Provision of out of School Reading Services in the Community: The Case of University of Education Winneba Reading Resource Center

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ABSTRACT

In second-language reading (L2), the amount of opportunity to practice the second language is vital to reading proficiency. Also, research informs us that pupils' performance in reading is enhanced to a great extent by the amount of reading they do out of school. The amount of reading pupils engage in outside of school also tends to positively impact on their achievement in reading. The Special Education Reading Resource Centre and Library at the University of Education, Winneba, has provided out of school second-language reading services in the community to Primary school children in Winneba since 2006. This article presents a phenomenological case study on the model and strategies used to provide opportunities to enhance fluency and word recognition ability of struggling second language readers at the Reading Resource Center at University of Education, Winneba, Ghana. The study revealed that the out of school reading experience, as part of service-learning initiative, impacted positively on the reading proficiency levels of the pupils and their overall academic performance. Implications of the findings for service provision to the pupils, community and teacher education are highlighted.

INTRODUCTION

> *"Despite years of steady growth in enrolment rates, the education situation in sub-Saharan Africa continues to threaten the future of entire generations"*
> ~ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2017a.

Global data from UNESCO's Institute for Statistics (2017a) posit that more than 85% of children in sub-Saharan Africa are not learning the basics or minimum level of proficiency in reading and mathematics. Ghana, a Sub-Saharan nation in western Africa and former British

colony, has approximately 28 million people and the official language is English. The adult literacy rate in Ghana, persons 15 and over who can read and write, is 71.6 percent, which is far below the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) global literacy rate of 86.3 percent (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2017b). These statistics are alarming with a glaring signal to seriously address reading skills and proficiency in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Ghana.

Currently, literacy and reading success are at the forefront of Nation-building in Ghana. The government of Ghana and its partners has mobilized resources to assist in this exigency of reading. Efforts aimed at enhancing reading achievement and the quality of reading instruction in early grades are underway and includes a partnership among Ghana's Ministry of Education (MoE), its Ghana Education Service, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID, collaborate to improve reading in rural schools, 2017). There is no denying the fact that reading is paramount in meeting the demands of life and work in a global world. Therefore, reading problems must be addressed early with children and youth as they tend to have a tremendous long-term effect on children, since it affects their self-esteem, motivation to learn, and eventually their future academic performance. It is of grave concern that a host of Ghanaian school children today are struggling to read and a lot more who do not struggle to read are capable of reading, but not at grade level proficiency.

The Special Education Reading Resource Centre and Library, an out-of-school reading initiative at the University of Education Winneba has provided evidence-based reading services in English to Primary school children in Winneba since 2006 via service-learning. University faculty supervisors, National Service personnel assigned to the Department of Special Education, which are recent graduates with a degree in special education, and pre-service teachers in special education on internship partner with the community for a mutually beneficial experience to enhance the reading skills of struggling readers. The mutually beneficial experience – where pre-service teachers develop their skills and abilities in reading education by teaching reading to struggling readers and Ghanaian pupils develop their reading skills for reading achievement, future post-secondary, or career opportunities – is a community engagement initiative that connects the University to its surrounding community. This community engagement activity is situated in service-learning, whereby students, faculty, and community partners address an issue of public concern and meet community needs. Additionally, the pedagogy of service-learning utilized in the out-of-school reading initiative emphasizes the application of academic course content from the University in real-world contexts. It is pertinent to note that the service delivery outlined, succinctly distinguishes the services provided by the Center from the traditional teaching practicum. This is consistent with the view of Wagner and Lopez (2014) that traditionally, teaching practicums are distinct from service-learning in that the later emphasizes reciprocity more than the former.

