

**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

**EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS' ATTITUDE TOWARD INCLUSION IN EARLY  
CHILDHOOD CENTRES WITHIN THE AYAWASO WEST MUNICIPALITY**

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## DECLARATION

### Student's Declaration

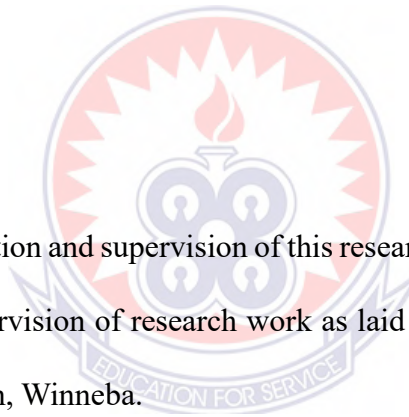
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### Supervisor's Declaration

I hereby declare that the preparation and supervision of this research work were done in accordance with the guidelines for the supervision of research work as laid down by the School of Graduate Studies, University of Education, Winneba.



**Name of Supervisor:** Professor Hans Kweku Wiabo Baffoe (Ph.D)

**Supervisor's Signature:** .....

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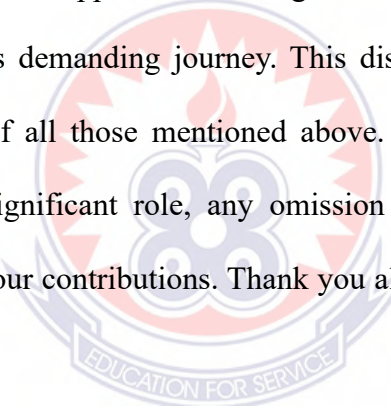
**DEDICATION**

To my lovely Family



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>DECLARATION</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>DEDICATION</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE:INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background to the Study	1
1.2 Problem Statement	4
1.3 Purpose of the Study	6
1.4 Research Objectives	6
1.5 Research Questions	6
1.6 Significance of the Study	7
1.7 Delimitations of the Study	9
1.8 Limitations of the Study	9
1.8 Operational Definition of Terms	10
1.9 Organisation of the Study	10
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>12</b>
2.0 Overview	12
2.1 Concept of Inclusion	19
2.2 Inclusion in Early Childhood Education	24
2.3 Category of Disabilities in Early Childhood Education	29
2.4 Benefits of Inclusion in Early Childhood Education	38
2.5 Teachers' Perspective on Inclusion in Early Childhood Centres	41
2.6 Influence of Cultural Beliefs on Attitudes Toward Inclusion	47



2.7 Support Services Available to Early Childhood Teachers’ Inclusive Practices	51
2.3.4 Challenges	61
<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>67</b>
3.0 Overview	67
3.1 Research Paradigm	67
3.2 Research Approach	68
3.3 Research Design	69
3.4 Population	70
3.5 Sample and Sampling Techniques	70
3.6 Data Collection Instruments	71
3.7 Trustworthiness of the instrument	73
3.9 Data Collection Procedures	74
3.10 Data Processing and Analysis	74
3.11 Ethical Considerations	75
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTSTION, AND DISCUSSIONS</b>	<b>77</b>
4.0 Overview	77
4.1 Data Analysis	77
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>100</b>
5.0 Overview	100
5.1 Summary of the Study	100
5.2 Key Findings	101
5.3 Conclusions	101
5.4 Recommendations	102
5.5 Suggestions for Further Studies	104
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>APPENDIX A</b>	<b>122</b>



## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate early childhood teachers' attitudes toward inclusion in early childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality. This study employed an exploratory case study design, whereas purposive sampling was employed to sample 14 teachers, the study employed semi-structured interview guide, the data was analysed thematically. The study found that teachers in the Ayawaso West Municipality generally support inclusive education because it promotes equity and social development among learners. However, many teachers feel inadequately prepared to effectively address the diverse learning needs of children in their classrooms. They emphasized the importance of a flexible curriculum but identified challenges such as inadequate resources, large class sizes, and weak administrative and parental support. Cultural beliefs were also found to influence teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, as societal perceptions of disability sometimes conflict with inclusive education principles. The study therefore concludes that successful inclusive education requires a comprehensive reform involving cultural, structural, and professional changes. This includes addressing societal beliefs about disability, providing adequate institutional support, and equipping teachers with practical inclusive teaching strategies. The study recommends professional development programs for teachers, increased funding for learning materials and assistive devices, stronger administrative and parental support, and the inclusion of cultural competence training in teacher preparation programs.



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

Inclusive education has emerged as a fundamental pillar of global educational reforms, emphasizing the right of every child, irrespective of ability, to access quality education in an inclusive setting (Ainscow, 2020; UNESCO, 2021). This commitment aligns with international frameworks such as the Salamanca Statement (1994) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4, which advocates for inclusive and equitable education for all learners (United Nations, 2015). Over the years, Ghana has made significant progress in integrating inclusive education policies into its national education framework, recognizing the necessity of providing equitable learning opportunities for all children, including those with disabilities (Ministry of Education, 2015). However, the successful execution of inclusive education, especially at the early childhood level, depends heavily on teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and level of preparedness (Sharma & Sokal, 2019).

In the Ayawaso West Municipality, efforts have been made to introduce inclusive education policies in early childhood centres as part of the national strategy to promote equity in education. Despite these initiatives, teachers' perceptions, deeply ingrained cultural beliefs, and the availability of support services significantly impact the effectiveness of inclusive practices (Avramidis & Norwich, 2018). Teachers serve as key agents in the successful implementation of inclusive education, and their perspectives can either facilitate or obstruct the inclusion of children with disabilities into mainstream classrooms (Florian & Spratt, 2013). Therefore, this study sought to assess early childhood teachers' attitudes toward inclusive practices within the Ayawaso West

Municipality by examining their level of knowledge, cultural influences, access to support services, and the quality of training received.

A teacher's knowledge of inclusive pedagogies and instructional strategies is paramount to the success of inclusive education (Forlin, 2018). Educators in early childhood settings are expected to be well-versed in differentiated instruction, assistive learning tools, and individualized support mechanisms to address the diverse needs of learners (UNESCO, 2020). In Ghana, the 2015 Inclusive Education Policy provides structured guidelines for creating inclusive learning environments (Ministry of Education, 2015). However, research indicates that many teachers lack sufficient knowledge and skills to effectively implement these guidelines, leading to the unintentional exclusion of children with special educational needs (Szumski et al., 2022; Hornby, 2014). Studies have further highlighted that a deficiency in professional training and exposure to inclusive methodologies may hinder teachers' confidence and willingness to adopt inclusive practices in early childhood centres (Kuyini & Desai, 2018).

Beyond knowledge, cultural beliefs significantly influence teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. In many societies, including Ghana, perceptions of disability are often shaped by traditional ideologies, which may either support or undermine inclusive education (Mpofu & Mutepfa, 2020). In some instances, cultural stigmatization and misconceptions about children with disabilities may lead to negative teacher attitudes, resulting in resistance to inclusive practices (Rohwerder, 2018; Opoku et al., 2017). Given that cultural norms are deeply embedded within the social structure of the Ayawaso West Municipality, it is essential to examine how these beliefs impact teachers' willingness to embrace inclusive education. Understanding these cultural dimensions would help address barriers that may hinder the effective implementation of inclusive teaching strategies.

The availability of adequate support services is another crucial factor influencing the success of inclusive education (Zabeli & Gjelij, 2020). Effective inclusion requires essential resources such as specialized training for teachers, assistive learning materials, and collaboration with special education professionals (UNESCO, 2020). However, in many developing countries, including Ghana, the scarcity of these resources has been identified as a major challenge (Kuyini & Desai, 2018). Within the Ayawaso West Municipality, early childhood educators often experience difficulties in accessing necessary support services, including adaptive teaching tools and professional development opportunities. This lack of resources may lead to frustration, burnout, and reluctance to implement inclusive education strategies (Bellour et al., 2017).

Teacher training is another fundamental aspect determining the success of inclusive education. Well-trained educators are more capable of accommodating diverse learning needs and fostering an inclusive classroom environment (Mitchell, 2017). While Ghana has integrated inclusive education into teacher training curricula, the adequacy and effectiveness of these programs remain questionable (Agbenyega & Deku, 2019). Studies suggest that many teachers enter the field with limited practical knowledge on how to support children with disabilities (Opoku, 2016; Pit-ten Cate et al., 2018). In the Ayawaso West Municipality, it is imperative to explore whether early childhood teachers have received sufficient professional development in inclusive education and how this impacts their attitudes toward inclusion.

Inclusive education is a crucial component of early childhood education, with its success largely hinging on teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and preparedness. In the Ayawaso West Municipality, teachers' perceptions of inclusive practices are shaped by several interrelated factors, including their understanding of inclusive pedagogies, cultural beliefs, availability of support services, and

level of training. This study sought to investigate these variables to provide valuable insights into the factors influencing teachers' attitudes toward inclusion in early childhood centres.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Inclusive education has become a central focus in global education reform, emphasizing equal learning opportunities for all children, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds (UNESCO, 2023). Ghana has made significant strides in integrating inclusive education into its national policies, as reflected in the 2015 Inclusive Education Policy. However, the effective implementation of inclusive education, particularly in early childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality, remains a challenge due to various factors such as teachers' perspectives, negative cultural beliefs, inadequate support services, and encountered challenges.

Despite the policy frameworks supporting inclusion, early childhood educators' perspectives on its implementation significantly influence the success of inclusive education. Studies suggest that many teachers hold mixed views about inclusion, often influenced by their level of knowledge, exposure, and institutional support (Sharma & Loreman, 2022). In the Ayawaso West Municipality, it appears there are limited research examining how educators perceive inclusive education and the extent to which they implement it in their classrooms. Understanding these perspectives is crucial to identifying barriers to effective inclusion.

Cultural beliefs also play a pivotal role in shaping teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. In many communities, including those within the Ayawaso West Municipality, deep-rooted cultural perceptions of disability may either support or hinder the implementation of inclusive practices (Mpofu & Chimhenga, 2021). Some traditional beliefs view children with disabilities as incapable of learning, which can contribute to their exclusion from mainstream classrooms. In many traditional societies, disabilities are sometimes perceived as a curse or punishment for ancestral

wrongdoings, leading to stigma and discrimination against affected children and their families (Opoku et al., 2017). This belief fosters negative attitudes among educators and caregivers, limiting the implementation of inclusive education practices (Rohwerder, 2018). However, research has consistently shown that with appropriate support, children with disabilities can thrive academically and socially within inclusive learning environments (Szumski et al., 2022). Furthermore, the availability and accessibility of support services are critical determinants of the successful implementation of inclusive education (Forlin et al., 2023). Teachers require continuous professional development, access to special education experts, and adequate learning resources to facilitate inclusion effectively. However, reports indicate that many early childhood centres in Ghana, including those in the Ayawaso West Municipality, lack sufficient support services (Opoku et al., 2022). The absence of these essential resources results in poor implementation of inclusive education and increased frustration among teachers. Research on the specific nature and adequacy of available support services in Ayawaso West is scarce, necessitating further exploration.

Another pressing issue is the challenges that early childhood educators face in executing inclusive education. Existing studies highlight various obstacles, including large class sizes, inadequate teacher training, and limited parental involvement (Kuyini & Desai, 2023). In the Ayawaso West Municipality, anecdotal evidence suggests that teachers struggle with classroom management, differentiation of instruction, and effective assessment of children with special needs. However, comprehensive empirical research examining these challenges within this specific context is lacking, revealing a methodological gap.

Inclusive education should provide equitable learning opportunities for all children, with teachers being adequately trained, well-resourced, and supported by educational stakeholders (Florian & Spratt, 2022). However, the current state of inclusive education in the Ayawaso West Municipality

appears to shift from the ideal practice of inclusion raising concerns about the effectiveness of existing policies and practices. This study, therefore, sought to fill the existing gaps in literature, methodology, and practice by investigating teachers' perspectives, cultural influences, support services, and challenges in implementing inclusive education in early childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate early childhood teachers' attitudes toward inclusion in early childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality.

### **1.4 Research Objectives**

The following research objectives guided the study

1. Assess early childhood educators' perspectives in the implementation of inclusive education practices within the Ayawaso West Municipality.
2. Examine how teachers' cultural beliefs influence their inclusion practices in early childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality.
3. Explore the support services available to early childhood educators in fostering inclusion in the Ayawaso West Municipality.
4. Find out the challenges teachers encounter in the implementation of inclusion in early childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality,

### **1.5 Research Questions**

These research questions guided the study;

1. What are early childhood educators' perspectives on the implementation of inclusive education practices within the Ayawaso West Municipality?

2. How do teachers' cultural beliefs influence the implementation of inclusive education in early childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality?
3. What support services are available to early childhood educators in fostering inclusion in the Ayawaso West Municipality?
4. What challenges do teachers encounter in the implementation of inclusive education in early childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality?

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

Assessing early childhood educators' perspectives on the implementation of inclusive education within the Ayawaso West Municipality would provide critical insights into their level of preparedness for inclusive teaching. The findings would identify gaps in knowledge that may hinder effective inclusion, informing policymakers at the Ghana Education Service (GES) and the Ministry of Education about areas requiring targeted interventions. These may include continuous professional development programs and curriculum enhancements to ensure that teachers are adequately equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to support inclusive education in early childhood settings.

Furthermore, examining the influence of teachers' cultural beliefs on inclusion would provide a deeper understanding of how societal and traditional perceptions affect the implementation of inclusive education policies. Cultural attitudes play a significant role in shaping teacher behavior and acceptance of inclusive practices. By analyzing these beliefs, the study would offer insights that can guide policymakers in designing culturally responsive policies and interventions that consider local norms while promoting inclusive education. Encouraging a positive mindset among educators and communities is essential for fostering an inclusive learning environment that benefits all children.

The study would also explore the availability of support services for early childhood educators in fostering inclusive education. Identifying gaps in resources such as assistive technologies, specialized teaching materials, and additional support staff would help educational authorities and stakeholders address these challenges effectively. Ensuring access to adequate resources would enhance teachers' ability to implement inclusive practices and create a more supportive learning environment for children with disabilities or special educational needs.

Findings from the study would enable educational policymakers and school administrators to develop strategic interventions aimed at minimizing barriers to inclusion. The study's insights would also be valuable for teacher training institutions and professional development providers in refining their training curricula to better prepare teachers for inclusive classrooms.

From a theoretical perspective, this study would contribute to the growing body of literature on inclusive education, particularly within early childhood education in Ghana. By exploring the relationship between teachers' perspectives, cultural beliefs, available support services, and challenges, this study would offer comprehensive insights into how these factors collectively influence the successful implementation of inclusive education. Moreover, it would extend existing theories of inclusion by incorporating the unique cultural and contextual factors affecting early childhood educators in Ghana. Given that much of the research on inclusive education focuses on primary and secondary education, this study's emphasis on early childhood education would address a critical gap in the literature, shedding light on the foundational stages of inclusive learning.

The study would also serve as a foundation for future research on inclusive education in Ghana and similar contexts. Identifying gaps in teacher knowledge, training, cultural perceptions, and support services would pave the way for further investigations into effective interventions and

strategies that enhance inclusive education. Researchers can build on these findings through longitudinal studies, intervention-based research, or comparative analyses of how different regions or countries tackle challenges associated with inclusive education.

Ultimately, the significance of this study lies in its potential to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of young children with disabilities or special educational needs in the Ayawaso West Municipality. By addressing the challenges faced by teachers, the study aimed to foster a more inclusive learning environment where all children, regardless of their abilities, can thrive. The insights gained would support efforts to ensure that inclusive education becomes a reality for all learners, in alignment with Ghana's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goal of inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

### **1.7 Delimitations of the Study**

This study was delimited to early public childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The study specifically examined teachers' perspectives, cultural beliefs, available support services, and challenges to inclusive practices in these centres. In terms of content, the research was focused on understanding teachers' experiences in implementing inclusive practices, highlighting key facilitators and challenges. Additionally, the study employed qualitative approach, qualitative data from semi-structured interviews to provide an in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences and attitudes.

### **1.8 Limitations of the Study**

Some limitation which lies in its restricted geographical and demographic scope, focusing solely on a small sample of twelve kindergarten teachers from public schools within Ayawaso West Municipality. While this provided rich, context-specific insights, the findings may not be fully generalizable to all kindergarten teachers across Ghana, especially those in private schools or other

regions with different infrastructural and socio-cultural contexts. Also, the small sample size and subjective nature of data pose risks of researcher bias and interpretive limitations. Logistical challenges also limit the inclusion of relevant stakeholders.

### **1.8 Operational Definition of Terms**

**Early Childhood Centers:** Educational institutions that provide learning experiences for children from birth to age eight, focusing on their cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development.

**Inclusion:** In this study, inclusion refers to the practice of integrating all learners, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or disabilities, into mainstream early childhood education settings.

**Ayawaso West Municipality:** Ayawaso West Municipality, as used in this study, refers to the administrative area located in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana, which serves as the geographical focus of the research.

**Disability:** Limitation or inability to perform an activity in a manner within the range considered normal for a human being

**Inclusive Education:** A process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all learners by reducing barriers to, and within, the learning environment.

**Diversity:** Diversity, in the context of this study, refers to the presence of learners with different characteristics, including but not limited to abilities, disabilities, socio-economic backgrounds, cultural identities, and learning needs.

### **1.9 Organisation of the Study**

The study was organised under five chapters. Chapter one consisted of the background the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study and the research questions. The chapter included delimitations of the study, limitations of the study, as well as the organisation of the study. Chapter two dealt with issues concerning conceptual review, theoretical framework and empirical review that guided the study. The third chapter covered the research design and procedures

employed for the study. The chapter also described clearly the sample and the instrumentation and the last section of the chapter dealt with the procedures adopted for gathering data and analyzing the data. The fourth chapter presented the data analysis results and the discussions obtained. The chapter was grouped into two parts. The first part is the preliminary data and the second part being the main data. The final chapter presented the summary of the study, conclusions and recommendations. Areas for further research have also been suggested.



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Overview

This chapter focused on the review of related literature on the specific objectives of the study.

