THE EFFECT OF MENTORSHIP ON PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEIVED COMPETENCE IN ADDRESSING DIVERSE LEARNERS' NEEDS IN MEZAM DIVISION, CAMEROON

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Abstract:

This paper explores the effect of mentorship on pre-service teachers' perceived competence in addressing diverse learners' needs in Mezam Division. The study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gather data from the sample population of 334 pre-service teachers and six teacher educators. A closed-ended questionnaire was used for pre-service teachers and an interview guide for teacher educators. The quantitative data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations and the one-sample t-test and qualitative data was analyzed thematically. Findings show that mentorship and pre-service teachers' perceived competence in addressing the needs of diverse learners is 32.51, with a standard deviation of 4.821. The mean suggests that pre-service teachers generally acknowledge the positive role of mentorship in enhancing their confidence to teach diverse students. Findings also show that mentorship increased their confidence in applying culturally responsive teaching strategies and encouraged them to reflect on their teaching experiences to improve competence in addressing diversity. Furthermore, the standard deviation indicates some variability in responses, but overall,

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the data points to a strong perception of mentorship as an essential factor in building teaching competence. It was recommended that mentorship frameworks should be enhanced by school administrations and teacher training colleges to ensure that mentors are trained in culturally responsive pedagogy and equipped to provide inclusive resources, feedback, and modeling practices.

Keywords: mentorship, pre-service teachers, perceived competence, diverse learners, Mezam

1. Introduction

Mentoring is a vital aspect of pre-service teachers' engagement with professional practice (Shankar, 2022). Mena *et al.* (2017) say mentoring is the most effective way to help pre-service teachers develop their expertise as future professionals. Acquiring pertinent skills is facilitated by mentoring (Al-Jaro, Asmawi, & Abdul-Ghafour, 2020). A mentor needs personal and interpersonal skills to engage effectively with their mentees (Bird & Hudson 2015). The field of mentoring is complicated (Leshem, 2012). Constant focus and adaptation are required to guarantee successful mentoring with worthwhile experiences during teaching practice (Hudson & Hudson, 2010; Maphalala, 2013). Thus, in order to effectively assist pre-service teachers in their endeavors, mentors in placement teacher training schools must have the necessary skills (Orland-Barak & Wang, 2020). It was recommended (Hudson, 2013) that educational institutions that prepare teachers "... *not only pay more serious attention to the skills mentors use in their supervisory practice but also the extent to which their support facilitates the acquisition of knowledge.*" This begs the question of whether mentors acquire the required skills on the job or if they are already prepared.

Effective mentoring helps pre-service teachers receive quality guidance that empowers them with the requisite skills. Mentorship provides pre-service teachers with opportunities to learn and practice affective strategies for engaging diverse learners. By observing mentors in action and receiving direct instruction, pre-service teachers can develop the necessary skills to adapt their teaching to meet various needs. Guidance is easily achievable when relevant feedback is provided (Carter & Francis 2011). Feedback instills confidence and motivation in pre-service teachers, helping them to recognize their strengths and identify areas for improvement, thereby enhancing their self-efficacy (Rauduvaitė *et al.*, 2015). Mentors who model culturally responsive practices can help pre-service teachers understand the importance of cultural awareness and sensitivity. This exposure increases their confidence in recognizing and valuing the diverse backgrounds of their students.

2. Background to the Study

Mentoring is a valued component for pre-service teacher training for a diverse student population. Tareef (2013) says that mentoring relationships consist of skilled

professionals supporting and guiding others less practiced in a field. Mentoring relationships were time-consuming and evolved over time (Tareef, 2013). In the case of pre-service teachers, assigned classroom teachers during practicum and internship field placements served as mentors. Participants unanimously said that the classroom mentor was the extent of their mentoring experience. White and Mason (2006) suggested an informal approach to mentoring could accomplish the same or more in the mentee's professional growth.