Although English is the official language, Ghana is a multilingual country with approximately ten major languages. The acquisition of English language skills, reading and writing, occurs at the formal education level. Consequently, pupils in Ghana learn to read in a language that is not their first language. A coordinated response from the government and other stakeholders, like institutions of higher education, is necessary to effectively respond to Ghana's crisis in reading proficiency. The work of the Reading Resource Center at the University of Education, Winneba, responds to the call, highlights the importance of literacy, and is grounded in the notion that children who acquire the requisite competencies and master the transition from

learning to read (LTR) to reading to learn (RTL) tend to perform well in school. This corroborates the view of Harlaat, Dale & Plomin (2007) that most children learn to decode letters into words and sentences (learn to read) and eventually acquire the competency to arrive at meaning and extract information from text sources (reading to learn). Subsequently they are expected to generalize this skill in everyday situations in and out of school; this underscores the need to emphasize reading proficiency. It is in keeping with these views the Reading Resource Center provides the following services among others:

- Informal reading assessment is administered to diagnose pupils' reading difficulty in order to get the baseline that is necessary for developing, implementing, and evaluating literacy programs in general. These assessment tools include letter stimulus sheet, letter knowledge sheet, maze, running records, and sight words.

- Assessment results are used to design intervention strategies that are research-based for remediation of individual pupils who are struggling to read at grade level proficiency.

- Reading instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, sight words, and comprehension.

- Consultancy services to teachers, parents, and the community on strategies and materials that can enhance reading instruction. ·

Service-learning involves student-interns and national service personnel whose area of specialization is in the education of children with intellectual disabilities (EID) in the Department of Special Education, UEW working in the community. We solicit school supplies and reading books from our partners and in turn donate to basic schools in Winneba. The Center also has in stock professional materials, information textbooks, children's literature books that feature persons with disabilities as protagonists, and so on. That is, it serves as a library for independent reading in the Community.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review presents the themes related to this study. First, afterschool reading programs are reviewed. Next, service-learning is defined; model of service-learning used in the center's work discussed, and benefits of service-learning in teacher education and community-based settings are examined.

After School Reading Programs

Spielberger and Halpern (2002) mention that although it is a highly informal practice, the after-school program goes a long way to promote the cultural and social dimension of literacy, making it intrinsically rewarding.

A thorough synthesis of literature reveals that a lot more progress has been made by other researchers reinforcing previous studies that breath, quality, intensity, and duration of after school programs tend to make a difference in the short-term and have a long lasting impact on the academic, social, and behavioral outcome of learners (Mahoney, Vandell, Simpkins, & Zarrett, 2012).
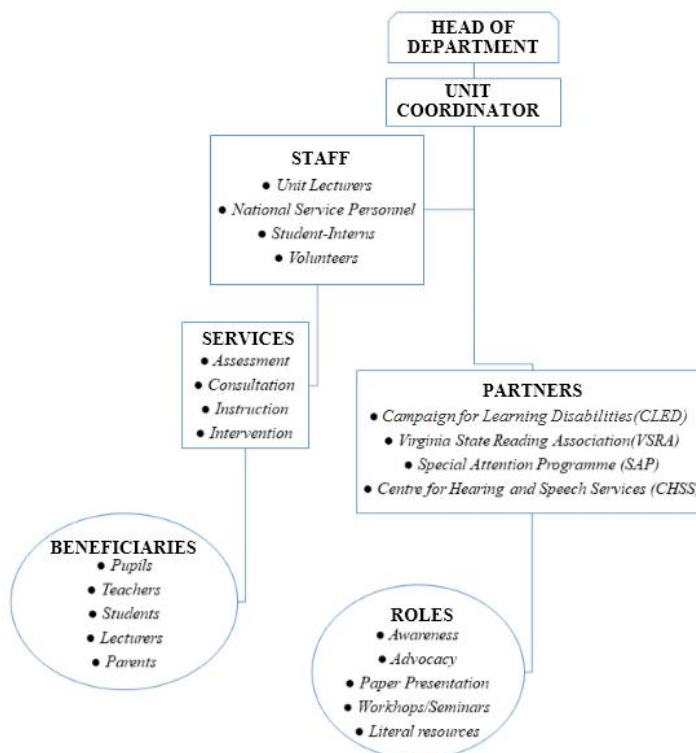
Figure 1. Organogram of Special Education Reading Resource Centre/Library

After-school programs do have an impact on the academic outcomes of students, especially students from low income communities. For instance, Vandell (2011) lists the following as benefits of after-school programs:

i. Expanding learning programs show promising evidence for helping to close the achievement gap.

ii. High quality afterschool programs have positive long-term effects on school attendance and task persistence.

iii. Expanded learning opportunities have positive cumulative effects on student grades and academic work habits.