Literature was reviewed on the following sub-headings:

#### Theoretical Framework

- Self-Efficacy Theory

#### Conceptual Review

- Concept of Inclusion
- Inclusion in Early Childhood Education
- Categories of Disabilities in Early Childhood Education
- Benefits of Inclusion in Early Childhood Education

#### Empirical Review

- Teachers' Knowledge Towards Inclusion
- Cultural Beliefs of Teachers Toward Inclusive Practices
- Support Services Available to Early Childhood Teachers' Inclusive Practices
- The Level of Training of Teachers Towards the Implementation of Inclusive Practices
- Challenges Teachers Face when Implementing Inclusive Education

#### 2.1.1. Self-Efficacy Theory (Albert Bandura 1977)

The theoretical foundations of this study are grounded in Bandura's self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977). In this study, I used self-efficacy theory as a way to understand how teacher attitudes and

beliefs about inclusion can impact student development. Bandura discusses the concept of self-efficacy beliefs as an assessment of a person's capabilities to accomplish and create needed results. Self-efficacy beliefs are further defined by one's capability to meet specific demands and overcome given challenges in order to succeed. A strong sense of self-efficacy results in one's ability to persist and demonstrate a strong sense of commitment, increasing and sustaining efforts in order to produce the expected outcomes (Bandura, 1977, 1989, 1993; Bandura et al., 2001). Therefore, teacher self-efficacy can reflect attitudes and beliefs about one's practice.

Bandura argued that self-efficacy beliefs have diverse effects through four major processes: cognitive, motivational, affective, and selective (Bandura, 1977, 1989). These processes impact an individual's perception of how he/she can motivate him/her and would impact them in either self-enhancing or self-debilitating ways. Teachers who believe they can be successful in teaching students would have enhanced skills, such as better cognitive skills to plan what they teach, increased motivation to put forth the effort needed, and refined affective disposition or capability to cope and adjust through stress, and would demonstrate the selective processes that allow teachers to meet challenges and further develop new competencies (Bandura & Locke, 2003). Self-efficacy impacts one's attitudes and beliefs and contributes to positive or negative instructional practices.

According to Bandura, "Faculties' beliefs in their collective instructional efficacy contribute significantly to their schools' level of academic achievements" (1993, p. 177). Teachers with positive attitudes and beliefs regarding their own teaching skills and abilities can demonstrate effective teaching strategies and impacting student learning. The attitudes and beliefs teachers have about inclusion may have impacts on their teaching in inclusive environments and further impact student outcomes.

Teacher self-efficacy beliefs, described by Rimm-Kaufman & Sawyer (2004) as “high internal locus of control and positive attitude toward overcoming difficult situations, (p. 322).” are closely related to teacher practices and increased student achievements. Bandura explained *personal efficacy* as a person’s confidence or belief in what they are capable of doing or can do and *outcome efficacy* as the expected actions one takes. Bandura further proposes the theory that self-efficacy is a combination of personal efficacy and outcome efficacy and a person’s confidence in their abilities can produce an outcome that is the result of personal efficacy. An individual’s estimation of their capabilities can further influence the action and practice of a skill (Bandura, 1977, 1993; Goddard et al., 2004).

A teacher’s positive personal beliefs and attitudes toward their own abilities provide the needed confidence to practice and implement useful strategies for students, also known as outcome efficacy. Teacher attitudes, dispositions, and perspectives are a range of terms used interchangeably to describe teacher efficacy beliefs. Clearly defining teacher beliefs can be complicated by several factors (Pajares, 1992), such as definitional problems, weak conceptualizations, and differing understandings of both beliefs and belief structures. For this study, *teacher self-efficacy* describes a construct that captures teacher perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs (Rimm-Kaufman & Sawyer, 2004). In further studying attitudes and beliefs about inclusion, the field can continue to examine how these beliefs influence self-efficacy (Hart, 2004; McHatton & Parker, 2013; Pajares, 1992).

The Self-Efficacy Theory, developed by Albert Bandura, underscores the significance of an individual's belief in their ability to complete tasks and achieve specific outcomes (Bandura, 1977). In the field of education, self-efficacy is a critical factor that influences teachers' motivation, instructional strategies, and ability to create an inclusive learning environment (Tschannen-Moran

& Hoy, 2001). It determines how teachers approach challenges, respond to setbacks, and adapt their teaching methods to accommodate diverse learners, particularly those with disabilities or special educational needs (SEN) (Sharma & Sokal, 2019).

In the context of inclusive education, self-efficacy refers to early childhood educators' confidence in their ability to implement inclusive practices effectively (Forlin et al., 2014). Research suggests that teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to embrace inclusive education, demonstrate persistence in overcoming instructional challenges, and modify their teaching approaches to support diverse learners (Bandura, 1997; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Conversely, educators with low self-efficacy may feel unprepared or overwhelmed by the demands of an inclusive classroom, leading to reluctance in adopting inclusive teaching strategies (Opoku et al., 2017).

When applied to the study on inclusive education in early childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality, Self-Efficacy Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how teachers' confidence or lack thereof affects their willingness and ability to implement inclusive education policies (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Teachers who believe in their ability to successfully include children with disabilities are more likely to foster inclusive learning environments (Loreman et al., 2013). However, those with low self-efficacy may require targeted professional development to enhance their knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward inclusive education (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Therefore, understanding self-efficacy among early childhood educators in Ayawaso West Municipality is essential for improving inclusive education practices.

### **Teachers' Perspective and Self-Efficacy**

A fundamental objective of this study is to assess early childhood educators' perspectives on inclusive education practices and their relationship with self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) argues that

individuals who perceive themselves as competent in a given domain exhibit higher confidence, motivation, and persistence in their tasks. In the context of education, teachers' self-efficacy significantly influences their ability to implement inclusive practices effectively (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Research has demonstrated that teachers with strong self-efficacy beliefs are more likely to adapt instructional strategies, employ differentiated teaching methods, and exhibit a positive attitude toward inclusive education (Forlin et al., 2014; Sharma & Sokal, 2019). Conversely, teachers with limited knowledge of inclusive education may struggle to develop the confidence necessary to support learners with disabilities or special educational needs (SEN) (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Studies indicate that inadequate training in inclusive education often correlates with lower teacher self-efficacy, leading to reluctance in implementing inclusive strategies (Jordan et al., 2009). Within the Ayawaso West Municipality, a lack of exposure to inclusive education frameworks and best practices may result in teachers feeling unprepared and overwhelmed by the demands of an inclusive classroom. Research by Opoku et al. (2017) highlights that in many Ghanaian educational settings, teachers who lack sufficient training tend to view inclusion as a complex challenge rather than an opportunity for holistic learning.

Additionally, Paju et al. (2016) found that teachers with low self-efficacy often rely on traditional instructional methods, which may not adequately support the diverse needs of learners in an inclusive environment. As Loreman et al. (2013) suggest, professional development programs tailored to enhance teachers' knowledge of inclusive education can significantly boost their self-efficacy. Understanding the interplay between knowledge and self-efficacy is therefore essential for designing effective teacher training initiatives that promote confidence, competence, and positive attitudes toward inclusion in early childhood education.

### **Cultural Beliefs and Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy theory also offers insights into how cultural beliefs shape teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. A teacher's self-efficacy is not solely influenced by his/her professional training but is also shaped by the socio-cultural context in which they work (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). In Ghana, persistent cultural stigmas and misconceptions about disability may negatively impact teachers' perceptions of learners with disabilities (Opoku et al., 2017). Teachers who subscribe to these beliefs may develop lower self-efficacy regarding their ability to educate children with disabilities, leading to reluctance to adopt inclusive practices. For instance, an educator who believes that children with disabilities cannot thrive in mainstream classrooms may feel incapable of supporting them effectively, further reinforcing exclusionary practices. Conversely, teachers who challenge these stigmas and recognize the potential of all learners, regardless of ability, tend to exhibit higher self-efficacy. Such educators are more inclined to explore inclusive strategies, modify teaching approaches, and provide the necessary support for learners with special needs. Addressing these cultural barriers through sensitization programs and professional development is essential in fostering a more inclusive mindset among early childhood educators in the Ayawaso West Municipality.

### **Support Services and Self-Efficacy**

Another key factor related to self-efficacy is the availability of support services. The Self-Efficacy Theory posits that external support, such as resources, professional development, and collegial collaboration, plays a crucial role in building self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). In the context of inclusive education, support services such as assistive technologies, classroom aides, and

continuous professional development can significantly enhance teachers' self-efficacy by providing them with the tools they need to succeed.

Teachers in early childhood centres who have access to these support services are more likely to feel capable of implementing inclusive practices, as they are better equipped to handle the diverse needs of their learners. On the other hand, when support services are inadequate or unavailable, teachers may experience frustration and helplessness, leading to low self-efficacy and resistance to inclusive education (Kuyini & Desai, 2018). Understanding how the availability of support services impacts teachers' self-efficacy in the Ayawaso West Municipality can help stakeholders address the systemic barriers that hinder the implementation of inclusive education.

### **Teacher Training and Self-Efficacy**

Finally, the level of training teachers receive significantly influences their self-efficacy. Bandura's theory highlights the importance of mastery experiences in building self-efficacy. Teachers who have undergone effective training in inclusive education are more likely to feel confident in their ability to implement inclusive practices (Bandura, 1997). Adequate training equips teachers with practical skills, strategies, and resources, which in turn boosts their self-efficacy and enhances their commitment to inclusive education.

In the Ayawaso West Municipality, if teachers are not receiving sufficient or relevant training, their self-efficacy will likely remain low. Teachers may feel unprepared for the challenges of inclusive classrooms, which can result in poor attitudes toward inclusive practices. The Self-Efficacy Theory thus underscores the need for comprehensive training programs that not only focus on inclusive education theory but also provide practical, hands-on experiences that allow teachers to build their self-efficacy through successful implementation of inclusive strategies.

The Self-Efficacy Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how teachers' beliefs in their own capabilities influence their attitudes and behaviors toward inclusive practices in early childhood centres. Teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to embrace inclusive education, while those with low self-efficacy may resist it. By focusing on teachers' knowledge, cultural beliefs, support services, and training, this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of how self-efficacy impacts the implementation of inclusive practices in the Ayawaso West Municipality, informing strategies to strengthen teacher preparedness and commitment to inclusive education.

## **2.1 Concept of Inclusion**

During the last three decades, inclusion in education has taken hold and is recognized all over the world (UNESCO, 2009; OECD, 2009). The educational system is currently introducing new innovations in approaches, structures and strategies. Society has to come to the point of having a common vision for the framework in providing education. (UNESCO, 2009). Thus, educational, social and economic factors justify the implementation of inclusion as a shift in education that involves content modification in the system.

Despite a shared general understanding and standards, inclusive education is interpreted in various ways depending on the schooling organization, political context and educational beliefs (Kozleski et al., 2007). It is also considered differently depending on cultural context. According to Ainscow (2005), each country might define inclusion in a unique way by connecting its meaning in compliance with the four key elements that contribute to the meaning of inclusion: to promote inclusive practices not only in educational and sociological aspects of relationships, but cultural, historical and political contexts.

Due to the significance of education as mentioned early on, several long-standing projects, frameworks, and agreements such as the Education for All, the Salamanca Statement, the Millennium Development Goals, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with

Disabilities have been initiated and progressed over the past decades (Inter-Agency Commission, 1990; Sightsavers, 2010; United Nations, 2006; United Nations Development Programme, 2015; UNESCO, 2000; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2015; UNESCO, 1994; United Nations, 2008). One key mutual direction in which they all share is to create and establish an education system where all individuals can be included and their personal educational needs can be met (United Nations, 2006; UNESCO, 2000).

Inclusion has been a part of the education system for some time now, and is generally associated with students who have special needs, are exceptional, or differently-abled. The inclusion of students with disabilities has been the central theme of policy debates in education, especially in reference to student access to the general education setting (Obiakor, 2011). Inclusive education implies that regardless of strengths, weaknesses, or ability levels all students become part of the school community. Inclusion is based on the principle that all students are valued for their unique abilities and are accepted as important members of the student body. According to Harris (2009), schools have a duty to include students with disabilities in the general education setting to the maximum extent possible.

One aspect that makes inclusion challenging for school districts is the lack of a universal definition or clearly defined policy at the federal level (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2013). The word “inclusion” does not exist in IDEA and is rarely used in case law. The widely accepted understanding of inclusion comes from the definition that IDEA gives to the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). The lack of a clear definition coupled with broad language allows districts to implement inclusion according to perceptions of the least restrictive environment. According to DeMatthews and Mawhinney, school districts have a large amount of flexibility when drafting policies and programs related to inclusion. Though there may not be a set of characteristics that

specifically describe inclusive settings, one defining practice is that students with disabilities should be in the general education setting to the maximum extent appropriate and not isolated in special classes (Washington, 2010).

The term “inclusion” indicates that students with disabilities should be educated alongside their age-appropriate peers in a general education setting. Jenkins (2012) stated that content should be taught to students in inclusion by a highly qualified, general education teacher who provides accommodation in accordance with the child’s IEP. For over two decades, inclusion has been gaining momentum. Jenkins explained that the expansion of inclusive education practices have spurred new research. More students than ever are being educated in an inclusive setting. Approximately 96% of general education teachers have taught a student with disabilities at some point in their classroom. Approximately 95% of students with disabilities ages 6-21 are being served in regular schools. In addition, 59% of students with learning disabilities are receiving their instruction in a general education setting. In today’s schools, more than ever, students with disabilities are being served in a general education setting by general education teachers. In spite of the drawbacks or weaknesses, inclusion offers a large number of strengths as well.

Inclusive school policies provide the foundation that see schools are accessible to all students and staff; admittance to the school is enabled, and barriers to accessibility and participation within all aspects of the school environment are reduced. Inclusive policy also ensures appropriate resources are in place for students' learning and for staff members' development as inclusive practitioners. Inclusive school policies in Australia are underpinned by international statements such as Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations (UN), 2006), as well as Australian national policies and statements such as the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration 2019 (Australian Government Department of Education,

Skills, and Employment (DESE), 2019), Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2021), Australian Student Wellbeing Framework 2018 (Education Council, 2018), Disability Standards for Education 2005 (DESE, 2005) and Disability Discrimination Act 1992.

Within Australia, States and Territories also provide statements which inform school policy within their jurisdiction. For example, the Inclusive Education Statement in New South Wales advocates for inclusion as an important part of providing high quality educational opportunities for all students, “where every student is known, valued and cared for and all students are learning to their fullest capability” (NSW DoE, 2021, p.1). Collectively, these encourage and/or require schools to address barriers to students' fair and equitable access and participation in educational environments; affirm that every student has the right to a high-quality education free of discrimination in an environment that supports their safety and wellbeing; that positive, caring and respectful relationships with students, peers and teachers should be fostered; and that a culture of diversity is to be celebrated and valued. In order to effectively implement an inclusive policy, schools need to foster an inclusive culture complemented by inclusive practice.

An inclusive culture is one in which diversity is embraced and all members are treated fairly, respectfully and equitably. Students should be enabled to feel that they belong within the educational community or classroom (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). Building an inclusive culture requires teachers to understand that any student can experience barriers to learning and participation, not only those considered to have ‘special educational needs’ (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; 2011). Labelling students based upon their perceived ability is often avoided, as are views that ability is fixed (Florian & Spratt, 2013), and high expectations are held for the learning potential of all. An inclusive culture is also one in which teachers recognise their ability to facilitate

learning and reduce barriers to learning and participation for all students in their classrooms (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, 2011; Florian & Spratt, 2013).

Inclusive practice means that learning and teaching activities are responsive to student diversity (Ainscow, 2020). That is, learning experiences are designed with students' individual strengths and needs in mind, and consideration is given to the ways in which all students can be enabled to actively and meaningfully participate in their learning and be appropriately challenged (Ainscow, 2020; Booth & Ainscow, 2011). A strengths-based approach should be considered throughout this planning and implementation, meaning there should be a strong focus on students' capabilities rather than 'deficits' (Florian & Spratt, 2013).

Difference and diversity should be embraced and responded to positively (Finkelstein et al., 2021). Barriers to students' learning and participation are identified and addressed (Dally et al., 2019), and the lessons learned from this are utilised to support the learning and participation of others (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; 2011). Assessment of student learning is designed to be receptive to and support the achievement of all students, and both collaborative and individual achievements are celebrated (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; 2011).

Where teaching assistants (i.e., teachers' aides or school learning support officers (SLSOs)) are present, they support all students in their learning and participation, not just students considered to have 'special educational needs', and through designing learning experiences to be responsive to all learners, the need for individual student support is reduced (Ainscow, 2020; Booth & Ainscow, 2002). When effectively implemented, inclusive education can benefit all students' learning and achievement, positively impacting their self-esteem and their emotional and social development (Antoninis et al., 2020). Inclusive practice can be supported by approaches such as the Universal Design for Learning (UDL; see Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST),

2018; Finkelstein et al., 2021) and differentiated instruction. A Universal Design for Learning is considered a proactive approach where responsiveness to student diversity is planned for from the outset regardless of students' specific needs, whereas differentiated instruction is considered a reactive approach where learning experiences are varied or modified to cater to students' specific needs (Lidner & Schwab, 2020).

The UDL approach (CAST, 2018) involves providing multiple means for students to access and perceive information (e.g., displaying information in accessible and alternative modes), to engage in learning (e.g., providing opportunity for student choice within learning activities), and for communicating their learning (e.g., enabling various modes of expression). Differentiated instruction can involve modifying the learning environment, instruction, content, the processes through which students engage and learn this content, the product through which they communicate their learning, assessment, and the timeframes (Lidner & Schwab, 2020). Student groupings can also be differentiated to support the learning of all students (Lidner & Schwab, 2020). When used effectively, UDL and differentiated instruction can support fair and equitable educational experiences for all students.

## **2.2 Inclusion in Early Childhood Education**

The concept of inclusion in early childhood education (ECE) has become a focal point for efforts to create equitable learning environments that cater to all children, regardless of ability or background. The evolution of this practice is rooted in a global push for human rights and educational equality, highlighted by critical international frameworks like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). This landmark treaty underscores that inclusive education is a right, mandating that all educational institutions must ensure full and meaningful participation for every child in an environment that fosters their holistic development

(United Nations, 2006). This shift represents a broader movement toward embracing diversity and ensuring that differences are celebrated and supported rather than sidelined.

