TEACHING LEARNERS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES: EXPERIENCES OF STUDENT TEACHERS AT METHODIST COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, GHANA

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Abstract:

The study aimed to explore the experiences of student teachers teaching learners with learning disabilities in regular schools within the Birim Central Municipality. Using a phenomenological research design and purposive sampling, 25 participants were selected. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, with analysis using a thematic approach. The findings highlighted prominent learning obstacles, including reading challenges, writing difficulties, and problems with basic arithmetic. The schools were observed to provide limited instructional adaptations for these learners. Student teachers faced several challenges, such as extended time required for teaching these learners, insufficient teaching materials, negative attitudes from both mentors and peers towards learners with learning disabilities, and limited knowledge in managing such learners. The study recommended enhancing the training provided to student teachers, focusing specifically on instructional adaptations tailored to learners with learning disabilities. Additionally, advocacy efforts should be intensified, featuring individuals who have overcome similar challenges and achieved success. The Ghana Education Service, supported by Parent Associations, should educate parents on the importance of providing adequate learning materials to learners with disabilities.

Keywords: attitudes, disorder, learning disabilities, stigmatisation, teaching practice

1. Introduction

The off-campus teaching practice programme under the Diploma in Basic Education programme in Colleges of Education spans for a whole year where student teachers are posted to basic schools to undertake training to develop requisite professional knowledge, skills and values needed for classroom settings (Transforming Teacher

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Education and Learning [T-TEL] & Ministry of Education [MOE]-Ghana, 2016). However, since the inception of the Four-Year Bachelor of Education programme, the off-campus teaching practice now covers only a semester, which consists of four months (T-TEL & MOE, 2016). Teaching practice exposes student teachers to practical issues such as school management, disciplinary procedures, and staff relations, as well as community exposure and appropriate professional behaviour development both inside and outside the classroom (Abudu & Donkor, 2014). According to Kihwele and Mtandi (2020), teaching practice is seen as a crucial part of teacher education as it helps to consolidate pedagogical skills and competencies through merging theoretical understanding and actual practices, as well as how to select, prepare and use teaching and learning materials in teaching diverse learners.

Tillema *et al.* (2011) assert that teaching practice offers student teachers a unique learning environment distinct from campus-based learning, compelling them to adapt to new circumstances. During their practicum, student teachers engage with diverse learners both inside and outside the classroom, including those with learning difficulties (Possi & Milinga, 2017). Despite this valuable exposure, student teachers often face challenges in effectively addressing the needs of these learners, resulting in unmet educational requirements (Dotse, 2012).

Learning disability is a disorder characterised as a dynamic and evolving condition that impedes the absorption, retention, and recall of information (Narh, 2015). Consequently, learners with learning disability perform below the expected standard for their peer group due to various challenges related to basic psychological processing functions (Korhonen, 2016). These psychological processes are associated with language use and can result in deficiencies in listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or mathematical calculations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Adelman's (1971) Instructional Model of Learning and Its Relevance
The study utilised Adelman's (1971) interactional model of learning disabilities as its framework. This model emphasises that a student's academic performance is influenced by the interplay between their individual strengths, weaknesses, and limitations and the specific situational factors within the classroom environment. Adelman rejects the notion that school failure solely stems from inherent deficits in the child, instead highlighting the crucial role of the interaction between the student and the instructional program. Central to Adelman's model is the testable hypothesis that the greater the mismatch between a student's characteristics and the instructional programme, the higher the likelihood of poor academic performance. Consequently, the model proposes that teachers who excel in personalising instruction are likely to have fewer students facing learning challenges, while those who struggle with personalisation may have a higher proportion of students with learning problems.

The relevance of Adelman's model to the study lies in its comprehensive consideration of both child and situational variables within the classroom. It offers a nuanced understanding of learners by examining their behaviours, skills, interests, and needs within the school context. Furthermore, the model delineates key aspects of the classroom environment, including personnel, goals, procedures, and materials used in instructional efforts. Importantly, Adelman's model provides a structured approach to remediation, offering guidance on addressing learning disabilities sequentially and hierarchically. By familiarising student teachers with the characteristics of learners with learning disabilities and strategies for lesson adaptation and remediation, the model facilitates the fulfillment of unique student needs within the classroom setting.