Halpern (2003) posits that in spite of the variety of creative and engaging literacy practices of after-school programs, there were inherent challenges to effective literacy practice of after school programs. The following limitations and challenges to literacy work in after school programs were listed:

- Time, space, and material resource constraints.

- Lack of staff skill and experience in fostering literacy, as well as limitations in staff members' own literacy skills.

- The wide range of literacy support needs, interests, and identities among participating children.

- Lack of support for programs—in particular for program directors—in thinking through and trying to implement a coherent approach to literacy activity (p.15).

Community-Based Service-Learning Centers

The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse of the United States of America (2018) refers to service-learning as "a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities." In today's higher education landscape, this definition of service-learning is typically considered part of community engagement. The Carnegie Foundation (2018) defines Community Engagement (CE) as the "collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" (¶ 1). Furthermore, service-learning is considered as an experiential learning technique that allows students to experience, experiment, and reflect on what they have learned (Sileo, Prater, Luckner, Rhine, & Rude, 1998).

Van Dyk and du Plessis (2013) reported that The Bright Site of Sunnyside Service Learning Centre was initiated by the Department of Social Work of the University of South Africa (UNISA) in 2008 in collaborative consultation with the stakeholders and the community of Sunnyside in Pretoria. The Brite Site incorporates service-learning, community engagement, and research and development of capacities. The focus of Brite Site Project is on:

- Establishment of a counseling and referral service for the Sunnyside community.

- Establishment of a support service for UNISA students.

- Initiation of a community development process with the Sunnyside community.

- Identification and initiation of research opportunities within the Sunnyside community.

- Placement of fourth level social work students for a service learning opportunity.

The Special Education Reading Resource Centre and Library on the other hand is an out-of-school reading initiative that provides evidence-based reading services in English to Primary school children in Winneba via service-learning. The Centre is attached to the Unit for the Education of Children with Intellectual Disabilities (EID) in the Department of Special Education of the University of Education, Winneba (UEW).

It renders its services under three main categories, namely assessment, instruction, and consultation. That is, the focus is to:

- Conduct diagnostic assessment that is required for developing, implementing, and evaluating literacy programs in general.

- Use assessment results to design instructions that are research-based for individual pupils. Some of these instructional strategies include phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, and sight words. Pupils use the Center as a library for independent reading or learning.

- Provide consultation services to teachers, parents, and the community at large. In other words, it provides support to teachers and parents by suggesting ideas, strategies, or materials that can enhance reading instruction.

In realizing the afore-mentioned services, final year students on internship program and National Service personnel from the EID Unit are placed at the Centre in order to have hands-on experience of what they have learned and providing support to the local community. It is pertinent to note that this service delivery is provided in addition to the normal one Semester of Teaching Practice. Van Dyk and Du Plessis (2013) posit that the Brite Site's service-learning provides alternative options for placements for social work students within the community engagement context in South Africa. While research and community services are common objectives, the Special Education Reading Resource Centre/Library and the Brite Site have different purposes. The research undertaken at the Sped Reading Resource Centre/Library is geared towards the development of literacy programs for the unique needs of struggling readers and for organizing in-service training workshops for teachers in and around the Winneba community, whereas the Brite site service delivery in South Africa, creates opportunities for other academic departments to become involved in community-based research and applied research responsive to societal needs. This research is disseminated to the community as well as organizations functioning in the community to inform service delivery and decision making.

Meanwhile, the Special Education Reading Resource Centre/Library as part of its community service provides support to teachers and parents by suggesting ideas, strategies, or materials that can enhance reading instruction. It also runs a mobile library service with the sole aim of alleviating the demands for library service in the community by reaching out to pupils, especially those who, due to certain challenges at home, are unable to visit the Center.

The Brite site's counseling and referral services for the Sunnyside community in South Africa contrasts those of the Reading Resource Center in Ghana. Since the latter does not provide clinical services, educational reports are written based on assessment results and recommendations are given as such. Afterward, follow-up is done to monitor the progress of beneficiaries in the Winneba community.