The essence of inclusion in ECE lies in moving beyond tokenistic measures, such as simply placing children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. It involves a paradigm shift where these educational environments are thoughtfully transformed to be genuinely inclusive. For example, classrooms must be adaptable and supportive, employing teaching strategies that meet a range of developmental needs. This includes designing flexible curricula that can be modified or differentiated to support various learning styles and paces, ensuring that every child has the chance to succeed and feel like a valued member of the learning community (Booth & Ainscow, 2016).

Moreover, inclusion in ECE emphasizes the role of educators in creating these environments. Teachers must be equipped with the skills and knowledge to deliver inclusive education effectively, using strategies that promote active participation and engagement for all students. Learner-centered approaches, such as cooperative learning and experiential activities, can help children of all abilities feel engaged and valued (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). The success of inclusion depends on an ongoing commitment to professional development, which ensures that teachers are prepared to adapt their practices to be inclusive of all learners.

Understanding the holistic nature of inclusion in early childhood education involves recognizing that it extends far beyond physical integration. The goal is to create an environment where every child feels a strong sense of belonging, acceptance, and the ability to thrive. Achieving this requires significant transformations in how traditional educational settings operate. Inclusive classrooms emphasize flexibility, not just in physical setup but also in the approaches used to teach and assess learners. This flexibility allows for a curriculum that can be tailored to meet diverse developmental stages, cognitive abilities, and learning preferences (Booth & Ainscow, 2016).

In practice, this means that teaching methods must be dynamic and adaptive. Educators are encouraged to employ differentiated instruction, which involves modifying the content, process, or product of learning activities to ensure all students can participate fully. For instance, some children may benefit from visual aids, while others might require hands-on activities or oral instruction. The key is to use multiple teaching methods that allow all children to engage with the material in ways that are most meaningful to them (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Furthermore, the holistic nature of inclusion emphasizes collaboration and shared responsibility among all stakeholders involved in a child's education. This includes not only teachers and support staff but also families and community members. When families are actively engaged in the learning process, it reinforces the child's sense of belonging and provides additional support structures that are essential for development. Educators must also work closely with specialists, such as speech therapists or occupational therapists, to design and implement effective inclusive practices (Suc et al, 2017).

The holistic approach also requires a commitment to social-emotional learning, recognizing that children's emotional well-being is as crucial as their academic growth. Inclusive classrooms often incorporate social-emotional curricula that teach children how to understand and manage their emotions, build empathy, and develop healthy relationships (Khattak et al, 2025). This focus on emotional intelligence fosters a nurturing and inclusive atmosphere where every child feels safe and respected (Trish, 2023).

Inclusive early childhood classrooms have distinct characteristics that set them apart as environments designed for every child to thrive. These classrooms are intentionally structured to be supportive, flexible, and responsive to diverse needs. Teachers in inclusive classrooms act as facilitators, creating opportunities for all children to engage in meaningful and developmentally

appropriate learning experiences. A key component is the use of a curriculum that promotes active learning, where children explore, experiment, and express their ideas in various ways. This kind of engagement is particularly effective in early childhood settings, where hands-on and play-based learning are central to development (DEC/NAEYC, 2009).

Accessibility is another critical feature of inclusive classrooms. This encompasses not only physical accessibility, such as ensuring the classroom is navigable for children with mobility challenges, but also cognitive and communicative accessibility. Educators might use visual schedules, sensory supports, or alternative communication systems to ensure that every child can participate fully. The use of assistive technologies, such as speech-generating devices or adaptive seating, can further enhance accessibility, allowing children with specific needs to engage alongside their peers (Raver & Childress, 2015).

Collaboration among educators is vital in an inclusive classroom. Team teaching and co-planning strategies are often employed to ensure that all children receive appropriate support. For example, a general education teacher might collaborate with a special education teacher to design lessons that cater to diverse learning needs (Pratt et al, 2017). Additionally, teachers use ongoing assessment to monitor each child's progress and adjust instruction as needed. This formative approach to assessment ensures that children who require additional support or alternative strategies receive them promptly.

Moreover, inclusive classrooms often emphasize peer-mediated learning, where children learn from and with one another. This can include pairing children in buddy systems or facilitating group projects where each child has a role suited to their abilities. Such practices not only promote academic learning but also foster social skills, empathy, and a sense of community among students. The emphasis on creating a positive and inclusive classroom culture cannot be overstated, as it

lays the foundation for lifelong attitudes of acceptance and respect for diversity (Assefa et al, 2024; Guberina, 2023).

While inclusion has often been associated primarily with supporting children with disabilities, current perspectives advocate a broader understanding that encompasses cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity an orientation grounded in concerns of equity and social justice (Alhassan et al., 2025; Giera, 2025). In increasingly multicultural societies, where children arrive with varied backgrounds and experiences, educators are called to implement practices that recognise and affirm this diversity so that all children feel valued and included (Heinz, McDaid & Keane, 2025).

Addressing cultural and linguistic diversity in inclusive early childhood settings requires responsiveness to children's cultural identities and home languages. This may involve integrating multilingual resources, celebrating diverse cultural traditions, and ensuring classroom materials reflect a range of cultures (Stitzinger, 2025). Culturally responsive pedagogy tasks teachers with understanding and respecting students' cultural values and using them to inform instructional practice, while embedding an anti-bias curriculum that challenges stereotypes and fosters belonging (Duarte & Veld, 2025).

Socioeconomic diversity further complicates the inclusive landscape, as children from low-income families face unique barriers such as limited access to enriching experiences and learning resources that can impede participation and outcomes (Heinz et al., 2025). Inclusive classrooms must therefore strive to provide equitable resources and support, such as subsidised materials, community partnerships, and inclusive policies to enable full participation by all learners regardless of socioeconomic status (Giera, 2025).

An intersectional approach highlights that children can simultaneously belong to multiple marginalised groups (e.g., multilingual learners, have disabilities, and face socioeconomic disadvantage). Recognising these overlapping identities is essential for designing inclusive practices that address the full complexity of a child's experience (Prior, Evans, Merlo & Leckie, 2022; Alhassan et al., 2025).

Effective inclusion also relies on coherent policy frameworks that provide for teacher training, resource allocation, and continuous professional development focused on inclusive pedagogies, cultural competence, and collaborative family-school engagement (Heinz et al., 2025; Giera, 2025). Without sufficient resources and structural support, such as additional staff, assistive technologies, or facility adaptations, even the best policies may fail to translate into meaningful inclusion (Duarte & Veld, 2025).

Finally, community engagement plays a vital role in sustaining inclusive practices. Parents and caregivers are critical partners, and schools must build respectful relationships, provide inclusive communication channels, and involve families in decision-making to strengthen inclusion (Alhassan et al., 2025). Moreover, broadening societal attitudes through awareness-raising and inclusive initiatives can help foster environments beyond the classroom where diversity is celebrated and supported.

## **2.3 Category of Disabilities in Early Childhood Education**

### **Intellectual Disabilities in Early Childhood Education**

Intellectual disabilities (ID) in early childhood education encompass limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviors, impacting how children learn, problem-solve, and interact

socially. The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) describes intellectual functioning as general mental capacity, including reasoning, planning, and abstract thinking, and adaptive behavior as everyday social and practical skills necessary for independent living (Luckasson et al., 2002). Children with ID often face significant developmental delays, including difficulties in language development, social interaction, and problem-solving. These challenges necessitate targeted support strategies to ensure effective participation in educational settings.

Classrooms that serve children with intellectual disabilities are designed to offer individualized and inclusive experiences. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates that children with ID receive a free and appropriate education tailored to their unique needs through Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). These programs set measurable goals and outline specific instructional methods, interventions, and accommodations (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Effective educational strategies for young children with ID emphasize hands-on and experiential learning, allowing them to engage actively and meaningfully with educational content. Visual supports, such as picture schedules or symbols, help in establishing clear expectations and enhancing comprehension (Schalock et al., 2010).

Teachers play a crucial role in fostering the development of students with intellectual disabilities through differentiated instruction, which involves modifying the curriculum and teaching strategies to meet individual learning needs. Consistent routines and structured environments provide a sense of security and predictability, enabling children to feel more confident and engaged. Social integration is also critical, as inclusive activities with peers help to build communication skills and a sense of belonging. Cooperative learning activities and peer-mediated strategies have shown promise in improving social interactions and reducing feelings of isolation

among children with ID (Katz & Mirenda, 2002). By employing these approaches, early childhood educators can create supportive, inclusive environments where children with intellectual disabilities are empowered to learn and thrive.

### **Communication Disorders in Early Childhood Education**

Communication disorders in early childhood education encompass a wide spectrum of difficulties related to speech, language, and communication. These can manifest as problems with articulation (producing speech sounds correctly), receptive language (understanding spoken or written language), expressive language (using words to express thoughts), or pragmatic language (using language appropriately in social contexts) (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2005). These disorders can significantly affect a child's ability to engage with peers and adults, follow classroom instructions, or participate in group activities, impacting both their academic and social development.

Early identification and intervention are critical in managing communication disorders effectively. Teachers and caregivers play a pivotal role in recognizing early signs of speech and language delays, such as limited vocabulary, difficulty forming sentences, or challenges with social communication (Justice & Redle, 2014). Once identified, tailored interventions can be employed to support these children. Visual aids, such as picture cards and communication boards, are commonly used to enhance understanding and reduce frustration. Additionally, integrating speech therapy techniques into classroom activities such as modeling correct speech, expanding children's utterances, and using repetitive language games can be highly beneficial.

Collaboration with speech-language pathologists (SLPs) is essential for developing and implementing effective intervention strategies. SLPs can provide specialized assessments, design

individualized therapy plans, and offer guidance to teachers on best practices for language facilitation in the classroom (Justice & Redle, 2014). Peer modeling, where children learn communication skills by interacting with their peers, is another effective method for promoting language development and social integration. Teachers can create opportunities for structured peer interactions, encouraging children with communication disorders to engage in meaningful conversations.

Creating a language-rich classroom environment is also vital. This includes storytelling sessions, interactive read-alouds, and the use of songs and rhymes to reinforce language skills. Teachers can further support children by employing scaffolding techniques, such as breaking down complex instructions into simpler steps and providing ample time for children to process and respond. These approaches, combined with ongoing collaboration among educators, families, and specialists, ensure that children with communication disorders receive the comprehensive support they need to academically and socially thrive (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2005).

### **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Early Childhood Education**

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental condition characterized by challenges in social communication, restricted interests, and repetitive behaviors. The spectrum nature of ASD means that each child presents a unique set of strengths and difficulties, necessitating highly individualized education plans (IEPs) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Children with ASD may exhibit delays in language development, have difficulty understanding nonverbal cues, or struggle to initiate and maintain conversations. These challenges often impact their ability to form social relationships and engage fully in classroom activities.

Structured environments and predictable routines are essential in supporting children with ASD. Consistency in daily schedules helps reduce anxiety and enhance focus, while visual schedules and clear, step-by-step instructions can improve understanding and engagement (Wong et al., 2015). Sensory-friendly classrooms that accommodate sensory processing differences, such as using noise-canceling headphones or providing quiet spaces, can also make the learning environment more accessible and comfortable.

Evidence-based practices like Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) are widely used to promote skill development in children with ASD. ABA focuses on using positive reinforcement to encourage desired behaviors and is effective in teaching communication and social skills (Wong et al., 2015). PECS, on the other hand, enables nonverbal children to communicate using pictures, fostering independence and reducing frustration. Teachers trained in these methods can implement them seamlessly into daily routines. Collaboration with families and multidisciplinary teams, including occupational therapists and behavioral specialists, is crucial. Parents provide valuable insights into their child's preferences and triggers, enabling teachers to tailor their approaches more effectively. Regular communication between educators and families ensures consistency between home and school environments, supporting the child's development holistically. Overall, a comprehensive, inclusive approach that considers each child's needs and strengths helps create a supportive educational experience for children with ASD (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

### **Physical Disabilities in Early Childhood Education**

Physical disabilities, encompassing conditions such as cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, and spina bifida, present unique challenges in early childhood educational settings. These impairments

impact a child's physical functioning, mobility, and coordination, often necessitating environmental adaptations to ensure equitable participation in classroom activities. Early intervention is crucial, as it helps develop motor skills and promotes inclusion from a young age. Assistive technologies, such as wheelchairs, adaptive writing tools, and communication devices, can empower children with physical disabilities to engage meaningfully in academic and social contexts (World Health Organization, 2022; Murphy & Carbone, 2008).

Inclusive practices, such as employing the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), are vital. These approaches emphasize designing classrooms that accommodate a wide range of abilities, making learning accessible to all. Modifications may include installing ramps, using height-adjustable tables, and incorporating flexible seating arrangements. Teachers must work collaboratively with physical and occupational therapists to create tailored educational plans that address each child's unique needs, ensuring that physical barriers do not hinder learning opportunities (Pivik et al., 2002; Lancaster & Bain, 2023).

Furthermore, physical education is a critical component of development for children with physical disabilities. Adaptive physical education programs emphasize movement skills that are both engaging and safe, allowing children to build strength, coordination, and confidence. Educators must also consider peer relationships, fostering an inclusive classroom culture that promotes empathy and cooperation among students. By raising awareness and encouraging positive interactions, teachers can create a supportive learning environment for all (Anaby et al., 2023).

### **Emotional and Behavioral Disorders in Early Childhood Education**

Emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) in early childhood significantly impact children's ability to engage in educational settings, requiring strategic interventions to support their

development and learning. Conditions under the EBD umbrella include anxiety disorders, oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). These children may exhibit disruptive behaviors such as aggression or defiance, or conversely, symptoms of withdrawal and anxiety that affect classroom engagement. Effective educational strategies emphasize creating structured routines, providing emotional regulation tools, and employing positive behavior supports to promote appropriate classroom conduct (Kauffman & Landrum, 2018; Merrell & Gueldner, 2010).

Teachers play a pivotal role in implementing behavior management strategies that reduce disruptions and promote learning. Clear and consistent expectations, coupled with immediate and positive reinforcement, are key techniques. Furthermore, social-emotional learning (SEL) programs have shown significant promise in helping children develop emotional awareness, self-regulation, and social skills. SEL can be incorporated into daily activities through stories, role-playing, and guided discussions about emotions (Durlak et al., 2011; Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2022).

Collaboration with mental health professionals, such as school psychologists or counselors, is also essential. These specialists provide insights into individualized education plans (IEPs) and behavioral intervention strategies that support children's unique needs. Teachers and parents must work together to create a consistent approach to managing behaviors, ensuring that interventions are effective both at school and at home. Addressing EBD comprehensively enhances academic performance and emotional well-being, preparing children for long-term success (Lane et al., 2019; Cook et al., 2022).

### **Hearing Loss in Early Childhood Education**

Hearing loss, which ranges from mild to profound, significantly impacts a child's ability to develop language and communication skills. In early childhood education (ECE), hearing impairments can affect social interactions, speech development, and overall academic performance. Early identification and intervention are essential to mitigate these impacts, as hearing loss can hinder the development of critical communication skills during formative years (National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, 2021; Yoshinaga-Itano, 2020).

Teachers play a crucial role in creating inclusive classrooms for children with hearing loss. Strategies include the use of visual aids, incorporating sign language, and employing hearing assistive technologies such as FM systems. Classroom modifications, like arranging seating to ensure clear visibility of the teacher and peers, are necessary for effective learning. Teachers must also use clear speech and provide written instructions to complement verbal communication, ensuring that children can follow along with lessons (Marschark & Hauser, 2011; Spencer & Marschark, 2020).

Collaboration with audiologists, speech-language pathologists, and parents is critical for successful intervention. These partnerships help to tailor individualized education plans (IEPs) that address specific needs, promoting academic and social development. Additionally, educators should foster an environment of peer support and understanding, teaching all students about hearing differences to create a more inclusive and empathetic classroom (Moeller et al., 2013; Swanwick, 2021).

The use of technology, such as video captioning and interactive apps, further enhances learning opportunities. As inclusive practices evolve, ensuring that educators receive training in supporting children with hearing loss remains a priority. Research underscores the importance of early and

ongoing support to help these children reach their full potential, emphasizing a holistic approach that integrates family and community resources (Fulcher et al., 2015).

### **Visual Disability in Early Childhood Education**

Visual disabilities range from low vision to total blindness, impacting a child's ability to learn through traditional visual means. In early childhood education, these impairments require specific accommodations to promote development across cognitive, social, and motor domains. Teachers must adapt instructional strategies to provide equitable access to learning materials and foster an inclusive environment (American Foundation for the Blind, 2022; Ferrell et al., 2017).

Key strategies include using tactile resources, such as braille books and raised-line drawings, to support literacy and numeracy skills. Teachers should also employ audio descriptions, screen readers, and accessible educational software to facilitate learning. Arranging classrooms with clear pathways and minimizing obstacles enhances safety and mobility, allowing children with visual impairments to navigate their environment confidently (Holbrook et al., 2016; Hatlen, 2019).

Collaborative teamwork involving orientation and mobility specialists, vision teachers, and parents is crucial. These partnerships help design individualized educational plans that cater to the child's unique needs, emphasizing independence and self-advocacy. Additionally, training peers to interact inclusively with children who have visual disabilities fosters a sense of community and reduces social isolation (Douglas et al., 2019; Ravenscroft, 2021).

Educators must also emphasize experiential learning, using multi-sensory approaches to engage all children. For instance, hands-on activities, auditory storytelling, and real-life experiences can be particularly effective for children with visual disabilities. Professional development for teachers is necessary to ensure they are equipped with the knowledge and skills to implement these

strategies effectively (Sacks & Rosenblum, 2020). As research continues to shape best practices, a focus on inclusivity and collaboration remains at the forefront of supporting children with visual disabilities in early educational settings.

## **2.4 Benefits of Inclusion in Early Childhood Education**

Inclusion in early childhood education (ECE) brings many benefits for all children, not just those with disabilities. By integrating children with diverse abilities into mainstream classrooms, inclusion fosters a more equitable and enriching learning environment that promotes developmental, academic, and social growth. These benefits extend to children with and without disabilities, as well as to educators and the broader school community.

### **Promoting Social Development and Acceptance**

One of the most significant advantages of inclusive ECE settings is the promotion of social development and acceptance among all children. In classrooms where children with and without disabilities learn side-by-side, children are exposed to a variety of abilities and learn to appreciate differences from an early age. This exposure fosters empathy, respect, and understanding, reducing prejudice and stigma associated with disabilities (Odom et al, 2011). Research has shown that children without disabilities in inclusive settings develop stronger social-emotional skills and become more adept at navigating diverse social interactions (Guralnick, 2011).

