

**Understanding Teachers' Experiences of Teaching Students
with Visual Impairment in Inclusive Classrooms in Ghana:
An Ethnographic Study**

Joseph Ampratwum

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Faculty of Culture and Society, School of Education

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Abstract

Inclusive education ensures that all children, including those from marginalised groups, ethnic minorities, and those with disabilities, receive free, high-quality education. In support of the global movement towards inclusive education, the Government of Ghana has introduced and implemented policies that promote and uphold these principles to ensure equal educational opportunities for every child. Despite international advocacy and policy commitments, such as the Salamanca Statement, the practice of inclusion within Ghanaian educational systems reveals significant gaps and inconsistencies. This research explores the experiences of four teachers in inclusive classrooms. Using a qualitative ethnographic approach, this study provides an in-depth understanding of the experiences of teachers in educating students with visual impairment in an inclusive classroom in Ghana. The study adopted Critical Disability Theory and Akan proverbial knowledge as lenses to guide this research. The data combines interviews, observations, and hanging out, with insights from an advisory group of four final-year students with visual impairments. The study identifies a complex network of sociocultural, structural, and relational barriers that undermine the effective inclusion of students with visual impairments. The use of local proverbs became central to how inclusion is imagined in Ghana. Teachers strive to adapt their pedagogical practices; however, their efforts are frequently hindered by a lack of support and resources, resulting in limited pedagogical change. Findings indicate that both teachers and students experience a form of exclusion within inclusion. Teachers feel excluded from the development and implementation processes of inclusive policies, while students with visual impairments encounter social, emotional, and educational exclusion despite being physically included in mainstream classrooms. This study reveals that social and cultural misconceptions about visual impairment significantly exacerbate these barriers. To reduce this gap, the study proposes several recommendations for improving the alignment between educational policies and inclusive practices.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

1st October 2025

Signature

Date

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my mother, Elizabeth Owusuaa, whose prayers and unwavering encouragement have been my constant source of strength.

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Ethics Approval

The ethics application for this research project was approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee, AUTEK Reference number 23/31

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis is an ethnographic study that investigates teachers' experiences in teaching students with visual impairment in an inclusive junior high school in Ghana. This chapter is organised into nine sections. Section 1.1 introduces the chapter outline. Section 1.2 explains inclusivity as a global phenomenon ('Is everybody in?'). Section 1.3 presents the personal experience that informs the study. Section 1.4 outlines the problem statement and research questions, while Section 1.5 details the study's aims and its contributions to knowledge. Section 1.6 introduces the key research approach. Section 1.7 defines the key terms. Section 1.8 provides the structure of the thesis. Finally, Section 1.9 offers a summary of the chapter.

1.2 Inclusivity as a global phenomenon: Is everybody in?

Inclusive education, as a global phenomenon, has been both an aspiration and a hurdle for educational systems in most countries (Slee, 2019). Despite commitments made at the international level to incorporate and implement inclusive schooling policies and practices, there is a lack of studies exploring how teachers interact with students with disabilities, including those with visual impairments, particularly when there is a focus on inclusion (Smith, 2018). According to various educational experts, the differences in how countries approach inclusion can be seen in the varying stages of their progress (Simon et al., 2024). Some countries are still in the process of justifying and understanding the importance of inclusion, which means they are working to change mindsets and build the necessary support systems. In building the necessary support systems in an inclusive environment, all human social structures and teaching methods must change to accommodate all students' needs, including those with visual impairment (Tomlinson, 2017). This is particularly true when it comes to accommodating students with visual impairments in countries where resources like audio tactile technology, embossers, and assistive technology might be lacking. Adapting learning materials for students who need braille or large print is a demanding and time-consuming process that requires specialised expertise (Salisbury, 2007). Much of the teaching content is visually focused, including diagrams, charts, tables, illustrations, and a variety of fonts, sizes, and colours. For students with visual impairments, tactile diagrams play a vital role in making the information accessible

(Salisbury, 2007). However, grasping diagrammatic and pictorial representations of the real world can be challenging for students with visual impairment (Rosenblum et al., 2018).

While this study may resemble a focus on students with visual impairments, it seeks to understand this phenomenon through the notion of inclusive education. Educational settings must adapt to meet the diverse needs of all students and remove any barriers that might hinder their full participation. Creating an inclusive mainstream environment requires accessible school infrastructure, inclusive teaching methods, and appropriate learning materials. These elements are crucial for establishing an educational landscape where all students, regardless of their abilities, can thrive and reach their full potential. The global push towards inclusion aligns with the principles of equity and inclusion outlined in international frameworks, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically Goal 4 (UNICEF, 2015) which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all. By embracing inclusive education, educational systems worldwide are working towards a future where every learner has the opportunity to succeed.

Relevant to this research, in some developing countries, studies have found that most students with disabilities, including students with visual impairment, are not in school because of sociocultural beliefs and practices (Ozaji, 2020). An early study by Worlanyo (2012) found that prevailing social norms regarding visual impairment present substantial barriers within educational institutions and broader societal contexts. Opoku et al. (2017) agree and have found that sociocultural beliefs and perceptions of society have become significant issues in meeting the needs of students with disabilities. However, the specific origins of sociocultural barriers, whether rooted in individual beliefs, societal and cultural perceptions of disability, or personal experiences, remain unclear. It is believed that the social context significantly influences how every individual thinks which can affect the inclusion of students with visual impairment (Ainscow, 2020a). At a fundamental level, achieving inclusion requires societies to change and modify their belief systems to accept all individuals, including those with disabilities (Barnes, 2019). Given this, society must be accountable for meeting the needs of all students through increasing access to learning opportunities and breaking down barriers for students with disabilities, including students with visual impairment.

Inclusion should be well-rooted in clearly understanding its goals, philosophy, and principles. The foundation of inclusion necessitates a deep understanding of its underlying objectives, philosophical underpinnings, and guiding principles. It must be unequivocally recognised as a fundamental entitlement with disability reframed positively to acknowledge its dual nature as both an individual struggle and a societal issue of systemic marginalisation (Goodley, 2016). Therefore, the prime objective of this research is to challenge the localised patterns of exclusion or obstacles to the inclusion of students with visual impairment from teachers' perspectives in Ghana.

In the context of inclusive education in Ghana, while policies advocate for inclusion, the practical implementation often resembles mainstreaming with some inclusive practices. Students with disabilities are frequently expected to fit into existing educational structures with limited support, rather than the system being transformed to meet their diverse needs. This reflects a tension between policy intent and actual practice, and aligns more with Slee's critique of mainstreaming as a surface-level solution that fails to challenge the exclusionary foundations of traditional schooling (Slee, 2011). Drawing on Slee's (2019) conceptual distinction, mainstreaming is often based on a medical or deficit model of disability, where students with impairments are integrated into regular classrooms only if they can adjust to the norms and expectations of the mainstream system with minimal disruption or support. In contrast, inclusion challenges this approach by promoting systemic change, where schools adapt their structures, practices, and cultures to accommodate all learners, valuing diversity as a resource rather than a challenge. Thus, the continued use of the term inclusion in this thesis must be critically examined within the local context, acknowledging that what is being practiced may not fully align with the principles of inclusion.

1.3 My personal experience informing the study

This study focuses on understanding teachers' experiences teaching students with visual impairment in Ghana. The impetus to conduct this study stems from my aspiration to become an inclusive education activist for individuals with visual impairment and a researcher. I developed this passion for individuals with visual impairment because of my friend who suffered from an eye condition and became blind during our early days in primary school.

In 2002, we were promoted to a junior high school to continue our education. My friend who became blind was advised by the school authorities to opt for a special school for the blind rather than continue with me to junior high school. The school authorities said he would struggle to benefit from regular classroom teaching because the teachers were accustomed to the traditional method of teaching, which included whiteboard illustrations, note-taking, and memorisation. My friend's parents could not afford the boarding facility at the school for the blind and the purchase of assistive devices to support his education. Consequently, he dropped out and did not realise his dreams. This story of my friend ignited my interest in offering special education to support the inclusion of students with visual impairments in mainstream classrooms.

In 2012, I completed a Bachelor of Education in Special Education, specialising in the education of the visually impaired. This has helped me to understand the rationale behind different approaches to educating students with visual impairment. In 2013, I was appointed as a resource person at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. My duty was to support learners with visual impairment in orientation and mobility training, braille transcription, and computer training.

During my tenure as a resource person, I encountered frequent complaints from students with visual impairments about teaching methods that predominantly favour sighted students. These students highlighted specific challenges they faced during lectures, especially when instructors used phrases like "Look here", "It is on the screen", and "Can you check it there? I want you to look at it very well." Such language assumes visual capabilities and thus excludes those who are visually impaired. Moreover, these students often struggle to take notes or record lectures due to the auditory disruptions caused by sudden cheers and shouts from sighted students in large lecture rooms. Regarding the resources available to support students with visual impairments, there was a noticeable scarcity of essential materials, such as Perkins Brailers and computers equipped for accessibility. This shortage significantly impacts the educational progression of these students, often prolonging their postgraduate programmes to three or four years rather than the standard two years.

In 2013, driven by a desire to deepen my understanding of educating students with visual impairments, I pursued a Master of Philosophy in Education, specialising in the education of the visually impaired. I completed the master's programme in 2015 and was appointed part-time lecturer at the Institute of Distance Learning Education,

University of Education, Winneba Kumasi Campus. I was responsible for training teachers to teach students with visual impairment in mainstream schools with inclusive practice, and these roles broadened my perspectives on educational provision for students with visual impairment. I have found variations in the training provisions for teachers teaching in inclusive schools in Ghana. Teachers still rely on the traditional methods of teaching, which are more teacher-centred methods that include visual materials and demonstrations that are problematic for students with visual impairments. I realised that these methods were disabling students with visual impairment and were particularly evident in my experiences with teachers even in so-called “inclusive classrooms” in Ghana that espoused more responsive pedagogical approaches. I became concerned about how these traditional methods might impact teachers teaching students with visual impairment in inclusive classrooms. My experience working with students with visual impairments in inclusive settings and training teachers to teach in these classrooms sparked my desire to gain deeper insights into teachers' experiences in inclusive environments and their pedagogical change needed to accommodate students with visual impairment. In particular, I wondered how the integration of inclusive pedagogy could be implemented in relation to the teachers' early, established, traditional teaching practices and their construction of visual impairment.

1.4 Research questions and problem statement

This study delves into the intersection of culture, inclusive pedagogy, and disability. It aims to understand how social and cultural norms impact teaching practices and how individuals with disabilities are perceived in Ghana. The study also examines the dynamics of classroom interactions between teachers and students with visual impairment, with a focus on how teachers' methods may have evolved to accommodate the needs of these students. It focuses on critically exploring the role of teachers as the key protagonists whose pedagogies potentially contribute to and perpetuate disability within their teaching or take more inclusive approaches that enable learning opportunities and, in doing so, cast a vision for a more inclusive society. Therefore, my main research question is: *What are the experiences of teachers who seek to implement inclusive education approaches among students with visual impairments in junior high schools in Ghana?*

Sub questions relating to the main research question are:

1. How do social and cultural norms influence teacher pedagogy?
2. What is the nature of the classroom interactions between teachers and students with visual impairment?
3. In what ways have teachers' pedagogy changed to accommodate the needs of students with visual impairment?

In this study, my experience and worldview about visual impairment positions me to accept visual impairment as a result of the barriers created by society, not solely based upon their visual condition (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). Individuals with visual impairment are capable and can contribute positively to our society, like the sighted individual, and, therefore, I prefer to consider individuals first before their condition (Barnes, 2019).

From the 1960s to the 1970s, the education of students with visual impairment in Ghana was mainly through segregation as was the case in most other countries of the world in this period (Avoke, 2002). This was occasioned by the fact that, in most Ghanaian communities, it is accepted that people with disabilities could adversely influence other community members, such as their families, peers, and even broader societal perceptions of normalcy and capability. The debate about disability and persons with disability was viewed from the perspectives of religious and superstitious models. This led to people resisting having special schools in their midst. Consequently, in Ghana today, all special schools are found on the outskirts of towns. On the other hand, advocates of special schools for persons with disabilities often see these institutions as safe places for persons with disabilities (Avoke, 2001). However, as a signatory to many international treaties, Ghana supports equal educational opportunities for students with visual impairment by subscribing to the tenets of the United Nations. (1989), Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations. (2006), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, The International Declaration on Inclusive Education (Salamanca Statement; 1994), Declaration of Global Education for All (Jomtien, 1990), and The Agenda of Millennium Development Goals Dakar (2000). This is evidenced in policy objective 4, section 5.1.1.1b of the Training, Capacity Building and Professional Development, which states: "Educators will be abreast with the understanding of pedagogical skills and possess adequate knowledge of educational policies to meet diverse needs."

Because of the prejudice and isolation, there has been a call for drastic pedagogical changes for teachers in Ghana with the implementation of a new model of inclusive education (Ghana Education Service, 2005a). Under these reforms, teachers are tasked to meet the needs of diverse learners in the regular education system, including students with visual impairment (Ghana Education Service, 2005b). This, therefore, demands teachers acquire a unique set of pedagogical skills, like Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2018). This is a framework for considering the range of pedagogical skills that can be applied in certain teaching contexts. Similarly, individualised plans identify what pedagogical skills are required to effectively support each student's unique learning needs, ensuring that teaching strategies, accommodations, and resources are tailored to promote meaningful participation and academic progress. This means that all diverse learners in general education, including students with visual impairment, receive flexible instruction methods, materials, and assessments to meet their unique needs.

Furthermore, a study by Bascia (2010) suggested that teachers with smaller classes are likely to yield better pedagogical understanding among students. The author further stated that in smaller classes, teachers can familiarise themselves with each learner, know their concerns, and use various teaching strategies that address all needs. However, in Ghana, there has long been a concern about the overcrowding of students in inclusive classrooms (Avoke, 2002). Despite efforts to improve inclusive education, this issue remains prevalent. Two decades later, findings from other studies such as Anthony (2011) and, Ampah and Gyimah (2021) suggest that overcrowding continues to be a significant challenge, raising critical questions about how teachers cope and demonstrate pedagogical understanding to support diverse learners within such constrained environments. Moreover, how students appreciate teachers' pedagogical practice in this situation remains unanswered too. Mantey (2017) highlighted that certain institutions in Ghana continue to discriminate against students with disabilities, including those with visual impairments. This discrimination often creates significant barriers to learning and participation, ultimately contributing to higher dropout rates among students with disabilities.

Despite Ghana's progress in adopting international frameworks for disability inclusion, outdated misconceptions about disabilities persist. For instance, on September 6, 2024, a visually impaired PhD applicant sued a university in Ghana after his admission to pursue a PhD in public health was revoked (Adam, 2024).

The applicant claimed his admission was withdrawn due to discrimination, and, despite using the university's internal structures for redress, his concerns were ignored. As a result, he turned to the courts to seek justice and uphold his right to education. To avoid a legal battle, the university reversed its decision, reinstating his admission and offering some resources to support the applicant's education (Adam, 2024). However, the applicant was still responsible for acquiring essential assistive technology. This situation raises a critical question: Is the education system equipped to comply with both international and local legislative frameworks, such as Sustainable Development Goal 4 (UNICEF, 2015) which promotes inclusive and equitable quality education for all? This incident reflects the challenges faced by students with disabilities in Ghana's educational institutions and highlights the gap between inclusive education policies and their actual implementation. The need for legal intervention to reinstate the student reveals deep-rooted societal and institutional barriers, prompting questions about how well teachers and institutions perceive and accommodate students with visual impairments.

Knowledge of teachers' experiences appears critical since it highlights the unique barriers to teaching students with visual impairment and sets the tone for discussions to address them (Carey, 2013). Again, by listening to teachers' voices, we can know what influences their pedagogy in an inclusive classroom and identify enhancers for effective participation. Consequently, teachers' attitudes and their changing pedagogical approaches employed to accommodate students with visual impairment for successful inclusion can be appreciated (Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2011).

1.5 Aim of the study and contribution to knowledge

Very little research has been done to ascertain teachers' experiences teaching students with visual impairments in classrooms in Ghana and beyond (Vanderpuye et al., 2024), and no research has specifically considered teachers' knowledge, perceptions, and pedagogies in supporting learners with visual impairments within inclusive classrooms. Studies that consider the learning needs of students with visual impairment often concentrate on medicalised perspectives, such as focusing on the work of ophthalmologists and optometrists (Nott et al., 2023). The few studies on teachers' experiences teaching students with visual impairment have not focused on the pedagogy teachers require in teaching such students (Maher et al., 2024). Moreover, such studies were conducted in special schools for the visually impaired (Kauffman, 2022).

The aim of this ethnographic study is to explore the experiences of teachers who work with students with visual impairments, the barriers these teachers face, and the pedagogies that emerge in inclusive school environments.

This study will contribute to the literature concerning a culturally located philosophy of inclusion and inclusive pedagogies that emphasise Ghanaian proverbs as a way of knowing and talking about inclusion (further details will be provided in Chapter Five). It is hoped that this cultural approach to understanding the findings may encourage ways to improve inclusive approaches among teachers in the regular classroom. This will ensure full participation in learning among students with visual impairment in inclusive classrooms in Ghana.

The findings of the study could support head teachers, resource teachers, and mainstream teachers in improving their teaching and learning practices through a more inclusive pedagogical approach (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). As a result, it is hoped students will ultimately benefit from this increased understanding of teachers working with students with visual impairments. It is also hoped that this study can contribute to shifting prevailing prejudices in relation to the visually impaired in Ghana and contribute to global discussions on best inclusive practices that derive from teachers' everyday experiences.

1.6 Introduction to key research approach to be expanded in methodology

In this study, I used Critical Disability Theory and ethnography to examine inclusive classrooms, with the aim of understanding how society constructs visual impairment and how this construction shapes teacher pedagogy. The application of Critical Disability Theory helped me to challenge the traditional perspective of visual impairment and understand how teacher pedagogy potentially creates and perpetuates barriers and inequalities in the inclusive classroom. Ethnography of teachers' experience positioned me to understand the institutional, cultural and context realisation of the inclusive classrooms and practices. These research approaches will be expanded upon in the methodology in Chapter 4.

1.7 Definition of key terms

1.7.1 Disability

The use of disability in this research refers to the social and environmental barriers that prevent individuals with impairments from full participation in society. It recognises that the marginalisation and exclusion experienced by people with disabilities are not solely due to their impairments but are largely influenced by ableist beliefs, practices, and systems (Kohli & Atencio, 2023).

1.7.2 Students with visual impairment

Students with visual impairment refers to students who have a degree of vision loss that cannot be entirely corrected by glasses or contact lenses, ranging from limited vision to total blindness (Amanda, 2023). They rely on accommodations the school makes to access educational materials and activities, including materials in alternative formats, such as braille, large print, or electronic text, and assistive technology like screen readers or magnifiers. Teachers can use strategies, such as verbal descriptions of visual information, the use of tactile materials, and the incorporation of auditory cues, in instruction to support them in inclusive classrooms.

1.7.3 Inclusive education

Inclusion is defined as a classroom setting where teachers adopt teaching strategies that position students at the heart of the educational experience, facilitating learning to enable all students to thrive and reach their full potential (Liasidou, 2015). This approach on inclusion centres the needs of learners and seeks to utilise all resources and expertise to support their individual educational goals. Inclusion should be viewed as a strategy for educating students with varied needs together, rather than focusing on one specific group. This concept aligns with the broader goal of advancing universal basic education, fostering an educational transformation through inclusive practices that equip teachers to address diverse needs and fulfil the objectives of Education for All and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (UNICEF, 2015).

1.7.4 Inclusive pedagogy

Inclusive pedagogy is an approach to teaching practices that recognises every student's unique learning needs, regardless of their diverse backgrounds, learning styles, and

abilities, to feel valued, supported, and engaged (Miña, 2024). Inclusive pedagogy is not a single approach to teaching but a commitment to ensuring that every student has the same opportunities to learn and succeed, irrespective of where they find themselves (Florian, 2014).

Inclusive pedagogy requires teachers to be empathic, responsive, and proactive in handling classrooms that foster all students' success and well-being (Miller, 2024). Some examples of inclusive pedagogy include respect for diversity, differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning, collaborative learning, culturally responsive teaching, assessment and feedback, flexibility and adaptability, continuous learning, and reflection (Tomlinson, 2017; CAST, 2018; Florian, 2015; UNESCO, 2017).

1.8 Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters. This chapter presented the research questions, background, key terms, and the researcher's stance. It outlined the study's objectives and its contribution to knowledge. Chapter Two provides an overview of the study's context, focusing on Ghana's culture and educational system. Chapter Three introduces the current literature to understand the phenomenon under study. It reviews Critical Disability and inclusion by drawing on the principles of Critical Disability Theory and its relevance to my study. The chapter reviews literature on the influence of social and cultural norms on teacher pedagogy, knowledge, and skills in teaching students with visual impairment and teachers' engagement with students with visual impairment in using instructional materials. Finally, it looks at literature on the Universal Design for Learning as a means of teacher pedagogical change. Chapter Four critically examines the methodology and method, linking them to Critical Disability Theory. It provides details of the ethnographic data collection processes and explains the steps of data collection and ethical considerations. In addition, the chapter discusses the process of the research, triangulation, reflexivity and transparency.

Chapter Five explores the findings of the study. The findings are to understand participants' views on the influence of their pedagogical practice in the inclusive classroom of Ghana. The chapter gives a perspective on social and cultural norms and their impact on teacher pedagogy. Finally, the chapter identifies the nature of classroom interaction and the shaping of teacher pedagogical change in inclusive classrooms.

Chapter Six discusses the essence of teachers' experiences in teaching students with visual impairment. Finally, Chapter Seven summarises the whole research, bringing out the major contributions, recommendations, and implications for further research.

1.9 Chapter summary

This chapter introduced the research and my personal experiences informing the study. It broadly outlined the problem statement and research questions. The study's objectives and its contribution to existing knowledge were also explored. The chapter presented key terms and introduced the research approaches and concluded with my position and explored the structure of the thesis. The next chapter outlines the context of the study in Ghana.

Chapter 2 Context of the Study

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the sociocultural context of the research, which broadly lays the foundation for understanding Ghana's relationship to inclusion in education settings. Section 2.1 introduces the chapter structure. Section 2.2 gives a detailed description of Ghana. Section 2.3 presents the Ghana education system, explaining pedagogical practice in Ghana, and Section 2.4 talks about the road to inclusive education in Ghana. Section 2.5 highlights the concept of inclusion in Ghanaian schools today, while Section 2.6 explains how disability is viewed in Ghana. Section 2.7 provides a summary of the chapter.

2.2 Ghana

Ghana is a country in West Africa; it shares boundaries with Cote d'Ivoire to the west, the Gulf of Guinea to the south, Burkina Faso to the north, and Togo to the east. Its population is 31 million people, and Accra is the capital city (Kaba, 2024). In 1957, Ghana became the first nation in sub-Saharan Africa to achieve independence from British colonial rule. Since gaining independence, Ghana has aspired to establish a robust and self-reliant nation, fostering economic growth and political stability. It has aimed to strengthen its democratic institutions, promote social and economic development, and assert a significant role in regional and international affairs (Kalagbor, 2024). Through its efforts, Ghana seeks to uphold the values of freedom, democracy, and progress, striving to create a prosperous future for all its citizens while maintaining its cultural heritage and identity. Ghana has 16 administrative regions with 216 districts. The coordinating council, District Assembly (depending on population), Metropolitan/Municipal and Urban/Zonal/Town or unit Committees form the three-tiered structure of the administrative regions (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS], 2014). The District, Metropolitan, and Municipal Committees manage the Ghana education system. Ghana is known for its rich cultural heritage, diverse wildlife, and natural resources, such as gold, oil, and cocoa. According to a report by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 2006, a significant portion of Ghanaians lived below the national poverty line, and many are engaged in small-scale subsistence farming as a means of earning a livelihood. However, it is essential to note that there have been efforts to address poverty and improve living conditions in Ghana since then.

Two factors influence the Ghanaian cultural background: religion and language (Quaicoe, 2015). The Indigenous people in Ghana practise various traditional religious beliefs and worship systems. Each ethnic group has its unique traditions and rituals. Ghanaians believe in ancestral worship, which is seen as a significant aspect of traditional Ghanaian religion (Auwah, 2012). However, with the arrival of the Basel Mission in 1828 and Arab traders in the 8th century, explorers began venturing southward into the African interior in search of gold, ivory, and other valuable commodities. These traders brought Islam and established trade networks connecting Ghana with the broader Muslim world (Kobo, 2009). These religions converted most Ghanaians into both Christianity and Islam. Consequently, both Christianity and Islam have been practised by most Ghanaians. Although Ghanaians believe in Christianity and Islam, it is somewhat syncretic as they still hold on to their old traditional beliefs. For instance, a study by Benson (2021) suggests that if a person is a Christian or Muslim in Ghana, they are expected to perform their rituals to the local gods during funerals and community gatherings. It is believed the gods can punish anyone who fails to do so within one's specific family. Therefore, these three religions (Christianity, Islam, and traditional) have all influenced Ghanaian life: within community life, the education system, and politics.

The second factor influencing Ghanaian culture is language. The Akan language is the most dominant among the languages spoken in Ghana. English, due to Ghana's colonial past, is the official language and is used in government, education, and other official domains, ensuring a unified mode of communication in a nation with diverse linguistic groups.

2.1 The Ghana education system

The Ghanaian education system today still bears the imprint of British colonialism with its structure, curriculum, and pedagogical methods largely modelled on the British system (Langan, 2024). Introduced during the colonial era (1874–1957), this framework emphasised formal schooling that prioritised rote learning, examinations, and a Eurocentric curriculum, often at the expense of Indigenous knowledge and languages (Langan, 2024). Despite numerous reforms since independence, the legacy of colonial education persists with English remaining the primary language of instruction and the curriculum continuing to reflect British educational traditions (Branford, 2023).

This historical influence shapes not only the content taught in schools but also the broader educational goals and values, leaving Ghana's education system as a blend of colonial remnants and post-independence efforts to adapt to local needs and aspirations.

The education system in Ghana is structured into three main levels: basic, senior high, and tertiary education. Basic education, which is mandatory and free, lasts nine years, encompassing six years of primary education followed by three years of junior high school (Takyi et al., 2019). This phase culminates in the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), determining students' eligibility for senior high school. At the senior high level, students undergo three years of education, preparing for the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), which qualifies them for tertiary education (Okebukola, 2015). Tertiary education in Ghana includes universities offering diverse undergraduate and graduate programmes, technical universities focusing on applied skills and diplomas, nurses' training colleges dedicated to healthcare training, and education colleges that prepare teachers for the basic education system. These institutions provide a range of programmes to cater to the country's workforce needs and development goals (Takyi et al., 2019).

2.3.1 Pedagogical practice in Ghana

The current study highlights the importance of understanding pedagogical norms in Ghana where traditional teaching methods, based upon colonial models, often rely heavily on rote learning. Acheampong (2017) notes that this approach is prevalent, reflecting a system where students' ability to memorise and reproduce information is highly valued. This emphasis on memorisation, as Acheampong points out, is rooted in early informal educational experiences. For instance, success in Ghanaian education, particularly in subjects like social studies (Ehun, 2023) and English (Abdul-Aziz, 2022), is measured by students' capacity to recall and replicate the material, often to excel in examinations. Abdul-Aziz argues that such a focus on rote learning overshadows deeper understanding and critical engagement with the content. The Ministry of Education's workshop training, which prioritises examination-oriented teaching, further emphasises this trend. This educational model fosters a teacher-centric environment, prioritising content delivery over students' conceptual comprehension, thereby emphasising performance in examinations as the primary indicator of academic prowess and creating challenges for students who do not learn well using this approach.

The findings regarding the Ghanaian education system, particularly at the junior high school level, resonate with Freire's (1970) idea of the "banking" model of education as discussed in his work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In this model, education is seen as an act of depositing where teachers deposit information and students are the depositories, emphasising a one-way transmission of knowledge. For example, there is a focus on summative assessment in Ghana where students are evaluated primarily on their ability to recall and reproduce the information in examinations. Salifu (2024) highlights that despite efforts to implement inclusive pedagogical practices in Ghana, traditional approaches remain prevalent with a strong emphasis on rote learning and examination success whereby assessment drives understanding about learning rather than pedagogy.

The teaching practicum for student teachers emerges as a crucial phase for student teachers to gain practical experience and attempt alternative pedagogical approaches. However, once qualified, teachers often continue the cycle of delivering prepackaged knowledge, perpetuating the banking model (Swargiary, 2024). This approach may limit students' ability to engage critically with content, explore new ideas, or apply knowledge creatively, highlighting a gap in the feedback/feedforward mechanisms that could foster deeper learning and understanding (Swargiary, 2024).

These insights suggest that while Ghana has made strides in providing a foundational education, there remains significant room for pedagogical reform to move beyond the banking concept towards more transformative, participatory, and student-centred teaching and learning practices. My study seeks to discover how teachers' traditional pedagogical practices have been challenged by the inclusive education movement in one school in Ghana.

2.2 Towards inclusive education in Ghana

The British initiated the education of students with disabilities in 1936 (Avoke, 2001). To sustain the education of students with disabilities, they established the first school for individuals with visual impairment in 1946 at Akropong in the Eastern Region of Ghana (Avoke, 2002). This special school followed the same curriculum as the mainstream school with teachers' adaptations to instructional materials (Baah, 1994).

In 1958, the school for individuals with physical disabilities was opened by the Methodist church with the implementation of the Accelerated Education Plan (Anson, 1977) to provide free education for all students. The Accelerated Education programme did not address the education of persons with disabilities, irrespective of its positive impact on increasing basic education enrolment (Akyeampong et al., 2007).

The Ghana government responded to growing international influence by introducing laws to protect the education of individuals with disabilities. Adu-Gyamfi et al. (2016) state that the 1961 Education Act mandated free and compulsory education for all school-age children. The same Act compelled the government to establish more schools and equip teachers with adequate teaching and learning materials to support the education of students with disabilities (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016). This shows that the core mandate of the Act was to integrate students with disabilities into the mainstream school system (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016). In addition, medical professionals were tasked to conduct assessments on students with disabilities to determine whether they were fit for mainstream education or special school. Again, the Act outlined that students with severe and multiple disabilities who may find it challenging to be accommodated in regular school should be educated in special schools.

On the other hand, the education of students with disabilities in mainstream settings was prioritised in 1962 when the government implemented the Special Education Act (SEA). The SEA aimed to welcome the education of students with all categories of disabilities in both special schools and mainstream environments (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016). Ghana therefore had a clearly defined policy framework for educating persons with disabilities in the early 1960s. Later, the first school for the so-called “mentally disabled” was established in 1970 (Avoke, 2001).

While these policies marked the journey to educating students with disabilities in Ghana, many significant advancements have been made since implementing the 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution. The fundamentals of the 1992 Constitution recognised and promoted basic education as an educational right, including for students with disabilities (Republic of Ghana, 1992). It also emphasised the implementation of free, Compulsory Universal Basic Education throughout Ghana, which did successfully increase access to basic education but struggled to support achieving inclusive education because of inadequate teacher preparation, limited resources, and the absence of disability-friendly infrastructure (Gadagbui, 2010).

The Education Strategic Plan 2003–2015 hoped to ensure the inclusion of students with mild to moderate disabilities in mainstream schools by 2015. This saw the education of students with disabilities, including students with visual impairments, being redirected to mainstream schools from 2003/2004. However, from the onset, implementing inclusive education was confronted with challenges due to unclear inclusive goals (Opoku et al., 2017). Therefore, a new Education Strategic Plan 2010–2020 was enacted to address the difficulties encountered in the previous plan. To provide a framework to improve inclusive practice, the Ghanaian Government tasked the Ministry of Education (MoE) in 2015 to draft the Standard Guidelines for the practice of inclusive education and an implementation plan (MoE, 2015).

The draft of the standard guidelines and implementation plan was to guide the educational authorities to provide accessible buildings and learning equipment and incorporate inclusive pedagogy. The Education Strategic Plan 2018–2030 followed the Education Strategic Plan 2010–2020 to improve access to basic education and achieve The UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 (Mukhtar, 2024).

Global agreements on inclusive education have shaped Ghana's educational policies, including the Salamanca Statement on Special Education (1994) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006). Ghana's parliament ratified this convention on August 22, 2012 (Ghana Federation of Disability Organisation, 2013), setting the groundwork for implementing inclusive education within Ghanaian schools.

In Ghana, inclusive education is segmented into three distinct phases: segregation, integration, and inclusive education. Initially, segregation was the norm where students with various disabilities received their education in separate facilities known as special schools. The next phase, integration, allowed students with disabilities to attend mainstream schools but only for specific periods deemed beneficial to them. Sometimes, this integration occurred within special units established in mainstream schools. Scholars like Mantey (2014) and Wedell (2005) note that during this phase, there was an expectation for these students to collaborate and interact with their nondisabled peers. The third phase, inclusive education, arose as a progressive response to the limitations and criticisms of segregation and integration. This approach advocates for the acceptance and accommodation of all students, particularly those who are marginalised, in mainstream educational settings, regardless of their diverse backgrounds and needs.

Inclusive education suggests a transformative approach where the educational system and its culture change to meet the diverse requirements of all students, ensuring a truly inclusive learning environment.

Despite these intentions, the implementation of inclusion practices reveals a lingering influence of the medical model where decisions regarding the enrolment and placement of students with visual impairments are often based on assessments of their health status rather than their educational needs or strengths (Ametepée & Anastassiou, 2015; Avoke, 2002). Such practices can inadvertently perpetuate exclusion and marginalisation, focusing more on students' limitations than on removing societal barriers and leveraging individual abilities in the learning environment.

In contrast, the Ministry of Education's vision of inclusive education is to create a learning system that is adaptable and supportive, providing diverse learning experiences that cater to the needs of all students. This approach aligns more with the social model of disability, emphasising the removal of barriers to participation and learning rather than categorising students solely by their impairments (Ministry of Education, 2013).

While policy documents may reflect a shift toward the social model, the actual practices within educational institutions often remain anchored in the medical model. The disparity between policy and practice suggests a need for further research and action to align Ghana's educational practices with its inclusive education policies. This study aims to delve into teachers' experiences with visually impaired students in a Ghanaian inclusive basic school to gain insight into the realities of inclusive education at the ground level and identify areas for improvement.

2.3 Inclusion in Ghanaian Schools today

Ghana's current inclusive education policy asserts that all students, including those with visual impairments, have the right to enrol in their local schools (Ghana Education Services, 2005). Consequently, schools nationwide are required to adhere to curriculum standards and educational policies that accommodate students with disabilities. In this context, students' values, aspirations, cultural backgrounds, and learning abilities are to be honoured (Ministry of Education, 2015). Based on referrals from the ophthalmology departments of teaching hospitals across Ghana, students with visual impairments are integrated into inclusive schools. Inclusive schools accept all students with visual impairments, whether they have low vision or are totally blind.

These schools are supported by an assessment team, including specially trained teachers and special education coordinators, who help in placing students with visual impairments.

2.4 How disability is viewed in Ghana

The disabled are recognised and understood in Ghana in particular ways. In Ghana, people's belief and understanding of the world is associated with their religion. Christianity, Islam, and traditional beliefs are the three main religions that unite Ghanaians (Abosi, 2007). The belief in karmic theory, which states that every action has a corresponding reaction that may be positive or negative, depending on the nature of the action, is deeply rooted in Ghanaian societies. Positive deeds result in future happiness and wealth while a negative response results in a painful future. For instance, if a woman in Ghana gives birth to a child with a disability, it is commonly believed that this is due to the displeasure of the gods (Anthony, 2011). Additionally, Anthony noted that many Ghanaians believe that individuals with visual impairments or other disabilities are possessed by evil spirits, which are thought to bring misfortune to both the community and the family. Such beliefs foster a societal perception that individuals with disabilities have little to contribute and pose a danger to communities.

Research indicates that in Ghana, disability is also viewed through the lens of a medical model, which attributes educational challenges directly to the disabilities of individuals rather than considering societal or environmental influences (Amenyedzi, 2016; Anthony, 2011; Baffoe, 2013). This model has been criticised for its narrow focus and its tendency to mislabel students with disabilities (Kalyanpur, 2022). Consequently, there are calls for policymakers to embrace a more socially informed approach that recognises the broader context affecting individuals with disabilities (Baffoe, 2013; Mprah et al., 2016).

In Ghana, the sociocultural understanding of disabilities as well as individuals with visual impairment derives from the beliefs, attitudes, and values that are held by society that can significantly impact how people with visual impairment are perceived, treated, and included in society. Most often, visual impairment is viewed as a tragedy or misfortune. People with visual impairment are seen as objects of pity for they often become beggars, and their condition is often considered a source of shame or embarrassment to many families.

Ghanaians believe that visual impairment is a punishment by the gods for the various offences done. Again, some believe they are witches who can harm others and would not want to socialise with them.

Such societal understanding of visual impairment may significantly influence teachers' pedagogical practices, even when they have been introduced to special needs education. Teachers construct their world in the inclusive classroom by mingling with students with visual impairment (Smith, 2020). For example, if society sees individuals with visual impairment as impure or poor due to their barriers, this may hinder their progress in inclusive classrooms and lead to low self-esteem.

Reynolds (2010) posited that Ghanaian attitudes towards persons with disabilities, including individuals with visual impairments, improved after Ghana passed two significant documents: the *Persons with Disability Act, 2006 (Act 715)* and the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)*. The UNCRPD is focused on the tenets of the social ideology of disability. Several other writers, however, assert that the stigmatisation of persons with visual impairment caused by Ghanaian traditional beliefs and religion (associated with evil, magical powers, sorcery, and witchcraft) continues to linger. For example, in 2011, during the graduation ceremony at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ghana, some chiefs from the Akan tribe of Ghana refused to shake hands with a visually impaired graduate as they did with other abled individuals. This act of discrimination was incited by the fact that traditional chiefs from the Akan tribe are unskilled communicating with persons with disabilities, including individuals with visual impairment in any form whatsoever. The discriminative act of not shaking hands is said to be influenced by how society constructs the identity of individuals with a disability, including individuals with visual impairment. It is evident, therefore, that work must be done to change attitudes in Ghanaian society.

The traditional distinction between the medical and social models of disability is increasingly viewed as obsolete (Shakespeare, 2006). The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) advocates for a biopsychosocial model that acknowledges both individual capabilities and environmental factors (World Health Organization [WHO], 2001). This model understands that environmental barriers significantly influence the opportunities and challenges faced by individuals with disabilities.

The movement from a medical lens to social model in public discussions emphasises reevaluating how environmental factors affect disabilities, advocating for changes in educational curriculums and settings to foster inclusivity.

By integrating the medical and social perspectives into a biopsychosocial framework, the approach to disability becomes more holistic, recognising that disabilities are not just about individual limitations or environmental obstacles but involve a complex interplay of both. This refined perspective emphasises that many barriers individuals face stem from entrenched societal structures, shifting the discourse towards a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of disability in Ghana.

This study is grounded in the view that societal change can be initiated through education, particularly by challenging and transforming dominant discourses. There is a paucity of information on the teaching methods educators employ in inclusive classrooms in Ghana. Therefore, comprehending teachers' experiences can support the implementation of inclusive education in Ghana's basic education system by providing practical and theoretical foundations for making effective enhancements in the inclusion of students with visual impairment. Furthermore, this research has the potential to influence educational policies and practices within Ghana and other countries while also serving as a groundwork for future studies.

2.5 Chapter summary

This chapter provided an overview of Ghana, covering its geography, cultural background, and educational system. It explored literature on inclusive education and teaching practices shaped by Ghana's cultural system. These insights are essential for understanding teacher educators' pedagogical approaches within the Ghanaian context. The chapter concluded with a sociocultural perspective on visual impairment in Ghana. The next chapter discusses the literature review.

Chapter 3 Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the literature pertinent to the main topics of this study and is organised into several sections. Section 3.1 outlines the organisation of the sections in this chapter. Section 3.2 explores critical disability studies and their role in education. Section 3.3 discusses the philosophical concept of Ubuntu and its relevance to inclusive education, and Section 3.4 focuses on discrimination and stigmatisation in inclusive education while Section 3.5 examines the concepts of inclusion, inclusive pedagogy, and the barriers to inclusive practices. Section 3.6 delves into teachers' implementation of a Universal Design for Learning, leading to Section 3.7, which highlights teachers' experiences with inclusion. Section 3.8 discusses barriers to inclusive practices in education, and Section 3.9 explores culture and pedagogical practice in detail. Section 3.10 addresses the concept of visual impairment and its implications for pedagogy, and Section 3.11 focuses on teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. Section 3.12 explores curriculum and assessment in the context of inclusion. Finally, Section 3.13 provides a chapter of the summary, outlining the gaps in the literature.

3.2 Critical disability studies

The Civil Rights Movement in the United States during the 1960s, along with the rise of postcolonial studies in the 1970s, gave rise to Critical Disability Theory (CDT) (Chataika et al., 2024). Growing awareness about the systemic discrimination faced by disabled individuals played a key role in formulating CDT. In order to understand CDT, it is essential to know the connection between the construction of disability and society. Citron et al. (2024) argue that CDT aims to understand the marginalisation of disability and challenges the ableist assumptions that shape society. Thus, CDT relates to how individuals with disabilities are imagined and defined in varying sociocultural contexts (Morton, 2012). This theory acknowledges and explores the power imbalances between individuals with disabilities and those without.

In this study, a power imbalance signifies an unequal relationship in which individuals with disabilities may experience disadvantages and discrimination compared to those without disabilities.

For example, Vornholt et al. (2018), in their studies on disability and employment, found that persons with disabilities might face barriers restricting their access to various opportunities, resources, and services available to those without disabilities. These could include limitations in education and social participation and highlight how societal norms and structures can perpetuate inequality and marginalisation. The idea of CDT signals its emancipatory role and advocates for societal transformation (Goodley et al., 2018). Critical disability theorists believe that we develop a sense of shared truth and argue about what is wrong and right through engagement with society (Phillips, 2021). Therefore, Critical Disability Theory is seen as a tool that focuses on the experiences and attempts to transform conditions under the oppressed (Wilke et al., 2024).

3.2.1 Critical disability and education.

Critical disability studies are concerned with the broader social, cultural, and political contexts in which disability is constructed and experienced (Flynn, 2024). In contrast, CDT focuses on developing and applying critical theoretical frameworks to analyse and challenge these constructions (Gillies, 2024). Critical disability studies draw us to interrogate the connection between ethnicity and disability and has particular relevance in education settings. For example, critical disability studies underpin questions that help identify the construct of normalcy within the classroom and asks how students with visual impairment are recognised and considered by schools, fellow students, and teachers. Critical disability studies provide insight into how the inclusion of students with a visual impairment might work to shift “the awareness created away from the issue of disablism (‘the Other’) to the attention of ableism (‘the dominant or the same’) (Goodley, 2016, p. 637). Critical disability studies offer promising potential as demonstrated by its application to classroom discourse analysis and interactions (Eilers, 2018) and has been utilised within teacher professional development (Cosier & Pearson, 2016).

However, the insights gained from critical disability studies have yet to make significant inroads into the field of inclusive education practice in Ghana and elsewhere (Cosier & Pearson, 2016), particularly for students with visual impairment. The fields of CDT and inclusion of students with visual impairment remain separate, in part due to a perception that critical disability studies lack practical application (Oliver & Barnes, 2012).

For example, Hoskins and Ilie (2017) contend that critical disability studies are yet to cause transformation in teachers' pedagogy, which will subsequently positively affect the needs of students with visual impairment in inclusive classrooms. This may be because there is a lack of recognition of teachers' daily experiences with the perceptions of students with visual impairment in various socioenvironmental and cultural contexts of inclusive classrooms (Bani Odeh et al., 2024).

Critical disability studies' philosophy is essential as it is relevant in making sense of teachers' pedagogical practice as we build an inclusive culture (Teachman, 2016). Creating an inclusive culture in a mainstream setting can increase teachers' understanding of all students, including students with visual impairment; their views can be contested and changed (Morton & Guerin, 2016). If teachers of students with visual impairment gain an understanding of the construction of visual impairment, it will shape the ways students with visual impairment can be respected through inclusionary practice. This is the case in Ghana. Currently, negative thinking and beliefs within Ghanaian society are likely to shape teachers' thinking, behaviour, and attitudes toward students with visual impairment and other disabilities (Kuyini et al., 2016). Even though exclusionary pedagogy may shape teachers' thinking—often reinforcing deficit-based views of disability and limiting the potential for inclusive practices—an inclusive school culture has the capacity to challenge, deconstruct, and ultimately reconstruct these notions. By fostering values of equity, respect for diversity, and collaborative teaching, an inclusive culture provides a framework through which teachers can re-evaluate and transform their beliefs and instructional approaches. This thesis presents a model of change in which professional development, reflective practice, and supportive leadership act as catalysts for shifting teacher mindsets. It suggests that inclusive education is not only about structural or policy adjustments but also about reshaping the underlying attitudes and assumptions that inform pedagogy. Therefore, critical disability studies have the potential to uncover the conditions that create societal barriers found in the very nature of students' learning and teachers' pedagogical practices when working with students with visual impairment. Messiou (2019) posits that some researchers argue that critical disability studies and inclusion seek to transform societal understanding of disability from a medical problem to a societal issue that requires a collective effort to dismantle barriers and create an equitable and inclusive world for everyone. Again, it aims to use knowledge through research to improve society and create an anti-oppressive environment in an inclusive classroom.

In summary, critical disability studies provide a positive perspective on students with visual impairments, focusing on their abilities rather than their limitations. This theory contrasts sharply with the medical philosophy of disability, which attributes visual impairments solely to biological causes and prioritises treatment. Conversely, the social model views visual impairments primarily resulting from social and environmental factors (Jarbi, 2024).

Critical disability studies recognise disability as a socially constructed condition. It acknowledges the impact of biological deficiencies but argues that disabilities are not caused by biological impairments alone. Instead, disabilities arise from the interaction between social environments and prevailing disability perceptions where incongruences between a person's biological impairments and their cultural context produce disabilities.

This perspective offers a fresh approach to resolving longstanding debates in disability studies (Bøttcher & Dammeyer, 2016). This research seeks to examine the sociocultural factors that impact the implementation of inclusive education in Ghana, understanding how these factors create barriers that affect both teachers and students with visual impairments.

3.3 Inclusive education and African Philosophy of Ubuntu

Inclusive education has been defined in various ways. In this study, I have adopted Liasidou's (2015) explanation of inclusive education as a means of providing equitable access to education and opportunities for individuals with diverse abilities and backgrounds. Liasidou expresses that inclusive education should be seen as a community where teachers' adoption of pedagogical approaches situates students at the centre of the education process, facilitating learning to help all learners flourish and reach their full potential.

Respecting diversity emphasises fostering a sense of belonging, acknowledging the value of every individual, and creating an environment where collaboration, empathy, and respect thrive. Inclusive education approaches have been shown to improve academic outcomes for all students, increase social skills, reduce stigma and prejudice, and create a more cohesive and diverse learning community (Ainscow, 2020). Inclusive education promotes engagement beyond academics, fostering active involvement in the wider society, including both home and school environments.

This approach addresses equity and access, countering exclusion at both home and school levels, and emphasises quality to prevent marginalisation within the educational system. Achieving true inclusion calls for systemic reforms—encompassing curricula, policies, strategies, and classroom structures—to support inclusive pedagogy effectively (Booth & Ainscow, 2012).

It is important to note that various studies have often used the terms “inclusion” and “mainstreaming” interchangeably. Both terms have been employed to describe the delivery of educational services for students with visual impairment. However, the objectives and theoretical foundation of inclusion are distinct from mainstreaming; therefore, it is crucial to differentiate between them. Mainstreaming refers to integrating individuals with special needs, such as disabilities or learning differences, into regular educational settings and activities alongside their peers who do not have special needs. Inclusion should be understood as an approach to educating students with varied needs together in a shared classroom, rather than focusing on a single group of learners (Edward et al., 2021). Through inclusive teaching practices, educators can address diverse needs, advancing the goals of Education for All (1990) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (UNICEF, 2015). This concept is grounded in the social model of disability, which views disability as stemming from societal structures and environmental barriers rather than individual limitations (Letseka, 2013).

Theorists have different views of mainstreaming and inclusion. Curran and Runswick-Cole (2014) contend that “disability is framed as a societal concern that requires addressing by eliminating the obstacles that individuals with impairments encounter in their interactions within the community” (p.1622). On the other hand, mainstreaming relies on the medical approach to disability, which personalises disability and perceives it as inherently restrictive or impairing (Edward, 2021). Inclusivity enhancements alter societal structures and educational systems to ensure students can actively engage in education and all facets of existence (Letseka, 2013). As Slee (2008) expresses, establishing inclusivity necessitates fundamental changes to the structural arrangement of educational institutions and broader communities.

3.3.1 Ubuntu

Western approaches to inclusive education, including the Universal Design for Learning and Individualized Education Plans, have impacted Ghana's educational practices.

As a result, teaching in Ghana has been shaped by multiple theories related to professional development, curriculum design, teaching methods, assessment techniques, delivery modes, and instructional language. However, one suggestion is that Ubuntu philosophy holds promise because it is culturally located. The philosophy of inclusion and Ubuntu, as discussed by Samkange and Samkange (1980), shares similar views. Ubuntu is a Bantu term from Southern Africa, encapsulated by the phrase, “I am because we are” or “humanity towards others” (Mangena, 2016, pp. 66–80). It emphasises that an individual's well-being and identity are closely tied to relationships and interactions. When applied to education, Ubuntu highlights the need to create learning environments that value students’ unique strengths, experiences, and perspectives.