Service-Learning in Teacher Education

Research on service-learning in teacher education suggests that service-learning is an effective pedagogical method. For instance, Baldwin et al. and Guadarrama, as cited in Glazier, Able, and Charpentier (2014), reported the following about service-learning:

Community service-learning experiences in particular have the potential to allow teacher education candidates to see firsthand the diverse experiences and contexts of children and families, an important goal given the vast differences that can exist between pre-service teachers' experiences and lives and those of their students. (p. 182)

Additionally, university students who undertake service-learning tend to gain or strengthen their organization, collaboration, and problem-solving skills, and have a greater understanding of social issues (Daniels, Patterson, & Dunston, 2010). Furthermore, many studies attest to the educational efficacy of service-learning for pre-service teachers and suggest that students who have participated in service-learning show better learning performance, more interest in the subject-matter, better problem-solving abilities, and greater satisfaction with their chosen educational program (Sikula & Sikula, 2005). The cooperation and collaboration between the classroom and communities and between theory and practice, imparts a critical platform for pre-service teachers to understand and engage in real world issues from local perspectives (Ruffin & Boakye-Boaten, 2014).

The Special Education Reading Resource Centre and Library at the University of Education, Winneba collaborates with the local Winneba community in the framework of service-learning.

With service-learning at the center of their practice, the center enhances the civic responsibility, engagement, and development of the 21st century pre-service teacher, while partnering with the community to provide second-language reading intervention services to struggling readers in the local community. The Centre's out-of-school reading initiative practices Heffernan's (2001) conceptualization of the capstone course model of service-learning. In this model, students in their final year of undergraduate study use knowledge and expertise gained throughout their coursework and combine it with meaningful and pertinent service work in the community.

The benefits of service-learning extend far beyond pre-service teachers. Communities benefit from service-learning, too. For communities, service-learning brings human capital and resources to address community issues and achieve community goals. Also, it enhances relations with the University.

The purpose of the present study is to find out how useful the Reading Resource Centre is to the basic school pupils as they learn to be proficient in the English language use and also find out how beneficial the Centre is for students to have a hands-on practical feel.

Student teachers in the Department of Special Education of the University of Education, Winneba take a course, Assessment and Remediation of Reading Problems, which allows them to identify pupils with reading difficulties and then plan interventions to meet these reading challenges. This is in line with what Farrel (2007), as cited in Wagner and Lopez (2015), stated that such experiences are seen as a bridge between formal academic learning in the university and the "real world" of the classroom. Faez and Valeo's (2012) investigation of student-teachers' sense of preparedness after completing a TESOL program shows that they rate the practicum component as the most useful feature of their preparation. Furthermore, teaching practice can play a role in changing student-teacher beliefs. This is important because research suggests that many student-teachers have pre-existing beliefs that may be resistant to change and are at odds with current day constructivist views about learning (Wright, 2010 as cited in Wagner & Lopez, 2015).

Teaching practice can take a wide variety of forms, but Wagner and Lopez (2015) focus on teaching in actual or intact classrooms in the field. It can take place on-campus, or off-campus in public, charter, or private school settings, or in community settings such as community centers, churches, or other non-profit organizations. Another dimension of field-based teaching is availability of support from a cooperating teacher or mentor, that is, the lead teacher who is present in the classroom while the student teacher teaches. These student teachers are supervised by the course facilitator who serves as a mentor to unique student performance during the field-based teaching.

As Wagner and Lopez (2015) postulated, field-based teaching is likely to hold deficit views of those who are different from them. Students from the Special Education Reading Resource Centre hold the view that pupils who come to the center have chronic reading problems until intervention. Even taking this into account, the studies are very positive when assessing the impact of service-learning, with benefits realized in improved teaching practice, the development of a professional self, understanding context and developing a more critical perspective of English language teaching, and deepening cultural knowledge of the community.

Service-learning in African contexts

Service-learning pedagogy seems to be a nascent pedagogical tool in Ghanaian higher education institutions. A recent review of literature via various search engines revealed a dearth of literature on service-learning and its use at institutions of higher education in Ghana. Tagoe (2014) asserts that service-learning is not common in Ghanaian universities, although popular in the U.S.A. and South Africa. Therefore, he investigated "the attitudes, knowledge, and perceptions among students of the University of Ghana about community service-learning and its integration into the University's curriculum" (p.86). Tagoe's mixed-method study using interviews and questionnaires with selected students from the largest faculties at the University of Ghana discovered the following -- students were unaware of the meaning of community service-learning, they did not have prior experience in community service-learning via the University, only through their churches, but they perceived it as beneficial in connecting theory and practice. For instance, Tagoe (2014) intimated,