For children with disabilities, inclusive environments provide valuable opportunities for peer modeling. Observing and interacting with peers can help these children develop social and communication skills more effectively than in segregated settings (Wolery & Odom, 2000). Peer interactions can also encourage a sense of belonging and boost self-esteem, which is crucial for emotional well-being and engagement in learning activities (Bailey et al, 1998).

### **Enhancing Academic Achievement**

Inclusion in ECE has also been associated with improved academic outcomes for children with disabilities. Inclusive classrooms often employ differentiated instruction and universal design for learning (UDL) strategies, which cater to various learning styles and needs. These instructional practices not only benefit children with disabilities but also enhance the learning experience for typically developing peers (CAST, 2018). According to a study by Hehir et al. (2016), students with disabilities in inclusive settings tend to achieve better academic results compared to those in segregated classrooms, as they are provided with more stimulating and engaging learning opportunities.

Moreover, children without disabilities in inclusive classrooms are often exposed to adaptive learning strategies, which can enhance their cognitive skills and problem-solving abilities (Katz & Miranda, 2002). The diversity of teaching methods in inclusive settings encourages all students to think critically and learn in flexible, creative ways. This holistic approach to education prepares children for future academic success and fosters a lifelong love of learning.

### **Building a Sense of Community**

Inclusive ECE settings help build a strong sense of community within classrooms and schools. When children of all abilities learn together, they develop a shared sense of belonging and collective responsibility. Teachers play a crucial role in fostering this sense of community by creating a classroom culture that values collaboration, mutual support, and inclusive practices (Smith & Smith, 2000). Such an environment not only supports the development of interpersonal skills but also instills a sense of collective identity and purpose among students.

Parents of children with disabilities also benefit from inclusive education. They gain a sense of normalcy and acceptance when their children are included in mainstream settings, and they can engage more actively with the school community (Hornby, 2011). Additionally, inclusive schools often promote partnerships between families and educators, which are essential for creating a supportive learning environment that addresses the unique needs of every child (Blue-Banning et al. 2004).

### **Fostering Teacher Professional Growth**

Inclusive education also presents opportunities for professional growth among educators. Teaching in inclusive classrooms requires teachers to expand their knowledge and skills in differentiated instruction, behavior management, and the use of assistive technologies. This professional development can enhance teaching quality and benefit all students, not just those with disabilities (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Teachers learn to be more flexible, creative, and responsive to the diverse needs of their students, leading to more dynamic and engaging learning environments. Moreover, collaboration among teachers, special education professionals, and therapists becomes a central aspect of inclusive education. Such collaboration fosters a sense of teamwork and shared purpose among educators, contributing to a more positive and supportive school culture (Friend & Cook, 2010). Teachers in inclusive settings often report greater job satisfaction and a deeper sense of fulfillment, knowing that they are making a meaningful difference in the lives of all their students.

### **Preparing Children for a Diverse World**

In today's globalized and interconnected society, inclusion in ECE plays a crucial role in preparing children to live and work in diverse environments. By experiencing diversity firsthand, children

learn to value and celebrate differences, equipping them with the cultural competence needed for success in the 21st century (Brown & Broido, 2016). Inclusive education promotes values such as tolerance, respect, and collaboration, which are essential for building cohesive and inclusive communities.

Furthermore, inclusion encourages children to view differences as strengths rather than deficits. This mindset fosters a positive and inclusive worldview that children carry into adulthood, contributing to a more just and equitable society (Slee, 2018). As children grow up with an understanding of the importance of inclusion, they are more likely to advocate for social change and challenge discriminatory practices.

### **2.5 Teachers' Perspective on Inclusion in Early Childhood Centres**

Early childhood education plays a fundamental role in shaping children's attitudes, skills, and readiness for formal schooling. As inclusive education gains global recognition, understanding early childhood teachers' perceptions of inclusive practices becomes increasingly essential. Professional training is a key determinant of educators' attitudes toward inclusion. Studies indicate that teachers who undergo specialized training in inclusive education tend to develop more positive attitudes and greater self-efficacy in supporting children with diverse needs (Savolainen et al., 2018). For example, Florian and Spratt (2019) found that educators who engaged in targeted professional development reported increased confidence in modifying curricula and instructional approaches to accommodate all learners. Such training equips teachers with the necessary competencies to foster inclusive classrooms that support the learning and development of every child, regardless of ability.

On the other hand, insufficient training can result in feelings of uncertainty and inadequacy when implementing inclusive practices. Many early childhood educators express concerns about their

preparedness to effectively support children with disabilities or special needs (Lakkala et al., 2021). A lack of confidence in inclusive teaching strategies can hinder educators' willingness to adopt inclusive practices, leading them to rely on conventional methods that may not address the diverse learning needs of students (Ekins, 2020). Teachers who have not received sufficient training in inclusive education may feel overwhelmed by the complexities of accommodating different learners, contributing to resistance to inclusion (Sharma & De Boer, 2021).

Ongoing and practice-based professional development opportunities are essential for cultivating positive attitudes toward inclusion. Workshops, mentorship programs, and peer collaboration can provide teachers with practical strategies for implementing inclusive education effectively. Engaging in reflective practice and knowledge-sharing with colleagues allows educators to deepen their understanding of inclusion and strengthen their commitment to inclusive teaching (Florian, 2021).

Teachers' personal and professional experiences significantly shape their perceptions of inclusive education. Educators who have worked closely with children with disabilities or diverse learning needs tend to have a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and benefits associated with inclusion. These experiences foster greater empathy and a commitment to developing inclusive classrooms, as teachers recognize the positive impact of inclusion on all learners (Göransson & Nilholm, 2022).

For instance, a study by Waitoller and Thorius (2016) found that teachers who had previous experience in inclusive environments or had exposure to children with disabilities through internships or community programs were more likely to embrace inclusive teaching practices. Such experiences enable educators to appreciate the importance of diversity in the classroom and the need for individualized instruction to support all students effectively.

However, negative experiences can have the opposite effect. Teachers who have struggled with inadequate support in inclusive classrooms may develop doubts about the effectiveness of inclusive education. Educators facing challenges in managing diverse classrooms without adequate resources may become discouraged and skeptical about inclusive practices (Ekins & Grimes, 2019). These experiences highlight the necessity of fostering supportive environments that provide educators with the resources, training, and mentorship needed to promote positive attitudes toward inclusion.

The availability of resources plays a crucial role in shaping educators' perceptions and implementation of inclusive practices in early childhood settings. Resources encompass a broad range of supports, including instructional materials, assistive technologies, specialized personnel, and classroom modifications (Baker, 2017; Florian, 2021). When teachers have access to well-equipped learning environments, they often feel more capable and confident in addressing the diverse needs of their students (Avramidis & Norwich, 2020). For instance, the provision of adaptive technologies such as speech-to-text software and customized learning tools enhances engagement and participation for children with disabilities, fostering a more inclusive classroom atmosphere (Sharma & De Boer, 2021).

However, educators working in under-resourced environments frequently encounter significant obstacles in implementing inclusive practices. A deficiency in essential materials, inadequate support from special education staff, and limited training opportunities can lead to frustration and diminished efficacy among teachers (Browne et al., 2020; Slee, 2018). In many cases, the absence of these critical resources forces educators to rely on conventional teaching methods that may not adequately accommodate diverse learners, thereby hindering inclusive education efforts (Forlin et al., 2019). The disparities in resource availability between different early childhood programs

further exacerbate inequities, limiting inclusive learning opportunities for many children (Graham & Spandagou, 2020).

Moreover, the role of administrative support in fostering inclusive education cannot be overstated. Strong leadership that actively promotes inclusivity through policies, resource allocation, and continuous professional development significantly enhances teachers' ability to implement inclusive strategies effectively (Kwon, 2019; Göransson & Nilholm, 2022). Schools that encourage collaborative planning and provide access to inclusive education training create an environment where educators feel equipped to address the varied needs of their students (Timmons & Breitenbach, 2020). In contrast, institutions that lack a clear commitment to inclusion may inadvertently foster resistance and uncertainty among teachers, making it challenging to implement effective practices (Sharma et al., 2018).

The institutional culture surrounding inclusion in early childhood education settings plays a fundamental role in shaping educators' attitudes and behaviors toward inclusive practices. Schools that cultivate a culture of support, collaboration, and shared commitment to diversity create positive learning environments that encourage teachers to embrace inclusion (Browne et al., 2020; Lakkala et al., 2021). When educators perceive that their institutions prioritize inclusivity and provide the necessary resources, they are more likely to feel motivated and empowered to implement inclusive practices effectively (Florian & Spratt, 2019).

Conversely, a lack of institutional support can present formidable challenges to inclusion. Teachers who experience isolation or insufficient guidance in their efforts to accommodate diverse learners may become hesitant or resistant to pursuing inclusive strategies (Kwon, 2019). Additionally, when school cultures emphasize standardized testing and traditional instructional models, educators may feel pressured to focus on compliance and academic performance rather than individualized

learning needs (Savolainen et al., 2018). Such institutional priorities can undermine inclusive education efforts by discouraging student-centered teaching methodologies (Slee, 2018; Avissar & Shpigelman, 2017).

Many early childhood educators recognize the value of inclusive education, emphasizing its role in fostering social acceptance and a sense of belonging among children of varying abilities (Torgesen, 2020; Waitoller & Thorius, 2016). A growing body of research underscores that inclusive education benefits not only children with disabilities but also their typically developing peers by promoting positive developmental outcomes (Göransson & Nilholm, 2022). For instance, inclusive environments facilitate peer interactions that enhance social integration, communication, and cooperative learning (Florian, 2021; Baker, 2017).

At its foundation, inclusive education aims to create learning environments where all children feel valued and supported. Educators who champion inclusive practices stress the importance of nurturing a sense of belonging for every child, regardless of their abilities or challenges (Ekins & Grimes, 2019). Research by Torgesen (2020) suggests that inclusive classrooms contribute to children's positive self-identities while reducing the stigma associated with disabilities. Integrating children with disabilities into mainstream classrooms encourages meaningful peer interactions, fostering an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect (Miller & Mervosh, 2022).

Empirical studies further support the idea that inclusive education benefits both children with disabilities and their typically developing classmates. Educators who adopt inclusive approaches frequently report improvements in students' social skills, empathy, and communication abilities (Baker, 2017; Savolainen et al., 2018). For example, research has shown that inclusive classroom settings provide ample opportunities for peer collaboration, problem-solving, and shared learning experiences that enhance social development (Florian & Spratt, 2019). When typically developing

children interact with peers who have disabilities, they gain valuable insights into diverse perspectives, reinforcing emotional intelligence and social competence (Sharma & De Boer, 2021).

Kwon (2019) has argued that inclusion fosters essential social skills such as teamwork, conflict resolution, and adaptability. By engaging with peers of diverse abilities, children develop a deeper appreciation for individual differences, promoting a culture of acceptance and inclusivity (Avramidis & Norwich, 2020). These interactions not only enhance social-emotional learning but also prepare children for diverse environments beyond the classroom (Waitoller & Thorius, 2016).

In addition to social and developmental advantages, inclusive education is closely linked to improved academic outcomes for all children. Studies indicate that students in inclusive settings often perform better than their counterparts in segregated environments, owing to the enriched learning experiences provided by diverse classrooms (Miller & Mervosh, 2022). Exposure to varied learning styles and collaborative problem-solving fosters critical thinking, creativity, and adaptive learning strategies among young students (Göransson & Nilholm, 2022).

Furthermore, the emotional benefits of inclusive education are substantial. Children who learn in inclusive environments report higher levels of emotional security and self-confidence, as they experience a sense of acceptance and validation (Avissar & Shpigelman, 2017; Florian, 2021).

This supportive atmosphere encourages risk-taking in learning, as children feel comfortable expressing themselves without fear of judgment (Ekins & Grimes, 2019). Educators play a pivotal role in fostering a positive emotional climate, which contributes to students' overall resilience and well-being (Timmons & Breitenbach, 2020).

In conclusion, the successful implementation of inclusive education is influenced by various factors, including resource availability, institutional culture, administrative support, and teacher

attitudes. Schools that prioritize inclusivity through leadership initiatives, adequate resource allocation, and professional development create environments conducive to inclusive teaching and learning (Baker, 2017; Florian & Spratt, 2019). The benefits of inclusion extend beyond students with disabilities, enhancing the academic, social, and emotional development of all children. Therefore, continuous efforts to strengthen inclusive practices in early childhood education are essential to ensuring equitable learning opportunities for every child, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds.

## **2.6 Influence of Cultural Beliefs on Attitudes Toward Inclusion**

Cultural beliefs play a critical role in shaping educators' attitudes toward inclusive education. Research indicates that these beliefs significantly influence how teachers perceive and implement inclusive practices within their classrooms (Dignath et al., 2022). For instance, educators hailing from cultures that prioritize collectivism often exhibit a greater inclination to embrace inclusive education. Such cultures emphasize community values, cooperation, and interdependence among individuals, which align closely with the principles of inclusion. According to Sato et al. (2021), teachers in collectivist societies are more likely to view inclusion as a natural extension of their cultural values, facilitating a supportive environment where all children, regardless of their abilities, are integrated into the learning community.

Conversely, educators from cultures that emphasize individualism may adopt a different perspective on inclusion. Individualistic cultures tend to prioritize personal achievement, competition, and self-reliance, which can lead to skepticism regarding the effectiveness of inclusive education (Baker et al., 2021). In these contexts, teachers may focus on standardized testing and academic performance as measures of success, potentially marginalizing the needs of students with disabilities. This focus on individual success can create barriers to the acceptance of

inclusive practices, as educators may question whether accommodating diverse learners detracts from overall academic achievement. Such attitudes reflect a broader societal emphasis on individualism that can permeate educational environments, making it challenging to promote a truly inclusive approach.

The influence of cultural beliefs extends to educators' perceptions of disability itself. Teachers' beliefs about disability can vary dramatically across cultural contexts, affecting their understanding of the needs of children with disabilities. In some cultures, disability is often viewed through a medical lens, wherein it is seen as an individual deficit requiring specialized intervention and support. This perspective may lead teachers to feel that they lack the necessary expertise to address the diverse needs of students with disabilities, creating a sense of inadequacy in their ability to implement inclusive practices (Browne, 2020).

On the other hand, in cultures that regard disability as a social phenomenon, the emphasis is placed on the need for community support and inclusion. Here, disability is not solely perceived as a medical issue but as a condition that society must accommodate. Educators in these cultural contexts may be more inclined to advocate for inclusive practices, viewing them as essential for fostering a sense of belonging among all children (Browne, 2020). This cultural perspective encourages teachers to recognize the strengths and abilities of all students, promoting a more holistic approach to education that values diversity.

These differing beliefs about disability and inclusion can create significant barriers to effective implementation in early childhood settings. Teachers who hold medicalized views of disability may feel unprepared or unsupported when it comes to accommodating diverse learners within their classrooms. This lack of confidence can hinder their ability to create inclusive environments that cater to the needs of all students. Moreover, if teachers perceive that their educational institutions

do not support inclusive practices, they may become resistant to change, perpetuating existing exclusionary practices (Sato et al., 2021).

Additionally, cultural beliefs influence not only individual educators but also the broader educational policies and practices within their regions. In communities where collectivism is valued, there may be more emphasis on developing policies that support inclusive education, thereby fostering a culture of acceptance and integration within schools. In contrast, policies in individualistic societies may prioritize standardization and competition, which could inadvertently discourage inclusive practices (Baker et al., 2021).

Cultural beliefs profoundly impact teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. Educators from collectivist cultures are generally more supportive of inclusive practices, viewing them as aligned with community values. In contrast, those from individualistic cultures may prioritize academic achievement over inclusivity, leading to skepticism regarding the effectiveness of inclusive education. These cultural influences extend to perceptions of disability, which can create barriers to implementing inclusive practices. To foster truly inclusive educational environments, it is essential to recognize and address these cultural factors, providing teachers with the training and support necessary to navigate their beliefs and embrace inclusivity within their classrooms.

This competence is essential for educators, as classrooms are increasingly diverse, and teachers must navigate various cultural contexts. Research by Ghosh (2020) highlighted the significance of incorporating cultural responsiveness into teacher education curricula. By embedding cultural competence into teacher training, future educators can learn to appreciate and respect diverse backgrounds and learning needs, which in turn enhances their ability to implement inclusive practices in their classrooms.

Training that emphasizes cultural awareness helps teachers recognize their own biases and assumptions, fostering a more empathetic and understanding approach toward students from varied backgrounds. Culturally competent educators are better equipped to create learning environments that acknowledge and celebrate diversity, leading to increased student engagement and success. Ghosh (2020) argued that this cultural awareness not only benefits students with disabilities but also enhances the overall classroom experience by promoting inclusivity and mutual respect among all students.

Conversely, when teacher preparation programs do not adequately address cultural competence, educators may struggle to implement inclusive practices, especially in culturally diverse settings. Without the necessary training and resources, teachers may revert to traditional teaching methods that do not accommodate the unique needs of all students (Avisar & Shpigelman, 2017). Such methods may inadvertently marginalize students who do not fit the "norm," thereby reinforcing negative cultural beliefs about inclusion. Teachers may believe that inclusive practices are too challenging to implement or that they lack the skills required to meet the diverse needs of their students.

The impact of inadequate preparation is particularly concerning in classrooms with high diversity, where students may come from varying cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds. Teachers who lack cultural competence may feel overwhelmed and unsupported, leading to frustration and a diminished sense of efficacy. This can create a cycle of exclusion, where students who require additional support are left behind. Avisar and Shpigelman (2017) note that teachers who do not receive proper training may struggle to understand the specific needs of their students, leading to a lack of effective interventions and supports that could promote inclusive education.

Moreover, this gap in teacher preparation can perpetuate existing stereotypes and biases, further entrenching negative cultural beliefs about inclusion (Avisar & Shpigelman, 2017). When educators are not equipped with the tools to understand and embrace diversity, they may hold onto misconceptions that students with disabilities or from different cultural backgrounds are less capable of success in an inclusive setting. This perception can lead to lower expectations for these students, which is detrimental to their academic and social development (Ghosh, 2020).