According to Tusasiirwe et al. (2021), inclusion extends beyond physical presence in an Ubuntu-inspired educational setting, encompassing emotional, intellectual, and cultural inclusivity. Students are not seen as passive recipients of knowledge but active contributors to a collaborative learning process. Regarding Ubuntu philosophy, an inclusive school is viewed as a community rather than an aggregation of students with different backgrounds. Ubuntu gives a strong philosophical base for an inclusive community within schools in Africa as it emphasises the need to accept each one and work towards achieving a common goal because it knows neither colour nor race in today’s context.

In Ghana and Africa, it is thought that rediscovering the philosophy of Ubuntu in education is a movement toward rediscovering the African educational space to make education systems that are intellectually and culturally relevant (Oviawe, 2013). A pedagogical-based approach that is supported by the philosophical fundamentals of Ubuntu would help to reduce discrimination and injustice in inclusive schools in our education system. In the context of inclusion, the philosophy of Ubuntu challenges teachers' notions of traditional teaching methods and encourages teachers to embrace diversity and the differences among people. Ideally, when teachers in inclusive schools understand the idea of Ubuntu, it will help teachers to teach without judgment, discrimination, and labelling but recognise the needs of every individual through a pedagogical approach that brings some level of acceptance and belongingness to the classroom (Lefa, 2016).

A study by Le Grange (2018) emphasises that if there is a culture of Ubuntu at an inclusive school, there is always some level of acceptance and effective discipline that ensures fairness and clear and well-understood rules in their respective classrooms. A similar study by Mangena (2016) emphasises that the culture of Ubuntu manifests itself in the school context, specifically where there is discipline, acceptance, and belonging. From these studies, it appears that high-performing schools are characterised by the presence of the culture of Ubuntu. This is because the philosophy of Ubuntu emphasises humanness and interconnectedness among all individuals. Also, “I am because we are” presupposes coming together to embrace the diversity of culture in inclusive classrooms. Msila (2018) argues that institutional leadership that practises Ubuntu is respectful of its community partnership and, in education, is considered to provide Indigenous knowledge that will promote inclusion.

Ubuntu is an African pathway towards inclusion in education, but the reality in Ghanaian schools is often the opposite. In Ghana today, many people see persons with visual impairment as subnormal individuals. In many cases, individuals with disabilities are referred to by their impairment rather than by their actual names—for example, being called "the blind man" instead of using the person's given name. This practice effectively replaces their identity with their condition, reinforcing stigma and dehumanisation. Many end up begging as a way of life. These practices among individuals with visual impairment seem to influence teachers' minds when thinking about visual impairment in classrooms.

3.4 Discrimination and stigmatisation in inclusive education

Discrimination against people with disabilities is defined as any inhumane treatment, whether deliberate or inadvertent, that occurs as a result of their impairments (Goreczyny et al., 2011). This treatment often manifests as both visible and invisible barriers that impair the educational experiences of disabled students. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) elaborates on this, defining discrimination as any exclusion or restriction based on disability that impedes the equal enjoyment of human rights across various domains (United Nations [UN], 2006).

Similarly, Ghana's constitution identifies discrimination as unjust treatment based primarily on characteristics, such as disability, where one group may face restrictions or receive benefits that others do not (Republic of Ghana, 1992). These definitions underscore that discrimination stems from negative societal attitudes and behaviours towards people with disabilities.

Evidence suggests that discriminatory behaviours often come from a lack of understanding about disabilities (Mantey, 2017; Ntoaduro 2021), reinforced by cultural and social norms that widen the gap between those with and without disabilities. Baffoe (2013) argues that these misperceptions can significantly damage the self-esteem of persons with disabilities, leading to exclusion and oppression.

In the academic context, numerous studies across sub-Saharan Africa have shown that students with disabilities face discrimination due to discomfort among nondisabled peers and educators (Lorenzo, 2003; Mama et al., 2011; Mosia, 2017; Motonya, 2016; Opini, 2012). This is not just limited to Africa as researchers in Spain, the Czech Republic, and the United Kingdom (UK) have reported similar attitudes among higher education staff (Hopkins, 2011; Morina 2017).

In Ghana, disability is often equated with incapacity, a view deeply ingrained in societal attitudes and beliefs (Bott & Owusu, 2013). While the Ghanaian Government has taken steps to combat discrimination through legislation and policies (Republic of Ghana, 1992, 2006), challenges remain pervasive, affecting every aspect of life for persons with disabilities including education and social interactions (Lamtey et al., 2015).

Furthermore, discrimination is closely linked to stigmatisation, another significant barrier to inclusive education. Stigmatisation involves negative perceptions and labels that set persons with disabilities apart in society (Agbenyaga, 2003). It occurs through the labelling of differences, linking those labels to negative stereotypes and categorising individuals as “other” (Link & Phelan, 2001). In regions like sub-Saharan Africa, stigmatisation is fuelled by superstitions and sociocultural beliefs that are often misinformed (Agbenyega, 2003; Baffoe, 2013; Chataika et al., 2012). Stigma not only impacts social interactions but also affects the self-perception of persons with disabilities. Self-stigma happens when individuals internalise societal negativity, leading to low self-esteem and social disempowerment (Dhar, 2009; Vlachou & Papananou, 2015).

Negative labelling, particularly in Ghana, plays a significant role in public degradation and shapes the disability identity (Agbenyega, 2003). Understanding the cultural context is essential to fully comprehend and address the effects of stigma and discrimination on individuals with disabilities (Norwich, 1999). Such understanding is crucial for fostering environments that genuinely promote inclusivity and recognise the value of all individuals.

3.5 The concept of inclusion

The concept of inclusion, as outlined by the United Nations General Comment Number 4 (2016, p. 4), is defined as

“a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences.”

The goal is to provide all students of the relevant age group with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment tailored to their needs and preferences. According to this definition, simply placing students with disabilities into mainstream institutions does not qualify as inclusion if it does not involve corresponding structural adjustments, such as modifications to the learning environment. True inclusion creates a learning-friendly environment where all individuals feel safe, supported, acknowledged and have equitable learning outcomes. This definition guided the current study.

Mainstreaming of students with additional needs has been one approach in education that has sought to integrate students with special needs into general education settings, fostering an inclusive environment where all students, regardless of their abilities, learn side by side (Sharma, 2024). This approach was grounded in the belief that every student deserved equal access to quality education and that diversity in the classroom enriches the learning experience for everyone. With mainstreaming, however, schools generally failed to adapt their teaching methods, curricula, and infrastructures to meet the diverse needs of all learners (Wijayanti, 2024). A new approach was needed that focused on notions of inclusion.

Pagano (2024) emphasises that inclusion necessitates significant transformations in both school structures and societal frameworks. To note, the ongoing confusion between the concepts of inclusion, integration, and mainstreaming might stem from linguistic nuances. For instance, in Korea, “inclusion” and “integration” are not distinctly differentiated and are treated as synonymous in legal texts (Kim, 2019).

Although “inclusion” and “integration” have distinct meanings, they are often used interchangeably. For example, Binmahfooz (2019) equated inclusion with integration, describing it as a model of service delivery aimed at meeting the educational needs of students with special needs in regular classrooms. Inclusion is about fostering equality and acceptance, enabling all people to engage fully in all aspects of life. In contrast, integration often implies a level of tolerance towards individuals with disabilities, accepting their presence but not viewing them as equals (Liasidou, 2015). Inclusion is based on the social model of disability, which interprets disabilities as socially created and stresses the need to remove environmental barriers that limit participation (Oliver, 1990). Balter et al. (2023) describe disability as a societal concern that can be mitigated by removing such barriers. In contrast, integration follows the medical model of disability, perceiving disabilities as inherent limitations within individuals.

Haywood (2023) highlights that differences in how inclusion and disability are understood across languages make it challenging to establish universally clear definitions. Their research highlights discrepancies in understanding disabilities across 20 countries, suggesting that these linguistic differences contribute to the challenge. Ainscow (2020) further notes that cultural variations in terminology and concepts can obstruct a clear understanding of practices within their specific local and national contexts. Ghanaian society is deeply rooted in communal values, oral traditions, and indigenous knowledge systems, where wisdom is often communicated through proverbs (Adjaye, 2013; Agyekum, 2021). These proverbs serve not only as moral guides but also as culturally resonant tools for conveying complex ideas in accessible and memorable ways. While global frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) offer valuable principles for inclusive pedagogy, they can appear abstract or misaligned with local realities if not interpreted through a culturally relevant lens. This study explores how teachers in Ghana experience the inclusion of students with visual impairments by situating global concepts within a local context.

As the study will demonstrate, Ghanaian proverbs serve as powerful vehicles for articulating an inclusive philosophy that is both culturally grounded and pedagogically meaningful.

3.5.1 Inclusive pedagogy

In recent years, Universal Design for Learning has become almost synonymous with understanding inclusive pedagogy (Boysen, 2024). A research initiative by Black-Hawkins (2017) delved into inclusive teaching practices, examining how inclusion is implemented in classrooms, and the exploration of inclusive pedagogical approaches and the rationale behind them. The study was conducted in two primary schools in Scotland to determine how educators develop practices that integrate all students, avoiding distinct educational approaches for students with additional needs. Their research highlights the potential for a pedagogy that embraces all learners without discrimination (Black-Hawkins, 2017). Three theoretical premises guided Black-Hawkins's study. The first is a shift in the research focus from students identified as having disabilities to all students within the educational environment, promoting the application of the Universal Design for Learning to engage every student actively. The study emphasises a comprehensive pedagogical strategy that enhances learning opportunities for all rather than tailoring teaching to the needs of individual students. The second premise challenged the deterministic views that the presence of students with specific needs, such as visual impairments, might hinder the progress of their peers. The third premise critiqued the notion of striving for uniform outcomes for all students as a professional challenge rather than attributing it to the students' deficiencies. This necessitates a shift towards innovative teaching methods that accommodate the diverse needs of all students. Ultimately, Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) advocate for an inclusive pedagogy that consistently addresses the needs of all students rather than isolating the requirements of a few.

Katz and Sokal (2019) explored the impact of training based on a Universal Design for Learning on various teacher-related outcomes, such as self-efficacy and stress levels. This 2015 study found that Universal Design for Learning training led to enhanced positive views among teachers regarding their students' social and behavioural development, increased self-efficacy, and reduced stress, highlighting the benefits of such training. Makoelle (2014) investigated teaching and learning approaches within an inclusive classroom setting.

The study explores the criteria for ensuring inclusive pedagogy in meeting the needs of students with special needs among teachers. The study revolves around six teachers in selected senior high schools with inclusive practice in South Africa. The study indicated that there is no accepted definition for defining inclusive pedagogy. The study only focuses on teachers' understanding of inclusive pedagogy and does not include how teachers experience inclusive environments teaching learners with specific needs. The study also only looked at senior high school teachers from South Africa without data from other geographical areas. Research on teachers in inclusive schools, such as the study by Kuyini and Asiamah (2016) in Ghana, primarily centres on educators working with students with disabilities in general. Additionally, much of this research addresses various special needs, including learning disabilities, hearing impairments, and intellectual disabilities. These studies also explore areas like teacher competencies, information communication technology (ICT) use, teacher preparation, and teacher attitudes (Mprah et al., 2016; Opoku et al., 2017).

Research conducted by Thoma et al. (2023) advances the conversation about the impact of Universal Design for Learning by assessing how this approach affects teachers' confidence and their classroom techniques. Their results indicate that although the training generally boosts teachers' confidence and enhances their practical skills, their grasp of Universal Design for Learning principles shows considerable variation. Meanwhile, Ma (2024) introduces an important perspective by pinpointing both obstacles and enablers in the implementation of a Universal Design for Learning. Their research points out several challenges, including uneven understanding and application of the Universal Design for Learning, prevalent misconceptions about the framework, limitations in time and resources, and student unease. In contrast, they also recognise factors that propel the Universal Design for Learning forward, such as increased awareness, a proactive acceptance of Universal Design for Learning methods, and support from educational leaders and institutions. These findings illustrate that the impact of Universal Design for Learning training on teaching attitudes and methodologies is influenced by multiple elements, such as the thoroughness of the training, available support systems, and the overall preparedness of teachers and educational institutions to implement changes. However, the shortcomings of Universal Design for Learning are further exacerbated in the Ghanaian context due to limited resources and infrastructure.

Although the Universal Design for Learning aims to make learning accessible for all students, including those with disabilities, its implementation in Ghana often faces challenges related to inadequate assistive technology, teacher training, and cultural attitudes towards disability. Research by Adom (2023) highlights these difficulties in the context of art and culture courses where the lack of resources and tailored instructional materials hinders the full realisation of Universal Design for Learning principles. In many cases, the focus on inclusion remains theoretical as practical application is constrained by the lack of essential support systems. Thus, while the Universal Design for Learning holds promise for improving educational outcomes, its success in Ghana depends on addressing these systemic barriers.

3.6 Teachers' implementation of Universal Design for Learning

The Universal Design for Learning is an educational framework that aims to accommodate the diverse needs of all learners by providing flexible methods for engagement, representation, and expression (Veshal, 2024). Research in Ghana has highlighted that many educators are either unaware of the Universal Design for Learning or are unable to implement it effectively due to infrastructural and financial constraints. For example, a study by Amponsah et al. (2024) revealed that, although teachers were knowledgeable about the Universal Design for Learning in certain areas, their ability to incorporate it into daily teaching was limited by insufficient materials and specialised training. This gap has been particularly evident in rural areas where schools face additional barriers, such as overcrowded classrooms and limited access to technology, both of which hinder the flexibility that the Universal Design for Learning promotes. Ewe and Galvin (2023) argue that a Universal Design for Learning represents a fundamental shift in educational paradigms, urging educators to reconsider their perceptions of students, and their roles and teaching approaches to improve accessibility for all students through engagement, instruction, and assessment methods. The study by Israel et al. (2022), which included 108 primary school teachers, found that although there was an increase in teachers' confidence in teaching computer science and addressing the needs of students with disabilities, there was still a significant lack of understanding regarding Universal Design for Learning principles. This gap persisted even with the availability of coaching support, pointing to a misalignment between theoretical knowledge of Universal Design for Learning and its practical implementation in the classroom.

While teachers acknowledged the importance of inclusivity, engagement, accessibility, and flexibility as fundamental aspects, they often struggled to explicitly link these concepts to the Universal Design for Learning framework itself. This situation underscores the need for deeper professional development focused on the comprehension and practical execution of the Universal Design for Learning in various teaching environments.

Research by Thoma et al. (2023) suggests that while training in the Universal Design for Learning generally increases teachers' confidence and enhances their practical skills, teachers' comprehension of the principles can vary. Further, a study by Hills (2023) introduces an important perspective by pinpointing both obstacles and identifying aids in implementing a Universal Design for Learning. Hills' research outlines challenges, such as misconceptions surrounding the framework, limitations due to time and resources, and student discomfort. On the positive side, factors encouraging teachers to adopt the Universal Design for Learning were identified, including increasing awareness, a readiness to integrate Universal Design for Learning principles and support from educational leaders and institutions (Hills, 2023). These findings imply that the success of Universal Design for Learning training in influencing teacher attitudes and practices depends on multiple aspects, such as the thoroughness of the training, the availability of supportive infrastructure, and the overall preparedness of teachers and educational institutions to implement changes.

Ewe and Galvin (2023) stress the necessity of rethinking educational approaches. They call for a paradigm shift that reevaluates how students and instructional strategies are perceived and the role of educators, emphasising the importance of adopting adaptive and inclusive teaching methods that accommodate students' varied learning needs. A subsequent study by Mackey et al. (2022) discovered that teacher candidates believed they lacked and were not given the crucial foundational knowledge necessary for effective implementation of a universal learning design. This shortfall was evident in their strategies for engaging with, connecting to, revising, and building upon previously acquired knowledge. The candidates also stressed assessing prerequisite knowledge and rectifying gaps before advancing with additional instruction. This focus on foundational knowledge is consistent with the Universal Design for Learning principle of representation, which centres on the "what" aspect of learning.

Research by Owiny et al. (2021) and Lanterman et al. (2021) further offers insights into teachers' views on inclusion and diversity. Owiny et al. (2019) noted only a minimal impact of Universal Design for Learning training on teachers' perceptions of teaching students with disabilities. Conversely, Lanterman et al. (2021) found that Universal Design for Learning training positively affected teachers' beliefs, indicating that the way disability is framed during training as an individual issue or a result of societal constructs plays a significant role in shaping teachers' attitudes. Collectively, these studies point to the urgent need for more focused and thorough Universal Design for Learning training and professional development initiatives, as supported by additional research (Hills, 2023; Katz, 2015; Thoma et al., 2023). Ultimately, Universal Design for Learning should be replaced with more culturally located frameworks that can be understood in the Ghanaian context.

3.7 Teachers' experience with inclusion

Exploring teachers' experiences with inclusion offers important insights into how the process challenges and transforms them. As Lidubwi (2024) notes, analysing the experiences of those who implement inclusion can uncover fresh perspectives on evaluating the effectiveness of a specific programme. Moreover, delving into teachers' experiences can illuminate the complex dynamics within inclusive schools and illustrate the necessary modifications in teaching practices to better support the needs of children with special educational needs (SEN) (Carrington et al., 2016).

Carrington et al. (2016) conducted their study in Australia, specifically focusing on early career teachers in mainstream classrooms in Queensland. The research team was based at Queensland University of Technology, and it explored how these Australian teachers integrated 143 young students with developmental disabilities into their early years classrooms. Data were collected via a questionnaire containing two open-ended questions. The results showed that, although teachers supported the idea of including students with SEN in regular classrooms, they also faced notable challenges. Teachers reported increased workloads and additional responsibilities as they worked to improve educational outcomes for these students. A major challenge highlighted was managing disruptive behaviours and providing the extensive support needed for these children to function independently. To better handle these difficulties, teachers expressed a need for extra resources and support.

Jobling and Moni (2010) explored authentic learning experiences for preservice teachers teaching students with special needs in Australia. The study aimed to develop an integrated approach to provide preservice teachers with expertise and support to assist them in handling students with special needs. These experiences were taken within a postschool literacy programme for preservice teachers. The study revealed that teachers do not have real pedagogical experiences and knowledge in handling special needs students, and the teachers noticed that it takes an extended time to develop their skills. The study concluded that there should be a philosophical framework to support teaching students with special needs.

The impact of inclusion on teachers highlighted the emotional and physical toll that poor implementation can take. Ely (2013) in the United States of America discovered that general education teachers frequently experienced stress and a sense of powerlessness stemming from insufficient support, lack of collaboration among peers, and inadequate training. These teachers also felt isolated within the inclusive school environment. As a result of divergent attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours, they perceived their actions as segregating rather than including students.

Baena et al. (2022) conducted a study on innovation and inclusion in Spain. The study demonstrated that technology in the classroom was their primary target, neglecting inclusive practice. On the other hand, the study revealed that outside the inclusive environment, each teacher adopted the right pedagogical approach in including learners with special needs blended with technology in the classroom. Baena et al. (2022) noted that some heads of schools do not want to implement inclusive practices in their respective classrooms since they feel it will invite many students with special needs into their schools. The study concluded that there should be training for teachers on implementing the use of technology in inclusive classrooms to support every learner.

Teachers tend to have more positive experiences with inclusion when they receive support from their school principal (Sandfort, 2015). In Sandfort's study in the UK, the principal empowered teachers by allowing them to act independently, collaborate, and participate in decision-making processes, especially concerning the inclusion of children with autism. This autonomy and involvement enhanced their sense of competence and helped them address the challenges they encountered. Several studies have shown that an authoritarian and demanding approach by school administrators can leave teachers feeling powerless and foster negative attitudes towards inclusion (AlWadaani, 2019).

The nature of this support plays a critical role in cultivating an inclusive school culture and can significantly impact the effectiveness of inclusion practices.

AlWadanni explores a comprehensive approach to professional teacher training aimed at addressing the needs of students with disabilities (Jones & Symeonidou, 2017). Utilising a survey, the research gathered insights from teachers on their expectations for training to effectively meet the unique requirements of students with disabilities. Surprisingly, the findings revealed that uncredentialed teachers were often assigned to teach these students, which contributed to suboptimal academic performance among students with disabilities. This raises several questions: Is this issue influenced by cultural factors? Could it stem from inadequate pedagogical skills, or is it that teacher trainees lack a clear understanding of the dynamics within an inclusive classroom?

Ruble et al. (2013) observed that teachers often had negative experiences with inclusion, leading to a reluctance to include children with autism. The absence of support from school principals contributed to teachers feeling overwhelmed, disempowered, and stressed, which adversely affected their ability to implement individualised education plans and achieve desired educational outcomes. Similarly, Robinson et al. (2024) discovered that teachers experienced fear and anxiety due to their perceived lack of knowledge, which made them feel unprepared and professionally inadequate. This anxiety was heightened by the pressure to possess specific skills and knowledge, a reflection of the medical model's influence, which emphasises specialised capabilities to address the needs of students.

Mbwambo (2015) discovered that positive attitudes among teachers were less likely to develop when inclusive policies were implemented without adequately considering the teachers' ability to meet these expectations. Similarly, Mäkinen (2013) explored the experiences of teachers in Finland regarding their engagement with their work through written reflections. Teachers provided narratives titled, "Teaching, Learning, and Me" that detailed their experiences with inclusive education. Analysis showed that many teachers felt unprepared and overwhelmed by the demands of inclusive programmes, often leading to a lack of commitment to the principles of inclusive education. They reported that striving to be inclusive was more challenging than anticipated, inducing anxiety and a sense of being under constant pressure to fulfil demanding requirements.

In a related study in Russia, Millrood (2017) observed that secondary school teachers frequently experienced anxiety and feelings of inadequacy. These feelings stemmed from the pressures to adhere to inclusive educational policies, highlighting the emotional and professional challenges faced by educators in inclusive settings. Together, these studies underscore the need for supportive measures that consider the realities of teachers' capacities and the practical challenges of implementing inclusive education.

3.8 Barriers to inclusive practices in education

Educational research strongly supports the necessity of inclusive practices, not only for their benefits but as essential elements for enhancing the overall educational system (Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). A fundamental challenge in achieving true inclusion involves transforming societal perceptions of disabilities, which are deeply ingrained within cultural and social frameworks (Waring & Evans, 2014). As evident in Ghana, these perceptions, shaped by social conditioning and cultural norms (Giese & Ruin, 2018), often perceived disability as a deficiency rather than because of societal barriers, as suggested by Šiška and Habib (2013).

Despite the progressive shift towards inclusive education, numerous obstacles continue to hinder its full implementation. The successful integration of children with special educational needs (SEN) requires overcoming substantial social and political barriers. This multidimensional challenge is influenced by a variety of factors detailed in the literature (Galović et al., 2014). In her ethnographic study, Runswick-Cole (2011) identified ableism within the English education system as a significant barrier where prevailing attitudes promote a normative standard that often results in the exclusion of students with SEN, thereby emphasising the need for a cultural shift in disability perception.

Further complicating the landscape, Genova (2015) found through a qualitative study across Greece, Spain, and Lithuania that societal biases in Lithuania restrict access to inclusive programmes with disabilities often viewed as synonymous with illness, thereby questioning the need for education. This highlights the crucial role of challenging ignorance and biases to facilitate inclusive educational environments.

Similarly, in Guyana, entrenched prejudices pose major challenges to inclusive practices (Frankel et al., 2010) while in Bangladesh, cultural beliefs that attribute disabilities to maternal faults perpetuate a culture of disablism, severely limiting societal participation for children with SEN (Šiška & Habib, 2013).

In England and Wales, Evans and Lunt (2002) noted resistance from local educational authorities to inclusive practices, citing the complex needs of students with SEN as a primary hurdle. This reluctance often stems from a lack of willingness to assume responsibility for these students, fostering a culture that hinders inclusive education's progress. Paliokosta and Blandford (2010) observed that despite a formal commitment to inclusive policies, three English secondary schools were essentially unprepared for true inclusion, often resorting to integration practices dictated by a medical model focusing on deficiencies rather than capabilities.

These studies illuminate the profound impact societal attitudes and disability perceptions have on the implementation and effectiveness of inclusive education programmes, revealing a significant gap between idealistic policies and their practical application. These issues are essential to consider in my research as they provide a comprehensive understanding of how societal contexts and the conceptualisation of disability can influence and complicate the execution of inclusive education.

3.8.1 Environmental barriers

Environmental factors play a critical role in shaping the success of inclusive education. Studies worldwide have demonstrated how these barriers, both physical and attitudinal, impact the implementation of inclusive practices. Global studies emphasise that the physical environment's barriers play a crucial role in shaping perceptions and the successful implementation of inclusive education. In Jordan, research by Abu-Hamour and Muhaidat (2014) found that parental reluctance towards inclusive education stemmed largely from concerns over inadequate physical infrastructure, a shortage of qualified teachers, and the absence of specialised materials. Parents feared these deficiencies would lead to the exclusion and potential harm of their children within inclusive settings.

In Saudi Arabia, Aref (2011) identified similar challenges, with parents citing unsuitable physical environments, resource scarcity, and a lack of qualified staff as major obstacles preventing the effective inclusion of students with SEN.

These environmental barriers are believed to detrimentally affect the educational experiences of these students. Jordan et al. (2010) discuss how the structure of an environment reflects and shapes societal views on disability, pointing out that both social and physical dimensions of an environment can impede the practical aspects of inclusion and the cultivation of positive attitudes towards disabilities.

The relationship between environmental and attitudinal barriers is complex as the structure of an environment both reflects and influences societal attitudes towards disability and inclusion. This connection is evident in how both the social and physical aspects of an environment can hinder not only the practicalities of inclusion but also the cultivation of positive attitudes towards it. In United States, United Arab Emirates, and Jordan a study by Hamaidi et al. (2012), affirmed that successful inclusion depends on teachers' access to collaborative opportunities and training resources. Similarly, Ahmmed et al. (2012) in Bangladesh observed that teachers felt more positively about inclusion when they perceived strong support from their schools.

Collectively, these studies underline the complex interplay of support, leadership, and environmental factors in shaping attitudes and practices surrounding inclusive education. They highlight the need for well-defined roles, regular collaboration, and comprehensive support systems to successfully overcome the challenges faced in implementing inclusive practices effectively. In summary, addressing the physical barriers in inclusive education is not merely about removing physical obstacles but also involves a comprehensive approach that includes enhancing support systems, providing adequate training, and fostering a supportive and inclusive culture within educational settings.

3.8.2 Policy as a barrier

Misguided policies and a reluctance among policymakers to move away from an “ableist education” approach can significantly hinder the implementation of inclusive education. Slee (2013) suggests that true inclusive education demands the development of policies that improve every element of the school environment, including assessment practices, curriculum, teaching methods, and the physical design of the school. He critiqued the normalisation approach within schools, which pressures students to conform to an “ideal type”, undermining genuine inclusivity.

Slee assessed many educational systems globally for employing resource allocation models that paradoxically increase the segregation of disabled students. Kang et al. (2015) observed that in South Korea, policymakers' negative attitudes towards inclusion and their lack of commitment to supporting inclusion laws have impeded the development of inclusive education programmes for young students' political perspectives on inclusion are often intertwined with beliefs about educational outcomes with positive attitudes generally leading to more inclusive policies (Lüke & Grosche, 2018). However, the focus on achieving national standards and high scores on standardised tests creates significant obstacles to inclusion (Ainscow & Kaplan, 2005).

The educational systems' focus on performance and high-stakes assessments often leads to the exclusion of differences, despite the appearance of inclusivity. In the United Kingdom, the inclusion policy is still largely based on a medical model of disability, which emphasises deficits and individual needs (Farr, 2018). This researcher advocates for an in-depth, multilevel approach to truly achieve inclusive schools.

Lloyd (2008) conducted a critical analysis of United Kingdom inclusion policies and found that these policies, while ostensibly inclusive, failed to significantly improve access to regular schools for students with SEN. These policies often perpetuate exclusion by grounding inclusive practices in normalisation and deficiency models where support services are designed merely to help students meet the rigid standards of regular education.

In Saudi Arabia, Alahmadi (2009) found that the absence of well-defined inclusion policies created significant challenges for teachers responsible for carrying out inclusive programmes. The research indicated that policymakers' ignorance of and disinterest in true inclusion were significant barriers, leading to policies that were amended and implemented without adequate planning or communication, leaving teachers unprepared and unsupported. Alahmadi observed that despite the nominal use of the term "inclusion", policies effectively promoted a withdrawal model, illustrating a conflict in policy implementation. In the United Arab Emirates, Alborn (2017) identified that the greatest barrier to inclusive education stemmed from misaligned policies between general education and special education, particularly around high-stakes assessments. This misalignment discouraged inclusive practices.

Similarly, Glazzard (2011), in the North of England, highlights that the prevailing educational policy, which emphasises standard achievement, fails to accommodate diverse student needs, creating significant challenges for inclusion. Drudy and Kinsella (2009) examined Ireland's approach to inclusive education, emphasising the need for supportive policies underpinned by rights-based legislation. They argue that inclusive education should be supported by an inclusive societal ethos that extends beyond the medical model of disability to reflect social and human rights models.

However, Talley and Brintnell (2016) point out that many policies overlook cultural contexts, leading to disparities between policy intentions and practical outcomes. Runswick-Cole (2011) and others have noted that conceptual misalignments undermine inclusion efforts. According to Mäkinen (2013) and Avramidis and Norwich (2002), the greater the gap between policy rhetoric and reality, the more formidable the barriers to achieving genuine inclusivity. Despite a general consensus on the importance of inclusion, deep-seated cultural and social beliefs continue to pose significant obstacles. As part of a broader discourse, there is an increasing recognition of the need to promote inclusion as a fundamental right for students with SEN and to enhance its implementation by understanding its application within different cultural contexts. This study aims to delve deeply into how inclusion is implemented in Ghana and identify the barriers it encounters and the features of the broader cultural context in Ghana that limit or facilitate inclusion.

In summary, reflecting Goodley's (2014) observation, societal responses to disability are often ambivalent and conflicting. Thus, it can be argued that as long as educational policies continue to impose normative standards on students with SEN, these policies will inadvertently perpetuate exclusion through normalisation practices. To create equitable educational experiences, there needs to be a fundamental re-evaluation and restructuring of the educational systems to recognise and respect differences rather than suppress them.

3.9 Culture and pedagogical practice

Social and cultural norms can have a significant impact on pedagogy and the practice of teaching (Rychly & Graves, 2012). Social and cultural norms impinge on many aspects of pedagogy, including teaching styles, curriculum content, classroom management strategies, and the expectations and goals of students and teachers.

For example, it was found that in some cultures, there may be a strong emphasis on respect for authority figures, such as teachers, and this can influence the pedagogical approach used in the classroom with teachers adopting more authoritarian teaching styles (Zhu, 2010). Researchers in various cultural settings have discussed how routine behaviours and habits become embedded in pedagogical practices (Cheng et al., 2010; Kukari, 2004; Wong, 2005).

In contrast, in other cultures, there may be a greater emphasis on collaboration and student-centred learning, leading to more participatory and democratic pedagogical practices (Moriña, 2020). There may be a greater emphasis on critical thinking and inquiry-based learning, leading to more student-centred and participatory teaching practices, or, conversely, there may be a strong emphasis on rote learning and memorisation, which can lead to more didactic teaching methods (Tran, 2013). Otieno et al. (2018) conducted research in Kenya and found that a significant number of people attribute disabilities to curses, taboos, or witchcraft. They further noted that in Kenya Rachuonyo South, deeply ingrained traditional beliefs greatly hinder the empowerment and education of individuals with disabilities.

Gay (2018) posits that the cultural background of teachers profoundly informs their pedagogical values, beliefs, and decisions within the classroom. This perspective is particularly relevant to my research, which seeks to understand how pedagogical practices are shaped in Ghana, a country with a rich tradition of educational culture, has long valued knowledge transmission through both formal schooling and Indigenous systems of apprenticeship, storytelling, and proverbs, reflecting a deep-rooted respect for learning across generations in Ghana, a country with a rich tradition of educational culture. Consequently, the prevalent educational philosophies, values, and methodologies in Ghana are more likely shaped by colonial influences than by traditional Indigenous ways of teaching and learning. This cultural framing influences teachers' dispositions, including their educational aims and philosophies. Kukari (2004) explores how indigenous culture in Papua New Guinea shapes student teachers' initial perceptions of teaching methods. His research suggests that early educational experiences significantly shape one's pedagogical understanding, although the impact on actual teaching practices remains less clear.

Chafi et al. (2016) demonstrated how cultural practices about disability affect inclusion in Morocco.

However, their study did not explore the specific impact of cultural beliefs on inclusive classroom pedagogies. Dixon and Senior (2011) argue that teaching and learning are processes marked by the emergence of unconsciously embodied experiences, touching on the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions of student teachers' early lives. This suggests that pedagogical practices are intertwined with the broader cultural context of an individual's upbringing. Furthermore, Kisiel (2013) contends that in the United States, despite robust teacher education programmes and exposure to diverse teaching methodologies, pre-existing cultural beliefs and early educational experiences can persist, potentially resisting transformation within the teaching context. In Ghana, therefore, pre-service and in-service teachers may also hold onto deep-rooted cultural beliefs that influence how they perceive and respond to inclusive education.

In my research, one area of exploration is whether teachers in Ghana have developed their pedagogical approaches based on their experiences during their schooling. It is crucial to determine if these teachers' perceptions of teaching might be deeply rooted in their personal and cultural histories, embodying these early influences in their professional lives.

Amoatey et al. (2020) state that sociocultural belief systems have hindered inclusion in Ghanaian schools. This is because some disabilities are often associated with spiritual causes or seen as curses, leading to stigma, discrimination, and exclusion of learners with disabilities from mainstream classrooms. Similarly, Salmon's (2024) research in the United States emphasises that students with disabilities often form bonds with each other as a strategy to cope with the social isolation that stigma brings. To address discrimination and stigmatisation of visually impaired students in inclusive classrooms, it is important to thoroughly explore Ghanaian cultural beliefs and practices. Acheampong (2022) supports this discussion by identifying various sources of stigma, such as superstitions, ignorance, lack of knowledge and empathy, outdated belief systems, and the ostracising of individuals who are different. This finding highlights the complexity of stigma, showing that it is a multifaceted issue deeply ingrained in societal perceptions and attitudes towards diversity and difference. Acheampong's research emphasises the need for comprehensive approaches to education and awareness that address the underlying causes of stigma, fostering a more inclusive and empathetic society. It is crucial to integrate an understanding of these cultural nuances into the educational framework, especially for visually impaired students.

Furthermore, research shows that a significant number of children with disabilities in many developing countries, including Ghana, are not attending school due to prevailing sociocultural beliefs and practices (Ozoji, 2020).

Agbenyega's study (2007) shed light on cultural attitudes linking disability to concepts like witchcraft, sorcery, juju, and magic stemming from past wrongdoings. However, Agbenyega's research fails to explore how these cultural beliefs impact teaching methods and teachers' readiness to embrace inclusive approaches in their instruction. Dogbe (2015) found that some people view visual impairment as a result of past life or spiritual retribution for wrongdoings. This belief can lead to discrimination and stigmatisation of people with visual impairment, who may be seen as deserving of their condition or as having some moral failing. The study also stressed that these negative attitudes within Ghanaian society seem to shape teachers' attitudes and behaviour towards students with visual impairment in the classroom. These insights underscore the importance of considering the impact of early learning and cultural upbringing in understanding pedagogical practices, an area my study seeks to illuminate in the context of Ghanaian education.

3.10 Visual impairment and pedagogy

Disability is understood as a multi-layered concept that includes limitations in activity, restrictions in participation, and impairments. It reflects the challenges arising from the interaction between an individual's health conditions and the contextual factors they face, such as environmental and personal circumstances (WHO/World Bank, 2011, p. 4). Visual impairment is understood not only as a health issue but as a complex challenge involving various levels of interaction. It includes problems with visual functioning (a health condition), difficulties in performing certain tasks (known as activity limitations due to environmental barriers), and challenges in engaging with the physical environment (participation restrictions). Therefore, visual impairment represents a multifaceted condition shaped by the interplay between personal attributes and the social and physical environment.

Florian (2015) is of the view that students with visual impairment are always ready to explore their world and tend to rely on other senses like touch, smell, and hearing.

At times, teachers and peer-to-peer communication normally occur in the form of nonverbal means, such as body gestures using arm, hand, and facial expressions, of which not all these students with visual impairment may be aware. Since students with visual impairment have limited vision, they may find it challenging to locate objects and rely on mobility techniques to travel independently. Thus, visually impaired students familiarising themselves using orientation and mobility techniques is one common approach supported in the literature (Ravenscroft, 2019). This means students' ability to determine their position in space and navigate from one location to another using their remaining senses. This helps create a mental picture of one's environment. Another strategy used to maximise students' academic achievements with visual impairment in inclusive classrooms is giving them extra time to connect words, activities, experiences, and even sentences (Ravenscroft, 2019).

Miyauchi (2020) notes that teachers demonstrate negative and positive attitudes toward including students with visual impairment. Environmental, teacher- and student-related factors influence teachers' attitudes towards students with visual impairment. In regard to teacher factors, teachers without professional qualifications feel unprepared to accept and include students with visual impairment in some specific academic subjects like science, mathematics, and physical education. Even though students with visual impairment were included in all education levels, they were not allowed to participate in other classroom activities. This exclusion generated long- and short-term effects on the academic achievement of students with visual impairment. Meanwhile, some teachers with professional qualifications were able to create an enabling environment for effective teacher pedagogical strategies and the use of teaching and learning materials to meet the needs of students with visual impairment. Even though Miyauchi's (2020) peer review specifically examined teachers teaching students with visual impairments, the articles reviewed by the author were from various geographical areas, including Spain, Turkey, the United States, India, and Zimbabwe. It never considered reports from Ghana as there were none. None of the articles reviewed looked at the cultural or attitudinal influences on teacher pedagogy. In particular, the study looked at subjects such as mathematics, physical education, and science. The issue of teacher pedagogy in general in inclusive classrooms was not investigated.

Klingenberg et al. (2020) conducted a study on visually impaired students, exploring topics such as teachers' attitudes and experiences, the use of the abacus, tactile graphics, and the development of mathematical concepts. Their findings emphasise that for effective teaching strategies, it is crucial to have qualified and enthusiastic teachers who can foster a learning environment where students experience a sense of accomplishment and success. Students with visual impairments are often viewed as having limitations in tasks that rely heavily on vision (Fraser et al., 2019; Hong Kong Blind Union, n.d.). The research was framed within the broader context of professional development for teachers working with students with visual impairment. However, the reliance on a survey method and the use of questionnaires limited the depth of teacher insights that could be gathered. Klingenberg et al.'s study identifies a methodological gap in how teacher and student voices are incorporated into the research process. Notably the study did not consider the students' viewpoints, so it is unknown how research outcomes can be beneficial to the students. My research aims to involve students more directly, bringing their voices to the forefront through advisory roles to ensure their needs and experiences are adequately represented and addressed.

Kuyini et al. (2020) in Ghana explored teachers' beliefs about the essential elements required for educating students with disabilities. The research identified that instructional strategies, and human resources were key factors teachers depended on to address the needs of diverse learners. The study employed a quantitative methodology, using a survey design to collect data. Their study focused specifically on the teachers' ability to effectively demonstrate skills necessary for addressing the unique requirements of learners with special needs. To this end, the study used a competency scale to evaluate teachers' effectiveness in implementing inclusive educational practices. However, the use of this scale to gauge teachers' skills in educating students with special needs had its limitations. The quantitative approach did not allow for an in-depth understanding of teachers' pedagogical abilities, so the extent of its effectiveness remains unclear.

Kuyini et al. concentrated on the capabilities of preservice teachers to instruct students with special needs but did not specifically address the unique requirements of students with visual impairments. There was no detailed exploration of how these teachers' experiences are shaped when teaching students with specific types of disabilities.

The study adopted a positivist approach, limiting respondents' contributions without providing a detailed or nuanced description of the phenomena related to teaching in an inclusive classroom.

Maryanti et al. (2022) used a qualitative method to explore the provision of science education for learners with special needs in Indonesia. They examined how science education is delivered to students with visual, hearing, and intellectual disabilities in a specific Indonesian school. The findings revealed a significant gap in the pedagogical training of teachers tasked with educating students with special needs. The educators recognised a need for improved competencies in addressing the diverse requirements of these students, attributing this deficiency to prevailing teaching beliefs. Notably, the study found that teachers tended to apply the general curriculum without modifications to suit the needs of students with disabilities. The research highlighted a limitation in its depth, focusing narrowly on students with disabilities without a broader exploration of inclusive educational practices. Additionally, the teaching approach observed was predominantly teacher-centred, placing the onus on students to conform to the teachers' expectations within the classroom setting.

Some studies in Ghana have concentrated on specific areas. For instance, Ocloo and Dogbe (2008) explored topics like braille, teachers' perceptions, and cultural beliefs within special schools. Ampratwum et al. (2016) focused on students' skills in using computer assistive technology, while Kuyini et al. (2016) investigated teachers' competencies educating students with special needs. Although these studies addressed students with visual impairments and additional needs, they overlooked teachers' instructional practices within inclusive classrooms. Additionally, these studies did not incorporate methodologies that involve teachers. The overall scarcity of academic research in Ghana that examines teachers' experiences in educating students with visual impairments has inspired this study.

3.11 Teachers' attitude

Teacher attitude sits at the heart of inclusion and is central to understanding teachers' experiences of working with students with special needs. Research overwhelmingly points to teachers' attitudes as a principal barrier to adopting inclusive education (Thapaliya, 2018).

At the heart of it, societal perceptions significantly shape teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. In this section, I summarise key research from various countries.

Research by Subban and Sharma (2021) in Australia explored teachers' attitudes toward including students with disciplinary issues and found that teachers' roles and attitudes critically influence the adoption of inclusive practices. Similarly, Moore (2022) examined preservice teacher preparation in Pune, India, and discovered a generally negative attitude towards the inclusion of students with disabilities and additional needs, highlighting concerns that moderately affected their inclusion in regular classrooms.

Historically, there has been a belief that individuals with disabilities, including students with visual impairments, were uneducable and incapable of learning (Anthony, 2011; Ocran, 2023). Similarly, the way students learn in the classroom is heavily influenced by teachers' perceptions and understanding of the curriculum and assessment methods (Ocran, 2023). If teachers of students with visual impairments harbour deficit-based views towards including students with disabilities in their classrooms, the educational experiences and learning opportunities for these students are likely to be restricted. Conversely, if teachers maintain a positive outlook towards all learners and commit to providing equal access to education, the learning experiences and opportunities for students with visual impairments can significantly improve (Le Fanu et al., 2022).

In Sri Lanka, Hettiarachchi and Das (2014) observe that teachers were confused about the concept of inclusion, often mistaking it for integration. This confusion was attributed to adopting Western educational concepts without adequate contextual adaptation. In another example, research by Kang et al. (2015) in South Korea revealed that the terms "integration" and "inclusion" are often used interchangeably, indicating a lack of clear understanding despite general consensus on the inclusion policy.

Additional research by Tiwari et al. (2015) highlighted that in Indian high schools, religious beliefs and an emphasis on standardised testing influenced teachers' views on inclusive education, often hindering broader acceptance of diverse educational needs. A study by Namrata (2011) in India involved 35 primary school teachers and, through interviews and classroom observations, revealed that societal biases influenced the classroom environment, leading to low expectations for students with SEN due to deep-rooted prejudices.

Alhudaithi's (2015) study in Saudi Arabia examined teachers' attitudes toward working with autistic children and suggested that cultural ignorance about autism significantly limits inclusion, although Islamic beliefs affirming the equality of all individuals provided a counterbalance to these challenges.

An international study by Cornoldi et al. (2018) surveyed 557 teachers from Italy, Spain, and the United States to assess their attitudes towards including students with learning disabilities. The study found that cultural and political contexts deeply influence teachers' beliefs about the causes of disabilities and the impact of diagnostic labels. For instance, United States teachers often attributed learning disabilities to biological factors whereas Spanish teachers focused on environmental causes and were particularly concerned about the emotional damage from labelling. These studies collectively illustrate how cultural and social beliefs about disability profoundly impact educators' attitudes and practices regarding inclusive education, demonstrating the necessity of considering these factors in the implementation of inclusive policies.

Gyimah et al. (2009) examined the attitudes of 500 primary school teachers in Ghana, both trained and untrained, towards the inclusion of students with SEN and disabilities in mainstream schools. They found that while teachers generally support inclusion, they expressed reservations influenced by teaching experience and knowledge of SEN. The study highlights the need for national and local adaptations of inclusion policies to address specific challenges and ensure effective implementation and reflects the importance of professional development and tailored approaches to inclusive education.

Fayez et al. (2011) carried out a qualitative study to investigate the perspectives of preservice early childhood teachers in Jordan regarding inclusion. While the participants generally held positive attitudes and were open to including students with SEN in their classrooms, they expressed reservations about including students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities. This exclusion was attributed to prevalent cultural perceptions that characterise individuals with intellectual disabilities as hostile and dangerous. Consequently, many of the participants perceived these students as potentially aggressive, posing a risk to their peers.

Jordan et al. (2010) analysed numerous studies to investigate how general primary education teachers' beliefs about disabilities influence their classroom practices.

The authors discovered significant variations with about one quarter of the teachers adopting a pathognomonic perspective, viewing disabilities as outcomes of medical issues. This view led them to believe that students with SEN were incapable of learning, resulting in a focus on labelling and attributing the lack of progress to the students and their families. These teachers were less inclined to spend time with SEN students and preferred to exclude them from regular classrooms, attributing their beliefs to broader cultural influences rather than personal prejudices.

Educational research consistently highlights inclusive practices as a successful strategy for improving the overall quality of school education systems (Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). However, numerous studies have identified significant obstacles to effectively implementing these practices across various countries, including Ghana (Mprah et al., 2016). A key challenge is teachers' negative attitudes towards students with disabilities. Additional barriers include a shortage of resources, overcrowded classrooms, the infrequency of professional development for teachers, and the inappropriate use of language towards students with disabilities (Armstrong et al., 2010; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Lamichhane, 2017, 2015; Loreman & Simi, 2013; Slee, 2010, 2011, 2013).

3.12 Curriculum and assessment

Teachers' understanding of curriculum and assessment practices plays a crucial role in determining which students are included or excluded from regular schooling as well as defining the roles and responsibilities of teachers. In this study, regular schooling refers to the standard or general education system where students attend mainstream schools that are designed to provide education to the general population without any specialised adjustments for students with disabilities or special needs (Romiszowski, 2024). In regular schooling, the curriculum, teaching methods, and classroom settings are typically structured to serve the needs of the majority of students, often assuming that all students can learn in the same way and at the same pace (Romiszowski, 2024).

Vanderpuye, (2013). define the curriculum as the instructional blueprint designed to achieve the nation's educational goals for all students, including those with visual impairments. This curriculum is a structured plan developed by the Ghanaian government to outline the essential knowledge and skills that students are expected to acquire by the end of each academic year.

According to Asamoah et al. (2018), a unified inclusive curriculum has been adopted under the National Education Strategic Plan in Ghana to cater to all students, including those with visual impairments. However, various other curriculum models are in use. For example, Smith (2010) discusses different approaches, such as fact-based, activity-based, and inquiry-based curricula. In a fact-based curriculum, the focus is on cognitive learning where students absorb knowledge through direct instruction, and the teacher's role is that of an expert imparting facts, concepts, and ideas. Students demonstrate their understanding by memorising and recalling information. Conversely, an activity-based curriculum engages students more directly by involving them in participation, reflection, and research with teachers, facilitating the discovery of new ideas and skills. In an inquiry-based approach, both teachers and students engage as co-learners in activities that generate knowledge socially and collaboratively.

Null (2016) emphasises that teachers should be actively involved in the development and review of curricula to ensure they reflect local needs and student interests effectively. Teachers must understand various aspects of the curriculum, including whom they teach, how and why they teach, what they teach when specific content is most appropriate for their students, and how to best acquire and impart the necessary knowledge.

Teachers' insights are crucial in navigating the constraints of the curriculum, enabling them to adapt and innovate in their instructional strategies. The importance of professional development is in equipping teachers to fully grasp the curriculum content and identifying the critical learnings that students need (Law, 2020). Through professional development, teachers are better prepared to implement the educational objectives of the school curriculum and develop effective lesson plans on a daily, monthly, term, and annual basis.

Professional development for teachers plays a crucial role in the effective implementation of inclusive education practices. Such training not only enhances teachers' instructional skills but also boosts their confidence and fosters positive attitudes towards all students, including those with disabilities (Florian et al., 2011; Forlin, 2012; Loreman et al., 2013; Sharma et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2008). Furthermore, targeted professional development in inclusive education positively influences teachers' attitudes towards adopting inclusive teaching methods in mainstream classrooms (Avramidis et al., 2000).

Avramidis et al. discovered that teachers with extensive training in inclusive education exhibited significantly more favourable attitudes towards inclusive practices compared to their counterparts who lacked such training.