> . . . although the majority of the students have not engaged in community service and are not well acquainted with the meaning of community service-learning, there is ample evidence from the study of students' willingness to engage in community service-learning and that it will be beneficial to students. (p. 94)

Other queries on service-learning in Ghana revealed U.S., University-based service-learning programs linked to study abroad opportunities for Americans to study, serve, and learn in Ghana, but no Ghanaian public university touting service-learning pedagogy on its website. According to Hatcher and Erasmus (2008), service-learning emerged in the U.S.A. and South Africa in the early 1990s and 2000s, respectively, due to several factors. One common factor, funding, was provided from the private sector and government for the adoption and implementation of service-learning. However, Ghanaian institutions of higher education have not experienced such funding for service-learning. Additionally, unlike the U.S.A. and South Africa, Ghanaian institutions of higher education have not formally adopted or officially sanctioned service-learning as a teaching strategy nor has it experienced national mandates, initiatives,

structures, or funding to support service-learning pedagogy. Nonetheless, service-learning is present in Ghanaian universities, albeit emerging.

The notion of service-learning in higher education at the University of Education Winneba (UEW), Department of Special Education's Reading Resource Center, is similar to the dimensions that shape U.S. and South African notions of service-learning in higher education as explicated by Hatcher and Erasmus (2008). The Department of Special Education Reading Resource Center's work is shaped by two of the three dimensions promulgated in Hatcher and Erasmus (2008), namely:

1. An explicit endorsement for higher education to prepare civic-minded graduates,

2. A transformational role of higher education in society supported by stakeholders both within the institution and among nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations. (p. 54)

UEW's motto and one of its four aims exalt civic responsibility. For instance, the University's motto is 'Education for Service' and one of its aims is to foster links between the schools and the community in order to ensure the holistic training of teachers. However, there is no national initiative guiding service-learning pedagogy in Ghana, so the Center's work is not congruent to Hatcher and Erasmus' third dimension, "a federal or national initiative to achieve such a transformation within higher education" (p. 54).

All in all, The Special Education Reading Resource Center's expression of service-learning in higher education is similar to the U.S. and South African expression of service-learning in higher education as espoused in Hatcher and Erasmus (2008) in that it engages more meaningfully with the communities the higher education institution serves and it sees service-learning as a means to cultivate social responsibility and prepare graduates equipped to work in a diverse society.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study was to explore the provision of out of school opportunities to enhance reading proficiency among struggling second language learners at the Reading Resource Center at University of Education Winneba, and to add to the existing body of the literature on service-learning to address the paucity of literature in Ghana. The main research question was:

- How is service delivery at the Reading Resource Center relevant to pupils, teachers and the community?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative method, which is a naturalistic approach that respects the context of the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Consistent with the views of these authors, in this study we are "qualitative researchers studying things in their naturalistic setting, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomenon in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p.2).

Research Design

Using qualitative methodology, this study specifically employed the phenomenological research design. This involves the study of lived experiences and the ways we understand those experiences to develop a world view. "It rests with the assumption that there is a structure and essence to shared experiences that can be narrated" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 104). As Creswell and Creswell (2018), citing Giorgi (2009) and Moustakas (1994), noted, phenomenological research designs have strong philosophical antecedents and usually entail conducting interviews.

Participants

The research team used a semi-structured interview schedule to elicit responses from one headteacher, three pupils and three past Interns of the Reading Resource Center. The purpose of using phenomenological interviewing is to describe the meaning of a concept or phenomenon that several individuals share. The research team is firmly convinced that the experiences of the pupils, past interns, and the headteacher will provide powerful insights into their experiences that have implications for improving the quality of service delivery at the Reading Resource Center.

Data collection procedure

Face-to-face interviews were conducted one-on-one to elicit responses from the interviewees using the semi-structured interview schedule. Document review was also undertaken to find out the number of pupils who benefited from service delivery at the Center.