2.2 Meaning and Types of Learning Disabilities

Alhassan and Abosi (2014) see learning disabilities as challenges faced by learners that are not directly attributed to a specific intellectual, physical, or sensory disability, but as a result of socio-economic issues. Instead, they may arise due to environmental, cultural, or economic factors (Narh, 2015). These disabilities manifest in both academic performance and social adaptation.

Learning disabilities often become apparent when a child enrols in school and struggles with specific skills such as calculation, writing, and reading, despite possessing average or above-average intelligence. These struggles result in subpar educational achievements, causing the child to fall short of their potential. Various types of learning disabilities, including challenges in arithmetic, writing, and reading, can significantly impact a student's educational trajectory. Addressing these issues requires tailored support and interventions to meet the unique needs of each student and facilitate their academic progress (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2011; Suma, 2022). In addition to specific academic challenges, learners with learning disabilities often face social and behavioural issues, such as inattentiveness, lack of self-organization, and shyness (Special Attention Project [SAP], 2011). These issues further complicate their educational experience and underscore the need for comprehensive support strategies.

Arithmetic problems are generally characterised by difficulty in learning or comprehending mathematics, affecting a person's ability to understand and manipulate numbers or grasp numerical concepts (Narh, 2015). A child with an arithmetic difficulty might struggle with organising problems on the page, keeping numbers lined up, following through on multi-step calculations such as long division, accurately transposing numbers on paper or into a calculator (e.g., turning 56 into 65), and distinguishing right from left. Learners with math learning disabilities often face challenges in areas such as spatial order and relationships, division, time, and money. Several studies, including those by Jordan *et al.* (2015) and Ozsoy *et al.* (2015), have shown that students with basic calculation difficulties also tend to have writing and reading difficulties. Ozsoy *et al.* (2015) analysed the correlation between students' reading skills and their ability to solve mathematical problems. The sample included six third-grade

students with varying levels of reading skills. The study concluded that a student's reading level had a significant impact on their ability to solve mathematical problems.

Writing difficulties refer to the challenges faced by learners who struggle to write content coherently, transcribe spoken words effectively, or write legibly (Hadi, 2016). These difficulties further include an inability to write properly on the same line, mixing up similar-looking letters, incorrect ordering of letters or words in a sentence, reversing numbers and letters, irregular letter shapes and sizes, spelling mistakes, errors while copying text from the board or book, poor handwriting, inadequate spacing between margins and letters, improper use of lines, and inconsistent or illegible writing that mixes print and cursive styles, upper and lower case letters, and irregular sizes, shapes, or slants of letters. Additionally, learners may struggle to accurately express their thoughts in writing (Al-khresheh, 2020b).

Reading difficulty involves partial challenges in comprehending or reading material, whether read aloud or silently (Al-Qadri et al., 2021). It is characterized by issues with alphabets, word recognition, decoding, spelling, and comprehension. A child with reading difficulties may struggle with naming, learning the alphabet sequence, or printing alphabets, memorizing non-phonetic words, reading words that cannot be mentally visualized, poor visual-motor coordination, inaccurate copying, letter and word reversals, poor handwriting, sentence repetition, word and letter omissions, and grammatical errors (such as punctuation, spelling, and capitalization) (Al-Qadri et al., 2021).

Apart from biological and physiological causes, school-related factors such as teaching methods, teacher characteristics, cultural and language factors, home environment, individual factors, and school systems can contribute to reading difficulties (Alhassan & Abosi, 2014). The prevalence of reading difficulties is substantial, with estimates suggesting that between 5% and 17.5% of learners experience this problem, with males being more affected (Rajinder et al., 2017). Similarly, Rasugu (2010) found that a significant proportion of learners faced challenges in English and Math tests, with high failure rates recorded. Learners with reading difficulties often struggle in class exercises, perform poorly academically, and may face social challenges, losing respect from their peers and sometimes from teachers who should provide support and guidance (Al-Qadri, 2021). Many children possess high or normal levels of intelligence, yet are unable to cope with the demands of the current educational system opposite (World Economic and Social Survey, 2013). Due to this, parents, specialists, researchers and organisations worldwide are now sponsoring initiatives for identifying the symptoms inherent to learning disabilities and trying to discover appropriate solutions to their needs (Al-Qadri et al., 2021).

