

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION WINNEBA

**TEACHER PREPAREDNESS FOR MANAGING DIVERSE LEARNING NEEDS IN
EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOMS IN THE EFFUTU MUNICIPALITY**

BELINDA EKUA AMOAKO

(7251900012)

**A dissertation in the Department of Early Childhood Education,
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of the requirements for the award of the degree of
Master of Education
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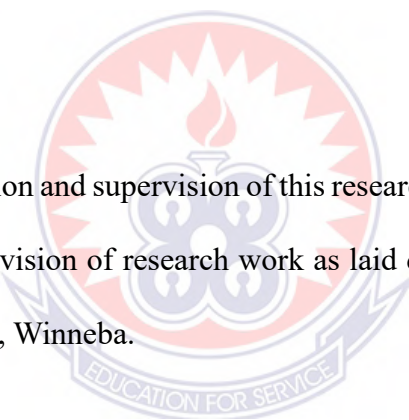
I, Belinda Ekua Amoako, declare that this thesis is a result of my original research except for references to other people's work which have been duly acknowledged and it has neither in whole nor in part been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature:

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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 Michael Subbey (Ph.D.)

Supervisor's Signature:

Date:

DEDICATION
To my lovely Family



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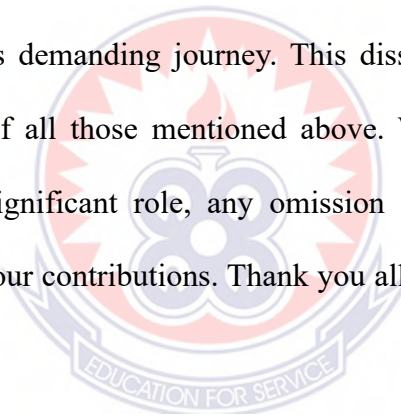


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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the level of preparedness of early childhood teachers in managing diverse learning needs in the Effutu Municipality. It sought to understand how teachers perceive their level of readiness, the strategies they employ to support learners with varying abilities, and the challenges they encounter in promoting inclusion. The study was guided by the interpretivist paradigm, which focuses on understanding human experiences and meanings within their social context. This philosophical stance recognizes that teacher preparedness is not fixed but shaped by teachers' training, beliefs, and classroom realities. A qualitative research approach was adopted to gain deep insights into teachers' lived experiences and practices. Data were gathered through interviews and observations involving purposively selected early childhood teachers across the Effutu Municipality. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data, revealing key patterns and meanings in participants' responses. The study found that teachers' preparedness is influenced by factors such as professional training, teaching experience, institutional support, and access to resources. The findings provide valuable information to policymakers, educational leaders, and teacher educators in strengthening professional development and enhancing inclusive practices in early childhood education within the Effutu Municipality.



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Early childhood education (ECE) is instrumental in the development of cognitive, social and emotional skills of learners, especially in the classroom where children manifest different learning needs arising from varying levels of ability, socio-economics and language diversity (Quansah & Ankomah, 2023). The National Pre-Tertiary Education Curriculum Framework (NaPTECF, 2020) for education in Ghana highlights the need for inclusive education as a response to the call for equity. But teachers in rural areas such as the Effutu Municipality often experience difficulty rendering policy into practice due to entrenched gaps in training, resources, and institutional support (Ministry of Education, 2021). The Effutu Municipality where the study was conducted, is home to a diverse population consisting of, but not limited to, indigenous Effutu, Fante, and migrant communities (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). Classrooms here are characterized by multilingualism (e.g., Effutu, Fante, and English) and a heterogeneous mix of typical learners and children demonstrating developmental delays or other disabilities (Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah, 2023). Despite this multifariousness, a study in 2023 in the Effutu Municipality found out that, 72% of ECE teachers in this municipality often utilizes the method of one-size-fits-all because they lack differentiated instructional training (Owusu-Ansah et al., 2023). This disconnection exacerbated by congested classrooms by pupils, with as high as 1:50 being the ratio for teacher-pupil, which leaves very little capacity for individualized support (National Council on Curriculum and Assessment [NaCCA], 2022).

In Ghana, instead of teacher training programs focuses on practical strategies for the management of diversity, its rather prioritizes theoretical knowledge, yet teacher preparedness globally is mostly recognized as critical for encouraging inclusive classrooms (Tchombe, 2020). In some instances, only 25% of teachers in the Effutu municipality reported to have access to adaptive learning tools workshops, such as multilingual resources or visual aids (Mensah et al., 2022). Compounding these issues, many schools lack basic infrastructure to support digital tools that could aid in personalized learning, infrastructure such as, internet connectivity or electricity (National Development Planning Commission [NDPC], 2023).

Cultural dynamics in Ghana may further limit teacher preparedness. One of the challenges that persist in Effutu is deep-rooted stigma towards children with disabilities that may cause parents to hide their children with special needs due to the fear of social exclusion (Mfum-Mensah, 2021). This challenge leads to low enrollment of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms because teachers often lack training for addressing these challenges (Au-Gyamfi, 2023). Moreover, gender norms impact classroom dynamics; where girls with learning difficulties might be overlooked, while “disruptive” is frequently labeled on boys with behavioral challenges, this actions reinforce inequities (Akyeampong, 2022).

While the Ghana’s Inclusive Education Policy (2015) aims to address these gaps, it remains inconsistently implemented in Effutu. Partly due to some logistical challenges such as unfunded district education offices and poor roads network, the state’s Ghana Accountability for Learning Outcomes Project (GALOP) has yet to deliver targeted training

for ECE teachers in rural communities (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, 2022).

This study seeks to explore the interplay of institutional, cultural, and systemic barriers affecting teacher preparedness in Effutu. By centering local voices, the research aims to propose context-specific strategies to align Ghana's inclusive education goals with classroom realities.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The increasing diversity in early childhood classrooms presents a significant challenge to teachers in meeting the unique learning needs of all students. Children enter school with varying backgrounds, abilities, and learning styles, requiring educators to adopt inclusive teaching strategies that accommodate these differences (Florian & Spratt, 2019). The variations in this context circumscribe diversities in cultural identities, socio-economic backgrounds, language proficiencies, abilities and disabilities which all require tailored pedagogical strategies (UNESCO, 2020). Nonetheless, many early childhood teachers in the municipality lack sufficient resources, training and institutional support to execute inclusive practices effectively, by preliminary evidence suggestion.

Recent studies spotlight that, only 35% of early childhood education instructors in Ghana have received inclusive education specialized training, where rural communities like Effutu reporting more lower rates (Akyeampong et al., 2021). This gap is aggravated by overpopulated classroom, where about 35-40 children with varying needs may be managed by a single teacher, leaving little room for individualized instruction (Ghana Education Service [GES], 2022). Additionally, the stigmatization towards children with disabilities

and cultural attitudes often discourage parents from seeking for support, exacerbating teacher's challenges in unbiased learning environments (Opoku et al., 2023). For example, a survey in Effutu in 2023 found that 62% of teachers felt unprepared in the integration of children with developmental delays into mainstream activities due to limited guidance or limited access to assistive technologies (Amponsah et al., 2023).

The Ghanaian government's National Teacher Education Curriculum Framework (NTECF, 2018) stresses on inclusive education, yet, implementing it remains inconsistent. Teachers regularly report inadequate professional development opportunities, with workshops on variety management being patchy and theory-heavy rather than practical (Adusie et al., 2022). Compounding these issues, basic resources such as sensory tools, multilingual learning materials or culturally applicable curricula that reflect Effutu's indigenous languages and traditions are being lacked by many schools (World Bank, 2021). For instance, most instructional materials are in English while the language widely spoken in the municipality is Fante, alienating children from non-literate households (Quansah et al., 2022).

The repercussion of this preparedness gap are heartfelt. Pupils risk falling behind academically with unmet learning needs, while teachers experience exasperation and burnout, sustaining cycles of underperformance and inequity (Agbenyega & Klibthong, 2021). With no urgent interference, the Effutu Municipality risks failing to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and perpetuating the systematic exclusion of vulnerable learners in schools in the municipality. This study seeks to analyze

the root of the causes of unpreparedness of teachers and propose actionable strategies to bridge the gap between classroom realities and policy aspirations.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine the level of preparedness of early childhood teachers in managing diverse learning needs in the Effutu Municipality.

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To examine the level of preparedness of early childhood teachers in managing diverse learning needs in the Effutu Municipality.
2. To identify the strategies early childhood teachers, employ to support learners with diverse learning needs in their classrooms.
3. To explore the professional development opportunities available to early childhood teachers for managing diversity in learning needs.
4. To assess the challenges early childhood teachers, face in addressing diverse learning needs in the Effutu Municipality.

1.5 Research Questions

1. How prepared are early childhood teachers in managing diverse learning needs in the Effutu Municipality?
2. What strategies do early childhood teachers employ to support learners with diverse learning needs in their classrooms?
3. What professional development opportunities are available to early childhood teachers for managing diversity in learning needs?

4. What challenges do early childhood teachers face in addressing diverse learning needs in the Effutu Municipality?

1.6 Significance of the study

There is substantial value for several stakeholders in this study on teachers' readiness to handle a variety of learning requirements in early childhood classrooms in Ghana's Effutu Municipality. First of all, it fills a significant practical gap in Ghana's educational system. There are ongoing difficulties in putting inclusive education policies into reality, especially in early childhood development (ECD) settings (UNESCO, 2020), despite governmental commitments to this goal (Ministry of Education, 2021). According to research, instructors frequently feel unprepared to deal with the variety of learning characteristics that are common in Ghanaian classrooms, such as impairments, linguistic diversity, and differing socio-emotional needs (Quansah & Ankomah, 2023; Owusu-Ansah et al., 2023). The preparation gap is directly examined in this study within the unique socio-cultural and linguistic setting of the Effutu Municipality, which is renowned for its multilingual environment (Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah, 2023).

Secondly, the results provide important information for enhancing teacher professional development (TPD). The study will identify specific knowledge, skill, and resource inadequacies by qualitatively examining teachers' self-perceptions, lived experiences, tactics, and articulated requirements surrounding diversity management (Florian & Spratt, 2019). Moving beyond generic training models, this evidence is crucial for the Ghana Education Service (GES), teacher training institutions, and non-governmental organizations to create contextually appropriate and successful TPD programs that are adapted to the realities of Effutu's ECD contexts (Tchombe, 2020).

Thirdly, the study makes a fundamental contribution to improving educational quality and equity. In order to ensure that all children have access to high-quality learning experiences and acquire fundamental skills, it is critical that various needs in ECD be effectively managed. This will help to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) targets (World Bank, 2021). Finding Effutu's facilitators and obstacles (such as attitudinal factors, specific training gaps, and resource limitations) gives local education directors and school administrators useful information for enhancing support networks and allocating resources, which will ultimately promote more inclusive classrooms and improved developmental outcomes for all students (Opoku et al., 2023). Finally, this study presents a potential model for comparable situations throughout Ghana and a crucial body of evidence for enhancing inclusive ECD practices in Effutu.

1.7 Delimitations of the Study

In the Effutu Municipality of Ghana, early childhood education (ECE) teachers' readiness to handle a variety of learning requirements in the classroom is the specific focus of this study. Geographically, the study is limited to ECE settings in the Effutu Municipality, both public and private (KG1 and KG2) levels. It focuses only on the experiences, perceived readiness, strategies, difficulties, and support needs of operating ECE teachers with regard to identifying and managing diverse learning needs, which include differences in abilities, learning styles, linguistic backgrounds, and socio-emotional development. The study takes a wholly qualitative approach, collecting rich, descriptive data directly from the teachers through techniques like focus groups and in-depth interviews. It excludes reviewing particular school policies in-depth, tracking child

outcomes, gauging family opinions, and looking into procedures at the primary or higher education levels in the municipality.

1.8 Delimitations of the Study

This research purposefully delimit itself to investigating the readiness of early childhood education (ECE) teachers in practice, particularly in the public and private kindergarten settings (KG1 & KG2) of Ghana's Effutu Municipality. Teachers' perspectives, self-assessed competencies, reported practices, obstacles faced, and stated support needs in relation to handling various learning needs are the only components that it focuses on. The study uses a qualitative approach (e.g., focus groups, interviews) and does not measure actual learning outcomes for children, evaluate parental perspectives, assess headteachers' or administrators' opinions, look into pre-service teacher training programs, or examine practices in the municipality that go beyond kindergarten. Teachers' personal interpretations of "diverse learning needs" in the context of their classrooms define the term.

1.9 Organization of the Study

The study is presented in five (5) main chapters. Chapter one is the introduction. It consists of background to the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, and the organization of the study. Chapter two entails the related literature to the study which encompasses the objectives of the study. Chapter three sought to address the methodology of the research. This comprises the research design, target population and sampling, instrumentation, data collection, and analytical techniques. Chapter four comprises the results of an analysis of the data collected

and discussions on the research work. Chapter five outlines the conclusion and recommendation of the study.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical framework

The two interrelated theoretical frameworks that underpin this study are Teacher Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997, as applied in contemporary educational research) and Inclusive Pedagogy (Florian & Spratt, 2013), which demonstrate the complex nature of teacher preparedness for managing diverse learning needs in early childhood education (ECE), particularly within the context of Effutu Municipality.

Inclusive Pedagogy Framework (Florian & Spratt, 2013): This framework offers the fundamental theoretical and practical perspective for comprehending what makes teaching in varied ECE classrooms effective. Traditional deficit models that emphasize "fixing" the child to match the curriculum are criticized by Florian and Spratt (2013). Rather, inclusive pedagogy places a strong emphasis on the teacher's duty to change instruction in order to remove obstacles to all students' involvement and success. According to Florian and Spratt (2013), it is based on the idea of "extending what is ordinarily available to everybody" (p. 120). This entails going beyond making special adjustments for each child (although these could still be required) and instead creating classroom procedures, settings, and interactions that are naturally adaptable and responsive right from the start. Key principles that are extremely pertinent to this study are: the rejection of deterministic views regarding ability; the dedication to continuously creating innovative methods that benefit all students; the significance of teamwork (with peers, experts, and families); and the shared responsibility for every child's education. Effutu's framework serves as a guide for analyzing how educators think about diversity, what tactics they use (whether proactive inclusive design

or reactive adaptations), how they see their role in creating a sense of belonging, and how they can creatively use limited resources to implement this philosophy. The ability to apply these ideas within particular limitations is how it defines preparation.

Teacher Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2020): Teacher Self-Efficacy Theory outlines the crucial psychological and motivational processes that support a teacher's confidence in their capacity to accomplish that aim, particularly in the face of difficulties, whereas inclusive pedagogy establishes the practice's objective. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is "an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments" (p. 3). According to Tschannen-Moran and McMaster (2020), it is a teacher's assessment of their capacity to achieve specific student outcomes, including successfully assisting different learners. According to Bandura, there are four main factors that determine efficacy beliefs: verbal persuasion (support and feedback), physiological/affective states (controlling stress and emotions), vicarious experiences (seeing others accomplish), and mastery experiences (successful prior performances). High self-efficacy is essential in the demanding environment of Effutu Municipality, which is marked by huge classrooms, limited resources, little specialized support, and a variety of requirements. Strong self-efficacy increases a teacher's likelihood of persevering through challenges, experimenting with inclusive practices, putting in effort, upholding high standards for every student, and avoiding burnout (Adomako, 2023). Low self-efficacy, on the other hand, can result in avoidance, less effort, and a dependence on exclusionary behaviors. This framework is essential for comprehending why teachers may feel unprepared or find it difficult to use inclusive principles successfully, even if they have some knowledge of them. It emphasizes

the necessity of investigating how teachers' confidence in their capacity to handle diversity within their particular school setting is shaped by their experiences (successes and failures), peer observations, leadership and specialized assistance (or lack thereof), and emotional health.

