**Exclusion Of Children With Learning Disabilities Within Ghana's
Basic Education System:
A Study In The Amansie Central District.**

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List of Acronyms

BECE   Basic Education Certificate Examinations

GES   Ghana Education Service

CLDS   Children with perceived Learning Disabilities

UNICEF   United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

ADHD   Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

MOE   Ministry of Education

SEN   Special Education Needs

JHS   Junior High School

Acknowledgements

Abstract

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states in its first article that, "…all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" (United Nations 1949:2). One of such rights is that of education for all children without discrimination (Article 26) (United Nations 1949:5). This idea of non-discrimination, whether based on a handicap or any other basis, is supported by numerous international and state legal instruments and policy papers (UNCRC 1989; UNESCO 2001; African Charter 1999; Ministry of Education 2015:2).

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the exclusions that Ghanaian children with learning disabilities experience in the classroom when they attempt to access the curriculum despite the availability of an established legal and institutional policy framework guaranteeing such rights. Eight children with perceived learning disabilities and five teachers from the Amansie central district participated in this study. In-depth interviews with the participants and non-participant observations provided the primary data. An examination of the curriculum document served as the source of secondary data. Findings show that the learning needs of children with learning disabilities are not sufficiently supported by the school curriculum currently in use, hindering participation with their peers as equals. Additional findings also indicate that teachers are constrained by the prescriptive nature of the curriculum in trying to support this category of learners. The implications for curriculum design and pedagogical practices are discussed.

Relevance to Development Studies

This study adds to the body of knowledge about how children with learning disabilities experience exclusions in the classroom in spite of being integrated into the mainstream educational system. Students may be present in the class but may not be part of it in terms of social and academic membership, demonstrating that the right to an education extends beyond simply having access to a classroom (Ferguson 2008; Peterson et al. 2016: 128). Therefore, inclusive education which could be thought of as belonging within society, goes beyond simply being present in class and includes removing obstacles to participation and accomplishing learning goals through allowing access to the school's curriculum (Lloyd 2008: 226, 234).

The SDG (Sustainable Development Goal) No. 4, which aims to "provide inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for everyone" (UNESCO 2016), emphasizes this and emphasizes the importance of education in the development debate. To accelerate the achievement of the SDGs and create a lasting change in the living conditions of vulnerable children with learning disabilities, it is necessary to raise awareness of and mitigate these exclusionary practices within basic education in Ghana.

Keywords

Inclusive education; curriculum; exclusion; children with learning disabilities; social justice; universal design for learning; critical disability studies.

Chapter 1 : Introduction

Children with perceived learning disabilities (CLDS) remain one of the largest categories of learners who are excluded from accessing school curricular content within the mainstream classroom (Kerrin 2013; Donald et al. 2010; Wentzel 2016:3-4). Due to the hidden nature of their impairments, CLDS are often labelled as "lazy" (ibid), because they are held to the same standards outlined by a centralized curriculum which provides little cues about and adaptations for such diversities in a mainstream classroom (Fitz and Nikolaidis 2020:203). This "sameness"(Malow-Iroff, Benhar, & Martin, 2008; Timberlake, 2014; Timberlake 2017:50) was precipitated by the efforts of the standards movements to ensure all students learn the same content in the same manner (Resnick and Resnick 1985; Schmoker and Marzano 1999; Ede 2006; Parks and Bridges-Rhoads 2012:309), and seems to have been strengthened by the Salamanca statement's insistence that all children irrespective of degree of disability should be educated within the same mainstream classroom to combat discriminatory behaviours towards disability (UNESCO 1994).

The Salamanca statement however, calls for a "flexible curriculum, instructional and assessment strategies to enable access for all children"(ibid), insisting that schools must make room for "the different learning styles and rates of absorption of educational contents" (UNESCO 1994). These learning styles include "auditory, visual and kinesthetics learners" (Chetty et al. 2019: 614) as well as multiple intelligences such as "linguistic, logical, spatial, bodily/kinesthetics', musical, interpersonal and intrapersonal types (Snyder 2000: 13). In fulfilling this right to education, other international legal frameworks such as Article 24 of the convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities (United Nations 2007:16-17), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 23) (UNICEF 1989), the African charter on the rights and welfare of the child (Article 11) (Unity 1999 :1), the Dakar framework on Education for all (World Education Forum 2000 :20) and the sustainable development goals (SDG4), entreat all states to provide inclusive education opportunities for all, especially for children with disabilities who suffer various forms of discrimination (Kurth et al. 2018 :471). As such standardised curricular are usually intended to be used to bridge the learning gaps between fully resourced classrooms with experienced teachers and deprived classrooms which have unskilled teachers, by providing them with pre-determined activities to achieve equitable education for all (Adams and Engelmann 1996;Parks and Bridges-Rhoads 2012:311). Yet, the mainstream school curriculum which was designed for

the "typical learner" (Smith 2006; Petersen 2016:20) excludes others learners outside this category (ibid). This implies that has become a major barrier limiting CLDS' access to meaningful learning activities within the classroom.

The inclusive education policy of Ghana draws richly from the Salamanca statement and international legal frameworks outlined above (Ministry of Education 2015). The enactment of the inclusive education policy in 2015 was in recognition of the fact that there are various individual innate characteristics which prevent children from accessing quality education in the classroom in addition to environmental and social circumstances (Ministry of Education 2015: 1-2). Therefore it set to create a conducive learning environment for students with severe and students with mild special needs (MoEYS 2003;Ametepee and Anastasiou 2015: 146) by adopting flexible curricular (MOE 2015:26). The mild disabilities include dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia, dyslexia and ADHD (MOE 2015:40).

However, in Ghana children with severe and visible disabilities like physical disabilities are educated in segregated special schools whilst those with disabilities which are not easily visible "such as partial visual and hearing impairments, behavioural problems, and learning disabilities attend regular schools, usually without identification or assessment" (Nketia 2018: 70). Due to the lack of such assessments, the national estimate by UNICEF, which found 21% (UNICEF 2020; 2021:23) of the total child population between the ages of 5 and 17 years with one or more functional difficulties, learning disabilities included, could be higher because disability is common among rural residents who are difficult to reach (WHO 2011; Ghana Statistical Service 2014: 32). This was demonstrated by a study done by Attah (2010), which Norman et al. (2021:2) mentioned. In her study, she discovered that around 70% of the 131 children sampled in the four schools under investigation had one or more learning disabilities in "reading, spelling, or mathematics"(ibid:96). The fact that learning disabilities are so common raises concerns since the current system, and the basic school curriculum in particular, is not designed to effectively accommodate children with learning disabilities.

To make the rigid school curriculum more accessible, reforms were introduced in 2018 to move away from the objectives-based curriculum used from 2007 to 2012 to the standard-based one (MOE 2018: 15). The reforms emphasize that teaching and learning should be learner-centred with activity-based practical activities, guided by the concepts of differentiation and scaffolding and universal design for learning (UDL) principles to enable access for diverse learners (Ministry of Education 2018:3,14). All of which are geared towards making the learning process enjoyable for pupils. It also proposed an extension of the school hours, pushing the closing time by an hour to enable learning goals to be accomplished

(Ministry of Education 2018:61-62). Yet, since 2018 various subject syllabi and textbooks have not been distributed to schools for use (Aboagye and Yawson 2020: 10). This implies that teachers are still relying on the old rigid curriculum and are probably still using top-down teaching methods prescribed by it, which have been found to be exclusionary (Ako 2019: 60). This suggests that attempts at democratizing to involve all children with and without learning disabilities in the learning environment has since stalled through government inaction.

1.1   Problem Statement

The problem in this context is that the school curriculum in use excludes children who suffer learning disabilities which are not considered serious enough to be admitted into the segregated special schools, but struggle to fit within the normal school for their able bodied counterparts because the curriculum in use is not flexible and differentiated. The entire learning experience for children with learning disabilities therefore is marked by low expectations and academic achievements because they are competing in a learning environment "with a set of pre-determined norm related instructional and assessment standards meant for non-disabled children" (Young 1990; Lloyd 2008:228-229).

The major problem facing Ghana's educational sector especially the pre-tertiary level is a restrictive and overloaded junior high school curriculum geared towards passing the basic education certificate examinations (Armah 2017:6). Hence the rigid nature of school curriculum coupled with its "fragmented nature", is regarded as one of the major reasons CLDS are unable to access education at the basic school level (ibid). This implies that for a diverse group of children who enter the mainstream school system, a section of them face barriers related to learner interaction with an inflexible and inaccessible content, instructional and assessment methods prescribed by the school curriculum which prevents effective participation in the learning process (Rose and Meyer 2002; Meo 2010: 22). Among these diverse groups, are children who have learning disabilities which are considered invisible and mild (Donald et al, 2010; Wentzel 2016:3), and sometimes difficult to detect. These include dysgraphia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia, dyslexia (MOE 2015:40) and impedes their ability to participate in learning activities such as reading, spelling, writing, and accounts for one of the reasons children drop out of school (Ananga 2011: 380). The study by Attah (2010) demonstrated that children with such learning disabilities generally have poorer learning

outcomes when compared to their colleagues without these conditions in the mainstream classroom setting (:97), because they show how knowledge was learned differently from the required timed pen to paper tests (Anglada 2010; Attah 2010:97).

Consequently, it may be assumed that CLDS account for part of the 30%(UNICEF 2020: 33) of the total student population in Ghana who drop out of basic school because their learning needs are not adequately supported hence their low motivation to stay. Overall, the goal of this study was to discover and comprehend how learning activities prescribed by the school curriculum excludes children with learning disabilities. In this context, exclusion referred to a child's incapacity to engage in curriculum-required learning activities due to a perceived learning disability.

1.1.1 Justification and relevance of this research

Owing to CLDS' inability to perform academically like the general school population, they are sometimes labelled as "lazy, disruptive or disobedient" (Donald et al. 2010; Wentzel 2016: 3). Name calling, "stigma, discrimination and abuse" (Okyere, Aldersey, & Lysaght, 2019; Norman et al. 2021:2) at the hands of teachers and their colleagues negatively impacts the self-esteem of CLDS and affects their ability to interact with their colleagues as peers (Hargreaves et al. 2021:89-90). Consequently, children with learning disabilities drop out of school, which could have negative repercussions for the human capital development of Ghana. This can hinder the country's ability to achieve the sustainable development goal targets such as ensuring universal education for all children (goal 4), ending generational cycles of poverty (goal 1) and ending maternal mortality (goal 3) because an educated populace aids in the realisation of these targets (UNICEF 2016).

Studies on CLDS on the continent and at the national level have largely focused on teachers efforts at differentiating the school curriculum to help all children access it (Wentzel 2016; Abosi and Alhassan 2017:72-73). This study however seeks to give a voice to the children with learning disabilities themselves to articulate how the learning experience in the classroom has been for them. This study could throw more light on how cohorts within the "normal" group of children experience basic education in Ghana. This research is therefore intended to add to the body of previous knowledge on factors which leads to exclusions from school and subsequent social exclusions.

1.1.2 Research objective and questions

The main objective of this study was to investigate whether CLDS actually participate and benefit from the learning process in the classroom by looking at their lived experiences.

The main research question was: What are the curriculum-related factors that prevent children with perceived learning disabilities from engaging in the learning process?

To collect data, these sub questions were asked;

1. How do children with learning disabilities experience learning in the classroom?
2. What type of teaching style excludes children with learning disabilities?
3. How could the assessments prescribed by the current curriculum allow room for CLDS to demonstrate meaningful learning?