Hoben (2021) identified a gap between mentors and mentees during training and practice. Mentors' capacity to effectively support pre-service teachers during their teaching practice is impacted by their inability to devote enough time to their primary responsibility of teaching. Sometimes, mentors are careful not to prioritize the needs of pre-service teachers over finishing the curriculum (Jita & Munje, 2022). Mentoring pre-service teachers who lack content knowledge and other essential skills can also be frustrating (Hoben, 2021). Some mentors are not professionally prepared for mentorship roles, which makes this worse (Hoben, 2021). Most mentors rely on their own experiences and expertise as teachers to socialize pre-service teachers into the cultures and practices of teaching in the school contexts where pre-service teachers learn to teach (Hoffman *et al.*, 2015). According to Al-Jaro *et al.* (2020), this leads to inadequate mentee support, which has detrimental effects on pre-service teachers' pedagogical practices.

Mentor encounters a number of difficulties that may affect their capacity to assist and develop mentees. According to Ewing (2021), mentors frequently have full-time teaching duties, and it can be difficult to juggle mentoring and giving mentees feedback while teaching, especially if they have several mentees to support. It's possible that mentor teachers lack the tools and resources required to provide mentees with effective support (Bressman *et al.*, 2018). Effective communication between mentor teachers and mentees is very important, but language barriers or cultural differences can sometimes make communication challenging (Balali *et al.*, 2018). Communication can be made even more difficult by the fact that mentor teachers may have to work with mentees who have different learning preferences or styles. It's possible that some mentees are not entirely ready for the teaching practice.

Lou (2022) defines 'competence' in an activity or task as the capability of a person; it describes how a teacher carries out their responsibilities in order to fulfill the requirements of a specific role in class activities. Competence necessitates the traits, abilities, behaviors, and knowledge that allow individuals to carry out the tasks and responsibilities of a particular job (Panggabean & Himawan, 2016). A complex combination of knowledge, skills, understanding, values, attitudes, and desire that results in effective, embodied human action in the world, in a specific domain, is what is meant by competence (Crick, 2008). It serves as a balance between the skills, knowledge, and character traits that a teacher needs. Other definitions of teacher competency include the skills, knowledge, and convictions necessary to perform the job well; additionally, from a humanistic and democratic perspective, teacher competency is seen as providing high-quality education to individuals as a necessary condition for human rights (Bayer,

2017; Sulaiman, Hamzah, & Rahim, 2017). Teacher competence is the competence of the teacher as a balance of the skills, knowledge, and beliefs of teachers to effectively carry out the profession as a teacher (Lou 2022). Teachers must perform their duties with a high level of competence. Since teachers have more authority in education, it shows how good they are. Education quality can be raised by having qualified teachers and a high-quality learning environment. In the field of education, raising the caliber of teachers is essential (Arrah & Swain, 2014).

The goal of teacher education programs (TEPs) is to prepare qualified educators who are equipped to take on the typical challenges faced by new teachers. First-time teachers are less effective than more seasoned ones because many TEPs find it difficult to make the connection between theory and practice (Hanushek *et al.*, 2004). In addition to having an impact on student achievement in their first and second years of teaching, a new teacher's lack of preparation also affects their self-efficacy, confidence, and readiness to use effective teaching strategies (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). According to research, new teachers typically have trouble setting goals, managing the classroom, and assessing students (Buck *et al.*, 2010; Daniels & Poth, 2017; Gilles *et al.*, 2013; Gorneau, 2014; Lew & Nelson, 2016; Reed, 2012).

It is important for teacher education programs to support and train pre-service teachers, thereby enhancing their multicultural competency. Kongnyuy *et al.* (2021) state that competence is based on how effectively the teacher was trained in the training school. Multicultural competence comprises: multicultural awareness, multicultural knowledge and multicultural skills. Shey and Fangwi (2020) indicated that it is important for teachers to be culturally competent in pedagogy in order to address the diversity in the classroom, and in particular, the various learning styles of students. The competence of teachers is a good indicator of their quality. During their pre-service training, teachers can demonstrate their competence; they must possess the attributes required for the position. In the field of education, raising the caliber of teachers is essential, and this can be achieved starting with pre-service teachers, who will train before entering the teaching profession (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Yoon, 2001; Mangin & Stoelinga, 2010; PGG, 2011).

