

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY



**EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING AMONG
TEACHERS OF STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES**

BY

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DECLARATION

This is to confirm that this thesis is the final product and a true reflection of a research conducted by **Theresa Nutsugah** in pursuant of an award of Master of Philosophy Degree in Clinical Psychology at the Department of Psychology, University of Ghana. This thesis was supervised by Dr. Margaret Amankwah-Poku and Dr. Kingsley Nyarko. This thesis has not been presented in whole or in part for the award of a degree anywhere and the ideas of other persons used in this study have been duly acknowledged.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my husband, Mr. Edward Kattah for his unconditional support and contribution towards my personal and academic development all these years. This work is again dedicated to my lovely children, Eizel and Ekel Kattah, who motivated me to finish this work despite the numerous challenges I encountered on this journey.

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated teachers' experiences, psychological distress and coping strategies adopted in educating children with learning problems. A mixed-method approach was adopted for the study. One hundred and forty-seven participants were sampled from special and inclusive schools for the quantitative study. Participants responded to items on questionnaires measuring psychological distress and coping. The qualitative study involved one-on-one interviews with 10 teachers. The quantitative study revealed that teachers' coping strategies were negatively related to psychological distress. Special school teachers experienced more anxiety than regular school teachers, however, there was no difference in their depression levels. Additionally, gender had no influence on psychological distress among special school teachers and years of teaching did not influence teachers' coping strategies. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data indicated that teachers had some knowledge about learning difficulties and identified students with difficulties based on observation. Challenges teachers faced impacted their health. Both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping were used to deal with distress. Social support was found to be the main school coping resources available to teachers. These findings were discussed using the theory of learned helplessness, the transactional stress and coping model, relevant cultural factors as well as related studies. The implications of the study were discussed. The high number of special school teachers than regular school teachers was a major limitation with regard to recruitment.

TABLE OF CONTENT

CONTENT	PAGE NUMBER
DECLARATION	i
DEDICATION.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
TABLE OF CONTENT	v
LIST OF TABLES	i
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.0 Overview	1
1.1 Statement of the Problem.....	12
1.2 Aims and objectives of the study.....	14
1.3 Relevance of the study.....	15
1.4 Scope of the study	16
CHAPTER TWO	18
LITERATURE REVIEW	18
2.0 Introduction.....	18
2.1 Theoretical Framework.....	18
2.1.1 The reformulated theory of Learned Helplessness (Abramson, Seligman & Teasdale, 1978) ..	18
2.1.2 The Transactional Stress and Coping Model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)	20
2.2 Review of Related Studies.....	23
2.2.1 Experiences of teachers in teaching children with LDs	23
2.2.2 Depression and anxiety	30
2.2.3 Gender Differences and Psychological Distress.....	32
2.2.4 Coping.....	36
2.3 Rationale of the study.....	42
2.4 Statement of Hypotheses.....	44
CHAPTER THREE.....	46
METHODOLOGY	46
3.0 Introduction.....	46

3.1 Research Design.....	46
3.2 Research setting	47
3.3 Population	48
3.4 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria	48
3.5 Sample and Sampling Technique.....	48
3.6 Demographic characteristics of Participants.....	49
3.7 Measures.....	50
3.7.1 Section A: Demographic Variables.....	51
3.7.2 Section B: Psychological distress (Kessler, 2003).....	51
3.7.3 Section C: Coping (Kyriacou & Chien, 2004)	52
3.7.4 Section D: Semi-structured Interview Guide	52
3.8 Pilot Study	53
3.9 Research Procedure	53
3.10 Ethical Consideration	54
3.11 Trustworthiness	55
3.12 Data Analysis	56
3.13 Qualitative Analysis.....	56
RESULTS.....	58
4.0 Introduction.....	58
4.1 Quantitative Findings.....	58
4.1.1 Analysis of Normal Distribution of Variables.....	58
4.1.2 Descriptive Analysis.....	59
4.1.3 Intercorrelation Matrix for Study Variables	59
4.1.4 Hypotheses Testing	60
4.1.5 Summary of Findings.....	64
4.2 Findings of Qualitative Phase	65
4.2.1 Introduction	65
4.2.2 Demographic information	65
4.2.3 Experiences of teachers	67
4.2.4 Coping Strategies	79
4.2.5 School Coping Resources.....	82
4.2.6 Summary of qualitative findings	84
CHAPTER FIVE	85