Synthesis: These two frameworks operate well together. Through transformed practice, inclusive pedagogy offers the vision and practical guidance for what preparedness should accomplish: equitable participation and learning for everyone. The psychological engine that propels the commitment and perseverance required to carry out this demanding goal, especially in the face of adversity like those in Effutu, is Teacher Self-Efficacy. Even when a teacher is aware of inclusive concepts, they may not believe they can successfully use them given their resources and class size. On the other hand, self-efficacy, or confidence, without a thorough grasp of inclusive pedagogy may result in well-meaning but ineffectual or even exclusionary practices. As a result, evaluating teacher preparedness in Effutu's ECE classes requires taking into account both the knowledge and abilities in line with inclusive pedagogy as well as the self-efficacy beliefs that enable instructors to use these abilities consistently and adaptably in their particular setting.

2.2 Concept of Teacher Preparedness

Teacher preparedness refers to the degree to which teachers possess the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and confidence necessary to perform their instructional responsibilities effectively in a given educational setting. In early childhood education, teacher preparedness is a crucial factor that determines the quality of teaching and learning, especially in classrooms characterized by diverse learning needs. It encompasses the ability of teachers to plan, organize, and implement teaching strategies that address variations in

children's abilities, backgrounds, languages, and developmental levels. According to Darling-Hammond (2017), teacher preparedness involves a combination of pedagogical content knowledge, professional competence, and reflective practice, which enables teachers to make informed instructional decisions. In the context of early childhood education, preparedness also includes emotional readiness, cultural responsiveness, and the capacity to create inclusive environments that nurture every child's holistic development. Well-prepared teachers are better able to recognize individual differences, use varied instructional methods, and apply inclusive pedagogies that promote equity and participation (OECD, 2021).

Teacher preparedness is not limited to academic qualification or certification but extends to the continuous process of professional growth. Shulman (1987) identified three domains of teacher knowledge—content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and curricular knowledge—that form the foundation of teacher preparedness. However, in modern educational systems, particularly in early childhood education, preparedness now integrates elements such as socio-emotional competence, communication skills, collaboration, and adaptability (Darling-Hammond, 2017). These components enable teachers to respond appropriately to the diverse needs of learners and the changing demands of contemporary classrooms. Preparedness is, therefore, a multidimensional construct that includes pre-service training, in-service professional development, and ongoing reflection on practice (OECD, 2021). Teachers who are adequately prepared through pre-service training tend to display higher levels of confidence, instructional competence, and adaptability to diverse classroom conditions (Ngcobo & Muthukrishna,

2019). In contrast, inadequate preparation often results in anxiety, low self-efficacy, and inconsistent instructional quality, particularly in inclusive classrooms.

In early childhood settings, teacher preparedness is grounded in the understanding of child development, learning theories, and inclusive pedagogical frameworks. This understanding allows teachers to design and implement developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) that align with children's cognitive, physical, social, and emotional stages. According to NAEYC (2020), preparedness in early childhood education also involves teachers' ability to create environments that support play-based learning, exploration, and interaction. Teachers must be ready to assess children's progress using observation and formative assessment techniques and to differentiate instruction accordingly (Pianta, 2016). Preparedness in this context also means readiness to engage with families, communities, and other professionals to support holistic learning. Effective collaboration among teachers, parents, and specialists enhances the capacity of teachers to meet diverse learning needs, especially those of children with disabilities or developmental delays (UNESCO, 2020). Therefore, a prepared teacher is not only one who knows what to teach but also how, when, and to whom to teach it.

The concept of teacher preparedness also includes teachers' psychological and emotional readiness to work in diverse classroom contexts. Emotional readiness refers to teachers' ability to manage stress, show empathy, and establish positive relationships with learners (Jennings & Greenberg, 2019). Teachers who are emotionally prepared demonstrate patience, resilience, and compassion, which are essential for building trust and supporting children's socio-emotional development. Cultural readiness, on the other hand, reflects the teacher's ability to respect, value, and integrate learners' cultural and linguistic

backgrounds into the teaching process. Gay (2018) emphasizes that culturally responsive teaching is a key dimension of preparedness, as it requires teachers to adapt their practices to students' cultural contexts. In diverse early childhood settings, cultural competence enables teachers to use inclusive language, materials, and examples that affirm children's identities and promote a sense of belonging. Hence, preparedness involves developing a mindset that embraces diversity and inclusion as strengths rather than challenges.

Another important dimension of teacher preparedness is technological readiness. In today's digital world, teachers must be capable of using information and communication technologies (ICT) effectively to enhance teaching and learning. Early childhood teachers need to integrate digital tools in developmentally appropriate ways that promote active learning and collaboration (Donohue & Schomburg, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of technological preparedness, as teachers had to transition to online or hybrid learning formats. Teachers who were technologically prepared adapted more easily to digital instruction and continued to support learners effectively during school closures (Trust & Whalen, 2020). This demonstrates that teacher preparedness is dynamic and must evolve in response to societal, technological, and educational changes.

In the context of managing diverse learning needs, teacher preparedness takes on an even more critical role. Teachers must be prepared to recognize and address differences in learners' abilities, learning styles, languages, and socio-economic backgrounds. Preparedness for diversity includes knowledge of inclusive education principles, differentiated instruction, and the use of universal design for learning (UDL) frameworks. According to Tomlinson (2017), teachers who are prepared to differentiate instruction can modify content, process, and assessment to meet the needs of all learners. Similarly,

UNESCO (2020) states that teacher preparedness for inclusion requires awareness of barriers to learning, skills for adapting curricula, and positive attitudes toward diversity. A prepared early childhood teacher identifies learners who require additional support, collaborates with specialists, and employs strategies such as peer learning, multi-sensory teaching, and individualized instruction. When teachers are adequately prepared, they are more likely to foster inclusive classrooms where every child feels valued and capable of succeeding.

Teacher preparedness is shaped by both pre-service and in-service experiences. Pre-service teacher education programmes provide the initial foundation of theoretical knowledge and teaching practice, while in-service professional development helps teachers adapt to emerging challenges. In many early childhood contexts, including Ghana, teacher preparation programmes often emphasize academic content but give limited attention to inclusive education and diversity management (Ametepe & Anastasiou, 2018). This gap results in teachers entering the profession with minimal exposure to inclusive pedagogies. Professional development programmes focusing on inclusion, such as workshops, mentoring, and peer collaboration, are therefore essential to improve teacher preparedness (Klinton et al., 2024). Continuous professional development ensures that teachers remain updated on inclusive practices, child-centred approaches, and emerging educational trends. As noted by OECD (2021), the quality of early childhood education depends heavily on the competence and preparedness of teachers, and ongoing learning opportunities are crucial in maintaining that quality.

Institutional and systemic factors also influence teacher preparedness. Schools and educational systems that provide strong support structures—such as mentoring

programmes, collaborative planning, and access to instructional resources—enhance teacher readiness (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). Conversely, systems characterized by inadequate funding, large class sizes, and limited professional development opportunities hinder teacher preparedness. Preparedness is therefore not solely an individual attribute but a systemic outcome shaped by policy, leadership, and institutional culture. Governments and educational policymakers play a vital role in ensuring that teacher preparation and professional development programmes align with inclusive education goals. UNESCO (2020) emphasizes that investment in teacher preparation is one of the most effective strategies for improving educational quality and achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4, which calls for inclusive and equitable education for all.

Preparedness also includes teachers' reflective capacity the ability to analyse one's teaching, identify areas for improvement, and make informed adjustments. Reflection enhances teacher learning and promotes adaptive expertise (Schön, 1983). Teachers who engage in reflective practice are more likely to adapt their instruction to suit diverse learners. In early childhood settings, reflection helps teachers to understand each child's developmental pathway, identify learning barriers, and design interventions that promote growth. Reflective preparedness aligns with the notion of the teacher as a lifelong learner, committed to continuous improvement in knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Reflection is also central to building self-efficacy, as teachers who understand their strengths and weaknesses can set realistic goals for professional growth (Bandura, 1997). Preparedness, therefore, involves both competence and confidence—the belief that one can make a positive difference in the learning outcomes of all children.

The concept of teacher preparedness can also be viewed through theoretical frameworks such as Bandura's social cognitive theory and Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory. Bandura's theory highlights the role of self-efficacy in determining teachers' motivation and performance. Teachers who believe in their ability to manage classrooms and support diverse learners are more likely to engage in inclusive and innovative practices (Bandura, 1997). Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, on the other hand, emphasizes that learning is socially constructed, and teachers must be prepared to scaffold children's learning within their zones of proximal development. This requires teachers to understand each child's individual needs and provide appropriate support through social interaction and collaboration. Preparedness, therefore, extends beyond technical skill to include social, cultural, and emotional competence.

Empirical studies have shown that teacher preparedness is positively correlated with student achievement and engagement. Teachers who feel well-prepared demonstrate stronger instructional quality, use a wider variety of teaching strategies, and create more supportive classroom environments (Pianta, 2016; OECD, 2021). In contrast, teachers who feel under-prepared often rely on rote instruction, show lower confidence, and struggle to adapt to diverse learners. In early childhood education, where developmental differences are pronounced, lack of preparedness can have long-term consequences on children's learning trajectories. Therefore, investment in teacher preparation and ongoing professional development is critical to achieving equity and quality in early education.

In Ghana and other African contexts, teacher preparedness faces specific challenges such as inadequate teacher education curricula, limited exposure to inclusive education during training, and insufficient in-service opportunities (Ametepee & Anastasiou, 2018; Ocloo et

al., 2021). Teachers often enter classrooms with minimal knowledge of inclusive pedagogies and limited access to resources. However, recent initiatives by the Ghana Education Service and teacher training colleges have begun integrating inclusive education modules into pre-service programmes. These initiatives aim to equip teachers with the skills necessary to support learners with disabilities, language differences, and socio-economic disadvantages. Despite these efforts, continuous professional development remains necessary to maintain and enhance preparedness levels. Teachers who receive consistent training and mentorship demonstrate greater adaptability, empathy, and creativity in responding to diverse learning needs (Dyosini, 2025).

2.3 Level of Preparedness of Early Childhood Teachers in Managing Diverse Learning Needs

Early childhood education serves as the foundation for lifelong learning, and teachers' preparedness to manage diverse learning needs significantly influences the success of inclusive education. The level of preparedness of early childhood teachers in managing diverse learning needs can be understood as the extent to which teachers possess the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, and confidence to identify, plan for, and respond to the varying developmental, cultural, linguistic, and ability differences among learners. In most countries, including Ghana, research shows that early childhood teachers demonstrate awareness of diversity but remain inadequately prepared to effectively manage the wide range of needs that exist in their classrooms (UNESCO, 2020). This limited preparedness is influenced by inadequate teacher education, insufficient professional development, and weak institutional support structures. Consequently, although teachers value inclusion and

express willingness to support all learners, they often struggle to translate inclusive ideals into practical strategies that meet individual learning differences.

The level of preparedness of early childhood teachers is largely shaped by the nature and quality of their pre-service and in-service training. Studies have revealed that pre-service teacher education programmes in many developing countries, including Ghana, often provide limited exposure to special and inclusive education concepts. For instance, a study conducted by Ocloo, Agbenyaga, and Tram (2021) on teacher readiness for inclusive education in Ghana found that a majority of early childhood teachers had not received sufficient training in inclusive pedagogies and therefore felt ill-equipped to support learners with disabilities or developmental delays. Similarly, research by Ametepee and Anastasiou (2018) highlighted that teacher training institutions in Ghana tend to emphasize general pedagogy without adequate focus on inclusive strategies, differentiated instruction, or the use of assistive technologies. These findings indicate that while teachers may have theoretical knowledge about child development, their practical competence to manage diverse learning needs remains inadequate. As a result, many rely on intuition or peer collaboration rather than structured inclusive methodologies to support learners.

Globally, similar trends have been observed. In the United States, Guo, Justice, Kaderavek, and McGinty (2019) found that early childhood teachers expressed moderate confidence in working with diverse learners but admitted to insufficient preparation for addressing linguistic and cultural diversity. Likewise, an Australian study by Hammond and Miller (2022) showed that teachers believed their readiness to manage diversity was acquired primarily through classroom experience rather than through formal teacher education. This suggests that while experiential learning enhances adaptability, structured pre-service

training remains essential for comprehensive preparedness. In sub-Saharan Africa, research by Muthukrishnan and Engelbrecht (2018) demonstrated that early childhood teachers' preparedness is hindered by systemic factors such as large class sizes, lack of teaching materials, and minimal access to special education specialists. These constraints limit teachers' ability to individualised learning and effectively accommodate learners with disabilities, language barriers, or socio-economic disadvantages.

In Ghanaian early childhood settings, teacher preparedness is further constrained by contextual challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, limited inclusive infrastructure, and the absence of tailored professional development opportunities. A study by Ntim and Boakye (2020) revealed that teachers in public early childhood centres in Ghana often handle classrooms with over forty children, making it difficult to identify and respond to individual learning differences. The lack of adequate instructional materials, including visual and tactile aids, further reduces teachers' ability to cater for learners with visual or hearing impairments. Teachers reported that even though they understood the importance of differentiated instruction, they lacked the resources and training to implement it effectively. These findings resonate with the social model of disability proposed by Oliver (1996), which attributes learning barriers to environmental and institutional shortcomings rather than to learners' impairments. Therefore, improving teacher preparedness involves restructuring teacher education and school systems to eliminate such barriers.

In terms of knowledge and skills, teachers' understanding of inclusive education principles, assessment techniques, and classroom management strategies determines their level of preparedness. Research by Forlin, Sharma, and Loreman (2014) showed that teachers who received structured training in inclusive pedagogies demonstrated higher levels of

confidence and competence in adapting lessons to diverse learners. However, in many developing contexts, including Ghana, such structured professional learning remains sporadic. Teachers often depend on informal collaboration with colleagues or personal initiative to handle diverse learners. For instance, studies by Opoku, Asare, and Nketsia (2019) in the Central Region of Ghana found that while teachers displayed positive attitudes towards inclusion, their preparedness was low due to inadequate exposure to inclusive instructional practices. This situation underscores the need for targeted professional development that focuses on practical application rather than theoretical awareness.