Mentorship plays a pivotal role in the professional development of pre-service teachers, particularly in enhancing their perceived competences in addressing the needs of diverse learners (Shankar, 2022). Daly and Milton (2017) say mentoring is an important tool in supporting student teacher development across different career stages. Teacher educators play a critically important role in the careers of pre-service teachers (PSTs). They have the responsibility of introducing PSTs to the practical and intellectual work of teaching by providing sustained and critical feedback (Zeichner & Conklin, 2005). When mentors do their jobs well, PSTs' learning is accelerated. Mentors assist PSTs to progress along the continuum from novice teacher to classroom-ready teacher. As classrooms become increasingly diverse, the ability to effectively teach students from various cultural, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds is essential

Mentoring is a vital aspect of pre-service teachers' engagement with professional practice (Shankar, 2022). Effective mentors need personal and interpersonal skills to engage with their mentees (Bird & Hudson 2015), guiding, scaffolding, and nurturing them in both professional and personal arenas. West (2016) explained the support provided by mentors can include designing and working with existing curriculum, reflecting on teaching, building confidence, building and maintaining trust, creating enthusiasm, modelling and teaching lessons, exploring teaching strategies, helping with classroom management strategies, offering assessment and evaluation of teaching, providing resources, making observations, offering feedback, facilitating problem solving, and helping the novice transition to the culture of teaching. Thus, mentoring entails a multi-dimensional skillset on the part of the mentor (Ndebele and Legg-Jack, 2022).

Hagenauer, Waber, and De Zordo (2021) say that *"the quality of the relationship between the mentor teacher and the student teacher is vital for successful training"*. Hudson (2016) added that a positive mentor-mentee relationship is more likely to develop in a milieu where trust and respect exist. When pre-service teachers are warmly received and supported by their mentors, their confidence is boosted as they feel valued and motivated (Hagenauer *et al.*, 2021). Sokhulu (2018) argued that potential positive relationships are demonstrated from the way mentors initially react toward pre-service teachers when introduced to them as mentees. Quality mentor-mentee relationships pave the way for pre-service teachers to develop their identities and teaching practice as professional teachers (Hudson, 2016; Izadinia, 2018).

Effective mentoring helps pre-service teachers receive quality guidance that empowers them with the requisite skills and competences. Mentorship provides pre-service teachers with opportunities to learn and practice affective strategies for engaging diverse learners. By observing mentors in action and receiving direct instruction, pre-service teachers can develop the necessary skills to adapt their teaching to meet various needs. Guidance is easily achievable when relevant feedback is provided (Carter & Francis 2001). Feedback instills confidence and motivation in pre-service teachers, helping them to recognize their strengths and identify areas for improvement, thereby enhancing their self-efficacy (Rauduvaitė *et al.*, 2015). Mentors who model culturally responsive practices can help pre-service teachers understand the importance of cultural awareness and sensitivity. This exposure increases their confidence in recognizing and valuing the diverse backgrounds of their students.

Mentors who set aside time to provide feedback and debriefings after sessions, especially in their capacity to teach diverse learners, are instrumental in mentee professional development (Hagenauer *et al.*, 2021). When mentors affirm their capabilities and provide encouragement, pre-service teachers are more likely to feel competent in addressing the unique challenges posed by a diverse classroom. Feedback depends on how it is communicated because *"it is not what is said which hurts but how it is said"* (Mukeredzi, 2017). This is important because feedback serves as a learning curve for pre-service teachers and a useful tool for mentors to create a space for reflection,

collaboration, and peer learning since errors and challenges are identified and ameliorated in the process (Mukeredzi, 2017; Rauduvaitė *et al.*, 2015). Chaliès *et al.* (2004) concluded that modeling, personalized feed, emotional support, and opportunities for reflection, mentors play a vital role in shaping pre-service teachers' competence and readiness to engage with diversity. This relationship not only enhances their perceived competence but also prepares them to create inclusive and effective learning environments in their future classroom.

