major areas of teaching (Harris & Sass, 2007). Similarly, Allen (2006) argued that teaching practice provides opportunities for the teacher trainees to develop and evaluate their teaching competencies.

Nevertheless, in their professional attachment, teacher trainees are bound to face a number of challenges including lack of curriculum materials, inadequate supervision, and mentors' neglect, and other socio-economic problems (Ankuma, 2007) that may interfere with their professional development and even negatively affect their attitudes towards the teaching profession. Subsequently this will reduce the quality of the graduate teachers who in essence ought to spearhead quality education in schools. Thus, based on this scenario, the present study sought to investigate the actual challenges and problems faced by teacher trainees in field attachment using a sample of students in field attachment from Maasai Mara University in Narok County during the period of May to August 2013.

The researcher sought to identify and describe possible problems that confront teacher trainees in their professional development during teaching practice, thus, jeopardizing their training quality as competent future teachers. Specifically, the study focused on problems associated with the availability of curriculum materials, professional and academic performances, mentorship and supervisory practices and socio-economic and health concerns during field attachment.

The study sought to find answers to the following questions:

- (i) What problems confront teacher trainees with respect to the availability of curriculum materials?
- (ii) What professional and academic challenges do teacher trainees encounter?
- (iii) What are the perceptions of teacher trainees on the mentorship and supervisory roles of assigned school mentors and university teaching practice supervisors?
- (iv) What are the socio-economic and health concerns of the teacher trainees?

Materials and Methods

The study adopted a case study design that utilized a self administered questionnaire which examined distinctive problems facing student teachers from Maasai Mara University on teaching practice and how they were coping with the varying circumstances in their field attachment in the Narok region of Kenya. The sample consisted of 24 students (11 boys and 13 girls) who were randomly visited in their schools of attachment. They were given a self administered questionnaire that asked them about availability of curricular materials, professional and academic challenges, level of supervision and mentorship and on the socio-economic issues they faced in the field. Both closed and open items formats were included in this self developed questionnaire. The closed ended items were put on a 4-likert scale format of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree, which were later collapsed in to agree and disagree during data analysis. The data from closed ended items was analyzed using descriptive statistics based on frequencies and percentages, displayed in form of charts. In addition, the data from open ended items were discussed qualitatively. The results of the analysis are discussed below.

Results and Discussions

The results of analysis are discussed under demographic characteristics and analysis of research questions as shown below.

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

The results of the analysis on sex and age characteristics of the sample, and the place of attachment are shown in figures 1 and 2 below;

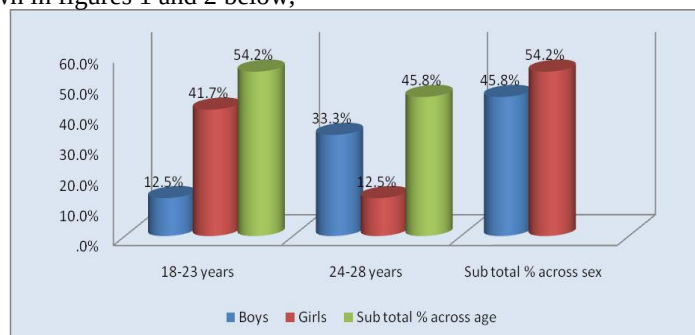


Figure 1. Distribution of Respondents by Sex and Age

Figure 1 above shows that girls were the majority (54.2%) in the sample and boys were represented by 45.8%. The ages of the respondents varied from 18 to 28 years, with the age category of 18 to 23 years being the highest (54.2%), and that of 24 to 28 years being represented by 45.8% of respondents in the total sample. Majority of girls (41.7%) were in the age bracket of 18 to 23 years, while majority of boys (33.3%) were in the age category of 24 to 28 years.