Chapter 2 Literature Review And Conceptual Framework

2.1 Introduction

This section contains relevant literature reviewed with regards to how inflexible school curricula prevents CLDS from engaging in learning which is meaningful for them and the unfair assessments of such knowledge which reflects in low achievements. It also focused on how teachers are constrained by prescribed learning goals and standardized assessments in their desire to help modify the curriculum to meet the needs of such children. First of all a definition of learning disabilities is provided.

2.2 Literature Review

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) of the American Psychiatric Association, , specific learning disabilities fall under the category of neurodevelopmental disorders and manifests in a person's inability "to perceive or process information efficiently and accurately" (APA 2013:32). Noticed within formal schooling, learning disabilities manifests itself as permanent constraints in acquiring basic foundational cognitive "skills in reading, writing, and/or math (ibid). The definition goes further to indicate that specific learning disabilities do not only occur in academically poor students but also the "intellectually gifted" students who may struggle with learning demands of particular studies and is noticed during time bound examinations (ibid). This may have negative repercussions for their continuous stay in academia and subsequent occupations in adult life because of their failure to acquire these skills (ibid).

Similarly, the National Health Service (UK) in 2022 observed that a person with learning disabilities struggles to experience "new things" in the course of their life. They may also have challenges comprehending complex ideas or knowledge, acquire new skills or being responsible for themselves even though some of them manage to do so with little or no help (NHS, 2022). It went further to list the suspected causes of learning disabilities which includes; ailments during pregnancy, lack of oxygen in babies during child birth, genetic transmission of such disabilities from parents to children, early childhood diseases like meningitis and injuries (ibid). This results in children or people with ordinary or "above

average" intelligence as indicated by The Learning Disability Association of America (LDAA, 2022). Subsequently, between a person's potential and what they actually do, there frequently seems to be a gap. Because of this, learning difficulties are sometimes referred to as "hidden disabilities" because the individual may appear to be completely "normal" and to be very bright and brilliant, but may not be able to display the skill level expected of someone their age (ibid). These include; dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia (ibid).[1]

Learning happens in pupils when they are able to relate new ideas to what they previously know (Piaget 1926; Hong and Chick 2013: 31) and this involves the "simultaneous use" of the individual's "auditory, visual and perceptual " awareness to discern what is been taught (Laasonen, Service, and Virsu 2001; Hong and Chick 2013: 31). That said, for children with learning disabilities this process is not linear because there is a mismatch in the senses involved in learning processes (Hong and Chick 2013, p 32). This implies that for this group of children, new knowledge is processed much more slower than their able-bodied colleagues who grasp new concepts easily, or the message put across by the teacher is lost completely for CLDS who may be unable to connect abstract ideas with previous knowledge within the limited time frame dictated by the curriculum for lessons. This is reflected in wide achievement gaps between children with and without learning disabilities within the mainstream classroom (Bouck and Joshi 2012:140) and is indicated by the following literature.

 Gilmor et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of 23 literature reviewed to ascertain the extent of achievement gap between students with and without learning disabilities in reading comprehension. They conducted a quantitative synthesis of "180 effect sizes from the 23 studies between the period January 1, 1997 and April 26, 2016" (:334). The findings showed that children with learning disabilities, behavioural disorders and other health impairments on an average were 3.3 years behind when it came to their reading skills, when compared to their colleagues without such disabilities. However, one major limitation with this study is that all students with disability types were lumped together and not looked at individually (:342). This reflects a wide shift in focus away from children with milder forms of learning disabilities to other categories within the mainstream classroom (Polloway 2004; Smith 2006;

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[1] The use of the term CLDS in this study refers to the APA's specification as specific learning disabilities and learning difficulties by the NHS. The national inclusive policy does not provide detailed definition of learning disabilities which is specified in the document as mild learning difficulties (Ministry of Education 2015:31). This informs the use of the American Psychiatric Association (APA, 2013) and the United Kingdom's national health services' definition of this category of disability.

Bouck and Joshi 2012: 139). Additionally, the percentages of biases in the literature reviewed were not stated and this makes it problematic to accept findings wholeheartedly for generalization purposes.

In a similar vein, Fuchs et al. (2015) investigated achievement gaps for very low attaining pupils such as CLDS, as a function of whether they receive inclusive fraction instruction or specialized fraction intervention when compared to their peers as the curriculum became more challenging. Data from three "randomized control trials" carried out in three consecutive years in an urban school district with a sample size of 203 students chosen from 147 classrooms, was gathered (:137). Students in the fourth grade who scored poorly—below the 10th percentile—were targeted, and either individualized, inclusive fraction education or focused action interventions were given to these children at random. In light of the transition to the common core state standards for curriculum, the impact of both interventions was evaluated in terms of the students' better grades in comparison to their able-bodied counterparts (:140). Despite the lack of empirical evidence supporting the kind of inclusive teaching methods used through classroom observation, results revealed that, on average, students' post-test scores improved across both the inclusive teaching and the specialized intervention groups, with the specialized instruction class performing somewhat better than the inclusive instruction classes (:150). The evidence showed standard deviation values for comparing fractions ranged from 0.8 to 1.67, and for the calculation measure, they ranged from 0.87 to 2.54 (ibid). This appears to show that children with learning disabilities can learn if their teachers provide them with the necessary help. This supports the social model of disability's claims that the environment, not the learner's traits, is to blame for disabilities (Shakespeare 2006; Anastasiou and Kauffman 2017:378). The social model contends that societal attitudes of prejudice and discrimination play a crucial role in explaining why some disabilities have a negative impact on the welfare of those who have them (Blustein 2012: 575). As a result, disabilities arise from a person's limitations in interacting with their physical surroundings, institutions, and societal norms, which prevents this group of people from fully participating in their communities. (Goodley 2001; Haegele and Hodge 2016: 197). They suggest removing these barriers by overhauling social processes and, consequently, the way the educational system is set up to ensure that everyone has the chance to participate (ibid). Restructuring the curriculum in light of this context might entail tailoring the level of difficulty to each student's abilities and allotting enough time for instruction to support learning for each of them.

However, additional findings from the study conducted by Fuchs et al., 2015 demonstrated that the learning outcomes for the groups of children without disabilities significantly improved as the fraction curriculum grew wider and more challenging. Despite the inclusive initiatives, this increased the gap between the CLDS and their typical colleagues (:152). This agrees with the medical paradigm, which views disability as a biological flaw that must be treated or managed in order for a person to function in society. They contend that any sort of impairment is deeply ingrained in a person's body and cannot be eliminated or remedied by merely altering social and environmental systems to allow them to carry out daily activities as those who are not experiencing such difficulties would (Anastasiou and Kauffmann 2017: 377). This seems to imply that for some people, it is a truth and reality that their bodily functions are flawed and that they may require medical assistance in order to live a life that resembles one that is normal. As such, to place all the blame on external policies and structures may imply one is demeaning their lived experiences. This was made clear in Arnold et al's systematic evaluation of 176 academic articles published between 1980 and 2012 to assess the long-term consequences of ADHD on children's academic achievement. The study's quantitative analysis revealed that when the condition went untreated, it had a negative impact on the results of academic assessments over the long term (2020: 81) because of the condition's connection with learning disabilities (Khushabi et al. 2006; Afeti and Nyarko 2017: 1). Overall, when the therapies worked better, it led to better note-taking, higher grades, and better social skills (Arnold et al. 2020: 81).

At the national level, Afeti and Nyarko (2017) aimed to find out how common ADHD was in the Hohoe municipality in Ghana and its impact on learning outcomes of affected children when compared to other students who were not affected. Using a "simple random method", ten schools were selected and 400 children selected for data collection. Data was collected using "the disruptive behaviour disorder rating scale which includes the three subtypes of ADHD among pupils in the form of a close-ended questionnaire" (:2). Teachers were tasked to fill the questionnaire for the children because they were presumed to know the students better. This may have opened up the study to teacher bias and might limit the reliability of such information. Findings showed 12.8% of pupils sampled had ADHD, according to the analysis (:5). In comparison to females (10.5%), males had a higher prevalence rate of (14.4%). Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, hyperactivity disorder, and the mixed subtype all had prevalence rates of 8.0%, 8.5%, and 3.8%, respectively (ibid). The findings on academic achievement demonstrated a substantial difference in academic

performance across the various core subjects like mathematics, English language and science, between students with ADHD-positive status and those with a negative status (:6).

The school curriculum's impact on the teaching practices was illustrated by Timberlake et al. (2017), when they sought the views of ten teachers using a semi structured guide on how their authority and ability to teach a diverse classroom is limited by a prescriptive guide (47). The findings showed that whilst some participants saw it positively as a structure to direct teaching and learning activities, others saw it as "robotic"(:49) which made classrooms "less fun"(ibid) because they have to stick to the "aggressive pacing"(:50) of prescribed activities with little differentiation. The effect of this is that teachers in this study equated equity to holding all children irrespective of disability to the same standards and high expectations, implying that even if they had knowledge of differentiation techniques, it might not be utilized because of the belief that mere exposure to the curriculum is enough. This was evidenced by Parks and Bridges-Rhoads 2012 ethnographic study of a teacher. They realised that even though the teacher was conversant with different innovative pedagogical practices (:318), she followed strictly the rote learning strategies encouraged by the curriculum because of accountability structures (:316). Additionally, the findings showed that teacher's interactions with children were " more automatic and less thoughtful" when they followed the curriculum guide (:321). Admittedly, teacher competencies in practising inclusive pedagogical strategies for handling a diverse class depends on the "inclusive competency training for teachers" (Majoko 2019:3) which to a large extent is influenced by training from "pre-service and in-service" education (Flecha & Soler, 2013; Forlin, 2010; Kuyini & Mangope, 2011; Majoko, 2016; Majoko 2019:4) and number of years of experience within the field. This gives educators the confidence to be flexible (Timberlake et al 2017:50).

Taking into consideration the effect of inclusive instructional practices on CLDS' access to and participation in the classroom, Finkelstein, Sharma and Furlonger 2021, looked at what those practices entail. They conducted a thematic analysis of 13 literature reviewed with the aim of determining the types of teaching practices which promoted higher levels of inclusiveness in the classroom. Overarching themes extracted from the literature were grouped under " collaboration and teamwork", "determining progress", "instructional support", "organizational practices" and "social /emotional/ behavioural support"(:747, 748). These five themes guided the direct observation of teachers in inclusive classrooms. The findings from the study showed a general teachers willingness to work with stakeholders within and outside the school environment improves inclusive instructional practices (:747). With regards to assessing and monitoring students' participation in the school curriculum, a

whole child approach is adopted and teachers are not overly focused on grades (:753-754). Additionally, emotional support was provided to students in the literature reviewed to foster a positive learning environment. However, the use of observation opens the study up for biases and not all teacher inclusive practices can be directly observed. In sum, inclusive teaching practices distilled from the literature implies that aside the skills and knowledge the profession demands in introducing new ideas to children, being emotionally invested in children's welfare is required in making sure a diverse classroom feels a sense of belonging.

In addition, a qualitative study conducted by Florian and Black-Hawkins 2011 in two primary schools in Scotland to examine how teachers implemented teaching practices which included everyone involved 11 teachers who were observed and interviewed on how they translated inclusive theories into practice (:815-816). Findings from their analysis showed that school policies on grouping children based on ability levels as well as policies within the educational system impeded on teachers' abilities to adopt innovative teaching and assessment methods to improve learning sometimes through play (:819). Their study found out that these policies limited teacher's agency in deciding what teaching practices was best for their students (:820).