There are some ways to improve the quality of mentoring for pre-service teachers' perceived competences. Capel and Lawrence (2018) indicated it is important to establish clear expectations for what pre-service teachers should expect from their mentor and what the mentor expects from the pre-service teachers. Guidelines for communication, observation, feedback, and evaluation can be established and communicated clearly to all parties involved. Benjamin and Xolani (2024) added that mentors should receive ongoing training and support to help them develop the skills and competences they need to provide effective mentoring. Topics such as effective communication, observation, feedback strategies, and strategies for supporting mentees in different contexts should be included in the training. Mentors and mentees should work together collaboratively to set goals and plan lessons so as promote sharing of ideas and encourages the pre-service teachers to take an active role in their learning (Stanulis *et al.*, 2019). Relationships between the mentor and pre-service teachers should be built on trust, respect, and mutual understanding. Creating a positive learning environment encourages mentor teachers to take risks, ask questions, and learn from their mistakes (Hudson & Hudson, 2018; Cape and Lawrence, 2018). By implementing these strategies, teacher education programs can improve the quality of mentoring, which may influence pre-service teachers' perceived competences.

This is to show that pre-service teacher program should develop cultural competences in their students. Cultural competence includes understanding and properly responding to the unique combination of cultural variables- including ability, age, beliefs, ethnicity, experience, gender, gender identity, linguistic background, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic (Jenks & Kanpol, 2001). When a teacher is culturally competent, it enables him/her to understand, communicate with and effectively interact with students from diverse cultural backgrounds and people across cultures. Villegas and Lucas (2002) added that culturally responsive teachers should have competencies, such as being socio-culturally conscious, feeling the responsibility of carrying out education based on CRT, actively using the learning resources of students in the learning process, supporting their students in structuring their knowledge, learning about their students' lives, and knowing culturally responsive teaching techniques and practices.

The theoretical framework of this study uses Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development, which emphasizes that cognitive development is a social process, with learning occurring through interaction with more knowledgeable others within a learners ZPD (Shabani, 2010). Experienced teachers or teacher educators act as the "*more*

knowledgeable others," guiding and supporting pre-service teachers within their ZPD for culturally responsive practices. Mentors who effectively implement CRT in their own classroom can provide powerful models for pre-service teachers to observe and emulate (Bandura, 1977). Witnessing experienced teachers successfully engage with diverse learners, adapt curriculum, and create inclusive environments can enhance pre-service teachers' belief in their own ability to do so (Feiman-nemser, 2003).

Pre-service teachers' engagements in reflective practice critically examine their own cultural biases, assumptions, and teaching practices (Verenikina, 2008). Incorporating reflective practices or giving feedback to pre-service teachers on their performance encourages them to construct new understandings regarding what they are learning (Smagorinsky, 2018). According to Farrell (2016), reflective practice helps teachers to collect evidence about their teaching practice in order to analyze, interpret and evaluate their experiences with the intention to improve future teaching. Mentorship often involves opportunities for reflection on teaching experiences and discussions about CRT principles (McAllum, 2014). This dialogue, guided by the mentor, can facilitate the internalization of culturally responsive approaches and a deeper understanding of the diverse needs of learners in the specific context of the Mezam Division. Mentorship can provide pre-service teachers with a sense of belonging and support, reducing feelings of isolation or inadequacy when faced with the complexities of teaching diverse learners. This supportive environment can foster a greater sense of perceived competence and self-efficacy (Tschannen-moran & Woolfolk, 2001).

3. Statement of the Problem

Many pre-service teachers feel unprepared or lack confidence in their ability to effectively teach students from diverse backgrounds (different cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, academic or special needs backgrounds). This is a significant concern given the increasing diversion of student populations in classrooms in the Mezam Division. Research studies have shown that many preservice teachers enter the field of teaching lacking the knowledge, skills and dispositions to effectively instruct culturally diverse students. Ndebele and Legg-Jack Dagogo (2022) reveal that pre-service teachers, even after having completed courses on diversity, demonstrate low self-efficacy concerning their implementation in teaching. Mentorship is identified as a vital component in supporting pre-service teachers' development, especially in practical skills and confidence. If mentorship is deficient or ineffective during training, pre-service teachers may not gain the necessary support to feel competent in addressing diverse learners. This study, therefore, intends to explore the effect of mentorship on pre-service teachers' perceived competence in addressing diverse learners' needs in the Mezam Division.