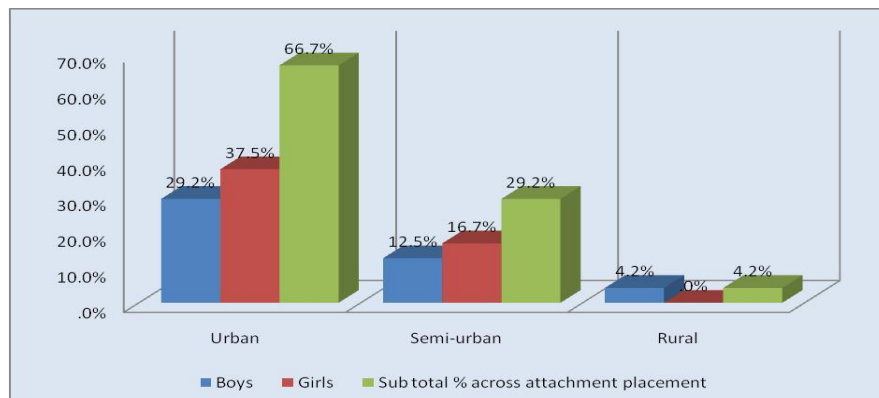


Figure 2. Place of Attachment

From figure 2, majority of respondents (66.7%) were attached in the urban schools of Narok region, followed by semi-urban schools (29.2%) and the remaining 4.2% of the respondents were attached in the rural areas schools of the larger Narok region. In this distribution, majority of girls were attached in the urban (37.5%) and semi-urban (16.7%) schools as compared to boys. The distribution of respondents across various places of attachment within Narok region sheds more light on the nature of challenges student teachers face across these places.

Availability of Curricular Materials

The first research question focused on the problems that the teacher trainees face when it comes to whether or not the instructional materials/facilities/equipments are available, and whether the teaching - learning environment is appropriateness for learning in the schools where they are conducting their field attachment. Figures 3a,b and 4 below provide the analysis of findings and basis of discussions in this respect.

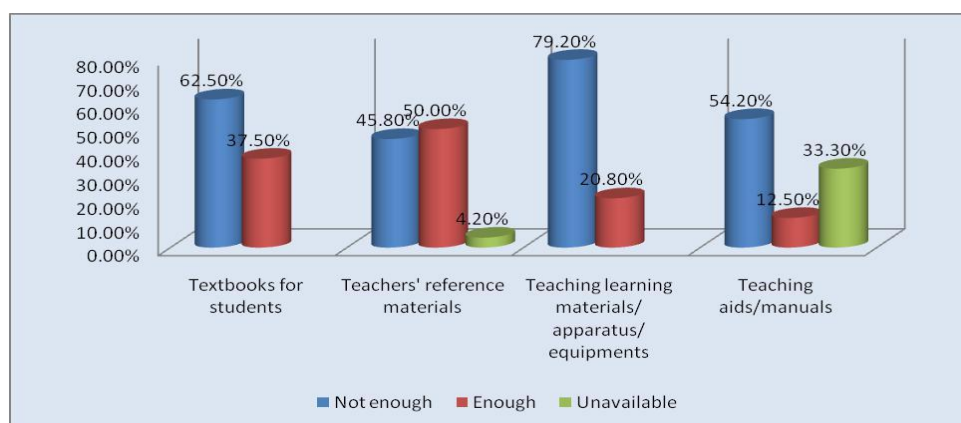


Figure 3a. Curricular Materials

Figure 3a shows that the most important curricular materials were not available in the schools of attachment for the majority of the respondents: these included, textbooks for learners (62.5%), teaching - learning materials/apparatus/equipments (79.2%) and teaching aids/manuals (54.2%). Only teachers' reference materials were enough for the teacher trainees as indicated by 50.0% of the respondents. This could be so, because many of them go to the field prepared with reference materials for their specific subject areas. From the foregoing analysis, it is clear that few schools in Narok region have the requisite supply of resource and curriculum materials. The problem of curricular materials in many schools in

Kenya as a whole is a historical one since Kenya became independent. The cost sharing move of the 1990s tried to alleviate it; however, it was again worsened with the declaration of Free Primary Education in 2002 when the then Narc government came into power. Thus, if quality teachers are to be produced, then a lot has to be done by the stakeholders in education on supply of curricular materials to schools.