This was confirmed by Nguyen et al, 2022. Using a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods, the study looked into how teachers perceived their freedom within the professional space to teach mathematics. The quantitative research was carried out in the United States of America to examine the impacts of mathematics teacher professional improvement and certification in curricular content on their classroom instructional practices (:5). The two year graduate program was based on the vision of a state sanctioned body to oversee mathematics instruction. The national council of teachers of mathematics provided general guidelines on how to teach the subject, mandatory textbooks and suggested time to be spent on various topics. Lastly, it carried out standardized assessments for measurement purposes. The surveys and interviews of a sample size of 56 teachers, comprising of 25 professionally upgraded and 31 non-upgraded teachers was analysed quantitatively (:670). Analysis of the data revealed that 24.53% of participants had positive perceptions about their professional space given the pre-set curricular and pedagogical guidance from the state and district, whilst 75.47% of teachers felt that such oversight bodies' work hindered their flexibility in math instruction (:671). However, when teachers had greater control over the daily activities within the classroom, their negative perceptions changed towards state policies and curricular frameworks (:678). This implies that when it came to student learning , a prescriptive curriculum with goals and competencies, and time bound standardized

assessments (Erss 2018: 245) limits teacher freedoms in ensuring everybody learns especially CLDS. In situations where teachers are held responsible for students performance during final exams, it may misplace the priority of learning to just passing examinations.

In regard of teacher freedom to adapt curriculum, a study was conducted by Almumen 2020 to investigate how the universal design for learning (UDL) was adopted to help all students, including those with learning difficulties, have access to a variety of learning environments. Five teachers were chosen at random to provide their opinions and was supplemented by personal observation of their UDL practices in the inclusive classroom. (:4). Analysis of the qualitative data collected showed that though Kuwaiti law did not explicitly demand the use of UDL instructional practices, teachers studied and practiced it on their own because of the perceived benefits to children with and without disabilities (:11). Overall, the framework reduced barriers CLDS faced in accessing the general curriculum through technology. Participants observed provided multiple ways of engaging students in showing them how to build tents in the desert using practical items (:8). They were also observed presenting ideas in multiple ways using multi-sensory instructional techniques to engage students with different categories of difficulties and engage them in their preferred learning styles (:9). Although the use of interviews together with direct observation enhanced the validity of the findings, the sample size of five teachers makes generalizations of findings impossible. Additionally, the focus of the study was too broad and would have been prudent to narrow its lens to early childhood.

A similar study was conducted by Garbutt et al. 2018, in the Trans-Nzoia county in Kenya on teacher support strategies used in supporting learners with disabilities. With a sample size of 351, the researchers used both qualitative and quantitative methods to determine the types of strategies used to support children with learning disabilities (:164). Findings showed that instructors interviewed used the concept of UDL under the broad social constructivists theoretical framework as one of the strategies in making the general curriculum accessible to CLDS (:167). It showed "that 64.7% of instructors claimed to always support children with learning difficulties", "64.4% undertook remedial activities to help children with learning disabilities" and "58% actually used several support strategies" (:174). This means that in reality only 58% of the total participants actually implemented inclusive practices that included every child with or without difficulties. Teachers assisted learners by moving those with mild visual impairments closer to the chalk board, giving them easier assessments and provided individualized support for CLDS (:176). The major limitation identified in this study was the use of interviews, focus group discussions to elicit responses from teachers

without confirming through direct observation of teaching and learning activities as it happened for verification purposes. Noticeably absent was the voice of the students in both studies to ascertain whether these strategies were beneficial for them. This may have accounted for the high percentage of teachers claiming to use differentiated instructional practices. Additionally, there was no mention of the use of assistive devices to facilitate learning which may be attributed to the lack of financial resources in such a developing country (Willoughby et al 2019:440).

In line with critical disability's critique of western conceptions and dominance in the area of disability studies, Song 2016 questioned the universality of the UDL. Song found in a study in two township schools in South Africa that the unique history and socio economic conditions of the country marginalizes groups of people with disabilities who are unable to secure adequate funding for the educational needs of children as such, the implementation of UDL principles is not feasible given the requirements (917). Thus UDL is viewed as another western imposition on the global south (:912-913).

In attempts to measure the educational goals and experiences outlined by the school curriculum, formative and summative assessments are used (Black and Wiliam 2018: 553-554). Formative assessment in this context means testing used for modifying instruction to improve learning whilst summative assessments are used for grading and accountability purposes (Hayward 2015: 30). However, when policy makers use summative tests as a way of policing instruction in classrooms and justification for allocating resources, then teachers' attention shifted from learning as a process to preparation for standardized testing (Madaus and Russell 2010: 21). These were found to be useful for individual and school ranking purposes (Black and Wiliam 2010: 85). Consequently, children with lower grades developed low self-images since they saw their worth tied to such grades (ibid).

This was seen" in a five year longitudinal study of 23 school pupils" conducted by Hargreaves et al. in four London primary schools to take a look at how these children's status as underachievers impacts their social interactions in school (2019: 82). Even though analysis focused on only qualitative data gathered during the first year, findings revealed that these groups of children associated success in school with hard work which is, putting in extra hours, listening attentively, being obedient and knowing the curriculum content better than others, all of which they tied to their suitability for future employment prospects (: 85-87). This implies that for low achieving students, they perceived that in order to catch up with the high achieving colleagues, they needed to sacrifice leisure hours both at school and at home to emulate them or surpass their grades. It also showed that the focus on specific goals

excluded children's interests which inhibited their ability to express themselves and interests as individuals (:88). Their low status made them vulnerable to bullying. The children expressed generally negative feelings towards learning which ranged from frustration to boredom and self-inflicted stigma (:89). Overall, findings from this study seems to suggest that their low achieving status made them subordinate to their peers in spite of the fact that they attend same school and participate in the same class lessons. Such feelings of low self-esteem may limit their ability to interact with their peers and in the society as they grow older.

Lastly, in a study by Marino et al. 2014, students with learning disabilities and their peers were provided with multiple representations of information and alternative assessment strategies through video games. Findings showed that this innovative formative exercise excited the students and afforded them the chance to apply practically what they had learnt in a science lesson. The students with learning disabilities indicated their preference for this type of assessment because it afforded them a chance to demonstrate their strengths as compared to paper and pen assessments which excludes them (:94-95). Subjecting all learners to the same summative evaluations have been found to discourage students with learning disabilities who receive very low grades from continuing their education in Ghana (Kwapong and Owusu-Acheampong 2021: 43), which is one of the main reasons why children leave school early (Acheampong et al. 2006; Kwapong and Owusu-Acheampong 2021: 39).

In conclusion, this a review of relevant literature related to how learning disabilities in children reflects in wide achievement gaps between them and their colleagues in mainstream classrooms. It also looked at teacher perceptions of the curriculum's impact on their pedagogical practices. Lastly, it looked at how assessments impacted the self-esteem of CLDS and how they would have preferred to demonstrate what they learn differently.

2.2.1 Theoretical Framework

To demonstrate that the inclusion of CLDS in a regular classroom does not automatically result in access to the curriculum (Pugach and Warger 2001: 195), I connect theories and concepts from disability studies, Universal Design for Learning, and social justice under the conceptual framework. A conceptual framework like this can reveal how CLDS are excluded from the academic and social life of the schooling experience.

2.2.2 Critical Disability Studies

This study utilized the concepts of ableism and disablism in critical disability studies to draw out exclusionary beliefs and practices children in this study context face as a result of their inclusion in the mainstream school. It was utilized to explain how notions of ableism within Ghanaian society has influenced pedagogy and assessments in the basic school system to the extent that right from the design stage of the school curriculum, much attention is not paid to how CLDS will access it. Ableism is dominated by the belief that a typical human body functions according to a shared communal view of how a normal body and mind should look and function like to fit within society (Campbell 2019:147-148). As such, any deviation from this ideal is frowned upon and seen as disablism. Steps are then taken to fix and cure the anomaly. Those unable to fit within the prescribed box are cast as "dishuman" or the "the other" (Goodley and Runswick-Cole 2014; Goodley, Runswick-Cole and Liddiard 2016: 774). This corresponds to the views of the medical model of disability which situates the responsibility for fixing impairments at the individual level to ensure people function properly within society (Haegele and Hodge 2016:194). Disabilities are thus seen as an individual biological and medical predicament. A major critique of this model is that when it comes to mental, intelligence and behavioural health issues, it promotes "stigmatization" (Hogan, 2019: 16).

This is in sharp contrast to the social model whose earliest proponent Engel, called for the need to move away from the "medical laboratory" (ibid) in finding the causes of disabilities to the individual's "social environment"(ibid). Arguments for this model state that disability is society's reaction to people with biological "impairments" (Oliver 1990; Gallagner et al. 2014: 1123). As such, institutional barriers and unequal power structures create a huge gap between disabled people's potential and their actual achievement when compared with their non-disabled counterparts (ibid). Proponents of the social model therefore situate the problem of non-participation of a person with disability within

his/her "environment" (Siebers 2008; Gallagner et al. 2014: 1123), which includes "the cultural, economic, institutional, and educational practices" (ibid).

Apart from these visible structures, the social model is particularly interested in norms, experiences, beliefs, language, attitudes and interpretations about the types of bodies which are desired and belong within the cultural context (Anastasiou and Kauffman 2017). This is evident when the focus is on learning disabilities which are easily open to stigmatization (Gallagner et al. 2014: 1124). The social model therefore calls for the removal of societal barriers to the full participation of persons with impairments.

Situating it within the Ghanaian context, a study done by Avoke, (2002 :770-771) established the prevalence of negative attitudes towards "mental retardation" which has been subjected to prejudices and attributed to religious causes. Through socialisation children are taught the societal needs and the required abilities to meet such needs (Egan 2014:65). They are taught which bodies deviate from the norm. These negative attitudes are in response to such perceived defects and reflect in the negative labelling of persons with learning impediments (Corsini and Auerbach; Avoke 2002: 772) which has seeped into Ghanaian mainstream schools as evidenced by a study by Mantey (2017: 21). This seems to suggest that what a society values and wishes to preserve may find its way into educational curricula through behaviours it encourages and sometimes discourages, and the standards it expects every child to achieve to earn respect. Therefore the basic school curricula's overloaded content, limited time allocations to topics and over emphasis on the knowledge and understanding domains instead of practical hands-on application of such knowledge (Ghartey-Ampiah 2006: 12) has inadvertently led to a situation where teachers equate learning with the whole class ability to memorize and repeat facts verbatim in assessments (Acheampong et al. 2006:171). This means that a child's inability to perform such tasks may be interpreted as deviation from the normal.

Taking the work of Avoke (2002:770-771) as evidence, it can be argued that the Ghanaian school system can be considered a platform for promoting ableist notions of being through curriculum, classroom and pedagogical organizations (Goodley et al. 2019: 988). This implies that ableist presumptions that have low expectations of CLDS' performance undermine their educational achievement through one size fits all instructional strategies and standardised assessments that do not challenge them sufficiently and make accommodations for them.

2.2.3 Universal Design For Learning

According to Meo (2008: 24), giving every student the same chance to succeed is the goal of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach to teaching and learning. When this framework is used, the assumption is that barriers to learning for children including those with learning difficulties are found in the environment and not necessarily within the child and this includes having access to the school curriculum (Smith et al. 2019: 174). Students have more freedom with this approach to learn the classroom material, engage with it, and show what they have learned. It makes a strong emphasis on proactively offering numerous channels for representation, expression, action, and participation to guarantee universal access within the learning environment to learners, especially those who are disadvantaged (Rose and Meyer 2002; Meo 2013: 22).This is done in acknowledgement of the many ways in which people learn. This variability interacts with students' emotional and psychological states to either support or obstruct learning. Therefore, it urges that curricula be created from the bottom up to accommodate this diversity; additionally, it must be universal by taking into account each student's talents, background, and interests in order to offer real-world learning opportunities (Hitchcock et al. 2002: 11- 12). This implies that flexible learning objectives, strategies, resources, and assessments will be produced by a flexible curriculum and instructional design to accommodate everyone.