3.1 Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study is to explore the effect of mentorship on pre-service teachers' perceived competence in addressing diverse learners' needs in the Mezam Division.

3.2 Research Questions

How does mentorship affect pre-service teachers' perceived competence in addressing diverse learners' needs in the Mezam Division?

3.3 Research Hypotheses

Ho_1: There is no significant difference in how mentorship affects pre-service teachers' perceived competence in addressing diverse learners' needs in the Mezam Division.

Ha_1: There is a significant difference in how mentorship affects pre-service teachers' perceived competence in addressing diverse learners' needs in the Mezam Division.

4. Methodology

The study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the effect of mentorship on pre-service teachers' perceived competence in addressing diverse learners' needs in the Mezam Division. A total of 334 pre-service teachers were selected for the study, comprising 273 from the first cycle and 61 from the second cycle. The sample distribution follows the trend of the population, with HTTTC contributing the largest number of sampled students (173), followed by HTTC (139), and FED (TED) (22) and six teacher educators. The researcher used a questionnaire for student teachers and an interview guide for teacher educators to collect data. These were all students from the University of Bamenda, the reason being that the University of Bamenda is the only government university in the whole of the Mezam Division that trains teachers to teach in secondary schools.

4.1 Method of Data Analysis

The data collected included both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data obtained from the open-ended question were categorized and analyzed thematically based on research objectives. The quantitative data collected from the sampled schools using students `questionnaires were organized, cleaned, coded and entered into a computer program, Statistical Package for Social Science SPSS for analysis. The quantitative data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, means, standard deviations and the one-sample t-test. The t-test provides a method for testing hypotheses about the population means, where it supports or rejects null hypotheses. It also allows for comparing two groups to see if there are significant differences between them.

5. Findings and Discussions

The findings are categorized based on different aspects to explore the effect of mentorship on pre-service teachers' perceived competence in addressing diverse learners' needs in the Mezam Division.

Table 1: Mentorship and Pre-service Teachers'
Perceived Competence in Addressing Diverse Learners' Needs

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	SA/A	SD/D	Mean	Std Dev
21	My mentor has provided valuable support in developing my skills to address the needs of diverse learners	140	167	17	10	304	27	3.31	.704
22	I have been effectively guided by my mentor to understand the best practice for teaching diverse students	149	150	26	9	299	35	3.31	.731
23	Mentorship has increased my confidence in applying culturally responsive teaching strategies	114	187	21	12	301	33	3.21	.712
24	The feedback I received from my mentor helps me to be more competent in addressing the diverse needs of students	132	168	21	13	300	34	3.25	.742
25	Working with my mentor on lesson planning has improved my ability to design inclusive lessons for diverse learners	138	150	26	20	288	46	3.22	.828
26	My mentor has helped me to develop problem-solving skills essential for addressing challenges with diverse learners.	127	174	28	5	301	33	3.27	.674
27	Useful resources that enhance understanding of how to support diverse learners were provided by my mentor	125	152	41	16	277	57	3.16	.816
28	Mentorship has encouraged me to reflect on my teaching practice experiences, leading to greater competence in addressing diversity	135	171	18	10	306	28	3.29	.704
29	Through mentorship, I have learned strategies for building strong relationships with diverse learners	118	173	31	12	291	43	3.19	.746
30	My mentor has fostered a commitment in me to create an inclusive classroom environment for all students	157	136	29	12	293	41	3.31	.778
Overall Mean of Responses (out of 40)								**32.51**	**4.821**

The findings in Table 1 indicate that mentorship also has a strong positive effect on pre-service teachers' perceived competence in addressing diverse learners' needs in the Mezam Division. The overall mean score of 3.25 suggests that most pre-service teachers

agree that mentorship plays a crucial role in enhancing their teaching skills, confidence, and preparedness to support diverse students. This highlights the importance of experienced mentors in shaping future teachers' ability to create inclusive learning environments. One of the strongest areas of agreement is that mentorship provides valuable support in developing the skills needed to address the needs of diverse learners, with a mean score of 3.31. This suggests that mentors play a key role in helping pre-service teachers acquire effective teaching strategies for diverse classrooms. Similarly, pre-service teachers reported that mentorship increased their confidence in applying culturally responsive teaching strategies (mean = 3.21) and encouraged them to reflect on their teaching experiences to improve competence in addressing diversity (mean = 3.29). These findings emphasize that mentorship fosters professional growth by helping future teachers think critically about their instructional practices.