Another significant factor influencing preparedness is teachers' attitude and belief systems. Inclusive education thrives on positive teacher dispositions toward diversity, and these beliefs often determine how well teachers apply inclusive strategies. According to Sharma and Sokal (2016), teachers who perceive inclusion as beneficial for all children demonstrate higher preparedness levels than those who view it as an additional burden. In Ghana, research by Gyimah (2021) found that early childhood teachers generally supported the idea of inclusion but felt under-prepared due to the absence of mentorship and specialist guidance in implementing inclusive practices. Teachers' willingness alone does not guarantee competence; without structured support and appropriate pedagogical tools, their capacity to manage diversity remains limited. Furthermore, when teachers lack confidence in their ability to handle special educational needs, they tend to lower their expectations for learners who require additional support, thereby perpetuating inequality (UNESCO, 2020).

Professional development remains one of the most effective ways to enhance teacher preparedness for managing diversity. Continuous professional learning opportunities help teachers refine their knowledge and skills and remain responsive to changing classroom dynamics. Research by Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017) demonstrated that sustained, practice-based professional development significantly improves teachers' ability to differentiate instruction and manage diverse learning needs. Unfortunately, in many early childhood centres across Ghana and other African countries, professional development programmes are either irregular or irrelevant to teachers' specific challenges. A study conducted by Abudu and Mensah (2022) revealed that many early childhood teachers in Ghana attended workshops that were not tailored to the realities of their classrooms, limiting the practical impact of such training. Effective professional development must therefore be contextualized, hands-on, and continuous, allowing teachers to practice inclusive techniques with feedback and mentoring.

The institutional environment also contributes greatly to teacher preparedness. School leadership, availability of resources, and collaboration with support specialists are all critical enablers of readiness. Ainscow and Sandill (2010) argued that inclusive schools operate as learning communities where teachers, administrators, and parents collaborate to identify and address diverse learning needs. However, in many Ghanaian preschools, this culture of collaboration is weak. Teachers often lack access to specialists such as educational psychologists, speech therapists, or special educators, which limits their capacity to design and implement effective interventions. Opoku, Kwadade, and Nketsia (2021) noted that without institutional structures for referral and support, teachers' preparedness to manage complex learning needs remains superficial. Furthermore, the lack

of assistive learning materials, such as Braille texts or sensory resources, compounds the challenge.

Globally, preparedness is enhanced when teacher education programmes adopt the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, which promotes flexible teaching strategies that accommodate different learning styles and abilities (CAST, 2018). UDL emphasises multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression to ensure all learners can access and demonstrate learning. However, studies reveal that this approach has not been widely adopted in most early childhood education systems in Africa. According to Agbenyega and Deku (2020), integrating UDL into teacher education in Ghana could significantly improve teachers' ability to manage diversity in inclusive classrooms. Similarly, differentiated instruction—another critical approach—remains underused due to limited exposure during training. Tomlinson (2017) asserts that teachers who differentiate their instruction based on learners' readiness, interest, and learning profiles are more effective in managing diversity, yet few early childhood teachers in sub-Saharan Africa receive explicit guidance on how to do so.

In addition to training and resources, early identification and assessment skills are essential indicators of preparedness. Teachers who can recognise early signs of developmental delays or learning difficulties are better positioned to implement timely interventions. However, studies have shown that many early childhood teachers in Ghana lack the assessment skills required to identify and document learning differences. Ocloo et al. (2021) found that teachers often wait for visible behavioural issues before seeking intervention, missing opportunities for early support. This lack of diagnostic competence reflects gaps in both initial teacher training and continuous professional support. Without

strong assessment literacy, even well-intentioned teachers may struggle to provide differentiated support, leading to the marginalisation of learners with subtle or complex needs.

Despite these challenges, many early childhood teachers demonstrate resilience and creativity in managing diversity within their limited means. Studies by Ntim and Boakye (2020) and Opoku et al. (2019) observed that teachers often use peer learning, storytelling, and local teaching materials to foster inclusion. For example, teachers might pair high-achieving learners with those who need extra help or use songs and games to promote engagement among children with short attention spans. These adaptive strategies, though not formally structured, reflect teachers' commitment to inclusive values. However, they also reveal the gap between policy and practice, where teachers compensate for systemic inadequacies through improvisation rather than through evidence-based inclusive pedagogy.

The level of preparedness also depends on socio-political and policy frameworks. In Ghana, the Inclusive Education Policy (2015) outlines government commitment to ensuring that all learners, irrespective of background or ability, have access to quality education. However, implementation remains inconsistent at the early childhood level. According to Mensah and Abudu (2022), many teachers are unaware of the policy's details or how it applies to early childhood education. This policy-practice disconnect contributes to uneven preparedness levels, where some teachers are highly committed to inclusion while others view it as optional. Strengthening teacher education institutions, aligning training curricula with inclusive policy requirements, and providing adequate funding for implementation are therefore essential.

Internationally, research supports the idea that teacher preparedness improves when educational systems invest in inclusive leadership, mentorship, and school-based collaboration. Studies from Finland and Canada by Savolainen et al. (2018) indicate that teachers who receive continuous mentorship from inclusion specialists show greater confidence and competence in handling diverse learners. Applying similar models in Ghana could enhance teacher preparedness by embedding inclusive mentoring and peer learning in school structures. Moreover, integrating inclusive education across all stages of teacher preparation rather than treating it as a standalone module can ensure that inclusivity becomes a natural part of teachers' pedagogical identity.

2.4 Strategies Early Childhood Teachers Employ to Support Learners with Diverse Learning Needs

Early childhood teachers employ varied strategies to support learners with diverse learning needs by adapting teaching and learning so that all children can participate meaningfully in classroom activities. Teachers ensure they know each child's strengths, interests, and needs in order to design learning experiences that respond to diversity (ChildCareEd, n.d.). Teachers use flexible grouping arrangements so that learners with differing abilities, learning styles, and language backgrounds can work together or separately in ways that support peer learning and scaffolded assistance (ChildCareEd, n.d.). Teachers provide choices in learning activities so that children with different readiness levels, interests and learning profiles can select tasks that match their capabilities and extend their growth (ChildCareEd, n.d.). Teachers integrate culturally responsive practices by using books, songs, and materials that reflect the children's home languages, cultures and experiences thereby promoting belonging and relevance (ChildCareEd, n.d.). Teachers actively

collaborate with families and communities to gain insights into children's backgrounds and to extend learning beyond the classroom so that children with diverse needs are supported both at school and at home (ChildCareEd, n.d.). Teachers create inclusive learning environments by adapting physical layouts, ensuring accessibility, and using diverse materials that cater to different developmental stages and support children with disabilities or additional needs (KKTC, n.d.). Teachers promote social-emotional learning by embedding activities that foster cooperation, empathy, self-regulation and positive peer interaction so that children with social, emotional or behavioural differences are supported (KKTC, n.d.). Teachers apply scaffolding techniques by breaking down tasks into manageable steps, providing modelling and guided support and then gradually reducing assistance as children gain competence (Parents.com, n.d.). Teachers use differentiated instruction by adjusting content, process, product and learning environment to meet individual learner needs rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach (ChildCareEd, n.d.). Teachers prepare lesson plans that incorporate developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) so that tasks align with children's current developmental levels while also offering challenge for growth (PearsonHigherEd, n.d.). Teachers use multiple means of representation, expression and engagement as guided by the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework so that children who learn differently can access, engage and demonstrate their learning in varied ways (CAST, 2018; Yoro et al., 2020). Teachers incorporate peer-learning and cooperative learning strategies so that children support each other and scaffolding becomes embedded in social interaction (Yoro et al., 2020). Teachers use visual aids, manipulatives, tactile and concrete materials, as well as multisensory experiences to help children with diverse learning needs understand abstract concepts

(Yoro et al., 2020). Teachers adapt the curriculum by simplifying language, chunking tasks, extending time or providing repetition and alternative formats for children who need additional processing time or language accommodation (Infants & Young Children Journal, 2016). Teachers embed instruction in naturalistic routines and across multiple settings so that children with diverse needs experience learning in meaningful, everyday contexts rather than only during isolated lessons (Infants & Young Children Journal, 2016). Teachers team up with specialists, co-teach or consult external professionals so that children with disabilities or complex learning needs receive support within the inclusive classroom rather than being isolated (Rehabilitation Journals, n.d.). Teachers reflect on their practice, engage in continuous professional development and collaborate in professional learning communities so that their strategies remain up to date, contextually relevant and effective for diverse learners (KKTC, n.d.). Teachers design learning centres and stations that vary by difficulty, interest and pace, so that children can engage in self-selected, differentiated tasks and teachers can monitor and adjust support based on observation (ChildCareEd, n.d.). Teachers implement interest-based learning and inquiry-based experiences to engage children with varying backgrounds, language proficiencies and abilities by providing open-ended tasks, multiple entry points and varied modalities of engagement (Northern Arizona University Study, 2025). Teachers systematically monitor children's progress, use informal assessment, observation and documentation to identify learners who need additional support or extension and adjust instruction accordingly (Infants & Young Children Journal, 2016). Teachers create a culture of inclusion where diversity is valued, children's home languages and cultures are incorporated, and classroom interactions reflect equity, respect and belonging so that learners with diverse backgrounds feel supported and engaged

(Springer Study, 2025). Teachers ensure that resources, materials and technologies are accessible and inclusive, using adaptive or assistive tools when needed to enable children with disabilities or language differences to fully participate (Northern Arizona University Study, 2025). Teachers build partnerships with parents and caregivers so that home and school work together, children's individual needs are understood holistically and interventions are reinforced beyond the classroom (ChildCareEd, n.d.). Teachers reduce teacher-child ratios, create small group instruction or circle times, and differentiate support to manage classes with diverse learners and ensure individualised attention (Botswana study, 2023). Teachers engage in explicit scaffolded language support for children who are multilingual or learning in a second language by modelling vocabulary, using gestures, visuals, peer support and extended response time (Springer Study, 2025). Teachers implement social stories, role-play, collaborative games and peer modelling to support children with communication, behavioural or social differences, thereby embedding social and emotional learning into everyday routines. Teachers embed formative assessment practices so that teaching is responsive, children receive timely feedback, and teachers plan for next steps in supporting each child's learning path. Teachers use reflection journals, peer observations and coaching to evaluate their inclusive strategies and continually refine their practice in response to learner diversity (KKTC, n.d.). Teachers foster children's autonomy and self-regulation by gradually reducing scaffolds, encouraging choice, supporting metacognitive talk (thinking about thinking), and helping children take responsibility for their learning, which benefits children who need additional scaffolding (Parents.com, n.d.). Teachers plan transitions and support across environments (e.g., home to school, playground to classroom, group to individual) so that children with diverse needs

experience continuity, predictability and reduced anxiety, thereby improving access and engagement. Teachers create rich, intentional language environments by embedding talk, songs, rhymes, story-telling and dramatic play that support children's expressive and receptive language development, particularly beneficial for children from multilingual or disadvantaged backgrounds. Teachers provide extension tasks and enrichment for children who demonstrate advanced ability or readiness so that differentiated instruction meets needs of all children rather than only those who are struggling. Teachers implement thematic planning and integrated curricular experiences that allow children to explore concepts through play, discovery and hands-on materials, which supports children with varying learning styles and developmental trajectories. Teachers use data from observations, portfolios, checklists and digital tools to track children's progress, identify patterns, and plan targeted interventions or enrichment for groups or individuals. Teachers encourage peer tutoring, buddy systems and cooperative pairs so that children support each other's learning and children who need extra help receive peer assistance in a natural and supportive way. Teachers design task scaffolding with adapted instructions, visuals, step-by-step cues, checklists, graphic organisers and exemplars so that children with executive-function, processing or attention challenges can follow learning sequences and complete tasks more independently. Teachers support children's social inclusion by structuring mixed ability group work, collaborative play, shared routines and opportunities for peer interaction so that children with special needs or language delays are included in peer networks and friendships. Teachers consciously attend to children's transitions and routines, providing visual schedules, timers, cues, first-then boards, and predictable structures so that children with attention, behaviour or autism-spectrum differences can

anticipate and engage in learning activities. Teachers design learning environments where materials are accessible, labelled in multiple languages, at children's eye level, arranged in interest zones, and include sensory supports (e.g., fidget tools, quiet corners, visual timers) so that children with sensory processing or attention issues can self-regulate and engage. Teachers celebrate diversity throughout the year through cultural heritage days, inclusive stories, multilingual signage, and reflection dialogues so that children with diverse cultural, linguistic, or ability backgrounds feel validated and included (Springer Study, 2025). Teachers build classroom schedules that allow for periodic small-group intervention sessions, reflection times, peer collaboration, and individualised check-ins so that children who need more time or alternative instruction format receive focused support without being removed from the inclusive setting. Teachers actively model and encourage metacognitive talk where children articulate their thinking, reflect on their strategies, evaluate their outcomes and plan next steps; this supports children who may struggle with self-regulation or planning and promotes inclusivity (Parents.com, n.d.). Teachers use assistive and adaptive technology (when available) such as apps for communication, audio books, speech-to-text, interactive manipulatives and alternative input devices so that children with language, hearing, or mobility challenges can participate fully (Northern Arizona University Study, 2025). Teachers identify children early through observation, checklists, screening tools, and collaborate with specialists or refer for further assessment so that delays or learning differences are addressed earlier and interventions initiated promptly (Botswana study, 2023). Teachers adjust the pace of instruction, providing extended time, revisiting prior knowledge, repeating important concepts, and reviewing progress so that learners who need slower processing speed or additional repetition are supported within

inclusive routines. Teachers adapt assessment and feedback by using non-traditional methods (oral responses, portfolios, drawings, peer demonstrations) so that children whose writing or standard test-taking is challenging can show what they know in different ways (Infants & Young Children Journal, 2016). Teachers implement collaborative reflecting and planning with co-teachers, therapists, family members and children themselves so that learning goals, strategies and supports are aligned and responsive to children's evolving needs. Teachers place scaffolding and differentiating as everyday practice rather than add-ons by embedding inclusive strategies into all lesson planning, centre design and interactions so that diversity becomes normalised, not segregated. Teachers monitor the classroom culture and interactions to ensure that children with diverse learning needs are not isolated, sidelined or bullied; teachers facilitate inclusive peer interactions, peer mediation, buddy support and ensure equitable participation. Teachers foster children's executive-function and metacognitive development by designing tasks that open, allow planning, monitoring and reflection, thus supporting children who struggle with attention, organisation or self-regulation. Teachers engage in ongoing professional development that is directly tied to inclusive practice, reflect with peers, use coaching, and participate in learning communities so that strategies for supporting diverse learners evolve and become more effective (NAEYC, 2022). Teachers tailor communication and instructions to reflect children's language background, cognitive processing style and cultural context by using simplified language, visual cues, gestures, modelling and paraphrasing so that children with limited proficiency or processing differences can access learning (Springer Study, 2025). Teachers schedule frequent check-ins and formative feedback moments so that children with diverse needs receive ongoing support, misunderstandings are addressed

quickly, and instruction is adjusted responsively. Teachers maintain high expectations for all learners, affirming that each child can succeed, and design supports accordingly rather than lowering standards; this supports equity and avoids the “aiming to the middle” trap (PearsonHigherEd, n.d.). Teachers incorporate play-based, child-centred, and explorative tasks into daily routines so that children with varying learning profiles can engage, choose entry points, explore at their own pace, and express ideas in multiple ways rather than purely teacher-led whole-group tasks. Teachers scaffold children’s social and communication development by using pairings, peer modelling, social language supports, visual cues, social stories and structured group routines so that children with speech, language or social interaction differences are included and supported. Teachers work to cultivate a reflective and inclusive classroom culture where errors are valued as learning opportunities, children’s backgrounds are respected, and divergent thinking is celebrated so that children with unconventional learning styles feel safe and valued. Teachers use formative portfolios, child narratives and collaborative goal-setting conferences with children and families so that planning becomes personalised, progress is documented and children’s strengths and needs drive the next steps rather than standardised tests alone. Teachers adapt transitions and daily routines by using visual schedules, first-next cues, countdowns and adult guidance so that children with attention, anxiety or executive-function challenges navigate classroom routines smoothly and are ready for learning. Teachers design peer mentoring or buddy systems where older or more capable peers support learners who need help through structured tasks or free play so that children with diverse needs benefit from naturalistic peer scaffolding. Teachers use sensory and movement breaks, brain-gym activities, alternative seating, flexible furniture and

movement opportunities so that children with high energy levels, attention differences or sensory processing needs regulate and engage more effectively. Teachers embed family and community stories, home language books, photos, cultural artefacts and multilingual signage into the classroom so that children's identities are affirmed and children from diverse backgrounds feel their experiences matter and contribute to class life (Springer Study, 2025). Teachers allocate specific times for teacher-child conferencing, individual reflections, goal-setting conversations and progress reviews so that children with unique profiles receive tailored support and feel valued as co-constructors of their learning journey. Teachers apply tiered instruction frameworks, providing whole-group experiences, small-group targeted instruction and individualised interventions within the inclusive classroom so that children at different levels receive appropriate challenge and support (Infants & Young Children Journal, 2016). Teachers engage children in metacognitive dialogues where they talk about what they are doing, why, reflect on what worked, what didn't, and plan next steps so that children develop self-regulation, monitoring and adaptive learning skills which particularly supports diverse learners. Teachers monitor and reduce bias in instruction, materials and interactions by reflecting on their cultural, linguistic and ability assumptions, diversifying materials and promoting equity so that children from historically marginalized groups receive inclusive support (Springer Study, 2025).