In a similar study focusing on learners with learning disabilities in primary schools, Narh (2015) indicated that teachers were aware of the presence of such learners but lacked specific knowledge about the types of learning disabilities they faced. Moreover, teachers were ill-equipped to employ adaptive instructional strategies tailored to meet the diverse learning needs of these students. The findings of Oluka and Okorie

(2014) underscored the inadequacy of modern instructional facilities for learners with learning disabilities in schools. This aligns with the results of a study by Ezeaku *et al.* (2021), which highlighted the insufficient provision of instructional and physical facilities in schools across South East Nigeria to effectively teach learners.

2.3 Challenges Student Teachers Face in Teaching Learners with Learning Disabilities
Osero (2015) highlighted numerous challenges faced by teachers in instructing learners with learning disabilities in inclusive schools. These challenges encompass a variety of issues, including a lack of knowledge about the diverse types of learners, instances of student indiscipline, heavy workloads demanding additional time, negative attitudes among teachers toward learners with disabilities, limited facilities for both teachers and learners to facilitate effective teaching and learning, and the low self-esteem experienced by learners with learning disabilities. Furthermore, Osero underscored additional obstacles such as learner absenteeism, parental opposition to classifying their children as students with special needs education, financial constraints, inadequate infrastructure, discrimination against students with special needs, and curricula that fail to address the needs of learners facing difficulties in learning.

In a study examining mentee teachers' attitudes towards learners with special needs, Amaniampong *et al.* (2020) found that 80% of participants exhibited positive attitudes, while 20% displayed negative attitudes towards these learners, particularly concerning their academic abilities. Similarly, Mantey and Esaaba (2017) discovered that children with disabilities often encounter discrimination from their peers, teachers, and other school staff members. Adusei-Bonsu (2020), in a study investigating teachers' perceptions of the impact of instructional strategies on children with reading difficulties in selected districts of the Central region of Ghana, identified several challenges in teaching learners with learning disabilities. These challenges include the presence of but insufficient teaching and learning materials, such as English reading textbooks, charts, dictionaries, and storybooks, as well as a lack of parental supervision of their children's learning at home.

Previous studies, including those by Karr *et al.* (2020), Alhassan *et al.* (2014), Narh (2015), and SAP (2011), have extensively investigated various aspects of inclusive education and teacher preparedness concerning learning disabilities. However, there remains a gap in research specifically addressing the experiences of student teachers in Ghanaian Colleges of Education regarding the instruction of learners with learning disabilities. Existing literature primarily focuses on in-service teachers or broader educational policies, often overlooking the preparatory experiences of student teachers. For instance, Karr *et al.* concentrated on the inclusion of children with learning disabilities in literacy and numeracy, involving in-service teachers. Narh's study examined in-service teachers' experiences in teaching learners with learning disabilities in primary schools in Kumasi.

2.4 Teachers' Instructional Adaptations to Meet the Needs of Learners with Learning Disabilities

Alhassan and Abosi (2014) conducted a study to assess the effectiveness of teachers in adapting instruction to meet the needs of learners with learning disabilities in regular primary schools in Ghana. Using a mixed-method design comprising descriptive and correlational surveys, data were collected from 387 teachers in the Northern region of Ghana. The research revealed that a majority of teachers lacked competence in adaptive instruction, suggesting that regular teachers were unlikely to effectively tailor instruction to the needs of learners with learning disabilities. Interestingly, this contradicts the findings of Alhassan and Abosi in the same study, which established a strong association between adaptive teaching and teachers' competence in addressing the needs of learners with learning disabilities in the regular classroom.

In their study on teacher educators' perspectives regarding inclusive education and teacher preparation in Ghana, Nketsia and Gyimah (2016) discovered positive attitudes and substantial support for inclusive education. However, the majority of teacher educators expressed concerns about Ghana's readiness for the implementation of inclusive education. Specifically, they noted that teaching learners with learning disabilities requires teachers to adapt the curriculum, materials, content, and methods to meet the unique needs of these learners. Unfortunately, learners with learning disabilities often do not benefit from the teaching methodologies and materials used in the regular classroom (Agbenyega & Deku, 2011). This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the experiences of student teachers in teaching learners with learning disabilities at the Methodist College of Education.

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate student teachers' experiences in teaching learners with learning disabilities in regular schools at Birim Central Municipality during teaching practice.