3.13 Chapter summary: Outlining the Gaps

This chapter reviewed literature related to culture and pedagogical change, focusing on factors that shape inclusive education practices. It began with foundational theories, including critical disability studies and the African philosophy of Ubuntu. The chapter then examined issues of discrimination and stigmatisation in education, exploring how societal attitudes can hinder the inclusion of students with disabilities.

The concept of inclusion and strategies such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) were discussed, highlighting frameworks that make learning accessible for all students. Insights into teachers' experiences with inclusion revealed practical challenges they face, and the chapter identified barriers to inclusion, including environmental limitations and policy restrictions. Additionally, cultural influences, particularly within Ghana, were considered and their impact in teaching practices and attitudes toward inclusion. Finally, specific approaches for teaching students with visual impairments were reviewed, alongside an analysis of how curriculum and assessment practices can either support or obstruct inclusive education goals.

The literature revealed several gaps. Discussions on teachers' conceptualisation of pedagogies generally overlook the specific impacts of cultural practices on inclusive methods, particularly in contexts involving students with visual impairments. Moreover, research addresses inclusive pedagogy broadly without focusing on the unique challenges of teaching students with visual impairments. Existing literature does not sufficiently explore how Ghanaian teachers, transitioning from traditional teaching methods to inclusive practices, conceptualise pedagogy influenced by their cultural backgrounds and early teaching experiences. This is critical for understanding the specific ways in which cultural context shapes the adoption of inclusive pedagogies.

In essence, understanding the role of culture in shaping educational practices is essential, especially in contexts where teachers have historically relied on traditional methods, such as transmissional approaches to teaching. This study argues that a comprehensive understanding of pedagogical change in inclusive settings must consider not just the theoretical frameworks like the Universal Design for Learning but also the cultural, social, and personal backgrounds of the teachers implementing these changes and, as with the focus of this study, especially for teachers working with visually impaired students. A graphic representation of the gaps can be seen in Figure 1.

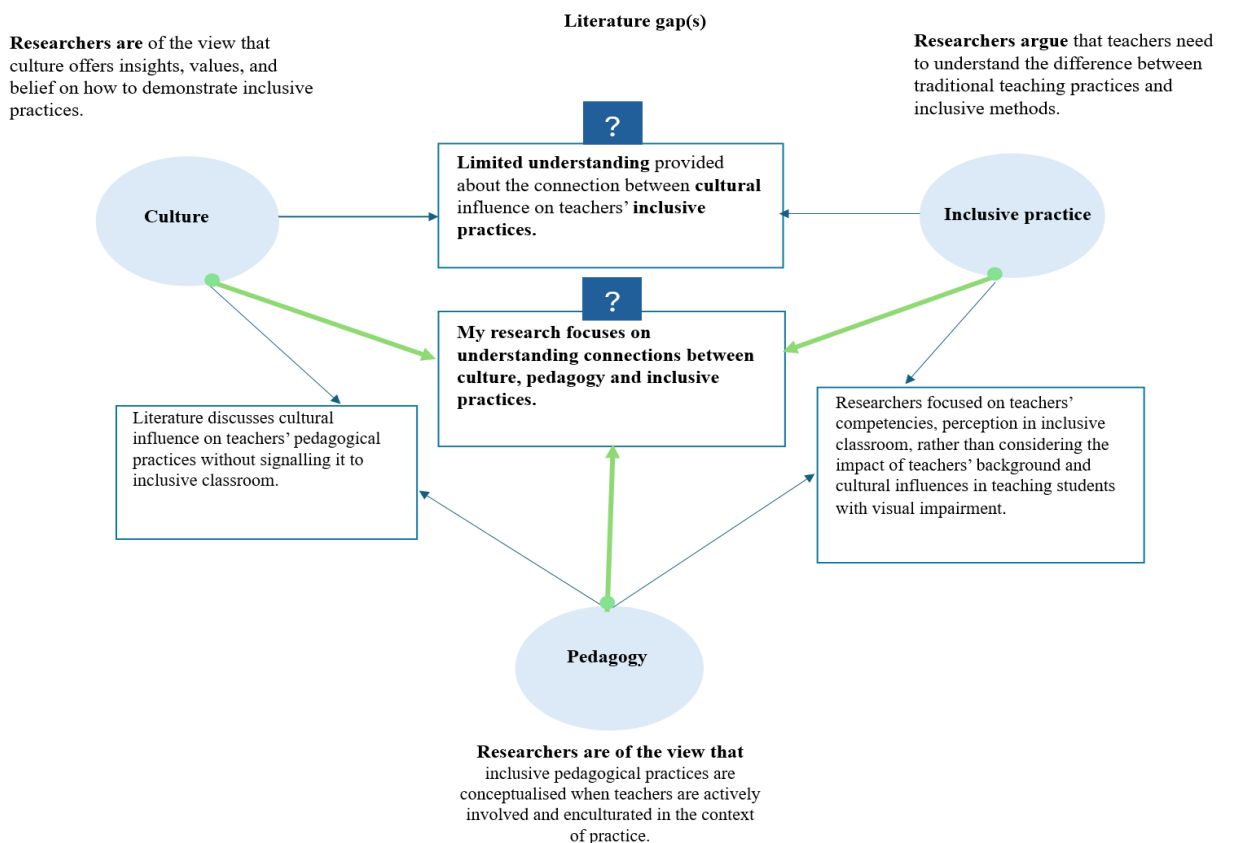


Figure 1: Gaps Identified in the Literature

I aim to address the research gaps identified in Figure 1 by exploring the experiences of teachers in an inclusive school setting in Ghana. My central research question is: *What are the experiences of teachers who seek to implement inclusive education approaches among students with visual impairments in junior high schools in Ghana?* The following chapter will detail the methodological approach employed to investigate this issue and provide a comprehensive response to the research question.

Chapter 4 Methodological Framework

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the methodology employed to address the research question: *What are the experiences of teachers who seek to implement inclusive education approaches among students with visual impairments in junior high schools in Ghana?* The study aims to understand teachers' stories of implementing inclusive education approaches among students with visual impairments. Chapter Four is structured in eleven sections. Section 4.1 outlines the sections in this chapter. Section 4.2 provides an overview of research paradigms. Section 4.3 justifies the use of an ethnographic methodology and Section 4.4 provides a summary of the methodological framework. Section 4.5 Understanding the research process. Section 4.6 explores the phases of data collection, and Section 4.7 gives a summary of the research methods. Section 4.8. explains the data analysis process while Section 4.9 presents a reflection on research ethics, and Section 4.10 evaluates the research process. Section 4.11 provides a summary of the chapter.

4.2 Overview of research paradigms

Understanding a research paradigm gives insight into the philosophical framework guiding how a researcher approaches a study (Leech & Leech, 2024). This section 4.1 clarifies my thoughts and views regarding ontology, epistemology and methodology. It is crucial to understand the pedagogical methods employed by teachers in inclusive classrooms for students with visual impairment. My philosophical and methodological worldviews are depicted in Figure 2, and detailed explanations are provided in the subsequent sections.

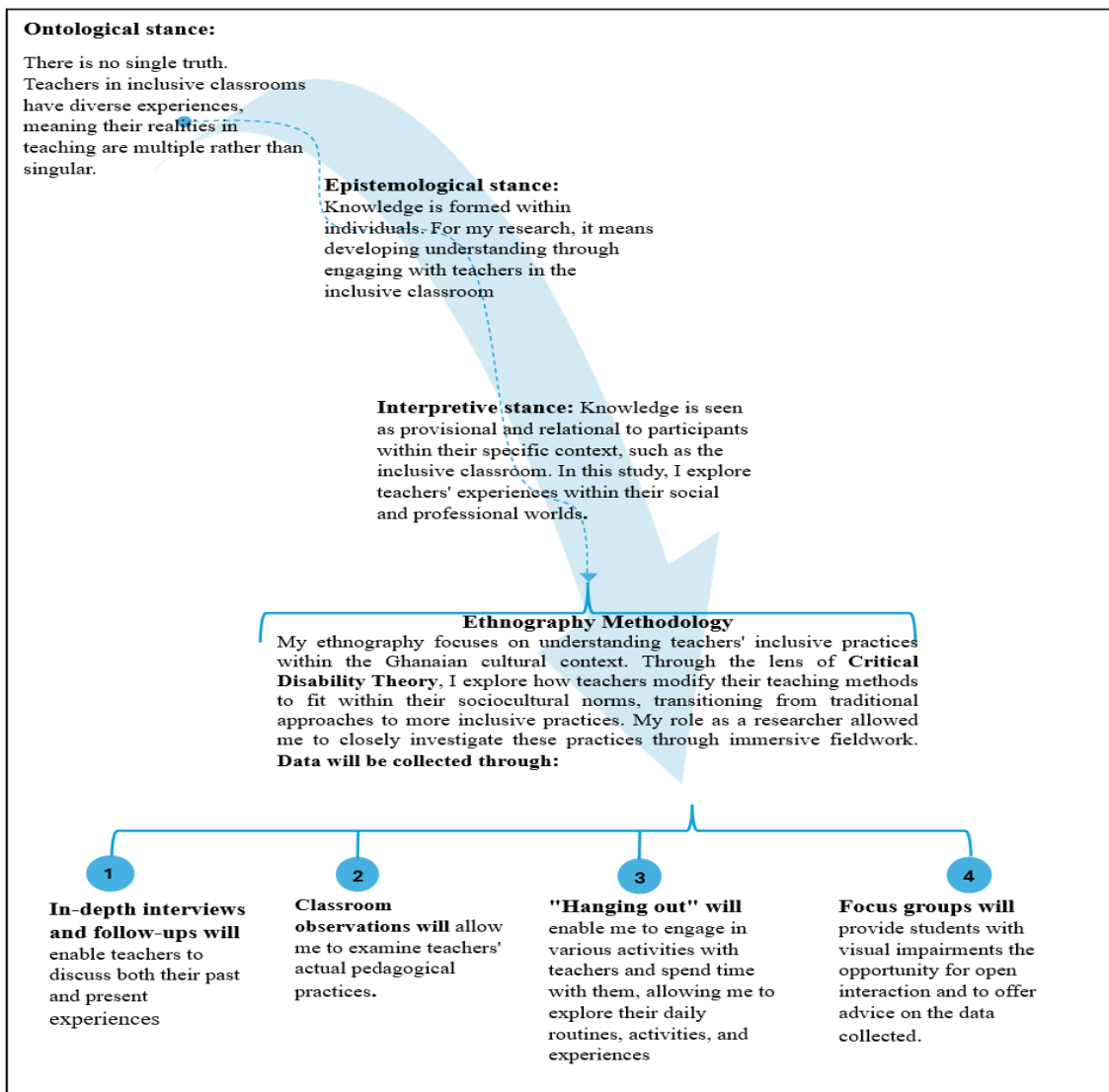


Figure 2: Philosophical and Methodological Worldviews

4.2.1 Methodological Framework

This section outlines and justifies my philosophical perspective on the nature of reality (ontology) and the process of acquiring knowledge (epistemology). It explains how these considerations guided me toward adopting an interpretive approach within the critical disability paradigm, with a focus on interpretive perspectives and an ethnographic methodology (Refer to Figure 2).

Ontology

My ontological stance acknowledges that reality is socially constructed within individual contexts.

It posits that a person's experience of inclusion is not a static reality but a dynamic interplay of relationships, knowledge, and meaning shared among participants, influenced by their social situations. This understanding recognises that teachers in the same inclusive settings might interpret their experiences with students with visual impairments differently due to varying social and cultural influences. Consequently, I focus on capturing the unique realities of each participant, understanding how the influence of social norms has shaped their teaching and interactions in inclusive classrooms.

Epistemology

My epistemological approach is rooted in understanding how knowledge about inclusion and teacher experiences is constructed through the perceptions and interpretations of teachers. This stance involves an active interaction between the researcher and the researched where knowledge is co-created. Recognising the diversity in teachers' experiences and perspectives, I view myself as an integral tool in this research process, aiming to capture the nuanced realities of teaching in inclusive environments through direct engagement with teachers.

Interpretive stance

Guided by my ontological and epistemological views, I adopt an interpretive paradigm focused on understanding individual experiences within their social contexts. This approach concerns the meanings individuals attach to their interactions and the cultural influences on their pedagogical practices. It emphasises an inductive analysis where themes and patterns emerge from the data, allowing for a deep understanding of teachers' experiences without preconceived notions of "best practices". This qualitative interpretive framework enables me to explore the subjective dimensions of teaching in inclusive settings, emphasising the importance of context and individual interpretation in understanding the pedagogical dynamics at play (Refer to Figure 2).

Ethnographic methodology

This study aims to comprehend and analyse participants' perspectives, experiences, and behaviours in their cultural environment of an inclusive classroom in Ghana and try to make sense of the social world of teachers (Denzin, 2013).

Ethnography is crucial because it allows me to investigate cultural norms and understand how they may influence teacher pedagogy. Therefore, this study investigates teachers' experiences teaching students with visual impairment. My beliefs about the nature of reality (ontology), how we know things (epistemology), how we understand things (interpretive philosophy), and critical disability theory helped me to choose ethnographic research for my study, as shown in Figure 2.

This ethnography is undertaken within a critical disability theory paradigm. According to Gobo (2018), ethnography is a research design deep-rooted in anthropology. Reynolds and Lewis (2019) explain that ethnographic research design is about getting a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study, “being there” to observe teachers of students with visual impairment, and shaping their experience in the sociocultural environment. Ethnography is deemed appropriate in exploring the nature of data that involves cultural understanding to answer my research questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012). Griffiths (2023) states that an ethnographic study describes cultural entities in people's activities and practices.

In his writing, Bryman (2016) suggests that time alone could not be used in producing data for ethnographic study; instead, the beauty of ethnography is based on the researcher's personal interaction with the environment and what the researcher intends to know. Ethnography positions me to understand the nature of classroom interactions and experiences among teachers and students with visual impairment, how culture has shaped teacher pedagogy, and how teachers' pedagogy has developed to accommodate students with visual impairment. This is to understand teachers' construction of visual impairment through pedagogical means and how they perceive students with visual impairment to be in the inclusive classroom. I therefore spent a prolonged time with the participants to understand teachers' conceptualisation of inclusive practices (Bryman, 2013). The value of firsthand information (data) and the analysis make up a robust ethnography (Russell et al., 1999). My eight years of experience in the field of visual impairment teaching positions me as a connoisseur in the field. “Connoisseurship”, as noted by Barone (2016), is developed when “an individual demonstrates and refines the understanding of knowledge of the phenomenon under study” (p. 289). Therefore, my experience in and knowledge of the field and cultural context enabled me to gain nuanced insight.

Furthermore, ethnographic design is critical in understanding teachers' perspectives on their practices as they are experienced in their cultural setting. The ethnographer interprets observed behaviour through a cultural lens, ensuring that the actions are placed in a culturally relevant and understandable context (Fetterman, 2010). For example, in the African context, Ubuntu is seen as a cultural lens that sees human dignity as fundamental to transcending divisions by working together and respecting each other (Le Grange, 2018). Teachers who truly understand and practise Ubuntu are always open and make possible pedagogical changes to meet the unique needs of students with visual impairment. Ubuntu reinforces the belief that every individual is an integral part of a larger community, and therefore, the success of one is tied to the wellbeing of all. To interpret how these values translate into actual classroom practices, I drew on *Critical Disability Theory*. Critical Disability Theory provided an analytical lens for understanding how inclusive philosophy, as enacted in classrooms, either supports or contradicts principles like Ubuntu. At its core, Critical Disability Theory challenges normative assumptions about disability and argues for inclusive schooling as a form of community care, where the needs of each student are central. Thus, Ubuntu offers a culturally grounded moral framework, while Critical Disability Theory helps uncover the social and structural mechanisms that enable or hinder its realisation within inclusive education settings.

In addition, taking inclusive schools as a workplace, my research involves understanding teachers' everyday practices, the nature of interaction that exists among teachers and students with visual impairment, how culture shapes their notion of including students with visual impairment, and how they have to involve inclusive pedagogy to accommodate students with visual impairment. A research methodology guides the explanation and discussion of my research methods. The next section explains my ethnographic process.

4.2.2 Making the Research Process Ethnographic

The three key characteristics of ethnography—cultural, institutional, and immersion—are discussed in relation to the research aims to clearly explain and justify the suitability of ethnographic methodology for this study.

Understanding the cultural context

Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) state that ethnography emphasises understanding participants' contexts. As a teacher in an inclusive classroom, I believe that the workplace environment of teachers can shape the development of particular practices. I used an ethnographic design to understand the cultural context of teachers' practices in inclusive classrooms in Ghana. This approach is crucial for capturing teachers' voices as they experience and perceive their practices within their cultural setting. By adopting a cultural lens, I analysed observed behaviours to ensure they were placed in a culturally relevant and meaningful context (Fetterman, 2010). Approaching inclusive schools as a unique culture, my research aimed to explore teachers' daily practices and how they interpret these experiences. As suggested by Bloor and Wood (2016), ethnography positions individuals' practices as relational, allowing me to explore the multiple realities of my participants' experiences within this cultural setting. I examined each participant separately and collectively to understand how cultural influences shape their pedagogical practices, assuming that their shared cultural backgrounds provide insights into how these practices are formed in their sociocultural contexts.

Understanding an in-depth experience of an inclusive school

Eadon-Sinkinson (2019) describes ethnography as a way to understand a "specific group" (such as teachers) who inhabit the same space through ongoing participation and observation within "their workplace community" (interactions with students with visual impairments) or "social world" (teachers' perceptions of visually impaired students). My perspective focuses on examining the factors that shape teachers' pedagogical choices to develop a comprehensive understanding of their experiences in an inclusive environment (Mäkinen, 2013). Grasping the inclusive context is crucial, as people's actions and thoughts are best understood within the settings where they unfold (Danforth & Narayan, 2015). Consequently, understanding what teachers do is key to uncovering the motivations behind their specific approaches to either include or exclude students with visual impairments.

Understanding Immersed Experience in Inclusive School

Because my research aimed at exploring cultural impact, I chose a method that allowed me to fully engage deeply in an inclusive classroom with teachers.

Van Manen (2023) argues that studying cultural influence is a moral and intellectual responsibility to represent the complexity of that specific culture in the writing of ethnography. This means engaging myself in the culture and becoming intimately involved with my participants' professional context to explicitly understand the complex issues associated with their shaping of pedagogies in the inclusive setting. Scattergood (2024) emphasises that ethnographers need to immerse themselves in the natural setting and gain deep insights. I chose to engage directly with teachers to understand their experiences and observe their daily interactions, events, and situations that occur within the inclusive environment. The experiences I may have encountered with participants could complement what teachers shared with me.

4.2.3 My choice of research approach

This study aimed to deeply comprehend teachers' encounters in teaching students with visual impairment in inclusive classrooms and bring their voices to the forefront of society. Hence, a qualitative research approach was adopted. According to Cohen et al. (2011), “qualitative research offers a comprehensive, intricate, and detailed insight into meanings, actions, attitudes, intentions, and behaviours” (p. 219). It also facilitates the amplification of participants' voices and delves into concealed issues and underlying factors influencing actions and behaviours (Cohen et al., 2011). Moreover, qualitative research tackles the “what” and “how” questions. It involves comprehending the context and social environment “by enabling the researcher to step into others' world and aim for a holistic understanding” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 41).

Based on Runswick-Cole's (2007) perspective, experiences are the foundation of qualitative research. Consequently, I chose qualitative research to enhance my grasp of teachers' experiences and thoroughly examine their encounters in inclusion. This approach enabled me to explore the teachers' experiences comprehensively. I consider it a research method imbued with values, where “the investigation process is influenced by both the researcher and the context being studied” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 43). Experiences are difficult to quantify but can be illuminated through qualitative research, offering insights into the social, cultural, and historical contexts that mould these experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). This research takes on a qualitative nature, recognising the researcher's active participation in the research process and constructing knowledge. It assumes that a wealth of data, profound comprehension, and significance can be attained by engaging in interaction with participants.

The objective is to delve deeply into and elucidate teachers' experiences of inclusion and explore how it is implemented.

4.2.4 Research's position

It is important to clarify my stance as a teacher of the visually impaired (Graham & Horejes, 2017; Young & Temple, 2014). My axiological position as a teacher of students with visual impairment, lecturer, and researcher motivated me to explore how other teachers experience teaching students with visual impairment. I have gained experience as a lecturer, training teachers to teach students with visual impairment in inclusive classrooms in Ghana.

Gaining access to an ethnographic research site is not a neutral or one-time event, it is a negotiated process shaped by social, cultural, and power dynamics (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Researchers must build trust with participants, often by spending extended time in the setting and participating in everyday routines. Entry is more than physical presence; it involves cultural immersion and relationship-building.

As a lecturer who trains teachers to educate students in inclusive classrooms, I recognise the inherent power differential between myself and the teachers participating in this study. Aware of the potential biases this imbalance could introduce, I diligently followed ethical procedures, such as obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, maintaining a neutral stance during interviews, and regularly reflecting on my own biases to avoid influencing the data (to be elaborated on in section 4.8). To ensure an unbiased understanding of teachers' experiences teaching students with visual impairments, I made a concerted effort to allow participants to express their views freely and without interference, ensuring that their genuine perspectives were reflected in the findings.

Moreover, my dual role as both a researcher and an educator equipped me with the necessary insights to probe during interactions with teachers and visually impaired students effectively. This background also informed me of where to source relevant information critical to addressing my research questions. My position guided my approach on “how” to observe, “what” to look for, and “who” to engage with to gather pertinent data, thus enhancing the richness and relevance of the research outcomes.

4.3 Ethnographic methods

In the next section, I will explain and justify the data collection methods used in this study. As mentioned earlier, I employed multiple means of data collection, and each of these methods offers complementary insights into the complex dynamics of teaching students with visual impairments. According to Grix (2010) and Yin (2009), findings derived from a variety of information sources are inherently more robust and convincing. An ethnographic approach supports the use of multiple methods for data collection, which allows for a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the teaching environment (Brayman, 2016).

Embracing the principles of ethnographic inquiry, I adopted a research approach grounded in long-term engagement and cultural immersion to explore how teachers interact with and support students with visual impairments in inclusive classrooms. This ethnographic methodology incorporated a combination of data collection methods, including in-depth, semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, focus group discussions, hanging out and participant observation. To deepen reflexivity and capture evolving insights, I also maintained a reflective journal throughout the research process. This multi-method approach not only allowed for a comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of teachers' experiences but also helped to mitigate the limitations associated with relying on any single method (Vega, 2024). These layered methods reflect the ethnographic commitment to generating "thick description" and interpreting meaning within the social and cultural realities of the research setting.

The ethnography approach facilitated a deeper exploration into how teachers' views and pedagogical practices are shaped within the inclusive classroom setting. By engaging with these methods, I aimed to capture teachers' dynamic and multifaceted experiences, providing a vivid, ethnographic portrayal of their interactions and instructional strategies in teaching students with visual impairments.

4.3.1 In-depth Interviews

In ethnographic studies, in-depth interviews are a valuable tool for knowledge construction, especially when they are situated within a broader context of cultural immersion and relational engagement (Tracy, 2024). In my ethnographic research, I conducted 12 in-depth interviews with four teachers who work with students with visual impairments in inclusive classrooms.

What makes these interviews ethnographic is not simply their format, but the way they were conducted: as part of an extended presence in the field, informed by ongoing participant observation, and shaped by the evolving relationships and trust built with participants over time. The interviews were conversational and open-ended, allowing participants to share stories, reflect on their pedagogical practices, and co-construct meaning in relation to their experiences. This approach aligns closely with my chosen theoretical framework, as it prioritises the voices of teachers and situates their experiences within the broader socio-cultural and institutional contexts in which they teach. In this way, the interviews functioned not as isolated data points, but as integral components of a holistic and reflexive ethnographic inquiry.

I chose to conduct in-depth interviews because they are the most suitable approach for exploring teachers' experiences and the challenges they face in inclusive settings. One of the key characteristics of in-depth interviews is the use of open-ended questions. I designed the interview questions to cover broad topics and provided interview guidelines to facilitate open discussions. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format rather than adhering to a rigid question-and-answer format. This approach included using various probes and cues to enrich the conversation and elicit more nuanced responses, which is crucial for comprehensively gathering data that addresses the research questions (Tracy, 2024).

According to Roberts (2020), interviewing is a process of constructing knowledge influenced by what the interviewer and participants contribute to the narrative. Garrett (2016) sees interviews as a versatile means of gathering data, using various approaches that encompass spoken and nonverbal communication. Specifically, interviews help participants bring valuable information, experiences, and perspectives about a phenomenon. Consequently, interviewing delves into the participants' social reality, their perspectives, and interpretations concerning their environment (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2023). Through this approach, I understood teachers' beliefs, experiences, and challenges related to their teaching methods in inclusive classrooms in Ghana. Through interviews, I could observe, gather information, and reflect on the content shared by my participants. This aligns with Seidel's (1998) data collection method—*noticing gathering information*—allowing me to modify questions, probe, and clarify issues when necessary. Seidel explains that interviews grant access to participants' past experiences, situations, and circumstances. This supports my purpose for three reasons.

First, I aim to understand the influence of social and cultural norms on teacher pedagogical approaches in inclusive classrooms. Second, I wish to encourage teachers to discuss their experiences and their interactions with students with visual impairment, and third, since I plan to investigate how teacher pedagogy has changed to accommodate students with visual impairment within Critical Disability Theory, I need to grasp the reasoning behind their use of specific pedagogical practices and how these practices evolve into actions that reflect Critical Disability Theory.

4.3.2 Classroom observation

In my study, I conducted six observations across three different classrooms over three months. Observation involves a deliberate and systematic approach to observing and listening to a phenomenon as it naturally unfolds in its environment (Kumar, 2005). It is observing social occurrences in the actual world and documenting events in their real natural environment. One such social occurrence might be how a teacher interacts with a student with visual impairments during a group learning activity—revealing unspoken norms, power dynamics, and inclusive or exclusionary practices in the classroom. An advantage of conducting observations is that the researcher can access sensitive information that participants may not be willing to share during the interview approach (Busetto et al., 2020). These two categories of observation are commonly differentiated as participant and nonparticipant observation. Participant observation helps me interact with my participants openly and understand teachers' everyday practices.

According to Musante (2015), participant observation should not be regarded merely as a technique; rather, it represents a role assumed by the researcher during the research process. In this study, I assumed the role of a participant-observer, engaging with the daily routines of teachers while maintaining a reflective stance. This role allowed me to be present in classrooms and school settings—not as an outsider or passive observer, but as a collaborator who built rapport with participants, shared in their experiences, and gained deeper insight into their practices and perspectives. Consequently, this form of observation centres on the researcher's active involvement and close interaction with teachers within their natural context. In this study, the natural context refers to the inclusive classroom. According to Seim (2024), ethnographers must observe how participants interact with each other within their natural environment. This involves understanding teachers' direct and indirect actions while including the specific time and location of these interactions.

In this study, adopting the role of a participant observer is connected to the "hanging out" approach, which I will explain later as a data collection method.

Observation in my research focussed on observing teachers' inclusive pedagogical practices. My role centred around taking notes and attentively listening to the interactions between students and teachers without actively participating in classroom activities. My observation aimed to give a detailed understanding of the phenomena, as Van Manen (2023) outlined. This type of observation is employed to gain insights into teachers' pedagogical practices (Hatch, 2023). Observations allowed me to collect data within the participants' educational settings and obtain information directly as it unfolded (Van Manen, 2023). Consequently, observations facilitate data collection while teachers conduct professional classroom activities. These observations serve as a reference point for comparing what is shared in interviews with the inclusive pedagogical practices observed.

In summary, adopting observations for this research was helpful for four reasons. First, my foremost concerns are understanding teachers' cultural context, their construction of inclusive classroom teaching, everyday activities, and habits regarding their interaction with students with visual impairment. Second, observation allowed me to gather information about the physical setting, the inclusive classroom, and the use of instructional materials to meet students' needs. Third, observation also allowed me to explore the nature of teachers' interaction with students with visual impairment. Finally, this method enabled me to understand and explore the pedagogical orientation of teachers when they use a Universal Design for Learning in their pedagogical practices. During my observations, I recorded all relevant information I wrote on teacher-inclusive pedagogical practices after the observations. After using interviews and observations, focus group discussions were helpful in data generation in my research. The following section explains my reasons for this method.

4.3.3 Focus groups

Students with visual impairment played an advisory role through focus group discussions on emerging issues related to teachers' pedagogical practices. The purpose of conducting focus group discussions with students with visual impairments is not to evaluate or criticise teachers' inclusive practices based on the students' feedback.

Instead, it is to gain a deeper understanding of the teachers' experiences in inclusive classrooms.

I conducted focus group discussions with four students with visual impairments, holding each session on four different occasions under a tree at the inclusive school. These focus group interviews were aimed at capturing the real-life experiences of the participants, providing an opportunity for an in-depth exploration of a specific topic (Diasse et al., 2024). The focus group interview emphasises group interactions to gain insights into participants' views. Ideally, participants are at ease and have chances to explore and deliberate on a topic from various perspectives (Cloutier, 2024). This social setting enabled me to generate fresh ideas that may not emerge in individual interviews. Focus groups, therefore, serve as a more informal platform for engaging in open discussions regarding a particular subject. In this study, students with visual impairment were selected based on emerging findings from interviews and observations from teachers' perspectives. Students with visual impairment were engaged through focus group discussion because it is participatory. In focus groups, the voices of students with visual impairment resonate through exchanging ideas, which Chen et al. (2024) explain as generating discourse among participants. This helped produce first-hand information and empirical evidence beyond the discussions between the researcher and teachers alone (Bergmark, 2024).

My aim was not to judge the teachers' perspectives shared during interviews or observed in practice. Rather, I used insights from students' experiences to support and validate what I was learning from the teachers. This process, often referred to as member checking, helped me confirm emerging themes and interpretations. It also allowed me to deepen my understanding by comparing perspectives and identifying consistencies or contrasts between what teachers said and what students experienced. To enhance clarity, Oliver (1992) argues that to achieve participation and understand the voices of the marginalised, researchers “should reject the Shackles of methodological individualism, which offers a narrow and abstract perspective of individuals” (p. 113). Therefore, for research to benefit students with visual impairment, it is necessary to include their voices. This reflects the slogan, "Nothing About Us Without Us", which calls for disabled people to be at the centre of research, policy, and practice decisions that affect their lives, ensuring their voices, experiences, and knowledge are meaningfully included in all stages of inquiry. (Barnes, 2019).

Focus groups seem to align with Oliver's (2013) stance on moving away from individualistic research methods because generating empirical data through group interactions reflects a more collective approach to qualitative research (Bergmark, 2024). In this study, I expanded on the participatory nature of focus groups by listening to students' perspectives. This allowed me to understand teachers' experiences concerning their interactions in the inclusive classroom. This is because students with visual impairment have direct contact with teachers and understand teachers' construction of teaching them in inclusive classrooms. Therefore, it becomes necessary to hear students' voices. Grosseohme (2014) expresses that focus groups can support researchers in exploring and clarifying views that are not known during interviews and in seeing if ideas are commonly understood and accepted.

In addition to understanding, the voices of the marginalised, focus groups possess other essential characteristics that are significant in this research. Focus groups are recognised as reliable, dependable, faster, and valid means of gathering data from different participants (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Focus groups foster a sense of togetherness among students with visual impairments by providing a safe space for shared experiences and peer support. This environment encourages openness, especially when participants relate to one another's challenges. As Nowell et al. (2017) explain, "focus groups can empower participants by validating their experiences through collective discussion" (p. 4). A skilled facilitator and accessible communication further enhance this inclusive dynamic.

In summary, focus groups offered four advantages in this study. First, they helped me to include the voices of students with visual impairment as they advised and shared their thoughts on the initial findings. Second, they helped students with visual impairment to share their experiences more openly than responding to specific questions in one-on-one interviews. Third, they allowed me to cross-verify the data gathered through previous teacher interviews, such as one-on-one interviews and observations. Finally, they helped me to understand crucial aspects of the construction of visual impairment and its effect on teaching practices. Data from students' perspectives and collective experiences is vital for understanding teachers' inclusive pedagogical practices.

4.3.4 The hanging-out approach

Field notes from hanging-out activities were used to complement the data as a less structured approach to direct observation. In this study, I adopted the practice of “hanging out”, a term that captures the essence of the field relationship between the researcher and the research participants. Hancock et al. (2001) describe hanging out as the researcher's engagement in a variety of activities within the data collection process. This includes participating in social gatherings, supporting staff members, and engaging in casual interactions, allowing the researcher to spend significant time with the group to gather insights that deepen the understanding of the research topic. For example, in a study on Ecuadorian migration to Italy, Boccagni (2011) engaged in various social events and gatherings as part of his ethnographic fieldwork. This approach, often called hanging out, allowed him to collect detailed information that supported his findings. Similarly, in my research, hanging out with teachers provided insights into their pedagogical reasons for including students with visual impairments. While Boccagni (2011) used hanging out as a primary data collection tool, it served as a secondary source to complement and validate other findings in my study. This method enhances ethnographic data collection by better understanding teachers' experiences.

Given that this study focuses on understanding the cultural impacts within educational settings, it was essential for me to immerse myself fully in both the lives of the participants and the research site. Van Manen (2016) argues that representing the complexity of any specific culture through ethnography requires intellectual engagement and a moral commitment to accurately portray the lived experiences of the subjects. Therefore, this study necessitated a deep immersion into the culture of the participating educators, involving myself intimately with their professional experiences. Such involvement was crucial to unravelling the intricate issues that shape their pedagogical approaches, thus providing a richer, more comprehensive view of their practices and challenges in inclusive classrooms.

Hanging out allowed the participants and me to learn from each other and understand direct and indirect actions among participants. This strategy was appropriate for my data gathering since it complemented and supported information obtained through interviews and observations. For me, this meant understanding what teachers encounter in their daily professional activities in the inclusive classroom in terms of classroom interaction and how this influences teachers' pedagogical choices.

Data collection in this manner is always “unstructured” (happening throughout the process) (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 3) and demands the researcher’s involvement in the study site of ethnography. For example, in research on homeless individuals who were women, some studies confirmed that researchers used the hanging out approach, involving themselves in many daily activities during the data collection process (Ugelvik, 2012). During the data collection process, Ugelvik drank coffee, played pool and music with the participants, and freely mingled with anyone who could help him gather relevant information.

4.4 Section summary

Ethnographers adopt various strategies that inform their research approach. In this study, I have explained my methodological framework and outlined the rationale and justification for my ontology, epistemology, and interpretive and critical paradigms throughout the research process, as presented in Figure 2. My ontological view is that there is no single truth but multiple realities of human experiences. This perspective shaped how I perceived the creation of teachers' knowledge with including students with visual impairment in their lessons. Furthermore, these ontological and epistemological stances directed me toward an interpretive approach to comprehend teachers' experiences within inclusive settings. Understanding these philosophical stances, I required a research methodology that allowed me to gather data through meaningful engagement with the participants. Consequently, I have chosen an ethnographic methodology that aligns with my research objective of gaining insights into the cultural influences of teaching students with visual impairment within inclusive classrooms. The ethnographic approach empowered me to provide rich, detailed descriptions of teachers' experiences within the inclusive setting of Ghana. Positioning myself as an outsider and employing a critical analytical lens helped me comprehend the data and the data generation process needed to address my research questions through interviews, observations, focus groups, and a hanging-out approach.

4.5 Understanding the research process

My study aimed to understand teachers’ pedagogical experiences teaching students with visual impairment in Ghana. I aspired to understand teachers’ construction of visual impairment in their pedagogical practices within a specific culture.

In this section, I outline my data collection processes regarding teachers' everyday practices, the nature of interaction that exists among teachers and students with visual impairment, how culture shapes their notion of including students with visual impairment, and how they must facilitate inclusive pedagogy to accommodate students with visual impairment in Ghana. This section is divided into four parts. The first part (Sections 4.5.1 to 4.6) describes the ethnographic phases of generating data for my study. The second part (Section 4.7) explains the steps involved in ethnographic data analysis to understand how the key themes emerged and how these themes helped me to understand teacher-inclusive pedagogical practices in Ghana. The third part (Section 4.8) describes my ethical practices during qualitative data collection and the drafting of my findings. Finally, the last part (Section 4.9 to 10) explains how I ensured trustworthiness throughout the study.

4.5.1 Choosing participants for an ethnographic study

This study is conducted at Unity Inclusive Junior High School (not its actual name). The school was purposefully selected based on preliminary consultations with local education officers, who identified it as one of the few schools actively implementing inclusive education practices. Its relative success in accommodating students with visual impairments made it a compelling site for exploring inclusive pedagogies in context. Following the ethics process, the headteacher of the school facilitated my introduction to the teaching staff. I formally discussed my research focus with them. Out of twelve teachers, four who teach students with visual impairments volunteered to participate in the study.

To maintain ethical anonymity, I identified participants by their characteristics rather than their names. These included their specific roles (teachers of students with visual impairments), the subjects they teach (religious and moral education, mathematics, science, and social studies), and their qualifications (ranging from bachelor's to master's degrees).

4.5.2 Getting started with the data collection

On April 1, 2023, I commenced my fieldwork in Ghana. Upon arrival at Unity Inclusive Junior High School, four teachers who teach students with visual impairments expressed interest in participating in the study.

I provided these teachers with informed consent forms, which they read and signed, thereby officially becoming part of the research. However, recognising the importance of incorporating the perspectives of students with visual impairments to fill a specific research gap and enhance the study's impact, I also sought to include their voices. Ethical guidelines require that for minors to participate in research, their parents or guardians must provide consent. Consequently, I distributed informed consent forms to the parents of five interested students with visual impairments. Given that the study required participation from only four students, I decided to include only final-year students (aged 12 to 16 years) with visual impairment. This decision was based on the rationale that these students would likely have more extensive experiences to share, which could provide deeper insights into the research questions and emergent findings. Throughout the data collection period, I visited the school twice per week within a period of four months, spending approximately eight hours each day observing and engaging with teachers. These sessions focused on their pedagogical experiences in teaching students with visual impairments, providing me with valuable, contextual data for the study.

4.6 Phases of data collection

My ethnographic research design consisted of four phases of data collection (see Figure 3). Each phase contributed to understanding teachers' experiences teaching students with visual impairments in inclusive classrooms and that influenced their pedagogical approaches. However, these phases were not distinct or time-bound; they overlapped. For instance, interviews continued even after observations had begun, reflecting the fluid and interconnected nature of the data collection process.

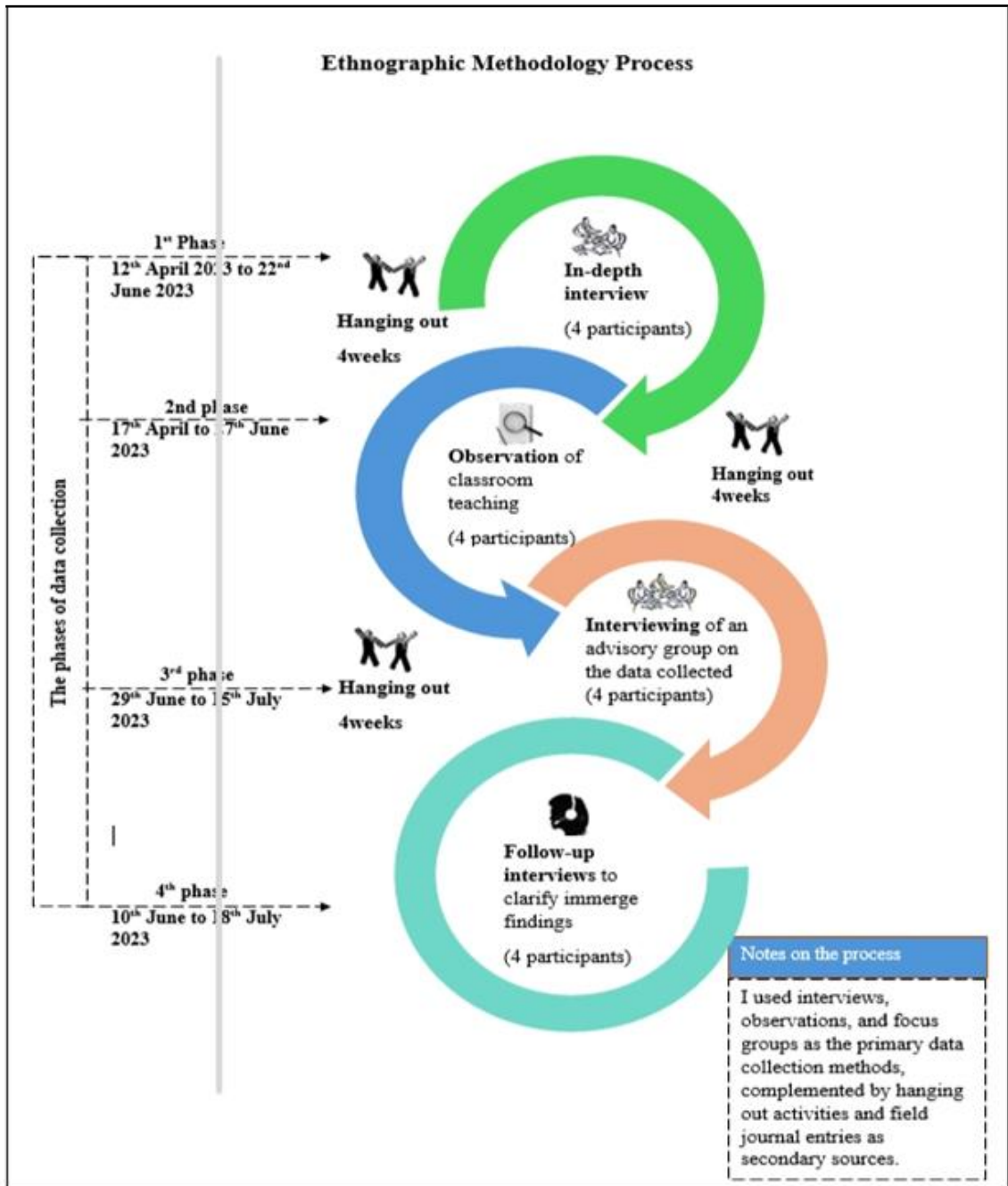


Figure 3: Ethnographic Methodology Process

4.6.1 The first phase of data collection: The interviewing Process

During the interview section, I asked each participant for an appropriate time to discuss their experiences. These interviews were held between April 12, 2023, to June 22, 2023. The interviews revolved around the influence of culture and the shaping of teachers' pedagogical practices. Participants talked about their experiences teaching students with visual impairment in their classrooms and expressed their views on the nature of classroom interaction between teachers and students with visual impairment. The interview process started informally, and each interview was audio-recorded for 40 to 45 minutes, although I had planned for one hour. The interviews were conducted either under a tree or in a classroom, depending on the circumstances. Figure 4 depicts the interviews.

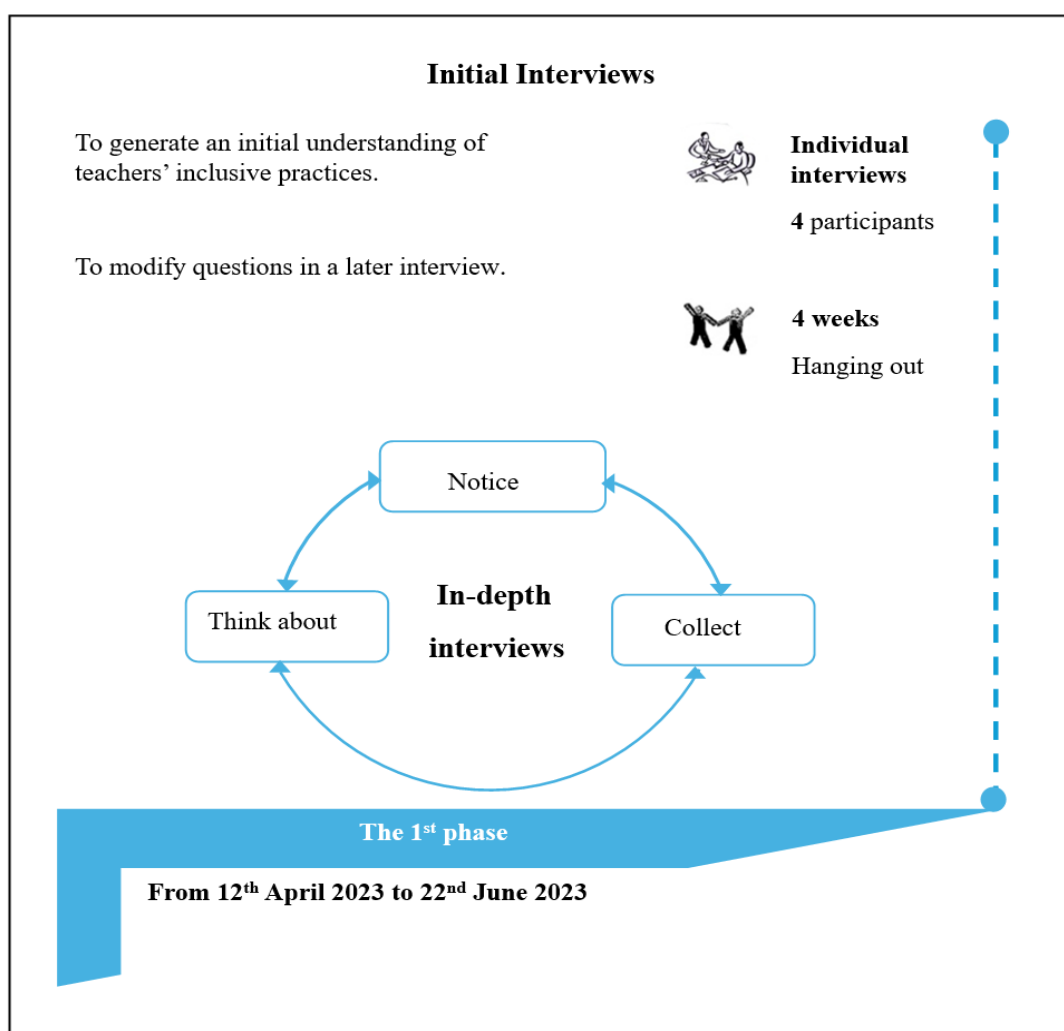


Figure 4: Interviews with participants

First Teacher Interviews

In each interview, I introduced myself to the participant, followed by my conversation in friendly language as, for example, “Can you share with me?” and “I would be very happy if you could explain it”. This type of beginning conversation was initiated to calm my participants and prepare them for the interview. After the interview, I listened to the audio recording repeatedly to understand the information gathered; this helped me to become familiar with the data, note down important things, and think about how I could ask different questions or probe further in the subsequent interview. To enrich my data, I also kept a reflective journal to write what happened in the inclusive school through my hanging out, which I will detail in the next section. I began interview transcription as I continued the process with my participants. These early transcriptions helped me determine what I should observe in the inclusive classroom. For example, during the interview, one of my participants said that students with visual impairment are known to be sick. Therefore, “*they do not have any business to do in inclusive classrooms*”. He further stated that keeping students with visual impairment in inclusive classrooms “wastes time”. I, therefore, decided to explore how students with visual impairment were treated in the inclusive classroom during teaching moments with teachers. Overall, the interviews informed me of how the teacher participants constructed notions of disability, their pedagogical reasons for including students with visual impairment, and the professional development support they received and how this may have helped them to create inclusive classroom interaction between teachers and students with visual impairment.

Throughout my interview data collection phases, I realised some limitations, and these were addressed to maintain the ethical validity of the data gathered. Some of these limitations were how my questioning was perceived by my participants; I realised that in some instances, my participants thought that I may be a spy who wanted to know more about their inclusion of students with visual impairment and report them to the appropriate authorities. Therefore, participants were unwilling to discuss issues about their pedagogical practice and cultural influence. So, I was asked to end the interview. I, therefore, sought help from my local ethics advisor, who assisted by explaining the purpose of the study to teacher participants and students with visual impairment. The participants were later convinced and asked me to continue my data collection.

At times, my participants spent time giving me information that was not directly linked to the focus of the study or what I had asked them.

I strategically probed questions to steer participants toward the focus of my research. Notably, some participants were not fluent in English and occasionally switched to Twi, a Ghanaian language. It is important to recognise that English was not the first language of my participants, and they expressed themselves more effectively in their local language. Consequently, I undertook the task of translating selected responses from Twi into English as my thesis is required to be written in the English language.

By listening attentively and transcribing the interactions, I gained a deeper understanding of the data, which informed my decisions on what and who to observe during the sessions. This approach also facilitated the clarification of issues and enhanced the focus of my subsequent data collection phases, thereby enriching the overall quality and relevance of the research findings.

4.6.2 The second phase of data collection: classroom observation

The classroom observation of my participants took place from April 17, 2023, to June 27, 2023 (see Figure 5). I conducted classroom observations of four teachers teaching students with visual impairment. The observations aimed to gather information about my previous findings of the first phase (interviews). I wanted to understand the relationship between teachers' pedagogical practice and what they said during the interview. After listening to the interviews with my participants, I played the audio recorder repeatedly for some time and became aware of the issues regarding my participants' views. After reviewing the initial data, I changed my observation sheet. This helped me to refine my observation focus and identify what I needed to explore in my participants' observations. I spent one hour, three times per week, observing my participants' teaching on most days. I did not directly interact with any visually impaired or sighted students. My observation focused on understanding the nature of classroom interactions between teachers and students with visual impairment to understand how they were accepted in the inclusive classroom and how teachers used instructional materials to engage students with visual impairment. At the end of each observation, I noted some strategies teachers employed. After each lesson, I spent time with the teachers, asking questions to better understand their specific methodologies and the instructional materials used in the inclusive classroom.