2.5 Professional Development Opportunities Available to Early Childhood Teachers for Managing Diversity in Learning Needs

Early childhood teachers require ongoing professional development opportunities in order to effectively support learners with diverse learning needs and such opportunities must

include both initial preparation and sustained in-service programmes. Professional development opportunities for managing diversity start with formal qualification courses that include specialised modules in inclusive education, differentiated instruction and culturally responsive pedagogy so that teachers are better equipped to meet learners with different abilities, backgrounds, languages and learning profiles (Lim & Able-Boone, 2017). Professional development can also take the form of short online courses, webinars and certificate programmes focused on inclusion, diversity, and the implementation of frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which help early childhood educators embed inclusive strategies in everyday practice (Making Education, 2024). Teachers may enrol in targeted training programmes that focus specifically on how to create inclusive, equitable and welcoming early learning environments, how to apply the UDL principles of multiple means of engagement, representation and expression, and how to adapt routines, settings and resources for children with diverse learning needs (Making Education, 2024). Continuous professional development (CPD) is a key opportunity for early childhood teachers to update their knowledge on inclusive practices, reflect on their attitudes toward diversity, and practice new strategies; research indicates that teacher training which addresses beliefs, biases and practical skills together is more effective for inclusive practice (OECD, 2021). Professional learning communities (PLCs) and peer-learning networks serve as important professional development opportunities, as teachers share experiences, reflect collectively, exchange good practices in inclusive pedagogy and support each other in adapting instruction for diverse learners (OECD, 2021). Workshops and in-service training sessions that focus on managing specific dimensions of diversity such as culturally and linguistically diverse learners, children with disabilities or

developmental delays, neurodiverse learners and children from low-socio-economic backgrounds offer early childhood teachers opportunities to build competence, increase their self-efficacy and reduce anxiety around working in inclusive classrooms (Dyosini, 2025). In multilingual and multicultural settings, professional development programmes designed for teacher assistants and preschool teachers that specifically target attitudes toward multilingualism, self-efficacy in working with children from other home languages and partnerships with families significantly improve participants' confidence and practices in inclusive early childhood environments (Klinting et al., 2024). Formal certification or credentialing courses in inclusive early childhood education or special educational needs also provide professional development opportunities for teachers wishing to deepen their competence in managing diverse learning needs; these courses often include supervised field experiences, inclusive settings practicum and modules in assessment, adaptation and collaboration (Stayton, 2017). Professional development opportunities include online modules, self-paced courses which can fit into busy schedules of early childhood teachers; for example, a short online “Supporting Inclusion and Diversity” course for early childhood sector professionals is available and focuses on practical strategies, legislation, inclusive environments and UDL (Making Education, 2024). The availability of flexible, accessible professional development means that teachers in non-urban or under-resourced contexts may access learning opportunities despite time and geographical constraints, which is especially relevant for early childhood teachers in Ghana and similar settings. Professional development initiatives at national or international level often include inclusion-focused toolkits and resources that teachers can use to guide their practice; for example, a European toolkit on diversity and inclusion available to ECEC professionals supports staff in

acquiring knowledge, skills and tools to address diversity and inclusion in their daily work (European School Education Platform, 2024). In many countries, professional development is framed by policy documents which emphasise building teacher capacity to deal with diversity; for example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) identifies continuous professional development and collaboration as key levers for teacher capacity building in diverse contexts (OECD, 2021). Mentoring and coaching are increasingly recognised as professional development opportunities for early childhood educators: teachers benefit from mentorship by specialists in inclusive education, peer coaching, classroom observation and reflection sessions, which help embed inclusive practices and support teachers in adapting and refining strategies for diverse learners (Kahmann et al., 2022). Professional development opportunities also include workshop series, seminars and conferences that bring together early childhood practitioners, inclusion specialists, researchers and policymakers to share research findings, innovations and inclusive pedagogical strategies and to build networks around diversity and inclusion in early childhood education. Professional development for early childhood teachers may be tailored to local context, such as training that addresses specific learner populations children with hearing or visual impairments, children with autism spectrum disorder, children learning in second languages, or children experiencing trauma thereby ensuring relevance to the particular diversity in the classroom (Dyosini, 2025). Teachers may engage in reflective professional development opportunities such as action research projects, peer-led inquiry, and classroom-based experiments which allow them to examine their own practice, test strategies for diverse learners, monitor effects and modify practice accordingly; such self-determined professional learning supports deep change in

teacher dispositions, beliefs and skills (McIntosh, 2019). Professional development opportunities can also be systemic and built into early childhood centres and schools: internal staff development days, centre-based collaborative planning time, peer observation cycles, and integrated professional learning embedded in the school culture all help teachers build inclusive practice capabilities over time (Education Sciences, 2024). Importantly, professional development must attend not only to knowledge and skills but also to teacher attitudes and the broader institutional culture; research indicates that professional development which includes critical reflection on bias, cultural assumptions and inclusive dispositions helps teachers move from just knowing about diversity to living inclusive practice (OECD, 2021). For early childhood teachers operating in resource-constrained settings, professional development opportunities that include practical adaptation of inclusive strategies to low-resource classrooms, peer mentoring, mobile learning or blended formats provide a realistic pathway to building competence in managing diverse learning needs; such context-sensitive professional development is increasingly recognised as crucial for equity (International Journal for Research and Innovation in Social Sciences, 2024). Professional development that includes follow-up, coaching, duration over time, and opportunities to apply strategies in classrooms and receive feedback yields stronger impact than one-off workshops that lack practical follow-up (Lim & Able-Boone, 2017). Teachers who participate in professional development opportunities focusing on inclusive practices report higher self-efficacy, greater use of differentiated instruction, more positive attitudes toward inclusion, and improved capacity to respond to learners with diverse needs (Kliting et al., 2024; Kahmann et al., 2022). Professional development opportunities that encourage collaboration among teachers,

allow them to observe inclusive settings, and engage with specialists and families help construct a richer understanding of how to manage learner diversity in real classrooms rather than only in theory (OECD, 2021). In Ghana and other African settings, professional development opportunities for early childhood teachers must be enhanced; research indicates that teachers express willingness to support diverse learners but feel under-trained and have limited access to professional development tailored to neurodiversity, inclusion and culturally responsive pedagogy (Dyosini, 2025). Professional development opportunities could include partnerships with universities, non-governmental organisations, government agencies and inclusive education programmes which deliver workshops, certificates and support for early childhood teachers in inclusive practice. Teachers may also access MOOCs (massive open online courses) and global platforms that specialise in inclusive early childhood education, enabling cross-contextual learning and exposure to global inclusive practices which they can adapt to local classrooms. Professional development opportunities can also be delivered via cascade models, where a small group of teachers receive training and then act as trainers for their colleagues within the centre or district; this model helps scale inclusive professional development and increases local capacity (El-Hamamsy et al., 2023). Teachers may engage in professional development opportunities that include data-based monitoring of their own practice, use of portfolios and reflection journals, peer discussions and continuous improvement cycles; this sort of professional learning leads to deeper change in practice around diversity (Education Sciences, 2024). Professional development may include modules on collaboration with families and community partners, recognising that effective inclusive practice involves partnerships with parents, specialist services and community supports;

training that explicitly includes family-engagement strategies helps teachers support diverse learners more holistically (OECD, 2021). Early childhood teacher professional development opportunities may also include access to inclusive education toolkits, online resource banks, checklists, reflective prompts and classroom adaptation guides which teachers can use to implement inclusive practices for diverse learners in everyday lessons (European School Education Platform, 2024). Teachers who engage in professional development opportunities that include hands-on practicum in inclusive settings, co-teaching experiences, peer observation and specialist support report stronger gains in preparedness to manage diverse learning needs (Stayton, 2017; OECD, 2020). Universities and teacher education institutions offer postgraduate or advanced certificates in leadership in early childhood education with an emphasis on culturally responsive teaching, inclusion and managing learner diversity; such opportunities enable teachers to develop expertise, assume leadership in inclusive practice and mentor peers (Southern Oregon University, 2023). Professional development opportunities should also include evaluation mechanisms so that the impact of training on teacher practice and learner outcomes is assessed; when professional development is evidence-based, sustained and evaluated, it contributes more effectively to inclusive teacher capacity (Kahmann et al., 2022). In summary, professional development opportunities available to early childhood teachers for managing diversity in learning needs encompass formal qualification courses, short-term certificate programmes, online and blended training modules, continuous professional development with coaching and mentoring, peer learning networks, in-service workshops, reflective and practitioner inquiry opportunities, inclusive toolkits and resources, partnerships with families and specialists, and advanced leadership programmes in inclusive education. These

opportunities are most effective when they are sustained over time, contextualised to local realities, combine both knowledge and attitude change, include classroom-based practice and feedback, and foster collaboration among teachers, families and specialists. Enhancing access to these professional development opportunities is essential, particularly in Ghana and other under-resourced early childhood contexts, in order to build the capacity of teachers to manage diverse learning needs and promote equitable, inclusive early childhood education.

2.6 Challenges Early Childhood Teachers Face in Addressing Diverse Learning Needs

Early childhood teachers face a myriad of challenges when attempting to address the diverse learning needs of all children in their classrooms. The first challenge is that teachers often lack sufficient specialised training in inclusive and differentiated instruction, which limits their capacity to respond effectively to learners with varied abilities, backgrounds, languages and developmental trajectories (Mahadew 2023). Teachers frequently report that they feel under-prepared to manage the full range of diversity, including neurodiversity, language differences and cultural variation (Dyosini 2025). The second challenge is that teachers often work in classrooms with large numbers of children and high child-to-teacher ratios, making it difficult to monitor individual progress, adjust instruction for different profiles and provide meaningful individual or small-group support (Barriers in Ghana study 2024). The third challenge is the lack of material resources and adapted learning materials, including assistive technologies, manipulatives, sensory aids and multilingual texts, which prevents teachers from tailoring learning experiences to children's individual needs (Barriers in Ghana study 2024; IJMRA 2025). The fourth challenge is time constraints:

teachers frequently report insufficient time for planning differentiated lessons, preparing adapted materials, collaborating with support staff, reflecting on practice or engaging in follow-up with children with additional needs (Early Childhood Educators in linguistically diverse contexts, 2025). The fifth challenge is insufficient professional development and ongoing support: even when initial training has been provided, many teachers lack access to continuous coaching, mentoring, specialist consultation or peer networks to refine inclusive practices over time (Early Childhood Educators in linguistically diverse contexts, 2025; IJMRA 2025). The sixth challenge is attitudinal and belief-related issues, including implicit biases, low expectations for learners with additional needs, culturally unresponsive teaching, and teachers' own uncertainty or lack of confidence in inclusive pedagogy (Meta-synthesis on CRP 2024). The seventh challenge is language and cultural diversity, meaning that children come from different home languages, cultures and styles of learning, and teachers can struggle to bridge those differences, engage families, adapt language of instruction and make culturally relevant pedagogical choices (Hizli Alkan & Sahin Ipek 2023; Meta-synthesis CRP 2024). The eighth challenge is behavioural, social and emotional issues among children with diverse needs, where teachers report difficulty managing challenging behaviours, ensuring social inclusion, scaffolding emotional regulation and adapting classroom processes to fit children with developmental or attention differences (South African Journal of Childhood Education 2024). The ninth challenge is the curriculum demands and policy pressures that sometimes conflict with inclusive practice: teachers often feel constrained by rigid curricula, heavy assessment demands, limited flexibility and accountability measures which reduce the time and scope for adaptation, creative pedagogy and responsive teaching (Zondo 2025). The tenth challenge

is institutional and systemic barriers, such as inadequate leadership support, lack of specialist staff (e.g., speech therapists, special educators), insufficient funding, minimal referral systems, weak collaboration with families and community, and outdated infrastructure, all of which hamper teachers' ability to address diversity effectively (Ravet & Mtika 2024; Barriers Ghana 2024). The eleventh challenge is transition and continuity issues for children with diverse needs: teachers may struggle to coordinate support across home, community, preschool and school settings, ensuring smooth transitions and consistent support, which is vital for young children with additional needs (Contemporary Challenges in Teaching Young Children 2020). The twelfth challenge is monitoring, assessment and early identification, where teachers may not have the skills, tools or time to identify subtle learning difficulties, developmental delays or language needs early enough and plan accordingly, thereby delaying intervention (Ocloo et al., 2021). The thirteenth challenge is emotional and professional stress: teachers working with highly diverse learners in constrained conditions often experience burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and lowered self-efficacy, which in turn affects their ability to deliver inclusive practice (IJMRA 2025). The fourteenth challenge is equity of access: in many early childhood settings, children from disadvantaged backgrounds, minority languages or with disabilities face structural barriers, and teachers may lack the capacity to compensate fully for those inequities within their classrooms (Barriers Ghana 2024; Meta-synthesis CRP 2024). The fifteenth challenge is inconsistent policy implementation: even when inclusive education policies exist, they are often poorly enacted at early childhood level, with limited guidance for teachers, unclear accountability, few resources and weak monitoring, which leaves teachers without clear direction on how to manage diversity (Mindes 2020). The

sixteenth challenge is lack of collaboration with families and other professionals, where teachers may not receive timely input from parents, specialists or community resources, leading to fragmented support for children with additional or complex needs (Meta-synthesis CRP 2024). The seventeenth challenge is physical environment constraints, such as inadequate classroom space, poor infrastructure, lack of quiet spaces, furniture unsuited for children with mobility needs, and poor sensory-friendly environments, which restrict teachers' ability to adapt the learning environment for diverse learners (Barriers Ghana 2024). The eighteenth challenge is complexity of multiple intersecting needs: many children present not just one area of diversity (e.g., language) but multiple (e.g., language + socio-economic disadvantage + developmental delay), and teachers find it challenging to address layered needs within a standard classroom routine (Contemporary Challenges in Teaching Young Children 2020). The nineteenth challenge is lack of research-to-practice translation, where evidence-based inclusive strategies are available but teachers lack access to, or time to implement them, and the context-specific adaptation needed for their setting is missing (Early Childhood Educators in linguistically diverse contexts, 2025). The twentieth challenge is limited peer or specialist modelling of inclusive practice, where teachers may not observe or collaborate with experienced inclusive practitioners, which reduces opportunities to reflect on and improve their inclusive pedagogy (IJMRA 2025).