Additionally, the feedback provided by mentors was found to be particularly beneficial, with a mean score of 3.25. This suggests that constructive guidance helps pre-service teachers refine their approaches to teaching diverse students. Moreover, working with mentors on lesson planning improved their ability to design inclusive lessons (mean = 3.22), reinforcing the idea that mentorship supports practical skill development in adapting instruction to meet diverse needs. Furthermore, pre-service teachers acknowledged that mentorship helped them develop problem-solving skills essential for addressing challenges in diverse classrooms (mean = 3.27), highlighting the role of mentors in preparing teachers to navigate complex learning environments. However, one of the lower mean scores (3.16) was recorded for the statement regarding the provision of useful resources by mentors to support diverse learners. This suggests that while mentorship is generally effective, there may be gaps in the availability or accessibility of instructional resources that could further enhance pre-service teachers' understanding of diversity. This indicates a potential area for improvement in mentorship programs, ensuring that future teachers have access to well-curated materials that support inclusive education.

Overall, the findings suggest that mentorship greatly enhances pre-service teachers' perceived competence in addressing diverse learners' needs. By offering guidance, feedback, and opportunities for reflection, mentors play a critical role in shaping pre-service teachers' ability to implement inclusive teaching strategies.

However, increasing access to instructional resources could further strengthen the impact of mentorship programs.

Ho$_3$: Mentorship has no significant effect on pre-service teachers' confidence in teaching diverse learners in the Mezam Division.

Ha$_3$: Mentorship has a significant effect on pre-service teachers' confidence in teaching diverse learners in the Mezam Division.

Table 2: One-Sample Statistics for Hypothesis Three

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Mentorship and pre-service teachers' perceived competence in addressing diverse learners' needs	334	32.51	4.821	.264

The descriptive statistics in Table 2 show that the mean score for mentorship and pre-service teachers' perceived competence in addressing the needs of diverse learners is 32.51, with a standard deviation of 4.821. The mean suggests that pre-service teachers generally acknowledge the positive role of mentorship in enhancing their confidence to teach diverse students. Furthermore, the standard deviation indicates some variability in responses, but overall, the data points to a strong perception of mentorship as an essential factor in building teaching competence.

Table 3: One-Sample t-test on Mentorship and Pre-service
Teachers' Confidence in Teaching Diverse Learners

	Test Value = 25					
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Mentorship and pre-service teachers' perceived competence in addressing diverse learners' needs	28.477	333	.000	7.512	6.99	8.03

Table 3 provides the results of a one-sample t-test, comparing the observed mean (32.51) to a test value of 25. The analysis yields a t-value of 28.477, with 333 degrees of freedom, and a significance level (p-value) of .000. Since the p-value is significantly below the standard threshold of .05, the null hypothesis (Ho$_3$) is rejected. This confirms that mentorship has a significant effect on pre-service teachers' confidence in teaching diverse learners, thereby supporting the alternative hypothesis (Ha$_3$).

Additionally, the mean difference of 7.512, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 6.99 to 8.03, further emphasizes the statistical and practical significance of these findings. The positive mean difference indicates that pre-service teachers who benefit from mentorship report significantly higher levels of confidence in their ability to address student diversity effectively.

These findings strongly support the alternative hypothesis (Ha$_3$), demonstrating that mentorship significantly enhances pre-service teachers' confidence in teaching diverse learners. These results highlight the importance of incorporating structured mentorship programs into teacher education curricula to ensure that future educators receive the necessary guidance and support to navigate diverse classroom environments successfully.