In order to manage the challenges faced by the teacher trainees by unavailability of curricular materials, they were asked whether they purchase some of these materials. The findings showed that an overwhelming majority of the trainees (79.2%) use their own meager resources to supplement curricular materials as shown by figure 3b below. This is a desperate move by the trainees to satisfy their need for curricular materials, given that they do not earn salaries during this attachment period and the only source of income is their attachment allowance and family support.

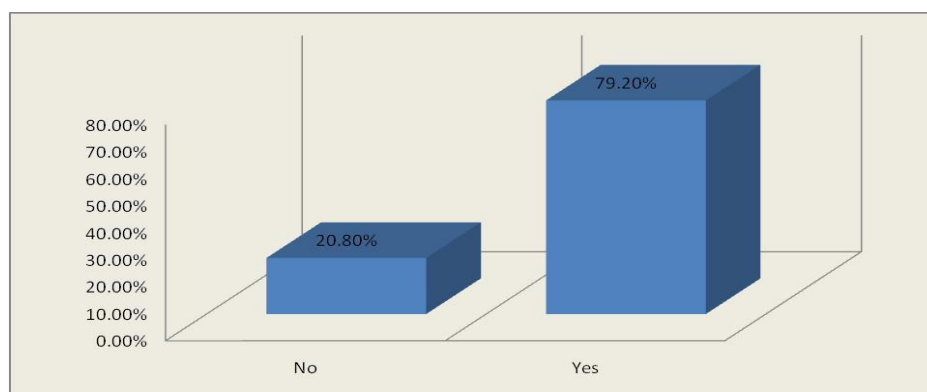


Figure 3b. Self Purchase of Curriculum Materials

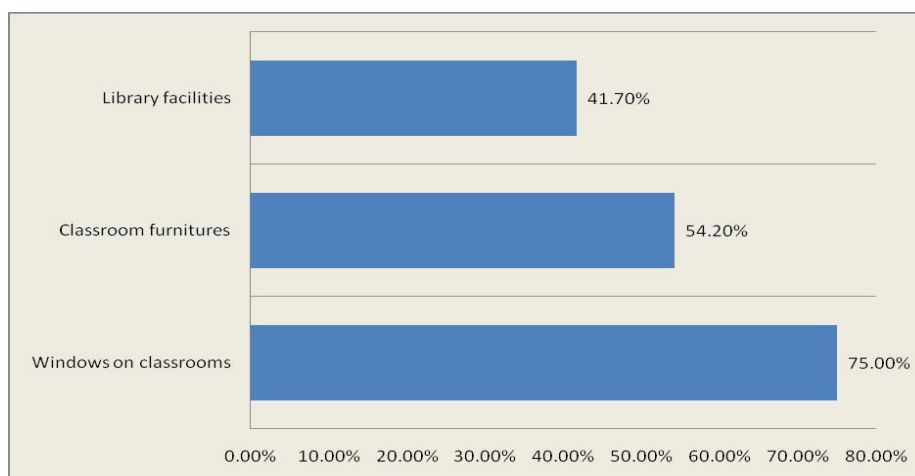


Figure 4. Appropriateness of Learning Environment

The results of analysis presented in figure 4 shows that library facilities and classroom furniture pose problems to trainees in their field attachment; because only 41.7% and 54.2%, respectively, indicated the appropriateness of these learning environment and facilities in their schools of attachment. Indeed it is not uncommon to university supervisors during teaching practice supervision to find learners sharing or squeezing themselves on one desk or seat in class in his/her trainees class. However, some improvements can be appreciated in the classroom buildings which have windows as indicated by 75% of the respondents, which is appropriate and conducive environment for teaching -learning processes.

Professional and Academic Requirements

Research question two focussed on professional and academic issues and requirements faced by the teacher trainees and the analysis of their responses is presented in figure 5 below.