In simple English, these challenges mean that while early childhood teachers may want to support all children, many conditions make this very difficult. Without proper training and resources the teacher can feel overwhelmed. When class sizes are large and materials are few, the teacher cannot attend to each child's individual needs. When there is limited time to prepare and reflect, plans cannot be adjusted well for children who learn differently.

When children speak different languages or come from different cultures, and the teacher has not been trained for that, inclusion becomes harder. When the school lacks support staff, assessment tools, specialist services or collaboration with families, the teacher often works alone to fill many roles. When behaviour, attention or social-emotional needs arise, the teacher may lack the strategies or resources to respond. The pressures of curriculum, assessment, policy and institutional structure add further difficulty. All these factors combine to make the task of supporting diverse learners in early childhood settings far more complex than many realize.

Ultimately, the significance of these challenges is that children with diverse learning needs are at risk of not receiving the support they require early. When teachers cannot address those needs because of training, time, resources or systemic barriers, the trajectory for those children may be negatively affected. Therefore, in early childhood education, addressing diverse learning needs demands more than teacher goodwill—it requires structural, institutional and systemic change so that teachers are supported, equipped, and empowered to work with diversity effectively.

2.7 Conclusion

This review synthesizes critical dimensions of teacher preparedness for managing diverse learning needs within Effutu Municipality's early childhood classrooms. Preparedness emerges as a multifaceted construct encompassing essential knowledge of development and diversity, practical skills in adaptation and differentiation, positive attitudes and self-efficacy, and access to enabling resources and support systems. The literature underscores the profound impact of context-specific barriers prevalent in Effutu, including inadequate

training, large class sizes, resource scarcity, and socio-cultural attitudes, which collectively hinder effective inclusive practice. Crucially, it highlights the alignment between research-identified gaps and teacher-articulated needs for practical, sustained professional development, accessible resources, manageable workloads, and collaborative support networks. This synthesis establishes a clear foundation, revealing significant gaps between policy aspirations and classroom realities, thus framing the necessity for the present empirical investigation into the current state of teacher preparedness within this specific municipality.



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter details the methodology employed in this study, offering a thorough overview of the data collection and analysis methods. It explains the procedures followed and identifies the data sources. Additionally, the chapter outlines the research study area, design, population under investigation, sampling method, inclusion and exclusion criteria, data collection instruments, their validation process, and the ethical considerations guiding the study.

3.1 Philosophical Underpinning

The interpretivist research paradigm provides a suitable philosophical and methodological foundation for exploring teacher preparedness for managing diverse learning needs in early childhood classrooms in the Effutu Municipality. This paradigm aligns with the nature of the study because the issue of teacher preparedness is inherently subjective, context-specific, and socially constructed. It focuses on understanding how early childhood teachers perceive their level of preparedness, interpret their professional experiences, and respond to the challenges of diversity in their classrooms. Interpretivism emphasizes the importance of human meaning and lived experience, recognizing that the realities teachers construct around preparedness, diversity, and inclusion are shaped by their backgrounds, beliefs, training, and social interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study therefore adopts the interpretivist paradigm to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences and perceptions within their real-life context in Effutu Municipality.

The interpretivist paradigm assumes that knowledge is not discovered objectively but is created through interaction between the researcher and participants. In this study, the researcher does not seek to measure teacher preparedness through statistical indicators but to interpret how teachers themselves define and describe preparedness for managing diverse learning needs. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018), interpretivism seeks to uncover the meanings individuals assign to their social world rather than to test predetermined hypotheses. This philosophical stance aligns with the purpose of the current study, which aims to uncover the depth of understanding early childhood teachers have about their own competencies, professional experiences, and training opportunities in relation to inclusion. Teachers' preparedness is not a fixed or measurable reality but a fluid, socially constructed concept that differs across contexts, institutions, and personal experiences.

In the Effutu Municipality, teachers work in a dynamic educational environment shaped by diverse learner needs, socio-economic variations, and differences in resources among schools. The interpretivist paradigm allows the researcher to interpret how teachers in this particular context understand and respond to diversity. It enables the study to capture the multiple realities that exist among early childhood teachers—each teacher's perspective is considered valid and meaningful in its own right. This fits the interpretivist view of ontological relativism, which assumes that there are multiple constructed realities rather than one single objective truth (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). What one teacher considers adequate preparedness may differ from another's interpretation depending on training, years of experience, or exposure to inclusive education practices. By adopting

interpretivism, the researcher is able to respect and represent these multiple perspectives rather than impose a uniform definition of preparedness.

Epistemologically, the interpretivist paradigm assumes that knowledge is co-constructed between the researcher and the participants. In this study, the researcher engages in dialogue with early childhood teachers through interviews and observations to construct an understanding of preparedness collaboratively. The researcher's own background, assumptions, and interpretations become part of the process rather than external to it. As Schwandt (2015) argues, interpretivism accepts that complete objectivity is impossible in social research, and that meaning emerges through interaction. This makes the paradigm appropriate for a study that seeks to explore teachers' inner thoughts, emotions, and reflections on their ability to manage diverse learning needs. The researcher listens empathetically, interprets carefully, and ensures that the teachers' voices remain central to the findings.

The interpretivist paradigm also supports the qualitative methodology chosen for this study. Through qualitative interviews, observations, and document analysis, the researcher can gather rich and descriptive data about teachers' lived experiences. Interpretivism values depth of understanding rather than breadth of coverage, emphasizing detailed exploration of participants' perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the context of Effutu Municipality, where early childhood education is influenced by cultural, social, and institutional factors, this approach enables the researcher to understand how teachers' preparedness is shaped by their local realities. It allows the study to uncover not only what teachers know or can do but also how they feel, what they believe, and how they interpret

the challenges of managing diversity in their classrooms. This depth of exploration would not be achievable through a purely quantitative or positivist approach.

Methodologically, the interpretivist paradigm informs the use of purposive sampling, where participants are selected because they have rich experiences relevant to the research focus. Early childhood teachers from various schools in the Effutu Municipality are engaged to provide diverse perspectives on preparedness. Data collection involves open-ended questions and flexible interaction, allowing participants to share their stories freely and reveal insights that structured questionnaires might miss. Data analysis follows thematic interpretation, where meanings are derived inductively from the data. As Patton (2015) explains, interpretivist analysis focuses on identifying themes and patterns that capture the essence of participants' lived experiences. This aligns with the purpose of understanding how teachers conceptualize preparedness, how they describe their professional challenges, and how they experience the process of managing diverse learning needs.

The interpretivist paradigm also aligns with the contextual and cultural sensitivity required for this study. In Effutu Municipality, early childhood education is embedded within the socio-cultural context of Ghanaian communities, where factors such as parental expectations, community values, language diversity, and resource availability influence teaching practices. Interpretivism allows the researcher to understand teacher preparedness within this local context, recognizing that preparedness cannot be detached from the environment in which teachers work. As Geertz (1973) emphasized through the concept of "thick description," interpretivist inquiry seeks to describe not only the actions of participants but also the meanings attached to those actions within a cultural framework.

Therefore, the researcher interprets teacher preparedness not merely as an individual attribute but as a socially situated construct shaped by training institutions, educational policies, and local realities.

The interpretivist paradigm also informs the ethical orientation of this study. Because the paradigm views participants as co-constructors of knowledge, it emphasizes respect, trust, and collaboration. Participants are given the freedom to express their experiences openly, and their confidentiality and dignity are protected throughout the process. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) note that interpretivist research involves empathy and authenticity, requiring the researcher to represent participants' voices accurately and responsibly. This ethical sensitivity is essential when studying teachers' personal and professional experiences, as these narratives reveal deep insights into their identities, struggles, and successes.

3.2 Research Approach

The study adopted the qualitative research approach to explore teacher preparedness for managing diverse learning needs in early childhood classrooms in the Effutu Municipality. This approach was deemed appropriate because the phenomenon under investigation is complex, context-specific, and socially constructed, requiring an in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations rather than quantitative measurement. Qualitative research emphasizes the exploration of meaning, interpretation, and lived experiences, which aligns with the study's aim of understanding how early childhood teachers perceive their preparedness and how they respond to the challenges associated with diverse learning needs in their classrooms (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The qualitative approach enables the researcher to generate rich, detailed insights into the

processes, attitudes, and practices that define teacher preparedness in real-life educational settings.

Teacher preparedness is not a uniform or easily measurable construct, as it encompasses a range of personal and professional factors including prior training, teaching experience, confidence, instructional strategies, and adaptive skills in handling learners with diverse abilities. The qualitative approach provides the flexibility to explore these dimensions holistically, allowing the researcher to capture both explicit and implicit aspects of preparedness. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), qualitative research is particularly suitable for studies aiming to understand the meaning that individuals attribute to their experiences, making it ideal for exploring teachers' subjective experiences of preparedness in the Effutu Municipality. The approach acknowledges that teachers' readiness is shaped by multiple factors, including institutional policies, community expectations, classroom resources, and socio-cultural influences, which cannot be adequately assessed through purely quantitative methods.

3.3 Research Design

The study adopted the exploratory case study as its research design to investigate teacher preparedness for managing diverse learning needs in early childhood classrooms in the Effutu Municipality. The choice of an exploratory case study design was guided by the need to gain a deep, contextual understanding of a complex phenomenon that is not easily measurable and is highly influenced by the social and educational environment. According to Yin (2018), case study designs are particularly suitable for exploring contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts where the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly defined. In this study, teacher preparedness is a multifaceted

concept shaped by individual experiences, institutional factors, classroom conditions, and local cultural influences. An exploratory case study enabled the researcher to investigate these factors holistically, providing insights into how teachers perceive, interpret, and respond to the challenges associated with managing diverse learning needs.

The exploratory nature of the case study design was particularly appropriate for this research because the study aimed to examine a relatively under-researched area within the Effutu Municipality. Teacher preparedness in early childhood classrooms, especially in relation to managing learners with diverse abilities, has not been extensively documented in this specific context. Exploratory case studies are designed to investigate phenomena about which little is known, allowing the researcher to generate new insights, identify patterns, and establish a foundation for further research (Robson & McCartan, 2016). The design provided the flexibility to explore multiple dimensions of teacher preparedness, including professional knowledge, pedagogical strategies, confidence levels, and challenges encountered in the classroom, without being constrained by predetermined hypotheses or rigid quantitative measures.

The exploratory case study design aligns with the qualitative research approach adopted in this study. Qualitative case studies are particularly effective in capturing the lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of participants in their natural environment (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the Effutu Municipality, early childhood teachers operate within diverse school settings that differ in terms of resources, class sizes, learner composition, and administrative support. The exploratory case study design enabled the researcher to examine these contextual variations and understand how they influence teacher preparedness. By focusing on a bounded system—teachers within selected early

childhood classrooms—the study was able to provide detailed, contextualized insights that reflect the complexity and richness of the real-world setting.

Data collection in the exploratory case study was guided by the principles of qualitative inquiry and involved multiple sources to ensure comprehensive understanding. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather in-depth information from teachers regarding their professional experiences, perceived preparedness, strategies for managing diverse learners, and challenges faced in the classroom. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to express their perspectives freely while providing the researcher with the opportunity to probe and clarify responses (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). This approach was consistent with the interpretivist paradigm underpinning the study, which emphasizes understanding the subjective meaning that participants attach to their experiences and the co-construction of knowledge between researcher and participant.

Classroom observations complemented the interviews by providing direct evidence of teachers' practices in managing diverse learning needs. Observations allowed the researcher to witness the implementation of instructional strategies, classroom interactions, and adaptations made to support learners with different abilities. According to Patton (2015), the use of multiple data sources in case study research enhances credibility, allows triangulation, and provides a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon. In this study, the combination of interviews and observations enabled the researcher to verify and enrich the findings, ensuring that the interpretations accurately reflected both teachers' reported experiences and actual classroom practices.

The exploratory case study design also facilitated the investigation of context-specific factors that influence teacher preparedness. Early childhood education in the Effutu

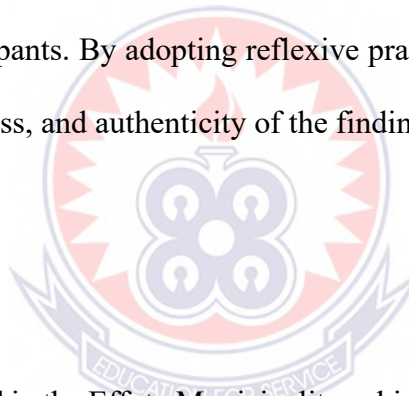
Municipality is shaped by local cultural norms, parental expectations, available resources, and policy directives. By adopting a case study approach, the researcher was able to situate teachers' experiences within these contextual realities, capturing the interplay between personal, professional, and institutional factors. Geertz's (1973) concept of "thick description" guided the analysis, ensuring that teachers' experiences were interpreted within their social, cultural, and institutional context. This approach enabled the study to identify not only common patterns across participants but also unique cases that illustrate the diversity of experiences within the municipality.

An exploratory case study design is particularly effective in identifying emerging themes and patterns that may inform future research or interventions. Through inductive thematic analysis, the researcher identified key dimensions of teacher preparedness, strategies for managing diverse learners, challenges encountered, and professional development experiences. This inductive approach is consistent with the exploratory nature of the study, which seeks to generate new knowledge rather than test pre-existing theories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The findings from this study provide a foundation for developing targeted professional development programs, policy recommendations, and future research focused on enhancing teacher preparedness for inclusive early childhood education.

The case study design also allowed for flexibility and adaptability during data collection. In real-world educational settings, circumstances may change, requiring the researcher to adjust data collection methods or focus areas. For example, differences in classroom environments, teacher availability, or school schedules necessitated adjustments to the timing and structure of interviews and observations. The exploratory case study design accommodates such flexibility, enabling the researcher to respond to contextual variations

while maintaining the integrity of the study (Yin, 2018). This adaptability was essential for capturing an authentic and comprehensive understanding of teacher preparedness in the diverse educational settings of the Effutu Municipality.