The principles of the UDL include, "providing students with multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement in the classroom"(Rose and Meyer 2000; 2002, 2006; Jimenez et al. 2007:45). The representation principle will be used to look at whether the curriculum in use is designed to assist teachers provide information in multiple ways for a diverse classroom (Hitchcock et al. 2002:9). The principle of expression will be used to determine whether CLDS are permitted to demonstrate learning has taken place in multiple ways. Lastly, the engagement aspect will be used to investigate whether teachers are guided to motivate CLDS so that they are motivated intrinsically to enjoy learning (Jimenez et al 2007:45).

The justification for the use of the concept is that the UDL as a learner-centred pedagogical approach differs from the dominant teacher centred approaches most African educational systems are known for (O'Sullivan 2002; Chisholm and Leyendecker 2008; Altinyelken 2010: 151). This approach sees learners as active agents with a choice to contribute to the co-construction of knowledge (Smith et al. 2019: 175).

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2.4 Parity Of Participation

This paper also considers the work of Fraser. Even though Fraser's concept of parity of participation was not originally used in the school context, it will be used here to explore the experiences of CLDS through the beliefs that; school resource allocations must ensure all children participate actively and equally in lessons; recognition that all children must be treated as equals, and presented with fair opportunities to partake in decision making in class irrespective of barriers (Fraser 2003; Fraser 2010: 365). In doing this, the study is linking the concept of parity of participation to the three principles of justice as defined by Fraser which includes recognition, representation and voice, thus, "combining recognition with redistribution" (Fraser 2001:25). These concepts will be used to illustrate how socially accepted definitions of academic excellence within the school system makes children with learning disabilities who in this study double as low achievers, subordinates to their high achieving colleagues who are normal.

The "status model of recognition", as Fraser refers to it, is essential to this framework. This concept sees misrecognition as a social status issue where cultural and institutionalized barriers have historically prevented marginalized groups of people from achieving respect within society (Fraser 2001: 24). It will be useful in this study to indicate instances of misrecognition and explain why low achieving students' performance in assessments prescribed by the school curriculum makes them inferior to their high achieving colleagues and hinders equal participation as peers within the school environment. It will also be used to look at how internalisation of this low achieving status in children with learning disabilities leads to social isolation due to lack of interaction and a learned sense of helplessness among children with learning disabilities.

Lastly, it will also be used to illustrate how classroom resources in the form of teacher attention is inequitably distributed during lessons and show how the voices and agency of children with learning disabilities in determining their interests, pace of learning and requests for additional help are disregarded. This is considered an injustice because it limits their ability to achieve self-esteem and has negative repercussions for peer interactions and participation within the classroom and school as a whole (Kamman 2001; Mand 2007:8).

Similar to the conception of social justice by Fraser, the central tenet of Rawls' theory of justice as fairness is the conviction that everyone should be treated equally as holders of

rights in a society that prioritizes the underprivileged. There are two guiding principles in it. The first principle, which addresses political institutions, asserts that everyone has the same rights, including the freedom of speech, and that these rights should not be restricted (2004: 13). The equality principle is the second tenet. Although Rawls acknowledged that inequalities in societies cannot be avoided, he argued that a just society should find ways to reduce inequalities by providing safety nets for the weak and ensuring that everyone has an equal opportunity to run for public office through education (ibid). On the other hand, Hayek rejects the notion of social justice as "meaningless" (Hayek 1976;Lister 2013: 410). He claims that inequalities are the outcome of individual personal decisions and deeds and contends that it is unrealistic to expect social justice to be brought about by impersonal social processes and institutions (Hayek 1976; Lister 2013: 412).

The "communitarian vision" (Christensen and Dorn 1997; Artiles et al. 2006:263) of social justice was chosen for this study's purposes instead of Hayek's "merit based perspective" (Christensen and Dorn 1997; Artiles et al. 2006:264) because the study agrees that equitable access to and distribution of educational resources are necessary for achieving true inclusion in schools and society (Rawls 1971; Artiles et al. 2006:264).

In conclusion, the concepts of critical disability studies, UDL and Fraser's conception of social justice used were deemed fit for this study because they were used to tease out violations to the rights of children with learning disabilities in the school environment specifically, their access to curricula content. Child rights specified under the united nations children's rights convention specifically Articles (28) right to education (UNCRC 1989:8), (23)(3) rights of disabled children to have their special needs recognised (ibid:8), (19) (1) protection of the child against all forms of violations (ibid:5) and (13) "freedom of expression" (ibid:4) were focused on.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Primary and secondary data sources were employed in this qualitative research study. This case study investigated the ways in which the school curriculum and related issues limit the ability of students with learning disabilities to participate in classroom lessons. It was a case study because it is an in-depth examination (Gerring 2004:342) of the phenomenon of non-participation in class, which is of relevance to this study since it is the "single phenomenon within its real life context" (Yin 1993: 2001:330).

3.2 Background information on the study area

The Amansie central is one of the 43 administrative districts under the Ashanti region (Ghana Statistical Service 2014: x). It has an estimated population size of 93,052 (Ghana Statistical Service 2021: 104). The area is inhabited by rural dwellers who make up 87.1% of the population, translating into a figure of 81,022 persons (ibid).

In the district, 26.1% of those aged 11 and older are illiterate, compared to 73.9% of the general population. Men are more likely than women to be literate compared to women (Ghana Statistical Service 2014: x). The literacy rate for both the Ghanaian and English languages is 69.9%. 21.9% of individuals between the ages 3 and older have never gone to school, 41.7% are presently enrolled, and 36.4% have never attended school (ibid).

The district's overall population is made up of about 3.9% people with some sort of handicap. Women make up a higher percentage of that population than men do (3.8% vs. 4.1%) (Ghana Statistical Service 2014: xi). Sight, hearing, speech, physical, intellectual, and emotional disabilities are the prevalent ones in the district. Nearly 44.0% of those who identify as disabled have never attended a formal educational institution (ibid).

3.2.1 Demographics Of Respondents

The unit of data collection and analysis (Yin 2009: 48) were CLDS in two anonymised basic schools within the district. Basic education now per the current reforms starts from the kindergarten level to the senior high school level, with children typically between ages six and eighteen (Ministry of Education 2018: 5). A CLDS is defined here as a child

between the ages of 8 and 18 who is still in school and fails consistently to demonstrate basic understanding of lessons measured through assessments (APA 2013:32). However child participants selected were between the ages of 13 to 18 years and at the junior high school (grade 7 to 9). Ten CLDS were interviewed by the research assistant utilizing in depth semi-structured interviews. The interviews took place once with each participant and lasted between 15 and 45 minutes; eight of those interviews were voice recorded with the study participants' permission.

Table 1 A profile of the study participants

Name of participant (anonymised)	Age	Sex	Class	School	Date interviewed
Kojo	16	Male	Jhs 1	A	19-08-22
Kwaku	18	Male	Jhs3	A	21-08-22
Akosua	17	Female	Jhs3	B	23-08-22
Yaa	17	Female	Jhs1	A	24-08-22
Afi	13	Female	Jhs1	B	25-08-22
Freda	13	Female	Jhs1	B	26-08-22
Kwame	14	Male	Jhs2	A	27-08-22
Tuah	18	Male	Jhs3	A	27-08-22

SOURCE: Field data (September 2022).

The opinion of teachers selected from the same school as the student participants were sought for verification purposes. Five teachers from the schools where those pupils were enrolled as well as one headmaster were also interviewed. This was done to ascertain their perceptions of their capacity to recognize and cater to the learning requirements of CLDS in the classroom within the confines of the prescribed course material. The district officer for special needs education was interviewed to seek her views on the state's support for these children in school. The table below contains their characteristics.

Table 2 Teacher characteristics

Name of teacher (anonymised)	Sex	Number of Years in service	School	Date interviewed
Afoko	Female	8	A	23-08-2022
Gregory	Male	5	A	22-08-2022
Thomas	Male	4	B	19-08-2022
Manu	Female	9	B	24-08-2022
Headteacher (HT)	Male	19	A	27-08-2022
Special education officer	Female	6	District education office	23-08-2022

Source: Field data (September 2022).

3.3.2 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection methods used included structured and semi structured interviews, participant observation and review of curriculum documents, class attendance records and assessment records (Yin 2009:89). Semi-structured interview was used as the primary research technique since it was the most appropriate for the nature of the research topic and the type of data I was looking for from the study participants.

While in depth semi-structured interviews were mostly used as the major primary data collection method in this study, a range of secondary data sources were also used. Such as the school syllabus and curriculum.

   Lastly, passive participant observation (Spradley 1980; Hojholt and Kousholt 2014: 326) was used to give an account of the interactions between a teacher and pupils within an ongoing classroom lesson without modification. Special attention was paid to the children with disabilities; their body language, behaviour and active participation /non-participation in the lesson, as well as how much attention the teacher paid to this group of children when compared to their abled bodied colleagues.

3.3.3 Sampling Technique

Out of a total school population of over 200 pupils, the study was only interested in a small number (Miles and Huberman 1994; Campbell et al. 2020:653) of children identified as

having learning disabilities based on the criteria outlined in table 2. As a non-probability technique, it was used because the study was particularly interested in how CLDS engage in learning activities in a mainstream classroom and sought to get an in depth picture(Palinkas et al.2015;Campbell et al. 2020:653) of how the learning environment facilitates academic achievement and the development of self-esteem of children with learning disabilities. Participants comprised eight CLDS, five teachers, one headteacher and the district officer for special education in the district.

3.3.4 Inclusion Criteria

Headteachers and teachers assisted in the purposeful sampling of the basic schools from which the study's participants were selected. Identification of learning disorders at the school level by teachers who recognize the traits of the disorder in children based on past experiences (Ahmad 2016: 92). Considered informal, this is done by reconciling past observations of similar traits with present occurrences in other children to offer a diagnoses (Eraut 1994; Eraut 2002: 375-376). Though this may be open to teacher bias, findings by Snowling et al. (2011:164-165) confirmed that teacher observations about the progress of children's reading abilities indeed constitutes a valid early identification avenue for dyslexia because of the amount of time teachers spend with CLDS which leads to cumulative data collected over an appreciable time period (Snowling 2013:10). This aids the timely identification and treatment of learning disabilities before they get out of hand (Souroulla 2009:491). Since 1995, inclusive education information has been introduced into the Ghanaian teacher training curriculum with the goal of making it easier to identify disabilities within the mainstream classroom (Kuyini 2004; ofori-Addo,Worgbeyi and Tay 1999; Kuyini and Mangope 2011:22). All teacher trainees undergo a mandatory two credit special education needs course at the various colleges of education (Nketsia et al.2020:53). The teacher therefore is an important informant in identifying learning disability aside parents (Worthy et al 2018).