3.1 Objectives of the Study
The specific objectives of this study were to find out:
1) The type of learning disabilities identified by student teachers in the classroom during teaching practice
2) Challenges student teachers face in teaching learners with learning disabilities during teaching practice
3) How student teachers adapt instruction to the needs of learners with learning disabilities during teaching practice.

3.2 Research Questions
The following research questions guided the study:

1) What type of learning disabilities do student teachers identify in the classrooms during teaching practice?
2) What challenges do student teachers face in teaching learners with learning disabilities in the classroom during teaching practice?
3) How do student teachers adapt instruction to the needs of learners with learning disabilities during teaching practice?

4. Research Methods

4.1 Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological research design to investigate the experiences of student teachers in teaching learners with learning disabilities in the Birim Central Municipality. Phenomenology aims to explore the meaning of individuals' lived experiences of a phenomenon, describing both what they experienced and how they experienced it (Creswell, 2012). According to Ary *et al.* (2014), phenomenological studies delve into participants' perspectives and experiences of a phenomenon. This design was considered appropriate for the study as it sought to gain a deeper understanding of student teachers' lived experiences in teaching learners with learning disabilities, capturing detailed insights into individual situations. However, it is important to note that the findings of the study cannot be generalised in the same manner as those from survey research.

4.2 Population

Population in research refers to the entire set of individuals of interest to a researcher (Gravetter & Forzano, 2009). The total population of this study was 50 participants from schools in three selected communities where student teachers are placed for their final year teaching practice. The target population was 50 student teachers, comprising 30 males and 20 females, whereas the accessible population was 25 student teachers, which consisted of 15 males and 10 females.

4.3 Sample Size/Sampling Technique

Twenty-five participants were selected for the study, comprising 10 females and 15 males. Among these participants, 10 were lead mentees (student teacher leaders), while five student teachers each were drawn from Oda, Oda Nkwata, and Akim Aboabo schools, as these towns constitute the Birim Central Municipality. Convenience sampling was utilised to select these schools, considering their relevance to the study's objectives. Additionally, purposive sampling was employed to hand-pick participants for the study. Specifically, homogeneous purposive sampling was adopted. This method involves selecting individuals, groups, or settings that possess similar characteristics or attributes relevant to the study (Andrade, 2021).

4.4 Instrument for Data Collection

Data collection employed a semi-structured interview guide, allowing for both a standardised set of questions and flexibility to explore new lines of inquiry as they arose during the interview process (Young *et al.*, 2018). This approach, as noted by Yin (2009), fosters a deeper understanding of respondents' thoughts, feelings, and the focal phenomenon compared to closed-ended questions. Lead mentees were interviewed individually, while other mentees participated in focus group discussions (FGDs). Three FGDs were conducted, each comprising five participants. The use of group interviews encouraged some participants to freely contribute, although a few expressed hesitation in expressing their views. The interview guide was developed based on existing literature. Interviews took place in the participants' schools of practice, with individual interviews lasting between 15 and 20 minutes, whereas FGDs lasted 20 to 25 minutes. Two separate days were scheduled for interviewing the two groups of student teachers involved in the study, with a week's interval. Individual interviews were conducted before the FGDs.

Ensuring the trustworthiness of the data is essential in qualitative research, as noted by Streubert and Carpenter (2011). Four criteria were employed to measure the trustworthiness of the data collected: credibility, dependability, transferability, and conformability. To enhance credibility, the researchers engaged in prolonged engagement with the participants, enabling them to detect any potential distortions in the data. For dependability, all methodological and analytical processes were clearly outlined, along with the rationale for using these processes, allowing other researchers to follow the lines of reasoning (Koch, as cited in Haq *et al.*, 2023). Transferability refers to the extent to which findings can be applied to different contexts (Koch, as cited in Haq *et al.*, 2023). The study was conducted in regular basic schools in the Birim Central Municipality, with findings potentially applicable to schools in other parts of the country. Confirmability was ensured by presenting the entire research process, from introduction to conclusions, in a clear and transparent manner, enabling any researcher wishing to audit the study to easily follow the steps taken.