Reflexivity was an integral component of the exploratory case study design. The researcher continually reflected on personal assumptions, experiences, and potential biases that could influence data collection, interpretation, and analysis. Reflexivity ensured that the study authentically represented teachers' perspectives rather than the researcher's preconceived notions (Schwandt, 2015). This reflective approach aligns with the interpretivist paradigm, emphasizing co-construction of meaning, acknowledgment of subjectivity, and ethical engagement with participants. By adopting reflexive practices, the study strengthened the credibility, trustworthiness, and authenticity of the findings.



3.4 Study Area

The study was conducted in the Effutu Municipality, which is located in the Central Region of Ghana. Effutu Municipality is a semi-urban area characterized by a combination of densely populated towns and smaller rural communities, creating a diverse socio-cultural and economic environment. The municipality serves as an important educational hub, with a range of public and private early childhood education centers that provide foundational learning experiences for young children. The educational landscape in Effutu is shaped by a mix of traditional values, community expectations, and formal educational policies, all of which influence teaching and learning practices in early childhood classrooms (Ghana Education Service, 2020).

The selection of the Effutu Municipality as the study setting was based on several considerations. Firstly, the municipality presents a representative context for examining teacher preparedness, as its early childhood classrooms accommodate children with diverse learning needs, abilities, and socio-economic backgrounds. The classrooms vary in size, available teaching resources, and learner composition, which reflects the diversity of early childhood education experiences across Ghana. Secondly, the municipality has a mix of both trained and untrained early childhood teachers, providing an opportunity to explore variations in preparedness and instructional strategies. This variation is critical for understanding how teachers perceive their ability to manage diversity and implement inclusive practices in real-world classroom settings.

The socio-cultural context of the Effutu Municipality significantly influences early childhood education. The municipality is home to the Effutu ethnic group as well as other minority groups, resulting in linguistic diversity within classrooms. Children come from different family structures, economic statuses, and cultural backgrounds, which presents teachers with the challenge of addressing diverse learning needs effectively. This context makes it important to examine how teachers prepare for and adapt their instructional strategies to meet the unique needs of learners (Boateng, 2019). Teachers in the municipality must navigate these complexities while promoting equitable learning opportunities for all children.

The physical setting of early childhood classrooms in the Effutu Municipality also shapes teaching and learning practices. Classrooms often vary in size, availability of learning materials, and accessibility of teaching aids for supporting children with special needs. Some classrooms are well-resourced with teaching aids, manipulatives, and visual learning

materials, while others face challenges of overcrowding, limited resources, and inadequate infrastructural support. Such variations provide a rich context for examining how teachers adjust their teaching practices, employ strategies to manage diverse learning needs, and perceive their preparedness for inclusive education (UNESCO, 2020).

The Effutu Municipality is governed administratively by the Effutu Municipal Education Directorate, which supervises educational programs, implements national policies, and supports teacher professional development initiatives. The directorate coordinates teacher training workshops, monitors classroom practices, and ensures compliance with the Ghana Education Service guidelines for early childhood education. These institutional arrangements influence the level of preparedness of teachers, as they determine the professional development opportunities, resources, and supervisory support available to educators. Understanding the institutional framework is therefore essential to comprehending how teachers prepare for and implement strategies to manage diversity in their classrooms (Ghana Education Service, 2020).

The study specifically focused on early childhood classrooms within selected public and private schools in the municipality. These schools were chosen because they represent the diversity of teaching experiences, learner populations, and resource availability in the Effutu Municipality. The classrooms included in the study accommodated children aged three to five years, which is the standard age range for early childhood education in Ghana. Teachers in these classrooms are responsible for providing foundational literacy, numeracy, social, and emotional skills, which requires them to be adequately prepared to address a wide range of learning abilities and needs (Asare, 2018).

In addition, the municipality's classrooms often reflect the challenges and realities of Ghanaian early childhood education, such as large class sizes, limited teaching aids, and varied learner readiness. These conditions provide a realistic setting for exploring teacher preparedness, as they require educators to adapt their instructional strategies creatively and to employ innovative approaches to support learners with diverse needs. By situating the study within this context, the research captures the practical realities and challenges that teachers encounter daily, providing a rich foundation for understanding teacher preparedness in a real-world setting.

The setting also enabled the researcher to explore the interaction between teachers, learners, and the broader school environment. Classroom dynamics, peer interactions, teacher-learner relationships, and parental involvement all contribute to shaping teacher preparedness and classroom practices. The socio-cultural and institutional context of the Effutu Municipality therefore provides a comprehensive backdrop for examining how teachers perceive and enact preparedness, manage classroom diversity, and implement inclusive education practices.

3.5 Study Population

The population for the study were all Kindergarten One (KG1) and Kindergarten Two (KG2) teachers of Ensuaqyir Methodist Basic School, within the Effutu Municipality.

3.5 Sample Size Determination

Given the specific, bounded nature of the research population comprising *all* Kindergarten One (KG1) and Kindergarten Two (KG2) teachers at Ensuaqyir Methodist Basic School within the Effutu Municipality, and the study's in-depth qualitative case study design,

a comprehensive sampling approach was employed. This means the study aimed to include the entire target population of KG1 and KG2 teachers at Ensuaakyir Methodist Basic School in the sample. This approach is justified because the population size is inherently small and manageable (typically ranging from 4 to 8 teachers in a Ghanaian basic school KG department), and the research objectives require rich, detailed data from *every* practitioner directly involved in managing diverse learning needs within this specific school context. Including all teachers ensures a holistic understanding of preparedness within the unique ecosystem of Ensuaakyir's early childhood classrooms, capturing the full range of experiences, perspectives, and practices present, thereby maximizing the depth and contextual relevance of the findings for this singular case. The sample size is thus determined by the total number of KG1 and KG2 teachers actively teaching at Ensuaakyir Methodist Basic School during the data collection period.

3.6 Data Collection Instrument



This study utilized a semi-structured interview guide as the primary instrument for data collection. This format allows for focused exploration aligned with the research objectives while providing the necessary flexibility to probe deeper into participants' unique experiences, perspectives, and contextual nuances within Ensuaakyir Methodist Basic School (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). The guide was organized into thematic sections corresponding to the key dimensions of preparedness identified in the literature review

3.7 Trustworthiness of Data Collection Instruments

In qualitative research, ensuring reliability and validity is critical to the credibility and utility of the findings. This study addressed reliability and validity through the concept of trustworthiness, which comprises credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These criteria guided the research design, data collection, and analysis processes, ensuring that the study produced rigorous and trustworthy results that accurately reflected the experiences and perspectives of the participants. The following sections discuss how each component of trustworthiness was applied throughout the research process.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth of the findings and the extent to which they accurately represent participants' perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, credibility was ensured through prolonged engagement with the participants. The researcher spent sufficient time interacting with each participant, allowing rapport to develop and providing opportunities for participants to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives. The extended engagement helped reduce the likelihood of superficial responses and allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' viewpoints.

Follow-up questions were used during interviews to clarify ambiguous responses and probe further into areas of interest. This iterative questioning process helped ensure that participants' meanings were accurately captured and prevented misinterpretation. Member checking was also employed as a key strategy for enhancing credibility. The researcher

summarized participants' responses during and after the interviews and sought confirmation from participants regarding the accuracy of the summaries. This practice allowed participants to verify that their views were accurately represented, thereby enhancing the authenticity of the data and minimizing potential misrepresentation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency and stability of the research process over time, ensuring that the study could be repeated under similar conditions with similar results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure dependability, the researcher documented the research process in detail. This documentation included the sampling procedures, criteria for participant selection, data collection methods, and the step-by-step process of data analysis. By maintaining a comprehensive audit trail, the study provided transparency regarding how decisions were made at each stage of the research.

The researcher also maintained detailed records of all methodological choices and procedural adjustments that occurred during the study. For example, changes to interview questions or approaches to probing participants' responses were recorded with justifications, enabling future researchers to understand the rationale behind these modifications. Maintaining such meticulous documentation allowed the study to demonstrate methodological rigor and facilitated replication or evaluation of the research process by other scholars, thereby enhancing its dependability.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the findings are shaped by participants' responses rather than the researcher's biases or preconceptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To enhance confirmability, the researcher employed multiple strategies to ensure that interpretations and conclusions were grounded in the data. Field notes and audio recordings of interviews were maintained throughout the data collection process. These records allowed the researcher to refer back to participants' exact words and non-verbal cues, ensuring that interpretations were evidence-based and consistent with participants' intended meanings.

The researcher also engaged in reflexivity throughout the study by acknowledging personal assumptions, experiences, and potential biases that could influence data interpretation. Regular reflection and documentation of these reflections ensured that findings were not unduly influenced by the researcher's perspectives. Triangulation of data sources was another strategy used to strengthen confirmability. By comparing and cross-referencing information from multiple participants and data collection methods, the researcher ensured that the conclusions were supported by multiple lines of evidence, reducing the influence of subjective bias.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the study's findings can be applied to other contexts or settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, transferability was addressed by providing rich and detailed descriptions of the research context, participants, and the

processes involved in the study. Descriptions included demographic information about participants, the characteristics of the educational setting, and the cultural and social environment in which the study was conducted. These detailed accounts allowed readers to make informed judgments about whether the findings could be applied to similar populations or contexts.

Additionally, the researcher included contextual information regarding the practices and interventions observed, the nature of interactions between teachers and learners, and specific examples of play-based learning activities. By providing this level of detail, the study ensured that readers could understand the conditions under which the findings were generated and determine their applicability to other early childhood education settings, particularly in similar districts or cultural environments (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.8 Data Collection Procedure

Following ethical approvals and scheduling, semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face with all KG1 and KG2 teachers at Ensuaqyir Methodist Basic School. Interviews occurred privately on school premises at participants' convenience, lasting 45–60 minutes. Using a piloted guide, the researcher explored preparedness dimensions, practices, barriers, and support needs. Sessions were audio-recorded with written consent, primarily in English while allowing Fante/Effutu for nuanced expression. Brief field notes documented contextual observations. Summaries were shared with participants for member checking to validate interpretations.

3.9 Data Analysis

The analysis employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis within a qualitative case study framework. Interview transcripts and field notes underwent iterative coding:

1. Familiarization through repeated reading.
2. Initial coding of key concepts related to preparedness dimensions (knowledge, skills, attitudes, practices, barriers, support needs).
3. Theme development by collating codes into patterns (e.g., "Resource improvisation," "Multilingual scaffolding," "Systemic constraints").
4. Refinement via constant comparison across transcripts to ensure themes reflect both shared experiences and unique contextual nuances at Ensuakyir.
5. Relating themes to the research objectives and theoretical frameworks (inclusive pedagogy, self-efficacy). Trustworthiness was ensured through reflexive journaling and peer debriefing.

3.10 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations are paramount in conducting research involving human participants. Before participating in the study, KG teachers of Ensuakyir Methodist Basic School, Winneba were fully informed about the purpose, procedures, and benefits of the research. Participants' privacy and confidentiality were strictly maintained. Data collected were anonymized and stored securely, with access restricted to authorized personnel only. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. The study complied with all applicable laws, regulations, and institutional policies governing research with human participation.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents, analyzes, and discusses the findings of the study on *Teacher Preparedness for Managing Diverse Learning Needs in Early Childhood Classrooms in the Effutu Municipality*. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a detailed account of the data collected, highlighting the perspectives of teachers and the realities within their classrooms. The analysis is guided by the study's research objectives, which focused on assessing teachers' knowledge and skills in inclusive practices, the availability of teaching and learning resources, the types of support systems accessible to teachers, and the challenges they face in catering for diverse learning needs.

The findings are presented thematically, reflecting the major issues raised through questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations. These themes include teachers' understanding of inclusive education, their classroom strategies for managing mixed-ability learners, the adequacy of physical and instructional resources, as well as the level

of institutional and professional development support they receive. The discussion links these findings to existing literature, drawing comparisons and highlighting areas where the Effutu Municipality context reflects or diverges from broader research on inclusive education.

By systematically analyzing the data, this chapter seeks to offer a clearer understanding of the extent to which teachers in the Effutu Municipality are prepared to effectively support young learners with varied educational needs. It also provides the basis for identifying gaps, challenges, and opportunities that will inform the recommendations in the next chapter.



4.1 Analysis of Research Questions

4.1 RQ1. How do early childhood teachers in the Effutu Municipality perceive and describe their own level of knowledge, skills, and confidence in identifying and responding to the range of diverse learning needs present in their classrooms?

The reflections gathered from the 8 KG1 and KG2 teachers at Ensuaqyir Methodist Basic School offer valuable insight into how early childhood educators understand and assess their own preparedness to manage a wide range of diverse learning needs. Their responses show that while they have developed significant practical strategies through daily experience, there is a clear tension between this informal expertise and the absence of structured training in specialized areas. Overall, these voices highlight a vital but under-resourced frontline in Ghana's quest for inclusive early childhood education.

4.1.1 Basic Confidence in Detecting Obvious Struggles

A shared strength across all respondents is their confidence in recognising clear, visible learning difficulties that emerge during routine classroom interactions. For example, nearly every teacher described how they easily notice when a child cannot follow simple instructions, struggles with letter or number recognition, or has obvious difficulties with speech.

Respondent 1 explained: *“I feel quite confident when it comes to noticing when a child is struggling to follow lessons or speak clearly... I usually see it early.”*

Similarly, **Respondent 2** anchored her confidence in years of experience: *“I am fairly confident because I have been teaching KG for over 8 years now. I can usually see when a child needs more time or more repetition.”*

Respondent 4 noted that slower progress in basic activities like counting and drawing are clear indicators for her: *“Most of the time I see when they are left behind in counting or drawing.”*

These accounts reflect a strong understanding of *observable developmental milestones*.

Respondent know when foundational skills, such as phonics, counting, and basic motor skills, are not progressing at an expected pace. This practical confidence is rooted in daily observation and comparison within peer groups which is a key informal assessment strategy in early childhood education. It demonstrates that teachers have developed useful “classroom heuristics” to monitor learning progress even without formal diagnostic tools.

4.1.2 Limited Skills in Identifying Deeper or Hidden Needs

However, beneath this surface-level confidence lies a clear sense of uncertainty and inadequacy when it comes to spotting complex learning disabilities, developmental disorders, or subtle emotional needs that do not present obviously in daily lessons.

Respondent 1 highlighted the uncertainty about quiet or withdrawn children: *“Sometimes it is hard to know if they have a learning problem or they are just shy.”*

Respondent 2 shared: *“Sometimes I find it hard to identify special needs like autism or hearing problems. We don’t really get any training for that here.”*

Respondent 3 voiced similar concerns: *“When it comes to emotional needs or behaviour issues, I am not so sure. Sometimes I think it’s just how the child is growing, but maybe it’s something more.”*

These examples show that while teachers are good at catching surface-level gaps, they often miss conditions that require a more structured assessment framework. Subtle or ‘hidden’ challenges such as dyslexia, mild hearing loss, ADHD, or anxiety can easily blend into typical early childhood behaviour or be misinterpreted as simple shyness or naughtiness. Without proper screening tools or training, these children risk slipping through the cracks.