Data Analysis

In keeping with the practice of phenomenological researchers, we utilized observation, participation, and reflection to understand the data gathered. It is worth stating that the researchers were directly involved in working with student-teachers, interns, and National Service Persons in providing services to pupils at the Reading Resource Centre. The topic under study and researchers' reflections on the data gathered were to a large extent influenced by those experiences. That notwithstanding, researcher bias was controlled by ensuring that transcripts of the interviews were consistent with the tape recording. Intercoder agreement was carried out to ascertain the level of consistency of coding. Data analysis was therefore carried out by analyzing significant statements, generating meaning units, and describing the transcripts of the interview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

RESULTS

Background Data

Credible repositories such as Reading Rockets, a U.S. based digital storehouse disseminating research-based information and strategies on reading, often tout time spent reading, particularly reading a great deal, access to engaging reading materials, and engagement in word recognition and comprehension activities as critical to becoming a proficient reader and

improving reading achievement. Furthermore, scholarly research, such as sources highlighted in the brief entitled, *Life-enhancing benefits of reading in out-of-school programs* by Family and Community Engagement and Afterschool Alliance (2013) highlight the benefits of out-of-school programs. The Special Education Reading Resource Centre and Library at the University of Education, Winneba provides an out-of-school reading program where pupils are afforded the time and physical space to read a variety of engaging reading materials, and practice word recognition and comprehension strategies. Essentially, the practices and activities of the Reading Resource Centre and Library are congruent to research-based practices in reading and service-learning.

Since pupils' performance in reading is enhanced to a great extent by the amount of reading they do, reading a wide variety of reading materials, and engagement in word recognition and comprehension activities, it is apparent that these activities, whether in or out of school, tend to impact achievement in reading positively. For over a decade now, the Reading Resource Center/Library, University of Education, Winneba, has provided out of school reading services to Basic School Learners from the neighboring schools. Given the state of affairs, the following statistics from the Centre display a significant number of attendances of the learners. Amongst the activities offered are basic informal assessments, interventions, workshops, library services, and professional advice.

Table 1 presents the statistics of attendance at the Reading Resource Center from 2006 to 2016.

**Table 1.** Statistics of Attendance at the Centre 2006 - 2016

Year	Frequency	Frequency against previous Year
2006	1,200	0
2007	815	-385
2008	228	-587
2009	1,400	+1172
2010	1,210	-190
2011	2,445	+1235
2012	1,480	-965
2013	3,034	+1554
2014	2,974	-60
2015	1,500	-1474
2016	2,348	+848

Figure 2 shows the graphic representation of Table 1.

Table 1 and Figure 2, reveal the set of findings gleaned from the Records of attendance at the University of Education, Winneba Reading Resource Center which provide evidence of a marked increase in the attendance rate at the Center.

Examining the impact of the country's educational policies and practices, there has been an increase in the numbers of school-going children. Meanwhile, there has not been enough support in terms of books and logistics, resulting in part to pupils' difficulties in learning to read. Meanwhile, literature has it that when children do not master the skills in reading at the

appropriate time, they tend to struggle and fall far in their learning not only in the languages but in all other subjects as well.
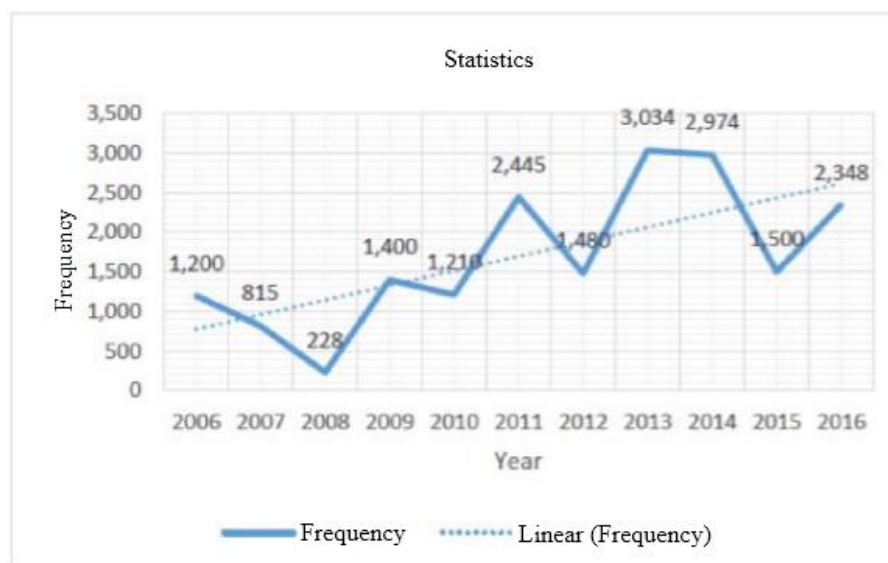
Figure 2. A graphical representation of pupils' frequency at the Centre for the period between 2006 and 2016