To address these issues, teacher preparation programs must prioritize cultural competence and inclusive education as central components of their curricula (Ghosh, 2020). Educators should engage in reflective practices that challenge their biases and assumptions while learning effective strategies for fostering an inclusive classroom environment (Avisar & Shpigelman, 2017). Collaborations with communities, families, and organizations that advocate for inclusivity can further enrich teacher training, providing future educators with real-world insights and experiences that inform their teaching practices.

### **2.7 Support Services Available to Early Childhood Teachers' Inclusive Practices**

The implementation of inclusive practices in early childhood education is a complex endeavor that necessitates a robust support system for educators. As the emphasis on inclusive education increases, it is crucial to provide early childhood teachers with the necessary resources, training, and collaborative frameworks to effectively meet the diverse needs of all students, including those with disabilities. This review discusses various support services available to early childhood teachers, highlighting their significance in fostering an inclusive educational environment.

### **Professional Development and Training**

Professional development opportunities are essential for equipping early childhood educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to implement inclusive practices effectively. Research indicates that ongoing training programs focusing on inclusive pedagogy significantly enhance teachers' competence and confidence in working with diverse learners (Baker et al., 2021). These professional development initiatives often encompass workshops, seminars, and coaching sessions that address specific strategies for accommodating students with varying needs. By participating in these programs, educators can learn about best practices for supporting children with disabilities and those from diverse cultural backgrounds, which is critical in fostering an inclusive environment.

Moreover, inclusive training programs that emphasize culturally responsive teaching can further bolster educators' ability to engage with children from diverse backgrounds. According to Ghosh (2020), culturally competent training enables teachers to recognize and appreciate the unique cultural contexts of their students, facilitating a more inclusive and supportive classroom atmosphere. This understanding is vital in early childhood settings, where children's backgrounds can significantly influence their learning experiences. Educators who are culturally aware can tailor their teaching methods to meet the needs of all students, ensuring that everyone feels valued and included in the learning process.

Hands-on training and practical experiences within professional development programs are crucial for effective learning. Workshops that involve role-playing, simulations, or case studies allow teachers to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world scenarios, enhancing their readiness to implement inclusive strategies effectively. Research shows that educators who engage in such practical training feel more prepared to address the diverse needs of their students (Ghosh, 2020).

These experiences build the necessary confidence and competence that educators require to create inclusive classrooms where all children can succeed.

Additionally, the inclusion of collaborative learning opportunities in professional development can greatly enhance the implementation of inclusive practices. Professional learning communities (PLCs) provide a platform for teachers to share experiences, discuss challenges, and collaboratively develop solutions related to inclusive education. These communities foster a sense of belonging among educators, allowing them to learn from one another and gain insights into effective practices that have been successful in different contexts (Baker et al., 2021). When educators can exchange ideas and strategies, they are more likely to adopt inclusive practices and feel supported in their efforts.

Furthermore, partnerships with special education professionals can enrich professional development experiences. When general educators collaborate with special educators during training sessions, they gain valuable perspectives on how to effectively support students with disabilities in inclusive settings. This collaboration fosters a deeper understanding of the individualized strategies necessary for accommodating diverse learners (Smith & Kearney, 2021). Such partnerships are critical for bridging the gap between general and special education, allowing for a more integrated approach to teaching that benefits all students.

Despite the clear benefits of professional development in fostering inclusive practices, several barriers can impede its effectiveness. Limited access to quality training opportunities, particularly in rural or under-resourced areas, can leave educators feeling unprepared to implement inclusive strategies (Ghosh, 2020). Additionally, the lack of institutional support for professional development initiatives can lead to inadequate training that fails to meet the specific needs of

educators. For instance, without proper guidance and resources, teachers may revert to traditional teaching methods that do not accommodate the diverse needs of all students.

Time constraints within the school schedule often hinder educators' ability to participate in professional development programs. Many educators juggle multiple responsibilities, making it challenging to find time for ongoing training. To address these challenges, educational institutions must prioritize and invest in comprehensive professional development plans that align with the goals of inclusive education. This investment includes allocating time for training within the school calendar and ensuring that resources are available to facilitate ongoing learning.

### **Collaborative Support Systems**

Collaborative support systems are crucial for promoting inclusive practices in early childhood education, as they foster a cohesive approach to meeting the diverse needs of all students. Effective collaboration among educators, specialists, and families creates a network of support that enhances educational outcomes for children with disabilities and their peers. One effective model of collaboration is the co-teaching approach, where general and special education teachers work together in the same classroom. This partnership allows for the sharing of expertise, resources, and strategies, ultimately improving the quality of instruction for all students. Research by Smith and Kearney (2021) highlights that co-teaching facilitates effective differentiation and accommodations, ensuring that instruction is tailored to meet the varied learning needs of each child.

Moreover, collaborative practices extend beyond co-teaching arrangements to include a wider range of professionals, such as special education teachers, speech and language therapists, and occupational therapists. This multidisciplinary approach is essential for addressing the specific

needs of children with disabilities, as it allows educators to draw upon a wealth of knowledge and expertise. Baker et al. (2021) emphasize that collaboration with these specialists equips teachers with practical strategies and insights, enabling them to implement targeted interventions that support the developmental goals of their students. For example, speech and language therapists can offer guidance on promoting communication skills among children with speech delays, while occupational therapists can provide strategies for improving fine motor skills essential for classroom participation.

Involving families in the collaborative process is equally important. When families are engaged in their children's education, it promotes a holistic approach to inclusion that acknowledges the unique strengths and challenges of each child. Collaboration with families allows educators to gain valuable insights into children's backgrounds, interests, and learning styles, which can inform instructional practices. Research indicates that when families collaborate with teachers and specialists, there is a greater likelihood of positive educational outcomes for children with disabilities (Ghosh, 2020). This partnership fosters a shared responsibility for the child's development, enhancing the support network available to educators.

Additionally, professional development programs that emphasize collaboration can further strengthen these support systems. Training that focuses on effective communication, teamwork, and conflict resolution among educators and specialists can enhance collaborative practices within schools. When teachers feel confident in their ability to work as part of a team, they are more likely to seek out and utilize the expertise of their colleagues and specialists to support their students effectively.

## **Access to Resources and Materials**

Access to appropriate resources and materials is paramount for the successful implementation of inclusive practices in early childhood education. These resources enable educators to cater to the diverse needs of all students, particularly those with disabilities or different learning styles. When early childhood centers provide a variety of teaching aids, adaptive materials, and assistive technologies, they create an environment that supports meaningful learning experiences for every child. This access not only enhances the quality of education but also promotes an inclusive culture within the classroom.

Early childhood educators require specific types of resources to effectively implement inclusive practices. Research shows that teaching aids such as visual supports, sensory materials, and developmentally appropriate activities are essential for accommodating various learning needs (Smith & Kearney, 2021). For instance, visual schedules can help children with autism understand daily routines, while tactile materials can support children with sensory processing disorders. Similarly, the incorporation of diverse and culturally relevant materials can foster a sense of belonging among children from different backgrounds, reinforcing the importance of inclusivity in educational settings (Baker et al., 2021).

Assistive technology also plays a crucial role in facilitating inclusive practices. Tools such as speech-to-text software, audio books, and communication devices empower children with disabilities to participate actively in classroom activities. Research indicates that the effective use of assistive technology not only supports the learning of students with disabilities but also benefits their peers by promoting a collaborative learning environment (Browne, 2020). For example, when educators incorporate technology that enables children to express their ideas creatively, such as

through multimedia presentations, all students can engage in the learning process, thereby reinforcing the principles of inclusion.

Moreover, the responsibility for providing access to resources does not solely rest with individual educators; schools and educational institutions must prioritize investment in inclusive resources. Administrative support is vital in ensuring that early childhood centers are equipped with the necessary materials to meet the diverse needs of their students. This includes not only the physical resources but also training and support for teachers in how to effectively use these tools in their classrooms. Professional development initiatives that focus on resource utilization can empower educators, enabling them to maximize the impact of the materials available to them (Ghosh, 2020).

Local educational agencies and government programs also have a significant role to play in enhancing resource availability for inclusive education. By offering grants and funding opportunities specifically aimed at supporting inclusive practices, these agencies can help schools acquire the necessary resources to implement effective programs. Such funding can be used to purchase adaptive materials, provide professional development for staff, and create inclusive learning environments that benefit all children (Avisar & Shpigelman, 2017). Furthermore, establishing partnerships with community organizations can lead to shared resources and expertise, enriching the educational experience for students with diverse needs.

To create a truly inclusive environment, schools must adopt a systemic approach to resource allocation. This means not only providing materials but also ensuring that they are integrated into the curriculum effectively. Educators should be trained in how to incorporate various resources into their teaching strategies, allowing for differentiation and personalization of instruction. For instance, using multiple modalities to present information—such as visual, auditory, and

kinesthetic can cater to different learning preferences and abilities, thus fostering an inclusive classroom atmosphere (Ghosh, 2020).

Additionally, ongoing assessment of resource effectiveness is crucial. Educators should regularly evaluate whether the materials and resources provided meet the needs of their students. This can be achieved through feedback from both students and families, enabling educators to make informed decisions about resource use and necessary adjustments. Furthermore, involving families in the resource evaluation process can strengthen the connection between home and school, as families can provide insights into their children's needs and preferences (Baker et al., 2021).

### **Parental and Community Involvement**

Parental and community involvement is a fundamental aspect of promoting effective inclusive education in early childhood settings. Engaging families in the educational process not only enriches the learning environment but also provides early childhood educators with invaluable insights into the unique needs and strengths of their students. Research indicates that when parents actively participate in their child's education, they contribute to a more seamless transition to inclusive practices, fostering an atmosphere where all children can thrive (Ghosh, 2020).

Parents are often the first educators in a child's life, and their perspectives are crucial in understanding a child's specific needs, challenges, and abilities. By sharing their experiences and insights, parents can help teachers tailor their instructional approaches and strategies to better accommodate individual learning styles. For instance, parental involvement can include participating in parent-teacher conferences, providing feedback on school programs, or volunteering in the classroom. These collaborative efforts not only strengthen the relationship

between families and educators but also empower parents to take an active role in their child's educational journey, fostering a shared commitment to inclusion (Baker et al., 2021).

Moreover, community organizations can serve as vital partners in the inclusive education process. They can offer a range of resources, workshops, and advocacy initiatives that promote awareness and acceptance of diversity within the educational system. By collaborating with local organizations, schools can enhance their support systems and provide additional resources that address the diverse needs of their students. For example, community groups may offer training sessions for educators on culturally responsive teaching or provide families with resources that help them support their children's learning at home (Smith & Kearney, 2021).

Establishing strong links between schools and community resources can also facilitate the development of inclusive practices by creating a network of support for both educators and families. These connections enable schools to access a broader range of expertise and services, such as mental health support, language translation services, and specialized educational programs. This comprehensive support system can significantly enhance the overall educational experience for children with diverse needs, ensuring they receive the individualized attention necessary for their growth and development (Browne, 2020).

### **Mentoring and Peer Support**

Inclusive school practices in early childhood centers play a crucial role in fostering an environment where all children, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds, can learn and thrive together. One of the foundational aspects of inclusive education is the recognition of the diverse needs of all students and the implementation of strategies that promote equity in learning opportunities. This approach is not only beneficial for children with disabilities but also enriches the educational

experience for all learners, encouraging social interactions, empathy, and cooperation (Baker et al., 2021).

A core component of inclusive practices is the use of individualized education plans (IEPs) for children with special needs. These plans are developed collaboratively by educators, parents, and specialists to outline specific goals and the necessary accommodations to support the child's learning. Research indicates that when educators effectively implement IEPs, they can better tailor instruction to meet the unique needs of each child, thus enhancing engagement and academic success (Ghosh, 2020). Furthermore, involving families in this process ensures that the strategies align with the child's home environment, thereby reinforcing learning and fostering a holistic approach to education.

In addition to IEPs, inclusive early childhood centers often employ co-teaching models, where general and special education teachers work together in the same classroom. This collaborative approach enables educators to share expertise and resources, creating a more supportive learning environment. Studies have shown that co-teaching not only improves instructional quality but also fosters a sense of community among students, as they learn to appreciate and respect diversity (Smith & Kearney, 2021).

Another essential aspect of inclusive practices is the use of culturally responsive teaching methods. These practices recognize and celebrate the cultural backgrounds of all students, ensuring that the curriculum is relevant and engaging for everyone. Culturally responsive pedagogy promotes inclusivity by validating students' identities and experiences, which can significantly enhance their motivation and participation in the classroom (Browne, 2020). Educators trained in culturally responsive practices are better equipped to address the diverse needs of their students, making learning more accessible and meaningful.

Moreover, access to appropriate resources and materials is vital for successful inclusive education. Early childhood centers must provide various adaptive tools, assistive technologies, and sensory materials to support children with different learning styles and abilities. This resource allocation allows educators to implement varied instructional strategies, catering to the diverse learning preferences of their students (Baker et al., 2021).

### **2.3.4 Challenges Early Childhood Teachers Encounter Towards the Implementation of Inclusion**

Inclusion in early childhood education (ECE) has become a key focus of global educational policies, emphasizing the need to provide equal learning opportunities for all children, regardless of their abilities or disabilities (UNESCO, 2023). While the concept of inclusion is widely supported, its successful implementation remains a challenge for many early childhood educators due to a variety of structural, pedagogical, and attitudinal barriers (Smith et al., 2023). This review explores the major challenges that early childhood teachers face in implementing inclusive education, with a focus on inadequate resources, lack of professional training, attitudinal barriers, curriculum constraints, and institutional support.

#### ***Inadequate Resources***

A critical barrier to the successful implementation of inclusive education in early childhood settings is the persistent lack of adequate resources (Brown & Johnson, 2023). These resources include specialized teaching materials, assistive technologies, trained support staff, and appropriate classroom modifications, all of which are essential for meeting the diverse needs of young learners (Williams et al., 2023). However, many early childhood education centers,

particularly in underfunded areas, struggle to access these necessary tools, creating significant challenges for educators attempting to implement inclusive practices (Anderson & Green, 2023).

One of the primary issues is the unavailability of assistive technologies, such as speech-to-text devices, adaptive seating, and sensory tools, which are critical for supporting children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms (Nguyen & Carter, 2023). Without these technologies, educators may find it difficult to facilitate meaningful engagement for children with special needs, limiting their opportunities for academic and social participation (Harrison et al., 2023). Additionally, many schools lack trained special education staff or paraprofessionals who can provide individualized support to students with disabilities (Parker et al., 2023). The absence of such personnel places an extra burden on teachers, who may already be managing large class sizes and diverse learning needs (Miller & Smith, 2023).

Furthermore, inadequate funding often restricts schools from making necessary classroom modifications, such as installing ramps, modifying furniture, or creating sensory-friendly learning spaces (Thomas & Lee, 2023). As a result, teachers are frequently forced to rely on traditional, one-size-fits-all instructional approaches that fail to accommodate children with varying abilities (Graham et al., 2023). Addressing these resource gaps is crucial to ensuring that inclusive education is effectively implemented and that all learners receive the support they need to thrive (Kim & Davis, 2023).

### ***Lack of Professional Training***

Teacher preparation plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of inclusive education. Many early childhood educators report feeling ill-equipped to manage inclusive classrooms due to insufficient training in special education methodologies (Harris et al., 2023). A study by Williams

and Thompson (2023) found that only a small percentage of early childhood teachers have received adequate training on how to implement inclusive teaching strategies effectively. Additionally, professional development opportunities focusing on inclusion are often scarce, leaving educators without the necessary skills to address the unique learning needs of children with disabilities (Taylor & Richards, 2023). The absence of continuous professional training further exacerbates the challenges, making it difficult for teachers to adapt to evolving best practices in inclusive education.

### ***Attitudinal Barriers***

Teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward inclusive education play a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of its implementation (Nguyen et al., 2023). While many educators recognize the value of inclusion, some express concerns about its practicality, particularly in classrooms with diverse learning needs (Foster & Clarke, 2023). These concerns often stem from fears of increased workload, a lack of adequate training, and uncertainty about how to effectively accommodate all learners (Johnson & Stewart, 2023). Without confidence in their ability to implement inclusive strategies, teachers may develop resistance to adopting inclusive practices (Morris et al., 2023).

Cultural beliefs and societal perceptions further contribute to attitudinal barriers in inclusive education (White & Adams, 2023). In many contexts, disabilities are still stigmatized, leading some educators to believe that children with disabilities should be placed in specialized schools rather than mainstream classrooms (Harrison & Lee, 2023). Additionally, teachers who have not been exposed to successful models of inclusive education may hold misconceptions about its effectiveness (Bennett et al., 2023).

Addressing these attitudinal barriers requires targeted interventions, including professional development programs that equip teachers with the skills and confidence to implement inclusive practices effectively (Kumar & Evans, 2023). Moreover, fostering a school culture that values diversity and provides ongoing support for educators can significantly improve their perceptions of inclusion (Thomas et al., 2023). Without these measures, negative attitudes will continue to hinder the successful implementation of inclusive education in early childhood settings.

### ***Curriculum Constraints***

The rigidity of standardized curricula presents a major challenge for early childhood educators striving to implement inclusive practices (Martinez & Lee, 2023). Many national and institutional curricula are designed with a uniform structure, often failing to account for the diverse learning needs of children with disabilities (Nguyen et al., 2023). This lack of flexibility makes it difficult for teachers to modify lesson plans, instructional pacing, and teaching strategies to accommodate all learners while still meeting mandated learning objectives (Chen & Davis, 2023).

One key issue is the pressure to meet standardized learning outcomes and high-stakes assessments, which often prioritize academic performance over individualized learning approaches (Parker et al., 2023). These assessments are typically designed for neurotypical students, leaving little room for alternative evaluation methods that would better reflect the progress of children with disabilities (Harrison & Patel, 2023). As a result, teachers may struggle to balance the demands of the curriculum with the need to create inclusive learning environments, often feeling compelled to focus on test performance rather than differentiated instruction (Johnson & Smith, 2023).