I, therefore, classified this observation as one of the hanging-out approaches to help me to bring out the direct and indirect actions. Through these activities, I learned more about the challenges teachers go through in their daily inclusive classroom teaching and how teachers seek to address the challenges associated with an inclusive approach.

The notes I made during the observations gave me rich information, including how teachers construct visual impairment and the nature of classroom interaction. In summary, teacher observations gave me practical knowledge of what my participants told me during the interviews, such as how they involved students with visual impairment in their daily teaching and the use of tactile materials in the inclusive classroom. The lessons I observed gave me accurate information about what the teachers said during the interviews concerning the struggles of students with visual impairment in class. The information I gathered through the observations confirmed some of the already spoken ideas of the teachers.

Despite successful data collection through observation, I encountered one challenge during this process. Some teachers invited me to select lessons that were specifically organised to showcase inclusive pedagogical approaches. However, these teachers occasionally reverted to their traditional teaching methods during the observation sessions due to inadequate knowledge about teaching students with visual impairments. Despite this obstacle, the data gathered from other sources, such as informal interactions, hanging out, interviews, and focus group discussions, provided additional validation and depth to the observations made in the classrooms. These diverse sources of information were instrumental in painting a comprehensive picture of the teachers' pedagogical practices within inclusive settings. Thus, even with the limitations encountered during observations and interviews, I collected valuable insights that significantly enhanced my understanding of the instructional dynamics in inclusive classrooms.

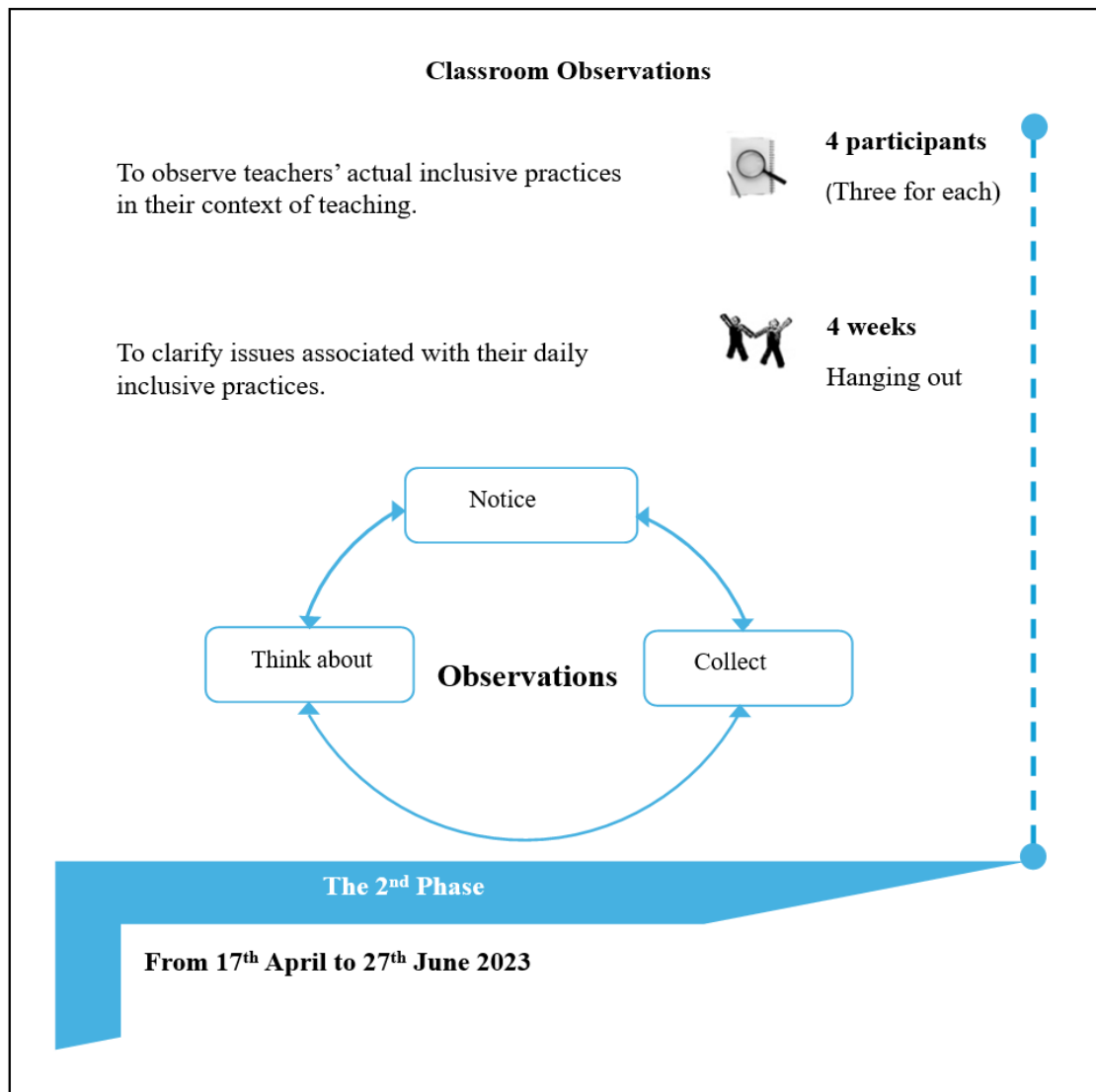


Figure 5: Classroom Observation

4.6.3 The third phase of data collection: Student advisory group

A focus group discussion was conducted with four visually impaired students who accepted and signed the informed consent form with their parents. The principle of "Nothing About Us Without Us" emphasises that decisions affecting individuals with disabilities should include their direct input. To ensure ethical integrity and avoid framing the research as an evaluation, I was intentional in how I engaged both teachers and students. While I clarified to teachers that I was not there to assess or judge their teaching, I also took care in how I communicated with students. I did not explicitly tell students what individual teachers had said about them.

Instead, I used what I refer to as a "wise way" of questioning—drawing on themes raised by teachers, but reframing them into open, reflective questions that allowed students to share their own experiences and perspectives. This approach helped avoid framing student responses as direct reactions to teacher comments and minimized the risk of students feeling like they were being asked to pass judgement on their teachers. Additionally, teachers were not informed about which of their students participated in the focus groups. This decision was deliberate, aimed at protecting the anonymity of participants and preserving the trust and confidentiality essential to meaningful, open dialogue.

Ultimately, the student data was not used to judge individual teachers, but rather to triangulate emerging themes, validate patterns, and offer a fuller picture of the inclusive classroom experience from multiple perspectives. This method aligns with ethnographic principles of reflexivity, respect, and interpretive depth. This ensures that policies and practices are shaped by those who experience the issues firsthand. In this case, the purpose of the advisory focus group was to enhance the understanding of students with visual impairments by drawing on the experiences of teachers. The focus group discussion phase started on June 29, 2023, and continued until July 15, 2023.

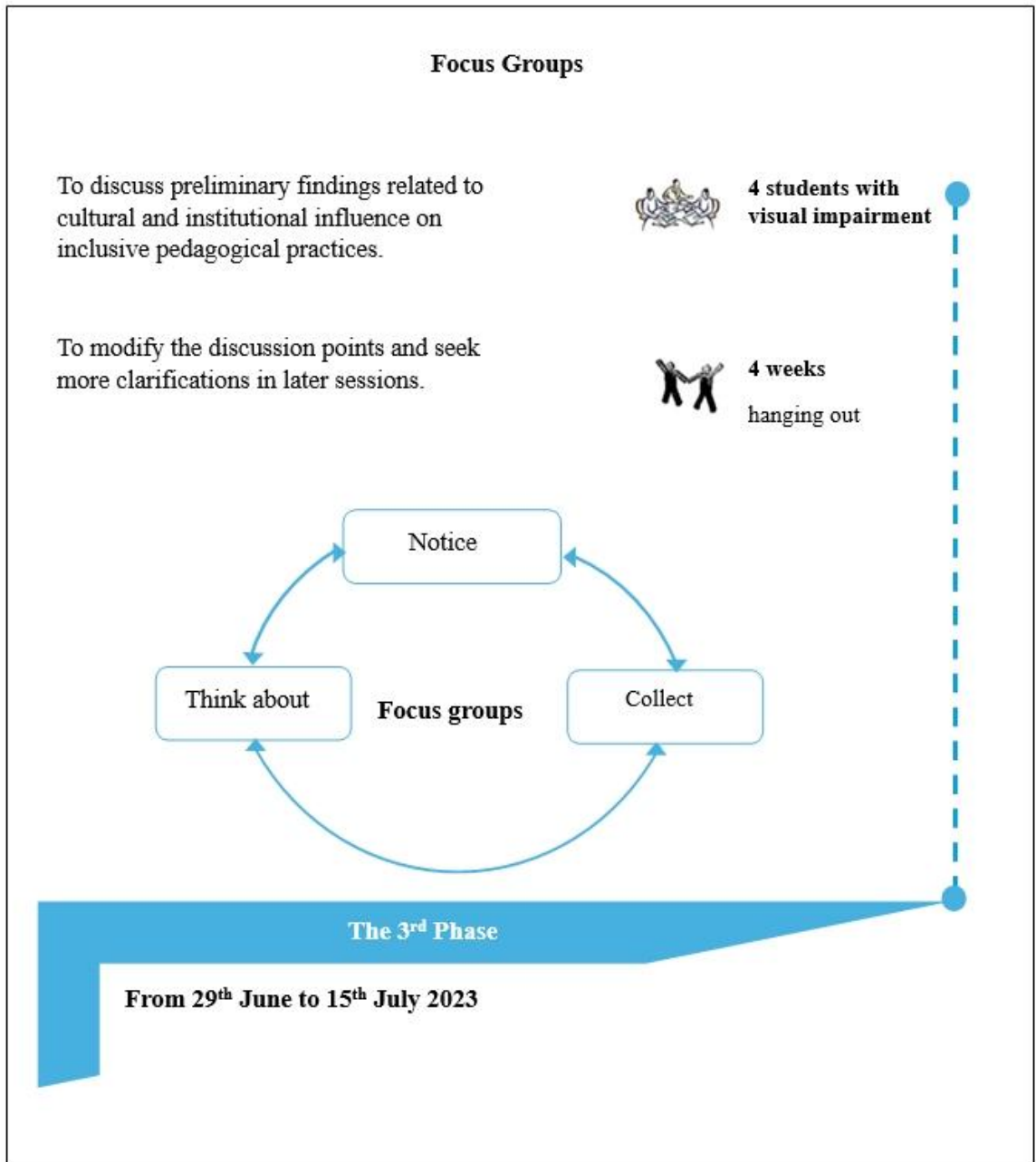


Figure 6: Focus Groups

I developed a preliminary analysis of the data gathered from teachers and generated questions for students with visual impairment to advice on the data gathered on teachers' pedagogical practices. I structured the questions in a way that students with visual impairment would not be able to identify particular teachers. Before I started the focus group discussion, I served students some soft drinks to prepare them for the discussion. I then outlined ethical issues and assured participants about anonymity and confidentiality as it was necessary for students to know and understand the process of their focus group discussion.

After that, I informed the participants about the need for this focus group, and they could choose to withdraw at any time if it was deemed appropriate. I informed participants that the focus group would occur every two weeks between April and June 2023. Seidel's (1998) data method of organisation was adopted through collection, notice, and thinking. This process aimed to enhance the focus group's quality and uncover unforeseen data by engaging in hanging-out activities, ultimately enriching the discussions.

Students with visual impairment in their final year could argue and justify what teachers said regarding their pedagogical practice in inclusive classrooms. The focus group discussion among students with visual impairment was an opportunity to understand students' thoughts on how teachers perceived them to be, the nature of classroom interaction, and teachers' means of pedagogical change to accommodate students with visual impairment. The students with visual impairment raised many concerns regarding teachers' construction of visual impairment and how they were treated in inclusive classrooms.

Despite the significant contributions of focus group discussions to the data collection process, I encountered certain limitations. One of the primary concerns was that researchers emphasise power dynamics between the researcher and participants during focus group sessions (Poliandri et al., 2023), proposing that power dynamics can have both advantageous and disadvantageous effects on the data. For instance, if a researcher heavily directs the questions, it may impact the interactions among participants, potentially influencing the data obtained. Conversely, providing participants with greater flexibility can also influence the nature of the data generated. I encountered both situations during the focus group sessions with students with visual impairment. For instance, some students with visual impairment brought up discussions that extended beyond the scope of my research focus. As a result, I saw the need to redirect them towards the intended research focus, creating a delicate balance between letting students with visual impairment advise and talk more about their interests and ensuring I gathered the essential information for my study.

Hanging-out activities

The hanging-out approach was carried out in the first two phases among teachers during interviews and observations as part of the nature of my ethnographic research.

The hanging-out approach was deemed necessary to get to the heart of the phenomenon under study and complement it as a secondary source of data collection. The two phases of the hanging-out approach took place between April 2023 and June 2023 and lasted for ten weeks. The hanging out occurred during school days from Monday to Friday, with working hours from 8:00 am to 3:30 pm.

Table 1 : Duration of Hanging Out with Participants during the Two Phases of Data Collection

Field visit	Year	Phases of data Collection	Time of hanging out
Year of visit	2023	1 st phase – interview April 12, 2023, to July 30, 2023	Four weeks at four days per week.
		2 nd phase – 17 th April to 27 th June, 2023	Four-week placement, 6–7 hours per day
		3 rd phase – 29 th June to 15 th July, 2023	Four weeks at two days per week.

I focused on collecting enough information during these hanging-out activities. I supported teachers in some of their activities in the school. Involving myself in these teaching activities helped me gain an inside understanding of the phenomena under study. Some of these activities included supporting teachers in braille transcription, lesson notes, lesson plans, and braille notes for the visually impaired as well as orientation and mobility training. These activities within inclusive schools helped me to understand teachers' daily professional practice and experience with students with visual impairment regarding teachers' pedagogical approaches to meet the needs of students with visual impairment. Informally, I was involved in sporting activities, breakfast and lunch with teachers, and other social gatherings.

The idea of my hanging-out activities was to help me gather in-depth ethnographic data. For instance, I often heard teachers' direct and indirect comments about students with visual impairment. Some of these comments were pertinent in understanding teachers' construction of visual impairment and their everyday professional practices concerning including students with visual impairment.

Teachers were found talking about their frustrations in handling students with visual impairment, the attitude of students with visual impairment towards inclusion, and the labelling of students with visual impairment by calling them different names. The written reflections on my hanging out added to the depth of my research (see Figure 7). The hanging-out approach proved valuable for my ethnographic data collection, especially in allowing me to contemplate various issues related to my position as an outsider researcher. This was particularly relevant during the initial stages of interviewing, and it also facilitated a connection with my participants beyond the formal interview and observation periods. Lastly, it aided me in adjusting interview questions, providing clarity on observed classroom teaching and incorporating additional discussion into focus group sessions. Overall, these enhancements enriched the focus of my research investigation. Combined with hanging out with my participants, I engaged in reflective journaling. Although I could not always write about the activities, I took brief notes to revisit and develop later. Documenting the hanging-out activities allowed me to gain further insights into various issues related to my experiences and involved incorporating my reflections whenever I wrote about incidents, events, or situations

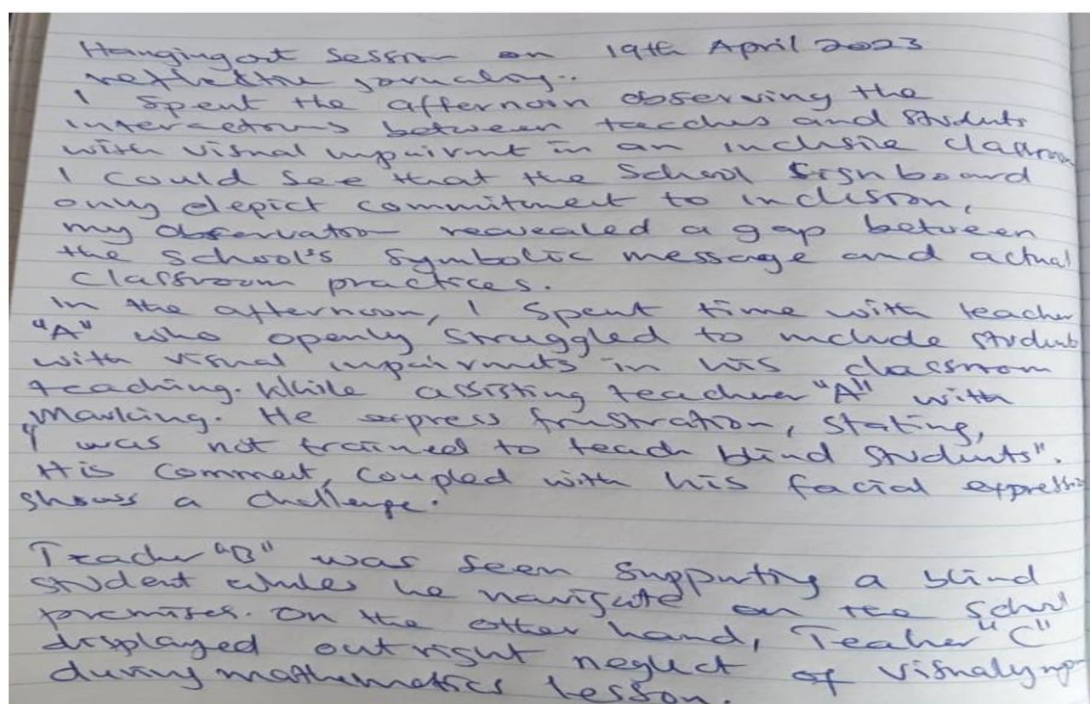


Figure 7: Excerpt from Fieldnotes

during the process. These reflections provided valuable insights into relevant issues concerning my understanding of the research focus.

4.6.4 The fourth phase of data collection: Follow-up interviews

The fourth phase of data collection took place from June 10, 2023, to July 18, 2023. Reflecting on the earlier phases, I realised that some teachers' pedagogical practices in inclusive settings were shaped by their traditional cultural teaching methods. This made me recognise the need to further explore how teachers understand visual impairment and its inclusion in the classroom. The teachers were scheduled for follow-up interviews to clarify issues with the data already gathered. I transcribed every interview and gained a better understanding of the data collected before I asked any further questions. This last data collection phase helped me confirm and validate the understanding of the data already gathered from teachers.

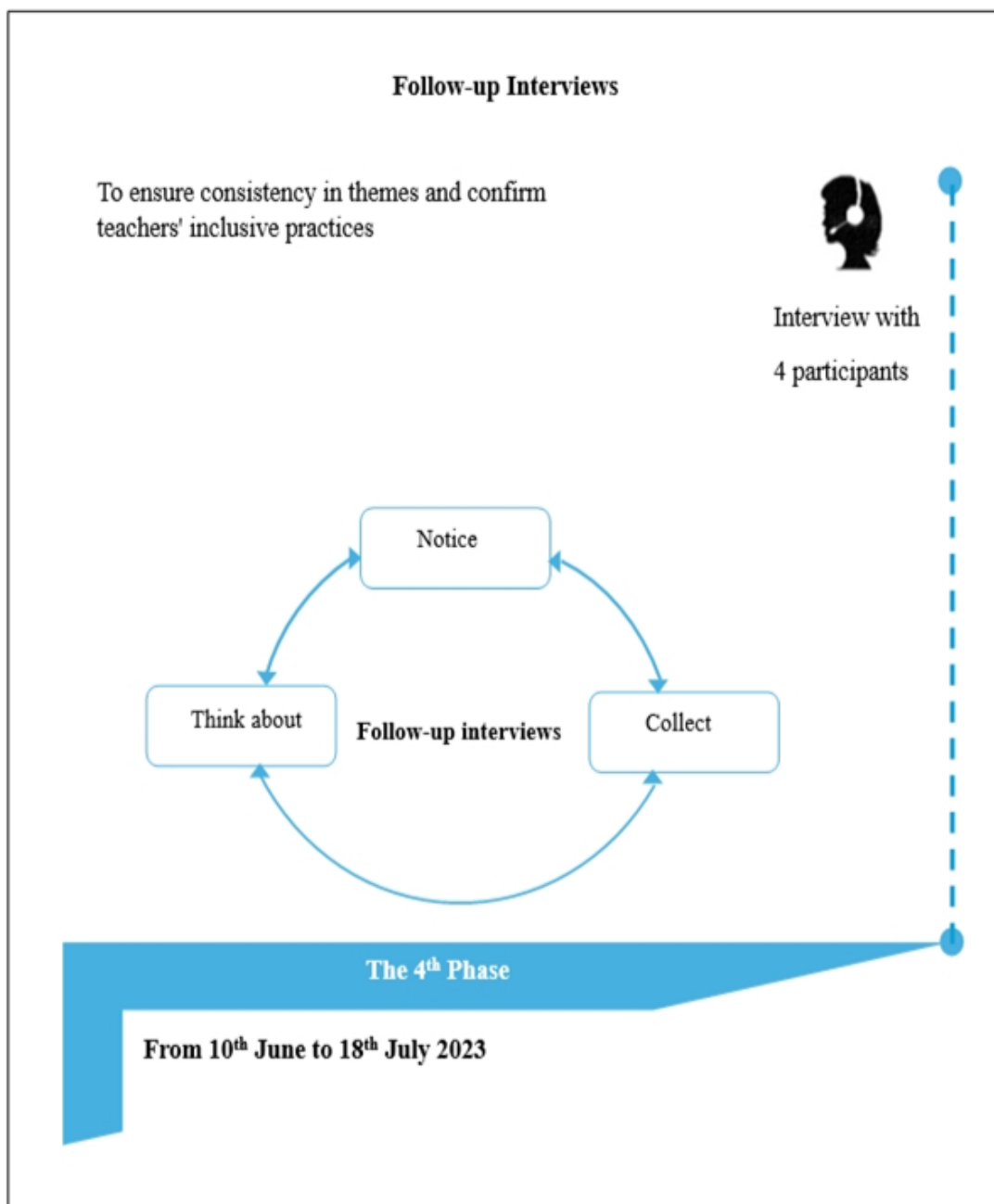


Figure 8: Follow-up Interviews

4.7 Section summary

This section has given a detailed explanation of my data collection process and has helped to clarify issues and note some shortcomings during the data collection process. To summarise, four teachers with experience in including students with visual impairment were selected for this study in Ghana. Four stages of the ethnographic data collection process were employed to understand teachers' experiences in teaching students with visual impairment in inclusive settings in Ghana.

The four stages were employed to gain an understanding of each subsequent stage and enrich the data already collected from the participants. The data generation process became cyclical, with each stage complementing the others. The first stage of data collection started with interviews and, at the same time, hanging out. The preliminary data gathered in the first stage of the data collection gave me more insight into the second stage when teachers were observed during teaching moments. I wrote my reflections on what I observed during teaching moments with four teachers in an inclusive classroom in Ghana. After gathering the first two stages of data, I visited students with visual impairment for the third stage—a focus group discussion on their advice on the data gathered from teachers with a written reflection on what students said in their focus group discussions. Finally, the last stage of my data collection was follow-up interviews that helped me to clarify and validate issues concerning teachers' shared experiences in handling students with visual impairment and the influence of teachers' inclusive pedagogical practice.

4.8 Data analysis process

Data analysis is a systematic way of understanding the data to provide detailed descriptions, discussions, interpretations, evaluations, and explanations of the data regarding the research questions (Salmona et al., 2024). This idea is valuable for my data analysis because the aim of my research is to explore how teachers demonstrate their inclusive approaches in meeting the needs of students with visual impairment in Ghana. Thus, any potential interpretations should be linked to the context of the study by the teachers in Ghana. In analysing the data, I carefully captured the meanings and experiences that teachers in inclusive classrooms shared with me. This ethnographic study employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic data analysis (see Figure 9). Braun and Clarke's (2013) data analysis stages are understanding and becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, looking for themes, reviewing themes, identifying and naming themes, and providing reports. Further, this approach is adaptable to both inductive and deductive thematic analysis. Braun et al. (2006) express that thematic data analysis supports the researcher in providing quality, rich, comprehensive, and multifaceted data accounts to maintain theoretical flexibility. Braun and Clarke's (2012) thematic method of data analysis has been used in educational research by many scholars from different perspectives. For example, Sarpong (2021) used this method to understand New Zealand's tertiary education, and Fägerstam's (2014) research on teachers' experiences with outdoor teaching and learning was conducted in Sweden.

The study involved a longitudinal case study where teachers from different disciplines were interviewed before and after an outdoor teaching project in a Swedish junior high school. Moreover, Woodcock et al. (2021) conducted their research in Australia, examining teachers' experiences in handling students with disabilities. The study focused on Australian primary and secondary teachers, exploring their beliefs in inclusive education and their levels of teacher self-efficacy. Hence, using thematic data analysis for this ethnography provided a clear account of data because it ensured that the research data was handled well (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Thematic analysis is suitable for this study because it provides a simple systematic procedure to guide researchers and offers detailed analysis derived from different perspectives, including in-depth interviews, observations, focus groups, and hanging out (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The analysis process commenced with the transcription of interview data, observations, and focus group, marking the initial step in getting familiar with the data. To ensure familiarity with the data, I went through the data collected every day after the interview sessions and contrasted it with previous interviews. I then began to transcribe the data verbatim. Following the guidance of Braun and Clarke (2013), I thoroughly read and reread each transcript after transcription, aiming to gain a comprehensive understanding of all facets of the data. Reading through my data thoroughly allowed me to identify initial patterns of ideas.

The second data analysis phase involved assigning preliminary codes to the data. Following the guidance provided by Saldaña (2021), in the coding process, I marked specific portions of the text and assigned words or phrases that conveyed the core meaning, importance, or description of the text's content. To do this, I utilised text highlighting and recorded codes within the comment section of Microsoft Word.

After the coding process, the next step was to identify themes within the data. Codes highlight interesting details in the text whereas themes are more comprehensive and provide the overarching significance of the codes and the data itself (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017). To achieve this, I compiled a list of codes that appeared to be relevant to the research questions and grouped similar codes. These groups were then designated as initial themes, representing the collective meaning of the codes.

For instance, codes like "individuals with visual impairment are magicians", "I am a chief, and I am not supposed to associate myself with such people", and "visual impairment is a sign of bad omen", along with others of a similar nature, were organised into a preliminary theme called "superstition and visual impairment". Braun and Clarke (2012, 2013) highlight using visual displays to organise codes into themes. I utilised tables that helped me identify patterns among codes when analysing extensive volumes of data.

The next step in the data analysis involved refining the initial themes. I carefully examined the coded data associated with each theme to determine if they supported it. If the coded data matched the theme, I analysed the individual themes within the context of the entire data. This comprehensive analysis allowed me to identify both differences and similarities among the themes. I observed that certain themes had overlapping content, and these themes were merged in such cases. I continuously reviewed, adjusted, and refined the initial themes until the coded extract and themes conveyed a coherent and meaningful story. Afterwards, I assigned names to the themes. These names were chosen to reflect the story conveyed by each theme and its relevance to the study objectives (see Figure 9). An ethnographic vignette was introduced as a narrative technique, drawing from multiple observations and notes collected during the research process, including informal interactions with participants. These vignettes were instrumental in capturing the essence of participants' experiences, providing insights into their daily lives. When combining all sources of data, these narratives form a strong basis for thematic analysis, revealing significant patterns and key themes within the research findings. This approach enriches the understanding of the social and cultural contexts in which the participants operate.

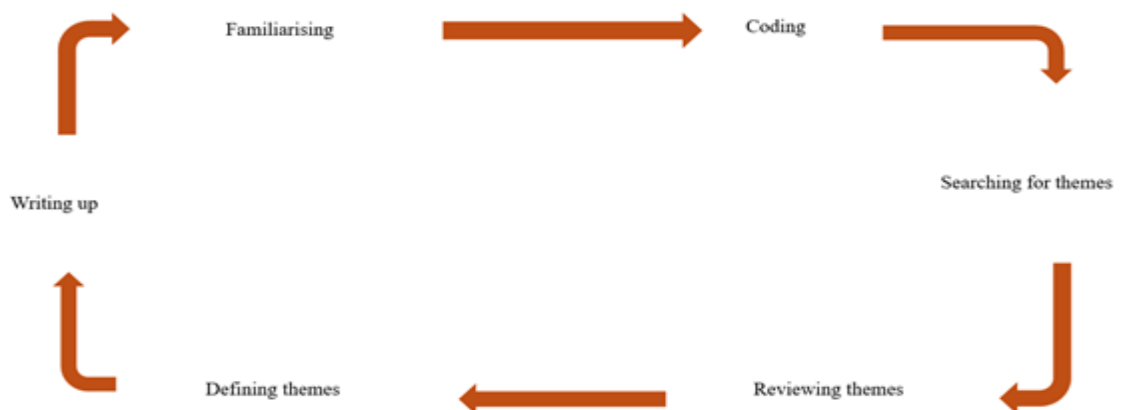


Figure 9: Outline of Braun and Clarke data analysis process

4.9 Reflections on Research Ethics

I obtained ethics approval for my research from the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC). I acknowledged that some of the teachers participating in the study might be individuals I had previously taught, which could potentially introduce biases in data collection and interpretation. As a researcher dedicated to adhering to the ethical standards set by AUTEC, I remained committed to ensuring the integrity of my study. To minimise potential bias, I drew upon the research ethics training I received at the Auckland University of Technology (AUT), which enabled me to critically evaluate elements that might be overlooked due to their perceived normalcy in the educational environment.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study. Before commencing each phase (interview, observations, focus group, and hanging out) during our initial meeting, I explained the purpose of the research to teachers and students. I assured them that all the data collected would be securely stored and protected in a file on my computer, accessible only through a password known only to me. Furthermore, I emphasised that all collected materials, including interviews, observations, focus groups, field notes, audio recordings, and interview transcripts, would be permanently deleted from my computer and destroyed using a paper shredder for hard copies.

Additionally, I made clear that the identities and information of teachers and students remained completely anonymous. I used pseudonyms for all the teachers and students to safeguard their privacy and ensure anonymity. To prevent any potential identification of the teachers and students, I decided not to include any photographs of the teachers and students with visual impairment. This could lead to the identification of the participants and the institution.

While I maintained procedural ethics there were some issues arising from ethics in practice. These ethical situations arise from “ethics in practice”, rather than procedural ethics in which the researcher has gained prior approval for a certain course of inquiry. Guillemain and Gillam (2004) describe these as “ethically important moments” (p. 261), which emerge from the everyday ethical challenges encountered during the research process—what they term “ethics in practice”—as opposed to procedural ethics, which involves obtaining formal approval before beginning the study.

During data collection, I encountered several ethical dilemmas. One ongoing issue was the perception among some teachers that I was a spy sent by the Ministry of Education to evaluate their pedagogical practices, despite consent from the teachers. Some repeatedly questioned the purpose of my research and were suspicious about where the data would be sent. In Ghana, steady employment is hard to come by and can be volatile. Teachers do not want to make their positions vulnerable through negative reports. One teacher even interrupted my observation during a playground session and attempted to disrupt interviews. This created significant pressure, as I was committed to protecting participant privacy. I reassured the teacher who interrupted me that my research was solely for academic purposes and not intended to assess or scrutinize teacher pedagogy. When a few teachers threatened to withdraw, I mitigated the situation by involving my local advisor, who spoke to them and reaffirmed the academic intent of the study. Once reassured, they agreed to continue their participation.

Another ethical dilemma I faced was when I observed that some of the teachers were under stress and appeared overwhelmed. I was concerned that the study was placing additional pressure on already busy teachers. In response, I made the conscious decision to withdraw from the classroom at times to allow them the emotional and physical space they needed. Despite their consent to participate, I believed it was essential to honour their right to respite. Given the already crowded classroom environment, I felt that my absence might help alleviate some of the tension regarding the available space for me to observe. During these moments, I used the opportunity to visit other classrooms. Through such actions, I aimed to uphold ethical research practices grounded in emotional and relational sensitivity. As the research progressed the teachers and students became somewhat used to my presence with them.

4.10 Evaluating the research process

4.10.1 Rigour

In qualitative research, maintaining rigour and trustworthiness is crucial for the integrity of the findings (Cope, 2014). Trustworthiness and rigour are processes used to ensure the values, qualities, standards, quality, and confidence of the data used in the study (Amin et al., 2020). Amankwaa (2016) emphasises that every researcher must adhere to specific processes and procedures to make their research credible to readers.

To ensure trustworthiness and rigour in the current study, I endeavoured to meet the criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1994), which included credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth value of the research (Ary et al., 2018). This is achieved by engaging with participants over an extended period through persistent observation, member-checking, reflective journaling, triangulation, and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). To enhance the credibility of this study, the data collection process was lengthy (four months), allowing for informal interactions with participants. These interactions built trust and encouraged participants to express their views openly, giving rich information for the study. Triangulation, involving multiple data collection methods such as interviews, observations, focus groups, and hanging out, provided a diverse perspective and a deeper understanding of teachers' experiences teaching students with visual impairment. Additionally, participants could review interview transcripts to confirm their views, further enhancing credibility. After collecting data from teachers, I transcribed all the interview data gathered from participants. I sent a copy of the transcript to teachers and students to check the credibility of the data gathered and what was shared among members (Choi, 2017). When teachers and students had concerns, they helped me clarify them.

Dependability relates to data stability over time under the same study conditions (Polit & Beck, 2016). It ensures that the same research could yield the same results if repeated (Shenton, 2004). This study maintained an audit trail consisting of detailed process logs to document all activities in the research site. This documentation allows other researchers to replicate the entire process in the future, ensuring dependability.

Confirmability assesses whether the research findings reflect participants' experiences and ideas rather than the researcher's biases (Shenton, 2004). Triangulation helps reduce researcher bias and involves reporting the methods used, reasons for their adoption, and any methodological weaknesses. This research elaborated upon the strengths and weaknesses of the methods used. Personal assumptions, characteristics, and preferences that could influence findings were set aside to present the data without personal influence.

Transferability measures the extent to which study findings can be applied to other settings (Polit & Beck, 2014).

This is enhanced when researchers provide in-depth descriptions of the context, participants, and transparent data analysis processes. This study's analysis was detailed in the research location, context, and participants. Continuous member feedback and using various data collection methods strengthened the transferability of the study's findings to other settings. Due to the ethnographic nature of this study, which is embedded in a specific cultural context, the research does not aim to make findings transferable. Instead, it seeks to provide deep insights that may inform future practices and understanding of inclusive education. The goal is to offer a nuanced understanding of how teachers' cultural backgrounds and beliefs influence their pedagogical approaches in inclusive classrooms, particularly in relation to students with visual impairments.

4.11 Chapter summary

This chapter provided a comprehensive overview of the research paradigms and methodological frameworks guiding this study, with particular focus on ontology and epistemology. It established an interpretive stance, rooted in an ethnographic methodology, to understand the cultural context and immersive experiences within an inclusive school setting. The choice of qualitative research is justified, outlining the researcher's positionality and the process of making the research ethnographic. A range of ethnographic methods was utilised, including in-depth interviews, classroom observations, focus groups, and the "hanging-out" approach, which offered insights into the experiences of participants. The chapter detailed the research process, from selecting participants to initiating data collection, structured in four phases: teacher interviews, classroom observations, student focus groups, and follow-up interviews. The data analysis process was discussed, emphasising the importance of confidentiality and anonymity. Finally, the chapter evaluated the research process, ensuring rigour and reflexivity in the approach. This structured methodology aimed to capture a holistic view of inclusive education in the studied context.

Chapter 5 Teachers' Experiences in Teaching Students with Visual Impairment in Inclusive Classrooms

5.1 Introduction

This chapter describes findings from interviews, observations, focus groups, and hanging out during visits to Unity Inclusive Junior High School (not original name). Four teachers' experiences are narratively presented, created from interviews, observations, focus groups, hanging out, and field notes. Pseudonyms were used to ensure participant and setting confidentiality. To reiterate, the goal of ethnography is to capture the insider's perspective. Section 5.1 introduces the chapter. Section 5.2 describes the school's context. Section 5.3 initiates the teacher observations, first impressions from "hanging out," and teachers' perspectives on inclusion. Section 5.4 provides an interim summary. Section 5.5 Understanding the voices of students with visual impairment in an inclusive classroom. Section 5.6 concludes the chapter.

By way of introduction and foregrounding, during my interactions with teachers in inclusive classrooms, proverbs were frequently employed to express attitudes, disappointments, and behaviours towards various phenomena. A proverb serves as a veiled statement or an expression readily understood by those familiar with its deeper meanings. These succinct sayings are treasured repositories of traditional wisdom, especially valued across Africa. Among the Akan, proverbial speech is pervasive in everyday conversation, narrative performance, and praise-singing in honour of ancestors and royalty. They are also commonly used in conflict resolution, highlighting their central role in the cultural and communicative practices of Akan society (Asare, 2020). For instance, a participant used this proverb in the Akan proverb (Twi), "*Oba nyansafoɔ yebu no be, yenka no asem*", which translates to "The wise is spoken to in proverbs, not in plain language". The proverb used here means everyone is expected to learn something from their experiences and circumstances. I have written the proverbs in both Akan (Twi) and English, and, while the English translations of the proverbs do not fully capture the richness of the cultural nuances, I have attempted to explain the proverbs in a way that conveys their deeper meanings and cultural significance.

5.2 Describing the context

Unity Inclusive Junior High School (not the real name) is located in southern Ghana and was established in 1990 as a junior high school. It operated as a regular school until 2003. In line with Ghana's commitment to the Salamanca Statement (1994) and the subsequent Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), the school transformed into an inclusive school on a pilot basis from the 2003/2004 academic year. This change involved redirecting some students with visual impairments from the Special School for the Blind to Unity Inclusive School in Ghana. The school now functions as a mainstream school with inclusive practices and is situated near a special school with a blind unit.

Unity Inclusive School follows the Ghanaian junior high school (JHS) curriculum, which comprises English Language, Ghanaian Languages (e.g., Akan, Ewe, Ga), French or Arabic, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Creative Arts & Design, Computer Studies, Religious and Moral Education, and Physical and Health Education. The curriculum is designed to provide students with a strong foundation in literacy and numeracy skills. The school's staff consists of trained teachers from Ghana's colleges of education and universities. Currently, the school has a total enrolment of 165 students, including 27 students with visual impairments. The school admits students aged 11 years and above. The school comprises three classroom buildings, each designated for a specific academic year. The first building accommodates first-year students, the second for second-year students, and the third for third-year students. Additionally, there is a separate resource room for students with visual impairments, staffed by one resource teacher providing support for their activities and learning.

In the school, there are subject-specific teachers assigned to each academic discipline. Despite having three separate classroom buildings, when the teacher concludes their instruction for a particular subject, the teacher departs, allowing the next subject teacher to take over and continue with their lesson in the same building. Regarding material resources for supporting inclusive education, the resource teacher mentioned the availability of one embosser and three Perkins Brailers, which assist students with visual impairments in producing their study notes. Typically, these students receive braille sheets from the Ghana Education Service.

Based on my observations, when considering the school's physical environment, it becomes evident that it has not been adequately adapted to support the inclusion of students with visual impairments. The current infrastructure does not facilitate inclusive practices. The school compound features steep slopes and rocky surfaces that are not conducive for visually impaired students to navigate. Additionally, the classrooms have deteriorated with cracks in the floor, making it difficult for students with visual impairments to manoeuvre safely and participate fully in classroom activities due to the risk of tripping or falling. This physical barrier further hampers their ability to engage with the learning environment, highlighting the need for better infrastructure to support inclusive education. Furthermore, Unity Inclusive School is located near a special school that has a unit for students with visual impairment. The students with visual impairments attending Unity Inclusive School come from this special unit. However, the pathway connecting the unit for the blind to Unity Inclusive School is suboptimal. It includes steep stairs with scattered rocks, and guide rails are absent to support the visually impaired in defining their position while moving. The desks and chairs are tightly arranged in the various classrooms, leaving minimal space for students to move around comfortably. Table 3 provides an overview of the inclusive classrooms in this study.

Table 2: Classrooms in this research

1st classroom	2nd classroom	3rd classroom
A total of 52 students with 12 students with visual impairment	A total of 55 students with 6 students with visual impairment	A total of 58 students with 9 students with visual impairment
Students' ages are from 11 to 12 years	Students' ages are from 12 to 13 years	Students' ages are from 13 to 14 years

I have chosen Unity Inclusive Junior High School in Ghana for several reasons. Considerable research has focused on inclusive education and the educational experiences of teachers and students with disabilities in tertiary education.

However, studies on inclusive education among teachers and students with visual impairment often concentrate on senior high schools, special schools, and tertiary education, addressing various concerns, such as teachers' competencies, educational assessment, and perceptions. Limited research exists on teachers' experiences in teaching students with visual impairment at the basic junior high school level in Ghana (Asamoah et al., 2018). In addition, with Unity Inclusive School having undergone the transformation over 20 years prior, it is hoped that enough time has passed for the vision of inclusion to be realised. I opted to work with a basic public inclusive school instead of a private school because, in Ghana, over 70% of students with visual impairment attend public schools (Ocloo, 2008). Unity Inclusive School was also selected due to its higher annual enrolment of students with visual impairment. Working with teachers and students in inclusive schools at the basic level will provide insights into how teachers deal with inclusive practices and identify enhancers, primarily for early intervention.

5.3 Commencement of observations

On the first day of my observations, I arrived at Unity Inclusive School during break time. Upon entering the school premises, I noticed some students (boys) engaged in a football match while the girls were found playing netball. This sparked my curiosity as I wondered if students with visual impairment also participated in the games, considering it is an inclusive school. Driven by this question, I drew closer and realised that only sighted students were playing football and netball. Intrigued by what students with a visual impairment might be doing during the break, I explored the school compound to find out and understand how they spent their break time. As I moved around the school compound, I saw one of the students with visual impairment standing in front of the resource room. I moved towards the resource room and discovered several visual-impaired students engaged in various activities. Some were using the closed-circuit television to read their notes while others were resting or napping (sleeping). Additionally, I observed some students actively writing with their Perkins Braille. Right from the outset, I was confronted by a segregation of sighted and visually impaired students and wondered if this would manifest within the inclusive classrooms.

Suddenly, a teacher entered the room and asked me, "Are you into special education?" I replied, "I am a teacher; I was introduced to the entire teaching staff two weeks ago." He responded, "Yes, I now remember your face; it looks familiar."

I asked him why that question, and he said, “The way you entered and asked students with visual impairment questions prompted me to inquire about your background.” He continued, “I believe you can manage students with visual impairment better than some of us.” I asked him why he thought so, and he responded by saying that I may have the skills to manage students with visual impairment. He then led me outside the resource room and said that some teachers struggled to handle students with visual impairment in their classes. As a researcher, all I could do was reassure him, saying that with time, they (the teachers) would be able to handle them. We shared a moment of laughter before the school bell rang, signalling the end of the break.

After the break ended, in just five minutes, I witnessed students with visual impairments holding hands in a queue-like manner as they proceeded to their respective classrooms. Students with low vision led the students who were blind. I then proceeded to the second-year classroom to observe one of my study participants teaching in his classroom. So, this is how my fieldwork began.

In the following section, I present ethnographic vignettes defined by Bloom and Grunow (2022) as “narrative descriptions of particular scenes” to illustrate the classroom dynamics of inclusion. These vignettes are composites drawn from multiple observations and hanging out, capturing everyday moments that reflect deeper social and pedagogical realities.

Importantly, the interview data served as a crucial interpretive lens through which I made sense of what I observed. While the vignettes presented scenes of practice, the interviews offered insight into how teachers understood, rationalised, or struggled with their actions. For instance, during interviews, several teachers expressed uncertainty about adapting teaching materials for students with visual impairment directly helping me interpret scenes of passive disengagement among these students in the classroom. Thus, the thematic analysis that follows emerges from a triangulation of data sources—the vignettes provide situated narratives, the interviews reveal teacher beliefs and constraints, and together they uncover key patterns about inclusion, exclusion, and pedagogical practice in the Ghanaian inclusive school context. The notes from hanging out were integrated into the vignettes and were a secondary source of information to help determine themes.

Table 1 presents the profiles of the teachers who participated in this study. They range in age from 34 to 45 years and hold degrees in Basic Education, Special Education, Science Education, and Religious and Moral Education. Their teaching experience spans both mainstream and inclusive settings, with periods of service in regular schools ranging from six to eighteen years before transitioning to Unity Inclusive Junior High School, where they now teach subjects such as mathematics, social studies, science, and religious and moral education.

Table 3: Teacher Participants

Participants	Details
Dadzie	A 45-year-old teacher with a degree in Basic Education, he teaches mathematics and has 12 years of experience teaching in a regular school. Additionally, he has spent the last eight years teaching at Unity Inclusive Junior High School.
Esinam	A 34-year-old teacher with a degree in Special Education. Specialising in social studies as a minor, she teaches social studies at Unity Inclusive School. She brings six years of teaching experience from a regular school and has four years of experience teaching at Unity Inclusive Junior High School.
Nkansah	A 37-year-old teacher with a degree in science education, he has eight years of experience teaching in various non inclusive schools. For the past four years, he has been teaching at Unity Inclusive Junior High School.
Baah	A 44-year-old teacher with 18 years of experience teaching in non inclusive schools, he has spent the last three years teaching at Unity Inclusive School . He specialises in religious and moral education.

5.3.1 Dadzie's classroom observations

One morning I visited Dadzie, who was teaching mathematics in his class; I greeted him and the class. Dadzie responded with a smile and offered me a seat at the back of the classroom.

I started to observe the classroom environment and noticed how worn out the space was with, amongst other things, visible cracks in the classroom floor. The room was poorly ventilated due to small windows, limiting airflow. Additionally, the class size was very large with fifty-five students and one teacher. The physical layout of the classroom made it difficult for students to spread out as the tables and chairs were arranged close together. Additionally, due to the large class size, the teacher had trouble managing the students and speaking audibly to everyone. Consequently, special attention to students with visual impairment became challenging. After being in the class for fifteen minutes, a student with visual impairment arrived late to the classroom. As he entered, I observed him grappling with his cane, almost losing his balance. Fortunately, one of his sighted peers extended a helping hand to support him, revealing inadequate knowledge of how to guide students with visual impairment although admittedly preventing the student from falling. Dadzie asked the student why he was late, and the student explained that he had been busy writing notes in the resource room. Dadzie further inquired why he used the instructional period for writing notes. The student failed to provide a convincing response, leading Dadzie to give him a verbal warning not to repeat the offence. The student thanked him and took his seat. This prompted me to observe if Dadzie would take any action to assist the visually impaired student who arrived late. However, Dadzie failed to revisit or clarify the material he had previously taught the students. I found myself wondering why this was the case and why he did not go back to explain the content again, ensuring that the students with visual impairment understood it.

During the class, I noticed that some of the students with visual impairment remained idle (not doing anything), others were asleep, and a few appeared to be dozing off while the teacher continued with the lesson. This raised further questions in my mind. Were these students comprehending the teaching methods that were not tailored for mathematics instruction for the visually impaired? Why were they not encouraged to participate? I also wondered whether there were considerations for students with visual impairment in the examination. Would students with visual impairments receive waivers for mathematics when advancing to senior high school? These questions weighed on my mind.

Dadzie actively asked questions and had meaningful interactions with the sighted students, but nothing happened for students with visual impairment.

This scene repeated itself throughout my observation in the inclusive classroom with Dadzie. I also realised that on one occasion when two sighted students were not paying attention in class, Dadzie gave stern warnings to those sighted learners several times to pay attention to the lesson being taught while the visually impaired were ignored. Again, I also noticed that, occasionally, Dadzie would ask the sighted learners questions to ensure they were in tune with him during teaching. This did not happen for students with visual impairment; therefore, I questioned myself why this was so.

Dadzie instructed students with “Look at the board”, “It is written on the board”, “Can you see clearly on the board?”, “Can you see what is there?”, “What colour is this?”, and “Can you explain from the board?” As Dadzie continued his lesson another day, he drew a circle on the board and labelled its radius. Beside the circle, he wrote, “ $r = 4\text{cm}$ ”. Subsequently, Dadzie assigned the class the task of calculating the area of the circle. While the sighted learners diligently worked on the question, students with visual impairment remained unengaged. This prompted me to seek clarification regarding why students with visual impairment showed little interest in the classroom exercise. After the classroom lesson, I took a walk and still asked myself who was responsible for ensuring students with visual impairment participated in all classroom activities. What is happening? Why did Dadzie exclude students with visual impairment? Why did Dadzie feel that students with visual impairment do not belong in their class? It was an emotional experience.

On another occasion, when I was hanging out, Dadzie asked me to assist in marking class assignments. As I began this task, in an informal conversation I asked Dadzie questions that had puzzled me during the teaching session. Dadzie responded, “Students with visual impairment are not our students; we are not their teachers. They are students of special education teachers.” He used the proverb, “*Nsa teaa nyinaa nye pe*”, which translates to “Not all hands are the same” to highlight his statement. In Ghanaian Akan, the phrase “The use of all fingers are not the same” highlights that students with visual impairments differ from sighted students. Dadzie questioned, “How can students with visual impairments learn mathematics? With which eyes?” He further remarked in the Akan proverb, “*Mponko mpo ehuri ta na ofui*”, which translates to “Some horses are jumping and farting; how much more the hyena?” This reflects the varying abilities and challenges faced by individuals, emphasising the unique needs of each student.