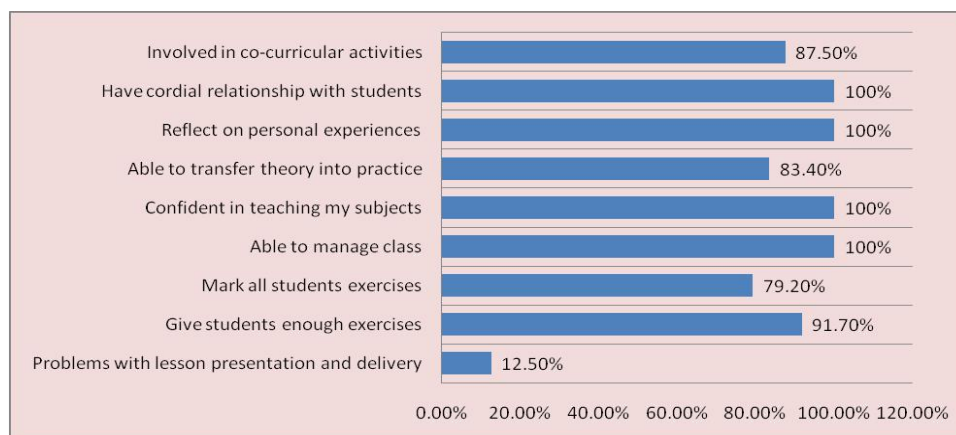


Figure 5. Professional and Academic Issues

The overall picture given in figure 5 shows that the teacher trainees tended to fair on well with the professional and academic requirements amidst challenges posed by lack of adequate curricular materials and inappropriate learning environment (as shown above in figures 3a and 4). Significant achievements were seen in the areas of relationship with students, positive personal experiences, teaching confidence and class management, all of which were achieved by 100% of the respondents. Perhaps these achievements are connected to good professional mentorship and supervisory services and support given to the teacher trainees by support teachers and university supervisors, respectively.

Mentorship and Supervisory Services

Respondents were asked about the nature of support and services they gained from their subject teachers and university supervisors and the results of analysis are shown in figures 6 and 7 below.

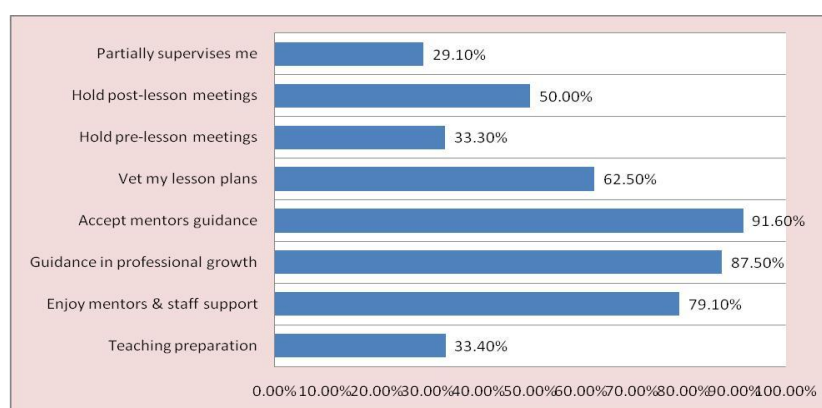


Figure 6. Mentorship Services

Figure 6 above shows that teacher trainees benefited a lot from their subject mentors in the areas of mentors guidance (91.6%), professional growth (87.5%), mentors -other staff support (79.1%), mentors vetting of their lesson plans (62.5%) and holding post lesson meetings (50%). These forms of support are crucial to teacher trainees as they enhance professional and academic growth and development on the part of the trainees. The respondents however indicated that some subjects lacked subject mentors, these were mathematics and chemistry.

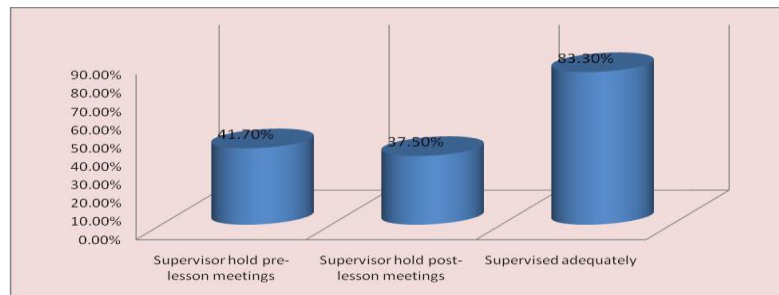


Figure 7. Supervisory Services

The findings in figure 7 show that majority of teacher trainees (83.3%) were supervised adequately by their university supervisors. Nevertheless, compared with subject teachers, the university supervisors did not hold more pre and post lesson meetings with the teacher trainees.