5.1 Mentorship and Pre-Service Teachers' Preparedness in Teaching Diverse Learners in Mezam Division

The interview findings presented in Table 4 offer valuable insights into the role of mentorship in shaping pre-service teachers' preparedness to teach diverse learners in the Mezam Division. The thematic analysis reveals that mentorship has a significantly positive impact on the confidence, competence, and adaptive teaching abilities of pre-service teachers. Through practical support and constructive feedback, mentors play a critical role in guiding teacher trainees toward more inclusive and effective classroom practices. One of the major themes emerging from the responses is that mentorship enhances both the technical and reflective aspects of teaching diverse learners. A respondent emphasized, "…my mentor has been instrumental in helping me integrate inclusive strategies into my lesson plans…," illustrating that mentorship extends beyond general guidance to include specific pedagogical support. By working closely with mentors, pre-service teachers gain practical skills in lesson planning, classroom management, and differentiating instruction to meet varied learner needs.

Table 4: Thematic Analyses of Interviews on Mentorship and Pre-Service Teachers' Preparedness in Teaching Diverse Learners in the Mezam Division

Category of Variables	Questioning themes	Response themes	Key statement of interviewees
Independent Variable: Mentorship	How does mentorship influence pre-service teachers' readiness to teach diverse learners?	Positive impact of mentorship on competence and confidence.	*"… my mentor has been instrumental in helping me integrate inclusive strategies into my lesson plans…"*
Dependent Variable: Preparedness to Teach Diverse Learners	What aspects of mentorship are most beneficial for developing inclusive pedagogical skills?	Support in lesson planning, classroom management, and addressing learner diversity.	*"… the feedback I receive from my mentor helps me reflect on my teaching and improve my approach…"*
Control Variables: Mentor characteristics, mentor-mentee relationship	How do mentors help in fostering reflection and adaptive teaching methods?	Importance of mentor feedback in improving teaching strategies.	*"… mentors need more resources to support us in teaching diverse learners effectively…"*

Furthermore, the findings point to the value of mentor feedback as a catalyst for professional growth. Another interviewee remarked, "…the feedback I receive from my mentor helps me reflect on my teaching and improve my approach…," highlighting the reflective dimension of the mentor-mentee relationship. This indicates that effective mentorship not only provides direct instruction or modeling but also encourages critical thinking and self-evaluation, which are essential for developing adaptive teaching strategies in diverse classrooms. Mentors also serve as role models in demonstrating how to navigate real-world classroom challenges, especially when it comes to addressing learner diversity. The support they provide allows pre-service teachers to build

confidence in handling a range of student backgrounds, abilities, and needs. This experiential learning, grounded in authentic teaching contexts, reinforces theoretical knowledge acquired during training and bridges the gap between policy and practice.

However, a limitation identified in the responses is the perceived lack of adequate support for mentors themselves. One participant stated, "…mentors need more resources to support us in teaching diverse learners effectively…," pointing to systemic challenges that may hinder the mentorship process. This suggests that while mentorship is beneficial, its impact is dependent on the quality of the mentor's training, the resources available to them, and the structure of the mentorship program. The effectiveness of mentorship is also shaped by control variables such as mentor characteristics and the quality of the mentor-mentee relationship. Although these variables were not deeply explored in the thematic summary, they are implicit in the success of the mentorship experiences described. Trust, mutual respect, and consistent engagement likely enhance the learning outcomes for pre-service teachers and should be considered in future program design and evaluation.

Therefore, the interview findings clearly demonstrate that mentorship is a crucial factor in preparing pre-service teachers to teach diverse learners. It facilitates the development of inclusive pedagogical skills, encourages reflective practice, and builds confidence through real-time support and feedback. Nonetheless, for mentorship to reach its full potential, mentors themselves must be adequately supported and equipped with resources to meet the growing demands of diverse educational environments.

6. Discussion of Findings

The finding shows the role of mentorship in enhancing pre-service teachers' perceived competence in addressing the needs of diverse learners in Mezam Division. With an overall mean score of 32.51 out of 40, it is evident that the majority of respondents acknowledge the value of mentorship in developing inclusive pedagogical skills. For example, statement 21, which received a mean score of 3.31, highlights how mentors provide essential support in developing the capacity to work with diverse students. This finding resonates with Hudson (2021), who emphasizes that mentorship enables teacher candidates to integrate theory with real-world classroom practices, particularly in multicultural settings. Furthermore, Margevica-Grinberga & Odiņa (2021) found that teacher mentors who model culturally responsive teaching significantly enhance the competencies of their mentees in differentiated instruction, classroom management, and inclusivity.