Teachers reported that their school had students who were now enrolled who had learning disabilities. The children with learning disabilities who served as the study's main subjects were chosen because they met the primary study requirements of being pupils in public schools who had learning disabilities and were chosen from two schools within the district. Children exhibiting characteristics of dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia, which translated into poor performance in reading and numeracy, were the only ones who met the inclusion criteria for this study's participant selection. The characteristics are tabulated below:

Table 3 Inclusion Criteria

Dyslexia	Dysgraphia	Dyscalculia
the incapacity to recognize, analyse, and interact with particular word sounds	"tight, awkward pencil grip and body position"	having trouble counting, memorizing number facts, and doing math operations
unable to recognize and distinguish between different phonemes or speech sounds	"tiring quickly while writing, and avoiding writing or drawing tasks"	the inability to accurately measure, tell the time, count money, and estimate number quantities
"difficulties with word decoding, fluency, reading speed, rhyme, spelling, vocabulary, comprehension, and written expression"	difficulty with letter formation as well as irregular word or letter spacing	difficulty with problem-solving and mental math
	Trouble drawing or writing within the borders or on a line	
	having problems writing down one's thoughts	
	"difficulty with syntax structure and grammar"	
	"large gap between written ideas and understanding demonstrated through speech"	

Source: (Cortiella and Horowitz 2014:3-4)

3.3.5 Exclusion Criteria

Children with visual, hearing, or physical impairments and those from low-income families were excluded from the study (Cortiella and Horowitz 2014:3). However, because learning disabilities are so common in rural impoverished areas (Peterson et al.2016:122), including the ones where the study was conducted, it was challenging to strictly separate poverty and learning disabilities. Nevertheless, the selection criteria was based on characteristics outlined in table 1.

3.3.6 Recruitment Of A Research Assistant

The research assistant who doubles as a gate keeper, was recruited because of his 22 years of experience within the Ghana Education Service and his conversance with the various policies and curricular reforms over the years. This "insider" (Adu-Ampong and Adams 2019: 587) status helped in gaining permission from both schools and parents to conduct the interviews because of his experience and good track record of caring for and building rapport with children and his familiarisation with the code of conduct of the service. Due to his long service, he had come across several children with learning disabilities and was instrumental in identifying CLDS, together with the other teacher participants. His fluency in both English and Twi languages also proved very useful. He translated the audio recordings from Twi into English language. Due to my absence, we spoke at length via telephone on what data needed to be collected and how, ethically. At the end of each day, I listened to each audio he sent and gave feedback which proved useful for subsequent interviews. The research assistant played an "expanded role" (Temple and Edwards 2002; Deane and Stevano 2016: 215) by conducting the entire fieldwork which involved, identifying and interviewing children with learning disabilities, contacting their parents and other relevant key informants.

   Although a protocol containing questions to be asked was designed beforehand, it was not meant to be overly prescriptive. We analysed each audio recording sent and his views were sought in understanding what the participants revealed in the audio recordings and in fine tuning the questions. This means that the research assistant wielded a lot of influence over "the research process and outcomes" (Dean and Stevano 2016: 217).

   Additionally, in view of how sensitive the issue of learning disabilities and low achievements is to the self-esteem of the participants and parents, care was taken in this study not to humiliate them any further or hurt the feelings of their parents. The parents

were informed that their wards were chosen because they have been identified as having difficulties with literacy and numeracy and their candid opinions on what goes on in the classroom during the delivery of these lessons would be appreciated. Participants were allowed to determine the location and time of the interviews. Before the interview started the research assistant engaged parents in low-pitched conversations about the academic performance of their wards. This was to prevent further stigmatization through gossip by neighbours. Parents were assured of the anonymity and privacy of their children in writing and verbally.

Overall, his reputation made it easier to gain permission for interacting with the study participants, however meta data in the form of body language, facial expressions and silences were lost (Fujii 2010: 232). Nonetheless, I noticed from the tone of their voices in the recordings, how frustrating their predicaments must be for them especially with respect to their academic performances. Their emotions were apparent when in some cases their answers dropped into whispers which could indicate embarrassment and disappointment. However, the research assistant encouraged them by acknowledging their uniqueness and made them feel seen.

3.3.7 Ethics

Ethical issues were taken into account to support the idea that all children engaging in research have a right to have their human rights protected (Abebe and Besell 2014:128). The interviews with the children who have CLDS were conducted from a child rights perspective. Children with CLDS were viewed as competent beings (Punch 2002: 322), research subjects (Mayne, Howitt and Rennie 2018:6) who can articulate their views and experiences because of their age range which fell within thirteen and eighteen years. In acknowledgement of such rights to be researched in a dignified manner (Beazley et al. 2009: 370), the researcher perceived CLDS to have developed the capacity to voice out their opinions without needing an adult as a valid medium (California Department of Education 2022).

Although the interview between the researcher and the participants started off as a professional one, it changed throughout the interview into an intimate one where experiences, difficulties, and failures were discussed. The research assistant made a point of neither making fun of or shaming the participants for their subpar academic work.

Therefore, the ethic of care was upheld by doing the interviews in settings that provided privacy and comfort for the participants. To protect their privacy and to make sure that nothing bad happens to them as a result of this study, the participants' names as well as those of their schools, were pseudonymized. Permission was sought from the district directorate which granted access to the district special officer, the two selected schools, headteachers , teachers and children as participants.

Another major ethical consideration was to be mindful of the power dynamics between the teacher and the children. In societies dominated by adults, children are vulnerable. They have uneven power relationships with adults, and many aspects of their existence are governed and constrained by adults (Alderson and Goodey 1996; Punch 2002: 323). This is especially true in the school context (Punch 2002: 328). This may have been exacerbated by the cultural demands of respect towards the elderly in Ghanaian societies. To counter this, voluntary consent of the children and their parents were sought throughout the process. Participants were reminded that they could revoke their permission to be interviewed and recorded at any point in time without any repercussions. Letters containing parental consent and permission from the schools were not attached because of anonymity issues. However they were made available to supervisors for grading purposes.

3.3.8 Positionality

My background as a teacher employed by the Ghana Education Service since 2018 had a significant impact on my decision to conduct this research (Holmes 2020: 2). As a teacher, I am conscious of my duties and obligations to meet the needs of all the students in my care, but I am not familiar with what it is like to be a student with learning disabilities. I am interested in knowing how CLDS see learning in a classroom environment that was not designed with them in mind from their own perspective.

3.3.9 Analysis

In order to identify topics and gradually incorporate them into higher order key themes that addressed the overall research questions, I first conducted a careful analysis of the data using thematic data analysis, "which involves discovering, interpreting, and reporting patterns and clusters of meaning within the data" (Ritchie et al. 2013; Kiramba 2018: 297). In order to create categories and find emergent themes, particularly those connected to the study issue, the data was subjected to the application of pre-determined codes derived from the

theoretical framework's concepts before being coded (Braun and Clark 2006; Vaismoradi et al. 2013: 402) and grouped by hand (Basit 2003: 147) in accordance with the research questions. The transcribed data was coded into 32 codes. These were further collapsed into 11 codes for analysis. Below is a table containing the codes and their frequency in the interviews.

Table 4 Themes and frequency within interviews

Theme name	How many times was it mentioned across all interviews	How many participants mentioned it
Understanding lessons	9	1
Asking teachers for additional help	8	1
Seeking help from peers in understanding lessons	8	3
Favourite subject (practical hands on activities)	4	4
Favourite subject (theory based)	3	3
Twi as Language of instruction	8	8
Negative emotions associated with learning	8	8
Negative emotions associated with class tests/ exams	8	5
Non-academic interests	4	4
Peer interaction (mockery, name calling and having school uniform pulled by peers)	8	8
How children with learning disabilities self-identify themselves negatively	7	7

Source: (Field Study, September 2022).

Chapter 4 Analysis

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I utilized the concepts under the UDL, critical disability studies and social justice frameworks to analyse and interpret the responses of my participants to determine how curriculum-based factors prevent them from participating in class, which hurts their academic performance. I demonstrate how ableism influenced the design of the school curriculum in use and the exclusive instructional practices it promotes. Also, I show how unmet needs of CLDS which reflects in poor academic performances makes them subordinates to their peers in school.

4.2 How do children with learning disabilities experience learning in the classroom?

In a learning environment designed exclusively for children without disabilities (Campbell 2009:117), most of my respondents struggled to have access to curricular content. A common response from the CLDS was that learning in the classroom did not take place for them. Six out of the eight children interviewed stated they did not understand lessons taught, though one said he understood everything and another said sometimes learning occurs for him and other times it does not. One of the respondents, Akosua stated,

> "…the teachers only stands in front of us and talk most times I cannot follow because I
> do not see what they are talking about."(August, 2022).

Akosua, a final-year eighteen year old pupil who was preparing to write her final BECE when asked if she comprehended the material covered in class, responded she did not understand abstract concepts without seeing the phenomenon being talked about. This implies that for this pupil, in order for learning to take place she has to see the phenomenon or concept being talked about because she is a visual learner and would prefer the information to be presented pictorially (Omrod 2008; Pashler et al. 2009:106). This reveals an exclusive curriculum without accommodations for CLDS to explicitly inform teachers on which strategies to best facilitate understanding (King-Sears 2001:70). It may also indicate

the lack of differentiation materials provided by the government to facilitate learning. This was the situation of most of the respondents who could neither read nor perform basic mathematical calculations. Afi, a thirteen year old participant said, "I am not good at math unless I use counters (stones)"(Afi, August 2022) to facilitate counting during maths lessons. Therefore, her understanding is hampered by the absence of differentiation and alternative ways to convey information, which would have caused lessons to move more slowly so that links may be made to prior knowledge.

Admittedly, a functional working memory is necessary for such learning to take place since there needs to be a link between prior knowledge and the material being currently studied. Its absence contributes to learning difficulties in children (Cain, Oakhill, & Bryant, 2004; McKenzie, Bull, & Gray, 2003; Peng and Fuchs 2016: 3). In order to properly digest information and convert it into understandable knowledge, one must simultaneously use their auditory, visual, and perceptual skills which is not a linear process for persons with learning disabilities (Laasonen, Service, & Virsu, 2001; Hong and Chick 2013: 31) and requires time for remembering and processing (Cain, Oakhill, & Bryant, 2004; McKenzie, Bull, & Gray, 2003; Peng and Fuchs 2016:3). However, this is challenging for CLDS as demonstrated by Kwame, another participant who articulated that lessons were too fast for him. He said, "it takes me a couple of days to understand but by then we would have moved on to something different " (August 2022). This implies that the time period of 35 to 45 minutes (Kuyini and Abosi 2017: 47) usually allocated to lessons is too short for him to process thoroughly and grasp lessons meaningfully. This means that time constraints imposed by an overloaded school curriculum inhibit teachers' flexibility to provide knowledge in a variety of ways and explain lessons well which may involve the use of assistive technological devices such as audio recordings to excite and engage students even if the contents of the curriculum becomes difficult (Hitchcock et al. 2002:12).

For instance, a look at the specific objectives specified in the junior high school form two syllabus seems to suggest that such accommodations are not incorporated. Taking the topic "complex prepositions" under the grammar aspect of the JHS2 English language syllabus as an example, the learning outcomes expects pupils to be able to "identify complex prepositions… categorize and determine the meaning …use complex prepositions in speech and writing" (Ministry of Education: 47). The use of specific verbs and phrases such as "identify", "categorize" "form sentences", "fill in the blank" suggests that there is only one correct way to achieve such learning objectives (Hitchcock 2002:11) within a short lesson period and this makes learning unreachable for children with untreated dyslexia (Torgesen et al 2001;Micik and

Fletcher 2020: 349). Afi, quoted earlier, added that, "I cannot read unless someone starts reading then I follow, even with that one if you leave me alone to continue, it will be difficult" (Afi August, 2022). This implies she cannot read on her own because she has little prior verbal memory, symptomatic of dyslexia (Rose 2009: Snowling 2011:166), to build on. It could be the case that she imitates the sounds made in order to read but is unable to distinguish and produce the various sounds of words on her own. This finding supports the conclusion by Gilmor et al. (2019) that CLDS lagged behind their peers in reading skills. Her inability to read and write legibly at her age means that with an almost non-existent foundation to build on, the learning goals specified in the syllabus are unreachable for her.