Social, Economic and Health Concerns

The respondents were asked to state the challenges they faced in terms of social, economic and health issues and the results of analysis are presented in figures 8, 9, 10 and 11 below.

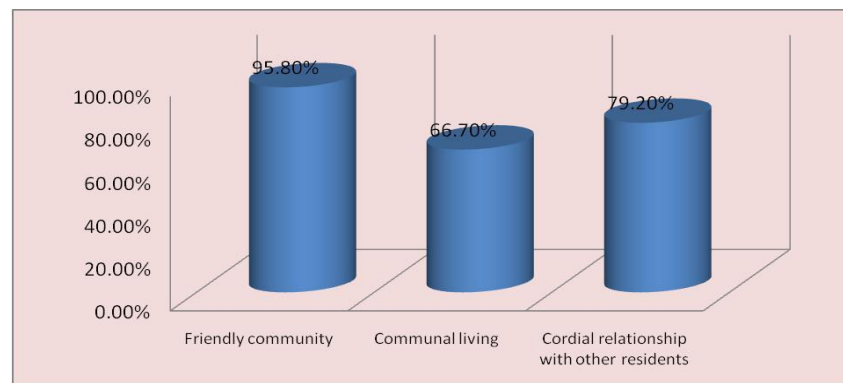


Figure 8. Social Issues

Figure 8 shows that the social interactions of the trainees was adequate and did not pose a big issue of concern during their field attachment as majority (95.8%) lived in friendly community set up.

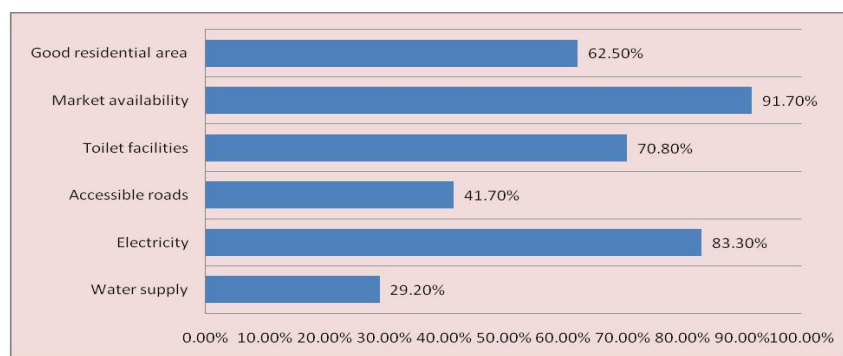


Figure 9: Social Amenities

Figure 9 shows that many of the necessary social amenities were achieved by the trainees given that majority of them hailed from urban schools in Narok area (as shown in figure 2 above). However, some problems were associated with roads accessibility (41.7%) and water supply (29.2%).

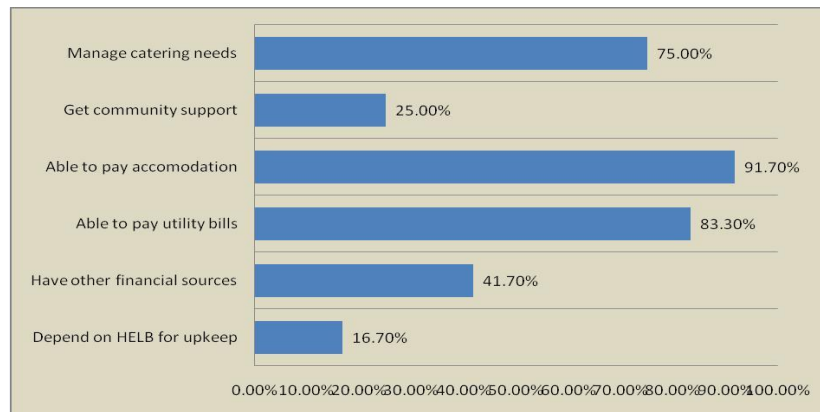


Figure 10. Economical issues

Figure 10 above shows that majority of trainees were able to manage their catering needs (75%), able to pay for their accommodation (91.7%) and able to pay their utility bills (83.3%). This was amidst meagre sources of income and support from Higher Education Loans Board – HELB (16.7%), community (25%) and family sources (41.7%). Thus, funding for trainees is an issue that need to be considered in improving the quality of teacher training.