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION	85
5.0 Introduction.....	85
5.1 Teaching, Psychological distress and Coping.....	85
5.2 Teachers’ experiences and coping strategies.....	90
5.2.1 Experiences of teachers	90
5.2.2 Coping Strategies	98
5.2.3 School Coping Resources.....	100
5.3 Limitations of the study	101
5.4 Suggestions for future studies.....	101
5.5 Recommendations of the Study	102
5.6 Conclusion	103
REFERENCES	104
APPENDICES	130
APPENDIX I	130
APPENDIX II	133
APPENDIX III	134
SECTION A	137
SECTION B	138
SECTION C	139
INTERVIEW GUIDE	142

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Summary of demographic characteristics of teachers of students with learning difficulties	50
Table 2: Summary of Descriptive Statistics of Variables in the Study.....	59
Table 3: Inter-correlation matrix of study main variables.....	60
Table 4: Factorial MANOVA Comparing Gender and Type of School on Anxiety and Depression	61
Table 5: Univariate effect for special and regular school teachers.....	62
Table 6: Pearson correlation between perceptions of the effectiveness of coping strategies and psychological distress among special school teachers	63
Table 7: Demographic characteristics of study participants.....	66
Table 8: Summary of themes and subthemes	67

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

Most occupations involving human services have been found to be demanding, however, teaching has been ranked to be one of the most demanding professions (Kyriacou, 2001; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005; Walker, 2018) with majority of basic school teachers experiencing a high level of stress (Herman, Hickmon-Rosa, & Reinke, 2018). Different teachers experience different challenges, demands and benefits and these are dependent on the educational level of students being taught, the diversity of students' educational needs and the type of school they work in (Kokkinos & Davazoglou, 2009). The level of stress associated with teaching could also stem from high expectations from supervisors, colleague teachers, students and parents. This is further complicated by student misbehavior, work overload, a lack of acknowledgement for achievements (Greenglass & Burke, 2003) and time pressures (Kyriacou, 2001). Classroom factors such as workload of teachers and students' behavior problems have been found to be contributory factors to the distress teachers experience (Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

A teacher's responsibility goes beyond teaching; this is just a part of the role (Schools Courses & Career Development, 2017). Teaching involves several aspects and roles such as preparation and planning, behavior management (SCCD, 2017; Kelly-Peterson, 2010) assessing, designing and modifying tasks, making use of curriculum, as well as supporting parents and families (Kelly-Peterson, 2010) and other specialized responsibilities such as being assistants at school functions, interior designers in the classroom, watchers at lunch and helping as fundraisers for school trips and school provisions (SCCD, 2017).

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

Most elementary school teachers teach several subjects to a class of diverse groups of students (Antoniou & Kyriakides, 2013; Kaur, 2001) and in some cases the class size is large. Teaching large class sizes which is usually the case in most urban public schools in Ghana (Osei, 2006) can be associated with additional distress. Research suggests that teacher distress and organization demands increase with large class sizes (Schanzenbach, 2014; Jin, Yeung, Tang & Low, 2008) which are mostly characterized by students' behavioral problems (Osei, 2006). Teachers are also responsible for producing productive members of society out of the children in their classrooms. Again, teachers are likely to have high distress levels in the face of rules, regulations, guidelines and performance expectations (Stauffer & Mason, 2013; Burchielli & Bartram, 2006).

The demanding nature of the job suggests that there is no end to it. As a result, teachers often take unfinished work home to prepare for the next class session (Holmes, 2005). In addition, many teachers no longer look forward to the traditional vacation break because most schools organize vacation classes during this period suggesting nearly a year long school session with a short vacation built in (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Liu & Onwuegbuzie, 2014; Kaur, 2001). Even during these vacations some teachers do not take a leave, rather, they take on another job of teaching either in the same school or in another facility due to low salaries. All these activities emphasize that working days at school are demanding and provide inadequate time for rest (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Despite the demanding (hectic) nature of their work, teachers are required to plan for each lesson to be taught throughout the academic year.