Additionally, many early childhood curricula emphasize structured learning experiences with limited opportunities for play-based, experiential, or multisensory approaches that benefit children

with disabilities (Anderson & Wilson, 2023). Teachers who attempt to integrate inclusive strategies may find themselves constrained by time limitations, rigid lesson plans, and a lack of administrative support (Wright et al., 2023). Without systemic reforms that allow for curriculum adaptability, teachers may feel discouraged from implementing inclusive methods, resulting in gaps in learning opportunities for children with diverse needs (O'Connor, 2023). Addressing these challenges requires a shift toward flexible curricula that embrace inclusive pedagogies, ensuring that all children receive equitable educational experiences (Kim et al., 2023).

### ***Institutional Support and Policy Implementation***

The extent of institutional support plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of inclusive education in early childhood settings (Rodriguez & Patel, 2023). Schools that actively promote inclusion often have well-defined policies, sufficient funding, and leadership that fosters an inclusive culture, enabling teachers to adopt inclusive teaching strategies with confidence (Nguyen & Carter, 2023). Research indicates that when institutions provide ongoing professional development and access to specialized resources, teachers are more likely to implement inclusive practices effectively (Morris & Evans, 2023).

However, many early childhood education institutions lack clear and comprehensive guidelines on how to execute inclusion, leaving teachers uncertain about best practices and struggling to meet the diverse needs of learners (Anderson & Lee, 2023). Administrative constraints such as large class sizes, high teacher-student ratios, and limited availability of support staff further complicate inclusive education efforts (Jackson et al., 2023). Teachers often find themselves overwhelmed by these structural barriers, which can lead to burnout and decreased motivation to engage in inclusive teaching (Harrison & Bennett, 2023).

Additionally, institutional priorities that emphasize standardized testing and rigid curriculum structures may detract from inclusive efforts, forcing teachers to focus on academic performance rather than individualized learning needs (O'Connor & Wright, 2023). Without comprehensive institutional backing and policy enforcement, educators may struggle to implement meaningful and sustainable inclusion strategies.

### ***Parental Involvement and Societal Perceptions***

The role of parents in supporting inclusive education cannot be overlooked. However, some parents may resist inclusive practices due to cultural stigmas surrounding disabilities or concerns about the quality of education their children will receive in an inclusive setting (Stevenson & Carter, 2023). Teachers often face difficulties in engaging parents who are either unaware of or skeptical about the benefits of inclusion. According to Chen and Watson (2023), strengthening parent-teacher collaboration through awareness programs and regular communication can enhance support for inclusive education. Overcoming societal perceptions and encouraging active parental involvement are essential steps toward fostering a more inclusive educational environment.

The implementation of inclusive education in early childhood settings is fraught with challenges, ranging from inadequate resources and lack of professional training to attitudinal barriers and curriculum constraints. Institutional support, parental involvement, and policy interventions play a crucial role in addressing these challenges. Moving forward, concerted efforts must be made to equip teachers with the necessary skills, resources, and support to effectively implement inclusive education. By addressing these challenges, early childhood education systems can move closer to creating truly inclusive learning environments where all children, regardless of their abilities, can thrive.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.0 Overview

The chapter provides detailed information on the research path followed in examining teachers' attitudes toward inclusive practices in early childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality of the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. This section describes the research paradigm, research approach, research design, population, sample, and sampling procedures, research instruments, trustworthiness criteria, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, as well as ethical issues considered in the study.

#### 3.1 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm refers to the philosophical framework that guides how knowledge is acquired and interpreted in a study. Interpretivist paradigm, which underpins this research, emphasizes the subjective nature of reality and sought to understand human experiences within their social and cultural contexts (Cohen, et al, 2018; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

This study adopts the interpretivist research paradigm, which is rooted in the belief that reality is socially constructed and that individuals interpret experiences differently based on their interactions with their environment. Unlike positivism, which assumes a single objective reality, interpretivism acknowledges multiple realities and the importance of exploring meanings from participants' perspectives (Saunders, et al, 2009; McChesney & Aldridge, 2019).

In educational research, interpretivist paradigm is particularly useful for understanding teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and lived experiences. This study sought to explore how early childhood educators in Ayawaso West Municipality perceive and interpret inclusive education practices. Through this lens, the researcher aims to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' attitudes by

engaging with them in their natural settings and interpreting their responses within the broader social and cultural framework (Bogna, Raineri, & Dell, 2020; Wahyuni, 2012).

Scholars identify three primary research paradigms positivist, interpretivist, and critical theory each with distinct ontological and epistemological assumptions (Bogna, Raineri, & Dell, 2020; Wahyuni, 2012). This study aligns with interpretivism because it prioritizes qualitative methods, such as interviews and observations, to capture the depth and complexity of teachers' perspectives. The interpretive paradigm enables the researcher to appreciate the subjective meanings that educators attach to inclusive practices and the contextual factors influencing their attitudes and perceptions.

### **3.2 Research Approach**

This study adopted qualitative research approach, which focuses on exploring participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of social phenomena in their natural settings (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative approach is particularly suitable for understanding teachers' attitudes toward inclusive practices in early childhood centres, as it allows for in-depth exploration of their beliefs, experiences, and contextual influences.

Qualitative research emphasizes rich descriptions, open-ended inquiry, and an interpretive understanding of human experiences rather than numerical analysis. Through methods such as interviews, focus group discussions, and observations, the researcher aimed to explore the meanings that teachers attach to inclusive education and the factors shaping their attitudes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

One of the strengths of the qualitative approach is its ability to capture diverse perspectives and uncover deeper insights that may not be accessible through standardized surveys or numerical data. By engaging directly with participants in their natural environments, the study sought to provide a

holistic and contextually relevant understanding of teachers' attitudes toward inclusion (Yin, 2016).

Despite its advantages, qualitative research also presents challenges, such as the need for careful data interpretation and potential researcher bias. However, strategies such as triangulation, reflexivity, and thematic analysis enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through this qualitative approach, the study aimed to contribute meaningful insights into the lived experiences of the teachers and inform policies and practices that promote inclusive education in early childhood settings.

### **3.3 Research Design**

This study employed an exploratory case study design to investigate teachers' attitudes toward inclusive practices in early childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality. Exploratory case study design is particularly suited for examining complex social phenomena in real-life contexts, allowing for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to inclusive education (Yin, 2016; Stake, 1995).

As an exploratory study, this research sought to understand how early childhood educators perceive and implement inclusive practices without imposing predetermined hypotheses. Case study approach enabled the researcher to examine the teachers' attitudes within their specific institutional and cultural contexts, offering a rich, holistic understanding of the factors influencing their perspectives (Merriam, 2009).

One of the key strengths of the exploratory case study design is its ability to capture the complexity of human experiences and interactions within a specific setting. However, challenges such as potential researcher bias and the limited generalizability of findings are addressed through

strategies like triangulation (using multiple data sources) and member checking (validating findings with participants) to enhance the trustworthiness of the study (Yin, 2016).

By employing an exploratory case study approach, this research provides a comprehensive, in-depth analysis of the teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, shedding light on the factors that facilitate or hinder inclusive practices in early childhood education.

### **3.4 Population**

Population refers to a specific group of individuals who share common characteristics and are relevant to the research objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Sekaran (2003) described a population as the total set of individuals, events, or objects that a researcher sought to examine. Similarly, Polit and Hungler (1996) defined it as the complete collection of cases that meet a predetermined set of criteria. In essence, the study population comprises the target group from which the researcher aims to gather information and draw meaningful conclusions.

For this study, the target population consisted of all early childhood teachers in the Ayawaso West Municipality. According to the Ayawaso West Municipal Education Directorate (2024), 87 early childhood educators are working in various public early childhood settings within the municipality. These teachers play a crucial role in implementing inclusive education, making them an essential population for this research on their attitudes toward inclusive practices.

### **3.5 Sample and Sampling Techniques**

The sampling technique used in this study was purposive sampling, which involves selecting participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. For this study, 14 teachers were purposively selected on the basis that they have more than 10 years of teaching experience

in early childhood education and have participated in inclusive practices training organized by the Municipal Education Directorate.

Purposive sampling was chosen because it ensures that participants possess the necessary expertise and experience to provide rich, relevant, and insightful data on the topic. According to Merriam (2009), purposive sampling allows researchers to select individuals who can offer in-depth perspectives on the subject matter, which is particularly valuable in qualitative research. In this case, experienced teachers with specialized training in inclusive education were best suited to share insights into the implementation and challenges of inclusive practices in early childhood centres.

Although purposive sampling enhances the relevance and depth of the data collected, it is not without limitations. The selection process may introduce researcher bias, as participants are chosen based on specific criteria rather than random selection (Rai & Thapa, 2015). However, this approach remains appropriate for the study because it enables a focused examination of the experiences and perspectives of teachers actively involved in inclusive education. As Creswell and Creswell (2017) emphasize, purposive sampling increases the applicability of findings by ensuring that participants have direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation.

### **3.6 Data Collection Instruments**

The study employed structured interview guide and observational checklists as the primary data collection instruments. These tools were designed to gather qualitative data on early childhood teachers' attitudes toward inclusion in early childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality.

## **Interview**

A semi-structured interview guide was utilized to collect in-depth data, ensuring that participants could express their views and experiences freely while maintaining alignment with the study's objectives and research questions. According to Creswell (2009), semi-structured interview is neither entirely rigid nor entirely open-ended, allowing for flexibility in questioning while ensuring consistency in key themes. This instrument ensures that relevant issues are explored while also providing room for new insights to emerge during the conversation.

The interview schedule was carefully developed to address the core research questions. Participants were asked a series of questions related to their attitudes, experiences, and challenges concerning inclusive education in early childhood centres. The interview guide was structured into two main sections. Section A and B

- Section A gathered demographic information about the participants, including their years of teaching experience and prior training in inclusive education.
- Section B contained detailed, structured questions designed to explore the teachers' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes toward inclusion, as well as the factors influencing their engagement with inclusive practices.

Using semi-structured interview format allowed the researcher to ensure that all key research areas were covered while also enabling participants to elaborate on their responses, thereby enriching the data collected. As Kusi (2012) noted, this approach enhances the likelihood of obtaining comprehensive and meaningful responses that directly address the study's objectives.

### **3.7 Trustworthiness of the instrument**

Trustworthiness criteria were established for the semi-structured interview guide. One major aim of the research was to put the knowledge created into practice. As a result, researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and the general public must understand and accept the findings as legitimate. Trustworthiness criteria are one-way researchers can convince themselves and readers that their study findings are worthy of attention (Nowell, et al. 2017). The criteria established were confirmability, dependability, transferability, and credibility.

#### **Credibility**

Credibility is a cornerstone of ensuring the trustworthiness of the study. It focuses on demonstrating the rigor of the research process and the soundness of the interpretations drawn from the data (Horsman, 2018). Techniques such as prolonged engagement, triangulation, and member checking contribute to enhancing the credibility of the study's findings (Creswell, 2013).

#### **Confirmability**

In qualitative research, confirmability is a crucial criterion for establishing the trustworthiness of the study. It refers to the degree to which the researcher's biases are minimized and the findings accurately reflect the participants' perspectives and experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Techniques such as member checking and maintaining an audit trail are commonly used to enhance confirmability (Creswell, 2013). The researcher guaranteed confirmability by preventing his knowledge, values, and conclusions from impacting the study's findings. Each phase of the data analysis was included in the study, including the conclusions that were derived as suggested by Charmaz in Kusi (2012)

#### **Dependability**

Dependability is a critical aspect of qualitative research, emphasizing the need for consistency and traceability in the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By maintaining an audit trail and providing clear documentation of research procedures, researchers enhance the dependability of

their study (Creswell, 2013). To increase the dependability of the study findings, the researcher asked clear questions throughout the data collection, minimized bias, and controlled objectivity.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is a key consideration in qualitative research, focusing on the applicability of the study's findings to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By providing rich and detailed descriptions of the research context and participants, researchers enhance the transferability of their findings, enabling readers to assess the relevance to their situations (Creswell, 2013).

### **3.9 Data Collection Procedures**

Before commencing data collection, the researcher obtained an introductory letter from the Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Education, Winneba to seek permission from the relevant schools and authorities within the Ayawaso West Municipality. The letter outlined the purpose of the study, the importance of participants' involvement, and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity regarding participants' information.

The Ayawaso West Municipal Education Directorate issued an official introductory letter to the selected schools, granting the researcher access for data collection. After establishing initial contact with the headteachers of the chosen schools and relevant offices, formal permission was obtained for the administration of the research instruments.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with headteachers to gain insights into their perspectives on the implementation of inclusive practices in early childhood centres. Each interview lasted approximately 15–20 minutes, and responses were audio-recorded with participants' consent to ensure accuracy in data transcription and analysis.

### **3.10 Data Processing and Analysis**

The data collected from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that involves identifying patterns of meaning across the data to generate themes. The recorded

interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. Each transcript was carefully reviewed, coded, and categorized into emerging themes and sub-themes based on the research objectives.

To facilitate the organization and interpretation of the data, numbers were assigned to each interview for easy identification. The researcher independently coded the transcripts, grouped related codes, and generated themes using the framework method for qualitative analysis. This method provided a structured approach to organizing and interpreting data within the study's conceptual framework.

Throughout the process, reflexivity was maintained to ensure that the researcher's perspectives did not bias the interpretation of the data. The themes and sub-themes were then reviewed and discussed to ensure that they accurately represented the participants' responses and aligned with the study's objectives.

### **3.11 Ethical Considerations**

In conducting this study on early childhood teachers' attitudes toward inclusion in early childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality, ethical considerations were carefully addressed to ensure the rights and well-being of participants. These considerations included informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality.

#### **Informed Consent**

Informed consent provides participants with the opportunity to voluntarily decide whether to participate in the study. According to Seidman (2016), informed consent requires that participants fully understand the aims, objectives, and potential implications of their involvement in the study. In this study, the purpose, objectives, and potential influence of the research were clearly explained

to all the participants before data collection. The participants were assured that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any stage without any consequences.

### **Anonymity**

The anonymity of participants was strictly maintained throughout the study. Gujarati (2013) highlighted that anonymity in research ensures that participants' identities remain untraceable. To achieve this, fictitious names and identification codes were used instead of real names, ensuring that participants could not be directly linked to their responses. Prior to data collection, visits were made to the selected early childhood centres to explain the purpose of the study and reassure participants that their privacy would be respected. Additionally, no personal details or identifiable information were collected to prevent any potential victimization or unintended consequences from participants' responses.

### **Confidentiality**

Maintaining confidentiality was a key priority in this study. The participants were informed that their responses would be kept strictly confidential and that no third party or known individual would have access to their personal information. None of the interviewees' names were recorded, and all collected data were securely stored. Furthermore, to uphold academic integrity and avoid plagiarism, all information cited from previous studies was properly acknowledged through citation and referencing.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA PRESENTATION, AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 4.0 Overview

This chapter presents the results of the analysis of the qualitative data based on the results of the four (4) research questions.

To have an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of early childhood teachers towards the practice of inclusion in early childhood centres in the Ayawaso West Municipality, the researcher interviewed some teachers to solicit their views as far as inclusive practices are concerned. Here were some themes that emerged from the interview.

#### 4.1 Data Analysis

**Research Question one (1) What are early childhood educators' perspectives on the implementation of inclusive education practices within the Ayawaso West Municipality?**

##### **Theme 1: Equity and Equal Opportunities**

This theme highlights the belief that inclusive education ensures that all children, regardless of their abilities, have access to the same learning opportunities. This fosters a sense of fairness and equality in the classroom. Here were some of the excerpts from the interview:

Teacher 3 said that;

*I strongly believe that inclusive education ensures that every child, no matter his or her background or ability, has an equal opportunity to learn. In my classroom, I see how important it is to give all learners, including those with special needs, the same access to lessons and activities. T3*

Another teacher also has this to say;

*When we practice inclusion in the classroom, we're ensuring that all children have the same opportunities to participate and learn. It's not just about giving them access to resources; but making sure that every child is included in the classroom activities, discussions, and social interactions. T1*

These quotes highlight the fundamental belief that inclusive education fosters equality and fairness in the classroom. Both teachers emphasized that all children, regardless of ability or background, should have equal access to learning opportunities. Inclusion is not only about providing resources but ensuring full participation in lessons, activities, and social interactions. This approach promotes a sense of belonging, benefiting all learners by encouraging empathy, understanding, and collaboration while ensuring that children with special needs are supported and engaged alongside their peers.

## **Theme 2: Inclusion Provides Diverse Learning Experiences**

This theme reflects the teachers' perspectives on how inclusive education enriches the learning environment. It recognizes that when children with diverse abilities interact in the same classroom, it fosters a variety of viewpoints, skills, and approaches to learning, enhancing creativity, problem-solving, and peer collaboration. Here are some verbatim quotations from the interview

*In an inclusive classroom, every child brings something unique to the table. The diversity of abilities and experiences enriches the learning environment, encouraging creativity and diverse problem-solving approaches. It's through these varied interactions that students learn to think in different ways and appreciate each other's strengths. – Teacher 6*

The quotation emphasizes that inclusion fosters a rich learning environment by valuing diverse abilities and perspectives. This diversity enhances creativity and problem-solving, benefiting all students. It highlights how inclusive classrooms promote mutual respect and understanding, allowing children to learn from each other's strengths and differences, thereby developing a more well-rounded and adaptable approach to learning.

## **Theme 2: Inclusion Enhances Social and Emotional Growth**

This theme echoes the teachers' views on how inclusive education supports the development of key social and emotional skills. They recognized that when children with diverse abilities are

included, they learn empathy, cooperation, and communication, fostering a sense of belonging and positive peer interactions, which are essential for their overall emotional and social development.

Here are some excerpts from the interview;

*Inclusion helps children develop empathy and understanding. When they interact with peers who have different abilities, they learn to appreciate diversity and support one another. It fosters a sense of community where everyone feels valued, which is crucial for their emotional and social growth. Teacher 2*

Another teacher suggested that;

*Through inclusive practices, children not only learn academic content but also develop important social and emotional skills. They learn how to work together, communicate effectively, and care for others, which builds their confidence and emotional resilience. Teacher 5*

The quotes highlight that inclusion in early childhood classrooms goes beyond academics, promoting essential social and emotional development. By interacting with peers of diverse abilities, children learn empathy, cooperation, and communication skills. This not only fosters a sense of community but also boosts their emotional resilience and self-confidence. Inclusive practices help children develop a well-rounded emotional and social foundation, preparing them for future interpersonal relationships and collaborative environments.