4.5 Data Collection Procedure

The process commenced with the drafting of permission letters addressed to the head teachers and student teachers of the selected schools. Subsequently, familiarisation visits were conducted at these schools, during which the purpose of the study was verbally explained to the head teachers and participants. The researchers also sought the participants' willingness to participate in the study, ensuring confidentiality and privacy. Interviews were conducted in English and were tape-recorded with the participants' permission, supplemented by note-taking to capture key information. Following the interviews, each participant had the opportunity to listen to the recorded interview for verification and accuracy.

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the data collection process. Prior to initiating data collection, permission was obtained from the school authorities.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, assuring them of confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point if they no longer wished to participate.

4.6 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was guided by identifying key themes that emerged from the collected data. The process began by transcribing all interviews and identifying words, sentences, and thoughts that served as units for more detailed coding. Braun and Clarke's (2019) six-step coding of the reflexive thematic analysis approach was employed for this study, comprising the following stages: familiarization with the data, coding, generating initial themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up. This approach was applied to address all three research questions.

5. Results

The findings presented are the main themes that arose from the respondents. The findings are generally representative of the sample as a whole and accurately describe experiences of student teachers in teaching learners with learning disabilities in regular classrooms at Birim Central Municipality.

5.1 The Type of Learning Disabilities Identified by Student Teachers in the Classroom During Teaching Practice
5.1.1 Reading Problem
Reading difficulty was one of the categories of learning disabilities that emerged from the respondents. Most of the respondents indicated that in their classrooms, some of the learners cannot even read the alphabet. Even though these learners are in the upper primary level, such as basic four, five and six, this was what one of the respondents said:

> *"Another category of learning disability I identified in the class was learners with reading difficulty. Some of the learners cannot read all the alphabet, and some cannot read two-letter words even though they are in JHS."* (A responds from mentee teacher 'B')

Another respondent stated this:

> *"I identify learners who cannot read. Some cannot even pronounce a word, and others can't read a sentence or a paragraph; they are learners who make noise and disturb a lot when a teacher is not in the class, though they are in the upper primary."* (A response from mentee teacher 'C')

5.1.2 Writing Problem
Writing is also a skill needed to assist learners to function well in an educational environment. However, writing problems also emerged as one of the categories of

learning disabilities in the study. The respondents revealed that some of the learners cannot write well, and even those who can write, do so as if they are in kindergarten KG), one or two, even though they are in Junior High Schools (JHS). One of the respondents stated this:

"Yes, I have some learners with learning disabilities like those who cannot write, those with bad handwriting and speech problems. Someone who is in JHS is writing like a learner in KG one or Primary one." (A response from mentee teacher 'A')

Another respondent revealed this:

"I identify learners with writing difficulty. When you gave them work to do, in most cases, they find it difficult to write, and this makes me worried because of the class that they are and their ages." (A response from mentee teacher 'D')

This is another respondent's comment:

"Learners with writing difficulty. There is a boy in the class, he writes as if he is in Arabic school, and in fact, the handwriting is so bad that you cannot read or mark his work." (A response from mentee teacher 'F')

5.1.3 Problem with Basic Arithmetic

It also emerged from the respondents that one of the categories of learning disabilities was a problem with basic arithmetic. This was also one of the key issues raised by the respondents that some of the learners cannot do simple addition, multiplication, subtraction or division. Even though per their curriculum, those topics and subtopics are supposed to be taught at the lower classes, some of these learners could not do it at their levels and ages.

These were some comments from the respondents:

"I identify learners who cannot do simple addition. For example, a boy in JHS two cannot add and subtract three-letter words, which are supposed to be done by primary two and three learners." (A response from mentee teacher 'E').

"Yes, some of them have problems with addition, multiplication, division and subtraction. At this level, basic math that can be done by lower primary learners, some of my learners who are in JHS cannot do it and this is worrying." (A response from mentee teacher 'G')

5.2 Challenges Faced in Teaching Learners with Learning Disabilities in the Regular Classroom

5.2.1 Spending a Lot of Time on Lessons

A lot of time was spent on lessons as a result of teaching learners with learning disabilities and their friends in the regular classroom. It was revealed by the respondents that because of the difficulties facing the learners in relation to reading writing and arithmetic, they work slowly in activities like writing of notes, classwork and assignments which slow down the lessons and also affect their peers. This was what one of the respondent said:

"…. hmmm, one of the challenges is that they find it difficult to move with their colleagues, which makes us spend a lot of time with them and sometimes do remedial teaching." (A response from mentee teacher 'A')