Dadzie further explained:

Even those who have eyes to learn are struggling, how much more students with visual impairment? Do teachers in inclusive schools have the methods of teaching mathematics to students with visual impairment? It is very challenging as these concepts are fundamental in mathematics. If they struggle with these basics, it might seem unnecessary to burden them. Consequently, in Ghana, students with visual impairment are discouraged from engaging in advanced mathematics. Instead, they are encouraged to focus on subjects like social studies and other reading subjects.

Moreover, Dadzie nervously shared an insight with me, stating that students with visual impairments may react strongly if warned or spoken to in a way they dislike; spiritually, I am told, they can harm. Dadzie mentioned that there were historical superstitions involving them being used for rituals—a belief that still lingers today. When I asked Dadzie if he still believed in such myths, he replied, “How can you change a belief that has persisted for many years?” He chuckled and added, “I remain cautious in my interactions with students with visual impairment.” I felt sorry for these students with visual impairment in the inclusive classroom because the teacher thought it was not his responsibility to include them. He elaborated that students with visual impairments may exhibit body odour due to insufficient training in daily living skills. Such skills encompass teeth brushing, clothes washing and ironing, bathing, and grooming. Inadequate execution of these tasks complicates the teaching process, creating barriers to proximity. To gain deeper insights into Dadzie’s classroom practice, I conducted a follow-up interview to understand his personal experiences and perspectives.

The Akan proverb, “*Se dufɔkyee da nsuom da da koraa entumi nnane denkyem da*”, translates to “No matter how long a log may stay in a river, it can never turn into a crocodile”.

Dadzie, a 45-year-old with a degree in Basic Education from a university in Ghana, was trained as a teacher to teach mathematics. He had 12 years of experience teaching at a regular school and an additional eight years of experience teaching students with visual impairment at the Unity Inclusive School.

Poor implementation of inclusion

Expressing his frustration, Dadzie mentioned that since the school started implementing inclusive practices, he felt that the school authorities were not acknowledging his concerns regarding the inclusion of students with visual impairments, and his suggestions for inclusive education were not being considered. He believed that all the teachers in the school were not ready for inclusion, and the school environment did not support it.

Dadzie pointed out the insufficient training in teaching students with visual impairments, despite having taught them for the past eight years. This reveals the ongoing challenges in effectively supporting students with visual impairments in the classroom. Expressing his frustration, Dadzie questioned why his school was selected for inclusion without proper consultation. He suggested that two years of training should be provided before mainstreaming students with visual impairments, including knowledge of healthcare as teachers are not medical doctors. Dadzie also wondered how students, especially those who are visually impaired, could learn effectively in such an environment. He questioned whether inclusion was being enforced in the nation and expressed the challenges of working with students with visual impairments, mentioning their physical appearance and health issues. He stated he was feeling disturbed, losing his appetite after school, and finding it difficult to cope with the situation. Dadzie shared his experience: “Teaching abstract concepts, such as finding square roots of numbers, becomes difficult for students with visual impairments.” Providing the necessary support is challenging because he believes he does not have the knowledge and resources required to assist students with visual impairment properly. Dadzie also pointed out that concepts related to geometry, spatial relationships, and graphs were particularly challenging for students with visual impairments as these ideas heavily rely on visual cues. In the inclusive classroom during observation and hanging out, he tried to use tactile or auditory methods, such as tactile diagrams, braille materials, or verbal descriptions. Unfortunately, he had not received training in these techniques, and the necessary resources were unavailable. As a result, he could not conduct comprehensive assessments or evaluations for mathematics, unlike what is done for sighted learners.

During the interview, Dadzie mentioned that there were a few instances when they were introduced to the Universal Design for Learning, but it was only for a week.

Specifically, there was no mention of teaching mathematics using different methods. This lack of support has left him frustrated as he believed that even special education teachers may not have the necessary skills to effectively teach mathematics to students with visual impairments.

Pedagogy of exclusion within inclusion

Dadzie's perspective towards inclusion of students with visual impairment differed. He explicitly stated that he never liked including students with visual impairment, largely because he could not effectively communicate with them while teaching mathematics. He admitted that he consistently excluded students with visual impairments from the mathematics lessons. The ambiguity around visual impairment affected Dadzie's classroom practices; for example, it was observed that when he walked around the room, he avoided students with visual impairment.

He said that one time while teaching sighted students mathematics, there was a sudden noise from one of the students with visual impairment hitting hard on the table, making noise. He appeared frustrated, and all sighted students turned back to see why the student with visual impairment was causing a disturbance. This raised doubts in Dadzie's mind about the effectiveness of inclusion, leading him to believe that it was merely "lip service".

He said to me that due to these challenges, he grouped students with visual impairment to do their readings in braille, and some were left to sleep because he did not want to disturb them. In the past, there was not any problem in the school, but now there were a lot of problems for teachers to solve. He recited the Akan proverb (Twi), "*Wo ne hwan kɔka sɛ ɔkɔmfɔɔ sɛ kɔɔ*", which translates to, "With whom are you contending for a priest to declare judgment?" He laughs. The proverb he used means it is difficult to challenge an authority, so he could not stop the authorities from including students with visual impairment in the school at which he teaches.

During informal discussions, when asked about his frustrations, Dadzie shared:

There is no need to teach blind students mathematics. I have the zeal to do that, but what approach can I employ? How do I teach them to understand calculations? This is a problem; we think we are just including them for the world to know we are practising inclusive education on paper, but, in practice, we are not doing anything to reflect inclusive practices.

Dadzie said that during break time, he warned the sighted students not to allow students with visual impairment to participate in any playing activity, believing they could bump into objects and harm themselves. He felt the need to protect sighted students because they knew more about the visually impaired concerning their behaviour and attitude. If some of the sighted students mistakenly hurt one of the visually impaired, they could face punishment spiritually. In summary, Dadzie believed students with visual impairment should be exempted from any playing activities.

One significant hurdle Dadzie faced was teaching basic operations like addition and subtraction as students with visual impairment could not see the numbers written on the chalkboard. He mentioned that he had never encountered a braille mathematics textbook in his time in the school. Students with visual impairment relied on printed books with sighted students assisting them in reading assignments. Dadzie noticed the absence of tactile materials to aid in teaching mathematics to students with visual impairment. For instance, teachers could only describe how shapes appeared visually in geometry. There were no resources to create tactile materials to better understand topics, especially in geometry. Inadequate tools like drawing mats or tracing wheels made preparing tactile material for mathematics lessons challenging.

Mathematical knowledge can be difficult and designing fair and accessible methods for assessing students with visual impairment was a problem as traditional written examinations may not be suitable. Dadzie admitted to using the expository method (lecture-based teaching) for his mathematics classes as participatory methods were time-consuming and challenging to complete within the allotted 40-minute lesson time. He found that attempting to explain concepts to students with visual impairment often led to confusion, and some of them even left the class during mathematics lessons due to these difficulties.

In an attempt to support students with visual impairment, Dadzie occasionally offered help during break. However, he explained that his busy teaching schedule left him tired with limited time for additional assistance. He confessed to using trial and error methods when teaching mathematics to visually impaired students as he had not received specific training in this area.

Dadzie also highlighted the issue of overcrowded classrooms due to high enrolments, making it challenging for teachers to move around and check students' work effectively. Moreover, Dadzie understands that each student with visual impairment is unique with varying types and degrees of visual impairment, possibly coupled with additional disabilities. Consequently, he acknowledges that students with visual impairment could benefit from inclusive teaching, but he could not meet their specific needs. However, he is aware that this personalised instruction can be time-consuming and demands a high level of expertise.

He said: "Hmm, now, as I speak with you, because I have students with visual impairment in my classroom, I don't have any respect in the society in which I live." Dadzie stressed the Akan proverb, "*Se dufɔkyee da nsuom da da koraa entumi nnane denkyem da*", which translates to, "No matter how long a log may stay in a river, it can never turn into a crocodile", meaning no matter how long we keep students with visual impairment in an inclusive classroom, they can never reap the benefit of inclusive education, and, therefore, they must go back to a special school. He continued that not all mathematics teachers are adequately trained to work with students with visual impairment. Students with visual impairment may face additional psychological barriers, such as low self-esteem or a lack of motivation due to the perceived of mathematics.

Dadzie had concerns about whether acquiring more knowledge would alter his views on inclusion. Given the diverse needs and attention required, he remained unconvinced that inclusive education could effectively benefit every student. Dadzie described his classroom as divided into two distinct groups with him and some of his sighted students finding it challenging to interact with students with visual impairments. Despite his university training, Dadzie felt that some people questioned his academic qualifications, assuming he was assigned to teach students with visual impairments due to perceived inadequacies.

He noted that students with visual impairments often appeared somewhat detached in the classroom, and, when they needed assistance, Dadzie referred to students with visual impairments as students of special education teachers, indicating a lack of personal connection. He did not consider them to be “his students” and instead referred to them as “special education students”. Consequently, he viewed inclusion as a seemingly worthless experience, asserting that students with visual impairments did not seem to benefit from it.

Dadzie observed that students with visual impairments tended to interact more among themselves than with their sighted colleagues. He highlighted that trust was a significant issue for students with visual impairments due to their condition as they often worried that sighted individuals might take advantage of them, making it challenging to form friendships in the inclusive classroom.

From Dadzie's perspective, inclusion failed to benefit students with disabilities, including those with visual impairments, primarily due to behavioural issues and disruptive conduct. He explained that the frustration experienced by some students with low vision occasionally led them to throw stones at their sighted classmates in retaliation for being teased or called names. He also noted that students with visual impairments enjoyed singing, making noise, and playing music during break times, sometimes creating difficulties for the school. Teaching became particularly challenging when students with visual impairments were perceived as being noisy or moving around the classroom, especially in contrast to their sighted peers who did not exhibit the same behaviour. These dynamics were observed during informal “hanging out” sessions and classroom observations.

Influence of cultural beliefs, discrimination, and stigmatisation on pedagogy

Dadzie firmly believed that the concept of inclusive education was deeply rooted in societal beliefs, customs, and culture. He saw a direct link (negative) between these societal beliefs and the inclusion of students with visual impairments as well as the prevailing stigmas associated with disabilities. According to Dadzie, these societal beliefs significantly influenced how mathematics was taught in inclusive classrooms, and teachers found it challenging to detach themselves from these broader perceptions.

Dadzie attributed his negative feelings towards the inclusion of students with visual impairment to perceiving them as accursed. He remarked:

I wish to make them my own in the class, but how they appear to me frustrates me as sick individuals; perhaps they can harm you if you joke with them. I am told that they are magicians; I don't know if their ancestors talked with them at night. Hmm, man, must be careful handling the blind.

In his own words, Dadzie expressed his frustration with society's ignorance and the unjust stigmatisation of individuals with visual impairments and other disabilities. He pointed out that families who had children with disabilities often faced disrespect and were considered inferior by societal standards. Dadzie shared a specific experience illustrating how societal culture and beliefs impacted his inclusive practices. He described a student with multiple disabilities, including low vision and speech problems, who received extra attention from the resource teacher to improve his speech during lessons. After some progress, the student's mother came to collect his end-of-term report. Upon discovering that the report mentioned her son's special needs, she became upset and vehemently denied any disability. She tore up the report, adamantly refusing to accept any form of disability label for her son. She was concerned about the potential stigma her son might face. Dadzie empathised with the resource teacher, who had regularly communicated with the parents but never received a response. He found it particularly troubling because the mother herself was a teacher but had not noticed or acknowledged her son's difficulties. This issue went beyond mere knowledge about inclusion; it highlighted the deeply ingrained stigmas associated with disabilities in Ghanaian society. According to Dadzie, the mother's reluctance to seek a medical diagnosis for her son stemmed from a fear of subjecting him to potential stigmatisation. Additionally, the school's head had not requested the son's assessment reports, and the resource teacher worked in isolation without engaging with the parents. Overall, Dadzie argued that there was a significant gap in understanding the philosophy and practical aspects of inclusion with many individuals doubting its effectiveness for students with visual impairment.

Medical construction of visual impairment and its influence on teacher pedagogy

Dadzie advocated for prioritising the needs of visually impairment students, recommending that they remain in special schools to receive appropriate medical treatment before being included in mainstream classrooms. He stressed the importance of teacher training, understanding visual impairment, and working under a special education coordinator's supervision to meet these students' needs.

Dadzie believed that the recognition and behaviour of students with visual impairment were the most challenging aspects he encountered in the classroom. He explained:

There are different types of visual impairment, and understanding these differences would help us apply the right pedagogy to include them. However, there was nothing like that to guide us in understanding the distinctions. Therefore, I never knew the right materials to support their education.

He expressed his feelings of ambiguity and confusion: “At first, when we started inclusive education, I thought the problem with visual impairment was that they could not see, so we needed to do something about it to help them feel at home and accepted.” He added that students with visual impairment have some additional disabilities that are hidden. Additionally, one of the students with visual impairment always feels anxious in class, and the source of this condition is not known. That is the reason why he always says inclusion at this time is not the best. Students with visual impairment should be in their special schools.

Knowledge of accommodations and adjustments

Dadzie told me:

After teaching an entire lesson to an inclusive class, I have to find extra time to attend to the learning needs of students with visual impairment, who, at the end of the day, still demonstrate incompetence in achieving learning outcomes. Based on my experience, the extra time spent clarifying and emphasising thoughts by changing methods during teaching in inclusive schools for an intended benefit to students with visual impairment is a waste of precious time because nothing beneficial is likely to come out of it with the state of the learners’ vision and, more importantly, cognition.

At the heart of it, Dadzie reiterated that the inability of students with visual impairment to overcome their academic challenges in an inclusive classroom had nothing to do with teachers’ methodological approaches in the inclusive class. Rather, it was when students with visual impairment have been “cured” that they (visually impaired learners) could have the “cognition and sanity of mind” to achieve learning outcomes as their sighted counterparts or else, it was a “waste of everybody’s time”.

Assistive technology as a means of pedagogical change

Dadzie said he was eager to improve the learning experience of students with visual impairment by adjusting his teaching methods with the help of assistive technology. He stated that he believes the knowledge of appropriate assistive technology to help in the teaching and learning of mathematics will greatly change the nature of the classroom interactions between teachers and students with visual impairment in the inclusive class. He stated: “I don’t even know if it exists, but even if it is yet to come, it will be a groundbreaking technology that will change the phase of teaching mathematics among learners with visual impairment.” However, he soon realised that making these changes for students with visual impairment proved to be quite challenging.

Strong cooperative skills

Dadzie said:

I believe collaboration amongst experts will be the game-changer. I know I am quite deficient in matters concerning teaching students with visual impairment. But sometimes, I become helpless. For example, for years, I have searched for experts who can put these mathematical concepts in accessible formats for students with visual impairment. I have been to sister inclusive schools elsewhere and talked to colleagues but have yet to meet one. I will be very happy to have access to such expertise to effectively include these students with visual impairment in the inclusive classroom.

In his view, true inclusion requires collaborative efforts to develop comprehensive plans that meet the diverse needs of students. Until these changes occur, Dadzie found it difficult to teach mathematics in an inclusive classroom and considered applying for a transfer to a non inclusive school.

In conclusion, for Dadzie, including students with visual impairment was emotionally and physically burdensome. In most cases, he relied on the resource person for support.

He recalled:

When students with visual impairments first joined the school, I would go home feeling unhappy because of society's attitudes toward disability. When inclusive education was implemented, I felt emotionally drained from managing students

with such varied needs, including those who were blind. I even told my family and friends that I wouldn't remain at this school; I felt it was simply too much to handle.

Religion as a means of solace

Every year, Dadzie's situation seemed to worsen. Many students with visual impairment were enrolled in his classroom, and he thought he should have been given adequate training to help him handle students with additional needs. He looked worried while recounting his experience, saying:

They told me that next year wouldn't be any different it would be the same challenges all over again. I often feel exhausted teaching students with visual impairment alongside the sighted, constantly praying for patience and strength. I ask God to protect me and grant me the patience and resilience. It was difficult; I would frequently get headaches. Coping with everything was challenging. Sometimes, I felt on the verge of losing my patience, but then I would remind myself of their circumstances. I knew that students with visual impairments sometimes wished they could see, even though they couldn't. I only wish I could bring them some happiness. All they told him was that his reward was in heaven as a Christian.

5.3.2 Esinam's classroom observations

On different occasions when I visited the school, it happened to be during the morning assembly. I noticed that all students with visual impairments were assembled separately and did not mingle with their sighted peers. This observation raised questions in my mind about why there was such a division during the assembly. After the headmistress had addressed all the students during the assembly, I observed that the sighted students took the initiative to guide students with visual impairment to their respective classrooms. I saw such behaviour many times when I visited the school. After the morning assembly, I walked to Esinam's (one of the teacher participants) classroom. Upon entering, I greeted Esinam, and she responded together with the students. She offered me a seat at the back of the class. I noticed that students with visual impairments were seated in the front row. Esinam commenced the lesson on social studies, introducing a topic to the students. The classroom atmosphere was calm with all students, including those with visual impairments, being attentive. Using a tactile map

made from natural materials, Esinam illustrated the various regions of Ghana, ensuring students with visual impairments could physically feel and understand geographic concepts. She actively engaged these students by asking questions, ensuring their comprehension.

When asked about the location of one particular region, many hands, including those of visually impaired students, shot up. Esinam selected a visually impaired student to respond, and I closely observed the student's approach. Using his hands, the student indicated the location on the tactile map. Esinam explained the response on the board, and, when she asked if the class agreed, sighted students responded "yes" with the whole class applauding the visually impaired student for his contribution. Subsequently, the teacher assigned the entire class a task, instructing them to draw a map of Ghana, indicating its various regions. I wondered how students with visual impairment could complete such an assignment. However, I observed Esinam patiently explaining concepts to students with visual impairment. It appeared that she had requested students with visual impairment to explain locations using their tactile maps. This approach effectively engaged them, and they seemed enthusiastic about working on their assignments. It became evident that most students touched the tactile map to gain an understanding and later translated this knowledge into writing using the Perkins Braille.

In another instance, Esinam taught a lesson on culture and symbols during an observation in the same classroom. Esinam drew symbols on the board for the sighted students and later provided students with visual impairments a set of locally crafted, wooden "Adinkra" symbols. Adinkra symbols in Akan culture are visual representations that embody various concepts, values, and philosophies. Esinam allowed the visually impaired students to explore the wooden materials, engaging their other senses. I observed the students touching and smelling the wooden Adinkra symbols to form mental pictures, enhancing their understanding through tactile learning. This inclusive approach gave them a meaningful way to interact with the lesson and connect with the cultural symbolism. Esinam used clear and detailed verbal descriptions to explain the cultural signs and symbols. The joy expressed by students with visual impairments during this observation left me pleasantly surprised, making me wonder why more teachers could not adopt similar classroom practices. To understand Esinam's background and whether she had received specific training or attended workshops on

effectively supporting students with visual impairments in inclusive classrooms, I began my inquiry.

One afternoon, while sitting at the back of the school building, I saw Esinam leading a student with visual impairment to their boarding facility. A boarding facility refers to a residence within the school where students live and sleep after school hours. When I asked about their destination, she mentioned the boarding facility, revealing her passion for assisting students with visual impairments both inside and outside the classroom. Additionally, I noticed Esinam spending break time in the resource room with students with visual impairment. As I pondered the reasons behind Esinam's exceptional approach, questions surfaced: Why is this teacher different from the others? Has she undergone any specific training, or is there a history behind her approach? What is her perspective on visual impairment? These questions lingered in my mind as I sought to understand her story regarding the inclusion of students with visual impairments.

5.3.3 Esinam's experience

The Akan proverb, "*Dua kontonkyikontonkyi na ema ye hunu odwumfour papa*", translates to "It is the severely crooked wood that reveals the true sculptor." This proverb emphasises that true skill and craftsmanship are revealed when someone is able to work with difficult or challenging materials.

Esinam was the only teacher in the inclusive school with a bachelor's degree in special education from a university in Ghana. She has taught in the regular classroom for six years and four years teaching students with visual impairment in the inclusive classroom. Esinam loved teaching students with visual impairment and was passionate about teaching in inclusive schools. She referenced an adage: "*Dua kontonkyikontonkyi na ema ye hunu odwumfour papa*", which translates to, "It is the severely crooked wood that reveals the (true) sculptor". This proverb implies that it requires an exceptional and understanding teacher to excel in the inclusive classroom. She believes that it is not an easy task to include students with visual impairment.

To her, the happiness and joy she felt while teaching students with visual impairments were incomparable to anything else. Her beliefs about inclusion stemmed not only from her love for students with visual impairment but also from her experiences with her friends who were blind. During her education at senior high school, she mingled with students with visual impairment and ate with them, and that erased the misconception

she had about students with visual impairment from society and what her grandfather told her about disability. For Esinam, inclusion was one way they could create awareness about disability within their society. She believed that students with visual impairment should be active members of society, saying:

Inclusion was good because students with visual impairment would be able to learn from the sighted students, likewise, the normal students could also learn from the visually impaired. It would be good to see individuals with visual impairment in the community would be normal, so inclusion was good.

Esinam continued:

Students with visually impairments are a rare diverse group of human beings. Please remember their diversity doesn't make them abnormal. Having such a unique social unit of humans in my class encourages me to adopt an inclusive methodology meant to accommodate and support them to also achieve their learning aspirations.

She cited an Akan proverb, "*Se obi nnim a, obi kyere*", which translates to "Knowledge is shared and passed on". Esinam believed that students with visual impairment did not possess different "cognitive abilities" (resulting from their visual impairment) from their sighted colleagues; hence, they could be guided to "achieve learning outcomes" in inclusive classrooms just like their sighted counterparts by "employing inclusive methodologies", irrespective of the learners' visual impairment. She added: "All learners in my inclusive classroom attain their learning outcomes notwithstanding their state of vision or cognition because I consciously adopt inclusive pedagogies in my daily classroom practice in order not to leave any person behind, especially students with visual impairment." She mentioned an Akan *adage*: *nsa teaa nyinaa nye pe* "All fingers are not the same" to mean perceived differences in abilities.

Tactile and auditory

Esinam established that she enhanced communication abilities (using tactile and auditory), enabling her to adequately explain concepts and directions to students with visual impairment in the inclusive classroom. The influence of these enhanced communication abilities (tactile and auditory) between her and students with visual impairment was addressed in many conversations with them. She explained:

During social studies lessons, I adopt enhanced auditory and tactile communication strategies. For instance, when teaching something about the geography of Ghana, which requires the use of the map of Ghana, I ensure that each student with visual impairment, who obviously cannot see the map of Ghana drawn on the board, has access to individually carved-out maps from paper and wooden materials. Concurrently, I consciously speak out clearly in tone and pitch to the hearing of all students. I also encourage all learners with speech to do the same when there is a need for them to contribute. These forms of communication enhance the ability of students with visual impairment to grasp how Ghana is shaped and geographically placed among other nations. Also, through touching the borders and inscriptions created on these carved-out maps, the various regions in Ghana could be perceived. My students with visual impairment and I can communicate clearly and in detail about the phenomenon under study when such auditory and tactile communication approaches are adopted. Also, I have realised that students with visual impairment can give me fair and equivalent feedback as their sighted counterparts when I adopt such tactile communication approaches.

Strong cooperative skills

Esinam emphasises the need for strong cooperation during an interview. She spoke:

My educational background has informed me of the need for cooperation among professionals managing students with visual impairment in an inclusive classroom. These experts complement each other in the provision of tailored support to students with visual impairment.

For example, I employ a resource person, who is a braille expert, to convert all my notes meant for blind students in my classroom. Therefore, at the end of the day, I create a “level playing field” for all learners, irrespective of their disabilities. I bet you, if all teachers in this school adopt this strategy, they will realise that students with visual impairment are even academically better than their sighted counterparts. Most teachers ignore these learners to their fate whilst they have the capacity to organise support for them. It is unfair to turn around to blame them for not performing when you shirk that responsibility to seek the support you cannot offer to them.

Inclusive instructional strategies

Esinam said she adopted inclusive instructional strategies, including differentiated instruction, peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and activity-based learning, as she believed they influenced the nature of classroom communication between herself and students with visual impairment. Esinam shared these in support of her assertion:

During my practice in the inclusive classroom, I employ techniques, such as differentiated instruction as well as peer tutoring techniques. The differentiated instruction techniques ensure that all my diverse learners (including the visually impaired) grasp an independent perception of the concepts within a phenomenon being taught as per their strengths.

Although parents are hesitant or suspicious about their children working with students with visual impairments, Esinam noted that not all parents share these concerns. Some are supportive of their children assisting classmates with visual impairments. Peer tutoring techniques, in particular, encourage active participation from all learners, improve engagement, and help reduce disability-related discrimination in the inclusive classroom. These strategies also expand students' ability to respond effectively and stay focused, fostering a more collaborative and inclusive learning environment.

I kept my field journaling notes while “hanging out” with the teachers informally. I was present for the meeting (a bi-weekly practice by religious and moral education teachers) organised by the head of the social studies unit of the school for all teachers in the inclusive school. During the meeting, the head of the unit emphasised the need for teachers to use the cooperative learning instructional approach in their lessons. He reiterated that it was prudent that all teachers from the unit adopted and used that instructional approach due to its ability to improve the social and academic lives of all learners (including the visually impaired) in the inclusive classroom. From this, I gathered that there is a strong emphasis within the school on inclusive teaching methods that promote collaboration and equal participation, reflecting a commitment to supporting diverse learning needs.

Assistive technology as a means of pedagogical change

Despite having limited access to technology, Esinam made the best use of her tablets to engage students in her classroom. She assisted students in interacting with materials by

providing them in both braille and writing on the board. To support her teaching, she used verbal communication along with gestures. Esinam recapped the initial assertion during the second phase of the interview:

As of now, there should have been braille embossers, which are very simple to operate. After completing the typing of your notes and assignments, you just had to connect to the embossers to put them into braille for students with visual impairment. You do not have to be chasing the braille expert to convert these works manually. Unfortunately, we are yet to have some, so we have to deal with the old manual system, which slows down work looking at the number of students with visual impairment. It even does not encourage me as a teacher to give more reading materials to students with visual impairment because of the time and resources spent on manual braille.

Esinam recognised the need to employ a Universal Learning Design, specifically focusing on the aspect of multiple means of representation to support student learning. She understood that this approach involves using various methods to present information, catering to different perceptions, symbols, and comprehension abilities among students. Esinam was aware of the diverse needs of her students and made efforts to adapt fonts, text sizes, and layouts of materials to suit their individual needs. However, due to the scarcity of technology, she found that the multiple means of representation aspect of the Universal Design for Learning framework were the least supported.

To address this challenge, she used visual supports to help students interact with visual materials. With the assistance of a resource person, she offered braille services to students with visual impairments. She highlighted the need for specialised training, mentioning that becoming a certified braille specialist requires completing a two-year programme.

She told me:

Supporting students with visual impairment should be seen as the Akan local symbol known as the *“funtunfunenfu denkyemfunenfu”*, which depicts “two Siamese crocodiles with a shared stomach, but they struggle over food and yet manage to live together”. Likewise, we must accept the responsibilities of inclusion and treat students with visual impairment the same way.

Esinam expressed her concern about providing accessible materials to students who are blind, stating that very few teachers in her school could read and write braille. This limitation made it difficult for students with visual impairments to access braille materials when needed. She relied on hand-over-hand support with premade braille activities to assist these students.

Using multiple modes

Despite limited resources, Esinam remained creative in her approach to achieving multiple means of representation in the inclusive classroom. For students with low vision, she used stickers with letters that matched handwritten letters in a notebook. She encouraged students to verbalise or point to their answers, making the most of the available resources.

Throughout her teaching experience, Esinam observed that the Universal Design for Learning was supported by accessing background knowledge, creating connections to objects and visuals, and generalising information. She provided real-life manipulatives and tactile support when teaching both sighted students and those with visual impairments. This approach proved particularly effective for students with low vision, enhancing their understanding of the subject matter. When teaching about objects, Esinam emphasised a multisensory approach, which involved pointing to the object, voicing its name, and describing it. Esinam's dedication to accommodating diverse learning needs in an inclusive classroom environment, despite resource constraints, reflects her commitment to her students' education and growth.

5.3.4 Nkansah's classroom observations

In a different classroom observation with Nkansah, the science teacher, I entered the school premises early in the morning. Spotting the headmistress, I greeted her and explained my visit to Nkansah's classroom. Accompanied by the headmistress, we headed to Nkansah's class. I greeted the students and teacher upon arrival, and then Nkansah offered me a seat in the classroom and mentioned that he was about to start teaching. As Nkansah introduced a science lesson, within fifteen minutes, there was a sudden disturbance from a student with visual impairment who shook his head and hit his hand on the table.

The teacher expressed dissatisfaction, stating, “Look at all these. I know in every household, there exist individuals who stir up trouble, but this is becoming too much”, referring to the challenges of inclusion. He questioned how students with visual impairments with “their condition” could learn in such an atmosphere. The teacher later warned the student with visual impairment to stop the disruptive behaviour. Notably, in Nkansah's classroom, students with visual impairment were never asked if they understood the lesson during teaching. Sighted students were more active in asking questions while none of the students with visual impairment participated in questioning during the teacher's instruction. It was apparent that the teacher did not appreciate the presence of students with visual impairments in his class.

One afternoon in Nkansah's classroom, after the lesson, a guest speaker addressed the class, advising against discrimination and derogatory name-calling among students with visual impairments. The speaker empowered the students with visual impairment and encouraged them to resist any form of abuse. They also assured the students that there would be a way to address any problems they might encounter. The teacher then assigned homework to be submitted the following week. As the teacher wrote the assignment on the board, a sighted student read it aloud for the visually impaired students to write. This act was touching, marking my first experience witnessing a sighted student supporting visually impaired peers in notetaking. When the school closed, some sighted students voluntarily assisted the students with visual impairment to their destinations, reflecting varying levels of willingness among the sighted students to offer support.

On another occasion in Nkansah's classroom, he divided the class into groups. While sighted students were asked to read their textbooks and answer questions, there were no braille textbooks or tactile materials for students with visual impairments to engage with the concepts. Throughout the reading time, Nkansah never posed questions to students with visual impairment, leaving them idle (idle means they are not engaged in any activity, work, or action). A student with a visual impairment started talking, and Nkansah responded harshly, shouting, “A sick person like you and you don't think about yourself.” This insulting behaviour continued during my visit with Nkansah referring to students with visual impairments as “not normal”. During reading time, students with visual impairment were observed putting their heads on the table or sitting idly while sighted students read and received explanations from Nkansah. I questioned whether

there were braille textbooks or tactile materials to support students with visual impairment. On a different day, Nkansah grouped all students with visual impairments together, leading me to wonder if he intended to teach them separately or provide additional support. However, the class ended without any assistance or support for the students with visual impairment. Hanging out with Nkansah outside the classroom, he expressed frustration, stating that the Ghana Education Service claims to practise inclusion but does not have the necessary resources and teacher training. Nkansah emphasised the lack of respect for teachers dedicated to educating students with visual impairments. While pedagogical innovations, such as mixed grouping, are designed to foster inclusivity, cultural elements still hinder their success. For instance, Nkansah mentioned incidents leading some parents to withdraw their children from the school, such as when a parent observed their child being instructed to assist a student with visual impairment. Nkansah shared that when he approached the mother of the sighted student who had assisted students with visual impairments, she expressed deep fear. She feared her child might incur curses, lose sight, or give birth to a blind individual in the future. The mother's perspective was influenced by seeing individuals with visual impairments on the roadside, and she questioned whether this was the future envisioned for her child by the teacher. This situation left all parties involved—the mother, the sighted student, and the student with visual impairment—in a state of profound sadness and dismay. After Nkansah finished recounting this story, I could sense some teachers' apprehension about handling students with visual impairments in the school.

5.3.5 Nkansah's experiences

The proverb, "*Se biribi ankɔ ka papa a, enka ennye gɛdɛ*", translates to "If nothing pricked the palm tree, it would not have rattled." This Ghanaian proverb suggests that inclusive education is an external force, a Western ideology that conflicts with Ghanaian culture. If the school authorities had not integrated students with visual impairments into inclusive classrooms, teachers might have felt reluctant to teach them. Nkansah, a 37-year-old teacher with twelve years of teaching experience, joined the Unity Inclusive School inclusive classroom four years ago. Before that, he spent eight years teaching science at a different school. In 2014, Nkansah received the prestigious National Best Teacher Award in his municipality.

Poor implementation of inclusive education

Nkansah was not interested in teaching at the junior high school level anymore, but he did not have a choice, and he had to teach at the inclusive school. He did not believe in teaching science in the inclusive classroom. To him, the implementation was not the best because inclusion was imposed on teachers without any better preparation, even though it started as a pilot study. He explained:

Teaching students with visual impairment in the inclusive classroom was very complicated. Inclusion could not be implemented in this way. There wasn't any planning, just random decisions. We never achieve anything better at the pilot base and why must they implement it? We need to plan on how to meet every student's needs and adequate resources. Students must be prepared for inclusion, both physically and emotionally. Students with visual impairment should be gradually included, starting with a few of them spending a short time in the classroom for half a day then later they can be fully included. The problem was inadequate preparation. Looking at the school compound, you could see that the school, teachers, and students were not prepared.

Exclusion pedagogy within inclusion

As Nkansah reflected on his experiences, he expressed that he was not prepared to teach science to students with visual impairment at the inclusive school. Nobody considered how society would see him teaching students who are visually impaired. After all his university education, he ended up teaching students with visual impairment.

His problem with inclusion was his readiness and qualifications. As he explained:

I was not trained to teach science to students with visual impairment; they did not give me the option. I graduated from a college of education with second class; in fact, I never studied science at the college—I did language—but because there was a shortage of staff in the school, I was forced to learn science and became a science teacher. I don't have the right qualifications.

He never thought about teaching in an inclusive classroom. This is because he did not know how to work with students with visual impairment. Consequently, whenever Nkansah struggled, he blamed himself and the Ghana Education Service for not making a difference among students during teaching moments.

He believed that if the school authorities organised workshops for the teachers, he would be able to overcome some of these challenges. He stated:

I am used to teaching science to sighted students, and I learned more from the resource teachers. But, with inclusion, I needed training; I needed to know what inclusion was, especially for visual impairment! I know that there is no respect for teaching students; everybody believes that they are accursed!

Nevertheless, Nkansah was worried that simply gaining knowledge would not change his beliefs about inclusion. He was not convinced that inclusion could benefit every student, given students' different needs. His classroom was divided into two different worlds. He and his sighted students find it difficult to interact and mingle with students with visual impairment.

Students with visual impairment felt that they did not belong in the inclusive classroom whenever they needed support. Nkansah stated, "I am not specially trained to teach students with visual impairments; they should be taught by special education teachers." His feelings of nonaffiliation with students with visual impairment were obvious; he never thought of students with visual impairment as his students. Adversely, he believed that the inclusion of students with visual impairment was a valueless experience for him. He said:

Students with visual impairment did not benefit. The sighted students were in their own lives. Students with visual impairment fail to trust everyone and do not want to make friends; they always complain about the sighted students. It was just an exhausting experience.

Nkansah stated that the behaviour of students with visual impairment prevented him from doing more to support them. They could hit hard on the table, making noise, and sometimes decide to go out or stay in the resource room. He felt very bad because he believed that students with low vision who are normal without any problems are sometimes easier to handle than blind students. He felt he had done his best in this inclusive education. Nkansah added:

It was difficult to teach in the inclusive classroom. I am always tired because of students with visual impairment and their appearance. It was hard to teach students with visual impairment some basic concepts in science. I struggled to

help them understand the concept because I was not specifically trained to include these students and perhaps there was no respect.

Nkansah felt that teaching science to visually impaired students, practically speaking, was not possible. He explained that in teaching chemistry, when demonstrating which elements come together to form, for example, water (H₂O) or salt (NaCl), he writes these chemical reactions on the board, creating barriers for visually impaired students. He remarked that during teaching, he does verbalise or say it to their hearing but is not certain they are able to comprehend. “There is nothing I and the other science teachers can do”, Nkansah laments.

Medical construction of visual impairment and its influence on pedagogy

Nkansah mentioned that “students with visual impairment are sick, they have eye conditions”. To the best of his knowledge, they need to be segregated, given special treatment for their eyes, and sent to special schools rather than inclusive schools. He suggested they needed to receive “constant medical treatment from the ophthalmologist” for them to be “cured” before their reintegration into inclusive classrooms.

He commented on the Akan proverb, *"Se wonsa akyi be ye wo de a, ente se wo nsa yem"* that translates to "Even if you love licking the back of your hand, it's not the same as licking your palm". This implies that despite our efforts to include students with visual impairments in mainstream schools, they may still find special schools more beneficial than inclusive classrooms. It is important to remember that inclusive education is not our culture. He continued: “You don't just wake up and send these students with visual impairment to inclusive schools. Students with visual impairment could only be impactful in inclusive classrooms when they have been cured of their sickness. We should attend to first things first.”

He emphasised that the inability of students with visual impairment to surmount their academic challenges in an inclusive classroom had nothing to do with teachers' pedagogical approaches in the inclusive class. Rather, it was when students with visual impairment were “cured” that they (visually impaired learners) could have peace of mind to learn and achieve their goals like their sighted counterparts.

Field journaling notes kept whilst I was hanging out with the teachers, both formally (via planning lessons and discussions of assignments and group work) and informally (during break times), also corroborated the influence of medical understanding of visual impairment on teacher pedagogy. I sat in a lesson preparation schedule (weekly practice by integrated science teachers) organised by Nkansah (the head of the integrated science unit of the school) for all second-year integrated science teachers at the inclusive school. During the discussions on assignments and group work, there were arguments among teachers not to stress out students with visual impairment by either making them group leaders or assigning difficult group work to them. The meeting subsequently agreed that all students with visual impairment should be put into one group (rather than joining their sighted colleagues in other groups) and given an assignment intended for average performing students. This decision was arrived at because of the perception that students with visual impairment were sick, weak, and intellectually incapacitated unlike the typical and normal sighted second-year learners. Hence, they were incapable of achieving comparable learning outcomes as their sighted colleagues.

Strong cooperative skills

Although he was exhausted by his work and beliefs about visual impairment, Nkansah's relationships with the resource person helped him to overcome some of the challenges. The resource person served as a source of knowledge and helped him become accustomed to teaching science to students with visual impairment. However, he still struggled with inclusion, believing that he needed to learn more about the inclusion of students with visual impairment. It was evident through the data gathered that teachers' ability to demonstrate strong cooperative skills enhanced the nature of the classroom interactions between teachers and students with visual impairment. Nkansah shared:

Upon my 12 years of experience, I realised that these students with visual impairment could achieve academic success as their sighted counterparts if we, as teachers, maintain strong cooperation with other experts, such as special education coordinators, social workers, clinical psychologists, ophthalmologists, mobility training experts, and other assistive technology professionals. There is no way the teacher alone can assist students with visual impairment to overcome all their challenges within the inclusive class.

For instance, there is a student who was diagnosed with low vision and placed in my class. Upon interacting with the learner for a while, I realised she could benefit from appropriate lenses but, due to the inability of the family to provide, she struggled in her academic because she could not read with an unaided eye. Subsequently, I contacted the municipal social worker, who solicited some funds to get the girl a pair of reading glasses. Currently, she is among the best students in my class. Therefore, we need to cooperate with other professionals to harness the required expertise to support these learners to thrive in the inclusive classroom.

Influence of cultural belief, discrimination, and stigmatisation on pedagogy

Nkansah recounted that in 2019, he aspired to become an assemblyman. In Ghana, an assemblyman is the leader of a local assembly, elected by the community to head a specific suburb. Nkansah ran for this position in his community but, ultimately, lost the election. After the election, a man from the community said:

What better thing at all do you want to offer us, what do you know? You are teaching sick people like the blind and you want to lead us? How come? Did you think about it carefully before contesting for the position? We will never vote for you if you contest hundred times until you stop teaching these students with visual impairment. We don't want gods to incur any curses on our community.

Nkansah became afraid of teaching students with visual impairment in the inclusive school because he realised that there was no respect for him in society. He emphasised that because of these sociocultural beliefs, when he goes to the classroom, he does not have the zeal to teach students with visual impairment.

He recounted another experience when he was taking a walk in the evening when somebody saw him and asked him whether his son could get a job opportunity to teach in their school. The man explained that his son has a senior high school certificate, and the man thought teaching students with visual impairment did not require any further qualifications. The man further stated:

What exactly are students with visual impairments learning? I simply want my son to contribute something meaningful to his community. He could earn some income instead of remaining idle at home. Moreover, when teaching these students, one must be cautious, as there's a risk of perpetuating blindness inadvertently.

At that moment, Nkansah expressed feeling deeply disheartened upon realising that many in society believe his education is inadequate and that he only teaches students with visual impairments as a last resort. In reality, Nkansah felt that teachers teaching science to students with visual impairment must be rewarded and supported. He wanted the entire school community to appreciate their work and trust them as professional teachers doing their best.

He recounted another situation when he felt disheartened. One day he was teaching and had a call from a parent of a student with visual impairment in his classroom. He received the call, and the mother of the visually impaired student said her son was sick, and he had come home without telling the school authorities. The mother of the visually impaired student felt that it was not appropriate for her son to come home without telling anyone, so she decided to inform their class teacher. As soon as the headmistress of the school saw Nkansah on the phone talking to the students' mother, she shouted at him, questioning why he was using instructional time for making calls. The headmistress continued: "These are some of the things some of you do that leave a negative impression on us. Don't make calls here." The headmistress came over and informed him that he was not allowed to talk to people on the phone during teaching. Nkansah told her that he knew and that he was sorry, but he had to receive the call because it was urgent. The headmistress ignored Nkansah and walked away, and Nkansah was worried because of the actions of the headmistress. He thought the headmistress would have understood him. Nkansah felt that the headmistress did not encourage him to endure his difficulties in teaching science to students with visual impairment in his classroom. His emotional well-being was very necessary, and he said, "The school authorities need to recognise and appreciate the efforts of teachers in the inclusive classroom."

Inclusive instructional strategies

Nkansah recalled one time when a teacher in the school observed him in class, teaching students with visual impairment. Nkansah relayed:

He witnessed how I dealt with students with visual impairment. He told me that he loved how I dealt with students with visual impairment. I was emotionally touched by his words of encouragement. I felt happy because I realised that I was doing more. I was happy to hear that.

However, Nkansah also said that he was not supported. Teachers teaching students with visual impairment do not receive allowances for including students with visual impairment. Nkansah believed that he should have received an allowance, saying:

Teachers in special schools receive some allowance in teaching students with visual impairment. This is because we all teach students with special needs. Teachers teaching students with visual impairment receive more support because we are not supported.

Nkansah did not complain about financial support. He felt that his efforts were not appreciated or recognised, not even by the parents of students with visual impairment. Nkansah said that sometimes, in the inclusive classroom with students with visual impairment, it felt like doing good but doing nothing. He said: “Even the parents of students with visual impairment made me feel unsupported and unappreciated. Sometimes I wondered why I was being treated like that! I teach their wards.”

5.3.6 Baah’s classroom observation

At one of Baah’s classroom observations, I entered the classroom early, finding the students seated and waiting for their teacher. After greeting the class, I was offered a seat at the back, and, within fifteen minutes, Baah entered. The students stood up and greeted him. Baah, a religious and moral education teacher, wrote the title, “The Family and the Community”, on the board, providing a detailed lesson description. He discussed the meanings of difficult words using chalk. After the lesson, he instructed students to read the text and answer questions from their textbooks.

Notably, students with visual impairments were sitting idle. I observed a student with visual impairment calling for a sighted student to read the text so that he could answer

the questions. While the rest of the students worked individually, some engaged with friends, and the room became noisy. The teacher warned the class to keep quiet. As the headmistress's office was near the classroom, the noise caught her attention, and she entered the classroom and inquired about the subject being taught. Upon learning that students with visual impairment were not actively participating, she advised the teacher to ensure their inclusion. However, in the Ghanaian Akan community, there is a traditional belief that chiefs, due to their revered status and historical roles, are not expected to interact closely with people with disabilities, including those with visual impairments. This cultural norm stems from longstanding attitudes and practices that often marginalise individuals with disabilities. Reflecting on this perspective, Baah explained, "You know I am a chief, and I hold this position in high esteem, so I am very careful when dealing with such individuals." This statement illustrates how deeply ingrained these beliefs are and how they can influence a chief's interactions with members of the community who have disabilities. Baah's facial expression showed that he was not interested in handling students with visual impairment.

As the lesson continued, sighted students engaged with the teacher while students with visual impairment remained idle and some even dozed off. Later, Baah assigned homework, and I noticed students with visual impairment were given an extra one third of the stipulated time compared to sighted learners. When asked about the additional time provided to students with visual impairments for completing assignments, Baah explained that the resource person had recommended this accommodation. He said, "Due to the challenges students with visual impairments face with tasks like setting the Perkins Braille and understanding contractions, they need extra time to achieve academic success and equity with their sighted peers." This accommodation reflects a broader effort to support inclusive education; however, it also adds to the teachers' workload and stress.

The pressure on teachers was further intensified by the headmistress's frequent classroom visits when she would sometimes interrupt lessons, even just minutes before a break. Her insistence on maintaining a strict, hierarchical relationship with the teachers and her constant oversight made it challenging for teachers to feel autonomous in their classrooms. Not allowing teachers to close classroom doors as she wanted to continuously monitor their teaching added to this stress. The headmistress's approach not only undermined teachers' confidence but also complicated their efforts to

implement inclusive teaching strategies effectively, making the classroom environment more tense and challenging for everyone involved.

The above scenario repeated itself over time, leaving teachers feeling unsupported and alone. Teaching students with visual impairment at the Unity Inclusive Junior High School was emotionally and physically challenging for both teachers and sighted students. The inclusive school's atmosphere was, at times, uncomfortable. Students with visual impairment exhibited various behaviours, including screaming and making unnecessary noise, overwhelming the teachers. Compounding the difficulties, sighted students labelled some students with visual impairments with derogatory names, and others were unwilling to sit with them.

5.3.7 Baah's experiences

Baah has a bachelor's degree in religious and moral education from a university and has worked for 18 years. For seven years, he has worked with students with hearing impairment. Three years ago, he was transferred to teach in an inclusive school. This was the first time he had taught students with visual impairment.

Poor implementation of inclusive education

Baah was nervous because he believed that he did not know enough about teaching students who were blind and did not know how to read braille. He quoted an Akan adage, "*Se kwatrekwa ka se obema wo ntoma a, tie ne din*", which translates to "If a naked man promises you a cloth, listen to his name". This suggests that it is prudent to assess the capability of someone who may not possess the necessary expertise in teaching students with visual impairments, particularly within an inclusive classroom environment. He explained that visual impairment was difficult to handle, stating:

It wasn't easy for me to handle. It was hard because I did not know about the students' characteristics, growth, abilities, or needs. I did not have the appropriate background. Even though we have a long history of blindness, once I am asked to teach here, I have to honour it.

He felt that to include the visually impaired, teachers must be rewarded and given adequate training. When asked about his understanding of inclusive education, he said that it is about teaching students with learning disabilities in the same classroom.

Baah shared a similar sentiment to Nkansah and attributed his overwhelming feelings of inadequacy to the flawed execution of the inclusion programme. He identified misunderstandings, mismanagement, and inadequate planning as the root causes behind the hindrance to educational opportunities. He reflected:

Inclusion was challenging for all of us because we weren't adequately prepared. There was no clear structure or schedule for its implementation. The past two years have drained me. The school headmistress and supervisors accepted students with visual impairment without proper planning, leaving us with no established mechanism or timeline. Without proper planning, rules, and thorough analysis, it was impossible to provide a quality education for these students. We needed to equip them with the skills for independence, guide their behaviours, and collaborate effectively before full inclusion could succeed.

According to Baah, the inclusion of students with visual impairment in regular classrooms was not an easy task at all. To him, it was like a big river, and he was forced to swim in it without any knowledge about how to swim. Baah believed that for the inclusion of students with visual impairment to be successful, it had to be introduced properly. This means identifying every student's condition, knowing the degree of the disability, and the appropriate support to be used for any other additional disability. Baah added:

“I do not blame the resource person. They should have trained us very well to handle students with visual impairment. Sometimes, I felt that the school authorities did not know what to do and just started inclusion.” However, Baah struggled during the teaching moment. In addition to facing difficulty in handling students with visual impairment, the resource person normally disrupted the class when Baah was teaching. He felt that the sighted students were not focused when the resource person came to the class and supported students with visual impairment.

Influence of cultural belief, discrimination, and stigmatisation on pedagogy

When Baah began working with students with visual impairment, he was completely opposed to it. According to Baah, he was afraid to engage with students with visual impairment because he was told that if people mingled with individuals with visual impairment, they were likely to bring curses to the family.

Individuals with visual impairment were not allowed to hold any position within Ghanaian society, and their place was normally to stand at the roadside and beg for money. Baah believed that teaching these students together with their sighted counterparts was a disadvantage.