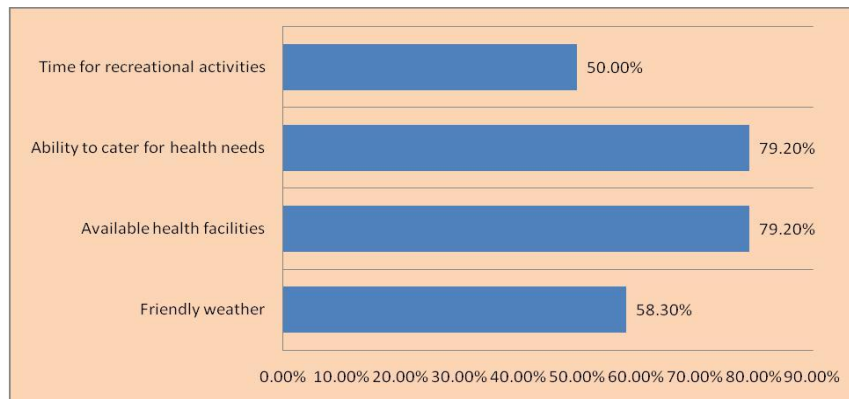


Figure 11. Health Concerns

On health matters, as shown in figure 11, majority of respondents were able to cater for their health needs (79.2%) as the health facilities were available too (79.2%). They also acknowledged the presence of friendly weather (58.3%).

The respondents were also asked whether there were other problems that they faced in field attachment, they pointed out the following:

- Students indiscipline issues
- Poor time management by students
- Harassment of female teacher trainees by university s upervisors
- Transportation means and costs
- Inadequate accommodation facilities
- Differences in lesson plans formats between the attachment schools and the university one

Finally, the teacher trainees were asked whether they will like to be posted or continue working at their attachment stations. The results of analysis are shown in figure 12 below.

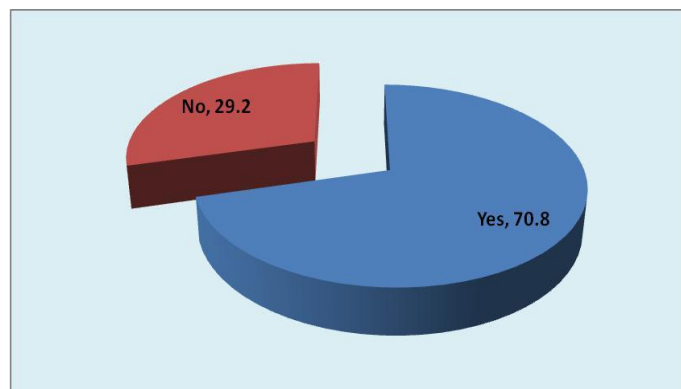


Figure 12. Posted to School of Attachment

As seen from figure 12 above, the findings indicated that majority of the respondents agreed to continue working in their schools of attachment. This is amidst some challenges they have faced during field attachment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that there are factors on the ground which could jeopardize the training of high quality teacher trainees, hence contributing to low academic achievement in students in schools. Factors that need attention include availability of curricular materials, financial aid and some social amenities, particularly, road network, water supply and adequate accommodation facilities.

Recommendations

In order to enhance the quality of teachers from field experience, the following recommendations need to be considered:

- There is a need for the supply of adequate and sufficient curriculum materials, facilities and apparatus to schools by the Government, NGOs, Donors and the Community
- Social amenities near schools need to be improved, especially road network, water supply and accommodation, by the Government, NGOs, Donors and the Community at large.
- There is need for increased financial support to trainees from the Government, NGOs, Donors and the Community at large
- University supervisors need to improve their supervision services by incorporating pre -and-post lesson meetings with their trainees
- Issues of harassment of teacher trainees, especially the female trainees, need to be addressed soberly by the concerned universities and schools

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