Additionally, Mereku, noted that the design of the basic school curriculum inhibits the acquisition of numeracy and literacy skills because of its emphasis on children learning mostly, fragmented "facts, principles, skills and procedures"(n.d:6) for testing purposes (Au 2007:262) "at the expense of the processes of thinking" (Mereku n.d :3). These processes of thinking include self-awareness and learning how to learn (Karaali 2015:439). As such the national goal of churning out students with 21st century skills like "critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and innovation, personal development and leadership" (Ministry of Education 2018:3) seems unattainable for CLDS who may not easily connect the dots between these fragmented ideas. Learning how to learn and think which falls under the concept of metacognition enables individuals to be aware of "one's own learning process and needs, identifying available opportunities, and the ability to overcome obstacles in order to learn successfully " (Education council 2006:Mannion and Mercer 2016:248). Examples of such metacognitive abilities include " controlling impulsivity, listening with understanding and empathy, applying past knowledge to new situations "(Burgess 2012:55).

The teaching of these skills may have helped Yaa, one of the participants who said, "I find it difficult to concentrate in class so I cannot follow the lessons" (August, 2022) to self-regulate and concentrate better during lessons. Findings in a study conducted by Burgess 2012, proved this point when learning outcomes improved among students with "challenging behaviours" (Burgess 2012:55), learning disabilities included, when they were deliberately taught self-regulation skills. Therefore, if metacognition is embedded within the Ghanaian basic school curriculum from the design stage, it may reflect in a closed gap in learning achievements between CLDS and their non-disabled peers because CLDS will acquire the requisite skills to be independent learners. Findings in studies by Dignath et al. (2008:112, 118) and Mannion and Mercer (2016:262) support this claim that embedding metacognitive strategies in the school curriculum makes students self-motivated to learn in the

face of challenges. Ultimately, encouraging and equipping children with the skills to take charge of their own learning processes under the UDL principle of engagement (Hitchcock et al 2002: 12-13), positively impacts the happiness, confidence, "sense of agency" and active participation of all children with and without learning disabilities in the mainstream classroom (Perry et al. 2019:495).

With regards to active participation of CLDS in lessons, another curriculum-related issue the interviews revealed was the use of English as the primary language of instruction (Fieldwork, August 2022) and this was evident in the following quoted interview with Afi who said, "...They use English language which I do not understand, I will understand it well if they are to use Twi…" (August, 2022). A similar view was shared by Sammy who reflected on how the official language of instruction hindered his participation in the classroom,

 " They ask us to use English only, so if I cannot speak English , then I sit there quietly" (August 2022).

This is consistent with findings of a study by Carter et 2020 that English as language of instruction from grade four in Ghana hinders their attainment of literacy skills and lowers learning outcomes in comprehension (:9). In Kenya, findings from studies done by Hungi et al. (2017:196) and Kiramba (2018:305-306) confirmed it too. However, Hameso (1997) acknowledges that the widespread usage of foreign languages in transacting businesses, everyday life and academia makes fluency in it an advantage especially in securing lucrative jobs by non-elites (:4). This was reflected in parents' fears that fluency in indigenous languages dims their children's future employment prospects (Graham 2010:314). Yet, the universal design for learning principle, which states that information should be presented in a variety of ways to promote understanding in a classroom setting, is violated by switching entirely to English as the only language of instruction (Doran 2015:4-5). Sammy indicates that he sits quietly, which in this case, is an example of how the language of instruction perceived as a resource inhibits student engagement and participation in classroom interactions. It can also be deduced from this extract that the English language is seen as more acceptable and more prized than the Twi language. As a result, it is considered inferior when a child is unable to express himself in the more valuable manner (Bourdieu 1991; Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Foucault 1977; Kiramba 2018: 292). His place as a subordinate is thus, further cemented by his infirmity and inability to speak English fluently.

As mentioned earlier in the third paragraph of this section of the analysis, to demonstrate that learning has taken place pupils within the mainstream classroom are expected to identify

words and read accurately within the allotted time periods. Those who are unable to attain this degree of precision may face consequences as documented by several authors on the use of physical violence and other abusive methods of punishment in Ghanaian schools which is based on outdated beliefs that it encourages students to learn (Boakye 2001; Edumadze 2004; Agbenyega 2006:111). This means that CLDS who are not formally identified may receive frequent punishments for low performance. Kwame, for example, detailed the punishments his teacher meted out to him when he made mistakes in a lesson,

> "… when I was in class 4, my teacher lashed me with three canes. I felt bad, so I encouraged myself not to answer any question wrong again" (August, 2022).

This suggests that mistakes are not tolerated during lessons and even if the student's response to the question was in fact incorrect, the teacher may have missed a golden opportunity to instil confidence in the student's ability to learn from his mistakes by expecting a defined specific line of thinking to be developed within the confines of the brief lesson. Applying corporal punishment after receiving a wrong answer seems to suggests that the teacher, and consequently the school environment, do not want certain types of students below the normal definition of a standard learner there, and inadvertently silence their voices. This indicates that there is a lack of recognition of difference in this environment (Nancy Fraser; Aquarone 2021:47).

This is made worse by some teachers' reluctance to respond to inquiries from students who struggle with learning when they find the guts to do so. Akosua, claimed in the interview that because she struggles academically, her questions are sometimes ignored by the teacher in class or she is instructed to speak with her peers (August 2022). As a result, she is unable to exercise her agency to redirect the course of the lesson for better understanding as outlined by "Lundy's model of child participation"(UNCRC 1989; Lundy 2007; Scarporo and Mackinnon 2022: 2). This restricts her ability to assert claims of equity, participation in classroom interactions and by extension, her basic human rights to quality education (Lundy 2007: 935-936).

4.3 What Type Of Teaching Style Excludes Learners With Learning Disabilities?

Aside teacher competencies and skills, a student's capacity to learn and feel safe and comfortable in the classroom can either be aided or hindered by the classroom environment (Bucholz and

Sheffler 2009:1). Classrooms that support emotional health foster an environment for both learning and emotional growth (ibid). A common view shared by most participants revealed a strained relationship with teachers because CLDS could not approach them for extra help in understanding lessons. Most of them preferred lessons to be slow paced in order for them to understand but were afraid to ask questions in class (Field study, August 2022). These results are in line with research by Klingner and Vaughn, who found that children with learning disabilities preferred a teacher who cared about them enough to slow down instruction so they could catch up (1999:32). Consider Freda, who in a response to the question whether she asks teachers questions in order to understand lessons in class, said, "I am afraid of the teacher, I am afraid that he will beat me with a cane"(Freda, August 2022). When asked by the interviewer whether she has been beaten before for asking a question in class, she responded, "No please but I see others getting beaten"(ibid).

This means that even when she has not been subjected to beatings yet, she lives in fear that asking questions deemed stupid by teachers will result in physical punishment. Due to her low achievement status, this type of punishment may be a constant occurrence. One recurring theme from a teacher who participated in this study was that spending time to explain lessons to the satisfaction of CLDS was a waste of time and unfair since they will be writing the same competitive BECE with their peers. As such, constant inquiries from CLDS are sometimes overlooked to stay within the stipulated time limit allotted to lessons by the school curriculum (Thomas, August 2022). Teachers ignoring the attempts of other CLDS to participate actively in the class may have been interpreted by the others as dislike by the teachers for them as was the case of Freda quoted above. Hence, her reluctance to ask questions which could have made lessons more interactive.

This unequal distribution of teacher attention was confirmed by the participant observation undertaken by the research assistant to either confirm or refute the interview findings. It was observed that there were higher incidences of teacher interactions with the "normal" children than those who were perceived as having learning disabilities (Field Study, August 2022). Interactions in this lesson was in the form of the teacher calling on pupils to repeat the definition of prepositions. Reponses mostly came from pupils considered normal because they grasped and repeated quickly the definitions verbatim to indicate that learning has taken place (ibid). This suggests that student interaction with teachers and the attention— which is valued as a resource—that is given to all children is not allocated fairly among children with and without learning disabilities. These findings have negative implications for achieving equal participation for all children as right holders under the social justice

framework. These CLDS are subjected to misrepresentation (Fraser 2008; Musara, Grant and Vorster 2021) in that they are inhibited from using their voices in the form of asking questions to make claims of educational equity and active participation (ibid). Due to the aforementioned denial of their ability to participate during lessons, CLDS are "prevented from participating as peers" (Fraser 2001:24) in academic interactions in the classroom, which is a misrecognition (Fraser 2001:27). Their incapacity to raise concerns suggests that their learning requirements are viewed as inferior to and below those of their peers who are not impaired (ibid:24).

As a result, the school curriculum, which can be seen as a by-product of Ghanaian social systems, views CLDS as inferior to their classmates, which contributes to its inaccessible design (Bernstein 2003:5,10). In view of this the school environment reflects an unjust society because according to Fraser, a just society and in this context, a healthy educational experience, are based on ideas of social justice, where participation is open to all people regardless of disabilities (Fraser 2001:25). This agrees with how Rawls (2004) perceives justice. He thinks that social goods such as health and education must be redistributed to the less fortunate in order for a just and equal society to be viable, as long as everyone else had the same rights (:13). The less fortunate in this study context refer to CLDS. As long the same rights are held by all children within the same class, then educational resources must be distributed in fulfilment of all their rights to education.

Apart from teacher led instruction, peer interaction in the form of CLDS and their non-disabled counterparts interacting was almost non-existent according to the participant observation, with CLDS choosing to associate with children similar to them (Swab 2019:396). This may illustrate the fact that academically these two groups of children are dissimilar and because interactions may lead to CLDS asking for help, children without disabilities avoid interactions in a bid to prioritise their own learning in order to pass competitive examinations with higher grades. During participant interviews, it became evident that students with learning disabilities were routinely low achievers on class assessments, frequently receiving zeros. As a result, their friends and teachers—those who are supposed to shield children from harm—mock them and call them names. This is consistent with a number of findings that show bullying and "victimization" are more likely to occur for children with learning disabilities in mainstream schools (Dawkins 1996; Llewellyn 2000; Martlew & Hodson 1991; Nabuzoka & Smith 1993; Sabornie 1994; Ziegler & Rosenstein Manner 1991; Mishna 2003: 339-340). Take for example excerpts of an interview with a child who suffered such fate,

"When I score zero in any exercise, the teacher can even throw your book away on the floor, they sometimes call me Kwaku Atongo, sometimes when a new topic is introduced, I can't make any contribution, I only sit there quietly and look at the good ones answer, I only sit there very timidly" (Kwaku, August, 2022).

Throwing his book to the ground and using a name that is not his seem to be an indication of disrespect for his personhood, an intentional misrecognition, (Fraser 1999: 3) and his lower standing among his peers. Therefore, it appears that he is accepting this disdain based on his meek demeanour. Some students who consider themselves to be poor learners and self-identify as such, accept the criticism and disregard of teachers as a justifiable response to their subpar academic performance (Reay and Wiliam 1999: 346). The participants internalised their low achieving status with statements such as "I am not good" (Afi, August 2022), "I have a low retentive memory" (Kwaku, August 2022), " my forgetfulness is hereditary" (Freda, August 2022) and "the problem is me" (Akosua, August 2022). Voicing out these negative self -beliefs suggests they did not feel good enough and have a distorted sense of self under the "able gaze" (Gannicot 2018: 218). This finding agrees with the claim by Hargreaves et al. 2021 that low achieving CLDS do not feel good about themselves because of their inferior status (:87-88). This was despite the fact that the participants in the interview had non-academic interests including sports, sculpture, and painting they were good at (Fieldwork, August 2022).