Moreover, teachers sometimes default to “trial and error” as they rely on guesses rather than evidence-based strategies. This can delay interventions, which is critical because early identification is key to managing such conditions effectively.

4.1.3 Strong Practical Skills and Improvisation

Despite systemic gaps, these teachers demonstrate remarkable ingenuity and adaptability in the classroom. Many described relying on songs, games, local language support, peer learning, storytelling, and improvisation with local materials to help bridge learning gaps.

Respondent 1: *“I use songs, rhymes and drawing to keep children engaged. I know how to repeat lessons in different ways.”*

Respondent 3: *“I know how to use local language to explain things better. I can mix Fante with English to help some children.”*

Respondent 6: *“I am good at improvising teaching aids, like using stones or sticks to count.”*

These skills illustrate the teachers’ resilience and commitment to inclusive practices, despite limited formal resources. By adjusting their communication styles (code-switching between Fante and English) and designing relatable activities using locally available materials, they help children engage at their own pace. This community-rooted, culturally relevant teaching is a powerful asset that supports children’s sense of belonging and understanding.

However, while these strategies work well for mild or moderate challenges, they may not be enough for more complex needs that require structured interventions or collaboration with health and psychological professionals.

4.1.4 Strong Demand for More Training, Resources, and Support

All teachers clearly articulated their desire for more professional development, more practical tools, and stronger school-community collaboration. Their reflections suggest they feel caught between knowing something is wrong and not knowing how to respond properly or advocate for the child.

Respondent 2: *“I wish I knew more about special needs like autism or ADHD. I only hear about them but don’t really understand.”*

Respondent 7: *“I need skills on how to write simple Individual Education Plans (IEPs). I don’t really know how to plan for each child’s special need.”*

Respondent 8: *“I wish I had more confidence in advising parents about serious learning difficulties. Some parents don’t believe us.”*

This theme shows that teachers want to shift from *reactive improvisation* to *proactive, evidence-based support*. They crave short courses, practical workshops, and real-life demonstrations of how to identify, plan for, and support children with complex or multiple needs. Importantly, they also need clear guidelines on how to communicate these issues sensitively to parents, many of whom may misunderstand or deny the presence of special needs.

This reflects a broader systemic gap: when early childhood educators lack links to child health services, speech therapists, and school psychologists, they carry the full burden alone in an unsustainable reality for large KG classrooms.

In summary, the voices of KG1 and KG2 teachers at Ensuaakyir Methodist Basic School paint a clear picture of the strengths and challenges embedded in Ghana's early childhood education at the community level. These teachers are *vigilant observers* and *creative practitioners*, capable of tailoring lessons to visible needs using local materials and language. However, they lack the diagnostic tools, specialized training, and systemic support to fully address the complex spectrum of diverse learning needs they face every day.

To fully unlock their potential, practical steps such as targeted in-service training, parent engagement strategies, access to specialists, and clear referral pathways must be prioritized. Supporting these teachers better will not only improve early detection and inclusion but also lay stronger foundations for every child's learning journey.

4.2 RQ2. What specific approaches, modifications, and teaching practices do teachers report using, and how do they describe implementing these, to accommodate children with diverse learning needs during typical classroom activities and routines?

The responses from the eight KG1 and KG2 teachers at Ensuaakyir Methodist Basic School clearly reveal that teachers are not simply delivering fixed lessons; they are active problem-solvers, constantly modifying their approaches to reach children with different strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles. Their daily practice demonstrates an intuitive grasp of inclusive teaching, even if they do not always have formal training in special education.

However, these creative methods are tested by real-world barriers such as overcrowded classes, inadequate materials, and parents' misconceptions about what quality early

childhood education should look like. This section sheds light on how teachers strike a balance between good intentions and practical realities.

4.2.1 Use of Local, Multi-Sensory and Play-Based Methods

One clear theme is the teachers' strong preference for songs, rhymes, real objects, drawing, role-play, and local examples. These methods help make abstract ideas more concrete and keep young children engaged, especially those who struggle with reading or writing.

Respondent 1: *"I use more songs and actions to help children remember letters and numbers. For those who can't sit for long, I break activities into small bits. I also pair fast learners with slower ones so they can help each other."*

Respondent 2: *"I do more hands-on activities like counting with stones or bottle tops. I use drawing for those who don't like writing yet. Sometimes, I use role-play or drama so children who are shy can participate."*

Respondent 6: *"I have a buddy system. Stronger children sit with weaker ones and help explain. I also use rhymes and local stories to keep everyone engaged."*

Respondent 7: *"I create games with learning, like counting games with local objects. Children who struggle enjoy learning through play more than just sitting and copying."*

These methods show that teachers intuitively apply multi-sensory learning theory which holds that young children remember best when they see, hear, touch, sing, and do. This is especially powerful in rural or low-resource communities where expensive teaching aids may be unavailable. The use of local items also reflects culturally responsive pedagogy:

children see their real-world context mirrored in the classroom, which builds confidence and bridges the gap between home and school.

4.2.2 Flexible Lesson Planning and Differentiated Activities

The teachers also described how they adapt lesson plans to cater for children who learn at different speeds. This includes breaking lessons into smaller parts, repeating concepts, mixing activities (writing, drawing, acting), and providing extra practice for struggling learners.

Respondent 1: *“I prepare extra simple tasks for fast learners so they don’t disturb others. For slow learners, I repeat lessons and sometimes teach them again during break time.”*

Respondent 3: *“I break big lessons into small parts. I teach one part today and another tomorrow. I also use peer support to help slow learners catch up.”*

Respondent 6: *“I adjust the time I give for activities. Some children need more time to finish work so I allow them to complete it later.”*

Respondent 8: *“I check homework for signs of who is struggling. Then I adjust my next lesson to include more examples and practice.”*

Such practices echo what inclusive education experts call “differentiation” designing lessons so all learners can access core content but in ways that match their abilities. Although these teachers may not use formal special education jargon, they show a clear understanding of how to stretch the curriculum for both struggling and fast learners. The

strategies also reflect an ethic of care: teachers sacrifice their own time (like using break time for remedial lessons) to make sure no child is left behind.

However, these efforts are also labor-intensive, doing individual or small-group support when managing 40 or more children single-handedly is not sustainable without extra support staff or smaller class sizes.

4.2.3 Inclusive Routines and Motivating Modifications

Beyond lesson planning, many teachers described daily routines and class modifications that help children feel included and motivated. Examples include reward systems, mixed seating, learning stations, morning recap songs, and quiet corners for independent learning.

Respondent 1: *“I start every morning with recap songs so everyone remembers the previous day’s lesson. I also have a corner with charts and books for slow learners to look at.”*

Respondent 2: *“I arrange children in mixed-ability seating so they can help each other. I also check work table by table to guide those who are behind.”*

Respondent 4: *“I use a reward system when they try hard, they get stickers or claps. It helps slower children feel motivated.”*

Respondent 6: *“I do circle time daily for everyone to share something, it helps shy ones speak up and feel part of the class.”*

Respondent 8: *“I divide the class into stations, one for writing, one for drawing, one for counting. They rotate, so each child learns at their level.”*

These routines align with modern early childhood education best practice, which emphasizes that children learn best through repetition, praise, and safe spaces for expression. Peer seating taps into Ghana’s communal culture where children learn that helping others is part of the classroom norm. Rewards build intrinsic motivation, especially for struggling pupils who risk feeling invisible when compared to fast learners. Circle time and stations ensure that quieter or slower pupils are not left behind.

These simple but powerful practices show that these teachers understand how to build a classroom community where every child feels valued which is a core principle of inclusive early childhood care and education (IECCE).

4.2.4 Practical Limits and Mixed Effectiveness

However, the teachers also reflected honestly on what *doesn’t work well*, showing how real classroom conditions can undermine good intentions. They cited large class sizes, time constraints, noise levels, parental resistance, and lack of materials as barriers to fully implementing or sustaining their adaptations.

Respondent 1: *“Songs and peer help work well. But sometimes group work becomes noisy and hard to control.”*

Respondent 2: *“Using real objects works well, it makes children remember better. But drama and role-play sometimes waste time when I have a large syllabus to cover.”*

Respondent 3: *“Repeating instructions works well but takes a lot of time. Flashcards are good but they get old quickly.”*

Respondent 4: *“Rewards really motivate them. But some parents complain when their child doesn’t get a reward, so I have to explain a lot.”*

Respondent 5: *“Drawing and acting help shy children open up. But some parents want only writing, they think drawing is not serious work.”*

Respondent 6: *“Buddy system is good but sometimes the strong pupil does all the work while the weak one just watches.”*

Respondent 8: *“Using local examples works well. But big class size makes it hard to give every child attention.”*

These issues reflect the reality gap between inclusive teaching ideals and structural conditions in many Ghanaian basic schools. Overcrowded classes, limited time, rigid syllabi, and unsupportive parental beliefs create an environment where even the best intentions hit a ceiling. Many parents still see early learning as strictly formal “ABC and 123” with a pen and book, undervaluing play-based, practical, and arts-based learning. Teachers find themselves balancing modern inclusive practices with cultural norms that sometimes resist them.

Moreover, most strategies rely heavily on the teacher’s personal energy and improvisation, which is unsustainable. Without trained assistants, adequate materials, or regular

professional development, teachers risk burnout which is a major hidden barrier to sustainable inclusive practice.

In sum, the teachers' responses demonstrate an impressive level of commitment, resourcefulness, and cultural sensitivity. They skillfully weave together songs, local objects, group work, differentiated tasks, and creative routines to ensure all children feel included and engaged.

Yet, their struggle to implement these approaches consistently reveals the urgent need for practical system-level support: smaller class sizes, teaching assistants, more learning resources, and better parental education about modern early childhood practices. Training should not only equip teachers with special needs skills but also empower them to communicate effectively with families about why inclusive, play-based, and flexible methods matter.

4.3 RQ3. What factors do teachers identify as significantly hindering (barriers) or supporting (facilitators) their efforts to effectively manage diverse learning needs in their Effutu Municipality classrooms?

The responses from the KG1 and KG2 teachers at Ensuaikyir Methodist Basic School reveal that, despite their commitment and ingenuity, several external and internal factors affect their ability to effectively address diverse learning needs. Teachers described both enablers (such as parental cooperation, peer support, and creative use of local materials) and barriers (including large class sizes, lack of training, and poor infrastructure) that shape their daily classroom experiences.

4.3.1 Parental and Community Involvement as a Double-Edged Sword

Many teachers emphasized that *parental cooperation* and *community engagement* can either enhance or hinder teaching efforts. On the one hand, teachers praised parents who assist children with homework and participate in school activities.

For instance, **Respondent 1** observed, “*One thing that really helps is when parents are cooperative. If parents listen to our advice and help children revise at home, I notice good improvement. Also, when my colleagues share extra teaching aids or activities, it reduces my burden.*”

Similarly, **Respondent 4** shared that *older siblings helping with revision* during holidays eased her workload, while **Respondent 7** stated, “*When parents visit and sit in class, they understand the challenges and cooperate more.*”

On the other hand, several teachers also described how a lack of parental involvement or outright resistance undermines their work. **Respondent 2** explained, “*Many parents don’t attend PTA meetings or follow up... it makes my work harder.*” **Respondent 7** added that, “*Some parents blame teachers if a child is not progressing fast, instead of working together with us.*”

These contrasting experiences point to the urgent need for greater community sensitization about inclusive practices and consistent school-home communication. While the community can be a powerful resource, inconsistent engagement often leaves teachers carrying the full burden.

4.3.2 Classroom Environment and Resource Availability

The physical learning environment, access to teaching materials, and infrastructural conditions significantly shape teachers' ability to implement inclusive practices. **Respondent 2** noted the positive impact of *colourful charts and flashcards made from old calendars*, adding that when the *headteacher supports with small funds*, it helps a lot. Similarly, **Respondent 6** shared that her *creativity with boxes and bottles* keeps restless children engaged.

In contrast, many responses highlighted the **resource deficits** they face. **Respondent 3** lamented, “*We don't have enough teaching and learning resources. Sometimes we share crayons or pencils among too many children.*” **Respondent 5** pointed out space constraints: “*Small rooms make it hard to arrange children in groups or create activity corners.*” These limitations are compounded by poor infrastructure, such as leaky roofs reported by **Respondent 8** and unreliable electricity affecting the use of audio-visual tools (**Respondent 5**).

This suggests that while teachers are maximizing what they have, more consistent investment in physical infrastructure, materials, and equipment is essential for meaningful inclusion.

4.3.3 Personal Effort and Creativity as a Survival Tool

A recurring theme is how teachers rely heavily on their personal creativity, improvisation, and passion to manage diverse learning needs. **Respondent 6** highlighted how she creates games using recycled materials, which sustain engagement. **Respondent 7** also valued

team planning and idea-sharing with colleagues, which refreshed her teaching approach.

Respondent 8 noted, *“Praise and small rewards like stickers... even slow learners make an effort.”*

However, this reliance on individual improvisation reflects systemic gaps. Teachers are using their own money, time, and mental energy to fill the void left by insufficient institutional support. While these practices are admirable, they are also unsustainable in the long term, especially for new or less experienced teachers.

4.3.4 Systemic Constraints and Lack of Structural Support

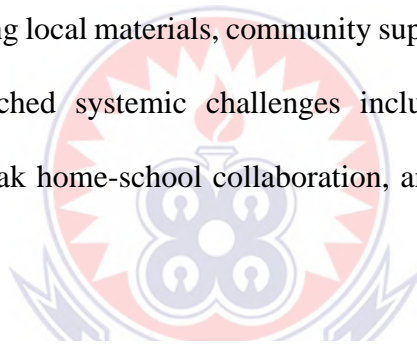
Almost all teachers pointed to structural issues beyond their control as major obstacles to inclusive education. The most frequently mentioned challenge was large class sizes, with **Respondent 1** stating, *“When you have 40 children, it’s very hard to give extra time to slow learners.”* **Respondent 6** added, *“We don’t have teacher aides. One teacher alone with 40 children is stressful.”*

Another consistent issue was the lack of professional training in handling special needs. For example, **Teacher 6** candidly admitted: *“I don’t have enough training to handle children with autism or speech delays.”* Even when inclusive intentions exist, the absence of specialist support staff, such as speech therapists or teaching assistants, limits what regular teachers can do.

Environmental distractions also featured prominently. **Respondent 4** mentioned that “*noise from nearby classrooms affects concentration*”, while **Respondent 2** discussed the “*waste of time*” due to lack of resources or overcrowded timetables.

These reflections point to a **systemic issue**: inclusive education is being pursued without adequate institutional frameworks, leaving teachers to navigate diverse learning needs in isolation.

The responses from teachers at Ensuaqyir Methodist Basic School paint a vivid picture of both hope and hardship. On the one hand, committed educators are creatively navigating complex classrooms using local materials, community support, and their own initiative. On the other hand, entrenched systemic challenges including overcrowded classrooms, insufficient training, weak home-school collaboration, and lack of resources continue to undermine these efforts.