In planning their activities, teachers are mindful of the fact that every child is unique, hence, instruction should be tailor-made to meet the educational needs of each learner as the teacher would have to teach different groups of learners (Anderson, 2007). These groups of learners

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

include those without special educational needs and those with special educational needs such as learning difficulties (LDs) as is usually the case in inclusive classroom settings. Thus, while some teachers teach only children with LDs in special schools, other teachers teach both children with and without LDs in regular classrooms, referred to as “inclusive education”. This means that both teachers in special and regular schools are responsible for teaching students with learning difficulties. These two different settings will certainly require different forms of workload and commitment from the teachers, suggesting the amount of distress they experience will differ.

Learning disabilities refer to problems associated with reading, writing and math, which are basic to an individual’s ability to learn (American Psychiatric Association, 2018). The common characteristic linked with this problem is that the individual has difficulties in learning using the traditional approach of education (Alkahtani, 2016). Children with peculiar educational needs have been described as those who have difficulties learning requiring special educational provision (Department for Education and Skills, 2001).

Children have a learning difficulty if they:

- a) experience greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age; or
- b) have a disability which hinders them from making use of educational facilities, generally provided for children of the same age in schools within the area
- c) are under obligatory school age and are within the definition at a) or b) above or would do so if special educational provision was not made for them (Department for Education and Skills, 2001).

Universally, reliable disability data are difficult if not impossible to obtain and statistics on children with disabilities are grossly underestimated in developing countries (Graham, 2014).

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

However, between 5 to 15% of school-age children have been estimated to suffer from some forms of learning disability (American Psychiatric Association, 2018). The prevalence of children with disabilities in Uganda, South Africa, Tanzania and Kenya have been reported to be 12% (UNICEF, 2014), 7.5% (ACPF, 2014), 4.5% (ACPF, 2014) and under 1% respectively (Graham, 2014). Focusing the lens on Ghana reveals that about 2% of school children between 6-14 years have some form of disability (UNICEF Ghana, 2015) and teachers are expected to meet their needs both within special schools and in the inclusive classroom setting, which can lead to psychological distress.

Psychological distress has been defined as an adverse case that a person has little or no control over (Mirowsky & Ross, 2003). On a daily basis, teachers experience many negative events in different professional situations which they are unable to control. Some of these occurrences are the behaviours and lives of students outside school, work safety, school boards and government initiatives and these can trigger psychological distress (Ferguson, Frost & Hall, 2012). Also, Ridner (2004) defined psychological distress as “the unique discomforting, emotional state experienced by an individual in response to a specific stressor or demand that results in harm, either temporary or permanent, to the person” (p. 539). This state of discomfort is associated with additional responsibilities to teachers such as holding meetings with guardians of children with special educational problems to discuss what educational resources the school has to offer such students (Clooney, 2013). Other responsibilities include developing new practices and policies and the modification of teaching strategies to accommodate students with learning difficulties. All these responsibilities suggest an increase in workload, hence, an increase in psychological distress levels (Boyle, Topping, Jindal-Snape & Norwich, 2012; Loreman, Deppeler & Harvey, 2011; Horn & Barnajee, 2009; Chaplain, 2008; Horne & Timmons, 2009; Francis, 2004).

Psychological distress arguably is a complex construct with several dimensions, however, in its simplest form it is seen as concerned with aspects of negative functioning. For example, psychological distress according to Masee et al. (1998) is manifested through forms such as irritability, anxiety, self-depreciation, depression and social disengagement. Again, it has been proposed that psychological distress is characterized by five attributes: inability to effectively cope with a negative situation, alteration of emotional state, discomfort, expression of discomfort and harm. A change of emotional state is confirmed by Masee (2000) who asserted that when an individual experiences psychological distress it is demonstrated by a change in his/her stable emotional state to a state of anxiety, depression, irritation, self-depreciation, aggression and demotivation.