This feeling of low self-worth was not limited to the classroom but extended into communal interactions as well,

"…even when we are walking together and someone ask me to store contact numbers on phone, because I cannot spell the name, I will only ask the person to give it to my friends. Because of that I will then separate myself from them and stand far away" (Kwaku, August 2022).

This suggests that his poor academic performance affects interactions not only at school but also outside of it in the community. The failure to complete a simple activity, such as correctly spelling a contact's name to record their phone number, is viewed as extremely embarrassing to the point that the person isolates himself from his peers. In these situations, he can perceive his peers as being vastly superior to him, which prevents him from developing a healthy self-esteem in the classroom and in the community as a whole (Fraser 1999:4). This could consequently restrict his access to societal and educational resources, turning his "misrecognition" into "maldistribution" (Fraser 1999: 6).

4.4 How Could The Assessments Prescribed By The Current Curriculum Allow Room For CLDS To Demonstrate Meaningful Learning?

The 2018 curriculum revisions continued to emphasise the use of formative and summative assessments (Ministry of Education 2018:39). It mentions "structured observations" as a way for formatively gauging each learner's progress, while end-of-term exams and school-based assessments (SBA) serve as summative evaluations that are graded and ranked using the suggested grade cut off points (Ministry of Education 2018:42-43). The only goal of these grades, despite being helpful in defining the subsequent step in learning (Tyson and Roksa 2017:142), is to make some students winners and others losers (Shepard 2019:189), with CLDS making up much of the latter. Take for instance the comments of one of the participants who said,

" I am always under pressure because my mates tease me when I do not do well in the exams, they go and check what everyone scored when madam puts the papers on her desk and start making fun of me" (Freda August, 2022).

The pressure she feels is as a result of the high social value placed on such test scores which serves to indicate competence and worth (Marchant 2004:3). Cut off points and grades which indicates whether the child is good or incompetent at a subject is only known when compared to others. Consequently, the overemphasis on grades negatively impacts the wellbeing of students (Dewey 1903; Mannello 1964; Kohn 1994; Dahlgren et al. 2009; Pippin 2014; McMorran and Ragupathi 2020:925), expressed as pressure as stated above. In an effort to dodge it, children engage in risky behaviours such as cheating in examinations which was expressed by two of the participants, one of them stating that, "…I will ask someone if what I learnt does not come in the exams" (Akosua, August 2022). This can probably be explained by the belief that good grades are indicative of societal worth and such malpractices are reasonable risks to attain such worthiness (Brilleslyper et al 2012:413). Given the widespread nature of cheating in the BECE due to poor preparation by students (Folson and Awuah 2014:15), the validity of results attained in such exams are questionable because it does not reflect whether true learning has taken place or not (Edwards 2019:716).

Additionally, one of the impacts of high stakes standardized assessments prescribed by the curriculum on pedagogy include the establishment of what type of knowledge constitutes valid school knowledge (Au 2007:262-263). As such, when a knowledge area is considered

important for examination it becomes legitimate and is presented in pieces to be memorised for passing examinations (ibid). This encourages behaviourists pedagogical approaches which limits pupil led activities in order to be ready for tests (ibid). This implies that student interests and competencies outside of the test focus are neglected. Five out of the eight participants who were interviewed stated that they had extracurricular interests that were not the primary focus of their academic studies, such as competitive football, cooking, dressmaking, painting, sketching, and sculpture (Fieldwork, August 2022). This is consistent with findings in a study by Amoako (2019:77) which stated that the overemphasis on the BECE led to the narrowing of the school curriculum because the objective questions does not cover everything in the curriculum. The study also found that teachers used rote learning methods to cover all aspects required for the tests (ibid:78). A narrowed curriculum and rote learning strategies therefore implies that there is little room for the practical activities mentioned by the participants. These practical activities do not fall under the category of core learning areas that the basic school curriculum aspires to instil in every child in Ghana (Ministry of Education 2018: 3), making them non-examinable and plays little role in facilitating entry into the senior high school.

Pen on Paper timed assessments, which are used to decide whether students will advance to higher levels, typically place too much emphasis on achieving a passing grade in English language, mathematics, social studies, and integrated science as required subjects, along with others to fit within the student's preferred senior high school courses. Over the years, this has prevented more than 40% of pupils from enrolling in senior high schools, with rural residents being most affected (Armah and Mereku 2018). Therefore, it can be argued that the basic school system and its curriculum does not adopt a holistic approach to identify and nurture multiple intelligences in the classroom because some children have other types of intelligence, such as the capacity to accurately perceive the visual-spatial world and bodily kinesthetics abilities, which cannot be adequately measured through only standardised pen on paper timed assessments (Gardener and Hatch 1989: 6). One of the participants supported the idea of adding sculpture and painting to the academic work and making them examinable through practical means, therefore seeking to emphasise his strengths. As a result, this study supports recommendations to stop using cut off grades in compulsory subjects as mandatory requirements for senior high school admission especially for technical and vocational skills courses.

In conclusion, the participants indicated unfavourable feelings towards the whole schooling experience. Whilst one of them indicated his readiness to quit school, another

who was in JHS1 indicated she will leave if she continues to perform badly in school. Two of them indicated their preparedness to engage in examination malpractices in their final examinations if they find the questions too difficult to answer (Field Study, August 2022). Most participants did not enjoy being in school, citing a variety of emotions associated with learning for them such as, feeling bad, feeling shy, afraid, and not happy (Fieldwork August, 2022). In addition to causing them emotional distress, teachers used caning and verbal abuses as punishments for scoring low marks which is meant to humiliate them into studying more (ibid).

Chapter 5 Stakeholder Views

This section describes the views of teachers and the district special education officer interviewed. I sought teachers perspectives because they are the direct implementors of the curriculum at the school level (Cheung and Wong 2012:39). The special education needs officer was approached because administratively, she is responsible for inclusive education within the district.

The five teachers who were interviewed agreed that the existing school curriculum was a document that included the necessary ideas, facts, and activities for educating children (Fieldwork August, 2022). A participant pointed out that the curriculum helps train children to meet the needs of the society therefore must be strictly followed (Gregory, August 2022).

Nevertheless, concerns expressed related to the workload and limited time to achieve all the goals. This reflected in most of them stating an inability to help a diverse class access the school curriculum. For instance, in response to difficulties faced by CLDS in not reaching learning outcomes, all five teachers interviewed expressed frustrations about how the work load of the syllabus which is derived from the curriculum, prevents them from helping children with learning disabilities, who they call slow learners, through innovative individualised instruction (Fieldwork August, 2022). During an interview, a teacher with four years of experience in the service stated his frustration,

> "From my own knowledge, I think that the inclusion methods specified by the curriculum is not so clear. I need to recognize the differences in every child and meet those needs, have equal but different expectations according to their abilities and do everything in my power to motivate them to cover everything before the BECE for a class of 65 pupils. That is too much work for the salary I am paid. We have to just move them to a different classroom. Not isolating them from the other classes, but give them special education." (Thomas August, 2022).

Due to his experiences with the curriculum, this teacher has developed his own personal narrative about it as a guide that the standards of the curriculum are unattainable, and because high stakes examinations are dependent on it, he does not believe he has much autonomy to meet the needs of a diverse classroom (Gudmundsdottir 1990a, 1990b, 1991; Shkedi 1998: 213). This is consistent with findings of Erss (2018) that teacher autonomy is limited when prescriptive curricula are used.

In the excerpt above, the teacher suggests segregation or grouping them according to their abilities but adds that they should not be separated from other classes which is contradictory and quite problematic as it deviates from the national inclusive guidelines (Ministry of Education 2015). Even though he is conversant with the inclusive policy guidelines, suggestions to segregate them may imply his belief that there something inherently defective about CLDS which cannot be remedied through integration and such disabilities must be separated from the other pupils who are higher achievers. This viewpoint corresponds with the medical model of critical disability studies and seems to be used as a justification to "absolve himself of any responsibility" (Nketsia et al. 2020:60). The teacher interviewed has a limited experience of four years and this may explain his low self-belief in consistently trying new ways of meeting the needs of pupils with learning disabilities (Gibson and Dembo 1984; Woodcock and Faith 2021: 219) and may also explain his discomfort at the presence of this category of children (Lee and Van Vlack 2018: 679-680) in the classroom. This was evidenced in another teacher's response to how he ensured equal participation in class,

> "… what I always do is I have to teach and then we move on because when I still keep on trying to make them understand always, I cannot even finish what the others will be doing for their examinations." (Afoko, August 2022).

This implies that guaranteeing children a seat in the classroom based on the rights they hold may not always result in positive attitudes and access to the same content as others within the classroom. This finding is consistent with findings by Timberlake et al. (2017) and Parks and Bridges-Rhoads (2012) that teachers rush teaching activities in a bid to meet strict timelines. In the quote stated above, it can be deduced that utmost priority is given to the other children. In an ableist society like ours where non-disabled bodies are ranked higher than defective ones, "the curriculum is made for the normal pupil in a bureaucratised manner and realised in a set of routines" (Berstein 2003:5), therefore any efforts to differentiate and offer extra help may be perceived in this instance as time wasting.

This is true especially in a developing country where inadequate resource allocations to the education sector leaves teachers with large class sizes with little instructional materials (Charema 2010; Forlin 2013:21). The effect is that differentiation is absent or, inadequately done, hence the focus on the other pupils. The quote stated above by the teacher implies that instead of slowing down instruction and using multiple strategies to teach, emphasis is placed on impending examinations and the ability of pupils without disabilities to ace it. Therefore additional time spent on CLDS is seen as fruitless time wasting and somewhat

unfair to the others since they will be sitting for the same competitive examinations. This finding is in line with a study carried out in the northern part of Ghana by Alhassan and Abosi (2017), which found that teachers do not modify their curricula to fit the needs of students with learning disabilities (:57-58). This was attributed to the belief that such differentiation is too much work in light of insufficient or a general lack of teaching and learning materials, constrained time limits and poor working circumstances (Fieldwork August, 2022). This finding also agrees with sentiments that the overemphasis on competitive examinations narrow the subjects taught to only those relevant for the tests (CEP 2007; Renter et al.2006; Au 2010:3) which forces teachers to employ behaviourist pedagogical strategies in order to control and tame the students in a bid to finish what is required for exams (Kuyini and Abosi 2017: 50).

In light of the time constraints an overloaded curriculum poses to teachers, two teachers stated that they try to help children with learning disabilities in their free time, especially during break time when all classes stop for thirty minutes to allow children to rest. A teacher with five years of experience in the service outlined the steps he takes to assist CLDS in his class,

> "… I call those children one after the other to my table during break time and ask them questions… then find an intervention for them."

> "…for reading I used a chart which consists of letters and their sounds to identify how the child is able to blend the sounds together to make simple words." (Gregory, August 2022).

Though he initially admitted he did not know much about universal design for learning principles, the intervention stated above represents some semblance of individualised instruction and differentiation. Thereby "unconsciously applying the UDL principles" (Adom 2022) of multiple means of representation as specified by Hitchcock et al. 2002:8). He later admitted that he had seen some improvements in the reading skill of CLDS, which supports the findings of Fuchs et al. (2015) that CLDS performance in class improved when they received personalised support. The downside however is that those interventions are scheduled for break times when children must be on recess either to eat or rest without children's prior notice. This was also the case of a female teacher with eight years of experience who stated she only assisted children with additional needs in her leisure hours. CLDS losing such rest could negatively affect the effectiveness of such learning interventions due to hunger and tiredness despite the good intentions.