Main Findings and Discussions

The responses of the participants of this study are reported as findings or results of the study. These findings are presented under thematic areas that emerged from the responses of the interviewees. The transcripts of verbatim expression of the study participants are presented under themes that emerged from their lived experiences. To ensure anonymity, the interviewees are captioned as Intern A, B, and C; Pupil A, B, and C; as well as Headteacher A.

Service Delivery at the Center

In describing the service delivery at the Reading Resource Center, the student interns had experiences to share. The verbatim expressions of the interns are captured. On service delivery at the Center one student intern reflected:

The Center is opened from 8:30am to 5pm from Monday to Friday for all levels of readers to come and read and do their homework and remediation for those with reading difficulties" (Intern A).

Another Intern in sharing a similar experience, intimated:

I reported for work at the Center from 8:30am to 5:00pm daily except on weekends and holidays guiding and assisting clients who visited the Centre to read. Children who

visited the Center were pupils from Basic schools within Winneba, especially those who are struggling to read. (Intern B)

On their responsibilities towards those who accessed services at the Reading Resource Center, an Intern averred:

> *My duties were to help pupils improve specific reading skills such as letter-naming, letter-sound correspondences, phoneme blending/segmentation, and comprehension strategies. This was to supplement classroom instruction that appeared to be insufficient for the pupils, especially those having reading difficulties. Also, I sometimes consulted classroom teachers using the local informal assessment procedures such as interview, pupils' sample work analysis and observation to target pupils who needed additional remediation. Through that, I was able to design interventions based on pupils' learning needs and styles.* (Intern C)

The study further revealed that the services rendered at the Center were mainly assessment, instruction, and leadership. On assessment an Intern reflected:

> *The Center provides assessment; I mean screening and diagnosis that is vital for developing, implementing, and evaluating literacy program in general, and in designing instruction for individual pupils. In this case, the reading strengths and needs of pupils are assessed and information is provided to classroom teachers, parents, and other specialized personnel.* (Intern B)

On instruction at the Center the intern noted:

> *I provided instruction in three of the five main components of reading. These include, phonemic awareness instruction, phonics instruction, and comprehension instruction. Sometimes, sight words instruction is provided. In addition, pupils patronized the Center as a library where they could always visit to do independent reading or learning.* (Intern B)

Finally, on the leadership role this was the Intern's reflection:

> *The leadership role at the Center is multidimensional. That is, the Center serves as a resource to other educators, parents, and the community. It provides support to teachers by suggesting ideas, strategies, or materials that can enhance reading instruction. The Center also runs a mobile library service with the sole aim of alleviating the demands for library service at the Center by reaching out to pupils, especially those who, due to certain challenges at home, are unable to visit the Center. Again, the Center is run in collaboration with similar organizations such as Campaign for Learning Disabilities (CLED) Ghana, Special Attention Project (SAP), and Center for Hearing and Speech Services (CHSS) of the University of Education, Winneba.* (Intern B)

It is evident from the reflections that the out of school service delivery at the Reading Resource Room provided an avenue for student teachers to relate theory to practice corroborating the views of Daniels, Patterson, and Dunston (2010) that University students who undertake service-learning potentially gained or strengthened their organization, collaboration, and problem-solving skills, and had a greater understanding of social issues.