Another respondent stated this:

"Time-consuming is one of the challenges I encountered when teaching these learners because you need to give extra attention to those who cannot read, write and those who cannot do simple arithmetic, and before you realise that, the time for the lesson is up." (A response from mentee teacher 'D')

5.2.2 Lack of Appropriate Teaching and Learning Materials

Inappropriate teaching and learning materials were one of the challenges that came up from the respondents. The respondents revealed that teaching and learning materials that would be used to make teaching easy to facilitate learners' understanding were not appropriate and, in some schools, were not available. Which, in their opinion, created a lot of challenges for them as respondents.

These were some comments made by the respondents:

"Another challenge is a lack of appropriate teaching and learning materials to teach them. The materials are sometimes not even enough when we have them, making teaching difficult." (A response from mentee teacher 'A')

"One challenge is the issue with teaching and learning materials because we don't have appropriate teaching and learning materials, which makes it difficult to address the problems of these learners, and there are not enough. Examples are a lack of textbooks and other teaching materials, all of which make teaching difficult." (A response from mentee teacher 'C')

5.2.3 Negative Attitudes of Mentors Toward Learners

Apart from the other challenges, respondents also revealed that some mentors themselves sometimes serve as an obstacle for the teaching of learners with learning

disabilities due to some negative attitudes that they sometimes show towards them. The respondents revealed that some of the mentors, that is, the classroom teachers, have developed an opinion on the learners that they cannot do anything. As a student teacher, if you try to give attention to learners with learning disabilities, then you are asked to leave them; otherwise, you will spend too much time on them.

This is what one respondent said:

"Another challenge is my mentor. When I want to give these learners extra attention, she always had a different view that the problem of some of the learners is that they are from their homes, so I should leave them and continue." (A response from mentee teacher 'F')

Another respondent revealed that:

"Some of the mentors sometimes look down on learners with learning disabilities. So as a mentee, if you try to give them extra attention, then the mentors are complaining that you are wasting too much time, and this sometimes becomes a challenge to me." (A response from mentee teacher 'E')

5.2.4 Stigmatisation Against Learners by their Colleagues

Learners without learning disabilities are stigmatised by their peers with learning disabilities by pointing at them, laughing and making noise when they are asked to read and write; these behaviours sometimes affect the lesson. The respondents further indicated that some of their peers sometimes prevent them from joining their groups during group discussions and even do the same during co-curricular activities. This is a comment made by one of the respondents.

"Stigmatisation is a problem because, since they cannot read, when you call them to read or answer a question, their colleagues always shout, laugh and call them names and prevent them from being part of their groups. These sometimes disrupt the class." (A response from mentee teacher 'D')

5.3 Student Teachers' Adaptation of Instruction to Meet the Needs of Learners with Learning Disabilities
5.3.1 Giving Extra Attention

Extra attention was one of the adaptations used by some of the teachers to assist learners with learning disabilities. According to the respondents, because some of these learners cannot write, read or do simple arithmetic whenever they are teaching, they gave them extra attention and sometimes gave them remedial teaching. The respondents indicated that it was a way that could help learners with learning disabilities meet some of their needs in the classroom.

This is a comment made by one of the respondents.

"Due to the condition of these learners, I, in most cases, give them extra attention to help them benefit from the lesson. Upon this intervention, it is not easy for them to cope with teaching and learning." (A response from mentee teacher ("E")

Another responded said this:

"Teaching learners with learning disabilities in a regular classroom is not easy, the reason being that they are slow learners and it takes time for them to understand, so what I did was that I gave them extra attention." (A response from mentee teacher ("F").

Apart from the few mentee teachers who said they gave extra attention to assist learners with learning disabilities, the rest said they teach all the learners the same way without any adaptation. This implies that most of the student teachers don't have in-depth knowledge of lesson adaptation to meet the unique needs of learners with learning disabilities, as well as handling learners with special needs in general.

This is what one of the respondents in focus group 1 said:

"In fact, even though I'm aware that some of the learners were having problems with learning, I still teach all of them the same way, the reason being that we were supposed to follow the timetable and some of them I don't have the skills to even handle them." (A response from a respondent from F G 1).