Medical construction of visual impairment and its influence on pedagogy

Baah thought students with visual impairment should be in a special school to obtain specialised services and get healthy before thinking about competing with the sighted. He expressed, "When you are sick, you get medical treatment at the appropriate facility, not in an inclusive classroom. And mind you, I am a teacher, not a medical professional or clinical psychologist to provide that service which they need urgently before anything else." Baah believed that it was a waste of everybody's limited time teaching students with visual impairment in an inclusive classroom. He continued: "This is so because unless these students are healed, for them to also have clarity in their minds, no amount of pedagogical changes adopted by teachers, whatsoever, will likely benefit them."

Exclusion pedagogy within inclusion

Baah said that during instruction:

I came across visual information, including images, pictures, and diagrams, among others. Due to the impairment in vision of some of the learners in my classroom, I make sure I provide verbal explanations for almost all the visual information. But you can bear with me that, at times during certain circumstances, it becomes utterly impossible to verbalise certain concepts like the effects of curses and witchcraft, among others.

During break time, Baah only interacted with sighted students. He quoted the adage, "*Aninguasee nfata Okaniba*", translating to "Public disgrace is considered unbecoming of an Akan child". This means it would be a shame for Baah to remain teaching individuals with disabilities. Baah said the inclusion of students with low vision was a challenge but not students with hearing impairment. He expressed:

I was able to handle them easily, and I could see them benefiting. In my previous teaching, some students with hearing impairment were unable to speak.

Now they can speak and interact with normal students, unlike students with visual impairment.

Teaching and interacting with students with visual impairment was a big problem. In his opinion, students with visual impairment can cause confusion in the classroom by making unnecessary noise during teaching time. He normally sees them gathered and singing. He suggested:

Maybe a music classroom may benefit them. When you tell them to stop, they reply, “When the sighted are not paying attention and sudden or occasional cheers come out during teaching, why don’t you punish them? When we, the visually impaired, make noise, you try to punish us.”

Baah truly wanted to help students with visual impairment, saying the proverb "*Hu ma ni so ma me nti na ntwee mienu nam*", meaning "It is because of 'blow the dust off my eyes' that two antelopes walk together". This adage means that everyone needs to be supported. He tried many times to include students with visual impairment, but it could not work because he admitted that he did not have the skills required to do that. He lamented, "I felt guilty because I could not teach the normal students and left the blind students doing nothing." Baah said:

Students with visual impairment were not included; they do their things separately in class. The role of the resource person was not done well to support students with visual impairment. The normal students did not know how to accept students with visual impairment. All that they could do was support their movement at times.

He believed that the resource person's understanding of including students with visual impairment was only physical inclusion but not inclusion with learning.

Lack of support

Baah said that he knows that inclusive education is not what they are practising because there is nothing to motivate teachers and no support for them. His feelings about teaching students with visual impairment changed the way he viewed himself. He said that he used to be rewarded for his teaching practices and that once he was chosen as a good teacher.

At the end of each year, he used to be very satisfied with his students' progress.

In contrast, for the past three years, he has felt emotionally overwhelmed. Baah felt guilty and incompetent that he was unable to meet the needs of students with visual impairment. He lamented, "I feel like I'm not fulfilling my role properly because I'm unable to effectively teach and enhance the lives of these students. They are in my class, but I should have done more to support them." His initial enthusiasm to provide a quality education for all students was overshadowed when he encountered some students with visual impairment exhibiting distressing behaviours like screaming and body rocking, which left him feeling helpless. The consequences of the inclusion of students with visual impairment were not limited to Baah alone; they had an impact on sighted students as well. He observed a decline in the academic progress of his sighted students and remarked, "Inclusion didn't just affect me; it affected the regular students too. Before inclusion, I could track their progress, but it's difficult to see many of them making significant strides now."

Strong cooperative skills

Baah stressed that there should be collaboration among members and better planning. He said that before they can do proper inclusion in the school, there should be an annual plan with a start and an end. The resource person, regular teachers, parents, other professionals like the eye doctor, and the headmistress must know what they are to accomplish and what they want every student to achieve. At the junior high school level, there was always pressure on teachers, and, therefore, students with visual impairment and their normal counterparts never benefited. Baah's choice to be a teacher was influenced by his belief that education has the potential to change human life. He believed that students with visual impairment can reach their potential and aspirations.

Baah said that collaboration is the philosophical foundation of inclusion. He said he worked in an environment where everyone had individual roles, and having no shared plans or goals was difficult for him. To Baah, working with the resource person for students with visual impairment was problematic. They were in the same school but in different classroom environments. He said, "We worked differently unless there was a problem among students with visual impairment. They fail to collaborate and discuss matters together."

The absence of collaboration negatively affected students with visual impairment. He found it difficult to work with the resource person and communicate with the parents of students with visual impairment. In the class, students with visual impairment did not receive the support and attention they should have received. There was a student with low vision Baah wanted to help because he seemed to be gifted. Baah expressed:

I had a student with visual impairment who was gifted. That student could recall and read everything. I was eager to talk to his father and tell him about his son because I knew that would make his father happy and encourage his son's education. My main aim was to do something about his giftedness. He could teach him many things. However, I could not get the opportunity to communicate with his father.

Baah informed the resource teacher, and he discouraged Baah because the resource teacher believed that the father of the visually impaired student was a traditionalist, and he ignored his son. He emphasised that the father could not accept his son's condition. Baah wanted to talk with his father, let him know that his son was gifted, and encourage him to concentrate on his giftedness, not on his weaknesses. Baah became very emotional when he realised that the student could do more with the appropriate support. Baah was frustrated because he was unable to communicate with the families or meet the student's needs. He said that nothing could be done in the absence of collaboration and communication.

Religion as a means of solace

Baah expressed his frustration with the lack of support from the resource teacher, feeling they could have done more to assist him: "It was challenging to teach when the resource teacher started braille transcription and spoke directly to the students with visual impairments in my class. At times, I became really upset with both the resource teacher and the situation." Despite these challenges, Baah turned to his faith for comfort, stating, "But through it all, I relied on my faith. God is our helper. It wasn't easy." His reliance on religion provided him with the strength to endure the difficulties he faced in the inclusive classroom.

Inclusive instructional strategies

Baah reiterated that inclusive instructional strategies influenced the nature of classroom interactions between teachers and students with visual impairment. He said:

I believe in cooperative learning as an instructional approach within the inclusive classroom with students with visual impairment. By putting these learners into groups, irrespective of one's disability, there is individual accountability. Again, I have realised that with this instructional approach, I enhance the extent and duration of learners' quality of academic and social contacts.

Assistive technology as a means of pedagogical change

Baah expressed that knowledge of assistive technology impinges on the nature of the classroom interactions between himself and students with visual impairment in the inclusive classroom. He felt teachers' knowledge of assistive technology and how it could be utilised to benefit students who have visual impairments is critical in the inclusive classroom. Baah stated:

These technologies have been manufactured to make our interactions with students with visual impairment in the inclusive class more interactive. However, these technologies cannot be found here in our school. Therefore, we still resort to the old system of doing things. For example, in this day and age, we still have to go and print large font sizes on papers during assignments and examinations whilst some students with visual impairment could have benefited from magnifiers.

This section has emphasised the importance of assistive technology in enhancing interactions in inclusive classrooms. Baah highlights that without access to these tools, teachers are forced to rely on outdated methods, which limits the effectiveness of their teaching for students with visual impairments.

5.4 Section summary

The continuum of understandings regarding disability among the four teachers reveals varied pedagogical approaches to educating students with visual impairments.

At one end, we have Baah, Dadzie, and Nkansah—teachers of mathematics, science, and religious and moral education—who resist the idea of including students with visual impairments in mainstream classrooms. Baah expresses a lack of confidence in his ability to effectively include these students while Dadzie highlights the challenges he faces in teaching mathematics to them, despite undergoing limited training. Nkansah notes that the introduction of inclusion was poorly executed, leading to the isolation of visually impaired students within the inclusive setting.

Sociocultural factors significantly influence these teachers' pedagogical skills and their attitudes toward teaching students with visual impairments. Both Baah and Dadzie are willing to assist but feel hindered by their insufficient knowledge. Baah, who is a chief, emphasises his struggles with engaging with visually impaired students. Meanwhile, religion emerges as a source of solace for these three educators. In contrast, Esinam fully embraces inclusive education and effectively demonstrates her teaching skills, akin to a craftsman at work. She inspires hope in her students with visual impairments by employing various approaches that make them feel included, accepted, and a part of the school community.

5.5 Understanding the voices of students with visual impairment in an inclusive classroom: "Nothing About Us Without Us"

An advisory group consisting of students with visual impairments was established in order to help me make sense of what I observed in the teachers' classrooms. Through this group, I gained further insights into the perspectives of students. Four final-year students with visual impairment were recruited to advise on the data gathered as teachers tell their stories in inclusive classrooms.

5.5.1 How visual impairment is understood by teachers at Unity Inclusive School

During the focus group discussion, students with visual impairment were asked their understanding of whether they believe their condition is a sickness. They shared their experiences as follows.

Aba was surprised that some people in society believed that blindness is a sickness and that visually impaired students are incapable of overcoming their academic challenges, thus suggesting they should be sent back to a special school.

She expressed: "*Etua wo yɔnko ho a wo se etua dua mu*", which translates to unless one experiences a condition personally, one may underestimate its severity. Aba added:

I recall that most, if not all, of us underwent an assessment at our regional and school assessment centre before being admitted and placed in various classes in this inclusive school. If we were deemed capable of fitting into this learning system alongside sighted students, why do people hold such views instead of coming down to our level of understanding to meet our needs?

Aba stated that she was from a poor peasant family. There was no way she could have survived at Unity Inclusive School in terms of buying textbooks and sometimes even eating if she had not received a bursary from the Department of Social Welfare. Aba noted:

When I initially came here, things were bad. It was one of my teachers who took me to the municipal office where I met the social worker and told him about my challenges. Subsequently, I received educational support from the municipality at least every quarter to cater for my educational needs. I have a sound mind to concentrate on my studies now. I'm able to perform very well both in the inclusive classroom through my contributions and out of the classroom during assignments. If there was no collaboration with these social workers, I would have been on the streets now begging to survive.

Efe said:

We believe if teachers debunk the notion of visual impairment and concentrate on us when teaching, I think they will get to know the best in us. Teachers must know the best way to teach us using appropriate teaching and learning materials. We suggest that they should avoid expressions, like "Look at the board" or "Have you seen this?", among others. I now understand why most of them don't care whether we understand what they teach or not. They think we are abnormal when compared to sighted colleagues.

Ato also articulated his complete disagreement that visual impairment is a sickness that needs to be cured before receiving inclusive education:

Do they know how long I have been through surgeries and different treatment schedules, both in orthodox and traditional medicine facilities? We, the visually impaired, are like the sighted learners and even unique; let me tell you, we are like their sighted children in their house.

She continues:

Even though some of us cannot see, we can see through other senses; I wish that one day, one of them becomes blind to understand us better. I always say attending inclusive school is like being in prison. They should rather see us as a diverse group of people who need to be supported to also achieve our goals. More importantly, they should know that our visual impairment has nothing to do with our cognitive abilities and intellectual functioning.

Fiifi believed that teachers' views of disability are a reflection of society who sees them as being sick, cursed, beggars, and dumb. Fiifi remarked: "That is why we students with visual impairment perform poorly at the end of the day", and added:

How do you expect me to perform when I don't understand whatever you teach because of the methods used in teaching, discrimination against us, and our non inclusion in even group activities in the class? It is pathetic. They should remember the proverb: "When two carry, it does not hurt". This implies that teachers and sighted students must wholeheartedly support them. They are the same as the normal individual without any evil spirit to harm somebody.

5.5.2 Effects of visual impairment on learning

According to Efe, it is quite unfortunate for some people to think that students with visual impairment are not intellectually capable of pursuing education with sighted counterparts in the same classroom. Efe explains that she was sighted two years earlier and was placed first in class during her entire year in primary school. Last year, when she came to the Unity Inclusive School, because of the emotional stress she had to deal with, Efe was among the best five students in her class. Efe believes if students with visual impairment are adequately supported in class—similar to their sighted classmates—the visually impaired can even perform better than some of them. She used the adage, "*Aboa a, onni dua no onyame na ɔpra ne ho*", which translates to "God is the helper of the helpless".

This proverb emphasises the belief that divine support is available to those who find themselves in vulnerable or disadvantaged positions, like the visually impaired.

However, students with visual impairment agreed that the use of tactile materials enhanced communication abilities (tactile and auditory) and influenced the nature of the classroom interactions. Abo said that they needed those tactile materials. Abo explained that this was because through the use of tactile materials, visually impaired students can get a mental picture of what the teacher is talking about in the classroom. Abo states:

I see through touching, so if you cannot create something for me to perceive, how do you require me to see? Then, I cannot benefit from their teaching. I love our social studies lessons because, whatever the sighted can perceive through seeing, we also can do the same through touching in that classroom. The other subject teachers should learn from that madam.

Ato said most of her classmates were very sad that they were prevented from doing any serious studies in mathematics, especially those who enjoyed mathematics before becoming blind. She explained:

I know even those who have not seen before will enjoy mathematics if the basic concepts at least could be put in tactile materials formats. Concepts like algebra could be put into braille and tactile accessible formats so we can also learn the subject. It is possible; they should do that else we are losing. From here, it means we cannot pursue any mathematics-related programme or career, which is quite unfair.

5.5.3 Teachers changing methods to suit the visually impaired

Fiifi enjoyed Esinam's class because of her clear communication and the space she provided for students to freely express themselves. He noted that the main challenge in other classes is that some teachers do not speak loudly enough for him to hear, and, when he raises concerns, he is often told to keep quiet. In contrast, Fiifi felt more able to participate in Esinam's class because her teaching strategies were more effective and inclusive, allowing for better student engagement compared to other teachers.

Additionally, students admitted that at times some teachers used strong cooperative skills to improve the nature of the classroom interactions among them. Efe commented that:

Truly speaking, I can perform very well in subjects when I have the textbook in braille. It is okay to listen to certain statements and keep them in mind, but, as human as we are, we also forget. So, when it is brailled, you can go for it anytime and refresh your thoughts. Therefore, a strong collaboration of my teachers with the braille expert will help enhance my academic success and even contribute to the inclusive classroom because I can read the materials before coming to the class for the teacher to teach me.

During a focus group discussion with students with visual impairments, participants endorsed some teachers' viewpoints on accommodations and adjustments concerning their interactions with students with visual impairments in the inclusive classroom.

Efe mentioned that some teachers provided support by offering accommodations and adjustments, particularly during examinations. As Efe explained, "We need time to organise ourselves and our materials properly, hence the necessity for these accommodations and adjustments." However, Efe said it was regrettable that some of her sighted colleagues perceived it as an undeserved advantage granted to the visually impaired. Efe elaborated:

Some go to the extent of even questioning the marks some of us obtain during examination. Some of them feel that it is due to some of these accommodations and adjustments that is why we score higher marks than them. It can be disheartening to hear them express such sentiments. It is only equitable for us to be provided with such accommodations and adjustments, but not out of pity as many of them believe.

Ato stated that inclusive instructional strategies, such as differentiated instruction and peer tutoring, truly brought out the best in them as individuals and as part of a team. Ato relayed:

Our involvement in groups alongside our sighted colleagues, learners with other disabilities, and amongst ourselves as visually impaired students during classroom activities enhances our overall strengths and mitigates our weaknesses. I recall Miss Esinam employing these methods during social studies, and they are indeed commendable strategies ... [but also added] ... I cannot distinguish any special methods that these teachers use in their teaching.

It follows the usual approach: I know they prepare their notes, deliver the lesson, and if you don't understand, they either try to explain or just ignore you. I haven't noticed any different or unique teaching methods being applied here.

5.5.4 Key messages from the Student Advisory Group: "Nothing About Us Without Us"

In examining the students' responses through the principle of "Nothing About Us Without Us", we uncover deeper insights into the marginalisation and exclusion faced by students with visual impairments in inclusive education settings. Students' perspectives challenge traditional views of disability as an individual deficit or medical issue that needs "fixing". Instead, Critical Disability Theory (CDT) argues that disability is a socially constructed phenomenon, shaped by societal barriers rather than individual limitations. The students' experiences reveal how the educational system, through its ableist structures and attitudes, disables rather than supports them. For instance, when teachers fail to use inclusive instructional strategies or when tactile materials are missing, students are denied equal participation in learning. This emphasises how exclusion is perpetuated, not by the impairment itself but by the systemic neglect to accommodate diverse needs.

Efe's frustration with teachers' misconceptions, particularly the belief that visual impairment diminishes intellectual capacity, highlights the social stigmatisation CDT addresses. Her call for teachers to shift focus from the impairment to more effective pedagogical methods is a critique of the medical model of disability, which CDT and Ubuntu philosophy challenges. Efe's story, where she excelled despite her visual impairment, underscores that it is not the impairment but the environment that restricts her potential. Similarly, Ato's remarks about the exclusion from mathematics due to the absence of accessible formats align with CDT's critique of institutional barriers. By not providing braille or tactile versions of mathematical concepts, the educational system effectively bars visually impaired students from accessing entire academic disciplines, perpetuating inequality. This calls for a systemic change, not only in resource allocation but also in teacher training and curriculum design to address these inequities.

The principle of "Nothing About Us Without Us" further emphasises that students with disabilities should be central in discussions and decisions about their education.

In this case, the students' voices reveal a lack of inclusion in the very design and implementation of inclusive education policies. For example, Fiifi's observation that teachers' views of disability reflect societal stigma highlights how societal narratives continue to shape the treatment of visually impaired students in school. Without incorporating the perspectives of these students into policy and practice, the school system reinforces ableist attitudes rather than dismantling them.

The students' demand for more tactile materials and better instructional methods is a direct expression of "Nothing About Us Without Us". They articulate clearly what they need to succeed: appropriate teaching materials, better communication, and inclusive learning strategies. This principle argues that policies and practices should not be imposed on them but should be codesigned with them, reflecting their lived experiences and specific needs. In summary, the results reflect how CDT helps explain the marginalisation faced by visually impaired students in the classroom with social and structural barriers being the primary factors disabling them. By advocating for systemic change and highlighting the importance of including students with visual impairment individuals in policymaking ("Nothing About Us Without Us"), these insights call for a rethinking of how inclusive education is implemented to truly empower and support students with visual impairment.

5.6 Chapter summary

This chapter explored the experiences and perceptions of four teachers regarding the inclusion of students with visual impairments. Through a combination of interviews, observations, hanging out with field journaling, and focus group discussions with four final-year students with visual impairments, the narratives provided have been instrumental in understanding the real-world dynamics of inclusive classrooms.

The stories shared by the teachers shed light on the nature of their experiences in such settings. They revealed that the improper implementation of inclusive practices has not only failed to create welcoming classrooms but has instead led to environments that feel exclusionary. A medical model dominates the perception of visual impairment, but cultural factors, including superstition, continue to shape teachers' views. These perceptions significantly influence their pedagogical approaches and inadvertently foster feelings of incompetence and being overwhelmed, largely due to teachers' backgrounds and preconceptions about visual impairments.

These negative perceptions have, in turn, affected their teaching practices, hindering their ability to effectively support students with visual impairments in inclusive settings. Despite these challenges, one teacher has developed robust cooperation skills and has learned to use tactile and auditory methods along with inclusive instructional strategies effectively. These skills have been crucial in fostering more effective interactions between teachers and students with visual impairments. Meanwhile, the voices of students with visual impairments in an inclusive classroom at Unity Inclusive School provided essential insights into their experiences and needs, highlighting several key lessons learned from their perspectives. The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in the Ghanaian educational context was seen as an imposition of Western cultural practices on local teachers. These tools and frameworks, while effective in promoting inclusivity, are not traditionally embedded in Ghanaian teaching methods or classroom instructions. UDL principles are often introduced without considering the cultural and resource differences between Western contexts where they originate and the realities of education in Ghana. Moving forward, the following chapter of this study will focus on the main themes emerging from the teachers' narratives, organised according to the research questions.

Chapter 6 Understanding the Essence of Teachers' Experience

This chapter continues the analysis of the research data through exploring the themes generated from teachers' narratives in relation to existing literature. It uses Critical Disability Theory (CDT) and the African philosophy of Ubuntu to address the research questions. Thus, my overarching question is: *What are the experiences of teachers who seek to implement inclusive education approaches among students with visual impairments in junior high schools in Ghana?* Section 6.1 examines the influence of social and cultural norms on teacher pedagogy; Section 6.2 explores the effects of cultural belief, discrimination, and stigmatisation on pedagogy; Section 6.3 considers the poor implementation of inclusive education; Section 6.4 discusses exclusion pedagogy within inclusion; Section 6.5 addresses the abuse of students with visual impairment; Section 6.6 analyses the medical construction of visual impairment and its influence on pedagogy; Section 6.7 discusses religion as a means of solace; Section 6.8 provides a section summary; Section 6.9 examines knowledge and skills for effective inclusive classroom interaction; Section 6.10 presents teachers' pedagogical change; and Section 6.11 concludes with the chapter summary. Each of these sections is discussed in the context of previous studies, providing a comprehensive discussion of the impact of inclusive education on both teachers and students with visual impairments.

6.1 The influence of social and cultural norms on teacher pedagogy

This study was conducted within one of the Akan tribes in Ghana. The Akan tribes are the major ethnic group in Ghana, and they primarily reside in the central and southern regions of Ghana. The Akans are famous for their rituals and belief system. In Ghanaian culture, particularly among the Akan tribes, proverbs often convey deep truths and societal norms, emphasising their significance through metaphor rather than direct statements. In this study, it was noted that teacher participants frequently used adages in their interactions and storytelling. These proverbs are common participants' communication features within the Akan communities, illustrating how deeply ingrained these expressions are used in participants' everyday lives. For example, "*Mpɔnkɔ mpo ehuri ta na ɔfui*" translates to "Some horses are jumping and farting; how much more the hyena?" This proverb used in the study is not directly labelling students

but rather metaphorically comparing sighted students' struggles with learning challenges to horses that can jump, albeit with difficulty, illustrated by the farting. Extending this analogy to students with visual impairments, symbolised by the hyena, suggests their even greater challenges, highlighting a societal perception of differences in abilities.

These cultural narratives deeply shape teachers' attitudes toward students with visual impairments, fostering the erroneous perception that students with visual impairments are incapable and that their education holds little value. Such beliefs not only diminish expectations but also severely limit the opportunities teachers offer, reinforcing exclusion. This mindset must be critically challenged and dismantled, particularly in the context of Ubuntu, which emphasises interconnectedness, compassion, and the inherent worth of every individual in a community. Slee (2019) argues that teachers must confront these biases and embrace the potential of all students, recognising that inclusive education requires rejecting outmoded, ableist views and creating environments where every student is seen as capable of success. This raises a critical question: Who is truly impaired? In many cases, it is not the students with visual impairments but, rather, the perceptions held by their teachers that present the greatest obstacle to inclusion. For instance, some teachers, influenced by the belief that visual impairment is a curse or a medical condition that needs to be cured, advocated for segregating students with visual impairment into special schools rather than integrating them into regular classrooms. Thomas et al. (2024) postulate that pervasive sociocultural beliefs deeply infiltrate educational settings, distorting inclusive pedagogy. This study highlights how teachers like Nkansah perceived impairment with a view rooted in historical superstitions that can lead to the isolation of students with visual impairment within inclusive classrooms. Dadzie's fear of spiritual harm further highlights how cultural myths undermine the potential of visually impaired students. Such beliefs not only misrepresent disability but also limit opportunities for students to thrive. To foster true inclusion, these cultural narratives must be critically challenged, and educators must reject superstition in favour of embracing all students' capabilities.

However, the voices of students with visual impairments directly challenge and dismantle the damaging sociocultural myths surrounding disability. They assert that visual impairment is a natural part of human diversity, not a limitation on learning or societal participation. Despite this clarity, teachers' resistance, rooted in outdated beliefs and scepticism about inclusive education, perpetuates exclusion. This resistance

highlights the urgent need for a radical transformation in societal attitudes and educational practices. Educators must confront and reject these cultural narratives, embrace inclusive teaching, and recognise that the real barrier is not disability but the prejudices that sustain inequality. Without such a shift, true inclusion remains a distant goal.

6.2 Effects of cultural belief, discrimination, and stigmatisation on pedagogy

Despite potential transformative experiences in inclusive settings, participants such as Dadzie, Nkansah, and Baah often referred back to familiar cultural patterns. The adherence to traditional beliefs and practices was evident in the classroom behaviour as highlighted in participant vignettes. It was observed that students with visual impairments were often neglected during classroom activities, leading to their limited participation. This demonstrated that teachers' actions were influenced by their cultural backgrounds. Their deeply entrenched prejudices and superstitions regarding visual impairment exposed the pervasive stigma in Ghanaian society. The findings from my study build on those of previous research by Amoatey (2020) and Salmon (2024), who explored the challenges of inclusion in Ghanaian schools and the coping strategies of students with disabilities, respectively. Amoatey (2020) highlighted how cultural belief systems obstruct inclusion while Salmon (2020) emphasised that students with disabilities often develop close relationships with each other as a means to cope with stigma-induced social isolation.

However, both studies left a gap in understanding how these cultural beliefs directly influence teachers' perspectives and specifically impact students with visual impairments within inclusive classrooms. My research addresses this gap by demonstrating that these cultural beliefs significantly shape teachers' attitudes, leading to discriminatory practices and disenfranchisement of students with visual impairments in inclusive settings. For instance, Dadzie's and Baah's belief that blind individuals were used for sacrifice reflects deep-rooted cultural perceptions. These cultural beliefs affected how Dadzie demonstrated his inclusive pedagogy among students with visual impairment. These examples highlight the urgent need for teachers to confront and dismantle destructive cultural beliefs that perpetuate exclusion, paving the way for meaningful and transformative inclusion in education.

The impact of societal stigma and discrimination related to disability extends beyond the students with visual impairments to include the teachers working with them in inclusive classrooms. An illustrative example from this study is the community's reaction to Nkansah's political ambitions, as highlighted during his interview. His association with visually impaired students was negatively exploited, influencing public opinion against him during his campaign. This incident exemplifies the pervasive stigma and discrimination faced by teachers of students with visual impairments within Ghanaian society. Such experiences reflect a broader undervaluation of inclusive education, and the specialised skills and knowledge required to support students with disabilities effectively. Additionally, the common belief that minimal qualifications are sufficient for teaching in inclusive settings contributes to this undervaluation, perpetuating misunderstandings about the complexity and importance of inclusive education. These findings align with Sackey (2015), who reported that in Ghana, the culture and social norms were the most significant barriers to implementing inclusion and fulfilling the rights of children with disabilities (van Berkel & Breit, 2024).

Acheampong (2022) supports this discussion by identifying various sources of stigma, such as superstitions, ignorance, lack of knowledge and empathy, outdated belief systems, and ostracising individuals who are different. This finding highlights the complexity of stigma, showing that it is a multifaceted issue deeply ingrained in societal perceptions and attitudes towards diversity and difference. Acheampong's research emphasises the need for comprehensive approaches to instruction and awareness that address the underlying causes of stigma, fostering a more inclusive and empathetic society. In Ghanaian culture, the spiritual perception of disability significantly influences educators' attitudes and shapes teaching methods in inclusive settings, as Baah's experiences in this study illustrate. Furthermore, research shows that a significant number of children with disabilities in many developing countries, including Ghana, are not attending school due to prevailing sociocultural beliefs and practices (Ozaji, 2020).

The observations in Dadzie's and Nkansah's classrooms highlight a crucial issue in the education of students with visual impairments. The way visual impairment is defined and understood perpetuates social divisions, unintentionally creating barriers between visually impaired students and their sighted peers. This not only isolates visually impaired students but also hinders their ability to interact meaningfully and fully engage

in classroom activities. Isolation in educational settings can have significant consequences for students with visual impairments, limiting their social interactions, hindering the development of social skills, and restricting access to the same learning opportunities as their sighted peers. When these students are segregated, either physically or through lower expectations, it reinforces society's perception of disability as a limitation. Dadzie's description of inclusion as burdensome clearly illustrates the widespread impact of the construction of disability as it affects teachers' well-being and effectiveness.

While ongoing support is essential, it often leads teachers to feel overwhelmed, fostering a reliance on assistance that can hinder these students' academic and social integration. This situation puts a strain on teachers tasked with creating inclusive environments. Contrasting with the view that adequate support empowers students towards independence, this research suggests that students with visual impairments may perceive themselves as dependent, primarily due to societal attitudes that treat them as such.

In this study, the ongoing support for students with visual impairments in inclusive classrooms has left teachers feeling overwhelmed and, consequently, developing a reliance on assistance from others. When students with visual impairments develop a sense of reliance on others in the classroom, it impedes academic and social integration, adding strain on teachers tasked with fostering inclusive environments. This differs from the perspective that adequate assistance and support can empower students to cultivate independence and lead fulfilling lives. Consequently, students with visual impairments would not perceive themselves as dependent unless societal attitudes treat them as such.

Further, Otieno et al. (2018) identified that in Rachuonyo, South Kenya, traditional beliefs attributing disabilities to curses or witchcraft severely restrict the empowerment and education of individuals with disabilities. This study extends that insight by considering how such beliefs might influence teachers' perceptions of visual impairment, not just as an individual challenge but as a complex interaction between the individual and their environment. This nuanced understanding, which aligns with Reindal's (2010) balanced interpretation of CDT, offers a comprehensive view that acknowledges both the societal influences on and the personal realities of teaching students with visual impairment. This approach fills a critical gap by illustrating how

cultural perceptions impact the practical implementation of inclusive education. The Ubuntu philosophy further reinforces this understanding by emphasising interconnectedness and collective well-being. As expressed by Mangena (2016), Ubuntu encapsulates the idea that *"I am because we are"* or *"humanity towards others"*. It highlights that individuals' identities and experiences, including students with visual impairments, are closely tied to their relationships within the inclusive classroom.

In the context of inclusive education, Ubuntu encourages teachers to adopt pedagogical approaches that recognise and respect the humanity and potential of every student, fostering a sense of belonging. It aligns with Liasidou's (2015) view of *inclusion* as creating an educational environment where teachers place students at the centre of the learning process, ensuring that all learners, regardless of their abilities, can flourish.

The findings of the current study suggest that when teachers adopt inclusive education teaching approaches for students with visual impairments, they challenge societal misconceptions and improve the quality of life of students with visual impairment. These teachers recognise that impairment might interfere with some aspects of inclusion, but they see the primary barrier as societal ableism, a discriminatory attitude toward disability (Goodley, 2014). This view contrasts with studies on friendship, which often depict impairment as a personal condition that hinders social connections (Castrodale & Zingaro, 2015). Additionally, it diverges from the internal attribution perspective highlighted by Danes-Staples et al. (2013) and Opie and Southcott (2018) where students with visual impairments are blamed for unfavourable behaviour in inclusive classrooms. According to Myers (2010), internal attribution refers to attributing a student's behaviour to their impairment or internal characteristics. In contrast, these teachers argue that the real issue lies in societal prejudices rather than the students' conditions.

Karmic influence on pedagogy

In Ghana, many people hold the belief that disabilities, such as visual impairments, are the result of sins committed in the past. This view is encapsulated in the adage, *"Se wo to boɔ boɔ ban a, esan ba wo ara wo so"*, which translates to "If you throw a stone at the wall, it bounces back to you". This belief obstructs the inclusion of visually impaired students as many view disability as a result of past actions. For instance, Baah's reluctance to interact with visually impaired students during breaks further exemplifies

how cultural beliefs hinder inclusive education. His choice of interaction with visual impairment demonstrates societal pressure to conform to cultural expectations, even at the expense of inclusivity. These findings are consistent with a study by Ocloo and Dogbe (2008), who found that some people in Ghana view visual impairment as a result of past life or spiritual retribution for wrongdoings. This belief can lead to discrimination and stigmatisation of people with visual impairment, who may be seen as deserving of their condition or as having some moral failing. For example, Dadzie's query—“How can you change a belief that has persisted for many years?”—reflects the entrenched nature of these beliefs, reinforced by cultural traditions. Nkansah, in his interview, admitted that he will not gain any respect teaching students with visual impairment in society. This highlights the pervasive impact of karma on educating students with visual impairment (Kyabgon, 2015). By embedding Ubuntu principles in inclusive education, teachers can overcome these cultural barriers and enhance the educational experience for students with diverse needs, including those with visual impairments. Ubuntu's emphasis on interconnectedness and shared humanity provides a foundation for creating an inclusive, respectful, and supportive learning environment for all students (Mutanga, 2023).

Esinam's story offers a compelling challenge to prevailing sociocultural beliefs and their impact on teaching practices. Gupta et al. (2023) expresses that tactile learning enables students with visual impairments to understand concepts more effectively by physically interacting with objects, which helps them form a mental picture of the subject matter. They emphasise that the tactile approach enhances students' attention and retention as they rely on touch to interpret and internalise information. Recognising the importance of educating students with visual impairments, Esinam actively engaged students with visual impairments in her inclusive classroom, demonstrating how hands-on learning strategies can significantly improve educational outcomes for these students. Her interactions reflect a deep respect for diversity, embodying the spirit of Ubuntu, which emphasises the collective responsibility of fostering an inclusive community where everyone thrives. Esinam's approach aligns with Ubuntu's core philosophy, “I am because we are”, which places value on interconnectedness and the well-being of all members of the community (Le Grange, 2019).

Esinam also draws parallels between inclusive education and traditional Ghanaian symbols, which are deeply embedded in the culture and carry significant spiritual

meanings and used these symbols' potential to foster an inclusive environment. One poignant example used by Esinam is the “*Funtunfunefu Denkyemfunefu*” symbol as shown in Figure 10, depicting Siamese twin crocodiles with a shared stomach. Despite their shared body part, they engage in conflicts over food yet manage to live together peacefully as siblings. This symbol, when used in Ghana, emphasises unity and cooperation despite individual differences, illustrating that people can collaborate to attain shared objectives. This symbolism can be particularly meaningful in educational contexts, suggesting that sighted students, teachers, and visually impaired students can coexist harmoniously and work together in inclusive classrooms.

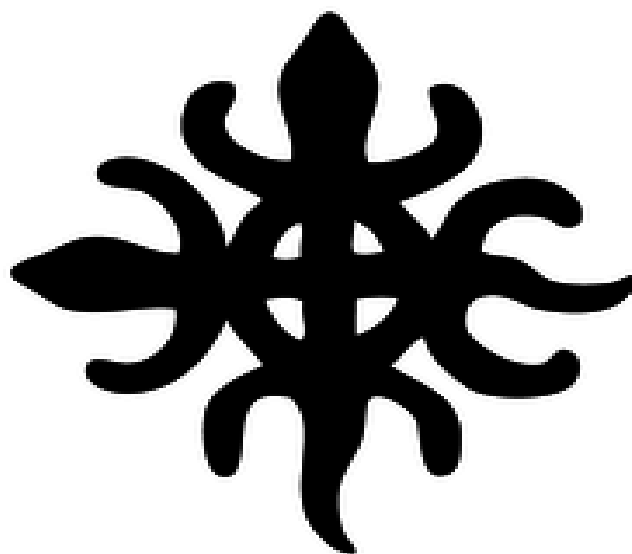


Figure 10: Funtunfunefu Denkyemfunefu Symbol

The traditional symbol can be seen as a metaphor for the interconnectedness of all students, regardless of disabilities, emphasising the need for inclusive practices that recognise and embrace diversity rather than promote segregation or exclusion. Esinam's narrative encourages teachers to re-evaluate their teaching approaches and consider the broader impact of sociocultural beliefs on inclusion. Her narrative serves as a powerful call to action for teachers, policymakers, and society as a whole to embrace inclusivity as a fundamental principle in education and society. Esinam's stories inspire a collaborative spirit, demonstrating that, despite differences, students can come together to achieve common educational and societal objectives.

In understanding the voices of students with visual impairments on these phenomena during focus group discussions, Efe, a student with visual impairment, contested some

of the teachers' views that link visual impairment with curses. Efe, who lost her sight at the age of eight due to an accident, firmly believes that her condition does not associate her with witchcraft or magical abilities. She argued that visual impairment is a natural occurrence that could happen to anyone, regardless of status or background. Efe strongly urged society and educators to reconsider their perspectives towards individuals with visual impairments, treating them as equals to their sighted colleagues. She advocated for full inclusion and participation in classroom activities, reassuring all that students with visual impairments pose no threat to others. Her call to action emphasises acceptance and belonging, challenging misconceptions and promoting inclusivity.

This discussion in section 6.2 highlighted the critical importance of addressing sociocultural beliefs in shaping inclusive educational practices. Efforts to promote understanding, empathy, and acceptance of diversity are crucial in reducing the barriers to inclusion created by deep-rooted prejudices and superstitions. By creating environments that celebrate differences and challenge discriminatory attitudes, educators can play a crucial role in promoting inclusivity and empowering students with disabilities to thrive within mainstream educational settings and society at large.

6.3 Poor implementation of inclusive education

The adage, "*Wo ne hwan kɔka se ɔkɔmfɔɔ se kɔɔ*", which translates to "With whom are you contending for a priest to declare judgment?", reflects the deeply entrenched hierarchical and authoritative structures within the educational system. This proverb highlights how these power dynamics discourage teachers from questioning institutional norms, particularly when it comes to inclusive education. As a result, inclusive education is often imposed upon teachers with little room for critical engagement or input. If teachers, who are at the heart of implementing inclusive education, are not involved in the process, how can they truly understand the students they are teaching and employ Ubuntu philosophy? The Ghanaian education system must fully recognise the crucial role teachers play in an inclusive classroom where the Ubuntu philosophy must be understood and embraced. However, inclusive education is often imposed on teachers with little opportunity for critical engagement or input. Teachers are expected to implement inclusion without questioning its practical implications, leaving them ill-equipped to address the real needs of students with disabilities. This unquestioning compliance perpetuates a top-down approach, stifling innovation and adaptation in

inclusive pedagogy. Ely (2013) and Ruble and McGrew (2013) report that, while general education teachers are motivated to participate in inclusion efforts, they frequently feel powerless in inclusive school settings. Hettiarachchi and Das (2014) observed a similar sense of powerlessness among teachers in inclusive schools in Sri Lanka. This suggests that teachers feel unable to challenge authority or push for essential changes, even when they are aware of shortcomings in inclusive practices.

Within the teachers' narratives, participants such as Dadzie, Nkansah, and Baah acknowledged that the inclusion of students with visual impairments at Unity Inclusive School began as a pilot programme but was not effectively executed. Their stories indicated that inclusion was “poorly implemented”, meaning that, as Baah stated, the inclusion of students with visual impairments was “randomly implemented without adequate preparation”. As shown in other studies based in Ghana, the insufficient planning and execution of inclusion were evident for the teachers, students with visual impairments, and the overall environment, all of which compounded the challenges faced by the teachers (Kuyini et al., 2020). Similarly, Frankel et al. (2010) contend that inclusion in Guyana's schools encountered numerous obstacles due to its implementation without thorough research or planning.

The Ghana Ministry of Education has committed to developing inclusive education for all learners as per the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Nketsiah et al., 2016) and the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO (1994)). However, the implementation of inclusion may have been inadequate because schools are required to admit all learners without receiving proper guidance on how to do so.

The improper practice of inclusion at Unity Inclusive School could be attributed to a lack of training, clear guidance, and clarity in Ghanaian inclusive policies. This claim is supported by Nketsiah (2016), who discovered that one of the primary challenges preservice teachers face in Ghana is the lack of well-defined guidelines for implementing inclusive education. Similarly, Owusu (2021) identified that vague and improperly directed policies have significantly affected the execution of inclusive education in Ghana. All teachers admitted that they were not involved in the preparation process for inclusion, despite it being implemented on a pilot basis. For instance, Nkansah mentioned that “teachers were excluded from the process”, while Dadzie stated that students with visual impairments are solely under the purview of special education teachers. Similarly, Baah emphasised that no one listened to their views

concerning the inclusion of students with visual impairment. These findings align with the research conducted by Paliokosta and Blandford (2010), which revealed that secondary education teachers in England often felt excluded when it came to matters of inclusion.

Dadzie's experience reflects a significant gap in inclusive education as he questions the rationale behind selecting his school for an inclusive programme without equipping it with the necessary resources for such a transition. This gap between the theoretical support for and practical implementation of inclusive education is also highlighted in the research by Kuyini et al. (2016), who point out that a lack of adequate guidance for teachers often hinders the effective execution of inclusive practices. This absence of clear direction prevents teachers from effectively implementing inclusive strategies within their classrooms.

Critical disability studies would advocate for dismantling these power structures, encouraging teachers to voice their insights, and promoting a more collaborative approach to developing inclusive education strategies considering all perspectives. Teachers' hesitance to speak reveals a broader problem within educational institutions where criticism, even when constructive, is not readily accepted by those in power, including the headmistress. Ultimately, these dynamics call for the urgent need for systemic changes to empower teachers to contribute to policymaking processes without fear of retribution, fostering an inclusive environment that genuinely supports all students.

Dadzie argued during hanging out that a substantial training period should precede the integration of students with visual impairments into mainstream classrooms. This situation is a broader concern echoed by Nkansah, who described the current state of inclusion as "lip service". This term captures the essence of the problem: there is a discrepancy between the endorsement of inclusion in policy and its realisation in educational environments. The term implies that, despite verbally affirming the value of inclusive education, the necessary actions, resources, and structural adjustments needed for its effective execution are often lacking. Ainscow and Sandill (2010) argue that effective leadership is crucial for implementing inclusion, so school administrators play a vital role in providing leadership within inclusive schools.

Dadzie, expressing frustration, questioned whether the nation was truly committed to practising inclusion. This scepticism stems from the fact that inclusive frameworks have sparked widely divergent opinions and created a general lack of clarity about implementation procedures. Consequently, these sociocultural beliefs among participants have led to pedagogical approaches that are more exclusive than inclusive. The persistence of exclusionary practices may stem from the educational system itself, which was introduced following the government's adoption of an international policy that conflicted with the nation's cultural beliefs and institutional frameworks. As Runswick-Cole (2011) states, inclusion necessitates structural and cultural changes. In the case of the Unity Inclusive Junior High School, inclusion was poorly implemented, with no significant changes made to its structure or cultural beliefs. Ghanaian culture is primarily characterised by authoritarian approaches where leaders are responsible for leading policy implementation, defining goals, and choosing the appropriate approach, often without allowing others to participate and feel autonomous.

In Akan, the term "*yen ka won mom*" ("let's put them together") conveys the ideas of inclusion, integration, and mainstreaming, thereby merging these distinct concepts. This overlap in terminology can lead to confusion for Akan-speaking individuals, making it challenging to distinguish between inclusion and mainstreaming effectively. These linguistic intricacies indicate that Ghana's policies on inclusion may not adequately differentiate between inclusion and mainstreaming, potentially leaning more towards the latter. This observation aligns with Kang et al. (2015), who noted a similar issue in Korea's inclusion policies where the failure to separate these terms resulted in the flawed execution of inclusive practices.

The inclusive cultures they foster greatly influence teachers' and students' perceptions and practices. Ghana's institutional structure and cultural beliefs conflict with the principles of inclusion. Unless changes are made, exclusionary practices will persist. As pointed out by Slee (2011), inclusion is a social movement that requires both structural and cultural changes; without these changes, exclusion will continue to prevail. Thus, if teachers themselves experience exclusion and are excluded from the process, how can they effectively practice inclusion?

6.4 Exclusion pedagogy within inclusion

There is an Akan adage, "*Se dufɔkyee da nsuom da da koraa entumi nnane denkyem da*", which translates to 'No matter how long a log may stay in a river, it can never turn into a crocodile'. This proverb was used to express the views held by some teachers that conventional teaching methods would not benefit students with visual impairments. It suggests that no matter how long these students spend in inclusive classrooms, they will not fully understand the teaching methods in the same way as their sighted peers. In this analogy, the students with visual impairments are compared to a log, which, despite being in the river (the inclusive classroom), cannot transform into a crocodile (achieve the same educational outcomes as sighted students). This comparison not only emphasises a perceived significant difference between the students with visual impairments and their sighted counterparts but also implies a fixed hierarchy or power dynamic in the educational experience, thereby challenging the notion of true inclusivity. These findings in this research could be associated with research indicating that the instructional beliefs and approaches of teachers are heavily shaped by their initial educational encounters and entrenched patterns of thought (Crumbly, 2021). Although Crumbly's study primarily focused on preservice teachers and general pedagogical approaches, it highlights the profound influence of entrenched teaching traditions on educators' pedagogical approaches.

While cultural beliefs and teachers' pedagogical understanding of visual impairment have hindered inclusive education at Unity Inclusive School and impacted its practice during my observation of the teachers' and hearing their narratives (Dadzie, Nkansah, and Baah), exclusion emerged as a prominent aspect, shedding light on how the school operated and the interaction between teachers and visually impaired students. The term "exclusion within inclusion" refers to the paradox where, despite being physically present in inclusive settings, students with disabilities such as visual impairments are often not fully integrated into the activities and social fabric of the classroom. Watson (2017) suggests that students' differences are typically ignored and concealed. This is supported by Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2011), who discovered that cultures of disablism have distinct notions of what constitutes a normal childhood and what constitutes an abnormal one.

However, Ubuntu philosophy offers valuable guidance for teachers in addressing this issue. Ubuntu, which emphasises "*I am because we are*", encourages teachers to

recognise the shared humanity and interconnectedness of all students, including those with disabilities (Rider, 2015). By adopting this philosophy, teachers can move beyond merely having students with visual impairments present in the classroom and instead foster a sense of belonging and respect for every student. Ubuntu encourages teachers to actively involve all students in classroom activities, views diversity as a strength, and promotes empathy, collaboration, and mutual support. This approach can help overcome the cultural barriers and biases that can lead to exclusion, ultimately enhancing the practice of inclusive education.

To promote mutual and emotional support among students with visual impairments, at Unity Inclusive School, students with visual impairment sat near each other and were rarely seen interacting among themselves. The teachers sat behind students with visual impairment in all three classrooms and held onto them. This was a clear metaphor for exclusion. Moreover, as illustrated in the classroom observations, the social dynamics within the classrooms where students with visual impairments were often left to their own devices or excluded from group activities suggest a broader cultural and institutional reluctance to embrace true inclusivity.

Despite sharing the same physical space as their sighted peers, students with visual impairments often experience exclusion that contradicts the core principles of inclusive education. For instance, in Baah's classroom, when the headmistress realised that students with visual impairments were not actively participating, she advised the teacher to ensure their inclusion. In a science class, students with visual impairments were unable to participate in reading activities due to the lack of braille textbooks. Consequently, these students were unintentionally left out and marginalised and given separate tasks instead of actively engaging with their classmates. Students with visual impairments are often viewed as having limitations in tasks that rely heavily on vision (Fraser et al., 2019; Hong Kong Blind Union, n.d.).

Access to appropriate resources is crucial for true inclusion, ensuring that every student, regardless of their physical abilities, is fully integrated and involved in the learning process. This study confirmed that inadequate teaching strategies contribute to the exclusion of students with disabilities, creating an unwelcoming environment in mainstream classrooms. In my field notes, the phrase “This is not inclusion; visually impaired students are students of special education teachers” was frequently repeated to demonstrate their exclusion. The teachers' isolation during teaching, especially observed

with Dadzie and Nkansah, the mathematics and science teachers, further exemplified this exclusion. This perspective is supported by the findings of Hayes et al. (2024), who note that teachers often face difficulties when teaching mathematics and science to students with vision loss.

This disengagement raised critical questions about the adequacy and adaptability of teaching methods for mathematics and other subjects specifically tailored to the needs of visually impaired students. The lack of encouragement for these students to participate alongside their sighted peers emphasises a deeper issue of exclusion within the supposed inclusivity. This finding aligns with a study conducted by Brydgesa and Mkandawire (2017) in Nigeria, which revealed that students with disabilities often experience exclusion in mainstream settings.

These teachers rely on traditional instructional strategies, such as direct knowledge transmission, note-taking, and preparing students for examinations. Specifically, teachers like Dadzie, Nkansah, and Baah were observed to rely heavily on traditional, teacher-centred methods and rote learning, with minimal incorporation of inclusive pedagogical approaches. Their instruction often involved directives that assumed visual capabilities, such as "Look at the board" or "What colour is this?", which do not accommodate the needs of students with visual impairments. This assertion is reinforced by the findings in the literature (Mariya, 2012; Shareef, 2010), where researchers highlight that teachers often develop their own pedagogical approaches, predominantly relying on rote learning. This method is favoured as it aligns closely with traditional classroom practices.

Similarly, Klingenberg et al. (2020) conducted a study on visually impaired students, exploring teachers' attitudes and experiences, using the abacus, tactile graphics, and developing mathematical concepts. Their findings emphasise that for effective teaching strategies, qualified and enthusiastic teachers must be required to foster a learning environment where students experience a sense of accomplishment and success. This highlights the need for teachers who are skilled and dedicated to nurturing the potential of visually impaired students through appropriate instructional methods. However, Klingenberg et al. indicate that when teachers are properly trained, students with visual impairments can participate more actively and effectively in mathematics classes.

Despite Nkansah's and Baah's claimed understanding of student-centred teaching methods, there was a noticeable gap between their knowledge and their actual classroom behaviour. Instead of implementing the student-centred strategies they acknowledged, they mostly resorted to traditional, lecture-based teaching. This inconsistency supports Regmi's et al.'s (2023) observation that teachers often struggle to implement inclusive education principles despite recognising them in theory. Essentially, the teachers' reliance on "teaching as they were taught" indicates resistance to pedagogical change, which eventually excludes students with visual impairment in inclusive classrooms.