Distress has been discovered to have a positive association with depressive symptoms, which means that increased occupational stress leads to increased symptoms of depression (Kidger et al., 2016; Shen et al., 2014). Depression and anxiety have been found to be common indicators of psychological distress and consequently cause teachers to leave the profession (Moges, 2017; Steinhardt et al., 2011; Montgomery and McCrone, 2010; Potter, 2007). Depression manifests itself in some emotional, mental, behavioural and physical symptoms and generally characterized by sadness, hopelessness, pessimism, tension, uneasiness and skepticism (Dilekmen & Erdem, 2013). Anxiety, on the other hand is defined by temporary fear, uncertainty and fear of the future, and intensity with which people experience anxiety varies (Barlow, 2004). Causes of anxiety among teachers in the classroom have been suggested to range from size of the class, classroom management and likely student violence to self-efficacy fears concerning student evaluation, administrative support and wage problems (Davis, 2007).

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

If teaching as an occupation has been found to be stressful, then teaching in a special school perhaps could be more demanding due to the peculiar nature of these learners and their diverse learning needs (Adeniyi, Fakolade, & Tella, 2010). It has been reported that special school teachers feel more anxious, feel less supported and are less satisfied with their jobs compared with their regular school counterparts (Hastings & Brown, 2002). Several factors have been found to be related with stress among special school instructors. These include high teacher-pupil ratio, high workload, lack of support and a lack of progress achieved by students and teachers. However, teachers in special schools may also experience low stress levels compared to their mates in regular classrooms because the former may be able to adjust adequately as a result of long periods of exposure to distress in these environments (Adeniyi, Fakolade, & Tella, 2010).

Workload and negative student behavior have been found to predict anxiety and depression among teachers (Ferguson, Frost, & Hall, 2012). Role overload has been suggested to be a root cause of distress associated with workload (Mirowsky & Ross, 2003). Instructors may have little control over workload associated with teaching students with learning difficulties such as implementing new initiatives pointing to the fact that the management of workload is crucial for teachers. Whereas classroom management is possible for teachers, in reality they have little or no control over the behaviour of students (Ferguson, Frost, & Hall, 2012). According to Ferguson, Frost and Hall, job security and opportunities for professional development may be out of teachers' control but assistance offered them through career counselling and education concerning teacher collective agreements may help reduce anxiety. Additionally, social support from colleague teachers may ease distress.

Anxiety and depression have been found to be associated with impaired job efficiency, accidents and absence owing to teachers calling in sick. The more absence leaves teachers take,

the less contact hours spent with students with learning difficulties resulting in student underachievement (Ansley, Meyers, McPhee, & Varjas, 2018). Effects of anxiety and depression among teachers are probable to impact productivity, employee morale, accidents, absences and staff turnover at the organizational level (Haslam et al., 2005). The mental health of individuals can be affected by anxiety and depression in various ways. It affects attention, increases forgetfulness and can lead to attrition (rate at which people leave their jobs; Williams, 2015). In reaction to stress, psychological distress is connected with one's inability to cope effectively with a challenging situation (Ridner, 2004).

Coping has been described as continually changing cognitive and behavioural attempts to address particular internal and/or external demand that exceed a person's resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping has been identified as a main variable to reduce, minimize or tolerate stress and prevent psychological distress (Deasy, Cougglan, Pironom, Jourdan, & Mannix-McNamara, 2014). While some teachers use coping strategies to overcome these stressors, others have difficulty in dealing with them (Dick, 2010). Research have discovered various coping strategies adopted by teachers in managing stressors in teaching (Green & Ross, 1996; McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, 2009) and how these strategies help decrease stress (Austin, Shah, & Muncer, 2005).