Additionally, teachers spoke about how they use the local language to make further elaborations during the remedial activities to enable CLDS understand. This is because of the proven benefits of using both local and English languages during instruction (Charemba 2020:9). However, Probyn (2015:232) warns that using local languages can sometimes derail learning because of translation issues, knowledge is presented in a fragmented manner which detrimental to actual learning in the long run.

In a bid to sustain the interest and motivate the children with learning disabilities to learn, another teacher stated,

> "… I use people who have made it in life although they were not seen as academically good students, but were able to get a lot out of life like Bill Gates, who was early on withdrawn from the university because he could not pass a course, but now he is the owner of the software, Microsoft here, so I use motivation to encourage them to sustain their interest in their classroom."(Afoko August 2022).

This means that the teacher uses extrinsic factors such as the wealth of someone who is very different from them to motivate CLDS, but does not employ intrinsic motivation strategies to help them improve their thought processes and self-regulation skills. This could however be an indication of poor teacher metacognitive skills acquired during training ((Veenman, Van Hout-Wolters, and Afflerbach 2006; Ozturk 2017:248) hence his inability to teach it (Boulware-Gooden et al. 2007; Ozturk 2017:248).

As the leader of the school, headteacher interviewed was especially worried about how the focus on rankings based on district level assessments using a "district prescribed scheme of work"(Mereku n.d:14) and national level examinations based on a centralised curriculum narrows teacher focus to only teaching children how to pass examinations whilst relegating to the background equally important knowledges and skills. With his nineteen years of experience, he observed that,

> "when the circuit supervisors from the district office come around for supervision, they look at your lesson note book to check how much of it you have covered. Nowadays the district sets questions for the end of term and mock BECE exams before the real one. When the results come out the schools within the circuit and district are ranked which is a source of pride if your school is on top but children with learning disabilities cannot cope they perform poorly… the best solution is specialised schools. " (Head Teacher August, 2022).

In supporting the call for CLDS to be segregated, a participant recognized the effect of the low academic achievement of CLDS on their behaviours and interactions with the other students. He noted that there does not appear to be a friendly relationship between these two groups of children because most children with learning disabilities have a low sense of self-worth and as a result, display "awkward behaviours in class" (Afoko, August 2022).

The call for segregation was however opposed by the district special education officer who stated that,

> "No it would not help. It would not help because some of them when they are separated from the normal class, their cases gets worse…Sometimes the stigma attached to it does not help. Isolating them will not help them. Integration will help them copy their "normal " peers at least. This is better than the segregation." (August 2022).

She advocated for integration within mainstream classrooms so they can be like their able bodied colleagues and live up to that standard of normality. This could imply that separating them will further cement their positions below their colleagues making stigmatisation worse. However, when CLDS are in close proximity to their peers, they will strive to emulate them and be accorded some form of respect. We might infer from the foregoing that the basic school in Ghana serves as a vehicle for the propagation of ableist notions of being or normalcy (Campbell 2009; Goodley 2013: 637-638).

In conclusion, teachers are mandated to deliver the contents of the curriculum for every child. Yet this does not always happen. For children with learning disabilities, accessibility is inhibited by barriers such as its overloaded nature, language of instruction and its narrow focus on assessments. Sadly, the whole schooling experience for CLDS is marked by non-participation in learning activities and low achievements. To make matters worse, they are seen as unworthy individuals. The school curriculum needs to proactively take into consideration the needs of CLDS at the design stage to be truly inclusive for all.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

This study looked at how CLDS experience exclusions in the classroom as a result of their interaction with a standardised curricular meant for a typical student (Young 1990; Lloyd 2008:228-229), through their lived experiences. By adopting critical disability studies, universal design for learning and the concept of parity of participation under Nancy Fraser's conception of social justice, this research looked at how ableists notions dominant within Ghanaian society influenced the overloaded and fragmented design of the school curriculum. It also discussed how the current curriculum in use influences the use of behaviourists pedagogical practices by teachers resulting in unequal distribution of classroom resources and interactions. This, the study found hinders the active participation of CLDS within the classroom and does not afford CLDS the chance to develop a healthy self-esteem. The overall impact on CLDS is a learning experience marked by low academic achievements because the curriculum design does not make provisions for equal access. The significance of these findings is that it highlights the side-lining of CLDS learning needs through an ineffective implementation of inclusive schooling policies, making it silent segregations.

6.1 Implications For Curriculum Design And Pedagogical Strategies

One of the main findings of this study was that the centralised and inflexible nature of the school curriculum did not make accommodations for the learning needs of CLDS and did not guarantee that lessons taught would be understood before subsequent ones are introduced. The fragmented and fixed learning goals seems to be indicative of the fact that the expertise of skilled special education teachers and health workers were not incorporated much at the design stage to anticipate barriers to learning for non-typical children. This could be remedied by incorporating their expertise to make the curriculum flexible (Wu 2010:3) for CLDS. It could begin with setting goals to match the needs of all students by taking into account their "strengths" (Wu 2010:4), "motivations and interests", mother tongue of the child and their "impairments" (ibid).

This could create a conducive classroom atmosphere where differences and mistakes are tolerated, and influences instructional methods as well as the physical arrangement of the classroom to make it more productive (ibid). By incorporating technology based solutions

(Coyne et al. 2012:168) like maps, pictures and videos to excite and engage students who struggle with reading comprehension (Wu and Newman 2008:7), it can ignite a passion for learning among CLDS. Also, laptops could be given to dyslexic students to help them write legibly (Molosiwa et al. 2014:116). In built read aloud functions of learning applications could help improve the reading skills of CLDS who could not read on their own.

Additionally, alternative assessments involving technological tools and local materials could also be used as forms of demonstrating practically knowledge acquired by CLDS (Marino et al. 2014:95). These can take the form of "oral presentations, video clips, dramatization" (Molosiwa 2014:115). This will build their confidence as members of the classroom.

To narrow the achievement gaps between CLDS and their peers as demonstrated by Fuchs et al 2015 and confirmed by this study, metacognitive strategies could also be embedded in the school curriculum to ensure CLDS are exposed to learning and self-regulation strategies. This will ensure that CLDS are self-motivated to learn as the curriculum becomes more challenging. More functional curricular activities such as "life skills"(Bouck; Brown et al. 1979; Bouck and Joshi 2012: 140) could be introduced in the regular school or parents and CLDS could be provided with an option of attending specially designated schools (Hanushek et al. 2002: Gilmor 2018:8) with functional curricular in order to equip them with the much needed functional vocational skills (Patton, Cronin and Jairrels 1997; Bouck and Joshi 2012:140).

The quality of delivery of a well-designed curriculum "ultimately depends on teachers"(UNICEF 2019; Sunthonkanokpong and Murphy 2019:92). In order to adopt learner-centred practices, there is the need to equip mainstream teachers with effective inclusive skills to go beyond identification of diverse special education needs of children (Nketsia et al.2020:53) which depends to a large extent on the incorporation of UDL and social justice principles into the teacher training curriculum. This will require the contents of the SEN course at the colleges of education to shift focus from the medical model to the social model of critical disability studies. This could equip teachers with positive attitudes and differentiation skills to employ learner-centred pedagogical practices such as "co teaching", "peer teaching" among the children themselves, "individualised education plans" and the use of "assistive technologies" (Nketsia et al. 2020:61-62) to enable CLDS access the curriculum. Periodic in-service training programs could be organised by the government to equip teachers with the requisite skills to implement effective differentiation of the curriculum.

Ultimately, the government must allocate adequate finances and establish the conditions required for the design and implementation of a curriculum for schools that is truly inclusive and includes tools for differentiation. When CLDS positively contribute to their communities after interacting with relevant curricular content, negative societal perceptions may shift.

With all this said, one major limitation identified in this study was the reliance on only teachers as the main source of identifying and confirming traits of learning disabilities. The use of clinical diagnostic tools by a professional may have increased the validity of diagnosis and ensured generalisability of these findings. Secondly, the study could have benefitted from a larger sample size instead of the eight that was relied on. Each participant was interviewed once. Future studies could take these factors into consideration in researching children with learning disabilities and their active participation in school. Further studies could conduct a longitudinal study where participants are interviewed at least twice to make the findings more richer.

Appendix A Interview Guide For Children With Perceived Learning Disabilities

The purpose of this interview is to gather data on the active participation of children with perceived learning disabilities in classroom learning activities within the Amansie central district of Ghana. This activity helps the interviewer fulfil one of the requirements for a master's degree in development studies. Any information supplied will be used by the student and university solely for academic purposes. Participation in this interview is voluntary and consent can be withdrawn at any point in time without any negative repercussions.

Can you tell me about yourself?

Bio Data:

   I.   Name (Anonymised):

  II.   Age:

 III.   Class:

1. what does a normal school day look like for you?

2. How long does your lessons last before break time?

3. Do what the teachers teach during lesson interest/make sense to you?

4. Are you able to sit and pay attention to lessons without your mind wandering away from class?

5. How do you normally learn new ideas?

6. Do you learn by listening, watching, doing or a combination of any of these?

7. Do you have enough time to process what the teacher teaches before he moves on to the new topic/idea?

8. Can you read fluently?

9. Can you add and subtract in mathematics?

10. Are your teachers and peers able to see your handwriting clearly?

11. Who is/are the best student/s in your class? (who are liked, praised and admired by teachers?)

12. What do you see them do to win such admiration from the teachers?

13. Do you feel you are different from them?

14. Do you learn from them/ ask them to help you in subjects you struggle in?

15. Do you compare your grades with theirs?

16. How does it make you feel?

17. What happens when you make mistakes?

18. How does your teacher/peers react to you?

19. Is learning fun for you?

20. What emotions do you associate with learning activities in the classroom? (anger, anxiety, frustration, impassivity?)

21. Do you look forward to coming to school regularly?

22. What is your favourite subject in school?

23. Why is it your favourite?

24. How does the teacher teach it?

25. How different is it from the other subjects you do not enjoy?

26. Who determines what you learn/ learning goals in class?

27. Are you able to decide what you would like to know during lessons?

28. Are you given room to ask questions?

29. What will happen when you consistently interrupt a lesson because you do not understand it?

30. Can you approach the teacher later on after the lesson has ended to explain things to you?

31. Will he pay you any attention?

32. How does classroom tests/ examinations make you feel?

33. Are you able to remember what you learnt earlier to answer the questions?

34. Are you given the chance to choose the level of difficulty of the tests/examination you can do?

35. Are your grades ranked in class assessments? How does it make you feel?

Appendix B: Interview Guide For Teachers

1. Where do you teach?

2. How long have you taught for?

3. Do you have any knowledge about the inclusive policy document and its contents?

4. Have you encountered children with disabilities in your classrooms?

5. How do you identify them?

6. How prevalent is this phenomenon in classes you have taught/ continue to teach?

7. How important is the school curriculum to you as a teacher?

8. What aspects of the school curriculum limits your ability as a teacher to help children with learning disabilities?

9. Do you know of universal design for learning principles and how it is practiced?

10. Have you incorporated these principles in your instructional activities?

11. Do you intentionally pay more attention to children without disabilities than those with disabilities?

Appendix C : Interview Guide For District Special Needs Education Officer

1. what is the estimated number of children with learning disabilities in the district?

2. How does their low academic performances contribute to the overall poor performance of children in the district at the BECE?

3. Does your unit have intervention plans to close this achievement gaps ?

4. Do you think the current curriculum makes provision for children with learning disabilities?

5. Do you think we should separate them from their peers to facilitate effective learning?

6. What suggestions would you make to the designers of the school curriculum to cater for children with learning disabilities' needs in the regular classroom?

7. How is the district helping equip teachers with special educational skills to handle children with special needs?

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