There were some examples when students felt included. Throughout my hanging-out observations, Esinam's teaching approaches reflect an inclusive ethos. She fostered inclusivity by encouraging all students to participate in learning activities and made accommodations, such as seating visually impaired students at the front of the class to ensure they could hear her clearly and interact with her. These measures demonstrate proactive steps taken to integrate and engage all students in the learning process, regardless of their abilities. As Macartney and Morton (2013) have noted, relationships help create a collaborative and inclusive educational environment that is essential for effective teaching and learning.

Esinam implemented various inclusive, student-centred teaching methods, including participatory classroom activities, peer collaboration, group work, reading, and inclusive pedagogical approaches. These approaches align with the guidance provided by educational experts, such as Slee (2019), Loughran (2015), and Florian (2015), who all advocate for teaching methods that actively involve students in their learning. The use of critical thinking exercises, such as group tasks, role-playing, projects, peer reading, and peer summarising, is widely recognised as an effective way to enhance classroom learning. This strategy is supported by the research of Carrington-Blaides (2017), who identified various educational tactics, including whole-class lectures, targeted small-group instruction, individual teacher-student interactions, peer tutoring, collaborative learning groups, and self-guided study, as beneficial for engaging all students. Such methods require diverse and adaptable teaching approaches to cultivate an inclusive educational environment that addresses the different needs of every student.

At Unity Inclusive School, some of the teacher's teaching methods promoted exclusion and did not provide visually impaired students with opportunities to participate actively.

The teachers physically and emotionally distanced themselves from these students. For instance, Dadzie and Nkansah avoided teaching mathematics and science to visually impaired students. Baah, on the other hand, withdrew both physically and emotionally, leaving the responsibility of caring for visually impaired students to the resource teacher. According to Balter et al. (2023), this approach isolates blind children, confining them to a limited environment where everything is tailored to their disability. This restrictive setting greatly limits their experiences and interactions, focusing solely on their impairment instead of creating a more inclusive environment where they can thrive and engage more fully.

The instructional approaches observed, such as grouping students with visual impairments separately without providing equivalent learning support or materials like braille textbooks or tactile resources, reinforce their exclusion. These practices not only segregate them within the classroom but also deprive them of the opportunity to engage with the curriculum meaningfully. Kuyini et al.'s (2020) study brought to light that in Ghana, most of the teachers teaching students with disabilities are not competent in handling them and therefore ignore them in classroom activities. Similarly, Mprah et al. (2016) express that general education teachers in their study believed that they were unqualified to teach students with special needs. The teachers emphasised that including students with visual impairment requires professional assistance and special training. This is supported by Ametepe (2015), who found that the provision of special and professional assistance has encouraged the development of categories of differences, not inclusion. Furthermore, Slee (2013) argues that focusing on assessment and providing special services maintains exclusionary practices. This focus causes regular teachers to feel unqualified, and, thus, they continue to engage in exclusionary practices.

6.5 Abuse of students with visual impairment

The treatment of visually impaired students at Unity Inclusive School often reflects deeply ingrained cultural biases towards normality and ability. Teachers, such as Dadzie and Nkansah, have been observed loudly reprimanding visually impaired students for certain behaviours in class, such as making noise or displaying distinct mannerisms. The teachers' reactions included shouting, changing facial expressions, and speaking harshly. I also witnessed overtly hostile actions towards visually impaired students during my observations. This type of conduct, although unacceptable, stems from

cultural perceptions that prioritise conventional abilities and often overlook the potential of visually impaired students.

Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2011) have identified that students with special educational needs frequently face abuse and hostility for not conforming to established patterns of normality. In this current study, the pervasive influence of disablism is evident in the classroom through the exclusion and mistreatment of visually impaired students, reinforcing their disabilities as deviations from the norm. The prevailing cultural views in Ghana foster a fundamental ontological stance on disability that significantly hinders inclusive education. Instead of valuing diversity and individual differences, schools like Unity Inclusive School emphasise these differences in an attempt to suppress students with visual impairment through forced normalisation, perpetuating a cycle of exclusion and abuse.

6.6 Medical construction of visual impairment and its influence on pedagogy

The perspectives of teachers Dadzie, Nkansah, and Baah predominantly align with the medical model of disability, but they are also significantly shaped by cultural nuances that influence their pedagogical approaches. Reflecting this perspective, Dadzie, Nkansah, and Baah advocate for a specific approach where students with visual impairments are first placed in special schools for intervention before they are integrated into mainstream schools. This approach is predicated on the belief that students need to undergo specialised treatment or adaptation to achieve a level of readiness for inclusive education. According to this model, the challenges faced by students with visual impairments are seen as medical issues that can only be resolved through medical interventions, allowing these students to achieve a state of “normalcy” and fully participate in inclusive classroom. This perspective is in line with the traditional definitions of the medical model put forth by scholars such as Brittain (2004) and Mitra (2006), who view disability as an individual's deficiency that requires medical treatment. Within educational settings, the medical model enables the classification of individuals according to their disabilities. Such classification informs decisions regarding how students are grouped for teaching or the selection of the most suitable educational setting for each person (Haegele & Hodge, 2016).

Teachers believe that visually impaired students must be “cured” before they can effectively participate in and benefit from inclusive education. This viewpoint highlights a lack of understanding or acceptance of the fundamental principles of inclusive education, which advocate for equal learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their physical, sensory, or cognitive abilities, in a shared environment. Instead of isolating them until they meet conventional standards of normalcy, the environment should be adapted to meet their diverse needs. However, this viewpoint contradicts the principles of inclusive education, which emphasise modifying the learning environment to support the education of students with disabilities in regular classrooms and ensuring their equal access to learning opportunities alongside their peers (Ford, 2014).

In cultures that prioritise normality and ability, teachers often lack knowledge about visual impairment and, when faced with it, respond with silence. These teachers have clear ideas about what “normal students” and their teachers should be able to do, but these ideas do not include students with visual impairment (Mwakyeya, 2013). Instead, these students are seen as abnormal and beyond the teachers' ability to provide care and education. Therefore, this finding reflects the influence of cultural beliefs rooted in the medical perspective of disability. According to this model, disability is viewed as inherently deficient and sick, necessitating special assistance. With the dominance of the medical model in Ghana, the teachers feel unqualified to interact with and teach students with visual impairment.

Critically, the medical model overlooks the social constructs of disability, where societal barriers, rather than the individual's impairment, are significant contributors to the challenges faced by people with disabilities. In contrast, the social model of disability, which many advocates and scholars support, suggests that society should adjust to include all individuals, recognising and valuing diversity (Robertson et al., 2024). The findings here demonstrate a reluctance or refusal to adapt teaching methods and classroom environments to include students with visual impairments, which reflects a broader issue within the educational system. This issue often persists in segregating students with diverse needs rather than integrating them. The challenge then is to shift the prevailing mindset from seeing disability as a problem to be fixed to one that recognises and addresses the environmental, attitudinal, and systemic barriers that prevent full participation and inclusion. Education, particularly for educators and

policymakers, on the benefits and strategies for inclusive education, along with a commitment to adapt and personalise teaching methods and materials, is crucial in moving towards a more inclusive educational system that values all students equally.

6.7 Religion as a means of solace

The religious beliefs and practices of the teachers provided them with relief and strength. Baah, for instance, regarded God as his helper, while Nkansah prayed for patience and resilience. They communicated with God to express their feelings and desires and voiced their dissatisfaction with the integration of visually impaired students into the inclusive classroom. This illustrates the conceptual inconsistency within Ghana's inclusive education policy. The teachers' religious beliefs often clashed with prevailing cultural attitudes toward visual impairment.

Christianity has a strong influence in Ghanaian society, emphasising the right of people with disabilities to participate fully in their communities. However, these principles were not adequately reflected in the way visually impaired students were included. According to Altamimi et al. (2017), Christianity supports the ideals of inclusive education, advocating that those with disabilities have the right and responsibility to participate like any other community member. This is consistent with the findings of Alhudaithi (2015), which indicate that Christian beliefs helped teachers overcome the negative cultural stereotypes surrounding individuals with disabilities. As Goodley (2014) notes, religion not only offers solace in a challenging world but also helps individuals navigate everyday struggles and conflicts.

The headmistress at Unity Inclusive School leveraged these religious beliefs and values, urging Nkansah, Dadzie, Baah, and Esinam to seek divine rewards for their efforts. Consequently, the teachers began to believe that little could be done in their circumstances and that only God or Allah could offer them proper compensation. This reflects the prevailing perception that disabilities are deficiencies that should be endured with patience and be rewarded by divine intervention (Alquraini, 2011). Understanding this influence, the headmistress knew she could keep teachers calm amid challenges by assuring them that their rewards awaited them in the future. This was evidenced during hanging out, where she was observed using such reassurances to maintain staff morale.

6.8 Section summary

This study reveals a stark conflict between inclusive education policies and deep-seated cultural attitudes in Ghana where differences, particularly visual impairments, are often seen as deviations rather than diversity. Teachers, shaped by cultural superstitions, view disability through a lens of deficiency, leading to exclusionary practices despite policies promoting inclusion. The flawed execution of these policies, combined with inadequate teacher preparation and infrastructural support, disproportionately marginalises visually impaired students. Additionally, the dominance of the medical model of disability further obstructs inclusive pedagogies. In summary, this study calls for a paradigm shift in cultural attitudes, educational policies, and teaching practices to foster a more inclusive environment that acknowledges and values the diversity of all students, including those with visual impairments. It emphasises the need for comprehensive teacher training, better policy implementation, systemic change, and a move toward a more inclusive societal perspective that challenges existing prejudices and embraces all forms of diversity.

6.9 Knowledge and skills for an effective inclusive classroom interaction

This section answers the second subquestion by synthesising the study’s findings with literature on inclusive pedagogy that fosters teacher–student interaction for learners with visual impairment.

6.9.1 Tactile and auditory

"Se kwatrekwa ka se obema wo ntoma a, tie ne din" translates to “If a naked man promises you a cloth, listen to his name”. This adage critically reflects the shortcomings of current training programmes for teachers where “nakedness” symbolises the lack of essential skills among teachers despite their intentions to support students with visual impairments. This deficiency is largely due to inadequate training and resources that are necessary for teachers to effectively interact with and support these students. Kızılaslan et al.’s (2020) study emphasises the importance of tactile and auditory materials in addressing the specific needs of visually impaired students as they significantly enhance their engagement and learning outcomes. The positive impacts observed when visually impaired students are integrated into mainstream settings further support the argument that these materials are crucial—not just supplementary—for their educational success.

The main challenge in this study was the teachers' limited knowledge and expertise in using tactile and auditory materials. Their attempts at using interactive teaching methods did not meet the learning needs of visually impaired students. For example, Baah's difficulties in verbally explaining abstract concepts such as curses and Nkansah's struggles in teaching chemical reactions indicate the lack of resources and strategies for nonvisual learning, especially in visually intensive subjects. A classroom that encourages interaction supports the idea of collaborative learning where everyone works together to meet the student's learning needs. Florian (2015) insightfully explained the learning dynamics of students with visual impairments, emphasising their desire to explore their environment through touch, smell, and hearing. The proverb regarding the naked man suggests that promises of inclusion without the necessary skills and tools, like offering a cloth without being able to provide one, are ultimately hollow.

The influence of contextual factors is vividly illustrated in the experiences of teachers like Dadzie, Nkansah, and Baah. For instance, during hanging out, Dadzie pointed out that hygiene issues are a significant barrier. He explained that insufficient training in daily living skills among visually impaired students can lead to challenges like body odour, which may hinder close physical interaction that is necessary for tactile learning. This concern is supported by the findings of Shenouda et al. (2018), who investigated personal hygiene practices among visually impaired students in Cairo. Their study focused on essential hygiene skills, such as tooth brushing, hand washing, and fingernail maintenance, revealing that these practices were generally unsatisfactory among the students examined. This lack of hygiene makes close interactions challenging and indicates a broader gap in hygiene education specifically tailored for visually impaired learners. This highlights that the specific educational needs of visually impaired students have to integrate with hygiene education to empower these students to manage personal care independently and effectively.

Nkansah's observations from the classroom highlight behavioural challenges. He noted that disruptions and lack of discipline can detract from the educational environment, making it difficult to implement effective tactile and auditory teaching strategies. Nkansah's comment, "Look at all these. I know in every household, there exist individuals who stir up trouble, but this is becoming too much", reflects a broader concern about maintaining order and focus in a diverse classroom setting. These findings confirm a study by Ambrose-Zaken et al. (2020) that braille learners exhibit

behaviours, such as withdrawal, hyperactivity, stereotyped mannerisms, irritability, aggression, and inappropriate speech.

In contrast, Esinam engaged students with visual impairment with tactile and auditory materials to enhance classroom interaction. She created an interactive classroom and shared resources with visually impaired students to gain a better understanding of the mainstream classroom. In Esinam's classroom observation, she tried to understand her role as a teacher, and she allowed students with visual impairment to explore their world through the use of real objects that can be touched by the visually impaired and help them to have a mental picture of it. Esinam appreciated visually impaired students' learning process to catch up with lessons and become familiar with topics discussed in the classrooms. This could mean that teachers who engage in classroom interaction with visually impaired students use tactile material to communicate directly with visually impaired students to boost the students' confidence in the classroom and promote their learning. This study supports Miyauchi (2020) from Japan, who conducted a systematic review that significantly contributes to our understanding of inclusive education practices for students with visual impairments, specifically focusing on teachers' perceptions and their implementation of practical skills. The study found that teachers' demonstration of practical skills through tactile material enhances classroom interaction. Esinam's approach in her vignette exemplifies how guided strategies, rather than intuition, lead to meaningful inclusion. My study fills a key gap by addressing the inadequacies in teacher training and the reliance on intuition over trained competencies in inclusive education. While previous research, like Lamichhane (2017) and Koehler and Wild (2024), highlights the benefits of tactile and auditory materials, they fail to tackle the systemic barriers to their effective use. My research emphasises the need for comprehensive teacher training to ensure consistent, effective use of inclusive methods for students with visual impairments. This method not only facilitates their academic growth but also significantly enhances teachers' confidence in classroom settings.

Teachers use their personal judgment, instincts, or improvisation to include students with disabilities in their teaching rather than applying formal, specialised training or evidence-based strategies. This challenge is metaphorically captured by a Ghanaian proverb shared by Esinam: "It is the severely crooked wood that reveals the (true) sculptor", emphasising the need for specialised skills akin to those of a sculptor transforming flawed wood into a masterpiece. This illustrates the high adaptability and

expertise required to tailor educational practices to effectively meet diverse student needs. Kuyini et al. (2016) reveal that the majority of Ghanaian teachers in inclusive classrooms do not have the necessary skills to teach students with disabilities effectively. Moreover, while Ravenscroft et al. (2019) found that teachers generally held positive attitudes towards including visually impaired students, this positivity did not necessarily translate into practical knowledge or skills for effective interaction in inclusive classrooms. The gap between teachers' attitudes and their actual competencies foreground the importance of targeted training. The fact that positive teacher attitudes correlate with their training background suggests that enhancing teacher education, both initial and in-service, could bridge this gap.

Esinam employed tactile maps and auditory instructions, which enabled visually impaired students to engage meaningfully with geographic content, thereby enhancing their understanding of complex spatial information. This evidence highlights a pressing need for more comprehensive teacher training in inclusive education techniques, particularly those that utilise tactile and auditory materials to enhance learning experiences for visually impaired students. By equipping teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge, we can ensure that inclusive education is not just a policy but a practical reality. Klingenberg et al. (2020) explored various aspects of inclusive education, such as teachers' attitudes and the use of tactile teaching aids like the abacus and tactile graphics, in developing mathematical concepts. Their research underlines the necessity for qualified, motivated teachers who can implement effective teaching strategies, allowing visually impaired students to achieve success and feel accomplished.

In understanding the perspective of visually impaired students and the nature of classroom interaction between them and teachers in inclusive classrooms, Aba's statement about the benefits of touch highlights the essential role of tactile teaching methods in supporting the academic success of visually impaired learners. The comparison between the accessibility in social studies, facilitated by tactile materials, and the apparent lack in other subjects indicates an inconsistency in inclusive practices across the curriculum. Efe's appreciation of the tactile approach in social studies exemplifies the potential for such methods to be extended to other areas of learning, suggesting a model for other teachers to emulate.

Highlighting the gaps in current educational practices, students like Ato, Aba, and Fiifi have expressed concerns about being excluded from mathematics, pointing out curricular limitations and the significant emotional and intellectual toll such exclusion takes. Their call for tactile formats in mathematics instruction signifies a practical step toward broader academic and career opportunities for visually impaired students. Further feedback from Aba, Efe, and Ato regarding Esinam's teaching approach offers a lens into the importance of effective communication and inclusivity in the classroom environment. Their experience emphasises the need for teachers to adopt clear, audible, and patient communication strategies to facilitate an environment where visually impaired students feel valued and encouraged to participate.

The feedback from these students corroborates the necessity for a systemic change in how inclusive education is approached, emphasising that beyond ad-hoc adaptations, there needs to be a foundational commitment to inclusivity across all subjects and teaching methods. The students' voices highlight the critical importance of ensuring that all teachers are not only aware of but also skilled in employing tactile and auditory teaching strategies. Moreover, their insights suggest that these strategies should not be viewed as supplementary but as integral components of the teaching process, essential for the true inclusion of visually impaired learners.

6.9.2 Cooperative skills

"Hu ma ni so ma me nti na ntwee mienu nam" translates to "It is because of 'blow the dust off my eyes' that two antelopes walk together" and emphasises the critical need for collaboration in supporting students with visual impairments. This metaphor not only highlights the importance of teamwork but also exposes the failure of isolated teaching approaches that often dominate inclusive education. The "dust" represents the barriers that students with visual impairments face, and, without collective effort, these barriers remain unresolved. Hanssen (2021) stresses that inclusive education thrives on the integration of diverse professional expertise, yet this study reveals that many teachers lack the necessary support systems to work collaboratively. Baah's example of securing reading glasses for a student facilitated through cooperation with other professionals is an exception rather than the norm. It exposes a systemic gap where many educators are left to navigate the complexities of inclusion alone, with limited resources or interdisciplinary collaboration.

The findings from this study show that teachers with strong cooperative skills can transform classroom dynamics, but the broader issue lies in an educational system that does not prioritise or incentivise such collaboration. Teachers often face institutional and structural challenges that limit their capacity to engage with other professionals effectively, undermining the very notion of inclusion. Without addressing these systemic barriers, inclusive education risks becoming a superficial practice where collaboration is celebrated in theory but underfunded and unsupported in reality. This lack of cohesive teamwork is detrimental to students with visual impairments, whose success depends on a coordinated effort between educators and professionals. Salter et al. (2017) argue for active engagement in meeting diverse learning needs, but without systemic support for collaboration, teachers are left with the burden of trying to “blow the dust off” alone, which ultimately fails both students and teachers. True inclusion demands more than individual effort—it requires a structural overhaul to foster genuine, sustained collaboration.

Esinam's approach of enlisting a braille expert to adapt all teaching materials for visually impaired students exemplifies the effective use of cooperative skills in educational practice. By ensuring equitable access to educational resources, Esinam not only improves the learning environment for these students but also potentially sets a higher standard of academic excellence compared to their sighted peers. This method aligns with Tveitnes and Hvalby (2023), whose study on inclusive education in Norway stresses that successful inclusion depends on collaborative support from professionals across various disciplines. They argue that real progress in inclusion is achieved through the collective efforts of diverse experts sharing ideas and strategies. This is mirrored in Dadzie's experience, which highlights a notable challenge—the difficulty in obtaining resources to make mathematical concepts accessible to visually impaired students—hence revealing a critical gap in the educational support system. Effectively addressing this gap is crucial for enhancing the educational experiences of these students.

Observations from Nkansah's and Baah's classes further validated the importance of cooperative skills. Nkansah's use of a braille expert not only enhanced the learning materials' accessibility but also ensured that visually impaired students received equal feedback on their work. Similarly, Baah's initiative to invite a resource teacher to address social and emotional learning aspects empowers visually impaired students to advocate for their rights and dignity. Feedback from students during focus group

discussions provides direct evidence of the benefits of these cooperative strategies. Statements by Efe and Ato highlighted how essential resources like braille textbooks and social welfare support contribute significantly to their academic success and overall well-being. The compelling evidence from interviews, observations, and focus group discussions paints a clear picture: strong cooperative skills among teachers and their collaboration with a broad spectrum of professionals are crucial for enhancing the educational experiences of visually impaired students in inclusive settings. These findings not only support the Critical Disability Theory but also call for a systemic embrace of multidisciplinary collaboration in educational policies and practices. This approach ensures that all students, regardless of physical abilities, have equal opportunities to succeed academically and fully develop in inclusive educational environments (Landsman et al., 2023).

6.9.3 Overcoming environmental barriers

The inappropriateness of the physical environment of Unity Inclusive School presented a significant barrier to effective classroom interaction. Observations revealed that neither the classroom layouts nor the school environment adequately considered the needs of students with visual impairments. Teachers frequently described their classrooms as overcrowded, such as in Baah's class, which held fifty-five students with only one teacher. During interviews, the teachers emphasised that the lack of appropriate physical preparation in Unity Inclusive School classrooms hindered their ability to include visually impaired students effectively.

This observation is consistent with Koller et al. (2021), who contend that overcrowded school settings and insufficient accommodations harm the social inclusion of students with disabilities and obstruct the development of inclusive educational experiences. In contrast, Avramidis et al. (2000) discovered that class size did not have a direct impact on teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. In Ghana, mainstream schools are often ill-prepared to accommodate students with disabilities, as confirmed by Mprah et al. (2016). The classrooms are overcrowded relative to the needs of the students and the available space, making it difficult for visually impaired students to navigate without bumping into objects or losing balance. Lindsay et al. (2003) note that the typical crowded and noisy school environment could overwhelm students with disabilities, leading to distraction and overstimulation, which might explain the disruptive behaviours reported by the teachers at Unity Inclusive School.

The lack of adequate preparation in designing inclusive classroom environments remains a significant barrier. Students and teachers are both affected by poorly adapted classrooms, reflecting a superficial approach to inclusion that emphasises the substitution of mainstreaming for genuine inclusion. This neglects the deeper requirements of creating a truly inclusive environment and overlooks the impact on students' development. Hauerwas and Mahon (2018) note that cultural beliefs, such as associating disabilities with shame and punishment, often lead families to conceal their children from society. In societies where disabilities are viewed as shameful, fostering a sense of belonging among students with disabilities is challenging, impacting their interactions with their physical environment and limiting their opportunities for inclusive learning experiences.

6.9.4 Inclusive instructional strategies

Essinam's approach to differentiated instruction and peer tutoring exemplifies effective inclusive teaching practices. By tailoring learning activities to meet diverse student needs, these methods ensure that students with visual impairments can fully engage with and understand concepts, capitalising on their unique strengths. This practice not only supports students with visual impairments but also enhances the overall classroom dynamic.

The literature supports the effectiveness of such inclusive instructional strategies. Negash (2020) highlights the importance of differentiated instruction, peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and activity-based learning in enhancing interactions within the classroom, especially for students with visual impairments. Manga et al. (2020) also recognise that these strategies are vital for catering to the varied needs of all learners, providing an accessible and responsive educational environment. This discussion emphasises the gap between recognising the need for such inclusive strategies and the actual implementation, as observed in Essinam's practice, which serves as a model for bridging this divide in educational settings.

Nkansah also emphasises the benefits of cooperative learning and activity-based strategies for inclusive instruction. These approaches enhance problem-solving skills and the practical application of knowledge while creating a supportive learning environment where students with and without disabilities collaborate. According to Smith et al. (2008), both teachers and students must actively engage as equal partners in the co-construction of new knowledge. This method supports academic growth and

contributes to broader societal goals of inclusivity, thus helping to foster both social and academic growth. Smith et al. talk about the transformative role of education in fostering a democratic and inclusive society in Northern Ireland. They advocate for teaching and learning that are grounded in sociocultural understandings of learning through interaction, promoting the development of democratic and inclusive values within educational practices.

Furthermore, classroom observations provide tangible evidence of the effectiveness of these strategies. For example, Esinam's technique of regrouping students for assignments encourages interaction and collaboration among learners from diverse disability backgrounds, enriching their understanding through varied perspectives. Additionally, Baah's approach to cooperative learning ensures that all students, regardless of disability, participate equally, thus improving the quality and scope of both academic and social interactions.

Overall, the findings indicate that while inclusive instructional strategies have a significant potential to improve the learning environment for students with visual impairments, the inconsistency in their application highlights the need for enhanced teacher training and clearer policy directives. Ensuring that all teachers are equipped with the skills and knowledge to implement these strategies will be crucial in fostering truly inclusive classrooms that cater to the needs of all students. This discussion clearly outlines how inclusive instructional strategies positively impact classroom interaction and dynamics, particularly for students with visual impairments, while also pointing out the areas where further improvement is needed to ensure these strategies are consistently and effectively utilised.

6.10 Teachers' pedagogical change

This section explores how teachers have diversified their methods to meet the unique needs of students with visual impairments and the barriers they encounter in inclusive classrooms. I reference past studies discussed in the literature review to address the third research question. This section amplifies the often-overlooked voices of teachers, highlighting their innovative pedagogical changes and the social, cultural, and structural challenges that have hindered their efforts.

6.10.1 The implementation of a Universal Design for Learning

"Se biribi ankɔ ka papa a, enka ennye grɛdɛ", which translates to "If nothing pricked the palm tree, it would not have rattled", speaks to a deeper resistance ingrained in sociocultural norms. This proverb illustrates a reluctance to shift teaching practices unless external forces, such as including students with visual impairments, compel change. Just as the palm tree only responds when provoked, many educators may be hesitant to embrace new pedagogical strategies like the Universal Design for Learning unless they face undeniable pressure. This resistance reflects a broader issue within educational systems where entrenched beliefs and practices prevail until disruption is unavoidable. It raises a critical question: are teachers adapting out of genuine commitment to inclusivity or merely responding to the demands of a system that leaves them unprepared and unsupported? The rattle may fade without more proactive engagement and deeper training, but true progress will remain elusive.

The findings of this study highlight a critical disparity in the adoption of Universal Design for Learning strategies. While Esinam has successfully embraced Universal Design for Learning approaches to foster pedagogical change in inclusive classrooms, most of her colleagues have not been able to do so. Despite receiving a week of training on Universal Design for Learning, three teachers (Dadzie, Nkansah, and Baah) expressed concerns that this brief duration was insufficient to translate Universal Design for Learning principles into effective classroom practice. Their feedback points to a systemic issue where training is treated as a checkbox exercise rather than a comprehensive developmental process. These teachers rightly advocate for at least two weeks of intensive, hands-on professional development, alongside continuous support, to effectively implement Universal Design for Learning strategies. This raises questions about the adequacy of current professional development models and highlights the disconnect between policy mandates and the practical needs of teachers, ultimately hindering progress towards true inclusivity in classrooms.

Moreover, the imposition of the Universal Design for Learning without proper training or cultural adaptation means that teachers like Dadzie are left to navigate these expectations with little support. While the Universal Design for Learning promotes flexibility in teaching and learning, it does not fully account for the realities of educational contexts in places like Ghana, where infrastructure, class sizes, and cultural approaches to education differ significantly from those in Western nations.

This perspective aligns with previous research by Schelly et al. (2011), which found that teachers could enhance their utilisation of Universal Design for Learning principles following professional development. The evidence suggests that both standalone training and ongoing support post-training can significantly boost the adoption of Universal Design for Learning strategies among teachers in inclusive settings. Long-term professional development is crucial as teachers continue to refine their pedagogical skills and adapt their approaches well beyond their initial training (Borko, 2004). Therefore, sustained and comprehensive professional development is essential for catalysing meaningful changes within inclusive classrooms, as underscored by Guskey (2000). Teachers may understand the principles of Universal Design for Learning and occasionally apply them in inclusive classrooms. Dadzie encountered significant difficulties in integrating Universal Design for Learning principles into his teaching methodologies, particularly in subjects like mathematics. Despite his desire to diversify instructional methods and move away from traditional teaching approaches, he finds it challenging to implement these changes.

While the Universal Design for Learning holds great potential for improving inclusivity in education, its effectiveness in Ghana is undermined by a lack of resources, insufficient teacher training, and the fact that it is a framework developed in a different cultural and educational context. Teachers may understand and appreciate the value of the Universal Design for Learning, but without the means to implement it effectively, it remains a theoretical rather than practical solution in many Ghanaian classrooms.

Similarly, Nkansah attributes his inability to consistently apply the Universal Design for Learning to a lack of time, indicating that even with knowledge of Universal Design for Learning, practical constraints hinder its full application. This reflects a broader issue where teachers struggle with the necessary pedagogical changes required for effective Universal Design for Learning implementation. These struggles are not only about logistics or skills but also involve deeper sociocultural factors. Ubuntu emphasises interconnectedness, shared responsibility, and the idea that an individual's well-being is tied to the well-being of the community (Fisher, 2017). If Nkansah, as a teacher, adopts this philosophy, he would see the application of Universal Design for Learning not merely as an additional task but as a moral and collective responsibility to ensure that every student, including those with visual impairments, is given the opportunity to succeed. Ubuntu teaches that we are all responsible for each other's success, and, in an

inclusive classroom, this would translate to a commitment to designing lessons that cater to all learners, even if it requires extra effort.

Nkansah's struggle, therefore, is not just logistical; it reflects a broader cultural and institutional reluctance to fully embrace inclusive education. Ubuntu encourages educators to view inclusion as essential to the well-being of the whole class rather than as an additional burden. By embracing this philosophy, Nkansah could shift his mindset from focusing on the constraints to finding ways to foster an inclusive, empathetic, and supportive learning environment that benefits everyone.

This resistance is critical because if teachers harbour misconceptions or biases towards students with disabilities, fully embracing and implementing the Universal Design for Learning becomes even more challenging. Fixsen et al. (2005) highlight that such struggles are typical in the early phases of implementing new educational programmes. Thus, schools and districts aiming to adopt a Universal Design for Learning must be prepared to offer extensive professional development, including coaching and ongoing support, especially during the initial stages of implementation. By integrating the Ubuntu philosophy with empathy, teachers may be able to challenge societal stereotypes about visual impairment, welcoming visually impaired students with kindness and without labelling or discrimination. This approach could enhance teachers' knowledge and understanding when it comes to educating students with visual impairments.

The African philosophy of Ubuntu offers a profound lens through which to view inclusion. Its emphasis on interconnectedness, empathy, and shared humanity provides a guiding principle for fostering societies and educational systems that embrace and uplift every individual. By integrating Ubuntu into our approach to inclusion, we take a step towards creating a more just, equitable, and harmonious world where every person's unique contributions are valued and celebrated. The literature emphasises the importance of an inquiry-based pedagogy, which involves teachers actively questioning and reflecting on their teaching strategies (Goodwin., 2024; Loughran, 2014). An inquiry-based pedagogy approach supports the idea that effective teacher professional practice should encompass modelling, reflection, and inquiry.

6.10.2 Using multiple modes

Using varied modes to present learning materials, such as tactile objects, can significantly aid students with visual impairments in grasping complex concepts. Esinam demonstrates this through her innovative teaching strategies where she employs audio-visual technology to engage these students. Additionally, she introduces maps in tactile formats, enabling students to physically explore and understand the different regions of Ghana through touch. This approach not only engages students but also aligns with the Universal Design for Learning principles that advocate for providing alternative auditory information (Carrington et al., 2020). Further supporting this approach, Landsman and Lewis (2023), suggest that by diversifying the modes of information presentation—such as visual, textual, and symbolic—teachers can improve accessibility and ensure equitable learning opportunities.

Dadzie, Nkansah, and Baah highlighted the risk of overwhelming visually impaired students with too many sensory inputs, such as mathematical concepts, tactile materials, and chemical names. They stressed that using multiple modalities without careful selection can cause “sensory overload”, hindering learning. To address this, they advocated for a strategic approach, selecting the most effective tools like tactile diagrams for spatial understanding and simplified auditory instructions for complex ideas. This ensures students can focus on key concepts, enhancing learning without confusion. Echoing this concern, Liu et al. (2023) express the importance of delivering information in a way that effectively engages visual and auditory channels without overburdening the learner's cognitive processing capabilities. This discussion underlines the need for teachers to carefully choose and integrate various modes of representation. Such a strategy ensures that each element introduced in the learning environment contributes positively, enhancing the overall educational experience without exceeding the cognitive limits of the learners. Ultimately, this thoughtful application of multimodal instructional strategies can lead to more inclusive and effective educational practices.

6.10.3 Scaffolding appropriate goal setting

Esinam employed scaffolding as a means of pedagogical change in teaching students with visual impairment in an inclusive classroom. Esinam supports students with visual impairments in setting appropriate goals, in accordance with Guideline 6 of the Universal Design for Learning (providing options for executive functions) (CAST,

2018). This approach emphasises how autonomy and motivation align with Universal Design for Learning philosophy. Kilag et al. (2023) argue that when students take control of their learning, it helps to improve academic results. This research endorses the importance of motivation and autonomy in learning.

Personalised goal setting fosters self-regulation and engagement, encouraging students to actively identify and pursue their objectives (Nedzinskaitė-Mačiūnienė & Šimienė, 2021). This active engagement is essential for Universal Design for Learning implementation as it requires teachers to adapt their strategies to accommodate and nurture students' self-directed learning skills. Furthermore, Dotson (2018) highlights the impact of precise, personalised goals on student achievement, reinforcing their academic success.

6.10.4 Assistive technology as a means of pedagogical change

The data gathered demonstrates that teachers' knowledge and use of assistive technology are crucial in shaping the educational experience of students with visual impairments in inclusive classrooms. However, the effectiveness of this knowledge is significantly hindered by the availability of these technologies. The comments from Dadzie and Esinam reveal a significant gap in the use of assistive technologies, such as computer assistive technology and mobile phones. For example, Dadzie's perspective highlights the transformative potential of assistive technology, particularly in specialised subjects like mathematics. His anticipation of future technologies underscores a widespread recognition among teachers of the need for technology that can adapt educational content to the needs of visually impaired students.

Observations in Esinam's class further validated the critical role of assistive technology. Esinam supports teaching students with visual impairment with her mobile phone. Similarly, Baah's experience during the examination, where multiple printouts at varying font sizes were needed, showcases the inefficiencies and resource wastage that could be mitigated with appropriate technology, such as screen readers or magnifiers. The insights from the focus group discussion with students with visual impairment, particularly Efe's comment about the use of technology, emphasise the tangible benefits of assistive technologies. Students recognise these tools as essential for reducing the educational barriers they face, highlighting the importance of these technologies in facilitating access to learning materials and assessments.

The findings make it clear that while teachers acknowledge the importance of assistive technology in enhancing educational outcomes for visually impaired students, the actual impact is stifled by a lack of access to these critical tools. This disconnect not only affects the quality of education but also reflects broader systemic issues that need to be addressed. For truly effective inclusive education, there is an urgent need for investment in and integration of assistive technologies in schools. This would ensure that all students, regardless of their visual capabilities, have equal opportunities to succeed academically and interact meaningfully within the classroom environment. This study aims to clearly articulate the pivotal role of assistive technology in inclusive education and the barriers that currently prevent its full potential from being realised.

6.11 Chapter summary

The proverbs have helped make sense of the data by providing cultural insights into the challenges and dynamics of inclusive education for students with visual impairments in Ghana. They illustrated how entrenched beliefs, and hierarchical structures prevent teachers from questioning ineffective practices (*"Wo ne hwan kɔ ka se Okomfoɔ se kɔɔ"*). They also revealed scepticism about traditional methods supporting visually impaired students (*"Se dufɔkyee da nsuom da da koraa entumi nnane denkyem da"*). The proverbs also critiqued the lack of adequate teacher training (*"Se kwatrekwa ka se ɔbema wo ntoma a, tie ne din"*) and emphasised the importance of collaboration (*"Hu ma ni so ma me nti na ntwee mienu nam"*) to overcome educational barriers. These cultural expressions contextualised the data, shedding light on the systemic issues that hinder effective inclusion and highlighting the need for better training and resources.

Chapter 7 Rethinking Teachers' Experiences of Inclusive Education: Pathways for the Future

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents final reflections on the research. It situates the study within inclusive education in Ghana and returns to the core focus—teachers' work with students with visual impairment in an inclusive junior high school. It considers what these accounts reveal about culture, pedagogy, and system support. Chapter organisation: Section 7.2 uses Critical Disability Theory and the African philosophy of Ubuntu to interpret teachers' accounts. Section 7.3 summarises the key findings. Section 7.4 proposes Funtunfunefu Denkyemfunefu (the two-headed crocodile) as a dialogic framework for inclusive education in Ghana. Section 7.5 outlines the study's limitations. Section 7.6 presents implications and recommendations. Section 7.7 states the thesis's contribution to knowledge. Section 7.8 provides a final reflection.

7.2 Engaging Critical Disability Theory and the African philosophy of Ubuntu in discussing teachers' experiences

This study applies Critical Disability Theory (CDT) and the African philosophy of Ubuntu to explore teachers' experiences in teaching students with visual impairments in inclusive classrooms in Ghana. Through the use of proverbs, cultural insights emerged, revealing how entrenched beliefs and hierarchical structures hinder effective inclusion. For example, some teachers, shaped by societal norms, did not question ineffective practices or engage in critical reflection. Proverbs critiqued the lack of adequate teacher training and emphasised the importance of collaboration to overcome educational barriers, illustrating the systemic challenges in providing inclusive education.

Integrating CDT and Ubuntu philosophy provides a strong foundation to critically examine these dynamics, highlighting how traditional assumptions about disability undermine inclusive practices. These two frameworks complement each other and challenge exclusive pedagogical practices in Ghana's inclusive classrooms. Goodley (2014) describes “critical” as involving self-appraisal and reassessment, which encourages a deeper exploration of issues such as inclusion and exclusion. This lens challenges the societal and structural barriers that portray students with visual impairments as incapable of participating in inclusive education.

Some teachers in this study described visually impaired students in negative terms, influenced by cultural beliefs that associate disability with curses or evil. These beliefs not only affect teachers' attitudes but also shape their pedagogical practices, reinforcing exclusion.

This study reveals the need for a systemic transformation, including a shift in ideological perspectives about visual impairment. It calls on teachers to question their biases and assumptions, urging them to foster an inclusive, equitable learning environment. CDT and Ubuntu philosophy theories encourage educators to go beyond the status quo and address the underlying injustices that can lead to exclusion in inclusive settings. Community-based sensitisation efforts are essential to challenge negative perceptions, myths, and stereotypes, reframing visual impairment as a form of diversity rather than an abnormality. In line with CDT principles and Ubuntu philosophy, this research amplifies the voices of teachers and students with visual impairments, acknowledging their aspirations and potential. Listening to their stories highlights that they, too, can thrive in inclusive educational settings when properly supported. Integrating both CDT and Ubuntu, I contend that teachers and students in inclusive classrooms can engage in meaningful dialogue, listen actively, and consider each other's perspectives. This creates a learning environment where conflicts and misunderstandings are resolved constructively, and neither students nor teachers resort to mocking or hostility when ideas or concepts are incomplete

Moreover, this study found that inadequate teacher training contributed to the failure to diversify teaching methods, infringing on the educational rights of students with disabilities. Although inclusive policies exist, there is a significant gap between policy and practice. Le Grange (2018) and Hall (2019) argue that Ubuntu's presence promotes pedagogical changes that meet the needs of both visually impaired and sighted students, creating a more compassionate and just learning environment. As Mutanga (2022) notes, Ubuntu encourages a compassionate pedagogical approach, reinforcing the value of each student and fostering collaboration to remove barriers to learning. Teachers lack the resources and skills to support visually impaired students effectively, further marginalising them. This gap reflects the need for in-service training to equip teachers with the necessary knowledge and tools and ensure that students with visual impairments have equal opportunities to succeed.

7.3 Summary of key findings

Whether acknowledged or not, prejudice and discrimination are deeply embedded in modern society, with individuals with disabilities often being victims. (McHenry, 2015, p. 123)

This study examines teachers' experiences working with students with visual impairments in inclusive classrooms in Ghana. An ethnographic approach was used, incorporating interviews, observations, focus groups, and informal interactions with teachers. Guided by Critical Disability Theory, the African philosophy of Ubuntu, and the use of proverbial knowledge, the findings that emerged have provided valuable insights into how cultural factors shape educational practices and allowed for a deeper connection with participants' narratives. The findings are organised around sub questions. How do social and cultural norms influence teacher pedagogy? What is the nature of classroom interactions between teachers and students with visual impairments? In what ways has the teachers' pedagogy changed to accommodate the needs of students with visual impairment?

The proverb "Sε dufōkyee da nsuom da da koraa entumi nnane denkyem da", which translates to "No matter how long a log may stay in a river, it can never turn into a crocodile", reflects how disability influences the perceptions of Ghanaians, shaping their reluctance to fully embrace inclusive approaches in education. Through this saying, teachers expressed their frustration, conveying the belief that, despite their efforts, students with visual impairments were perceived as unable to fully benefit from inclusion in Ghana.

The first research sub question reveals how social and cultural norms deeply influence teachers' pedagogical practices in inclusive classrooms. Teachers tended to view visual impairments through a medical lens, believing that students with such impairments should be placed in special schools for education and treatment rather than integrated into regular classrooms. Teachers like Dadzie, Nkansah, and Baah held this perspective, which significantly shaped their teaching approaches, often neglecting the needs of students with visual impairments. Cultural factors, such as superstitious beliefs about disability, played a stronger role in shaping these views than pedagogical reasoning. For example, Baah, who is both a tribal chief and a teacher, felt that there was no need to interact with or teach students with visual impairments.

During observations, teachers like Dadzie did not engage students with visual impairments, allowing them to sleep in class, which undermined the philosophy and goals of inclusion. These cultural beliefs made teachers feel burdened by the task of including students with visual impairments, leading to struggles in adapting their teaching methods to meet these students' needs. As a result, some teachers experienced guilt over their inability to effectively teach students with visual impairments. The study revealed the Akan term, “Yen ka won mom” (“Let's put them together”) merges the concepts of inclusion, integration, and mainstreaming. This overlap in terminology creates challenges among Akan-speaking individuals, who find it difficult to apply this proverb in educational settings. However, the voices of students with visual impairments reject these beliefs and sociocultural practices held by some teachers in inclusive classrooms. They assert that visual impairment is a natural phenomenon that can happen to anyone and should not affect their education.

The proverb, "Dua kontonkyikontonkyi na ɛma ye hunu odumfour papa" that translates to "It is the severely crooked wood that reveals the true sculptor" suggests that challenges and difficulties bring out true skill and craftsmanship. In the context of education, it emphasises that the ability to effectively include students with disabilities, despite the challenges, demonstrates the true capability of a teacher.

The study revealed that teachers faced several structural and relational barriers that significantly impacted their ability to teach students with visual impairments. Structural barriers included inadequate preparation, insufficient training, and poorly defined roles and responsibilities. Relational barriers involved a lack of collaboration and support among staff. These interconnected barriers contributed to the exclusion of students with visual impairments rather than fostering their inclusion.

The findings suggest that these challenges were largely shaped by sociocultural beliefs embedded within the Ghanaian education system. Additionally, the study highlighted the poor implementation of inclusive education with teachers given only a week of training before being asked to integrate students with visual impairments, which was insufficient to develop effective strategies. As a result, students with visual impairments were often socially, emotionally, and educationally excluded. Teachers also lacked essential resources, such as braille textbooks and tactile materials, further isolating these students in resource rooms instead of fully including them in the classroom.

However, the voices of the students with visual impairments suggest that some of the teachers should learn from Esinam, who diligently demonstrated inclusive approaches.

"Hu ma ni so ma me nti na ntwee mienu nam" that translates to "It is because of blowing the dust off my eyes that two antelopes walk together" signifies the need for mutual support and cooperation. In the context of inclusive education, it highlights the importance of acceptance and support in overcoming challenges and ensuring that students with disabilities are not left behind.

The teachers also faced a conflict between their Christian beliefs, which encouraged support and acceptance of students with visual impairments in Ghana; their cultural beliefs, which viewed individuals with visual impairments as deficient; and their professional knowledge, which promoted a student-centred teaching approach. This clash of perspectives created challenges in how they approached inclusive education. This incongruity created tension in their ability to fully align their practices with inclusive education principles. However, only one teacher in this study, Esinam, demonstrated inclusive approaches both inside and outside the classroom. During hanging out, Esinam was seen demonstrating her skills in leading students with visual impairment in orientation and mobility. This was largely due to her background in special education and her early experience interacting with students with visual impairments. She proposed that inclusion in Ghana should be reimaged in a way that reflects the country's cultural context. She emphasised the significance of the *Funtunfunefu Denkyemfunefu* (explained later in this chapter) a symbol highlighting inclusive education and which holds the potential to shape a culturally grounded approach to teaching students with visual impairments.

The proverb, "Sε kwatrekwa ka se obema wo ntoma a, tie ne din", which translates to "If a naked man promises you a cloth, listen to his name", suggests that someone who lacks the necessary resources or knowledge cannot deliver on their promises. In this study, the teachers expressed a similar sentiment, acknowledging that they did not have the proper training or skills to teach blind students. Many admitted that, without specific training in this area, they felt "naked" and unprepared to effectively interact with students with visual impairments.

The second research sub question explored several key findings about the nature of classroom interactions between teachers and students with visual impairments. The findings highlighted substantial barriers to achieving full inclusive educational practices. There was a noticeable deficiency in the practical skills and knowledge necessary for effective engagement and instruction. The research reveals that most teachers often lack proficiency in using tactile and auditory instructional materials, which are crucial for meeting the sensory needs of visually impaired students in inclusive classrooms. Additionally, while the implementation of cooperative learning and activity-based strategies has shown potential in improving problem-solving skills and fostering a collaborative learning environment, their application is inconsistent. This inconsistency suggests a need for more comprehensive teacher training programmes and clearer educational policies.

However, the sporadic use of these strategies highlights the gap between the ideals of inclusive education and the current reality in classrooms. These findings emphasise the urgent need for educational systems to invest in specialised training and policy refinement to ensure that inclusive teaching practices are not only adopted but also consistently and effectively implemented. Such measures are crucial to ensuring that all students, including those with visual impairments, receive the education they deserve.

The proverb, "Sε biribi ankɔ ka papa a, ɛnka ɛnnye grɛɛ", which translates to "If nothing pricked the palm tree, it would not have rattled", reflects a deeper resistance among teachers to changing their pedagogical practices for students with visual impairments. This proverb, shared by a teacher in the findings, illustrates the reluctance to adopt inclusive approaches in meeting the needs of these students. Inclusive education, seen as an external force in the Ghanaian context, is not culturally embedded, making it difficult for teachers to adapt their teaching methods to accommodate students with visual impairments. Despite the push for inclusion, teachers continue to struggle with implementing necessary changes.

The third research sub question focused on how teacher pedagogy has evolved to accommodate students with visual impairments. Key findings reveal a disconnect between the theoretical understanding of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles and their practical application in classrooms.

This gap is primarily due to insufficient professional development and complex sociocultural and institutional challenges. UDL principles, which advocate for diverse instructional methods and the use of assistive technologies, have great potential to support students with visual impairments. However, the success of these strategies depends on the availability of resources and teachers' ability to incorporate them into daily teaching practices. Effective strategies identified include scaffolding and personalised goal setting. Notably, only one teacher—Esinam—successfully adopted these strategies to address individual needs in the inclusive classroom. The study highlights the need for further development in inclusive practices as many students with visual impairments are still not fully integrated into mainstream educational settings. This gap emphasises the need for enhanced training and resource allocation to ensure that inclusive education principles are effectively applied.

In summary, teachers in inclusive classrooms must recognise that visual impairment is a part of human diversity, integral to both the human fabric and identity. Societies are strengthened when teachers embrace and enable students with visual impairments to become part of the inclusive educational experience, particularly at the basic level where early intervention is key. However, the failure to recognise visual impairment as part of Ghana's educational diversity perpetuates cultural biases and structural barriers, leaving students with visual impairments marginalised.

The unequal distribution of resources and support for students with visual impairments, along with the lack of prioritisation, continues to reinforce their exclusion. Furthermore, the absence of a strong voice for both teachers and students with visual impairments in the inclusive process results in unequal participation. If these issues persist, true equity remains an unattainable goal.

7.4 Building Ubuntu on the potentials of Funtunfunefu Denkyemfunefu: A Dialogic Framework for Inclusive Education in Ghana.

To create a socially just society through quality education, we must collectively and individually rethink our approach to disability. Ubuntu, a pan-African concept, encourages emotional and relational support among teachers and students, promoting shared responsibility and community.

Although the term *Ubuntu* may not be widely recognised in Ghana, the values it embodies such as communal care, sharing, and mutual support are deeply embedded in Ghanaian everyday life. The Ghanaian culture such as inviting others to share food reflect the spirit of Ubuntu, even if people do not use the term explicitly (Boaheng, 2024). These values closely mirror key elements of inclusive education, particularly the emphasis on empathy, cooperation, and respect for difference.

For inclusive education to succeed in Ghana, it must draw on both philosophical ideals and culturally grounded practices. Ubuntu offers a valuable moral and relational foundation, promoting the idea that a person's humanity is affirmed through relationships with others (Dzokoto et al., 2018). This aligns well with inclusive education's vision of equitable participation and belonging. However, applying Ubuntu meaningfully in Ghana requires an approach that does not impose external cultural frameworks but rather connects with local values and symbols.