This is another response from one respondent:

"I teach all the learners the same way because some of them, no matter how you try they will not get the concept. For me, I don't have enough skills to handle these learners because the special needs education course was only a semester-long course." (A response from a respondent from F G 2)

6. Discussions

Research question one revealed that reading problems, writing problems, and difficulties with basic arithmetic were the predominant types of learning disabilities identified by the student teachers in the regular classroom setting. This finding aligns with Rasugu's (2010) study, which highlighted the presence of learners with learning disabilities, with a significant proportion facing challenges in English and Math tests, resulting in high failure rates (100% and 63.3%, respectively). Specific errors observed in English included poor visual-motor coordination, inaccurate copying, spacing issues, letter and word reversals, handwriting difficulties, sentence repetition, omissions, overprinting for corrections, grammatical errors, limited expression of ideas and vocabulary, organisational deficits, illegible writing, and slow completion of tasks. While Rasugu's study shares similarities with the current findings, the present study provides a more

detailed characterisation of the identified learning disabilities. In contrast, Narh (2015) revealed that while teachers were aware of learners with learning disabilities, they were not knowledgeable about the specific types of learning disabilities present. This distinction sets Narh's findings apart from the current study, underscoring the unique contributions of each research endeavour.

In response to research question two, several key findings emerged. These included the prolonged time spent on lessons, insufficient availability of appropriate teaching and learning materials, negative attitudes from mentors towards learners, and instances of stigmatization against learners by their peers. These findings correspond with certain aspects of Osero's (2015) research, which highlighted teachers' inadequate knowledge of learner types, disciplinary issues, heavy workloads demanding additional time, negative attitudes toward learners with disabilities, lack of facilities, low self-esteem among learners with disabilities, absenteeism, parental opposition to special needs education classification, financial constraints, infrastructure deficiencies, syllabus coverage challenges, discrimination against learners with special needs, and the mismatch between the current curriculum and the needs of learners in inclusive settings. However, there were discrepancies between Osero's study and the present findings. For instance, Osero's research delved deeper into the issues of discrimination and stigmatization. Additionally, Mantey (2017) revealed that children with disabilities often encounter discrimination from their peers, teachers, and non-teaching staff in schools. Conversely, Amaniampong *et al.*'s (2020) study contradicted the current findings, indicating that approximately 80% of teachers and mentee teachers exhibited positive attitudes towards learners with special needs. These variations highlight the complexity and multifaceted nature of the challenges faced by student teachers in teaching learners with learning disabilities.

In response to research question three, it was found that while some respondents acknowledged adapting their instruction by providing extra attention to learners with learning disabilities, the majority indicated that they taught all learners in the same manner, without any adaptations. This was primarily due to a lack of necessary skills and resources for adaptation. This finding resonates with the results of Alhassan & Abosi's (2014) study, which revealed that the majority of teachers lacked competence in adaptive instruction, suggesting that regular teachers were unlikely to effectively tailor instruction to meet the needs of learners with learning disabilities. Similarly, Nketsia and Gyimah's (2016) study on teacher educators' perspectives on inclusive education and teacher preparation in Ghana found that a significant number of teacher educators believed that Ghana was inadequately prepared for the implementation of inclusive education. These findings underscore the challenges faced by educators in effectively adapting instruction to cater to the diverse needs of learners with learning disabilities within inclusive classroom settings.

7. Conclusion

Based on the findings, several conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, student teachers demonstrated the ability to identify various types of learners experiencing difficulties in the classroom. Secondly, participants outlined numerous challenges they encountered while teaching learners with learning disabilities in regular classroom settings. Lastly, it was observed that only a minority of participants reported adapting their instruction to support learners with learning disabilities, while the majority did not make instructional adaptations. These conclusions highlight the complexities student teachers face in addressing the needs of diverse learners and underscore the importance of providing adequate support and training to enable effective instructional adaptation in inclusive classrooms.

7.1 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings: Ghana Education Service, through Parent Associations, should educate parents on the need to provide learning materials to learners with learning disabilities. This will help reduce the challenges student teachers face in teaching them.

Teachers and student teachers should sensitise all the learners on diversity so that other learners can appreciate their peers with learning disabilities and support them.

Tutors in Colleges of Education should strengthen their training on instructional adaptation strategies to enable student teachers to develop more confidence in handling learners with learning disabilities.

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

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