#### **Theme 4: Better Peer Interactions and Peer Support**

The theme "Better Peer Interactions and Peer Support" focuses on how inclusive practices foster positive relationships among children. The teachers observed that when children with varying abilities interact, they learn to support and help each other. This collaboration improves social skills, empathy, and teamwork, benefiting all learners. Here is a quote from the interview;

*In an inclusive classroom, children learn to support each other. The more they interact, the more they understand and help their peers, regardless of their abilities. These positive peer relationships create a stronger classroom community and enhance social learning." – Teacher 2*

The quote illustrates that inclusive practices encourage children to work together, fostering a sense of mutual support. As students engage with one another, they develop stronger social bonds, enhancing their ability to collaborate and empathize. This not only improves individual social skills but also strengthens the overall classroom dynamic.

### **Discussions of Results**

The results of this study indicate a consensus among teachers in support of inclusive education, with a strong belief that it provides equal learning opportunities for all children, including those with disabilities. This finding aligns with recent studies that emphasize the importance of inclusion in promoting fairness and ensuring all children have access to quality education, regardless of their abilities (Gordon et al., 2020). Teachers expressed confidence in their ability to implement inclusive strategies, suggesting a belief in their competence and a commitment to providing inclusive practices. However, this confidence was tempered by concerns regarding their preparedness, particularly in working with diverse learners. This gap in teacher preparedness resonates with the literature, where many educators report feeling undertrained to effectively implement inclusive education (Lindsay & McPherson, 2020). Studies consistently show that while teachers may be willing, they often lack the specific training needed to address the unique needs of students with disabilities in inclusive settings (Forlin et al., 2020).

On curriculum adaptability, teachers generally agreed that the curriculum could be modified to accommodate learners with special needs. This finding corresponds with current educational discourse, which highlights the importance of a flexible curriculum that allows for differentiation and adaptation to meet the varied needs of all students (Lloyd & Stirling, 2021). However, the practicality of adapting the curriculum in diverse classrooms was questioned, with teachers indicating that more resources and support were needed. This concern is echoed in the literature,

where teachers cite resource constraints, such as a lack of specialized materials and support staff, as significant barriers to effective inclusive education (Kirk & Gallagher, 2019). Without adequate resources, inclusive education may not be fully realized, and teachers may struggle to make meaningful adjustments to the curriculum to benefit all students.

Teachers also highlighted the challenges of managing classrooms with both typically developing children and those with special educational needs. This reflects findings in the broader literature, which points to classroom management as one of the most challenging aspects of inclusive education (Sailor et al., 2020). Managing such diverse classrooms requires specific skills, including strategies for addressing a range of behaviors and needs, which many teachers feel they have not been sufficiently trained in (Kunc, 2020). The need for additional support in classroom management was a recurring theme in both the qualitative and quantitative data, with teachers expressing the desire for more professional development in this area.

While teachers were largely positive about the social and emotional benefits of inclusion, the lack of resources, particularly in terms of specialized support and materials, emerged as a significant challenge. This divergence in views between the perceived benefits of inclusion and the practical barriers to its full implementation is consistent with recent research, which identifies inadequate resources as one of the major obstacles to successful inclusive education (Baker et al., 2019). Teachers in this study, despite recognizing the social and emotional growth that inclusion fosters, expressed frustration over the disparities in resource availability, reflecting concerns in the literature that inclusive education can be undermined without proper investment in resources (Avramidis et al., 2020).

Finally, while teachers recognized the critical role of school administration and parental involvement, there was some variability in their experiences with these aspects. This divergence

points to the varying levels of support that teachers receive from their schools, which is a common finding in the literature. Research shows that strong administrative support is crucial for the success of inclusive education, but it is often inconsistent, depending on the school leadership (Hughes et al., 2021). Similarly, the qualitative analysis affirmed that teachers view parental involvement as essential for the success of inclusive practices, which is in line with the growing body of literature that emphasizes the importance of family engagement in fostering positive outcomes for students with special needs (Jeynes, 2022).

In conclusion, the study's findings converge with much of the existing literature in highlighting the benefits of inclusive education, particularly its impact on equity, social skills, and emotional growth. However, the challenges identified, including gaps in teacher training, resource limitations, and classroom management difficulties, align with the barriers reported in current research. Addressing these challenges through targeted professional development, increased resources, and stronger support systems is crucial for realizing the full potential of inclusive education.

**Research Question Two: How do the cultural beliefs of teachers influence their attitudes toward inclusive practices in early childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality?**

This research question investigates how teachers' cultural beliefs shape their attitudes toward inclusive practices in early childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality. It aims to explore the influence of cultural perspectives on teachers' openness, acceptance, and implementation of inclusive education, providing insights into how cultural values and norms impact the adoption of inclusive teaching strategies.

The data gathered from the interview on how cultural beliefs of teachers influence their attitudes toward inclusive practices in early childhood centres; generated some themes. Here were some of the themes that emerged from the respondents;

### **Theme 1: Negative Societal Perception**

The culture of a society significantly shapes perceptions of disability, often fostering negative views and stigma. These societal attitudes influence teachers' willingness to implement inclusive practices, leading to resistance or reluctance. Here were some excerpts from the interview

One teacher has this to share;

*Honestly, I think it's too difficult to manage. Children with disabilities require a lot of special attention and resources, which we don't have. I feel they would be better off in a separate, specialized environment where trained professionals can cater to their needs. T6*

Another teacher also said that;

*I think trying to include everyone equally only creates more problems for the teacher and the class. T1*

These quotes imply that teachers' negative perceptions about disability and lack of resources create barriers to inclusion. Viewing children with disabilities as burdens leads to a preference for segregation, hindering efforts to provide equitable education. These attitudes can perpetuate exclusion and limit opportunities for all students to learn together.

### **Theme 2: Perception of Teaching and Learning Style**

Cultural beliefs play a significant role in shaping teachers' perceptions of effective teaching and learning styles, which directly impacts their approach to inclusion. In cultures where authority and discipline are prioritized, teachers may favor structured, teacher-centered methods, making it challenging to implement inclusive, child-centered, and participatory practices. Conversely, cultures that value collaboration and respect for individual differences encourage teachers to adopt

more inclusive and flexible teaching styles, enhancing opportunities for all students, including those with disabilities, to thrive. One teacher has this to say

*I believe handling children with disabilities in an inclusive class requires a shift from rigid, authoritative teaching to more flexible, child-centered approaches. Embracing collaboration and valuing each child's unique abilities fosters a supportive environment where all learners, including those with disabilities, can thrive and participate meaningfully. T4*

The quote implies that effectively including children with disabilities in the classroom necessitates a significant shift in teaching practices. Teachers must move away from strict, authority-driven approaches and embrace more flexible, collaborative, and child-centered methods. This transformation is crucial for creating inclusive environments where every child's unique strengths are recognized and nurtured. Failing to adopt such approaches could perpetuate exclusion and hinder the meaningful participation and learning experiences of students with disabilities.

## **Discussions**

The findings from the data reveal that cultural beliefs significantly shape teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education, particularly in the Ayawaso West Municipality. Teachers generally recognize the influence of their cultural backgrounds on their perceptions of disability and inclusion, which affects their willingness and ability to implement inclusive practices effectively. These findings align with existing research, which highlights the importance of cultural beliefs in shaping educators' attitudes toward inclusive education and their ability to adapt to diverse learner needs.

Cultural beliefs about disability are particularly influential in determining how teachers perceive the integration of students with disabilities in their classrooms. As the data suggests, teachers express moderate to strong agreement that their cultural beliefs impact how they include children with disabilities in the classroom. This reflects research by Browne (2020), which notes that in cultures where disability is seen through a medical lens, educators often perceive disability as an

individual deficit, requiring specialized intervention. This perspective may lead to resistance to inclusive practices, as teachers may feel unprepared or unsupported in addressing the diverse needs of children with disabilities. In contrast, in cultures that view disability as a social phenomenon, where the emphasis is on community support and inclusion, teachers tend to be more receptive to inclusive practices (Browne, 2020). The findings from this study suggest a similar dynamic in the Ayawaso West Municipality, with some teachers acknowledging that cultural norms and traditions can pose significant barriers to fully embracing inclusive practices.

Moreover, the influence of cultural norms on teaching methods and classroom interactions is evident in the responses provided by teachers in the study. Teachers in cultures that prioritize authority and discipline tend to favor teacher-centered, structured methods of instruction, which may hinder the adoption of more flexible, student-centered approaches required for successful inclusion. This is consistent with Ghosh's (2020) assertion that cultural competence plays a key role in shaping teachers' ability to adapt their teaching practices to meet the diverse needs of students. In the study, teachers who recognize the importance of collaboration and respect for individual differences are more likely to adopt inclusive, child-centered teaching styles. This shift from rigid, authoritative teaching methods to more inclusive, flexible approaches is essential for creating an environment where all children, including those with disabilities, can thrive and participate meaningfully (T4).

Cultural beliefs also influence teachers' perceptions of the capabilities of diverse learners. The data shows that teachers in the Ayawaso West Municipality agree that their cultural backgrounds shape how they view the potential of children with disabilities. This finding supports the argument by Sato et al. (2021), who found that teachers from collectivist societies tend to view inclusion as a natural extension of cultural values, promoting cooperation and interdependence. Teachers in the

study also expressed a greater sense of confidence when it comes to interacting with diverse learners, suggesting that a positive cultural perspective can foster an inclusive classroom environment. However, the data also reveals that teachers struggle with balancing cultural expectations and the principles of inclusive education, as cultural beliefs sometimes conflict with the ideals of equal participation and support for all students. This is consistent with Baker et al. (2021), who argue that individualistic cultures, which prioritize competition and self-reliance, may lead to skepticism regarding the effectiveness of inclusive education, making it more difficult to implement such practices.

The role of cultural beliefs in shaping teachers' commitment to inclusive practices is also evident in the study. Teachers report varying levels of commitment to inclusion based on their cultural perspectives, with some viewing cultural values as supportive of inclusive education, while others see them as obstacles. The data reflects the findings of Avissar and Shpigelman (2017), who suggest that when teachers lack cultural competence, they may struggle to implement inclusive practices, leading to exclusionary educational environments. The study further reveals that teachers who embrace cultural sensitivity and cultural competence are better equipped to foster inclusive classrooms that celebrate diversity and promote student engagement and success. As Ghosh (2020) emphasizes, incorporating cultural competence into teacher training is essential for developing educators who are capable of navigating diverse cultural contexts and effectively meeting the needs of all students, particularly those with disabilities.

In conclusion, the findings from the Ayawaso West Municipality highlight the significant role cultural beliefs play in shaping teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. While teachers generally express confidence in implementing inclusive practices, cultural norms and beliefs create both opportunities and challenges. Teachers' perceptions of disability, teaching styles, and the

abilities of diverse learners are heavily influenced by cultural values, which can either promote or hinder inclusive practices. To address these challenges, it is crucial to integrate cultural competence into teacher preparation programs, enabling educators to navigate cultural barriers and adopt inclusive teaching methods that support the success of all learners. By acknowledging and addressing cultural beliefs, educators can create more inclusive and supportive learning environments, where every child, regardless of ability, has the opportunity to succeed.

**Research Question Three: What support services are available to early childhood teachers to implement inclusive practices in the Ayawaso West Municipality?**

This research question explores the types and availability of support services provided to early childhood teachers in the Ayawaso West Municipality for implementing inclusive practices. It sought to identify the resources, training, administrative backing, and community support that facilitate or hinder the effective inclusion of all learners, including those with special needs, in early childhood education settings. Understanding these support mechanisms is crucial for promoting successful and sustainable inclusive education practices.

To compliment the qualitative data, interviews were conducted on the support services available to early childhood teachers in the Ayawaso West Municipality towards their practice of inclusion in their early childhood centres. The interview sought to elicit responses on the support services available to teachers in inclusive practices in their various centres. These are some themes that were generated from the interview.

Here are four themes for analyzing interview responses on the support services available to early childhood teachers in the practice of inclusion, along with corresponding excerpts from teacher interviews:

## **Theme 1: Professional Development and Training Opportunities**

This theme emphasized the importance of continuous training and professional development as a form of support in implementing inclusive education. Many teachers highlighted that while some training programmes have been helpful, they often lack depth and frequency.

*We have occasional workshops, but they are not regular enough. I feel like the training we receive is more of an introduction rather than giving us practical strategies to use in the classroom every day. T4*

*There are some in-service training programs organized by the district, but they are not specifically tailored to inclusion. We need more focused training on how to manage classrooms that have both typical learners and those with special needs. T5*

The quotes highlight a significant gap in professional development for inclusive education. Teachers feel that existing training is infrequent and lacks practical, classroom-specific strategies. General in-service programs do not adequately address the complexities of managing diverse classrooms, underscoring the need for targeted, ongoing training. This shortfall in specialized training hampers teachers' ability to effectively support all learners, emphasizing the necessity for more comprehensive, practical, and inclusion-focused professional development initiatives.

## **Theme 2: Resource Allocation and Classroom Support**

The theme outlined the need for adequate resources to support the effective implementation of inclusive education. This theme captures the ongoing struggle to secure the necessary materials and tools to cater to all learners' needs. Here are some of the quotes from the interview;

*We don't have enough teaching aids that are suitable for children with special needs.*

*Sometimes, I have to create my materials, which takes a lot of time and effort. T3*

Another teacher also highlights;

*Our school does not have specialized equipment or enough teaching assistants to support children with disabilities. It can be overwhelming to manage everything alone. T6*

The quotes emphasize the significant resource gaps that hinder effective inclusion in early childhood education. Teachers face challenges like the lack of specialized equipment and teaching assistants, which increases their workload and stress. This implies a pressing need for schools to invest in appropriate teaching aids and provide additional support staff to ensure that children with special needs receive the attention and resources they require for meaningful learning experiences.

### **Theme 3: Collaboration and Peer Support Networks**

This theme highlights how collaboration among teachers and support from colleagues contribute to the effective practice of inclusion. Teachers described how working together and sharing experiences have been beneficial.

*One of the most helpful things is having a strong network of colleagues. We share ideas and strategies that work in our classrooms. It helps to know that I am not alone in facing these challenges. T1*

One teacher also suggested that;

*We have a small support group at our school where we discuss challenges and share solutions. It's informal, but it has been very useful. I wish we had more structured opportunities for peer collaboration. T3*

The quotes emphasize the crucial role of peer support networks in overcoming challenges related to inclusive education. Informal collaboration among colleagues provides practical strategies and emotional reinforcement, alleviating feelings of isolation. However, the desire for more structured and formalized opportunities for peer collaboration indicates a need for schools to invest in organized professional learning communities. Such initiatives could further enhance teachers' capacity to implement inclusive practices effectively and sustainably.

#### **Theme 4: Administrative and Policy Support**

This theme highlights the role of school administration in facilitating or hindering the practice of inclusion. This theme reflects mixed experiences with administrative backing and policy implementation. Here are some excerpts;

*Teacher 3: Our headteacher is supportive and tries to provide what we need, but there are limitations due to budget constraints. Sometimes, I feel the policies are there, but the practical support is lacking.*

Teacher 5 also opined that;

*Administrative support can be inconsistent. Some policies sound good on paper but are not fully implemented. We need more commitment from leadership to make inclusion a reality, including allocating time for planning and support.*

The quotes highlight the gap between policy and practice in inclusive education, with teachers acknowledging administrative willingness but noting the impact of budgetary and implementation constraints. They imply that while school leadership shows some support, the inconsistency and lack of committed resources undermine effective inclusion. This underscores the need for stronger, practical commitment from administrators, including better financial planning and structured support systems to bridge the gap between policy intentions and classroom realities.

#### **Discussion of the Results**

A comprehensive view of the support services available to early childhood teachers for implementing inclusive practices in the Ayawaso West Municipality. In terms of qualitative data, the results highlight moderate satisfaction with the support services, but with considerable variability in experiences. Teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the scarcity of training programs, educational resources, and specialist support, which reflects a significant challenge in meeting the diverse needs of children, especially those with disabilities. While there is some recognition of administrative support, the inconsistency in funding and specialist access poses

considerable barriers to effective inclusion. The findings align with literature indicating that a lack of resources and training is a persistent challenge in inclusive education (Kauffman & Badar, 2023; O'Toole et al., 2023).

The qualitative analysis reinforces these findings by shedding light on specific challenges teachers face. One of the most notable themes is the inadequacy of professional development and training opportunities. Teachers emphasized that the existing training programs are sporadic and lack depth, often providing only an introduction to inclusive practices rather than offering practical, classroom-ready strategies. This echoes the findings of studies by Berman and Reinke (2023) and Albus et al. (2022), which highlight that teachers often report insufficient preparation to address the diverse needs in inclusive classrooms.

Another significant theme from the qualitative data is the challenge of resource allocation and classroom support. Teachers lament the lack of specialized equipment, teaching assistants, and appropriate materials to support children with special needs. This not only increases their workload but also affects the quality of education provided to children with disabilities. The literature consistently highlights those inadequate resources, including physical and human resources, severely hinder the implementation of effective inclusive education (Cameron & Cook, 2023; Horn et al., 2022).

While collaboration and peer support networks emerged as a positive theme, teachers noted the informality and lack of structure in their collaborative efforts. Although they value sharing strategies and experiences, there is a clear need for more organized opportunities for professional learning communities. This aligns with recent studies suggesting that peer collaboration plays a vital role in fostering inclusive practices, yet many teachers report that such networks are often

unstructured and insufficiently supported by schools (Williams et al., 2023; McLaughlin & Wiggins, 2022).

The theme of administrative and policy support reveals a divergence between policy intentions and practical support. Teachers acknowledged the commitment of school leadership but pointed out that budget constraints and inconsistent implementation of policies create gaps in support. This mirrors findings from recent studies on the gap between educational policy and its real-world application, where administrative support is often limited by insufficient resources and unclear policy execution (Jackson et al., 2023; Thompson & Brown, 2022).

In conclusion, both the quantitative and qualitative data point to a significant need for improved professional development, better resource allocation, and more structured peer collaboration to enhance inclusive education practices. Teachers' experiences reflect a disconnect between policy and practical support, highlighting the importance of bridging this gap to ensure the successful implementation of inclusive education.