Relevance of Center to Pupils and Community

On the relevance of the Reading Resource Room to the Pupils and the Community, the views of the student interns and the Pupils who were the direct beneficiaries were sought. On the part of the pupils they found the Center very relevant to them and their community. This is a reflection from one of the pupils:

> *When I close from school my parent are not home. When I go home I cannot read. They help me at the Center to read. I come here when I close from School.* (Child A)

Another child also noted:

> *I didn't know there was a Center here, I pass here every day. One Sir, came to my school to do a reading test in my class. After that he brought me here to read. When he finished teaching me he told me to come here when I close from school*" (Child C)

Yet another indicated:

> *When I close from school I go home to eat and come here to read and do my homework. I live near campus.* (Child B)

It is evident from the findings of the study that the Center was having a positive impact in the community, the following reflections from a student Intern attests to the fact:
The mobile Library service has served, in particular, some children with orthopedic and physical disabilities in the community, this in fact underscores the relevance of the center to the Winneba Community.

Relevance of Reading Resource Center to Teacher Education.

On the relevance of the Reading Centre to teacher education, the following statements from the student interns and teachers of the pupils who benefited from services at the Center attest to it. In the words of one teacher:

> *The student teachers and interns who work at the Center have been collaborating with me as a teacher to help my struggling readers. My class size of 60 is too much for me so I refer those pupils with reading and other learning problems to the Center for assistance. Those pupils who I refer there have really improved in performance. The student interns are in fact practicing what they are taught on campus at the Center.* (Teacher B)

Another teacher also remarked:
> *The Center is helping me a lot because my pupils go there to read and do their homework. The student teachers also are now exposed to teaching pupils with reading*

problems which some of us did not have when we were in the Teacher Training College. (Teacher C)

The student teachers who worked at the Reading Resource Center as Interns also had the following reflections:

The Center is making an impact in the community considering the continuous increase in the number of pupils who patronize the Center. This shows that the pupils are developing the love and the zeal for reading. Pupils now have a place to seek support outside the classroom. Some parents and teachers have also testified to their children's improved performance in reading as a result of the Center's service. (Intern A)

As a result of the implementation of Inclusive Education from September, 2015 after years of piloting in selected schools across Ghana, many teachers are confronted with the task of working in contexts where there are children with diverse needs. These teachers find the Reading Resource Center, a valuable support in providing requisite professional support in enhancing fluency and comprehension among pupils who struggle to read in their classrooms.

Challenges and Prospects of Reading Resource Center

The following among others were the dominant responses by the interviewees as the challenges militating against the efficient service delivery at the Center. The reflections on the challenges at the Center were listed as:

- The reading materials were inadequate and foreign.
- Lack of standardized tools for reading assessment.
- Lack of assistive technological devices for reading.
- Lack of space and furniture to accommodate the increasingly large number of pupils who visit the Center after school.
- Difficulty in arousing and sustaining pupils' attention during reading instruction. This is because they were either exhausted or hungry after having a long day at school.
- Lack of permanent staff to man the Center to ensure consistency of programs at the Center in terms of working with pupils identified with reading difficulties.

In spite of the challenges, the interviewees were of the view that the out of school reading services provided by the Center were promising and had prospects. An intern for instance intimated:

The Center has resources to equip users to read at grade level or independently, irrespective of pupils' learning disability. This will help foster a love of reading and independent learning among pupils and also boost their academic knowledge. Eventually, academic failure will reduce, if not completely.

CONCLUSION

The center, since its establishment, has been filling a critical need for both teacher trainees who facilitate the activities of the center and the children who patronize the center. While the teacher trainees through their services at the center are able to enhance their teaching competencies and skill levels, the children benefit by improving their reading proficiency. This duality of benefits is what makes the center unique and helpful to both the university and the Winneba community. This service- learning model of literacy enhancement and acquisition may be a model that could be replicated in other regions of the country. The work at the Center is unique and portrays an effective service-learning model for teacher education programs and for providing resource support in teaching of reading to students who are learning English as a second language. It is worth reiterating that the practices and activities of the Reading Resource Center and Library are congruent to research-based practices in reading and service-learning. As a multilingual country with English as the official language, it is imperative to employ all strategies that could improve the reading proficiencies of students, especially those with less endowed resources.

The general implications of this study are that strategies to enhance service-learning opportunities for student-teachers at the University of Education Winneba Reading Resource Center should build on existing strengths in relating theory to practice through community engagements. As a result, if recognized as a valuable resource, service-learning could be used to support community development through literacy. Furthermore, the fact that student teachers participate in service-learning should prompt a closer look at the quality and effectiveness of those settings for student teachers. The program has the potential to serve as a valuable means of engaging with the community.

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