Several items in the data illustrate the multi-dimensional benefits of mentorship. For instance, statement 24 (mean = 3.25) confirms that feedback from mentors is instrumental in refining pre-service teachers' approaches to diversity. This aligns with Ambrosetti & Dekkers (2020), who found that quality mentor feedback leads to improved reflective practice and teaching performance. The data also shows that lesson planning with mentors (statement 25, mean = 3.22) helps future teachers develop inclusive lesson

strategies—consistent with Spooner-Lane (2021), who argues that joint planning fosters the practical application of inclusive teaching principles. Mentors also help develop problem-solving skills (statement 26, mean = 3.27), a critical asset for navigating diverse classrooms where cultural, linguistic, and academic challenges intersect. However, there is a noted concern in statement 27, where the relatively lower mean score of 3.16 indicates a shortfall in mentors' provision of useful resources for supporting diversity. This suggests a potential gap that institutions must address by training mentors to source and share relevant, inclusive educational materials.

Reflective practice, promoted through mentorship (statement 28, mean = 3.29), also emerges as a vital mechanism for enhancing teaching competence. This finding is reinforced by Zeichner and Liston (2022), who argue that teacher reflection, especially under the guidance of experienced mentors, leads to greater awareness of implicit biases and fosters equity-oriented practices. Similarly, statement 30 (mean = 3.31) shows that mentors instill a stronger commitment to inclusivity, emphasizing that mentorship impacts not only skill development but also shapes professional values Shankar (2018) have shown that mentoring programs which emphasize ethical responsibility and inclusivity produce more socially conscious educators who are equipped to challenge inequities in education. Nevertheless, it is crucial to ensure that mentorship is consistently structured, culturally aware, and resource-rich, to maximize its potential across different mentor-mentee relationships.

The statistical analysis further validates the effectiveness of mentorship. The one-sample t-test reveals a t-value of 28.477 and a p-value of .000, with a mean difference of 7.512, indicating a statistically significant and substantial positive effect of mentorship on teaching confidence. The 95% confidence interval (6.99 to 8.03) reinforces the reliability of this finding. These results are in line with studies such as Ndebele and Legg-Jack (2022), which report that mentored pre-service teachers display higher self-efficacy, particularly in classrooms with diverse learning needs. This supports the rejection of the null hypothesis (Ho3), confirming that mentorship significantly boosts pre-service teachers' confidence in teaching diverse learners, and validating the alternative hypothesis (Ha3).

6.1 Implications of the Study

Mentorship is identified as a crucial factor in enhancing pre-service teachers' abilities to work with diverse students. Mentors provide guidance, feedback, and support, helping teacher candidates develop critical skills such as lesson planning, reflective practices, and culturally responsive teaching strategies. Teacher education programs should ensure that mentors are well-trained and have access to adequate resources to support the development of future educators, particularly in fostering inclusivity.

6.2 Recommendations

Mentorship frameworks should be enhanced by school administrations and teacher training colleges to ensure that mentors are trained in culturally responsive pedagogy,

and equipped to provide inclusive resources, feedback, and modeling practices. Regular workshops and mentor certification programs should be introduced. These mentorship frameworks should be structured, culturally responsive and should prioritize practical support, resource sharing, and feedback loops between mentors and mentees. Mentor training should emphasize inclusivity, reflective practice, and access to diverse educational tools to bridge gaps in pre-service teacher support.

7. Conclusion

The study confirmed that mentorship is a critical factor in preparing pre-service teachers to meet the diverse needs of students effectively. Through targeted support, feedback, reflection, and modeling, mentors help shape competent, confident, and inclusive educators. However, the relatively lower ratings concerning access to instructional resources point to a gap that must be addressed through better mentor training and institutional support. As teacher education programs evolve, it is essential to integrate robust mentorship frameworks that prioritize cultural responsiveness, inclusivity, and resource accessibility to ensure all teachers are well-prepared for the complexities of diverse classroom environments.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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