4.4 RQ4. What specific forms of support, resources, or professional development opportunities do teachers express as being most needed or desired to improve their capacity and preparedness for managing diverse learning needs in their unique context?

The responses from the eight KG1 and KG2 teachers at Ensuaqyir Methodist Basic School reveal recurring themes regarding the preparedness, challenges, and support needs in managing diverse learning needs. Although the teachers’ personal experiences and expressions vary, a clear set of patterns emerges that reflect systemic resource shortages, skill gaps in inclusive education, the need for institutional support, and specific priority

requests that they believe would enhance their teaching effectiveness. The findings highlight that while individual teacher commitment is high, the enabling environment in terms of both physical resources and professional capacity is insufficient to fully meet the demands of inclusive early childhood education in the Effutu Municipality.

4.4.1 Need for Adequate Teaching and Learning Resources

One of the most dominant patterns across all responses is the urgent call for adequate and appropriate teaching and learning resources. The majority of the teachers expressed frustration over the lack of child-friendly materials, which directly impacts their ability to deliver lessons that cater to children with varying abilities and learning styles.

Respondent 1 stressed that “*more teaching and learning materials like storybooks, charts, toys, and colouring items*” would enable her to conduct more activity-based lessons tailored to different learners. Currently, she relies heavily on improvised materials such as bottle tops and stones, which, although creative, are not always sufficient for engaging children with different learning needs.

Similarly, **Respondent 2** emphasised the value of “*extra classroom furniture like small tables and chairs*”, explaining that such resources would allow her to divide children into smaller groups and provide more targeted attention.

Respondent 6’s concern revolved around manipulatives, stating the need for “*counting frames, abacuses, or puzzles*” as these hands-on tools are particularly beneficial for children with learning delays. **Respondent 8**, on the other hand, pointed out the potential of integrating technology into teaching, highlighting that access to “*a TV or projector for*

showing educational videos” could keep children engaged, especially those who struggle with traditional chalkboard-based teaching.

This consistent demand for better physical resources reveals a belief that the right tools can bridge learning gaps and make lessons more interactive, engaging, and adaptable to the needs of slow learners and children requiring additional support.

4.4.2 Desire for Inclusive Education and Special Needs Training

A second strong and recurring theme is the teachers’ desire for targeted training in inclusive education and the identification and management of special needs. Several teachers admitted feeling inadequately prepared to address the diverse needs in their classrooms, particularly when it comes to children with developmental delays or disabilities.

Respondent 1 expressed a clear need for training that would help her “*identify children with special needs early like signs of autism or dyslexia*”. This points to a gap in diagnostic awareness, which is essential for timely intervention.

Respondent 4 advocated for a comprehensive approach to inclusive education, requesting training on “*how to handle children with speech delays, physical challenges, or behavioural problems*”. This mirrors **Respondent 3**’s request for “*refresher training on classroom management for mixed-ability learners*”, recognising that a diverse classroom often requires advanced strategies to keep all pupils engaged simultaneously.

Respondent 6’s request for workshops on “*creative phonics teaching*” reflects an understanding that literacy struggles are common and require fresh, engaging approaches,

while **Respondent 5**'s call for more knowledge in "*early childhood psychology*" demonstrates a recognition that understanding how young children think and learn is a key part of designing effective interventions.

Overall, this pattern reflects that professional knowledge gaps in special education, differentiated instruction, and child development remain a major challenge. Teachers recognise the importance of having these skills and are actively asking for training that goes beyond theory to provide practical, immediately applicable strategies.

4.4.3 Institutional and Leadership Support

Another clear pattern is the belief that systemic and institutional changes both within the school and from education authorities are necessary to create an enabling environment for inclusive teaching.

Several teachers highlighted the role that school leadership and the Ghana Education Service (GES) could play in providing consistent support. **Respondent 1** recommended "*more in-service training*" and funding for teaching aids so that teachers would not have to rely on their own salaries to buy materials. **Respondent 2** pointed out that recruiting teaching assistants or volunteers would reduce the workload and make individualised attention more feasible.

Respondent 4 called for professional support from outside specialists, suggesting that "*speech therapists or special educators*" should visit periodically to guide teachers in working with children with complex needs. **Respondent 7** raised the importance of involving teachers in decision-making processes so that any plans reflect the realities of

the classroom, while **Respondent 8** suggested the creation of a shared “*resource room*” so teachers could access common teaching materials without having to individually acquire them.

The underlying message here is that, while teachers are willing to innovate and adapt, their capacity to do so is greatly influenced by leadership decisions, resource allocation, and institutional policies. A more responsive and collaborative leadership style, combined with systemic resource planning, could significantly boost teachers’ ability to manage diverse learning needs effectively.

4.4.4 Priority “One Thing” Requests

When asked for the single most important thing that would help them feel more prepared, the teachers’ responses could be grouped into four broad categories:

1. **Complete Teaching Kits:** **Respondent 1** requested “*a full set of good-quality teaching materials for KG like books, puzzles, charts, and toys*”.
2. **Human Support:** **Respondent 2** emphasised the importance of “*a permanent teacher assistant*” to share the workload.
3. **Specialist Training:** **Respondent 3** asked for “*training on inclusive education with practical strategies*”, while Teacher 5 wanted “*regular workshops every term*” to strengthen her skills.
4. **Infrastructure and Technology:** **Respondent 4** desired “*a bigger classroom with enough space for activity corners*”, while Teacher 8 called for “*a projector or TV*” to enhance visual engagement.

These one-thing requests reveal that while many teachers focus on acquiring material resources, others prioritise human support and professional development, and some emphasise the physical learning environment. This diversity in priorities reflects the multifaceted nature of inclusive education where teaching success depends not just on materials, but also on classroom conditions, human capacity, and specialised training.

4.5 Conclusion

The findings from this study reveal that while teachers in the Effutu Municipality demonstrate dedication and creativity in managing diverse learning needs, significant gaps remain in resources, training, and institutional support. Teachers rely heavily on improvisation due to inadequate teaching and learning materials, while limited knowledge in inclusive education and special needs management constrains their effectiveness. Strong calls were made for targeted professional development, better classroom infrastructure, and leadership-driven support systems. Overall, enhancing teacher preparedness will require a holistic approach that combines resource provision, continuous training, and collaborative school leadership to create inclusive and equitable early childhood learning environments.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary, conclusions, and recommendations drawn from the study on teacher preparedness for managing diverse learning needs in early childhood classrooms in the Effutu Municipality. The purpose of the study was to explore how early childhood teachers perceive their own level of preparedness, the strategies they employ in addressing diverse learning needs, and the barriers and supports that influence their efforts. The chapter begins with a summary of the key findings from the data analysis, followed by conclusions that highlight the main insights of the study. Finally, recommendations are provided for teachers, school leadership, education authorities, and policymakers, with the aim of improving inclusive teaching practices and strengthening teacher capacity in the Effutu Municipality and similar contexts.

5.2 Summary of the Study

This study examined teacher preparedness for managing diverse learning needs in early childhood classrooms in the Effutu Municipality, with a focus on exploring teachers' perceptions, practices, challenges, and desired support systems. The research was guided by four key questions: (1) how early childhood teachers perceive their knowledge, skills, and confidence in addressing diverse learning needs; (2) the specific strategies and

modifications teachers use to accommodate children with different learning needs; (3) the barriers and facilitators that influence teachers' ability to manage diverse learning needs; and (4) the forms of support and professional development teachers consider essential for improving their capacity.

The findings revealed that while teachers demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting all learners, they generally expressed mixed levels of confidence and preparedness. Many acknowledged having basic skills in adapting lessons but also admitted to gaps in identifying and addressing special learning needs such as speech delays, dyslexia, or behavioural challenges. Teachers reported using strategies such as group work, activity-based learning, and differentiated instruction but emphasized that limited resources and large class sizes restricted their effectiveness.

Barriers such as inadequate teaching and learning materials, lack of classroom space, absence of teaching assistants, and insufficient training opportunities were highlighted as major challenges. However, facilitators such as peer collaboration, community support, and teachers' personal creativity in improvising with local materials were seen as helpful.

The study further revealed that teachers strongly desired professional development in inclusive education, early childhood psychology, phonics instruction, and the use of technology in teaching. They also called for stronger institutional support, including the provision of teaching assistants, more resources, and specialist services such as speech therapists.

Overall, the study underscores that teachers in the Effutu Municipality are dedicated but require greater systemic support, capacity building, and resources to effectively manage diverse learning needs in early childhood classrooms.

5.3 Conclusion

The study set out to examine teacher preparedness for managing diverse learning needs in early childhood classrooms in the Effutu Municipality, with the aim of assessing teachers' perceptions, strategies, challenges, and support systems in fostering inclusive education. The findings revealed that although teachers in the municipality are deeply committed to supporting all learners, their level of preparedness is limited by structural, institutional, and professional constraints. While many teachers employ strategies such as activity-based learning, group work, and differentiated instruction, these are often hampered by overcrowded classrooms, lack of teaching assistants, and inadequate resources. This highlights that teacher preparedness is not solely about individual competence but is also dependent on the wider support systems within which teachers operate.

A key conclusion of the study is that teachers recognize the need for continuous professional development in inclusive education. They expressed interest in specialized training on identifying and addressing special needs such as autism, dyslexia, and speech or behavioural challenges. The desire for such capacity-building underscores the fact that teachers see professional knowledge as central to enhancing their effectiveness. However, the current gaps in training and resource provision limit their ability to respond adequately to diverse learning needs.

Institutional support also emerged as a critical factor in shaping teacher preparedness. Teachers consistently highlighted the absence of adequate teaching and learning materials, lack of infrastructure such as spacious classrooms, and minimal access to technological and specialist resources. At the same time, they pointed out the importance of school leadership and education authorities in ensuring resource allocation, organizing in-service training, and fostering collaborative support systems among teachers.

In conclusion, the study underscores that teacher preparedness for managing diverse learning needs is a multifaceted issue that requires attention at both individual and systemic levels. Teachers in Effutu Municipality are willing and committed, but without adequate training, resources, and institutional support, their capacity to create fully inclusive classrooms remains constrained. Addressing these challenges will require deliberate efforts from policymakers, education authorities, and school leaders to provide the necessary infrastructure, materials, and professional development opportunities. Only then can early childhood classrooms truly become inclusive environments where every child's learning potential is maximized.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are made to strengthen teacher preparedness for managing diverse learning needs in early childhood classrooms within the Effutu Municipality. These recommendations focus on teacher training, resource provision, institutional support, and policy implementation to create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Teachers within Effutu Municipality should be provided with regular training and workshops on inclusive education, classroom management for mixed-ability learners, and early identification of special educational needs. Specialized modules on autism, dyslexia, speech delays, and behavioural challenges should be incorporated into in-service training programs. The Ghana Education Service (GES) and local education authorities should also collaborate with universities and NGOs to deliver context-specific professional development.

To enhance teaching and learning, schools within Effutu Municipality should be adequately equipped with age-appropriate teaching and learning materials such as storybooks, phonics kits, manipulatives, and visual aids. Access to ICT resources, including projectors and educational videos, should also be expanded. Additionally, schools should establish resource rooms stocked with shared materials to support teachers across classes.

Classroom environments within Effutu Municipality should be expanded and restructured to accommodate activity-based and learner-centered methods. Adequate space for reading, play, and quiet areas will enable teachers to implement differentiated learning strategies effectively.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Research

While this study has provided valuable insights into teacher preparedness for managing diverse learning needs in early childhood classrooms in the Effutu Municipality, further investigations are recommended to expand and deepen the understanding of this subject.

Future research could compare teacher preparedness in Effutu with other municipalities or regions in Ghana to identify similarities, differences, and best practices in addressing diverse learning needs.

A long-term study tracking teachers' preparedness over several years could provide insights into how training, policy changes, and resource availability impact classroom practices and learner outcomes over time.

Further research should explore the role of parents and guardians in supporting children with diverse learning needs, especially in early childhood settings, as parental engagement strongly influences educational outcomes.

Studies could evaluate the effectiveness of specific teacher education and professional development programs in equipping teachers with the skills needed to manage inclusive classrooms.

Future research might consider incorporating the voices and experiences of children themselves to understand how diverse learners perceive inclusion, classroom support, and learning experiences.

With the increasing role of digital tools in education, studies could examine how ICT and multimedia resources can support teachers in managing mixed-ability classrooms and engaging learners with special needs.

Further research could investigate how national and local educational policies on inclusive education are translated into practice at the school level and the challenges encountered in their implementation.

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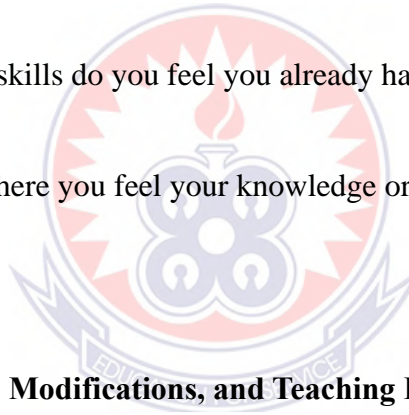


APPENDIX A
UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA
FACULTY OF APPLIED BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCES IN EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION, UEW
INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

Interview guide

Section A: Teachers' Self-Perceptions of Preparedness

1. Can you describe how confident you feel in identifying the different learning needs of children in your classroom?
2. In what ways do you feel prepared or unprepared to respond to the different learning needs you see daily?
3. What knowledge and skills do you feel you already have that help you manage diverse learning needs?
4. Are there any areas where you feel your knowledge or skills could be stronger? Please explain.



Section B: Approaches, Modifications, and Teaching Practices

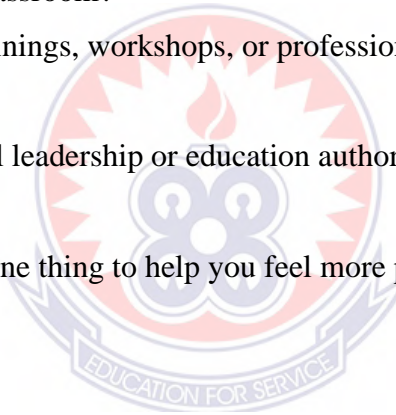
5. Can you share some specific teaching methods or strategies you use to help children with different learning needs?
6. How do you adapt your lesson plans or activities to include children who learn at different paces or in different ways?
7. Can you describe any classroom routines or modifications you have made to support all learners?
8. What has worked well for you when using these approaches, and what has not worked so well?

Section C: Barriers and Facilitators

9. From your experience, what factors make it easier for you to teach children with diverse learning needs?
10. What challenges or obstacles do you face when trying to meet the different learning needs of your pupils?
11. Are there things in your school or community that help you do this work better? If so, what are they?
12. What things make it harder? Please give examples.

Section D: Desired Support and Professional Development

13. What kind of support or resources would make it easier for you to manage diverse learning needs in your classroom?
14. Are there specific trainings, workshops, or professional development opportunities you would like to have?
15. How could the school leadership or education authorities better support you in this area?
16. If you could ask for one thing to help you feel more prepared, what would that be?



APPENDIX B