**Research Question Four: What is the effectiveness of the training that teachers have received for implementing inclusive practices in early childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality?**

Research Question Four examines the effectiveness of the training that teachers have received for implementing inclusive practices in early childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality. This question sought to assess how well the training prepares teachers to effectively integrate inclusive education strategies in their classrooms, and whether the training provided meets the needs of diverse learners, including those with disabilities. Understanding the effectiveness of such training is crucial for improving inclusive education practices.

This research question sought to find how the level of training of teachers influences the implementation of inclusive practices in early childhood centres in the Ayawaso West Municipality. The following themes were generated from the interviews;

### **Theme 1: Insufficient Depth and Practical Application of Training**

This theme echoed that while training sessions are occasionally offered, they often lack depth and practical strategies that can be directly applied in the classroom. Here are some excerpts from the interview;

*We have occasional workshops, but they are not regular enough. I feel like the training we receive is more of an introduction rather than giving us practical strategies to use in the classroom every day. T4*

*The training we get is basic and doesn't go into enough detail on how to deal with specific challenges in inclusive classrooms. T2*

The quotes imply that the existing training programs for teachers are insufficient in addressing the specific needs of inclusive classrooms. Teachers feel that the workshops are infrequent and introductory, lacking detailed strategies for practical application. This gap in training may limit teachers' ability to effectively implement inclusive practices, which could hinder their ability to meet the diverse needs of all students, especially those with special needs, in early childhood settings.

### **Theme 2: Lack of Ongoing and Specialized Training**

This theme highlights that the training teachers receive is not focused enough on inclusion, and there are few follow-up opportunities to reinforce the skills needed to manage diverse classrooms.

*There are some in-service training programs, but they are not specifically tailored to inclusion. We need more focused training on how to manage classrooms that have both typical learners and those with special needs. T5*

*The training is not continuous. Once you attend a workshop, there is no further support or advanced training to help you deepen your understanding of inclusive practices. T7*

The quotes suggest that while some in-service training programs exist, they lack a specific focus on inclusion, leaving teachers unprepared to manage diverse classrooms effectively. Additionally, the lack of continuous and advanced training after initial workshops means teachers do not receive the ongoing support needed to refine their skills. This creates a barrier to fully implementing inclusive practices, as teachers are left without the resources to deepen their knowledge or address complex classroom challenges.

### **Theme 3: Limited in Skill Development**

The theme sought to expound on how teachers acknowledged that the training helped raise awareness about inclusive education, but did not significantly improve their ability to implement practical inclusion strategies.

*The training raised my awareness about inclusion, but I still feel unprepared to handle children with special needs effectively. It's good to know the theory, but I need more tools for actual classroom situations. T3*

*I learned about the importance of inclusion, but the training didn't give me enough skills to implement it in my classroom. It was more of a general overview rather than specific methods I could use. T1*

These quotes highlight a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application in inclusive education training. While the training raised awareness about inclusion, teachers feel unprepared to address the specific needs of children with special needs in the classroom. The lack of practical, hands-on strategies means that teachers are not equipped with the necessary tools to implement inclusive practices effectively, which may hinder their ability to support all learners meaningfully.

#### **Theme 4: Inadequate Assistive Device**

This theme highlights a significant barrier to the effective implementation of inclusive practices in early childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality the lack of appropriate assistive devices. Here are some excerpts from the interview;

*Sometimes we have children who need special learning tools like hearing aids or tactile materials, but the school doesn't have them. We try to improvise, but it's not the same it limits how much support we can give to those learners (T6).*

Another teacher also suggested that;

*The training taught us how to use assistive devices, but in reality, we don't have those resources in our classrooms. It makes it difficult to put into practice what we learned about inclusion (T2).*

The quotes imply that the absence of adequate assistive devices severely limits teachers' capacity to implement inclusive education effectively. Although teachers are trained to use such tools, the lack of resources prevents them from meeting the diverse learning needs of children. This disconnect between training and classroom realities undermines the goals of inclusive education, reduces learner participation, and highlights the urgent need for policy interventions and resource allocation to support inclusive practices in early childhood centres.

#### **Discussions**

The findings addressing Research Question Four, which explored the effectiveness of the training teachers have received for implementing inclusive practices in early childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality, reveal both progress and persisting challenges. While training

initiatives have enhanced teachers' awareness and attitudes toward inclusion, their overall effectiveness remains constrained by limited depth, lack of continuity, insufficient skill development, and inadequate resources. These findings are consistent with previous studies that argue that teacher training in inclusive education often remains theoretical, with little practical translation into the classroom (Florian & Spratt, 2023; Opoku et al., 2021).

Teachers in the study emphasized that although training programs were occasionally organized, they often lacked the necessary depth and practical orientation to equip them for inclusive classroom realities. Most sessions were described as brief and introductory, focusing more on general awareness than on specific strategies that could be directly applied to teaching. This reflects what Forlin (2020) and Avoke and Eshun (2022) observed that effective inclusive education training must be experiential and practice-based rather than purely theoretical. The implication of this finding is that while teachers understand the principles of inclusion, they often feel unprepared to design differentiated instruction or adapt teaching materials to meet the diverse needs of learners. As UNESCO (2020) asserts, meaningful training should involve hands-on learning, role play, and classroom-based simulations that prepare teachers to handle real-life scenarios involving children with diverse abilities. Without such practical emphasis, teachers' understanding of inclusion remains abstract, limiting their capacity to create genuinely inclusive classrooms.

Another important finding concerns the absence of ongoing and specialized training opportunities for teachers. Many teachers reported that while they occasionally participated in in-service workshops, these sessions were neither frequent nor specifically tailored to inclusive education. They lamented the lack of follow-up programs that could help reinforce or advance their learning over time. This finding aligns with the arguments of Mitchell (2022) and Sharma and Sokal (2020),

who maintain that one-off workshops are insufficient for developing sustainable inclusive practices. Inclusion, they argue, requires continuous professional development (CPD) that deepens teachers' knowledge and builds their confidence through iterative practice, mentorship, and feedback. In the Ayawaso West context, the lack of ongoing training has left many teachers without the support needed to manage diverse classrooms effectively. Furthermore, the absence of structured peer collaboration or mentoring programs deprives teachers of valuable opportunities to reflect, share experiences, and learn from one another (Ainscow, 2020).

The study also found that while the training raised teachers' awareness about inclusion, it did not substantially enhance their skills for practical implementation. Teachers reported that although they learned about inclusive education concepts, they lacked confidence in applying them to real classroom situations. This gap between theoretical understanding and practice is not unique to this study—it reflects a broader issue in professional development across many low- and middle-income countries, including Ghana. Agbenyega and Klibthong (2020) and Opoku et al. (2023) have shown that training programs often emphasize policy frameworks over the actual pedagogical skills teachers need to handle diversity effectively. Teachers in the study expressed uncertainty in managing behavioral challenges, differentiating lessons, and adapting teaching materials for learners with disabilities. According to Lynch, McCall, and Douglas (2021), developing practical skills such as creating individualized education plans and using universal design for learning approaches is crucial for teachers to feel competent in inclusive classrooms. The lack of such targeted skills in the training programs studied here limits teachers' ability to meet the diverse learning needs of all children.

Another major barrier identified in the study was the lack of assistive devices and learning materials to support inclusive education. Teachers noted that while training introduced them to

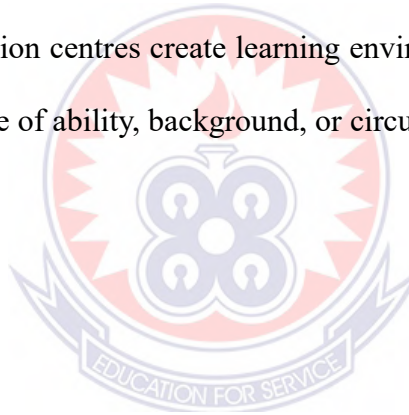
assistive technologies like hearing aids, tactile materials, or visual aids, these tools were often unavailable in their schools. As one teacher put it, “We try to improvise, but it’s not the same.” This shortage of materials significantly hampers the effective implementation of inclusive strategies, as teachers cannot apply what they learned in training without the necessary tools. This finding echoes UNICEF’s (2021) and Buli-Holmberg and Jeyaprathaban’s (2020) observations that inadequate resources remain one of the most persistent barriers to inclusive education in developing contexts. The lack of assistive devices limits learners’ participation, reduces teachers’ motivation, and creates disparities between training expectations and classroom realities. Miles and Singal (2023) argue that achieving inclusive education requires systemic support through proper resource allocation, funding, and policy enforcement. Thus, without adequate material and institutional backing, even the most dedicated teachers cannot successfully implement inclusion.

Taken together, these findings paint a complex picture of inclusive education training in the Ayawaso West Municipality. On one hand, teachers are becoming more aware of the philosophy and importance of inclusion; on the other, their ability to translate that awareness into effective classroom practice remains limited. This situation reflects a wider pattern across educational systems where inclusion is promoted at the policy level but insufficiently supported at the implementation stage (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2023; Opoku et al., 2021). To improve outcomes, training programs must evolve beyond one-time workshops to become continuous, practice-oriented professional learning frameworks. They should integrate hands-on learning experiences, mentorship, and opportunities for teachers to reflect on and refine their inclusive teaching approaches.

Furthermore, partnerships between the Ghana Education Service, teacher education institutions, and early childhood centres are essential to develop context-specific modules on inclusive

pedagogy. Investment in assistive devices, teaching aids, and classroom infrastructure must also be prioritized to ensure that teachers can implement the strategies they learn. Sustained mentoring and peer-support systems would further enable teachers to share experiences, seek guidance, and develop confidence in inclusive teaching.

In conclusion, the effectiveness of teacher training for inclusive education in early childhood settings within the Ayawaso West Municipality is mixed. While awareness and attitudes have improved, gaps in practical training, continuous support, and resource availability hinder full implementation. To move from rhetoric to reality, inclusive education must be supported by systemic investment in professional development, infrastructure, and collaborative practice. Only then can early childhood education centres create learning environments that genuinely meet the needs of all learners, irrespective of ability, background, or circumstance.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 Overview

This final chapter comprises a summary of the study, emphasizing the major findings. It discusses the conclusion, recommendations as well as suggestions for future research.

#### 5.1 Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate teachers' attitudes toward inclusive practices in early childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality. To achieve this purpose, the following research objectives were formulated to guide the study:

1. What are early childhood educators' perspectives on the implementation of inclusive education practices within the Ayawaso West Municipality?
2. How do teachers' cultural beliefs influence the implementation of inclusive education in early childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality?
3. What support services are available to early childhood educators in fostering inclusion in the Ayawaso West Municipality?
4. What challenges do teachers encounter in the implementation of inclusive education in early childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality?

The study adopted the exploratory case study design. A sample of 14 kindergarten teachers in the Ayawaso Municipality was used. The sampling technique adopted for the study was purposive sampling. The data collection instrument used for the study was semi-structured interview guide. The data from the study were analysed using thematic analysis.

## **5.2 Key Findings**

The study revealed that teachers in the Ayawaso West Municipality generally support inclusive education, recognizing its role in promoting equity and social growth. However, many feel underprepared to meet diverse learner needs despite their confidence. They stressed the need for a flexible curriculum but cited limited resources, large classes, and weak administrative and parental support as major challenges.

Cultural beliefs also strongly influence the teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. Some teachers noted that societal perceptions of disability shape their willingness to include children with special needs, with traditional beliefs sometimes conflicting with inclusive principles. This highlights the need to integrate cultural competence into teacher training.

Teachers expressed moderate satisfaction with support services but mentioned inadequate training, scarce resources, and limited specialist support. Training was seen as too general, lacking practical classroom strategies. Poor funding and weak policy implementation further affect inclusive practices, while peer collaboration remains informal and unsupported.

Finally, while training has improved awareness and confidence, the teachers still lack practical skills and continuous professional development. Stronger institutional support, better resources, and ongoing hands-on training are needed to make inclusion effective in early childhood settings.

## **5.3 Conclusions**

The following conclusions were drawn from the study;

The report concludes that while early childhood educators in the Ayawaso West Municipality demonstrate a foundational commitment to the ideals of inclusive education, this commitment is not yet matched by the capacity and systemic conditions necessary for effective implementation.

The study underscores that positive teacher attitudes alone are insufficient to guarantee inclusive

practices unless supported by practical skills, enabling environments, and responsive institutional frameworks.

The researcher concludes that inclusive education in early childhood centres must be approached as a multi-dimensional reform, not merely as a pedagogical adjustment. It requires a cultural shift that addresses deep-rooted beliefs about disability, a structural shift that ensures consistent and adequate support services, and a professional shift that equips teachers with hands-on strategies and ongoing developmental opportunities.

This study also points to the importance of aligning policy with practice. While inclusive education policies exist, their uneven implementation calls for stronger monitoring, accountability, and teacher involvement in decision-making processes. Teacher training must evolve beyond awareness-raising to embrace experiential, practice-oriented learning that builds confidence and competence.

Finally, fostering inclusive early childhood classrooms in the Ayawaso West Municipality would depend on a coordinated effort that connects teacher development, cultural responsiveness, community engagement, and institutional support. Without such an integrated approach, the promise of inclusion may remain rhetorical rather than realized.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

The following recommendations were drawn from the study;

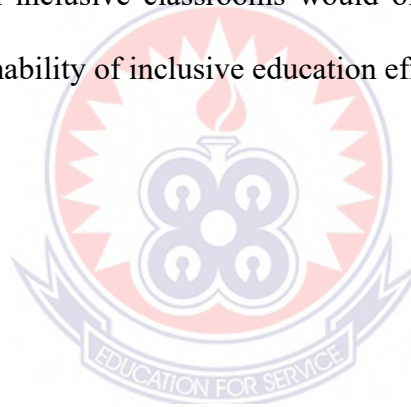
1. The Ayawaso West Municipal Education Directorate should organize practical professional development programs to help teachers manage diverse classrooms effectively. More funds should be allocated for learning materials, assistive devices, and support staff. Strong administrative and parental involvement should be encouraged through engagement

programs, and policies on inclusion should be consistently enforced to create a supportive learning environment for all.

2. School authorities should help teachers understand how cultural beliefs affect inclusive education by including cultural competence training in teacher preparation. Workshops should present inclusive principles in ways that respect local cultures. Teachers should also be encouraged to discuss cultural views on disability openly to promote understanding and improve inclusive teaching in diverse classrooms.
3. The Education Directorate should provide more practical and continuous training for teachers on inclusive education. Additional funding should be directed toward essential learning materials and professional support. Peer collaboration networks should be developed to allow teachers to share experiences and ideas. Clear administrative policies and adequate resource allocation are necessary to ensure quality education for learners with special needs.
4. School authorities in the Ayawaso West Municipality should provide ongoing training that focuses on applying inclusive strategies in real classroom situations. Teachers should receive practical tools and techniques to manage diversity effectively. Mentorship and peer-support programs should be established to strengthen teamwork among teachers. Investment in continuous resources and support systems will help create inclusive, well-structured early childhood learning environments.

### **5.5 Suggestions for Further Studies**

Future research could investigate the long-term effects of inclusive education training on teachers' confidence and practical competence in handling diverse learners. Comparative studies across various regions in Ghana may also help reveal how cultural beliefs and community values shape the implementation of inclusive practices. Moreover, exploring which specific educational resources most effectively support curriculum adaptation for children with special needs would provide actionable insights. Further inquiry could also focus on evaluating the impact of administrative and parental support programs, identifying effective strategies for sustaining collaborative engagement. Finally, longitudinal studies tracking learners' academic progress and social-emotional growth within inclusive classrooms would offer deeper understanding of the overall effectiveness and sustainability of inclusive education efforts.



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**APPENDIX A**

**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

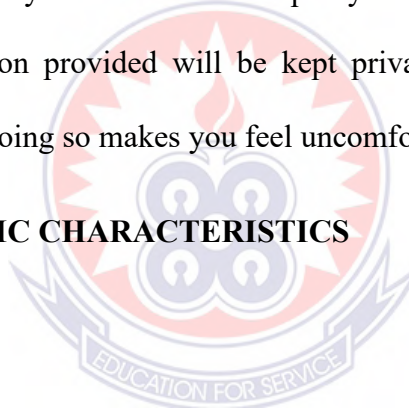
**DEPARTMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

**SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS**

Dear teacher, the purpose of this study is to investigate early childhood teachers' attitudes toward inclusion in early childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. I sincerely appreciate your cooperation in this study, which will enable me to gain a deeper understanding of the attitudes of early childhood teachers towards inclusive practices in early childhood centres in the Ayawaso West Municipality. Please be aware that participation is optional and that all information provided will be kept private. You have the option of not responding to any questions if doing so makes you feel uncomfortable. Thank you

**SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS**

1. How old are you?
2. Gender.....
3. What is your educational qualification?.....
4. Duration.....



## **SECTION B**

**Objective 1: Assess early childhood educators' perspectives on the implementation of inclusive education practices within the Ayawaso West Municipality.**

5. How do you understand the concept of inclusive education in the context of early childhood learning?
6. How do you implement inclusive practices in your classroom activities?
7. What factors influence your willingness or ability to practice inclusion in your classroom?

**Objective 2: Examine how teachers' cultural beliefs influence their inclusion practices in early childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality.**

8. How do your personal or cultural beliefs influence your attitude toward children with disabilities or special needs?
9. Are there any cultural norms that affect how inclusion is practiced in your school?
10. How do you balance cultural expectations with the need to promote inclusion in your classroom?
11. In your view, how do parents' cultural beliefs affect the acceptance of inclusive practices in early childhood education?

**Objective 3: Explore the support services available to early childhood educators in fostering inclusion in the Ayawaso West Municipality.**

12. What types of support services are available to you to promote inclusion?
13. How effective are these support services in helping you implement inclusive education practices?
14. Are there any collaborations between your school and external agencies to support inclusive education?
15. What additional support or resources would you need to improve inclusion in your classroom?

**Objective 4: Find out the challenges teachers encounter in the implementation of inclusion in early childhood centres within the Ayawaso West Municipality.**

16. What major challenges do you face when trying to include children with special needs in classroom activities?
17. What challenges do you encounter when working with parents or guardians of children with special needs?
18. How do you think these challenges can be addressed to improve inclusive education in your school?