For inclusive education to succeed in Ghana, there needs to be a balance between Ubuntu and the Ghanaian cultural symbol *Funtunfunefu Denkyemfunefu* depicted in Figure 10. This symbol offers a powerful tool to address issues of nonrecognition, unequal distribution of resources, and misrepresentation of people with disabilities.

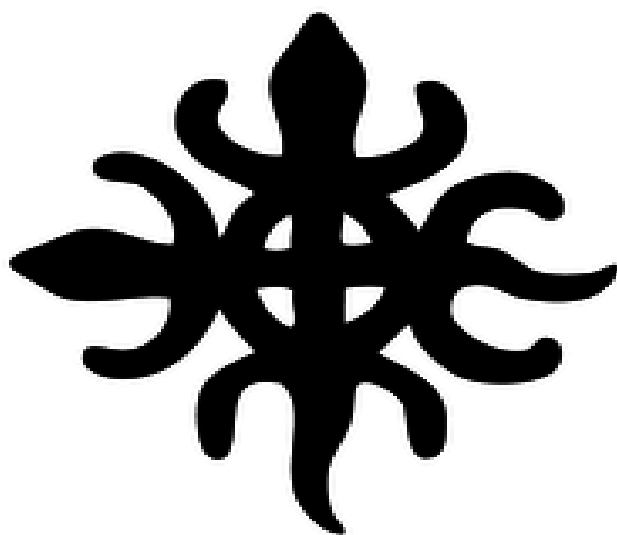


Figure 11: Funtunfunefu Denkyemfunefu Symbol of inclusion

The Akan Adinkra symbol *Funtunfunefu Denkyemfunefu* depicting Siamese crocodiles with a shared stomach offers a powerful resource (Willis, 1998). The symbol represents the tension of conflict within unity: two beings connected by a common destiny yet engaged in struggle.

In the context of inclusive education, one crocodile head can be seen to represent abled individuals in the classroom, such as teachers and sighted students, while the other symbolises students with disabilities, particularly those with visual impairments. Despite differences in ability, background, or learning needs, all stakeholders are bound together in the same system and must learn to support each other for collective success. Importantly, this synthesis does not suggest that Ubuntu should replace Ghanaian traditions or dominate local culture. Instead, Ubuntu can enhance and extend the meaning of existing symbols like *Funtunfunefu Denkyemfunefu*, offering a culturally located philosophical foundation for understanding inclusion. This avoids the implication of cultural colonisation and instead promotes intellectual collaboration across African cultures (Dzokoto et al, 2018). It respects the autonomy of Akan thought while building solidarity with broader African ideals.

Practically, this framework can inform teacher education, classroom relationships, and policy making. This symbol may encourage teachers and sighted students to see beyond impairments and work together toward shared goals with students with disabilities. Teacher training programmes, for instance, can use *Funtunfunefu Denkyemfunefu* to reflect on the challenges of diversity, while Ubuntu can offer strategies to nurture inclusive and caring classrooms (Le Grange, 2020). Lessons drawn from both traditions can be used to help stakeholders to reflect on how mutual support and understanding make inclusive learning environments possible. In doing so, cultural heritage becomes a living pedagogical resource, not just a symbol of the past.

Ubuntu philosophy and *Funtunfunefu Denkyemfunefu* together offer a compelling, culturally grounded approach to inclusive education in Ghana. Rather than viewing Ubuntu as a foreign philosophy, it should be understood as an African value system that complements local traditions. Through their integration, inclusive education can be reshaped to reflect both indigenous wisdom and shared continental aspirations, ensuring that the movement towards equity and inclusion remains rooted, relevant, and decolonised.

7.5 Limitations of the research

Data for this study was collected from teachers of students with visual impairments in a single basic inclusive school in Ghana, utilising one-to-one interviews, observations, focus groups, and hanging out.

Expanding these data collection methods to include multiple inclusive schools could have enriched the study further. Additionally, a more comprehensive approach would have involved examining the preparatory training that students with visual impairments receive before they engage in inclusive classrooms. Though students' voices were considered in this study, the study only considered advice from students with visual impairment on teachers' thoughts and examples in teaching them in inclusive classrooms.

This study employed an interpretive, qualitative approach, focusing on a selected group of teachers within an inclusive classroom in Ghana. The intent was to delve deeply into specific experiences rather than to produce generalisable findings. As such, the results are not broadly applicable beyond the specific contexts of the participating teachers and their classrooms, though efforts were made to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. This specificity, however, provides valuable insights into the challenges and barriers that may be present in similar cultural and educational contexts.

My study has avoided some of the methodological limitations associated with studies about teachers' experiences with inclusion. For instance, this study utilised more than one method of data collection. This contrasts with some studies (Mprah, 2016; Van Hees et al., 2015), which utilised interviews as the only method for collecting data. Further, a limitation of some studies appears to be the inclusion of the opinions of only teachers in inclusive classrooms (Kuyini, 2016; Phillips & Tibble, 2014). In this study, the perspectives of students with visual impairment were included. Involving the views of students with visual impairment has brought focus to insights into teachers' experiences.

7.6 Research implications and recommendations

As argued throughout this study, teachers cannot achieve the goal of inclusion alone. Improving the learning outcomes of students with visual impairment in basic inclusive classrooms requires collaboration. All actors—teachers, students, families, school leaders, and policymakers—must work together. Each brings unique expertise and resources to support inclusive education.

This need for unity is symbolised by the Akan Adinkra symbol *Funtunfunefu-Denkyemfunefu* (Dzokoto et al, 2018). It depicts two crocodiles sharing one stomach but struggling against each other.

The symbol reminds us that working in isolation is unproductive when the goal is shared. Inclusive education demands mutual respect, interdependence, and a collective commitment to equity. The following subsections explain how this study has implications for teachers, students with visual impairment, institutions that practice inclusion, society, policymakers, and researchers.

7.6.1 Recommendation for curriculum reform

The existing curriculum should be updated and applied using a rights-based approach to education, grounded in inclusive education principles that value diversity and equity. This study identified that the primary obstacle to implementing inclusive, student-centered teaching at Unity Inclusive School was the shortage of trained teachers. To address this, there is a need for in-service training for current teachers and enhancements to teacher education programmes, including the Bachelor of Education (BEd), Master of Philosophy in Education (MPhil), and Master of Education (MEd) degrees.

The study further revealed that the participating teachers had not received adequate training in inclusive education. Therefore, the Government of Ghana should provide comprehensive professional development focused on inclusive pedagogy, disability rights, and social justice. Delivering such training at the district level would empower teachers to adopt inclusive and student-friendly strategies that respect and affirm the unique identities and needs of all learners, particularly those with visual impairments. To reinforce inclusive teaching practices, district-level monitoring committees should be established. These committees would oversee classroom practices involving students with visual impairments and provide refresher training sessions to sustain effective pedagogy over time.

Critically, this shift toward inclusive and collaborative educational practice should be guided by the indigenous Ghanaian philosophy symbolised by Funtunfunefu-Denkyemfunefu—the Adinkra symbol of two crocodiles with separate heads but a shared stomach. This symbol represents unity in diversity, cooperation amidst difference, and the necessity of working together toward a common good. Integrating this philosophy into the curriculum would emphasise that although educators, students, parents, and administrators may have different roles and perspectives, they share a collective responsibility for achieving inclusive education.

7.6.2 Recommendations for Policymakers

To ensure the effective inclusion of students with visual impairments at all levels of education, there is a need for policymakers at both national and institutional levels to establish well-structured, detailed policies that incorporate input from all stakeholders. These policies should serve as practical guides for inclusive practices, ensuring that every actor involved—educators, administrators, families, and community leaders—plays a meaningful role in implementation. Collaboration between national and institutional policymakers is essential to bridge the persistent gap between policy formulation and actual practice.

The philosophy of Funtunfunefu-Denkyemfunefu is particularly relevant here (Willis, 1998). This Adinkra symbol reflects the idea that although stakeholders may have differing perspectives and roles, they are ultimately bound by a shared goal—in this case, inclusive and equitable education. Just as the crocodiles must learn to cooperate to survive, inclusive education policies must be developed and implemented through cooperation, unity, and shared commitment. When stakeholders are actively involved in creating inclusive education policies, they are more likely to support and engage in their successful execution. This process must include ensuring that the right individuals are adequately resourced, trained, and empowered to carry out their roles effectively. Integrating the Funtunfunefu-Denkyemfunefu philosophy into both policy discourse and implementation strategies reinforces the importance of collective ownership, mutual respect, and the interdependence necessary for true educational inclusion to be realised.

Additionally, the Ghanaian Government should increase the resource funding budget to meet the minimum educational needs of students with visual impairments. The study also highlights that current Ghanaian policy documents often frame visual impairment through a medical model of disability, treating it as an individual health issue that can be addressed with medical interventions. This approach needs to be revised. Policies must be updated to emphasise the fundamental rights of students with disabilities, including access to education, health, and other essential services. Furthermore, the existing infrastructure and resources are neither sufficient nor disabled-friendly. The government should prioritise supplying schools with adequate, accessible, and disability-friendly resources to create an inclusive learning environment for students with visual impairments.

By addressing these gaps, inclusive education in Ghana can be significantly improved, ensuring that students with visual impairments have equal access to quality education.

7.6.3 Recommendations for Teachers

The study revealed that only one teacher actively engaged students with visual impairments using auditory and tactile materials, fostering meaningful interactions with these students. This highlights the need for all teachers to take a keen interest in the unique learning needs of each student and to actively participate in supporting their learning processes. Teachers should make full use of the available resources and expertise within the classroom to enhance their teaching practices for students with visual impairments. The study also found varying teacher perspectives on the learning capabilities of students with visual impairments. Three out of four teachers believed that students with visual impairments could not learn effectively alongside their sighted peers while the fourth teacher supported the view that students with visual impairments could learn equally well in an inclusive setting. The *Funtunfunefu-Denkyemfunefu* theory offers a powerful conceptual lens through which to understand and address these challenges. Teachers must focus on inclusive pedagogy and adopt student-centred strategies that cater for the needs of all students, including those with visual impairments. To achieve this, teachers should be strongly motivated and committed to transforming traditional teaching methods into inclusive teaching practices. School principals should receive training in leadership and management for inclusive education. Principals with strong skills in this area can support teachers in building more welcoming, inclusive classrooms. Encouraging an inclusive approach among teachers and school leaders can greatly enhance the learning experience for students with visual impairments.

7.6.4 Recommendations for Broader Society

Some teacher participants interpreted disability through the medical (individuals with disabilities are sick) lens and karmic actions, believing that visual impairment resulted from sinful acts committed by forefathers, fate, or divine curses. To address these misconceptions, the government, nongovernmental organisations, and communities should organise awareness programmes to educate the public about disabilities in Ghana. The philosophy of *Funtunfunefu-Denkyemfunefu*, reinforces the need for unity and interdependence in addressing social issues like disability stigma.

This Adinkra symbol teaches that although people may hold different views or occupy different roles, they are connected by shared outcomes. In the context of disability inclusion, it suggests that progress requires collective effort. Educators, policymakers, families, and communities must work together in harmony rather than in isolation or opposition. This would help foster positive attitudes toward persons with disabilities among nondisabled individuals. A disability committee should be formed at the local level, not just at the district or national levels. Teachers and school principals are key in addressing these inequalities. For instance, principals could arrange meetings with parents to openly discuss these issues, helping to build strong, supportive relationships among parents, students, and teachers. Schools can act as catalysts for promoting inclusion and reducing exclusion by regularly communicating and organising meetings that bring together parents, teachers, and students. If teachers respect, welcome, and value each student as a learner, this can help develop a sense of belonging, which, in turn, may challenge traditional beliefs about disabilities, including visual impairments, in Ghana. This approach would contribute to building more inclusive and equitable educational environments.

To address the linguistic overlap in the Akan term, “*Yen ka won mom*”, which translates to “Let's put them together”, merges the concepts of inclusion, integration, and mainstreaming. It is recommended that educational policies in Ghana explicitly differentiate between these terms. Clear definitions and distinct terminologies should be developed and disseminated through teacher training and educational materials. This will help Akan-speaking individuals to accurately distinguish between inclusion and mainstreaming, ensuring that policies and practices align more closely with the true principles of inclusion rather than defaulting towards mainstreaming.

7.6.5 Recommendations for working with Students with visual impairment

This study highlighted the need to recognise and respond to the diverse learning needs of students with visual impairments by incorporating flexible and inclusive teaching strategies. It is crucial for teachers to be academically and pedagogically prepared to facilitate meaningful interactions with students with visual impairments.

By integrating more tactile and auditory instructional approaches alongside varied teaching methods, educators can create learning environments that are accessible, inclusive, and responsive to all learners.

This inclusive approach aligned with the philosophy of Funtunfunefu-Denkyemfunefu calls attention to the necessity of collaboration and mutual dependence in achieving a shared goal. In the context of inclusive education, this Adinkra philosophy reminds us that teachers, students, support staff, and the educational system must work together in harmony to ensure no learner is excluded. Just as the symbol warns against working at cross-purposes despite interdependence, the education system must avoid fragmented, one-size-fits-all strategies.

Additionally, the study revealed that students with visual impairments were not adequately prepared for inclusion in the classroom as they were often placed in inclusive settings without sufficient preparation or instructional support tailored to their needs. This lack of readiness negatively affected their ability to engage in the learning process. Therefore, the findings strongly advocate for a more structured approach where students with visual impairments are given the necessary materials and training to succeed in inclusive environments. This includes ensuring they are equipped with the tactile and auditory learning strategies essential for their success. By addressing these gaps in preparation and instructional support, this study provides a clear and compelling argument for the improvement of inclusive education practices. Ensuring that students with visual impairments are properly prepared for and supported in inclusive classrooms will enhance their engagement, facilitate smoother interactions with teachers, and ultimately improve their educational outcomes.

In conclusion, the findings of this study have broad implications for societal, institutional, and policy reforms. By leveraging culturally significant symbols like *Funtunfunefu Denkyemfunefu*, we can promote greater understanding and acceptance, fostering a more inclusive educational environment. This approach provides a blueprint for change, not only in Ghana but in similar contexts where cultural perceptions continue to hinder the full inclusion of individuals with disabilities.

7.6.6 Recommendation for future research

Future research into the working with visually impaired students in the Ghanaian education could take a few different directions.

Firstly, research could focus on students' experiences in inclusive classrooms. While this study considered students' perspectives, I was unable to explore them in depth.

A more detailed examination of their experiences would provide valuable insights into the effectiveness and challenges of inclusive education from the students' point of view.

Secondly, this study focused on a small group of teachers in one inclusive school in Ghana. Future research could be conducted in more schools practising inclusive education in the country to explore the similarities and differences between them.

Thirdly, research aimed at understanding how to increase societal awareness—such as through professional development opportunities for teachers—would be beneficial in advancing the effectiveness of inclusive education. This research could be allied with examining the philosophy of Funtunfunefu-Denkyemfunefu as a framework for advancing inclusive education.

7.7 Contribution to knowledge

This study makes a methodological contribution to knowledge. This use of proverbial knowledge enhances the methodology of ethnography (Chilisa, 2019). Proverbs not only reveal the worldviews of teachers but also serve as a culturally grounded lens for understanding how social and cultural norms shape teachers' teaching practices. By incorporating proverbs, the research affirms the significance of local perspectives in exploring how teachers navigate and develop inclusive teaching strategies.

The key to fostering inclusive practices lies in shifting teachers' worldviews and challenging the cultural narratives that frame disability as a limitation. This ontological shift is essential for rethinking pedagogy in a way that accommodates all learners. This study argues for a pedagogical shift that not only equips teachers with the tools for inclusion but also transforms their fundamental understanding of students with disabilities. By leveraging cultural norms as a point of reflection and change, inclusive education can become a reality, not just a goal. This research therefore offers a critical pathway for future reforms in teacher education and inclusive practices, highlighting the importance of cultural awareness as a lever for achieving inclusion.

Previous studies in Ghana and across the African region have primarily focused on quantitatively measuring teacher competencies, perceptions, and attitudes toward teaching students with disabilities in tertiary education as well as qualitatively examining structural barriers.

However, no research has deeply explored the experiences of teachers working with students with visual impairments in an inclusive setting. Internationally, while a few studies have examined teachers' experiences with inclusion, they tend to focus on structural barriers and issues that affect inclusion and, although these are legitimate concerns, they are insufficient for a holistic understanding of the challenges faced.

This research, in contrast, addresses the hidden sociocultural factors that impact the inclusion of students with visual impairments and the experiences of their teachers. By enabling both teachers and students with visual impairments to share their perspectives, this study emphasises the importance of developing respectful and trusting relationships between the researcher and participants. It offers valuable insights into how cultural, structural, and relational barriers influence teacher practices and affect the implementation of inclusive education. The study revealed that improper implementation of inclusive education, along with these cultural and structural barriers, negatively affects not only the teachers but also the students with visual impairments. Students with visual impairments are often viewed through a deficit lens, in contrast to their sighted peers, with an inability to look beyond their impairments to recognise their capabilities and potential. It is hoped that this research will contribute evidence to show that students with visual impairments are often perceived as deficient and, as a result, are deprived of equitable educational opportunities in various cultural contexts. Ultimately, this study aims to enhance inclusion in Ghana, offering a clearer view of the realities faced by students with visual impairments and advocating for systemic changes to support their education.

7.8 My final reflection

This study takes me back to a story from 22 years ago (see page 13, Section 1.2), a narrative that continues to resonate and shape my academic journey. During our transition to junior high school, a close friend of mine who had recently lost his sight was advised by school authorities to enrol in a special school for the blind, as teachers felt ill-equipped to meet his learning needs within the mainstream classroom. Unfortunately, due to financial constraints, his parents could not afford the boarding expenses such as toiletries and the assistive technology he required. As a result, he eventually dropped out of school. His unfulfilled educational dreams left a lasting impression on me.

This experience highlighted the systemic barriers—particularly inadequate teacher preparation, lack of resources, and exclusionary practices—that continue to marginalise students with visual impairments in Ghana today. It is this enduring reality that fuels my passion for inclusive education and underpins the focus of this research. This raises the crucial question: Who is truly impaired? Is it the visually impaired individual, the institutional systems, or perhaps the culture itself that is impaired? The phrase, "If all you see is all you see, then you don't see all there is to be seen", captures the heart of the issue where limited perceptions hinder genuine inclusion in Ghanaian society.

As I reflect on my PhD thesis, I am reminded of the Akan proverb, "*Abusua te se kwae, wo gyina akyire a, ebo mu tuu nanso wo ben ho a, dua biara si ne sibre*", which translates to **"Family is like a forest; from a distance, all the trees seem together, but when you get closer, you see the unique position of each tree."** In much the same way, inclusion in Ghana's education system appears unified from afar with schools symbolising the forest. At first glance, one might believe that inclusion is fully practised as signalled by the schools' commitment. However, upon closer examination, it becomes clear that not all students are truly included, much like how each tree in the forest stands in its own distinct place. Teachers have expressed their behaviour, attitudes, and thoughts on inclusive education through proverbs, offering deeper insights into what inclusion truly means in the Ghanaian context. These proverbial expressions provide an ontological understanding of how teachers approach the inclusion of students with visual impairments. The findings of my thesis reveal that teachers' perceptions of visual impairments have contributed to the exclusion of students with these disabilities—like how each tree in a forest stands in its own distinct, often isolated position.

Reflecting on the study of teacher experiences in working with students with visual impairments, this thesis has significantly enhanced my understanding of inclusive education. I found that teachers' pedagogical practices are profoundly influenced by a mix of past and present experiences, both conscious and unconscious, related to visual impairment. Conducting this research has been a transformative experience, improving my skills in data collection, critical thinking, and academic writing. Employing a diverse range of methodologies not only enriched my research but also prepared me for a future academic career.

I particularly discovered the effectiveness of diagramming for conceptualising ideas and analysing data, which sharpened my critical thinking and enhanced my ability to report findings.

In 2003 and 2004, Ghana made a legislative commitment to inclusive education. The aim was to transform the educational system into an inclusive model. The importance of such legislation and policies in achieving an inclusive education system cannot be denied. It must be noted from this study that legislation and policy alone are not sufficient for achieving an inclusive educational system. According to Slee (2008), it is essential to have a thorough strategy in place for evaluating inclusive education practices. Such a strategy ensures that inclusion efforts are regularly assessed and improved, helping to identify areas that need development. By doing so, educational systems can continuously adapt to better support the diverse needs of all students, particularly those with disabilities, ensuring more effective and equitable learning environments.

In Ghana, no studies have been conducted to ascertain whether cultural practices influence teacher pedagogy or the nature of classroom interaction with students with visual impairment. An inclusive education system at the basic level in Ghana guarantees equal opportunities for teachers to diversify their methods to meet the needs of every student. This paucity offered the impetus for this research. The study has raised awareness about the nature of barriers experienced by teachers in meeting the needs of students with visual impairment. This is an important aspect of participants' experiences as it reinforces the notion that challenges remain in the realisation of an inclusive education. On this basis, the findings of the study reinforce the need for basic institutions in Ghana to adopt and effectively implement inclusive practices.

I conclude this study with the Akan proverb, "*Se wo de wa no do nwere a, ebi nnwo wo*", which translates to "If you weed thorny plants with your lips, you will escape without scars". This proverb reflects the importance of genuine acceptance and belonging rather than mere lip service. This highlights the discrepancies between Ghana's inclusive education policy and the realities experienced in classrooms. It calls for an urgent need for systemic change within the inclusive education landscape in Ghana.

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List of Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approval



Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee
(AUTEC)

9 March 2023

Adrian Schoone

Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Adrian

Ethics Application: 23/31 Understanding teachers' experiences of teaching students with visual impairment in Ghana. Pedagogies and possibilities

Thank you for submitting your application for ethical review. We are pleased to advise that the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) approved your ethics application at their meeting on 13 February 2023, subject to:

1. Revision of the student recruitment process so they can contact the researcher directly if they are interested.

C.3.5.5. Is amended, so that students can directly contact the researcher if they are interested in the study, and an assent form will be given to them.

I have changed the working on the student participant information sheet.

2. Clarification of the recruitment process for PTA, and Head Teacher;

For students who have signed the assent form, the principal invites the parents of those students to the school where the researcher will explain the purpose of the research.

(The PTA are not being recruited but are a system that Ghanaian schools use to contact parents. The Head Teacher is the researcher's contact person at the school.)

The participant information sheet for the school clarifies the role of the head teacher.

3. Clarification of exactly what the participation of the teachers involves;

- Interview of up to one hour at the beginning (as indicated on the participant information sheet for Teachers)
- Each teacher observed once a week for 30 minutes over the course of two months
- Up to 30 minutes per week of ‘hanging out’ with teachers in their planning, and class preparation time (I have clarified this in the participant information sheet)
- At the completion of observations, a final interview of up to 60 minutes with teachers will be done to help teachers reflect on my observations.

4. Clarification of the role of the Ghanaian advisor;

The local advisor is a Ghanaian researcher and expert in the field studied.

- To provide cultural advice to the researcher
- To answer any questions that the parents/school/or students may have in relation to the project (rather than asking New Zealand-based supervisors)

5. Provision of more details about the role, including the inclusion criteria of the student advisors. Ensure that all this information is clearly outlined in their Information Sheet;

The purpose of the student advisory is to provide insights/perspectives to help the researcher make sense of the observation data. The student advisors may provide advice to the researcher on particular aspects to observe. The students advisors can give their perspectives on emerging findings.

6. Clarification regarding whether all students are participating (phase 2) or just those who are visually impaired;

Those that are visually impaired are in a classroom with sighted students. The observation focuses on how teachers are working with the visually impaired.

7. Provision of an Information Sheet for all the students (including incidental participants) in the classroom where the teacher observation is taking place;

I have completed a new participant information sheet for students with visual impairment. I am in your class 30 mins a day; my focus is on looking at the nature of interaction that exist between teachers and students during teaching moment. I am not going to record any observations of you.

8. Clarification as to why in the observation guidelines for teachers there is reference to observing the students;

This relates to the observing the teaching of students with visual impairment, and the teacher's interaction with these students. The emphasis is on the teacher practice.

9. Clarification of whether student advisors are from the class being observed and how release from class is being arranged;

The advisory group will come from students not in the observed classes. The names of the teachers and observations will be generalised so as not to identify particular teachers.

I will liaise with the Head Teacher on the best time to work with the students.

10. Revision of the data and Consent Form storage to meet AUT guidelines given in section 18 of AUTEK's *Applying for Ethics Approval: Guidelines and Procedures*, which can be accessed on the research ethics website at <http://aut.ac.nz/researchethics>;

Once the findings are completed the research data will be stored on a secured hard drive by the primary supervisor.

11. The Permission to Access Form needs to be tailored to the principal giving permission (not a CEO of an organisation)

The permission sheet has been modified.

12. Clarification as to whether the school will be named or given the option to be named. Include advice about this in the Information Sheet and consent form;

The school will not be named. (Check the Information Sheet and consent form)

13. Amendment of the Information Sheet (teacher)

- a. In the 'What will happen...' step out what the requirements are and include the time commitment;

I have amended it.

- b. Include advice about where the research will be conducted and that it will be recorded and transcribed;

These have been clarified.

- c. Advice that if the school is named then only limited confidentiality can be offered;

The school will not be named.

- d. Inclusion of advice that permission for the research has been given by the principal;

I have amended the teachers participant information sheet.

- e. Inclusion in the benefits section that the researcher will obtain a qualification.

I have done that.

14. Provision of separate Information Sheets for the parents/legal guardians and the students;

I have done this check participant information sheet for parents/legal guardian.

15. Amendment of the Information Sheet for the School as follows:

- a. In the 'What is the purpose of the research' delete the last sentence starting with "Ultimately..."

I have done this.

- b. Delete the word 'interview' when referring to students;

I have done this.

- c. In the section on risks, delete the statement that students can give information they are not supposed to reveal, or rephrase;

I have revised it.

- d. Advice as to whether the school will be named;

The school will not be named.

- e. In the 'What will happen...' step out what the requirements are and include the time commitment;

Amended.

- f. Inclusion in the benefits section that the researcher will obtain a qualification;

I have done it.

16. Amendment of the Information Sheet for students (focus groups):

- a. In the 'How do I agree...' section, remove the word 'selected' and replace with how the students was recruited;

Amended.

- b. Clarification as to who 'we' is and remove the word 'interview'

Revised.

- c. Inclusion in the benefits section that the researcher will obtain a qualification;

Amended.

17. Across all Information Sheets, include the name of all supervisors;

Amended.

18. Amendment of the Parent/Guardian Consent Form to be tailored to focus groups and reference the child as they are the participants;

I have replace with focus group consent form and tailor to child.

19. Inclusion in the teachers Consent Form of a bullet point in relation to observations;

I have done this.

20. Provision of the documents that will be translated into braille.

Student Information sheet and Assent form.

Please provide a response to the conditions in a memo and attach any altered documents, such as the Information Sheet, Consent Forms, Survey.

A revised EA1 is not required unless specifically requested in the conditions.

Please reference the application number and study title in all correspondence.

The Committee is always willing to discuss with applicants the points that have been made. There may be information that has not been made available to the Committee, or aspects of the research may not have been fully understood.

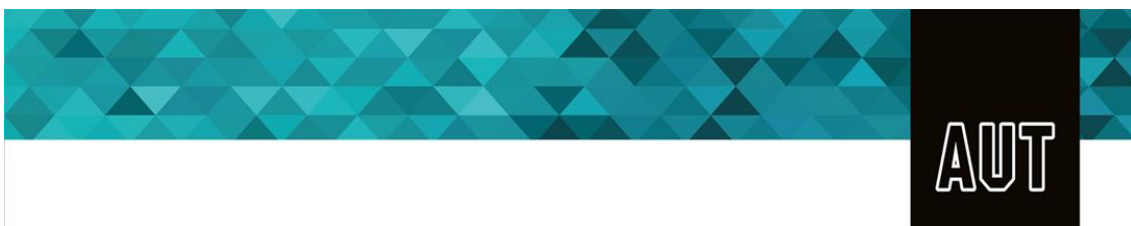
When the conditions have been met, you will be notified of the full approval of your ethics application. Full approval is not effective until all the conditions have been met. Data collection may not commence until full approval has been confirmed. If these conditions are not met within six months, your application may be closed, and a new application will be required if you wish to continue with this research.

If you have any enquiries about this application, please contact us at ethics@aut.ac.nz.(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEK Secretariat

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: j oelizzel@yahoo.com; anienie.veldsman@aut.ac.nz



Working Title

Understanding teachers' experiences of teaching students with visual impairment in Ghana: Pedagogies and possibilities.

Semi-structured interview guidelines

1. How do you define inclusive education?
2. Can you share with me your understanding of visual impairment?
3. Have you ever taught a student with visual impairment? If yes
Prompt: How many years?
Prompt: Where and When?
4. Can you share with me some of the social and cultural norms with regard to students with visual impairment?
Prompt: How?
Prompt: Do you think that is how it should be?
Prompt: How should it be? If yes what should be done?
5. Can you tell me how these social and cultural norms impact in your daily teaching?
6. What is your understanding of inclusive classroom interaction?
7. How do you relate to students with visual impairment in your classroom?
Prompt: What relationship exists between you and students with visual impairment?
Prompt: Do you experience challenges in relating with the visually impaired?
8. Please can you share with me some of the challenges you encounter in engaging students with visual impairment?
Prompt: Is there anything that can enhance teachers' and students' visual impairment interaction?
10. Do you think teacher pedagogy should change to accommodate the needs of students with visual impairment? If yes, why, and how?
11. Do you think you need support in changing pedagogy to meet the needs of students with visual impairment? If yes, what kind of support would you need?

12. Giving the support do you think teachers will be willing to make changes to accommodate students with visual impairment? If yes, how, and why?

Interview guide for Students with visual impairment

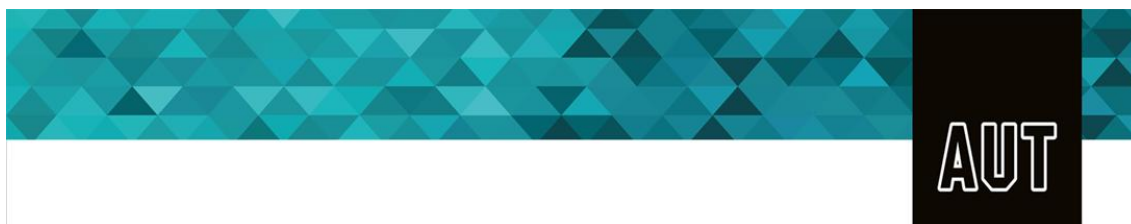
13. Describe what it is like learning in this classroom.

14. I observed x and x – what do you make of my observations?

15. How do you think the classroom interactions should be between you and your teacher?

16. Please, do you have any suggestions to make to ensure effective teaching?

3Appendix C: Interview guide for students with visual impairment



1. Please can you tell me your experiences in inclusive classroom?
2. Can you share with me the availability of support services and assistive technology to aid your understanding about teacher pedagogy in inclusive classroom?
3. How are you included in the inclusive classroom?
4. Do you think inclusive education is the best education for you? If yes how and if no why?
5. What is the relationship between you and your teacher in inclusive classroom and how do you belong during teaching moments?

4Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet - Teaching Staff Members in Inclusive School



Teaching staff members in Inclusive School

Date Information Sheet Produced:

14/01/2023

Project Title

Understanding teachers experiences of teaching students with visual impairment in Ghana: Pedagogies and Possibilities.

An Invitation

I am Joseph Ampratwum, PhD student at the Auckland University of Technology, at the school of Education, New Zealand. I invite you to participate in the first phase of this research project. I am exploring teachers' experiences in teaching students with visual impairment in Ghana. This research is a PhD thesis in Education with a focus on inclusion of students with visual impairment. I will be working with Dr Afua Ntoaduro (local advisor).

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this study is to explore the nexus of culture, inclusive pedagogy, and disability. This entails understanding how social and cultural norms influence teacher pedagogy and how disabled people are 'constructed' or imagined in Ghana, an exploration of the nature of the interactions between teachers and students with visual impairment, including ascertaining how teachers' classroom pedagogy has potentially shifted to meet the needs of students with visual impairment. Ultimately, this study focuses on critically exploring the role of teachers as the key protagonists whose pedagogies potentially contribute to and disability within their teaching, or take more inclusive approaches that enable learning opportunities, and in doing so, perpetuate cast a vision for a more inclusive society.

The findings of this research may be used for academic publications and presentations.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

As a teaching staff member in inclusive classroom, you are invited to participate in this study. I am seeking eight participants thus, four teachers and four students with visual impairment. Should I receive more than eight participants, I will select participants based on balancing the number of participants in the various inclusive classrooms and ensuring a balance of teaching experience.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You can withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may be possible.

If you wish to participate in this study, please email me, Mr Joseph Ampratwum at the contact details below. On receipt of your email. I will send you a consent form to sign and return through email, or you can leave a signed formed with your principal.

What will happen in this research?

The first phase of this research will be interviewing to understand the educational journeys of each of the teacher participants and what brought them to teach at Inclusive Schools, gain knowledge in regards to teachers' experiences of teaching students with visual impairments in inclusive classrooms, such as knowledge about approaches they have undertaken and the barriers they face. Each interview will last at least approximately 60 minutes and will be conducted at a time suitable for each participant.

With the second phase, each teacher will be observed twice during lesson delivery. The observation will focus on the teacher's relationship with students with visual impairment, teachers' demonstration of skills in handling students with visual impairment, and how teacher pedagogy changes to accommodate students with visual impairment.

Field notes from hanging out activities will be used to complement the data as a secondary source, from being in your class for a further hour after or before each observation.

Specifically, "hanging out" is an expression that embodies the field relationship between the researcher and the research participants. Since this current study is premised on understanding cultural impact, it demands that I immerse myself with participants as well as the research site.

These research methods will help me develop understanding of teachers' experiences in teaching students with visual impairment specifically in mainstream classroom with inclusive practice.

What are the discomforts and risks?

There are some risk that you may experience in phase 1 and 2. Given your work load commitments, the time commitment required for this phases may cause stress. You may feel overwhelmed with new information presented to you in the inclusive practice days.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

The location of time with participants will be negotiated with me the researcher, who is fully informed of this research. These sections will have frequent breaks. Should extraordinary events impact upon your total commitment, and you wish to continue in the research, I will be happy to provide catch-up sessions at a time suitable for you. In the inclusive practice, we will ensure to go at your pace of teaching.

What are the benefits?

We hope that your contribution to this research will result in better education outcomes for teachers and students in inclusive classroom and in the wider inclusive system. In addition, you will receive professional development regarding teaching students with visual impairment in inclusive classroom and expert guidance for the planning of your inquiries.

How will my privacy be protected?

You will not be named in any research report, publication or presentation or other communication in relation to this project. However, we will be naming Cape Coast School which could result in your identification. Consent forms, and data, pertaining to you will be locked in a secure cupboard, and destroyed after six years.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

The time involved in participating in this phase of research for teachers are one hour each day for the period of three months. We will give participant some gift for participating.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You have 10 days to consider this invitation with a reminder email will be sent by the principal of the school in 7days.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

You will receive a summary report on the preliminary stages of setting up teacher inquiries.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this research should be notified to Executive Secretary of AUTEK, ethics@aut.ac.nz, (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Dr Adrian Schoone and Dr Anienie Veldsman

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Joseph Ampratwum joelizzel@yahoo.com

0540485471.

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr Adrian Schoone: adrian.schoone@aut.ac.nz

Dr Anienie Veldsman: anienie.veldsman@aut.ac.nz

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *type the date final ethics approval was granted*, AUTEK Reference number *type the reference number*.

5Appendix E: Participant Information Sheet - Inclusive School



Inclusive school

Date Information Sheet Produced:

09/03/2023

Project Title

Understanding teachers' experiences of teaching students with visual impairment in Ghana: Pedagogies and Possibilities

An Invitation

I am Joseph Ampratwum, PhD student at the Auckland University of Technology, at the school of Education, New Zealand. I invite you to participate in the first phase of this research project. I am exploring teachers' experiences in teaching students with visual impairment in Ghana. This research is a PhD thesis in Education with a focus on inclusion of students with visual impairment. I will be working with Dr Afua Ntoaduro (local advisor). The local advisor is a Ghanaian researcher and expert in the field studied. She is supposed to give cultural advice to the researcher. Again, She will answer any questions that the parents/school/or students may have in relation to the project (rather than asking New Zealand-based supervisors)

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this study is to explore the nexus of culture, inclusive pedagogy, and disability. This entails understanding how social and cultural norms influence teacher pedagogy and how disabled people are 'constructed' or imagined in Ghana, an exploration of the nature of the classroom interactions between teachers and students with visual impairment, including ascertaining how teachers' pedagogy has potentially shifted to meet the needs of students with visual impairment. This study focuses on critically exploring the role of teachers as the key protagonists whose pedagogies potentially contribute to and perpetuate disability within their teaching, or take more inclusive approaches that enable learning opportunities, and in doing so, cast a vision for a more inclusive society.

The findings of this research may be used for academic publications and presentations.

How was your school identified to participate in this research?

Your school was chosen for its extensive experience in including students with visual impairment over many years. Therefore, your institution has been chosen as a study area. However, there is no obligation to participate.

How do my staff and students agree to participate in this research?

After your agreement to this research proceeding at your school, I will present the research project to the staff at Cape Coast Inclusive School. My aim is to have four teachers and four students (with visual impairments') for this study. Joseph Ampratwum will present the research to teachers and students. Staff and students participation in this research is voluntary (it is their choice) and whether or not they choose to participate in this study. As the students are 16 years or under, along with gaining students assent, we

will seek parent/caregivers consent. The staff and students are able to withdraw from the study at any time. We will be seeking consent from staff members and students at two phases 1 and 4 (teachers) and phase two (students with visual impairment).

What are the risks for our organisation?

These research inquiries into experiences of teachers in teaching students with visual impairment. Therefore, it is possible that students with visual impairment playing advisory role can give information they are not supposed to reveal.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

As your school is partnering with this research, your school name will not be mentioned.

However, should students inadvertently name teachers; we will keep that information confidential. No staff member names will be communicated.

What are the benefits?

We hope that your school contribute to this research will result in better inclusive system outcomes for students with visual impairment. Your teachers will receive professional development in inclusive classroom as inquiry, and expert guidance throughout the implementation of their own inclusive practice relative to visually impaired. This project will be awarded a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Education.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

As per AUT's participant information sheet for your school, we will give students and staff a small monetary gift of \$20.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

You will receive a summary report at the completion of each phase of this research.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor,

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, ethics@aut.ac.nz , (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Dr Adrian Schoone and Dr Anienie Veldsman

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Joseph Ampratwum: joelizzel@yahoo.com

0540485471

Dr Afua Ntoaduro (local Advisor)

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr Adrian Schoone: adrian.schoone@aut.ac.nz

Dr Anienie Veldsman: anienie.veldsman@aut.ac.nz

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *type the date final ethics approval was granted*, AUTEK Reference number *type the reference number*.

6Appendix F: Participant Information Sheet - Students and parents with visual impairments



Students and parents of students with visual impairment.

Date Information Sheet Produced:

09/03/2023

Project Title

Understanding teachers' experiences of teaching students with visual impairment in Ghana: Pedagogies and Possibilities.

An Invitation

Good morning, I am Joseph Ampratwum, PhD student at the Auckland University of Technology at the School of Education, New Zealand. I invite you to participate in the first phase of this research project. I am looking at teachers' experiences teaching students with visual impairment in Ghana. This research is a PhD thesis in Education focusing on the inclusion of students with visual impairment. I will be working with Dr Afua Ntoaduro (local advisor).

What is the purpose of this research?

This study aims to understand how teachers' backgrounds influence the methods teachers use in handling students with visual impairment. This entails understanding how social and cultural norms influence teachers' ways of thinking about visual impairment in an inclusive classroom or imagined in Ghana and the nature of the classroom interactions between teachers and students with visual impairment, including ascertaining how teachers' have changed their ways of teaching to meet the needs of students with visual impairment in order to cast a vision for a more inclusive society.

The findings of this research may be used for academic publications and presentations.

You might have the following questions.

How was I identified, and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You are invited because you are currently a parent or caregiver of a student with visual impairment at Cape Coast Inclusive School. If your child volunteers, I will keep you informed and sign consent form.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

If your child agrees with you to take part in the research, we will arrange for a research meeting explaining the purpose of the study to you. We will provide you with an assent form to sign because your child is 16 years or under. Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. Your child can withdraw from the study at any time. If your child decides to withdraw from the study, he will be offered the choice between having any data known as belonging to him removed and allowing it to continue to be used. However, removal of your child's data may not be possible once the findings have been produced.

What will happen in this research?

At a time suitable to your child, we will have a focus group discussion with four students with visual impairment including your child. The focus group discussion for the advisory group will meet three times for 20 minutes. We will ask them some questions about their thoughts and advice for data gathered from teachers and their understanding of an inclusive environment and the nature of classroom interaction between you and teachers. Also, they only have to contribute they wish to do so. We

will audio record the discussion and only the researcher will re-listen to what each participant said.

What are the discomforts and risks?

They may feel upset giving advice on the data gathered from teachers and the nature of classroom interaction between you and teachers.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

We will not ask them about their own thought on their teachers, but rather, we ask how students with visual impairment could (any other student) tell their perspective. These may be negative or positive experiences. They may leave the discussion section at any time. No questions asked.

What are the benefits?

We hope that your child's contribution to this research will improve inclusive education outcomes, specifically for students with visual impairment. Some gifts will be provided to students.

How will my privacy be protected?

You or your child will not be named in any research report, publication, presentation, or other communication related to this project. Consent forms, and data, about you will be stored in a hard drive by the primary supervisor and removed after six years.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

The time involved in participating in this research for your child will be 20mins over three months starting from April to June.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You have ten days to consider this invitation with your child. Their class teacher will remind you after 7 days to respond if you wish.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

No

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, ethics@aut.ac.nz, (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Dr Adrian Schoone and Dr Anienie Veldsman. Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Joseph Ampratwum: joelizzel@yahoo.com

0540485471/02108087888.

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr Adrian Schoone: adrian.schoone@aut.ac.nz

Dr Anienie Veldsman: anienie.veldsman@aut.ac.nz

Dr Afua Ntoaduro: afua.ntoaduro@yahoo.com (local advisor)

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *type the date final ethics approval was granted*, AUTEK Reference number *type the reference number*.

7 Appendix G: Participant information sheet - Sighted Students



/03/2023

Project Title

Understanding teachers' experiences of teaching students with visual impairment in Ghana: Pedagogies and Possibilities.

An Invitation

Good morning, I am Joseph Ampratwum, PhD student at the Auckland University of Technology at the School of Education, New Zealand. I am informing you of the second phase (observation) of my research project which will be carried out in your classroom. This is because you have colleagues with visual impairment in your classroom. I am looking at teachers' experiences of teaching students with visual impairment in Ghana.

This research is a PhD thesis in Education focusing on the inclusion of students with visual impairment. I will be working with Dr Afua Ntoaduro (local advisor).

What is the purpose of this research?

This study aims to know teachers' understanding of visual impairment (backgrounds) influences the methods teachers use in teaching students with visual impairment. This is to understand how social and cultural norms influence teachers' ways of thinking about visual impairment in an inclusive classroom or imagined in Ghana and how teachers interact with students with visual impairment, including the way teachers have changed their methods of teaching to meet the needs of students with visual impairment in the classroom.

The findings of this research may be used for academic publications, presentations, and PhD qualifications.

You might have the following questions.

How was I identified, and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You are invited because you are currently a sighted student with students with visual impairment in your class at Cape Coast Inclusive School.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

As a sighted student at Cape Coast Inclusive School, you are in the same classroom with students with visual impairment. I will be in your classroom to observe teachers' methods in including students with visual impairment. This is to help me gather relevant data to answer my research questions. If you wish to allow this observation, please let your class teacher know, and he will inform me (researcher).

What will happen in this research?

In this research teachers will be observe once a week for 30mins during lesson delivery each week over April to June, 2023. The observation will focus on the teacher's relationship with students with visual impairment, teachers' demonstration of skills in handling students with visual impairment, and how teachers' methods changes to accommodate students with visual impairment in your classroom. At a time suitable to you, we will have a focus group discussion with students with visual impairment.

What are the discomforts and risks?

Sighted students are likely not focus on what their teacher may teach them, rather they are likely to focus on the researcher's observation and find out how this is done.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

We will explain the focus of the research to sighted students and explain what the research is about. My aim is not to observe and evaluate teachers' performance as they teach. You may leave the classroom at any time. No questions asked.

What are the benefits?

We hope that your contribution to this research will improve inclusive education outcomes, specifically for students with visual impairment.

How will my privacy be protected?

You will not be named in any research report, publication, presentation, or other communication related to this project. Consent forms, and data, about you will be locked in a secure cupboard and destroyed after six years.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

The time involved in participating in this research will be three times for 20 minutes.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You have ten days to consider this invitation. Your class teacher will remind you after 7days to respond if you wish.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

No.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, ethics@aut.ac.nz, (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Dr Adrian Schoone and Dr Anienie Veldsman. Please keep this Information Sheet for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Joseph Ampratwum joelizzel@yahoo.com

0540485471/02108087888.

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr Adrian Schoone: adrian.schoone@aut.ac.nz

Dr Anienie Veldsman: anienie.veldsman@aut.ac.nz

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *type the date final ethics approval was granted*, AUTEK Reference number *type the reference number*.

8 Appendix H: Consent Form - Teachers



For teachers

Project title: Understanding teachers' experiences of teaching students with visual impairment in Ghana.

Project Supervisor: Dr Adrian Schoone and Dr Anienie Veldsman

Researcher: Joseph Ampratwum

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 30/03/2023.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- I understand I will negotiate with the researcher when he can 'hang out', and that he will be taking notes during these periods.
- I understand I can ask the researcher to leave during a 'hanging out' session without having to give a reason.

- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, the removal of my data may not be possible.

- I agree to take part in this research.
- I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes
No

Participant's signature:

Participant's name:

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

Date:

*Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on **type the date on which the final approval was granted** AUTEK Reference number **type the AUTEK reference number***

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

9 Appendix I: Consent Form - Focus group for students with visual impairments



Focus group for students with visual impairment

Project title: Understanding teachers' experiences of teaching students with visual impairment in Ghana.

Project Supervisor: Dr Adrian Schoone

Researcher: Joseph Ampratwum

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 30/03/2023.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that identity of my fellow participants and our discussions in the focus group is confidential to the group and I agree to keep this information confidential.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the focus group and that it will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.

- I understand that if I withdraw from the study then, while it may not be possible to destroy all records of the focus group discussion of which I was part, I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes No

Participant's signature:

Participant's name:

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

Date:

*Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on **type the date on which the final approval was granted AUTEK Reference number type the AUTEK reference number***

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

10 Appendix J: Consent Form - Parent/Guardian



Parents and Caregivers of Students with visual impairment

Project title: Understanding teachers' experiences of teaching students with visual impairment in Ghana.

Project Supervisor: Dr Adrian Schoone and Anienie Veldsman

Researcher: Joseph Ampratwum

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 30/03/2023.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw my child/children and/or myself from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- I understand that if I withdraw my child/children and/or myself from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to my child/children and/or myself removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of our data may not be possible.
- I agree to my child/children taking part in this research.
- I understand that my child is able to refuse to give assent to take part in this research.
- I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes No

Child/children's name/s :
.....
...
.....
.....

Parent/Guardian's signature:
.....

Parent/Guardian's name:
.....

Parent/Guardian's Contact Details (if appropriate):
.....
.....
.....
.....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on **type the date on which the final approval was granted** AUTEK Reference number **type the AUTEK reference number**

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.



Students with visual impairment

Project title: Understanding teachers' experiences of teaching students with visual impairment in Ghana.

Project Supervisor: Dr Adrian Schoone and Dr Anienie Veldsman

Researcher: Joseph Ampratwum

- I have read and understood the sheet telling me what will happen in this study and why it is important.
- I have been able to ask questions and have them answered.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the focus group and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- I understand that I can stop being part of this study whenever I want and that it is perfectly ok for me to do this.
- If I stop being part of the study, I understand that then I will be offered the choice between having any information that that other people can know bout me moved or letting the researcher keep using it. I also understand that sometimes, if the results of the research have been written, some information about me may not be able to be removed.
- I agree to take part in this research.

Participant's signature:
.....

Participant's name:
.....

Participant Contact Details (if appropriate):
.....
.....
.....
.....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *type the date on which the final approval was granted* AUTEK Reference number *type the AUTEK reference number*

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

12 Appendix L: Permission for researchers to access organisation school staff / students



For Inclusive School

Project title: Understanding teachers' experiences of teaching students with visual impairment in Ghana.

Project Supervisor: Dr Adrian Schoone and Dr Anienie Velsman

Researcher: Joseph Ampratwum

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 30/03/2023
- I give permission for the researcher to undertake research within _____
- I give permission for the researcher to access the staff / students / employees of _____

Principal's CEO's signature :
.....

Principal's CEO's name:
.....

Principal's CEO's Contact Details (if appropriate):
.....
.....
.....
.....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *type the date on which the final approval was granted* AUTEK Reference number *type the AUTEK reference number*

Note: The head of the organisation should retain a copy of this form.