The use of different coping techniques can moderate distress in teaching. Direct or indirect approaches to stress reduction can be either active or inactive. Using a direct approach can change the source of the stress while an indirect strategy can change the manner an individual thinks or responds to the distress to reduce its effect (Antoniou, Polychroni, & Kotroni, 2009). Also, taking some action as an individual to change the situation or oneself is an active or direct approach, while engaging in activities in order to avoid or deny the source of stress is an inactive or indirect

way of dealing with the situation (Kelso, French, & Fernandez, 2005; Kyriacou, 2000, 2001; Williams & Gersch, 2004).

Some coping strategies have been identified among special school teachers by Green & Ross (1996). These strategies have been placed in three classifications namely: problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping and avoidance coping. A direct or active way of coping which involves a step-by-step plan for problem solving is known as problem-focused coping. Emotion-focused coping, an indirect approach can involve seeking social support from friends, colleague teachers and family whereas avoidance coping, an indirect or inactive approach involves trying to avoid the source of the problem rather than dealing with it.

Studies have suggested reports of frequent usage of active coping strategies by special school teachers, for example taking steps to ameliorate the effects of stressors on the individual (Cancio, Larsen, Mathur, Estes, Johns, & Chang, 2018). In accordance with the three main classification of coping strategies proposed by Green and Ross (1996), it was revealed that special school teachers adopted mainly emotion-focused and problem-focused strategies (Antoniou, Polychroni, & Kotroni, 2009). Special school instructors are likely to use various direct or active coping strategies than regular school teachers, but they also adopt self-directed coping strategies comparable to those used by regular school teachers (Antoniou, Polychroni, & Kotroni, 2009). This is because special educators experience higher levels of distress compared to their mates in the regular schools due to the uniqueness of the different special needs of their learners (Adeniyi, Fakolade, & Tella, 2010). Consequently, it is probable that they make use of different active coping strategies to adjust adequately to the challenging situation in their environments.

Teachers have proposed a number of strategies as effective in coping with distress in teaching. Some of these are listing and prioritizing work, participating in recreational activities

and hobbies outside school hours and having a “sympathetic mentor” with whom to share issues (Gersch, 1996 as cited in Antoniou, Polychroni, & Kotroni, 2009). Social support from friends and colleagues, exercise and time management have also been described as effective coping actions used by special school teachers when they face difficult demands from their jobs (Paquette & Rieg, 2016). Special school and regular school teachers have also been found to resort to various strategies to cope with their distress. Among extremely effective strategies were time management and setting of priorities, engaging in recreational activities, and absenting oneself from school whereas the least used were the use of substance or prescribed medication and smoking. Again, special school teachers exhibited a proactive attitude toward coping than regular school teachers (Kebbi & Al-Hroub, 2018).

Typically, students with learning difficulties are found both in special education classrooms as well as in inclusive classrooms. In both settings, successful teaching and learning requires that for teachers to work effectively, there is the need to empower them with adequate knowledge and skills. It is therefore needful that teachers are adequately trained in special education needs to make them effective in the classroom (Dwomoh, Opoku, Owusu, & Ampratwum, 2016). This is because challenges associated with students with LDs require high competencies of learning and when teachers have inadequate competencies this might result in more distress (Rudiyati, Pujaningsih, & Mumpuniarti, 2017). Additionally, teachers have been found to be aware of LDs, but have less knowledge about the management of children with LDs (Ghimire, 2017) and this case is no different in Ghana (Dwomoh, Opoku, Owusu, & Ampratwum, 2016).

Teachers are often expected by parents and educational authorities to help children with learning problems (Teoh, Cheong, & Woo, 2019), however, teachers have indicated they

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

experience countless difficulties supporting students with learning difficulties, resulting in high stress and anxiety levels (Morton, 2007). This notwithstanding, most teachers have been reported to have positive attitudes towards students with learning difficulties (Horne & Timmons, 2009; Boyle, Topping & Jindal-Snape, 2013) whereas others also display negative attitudes towards these students (Dwomoh, Opoku, Owusu & Ampratwum, 2016). Teachers have emphasized the importance of one-on-one tuition for students with learning difficulties; however, one factor which interferes with the teaching process is time constraint. Due to large class sizes teachers have insufficient time to plan differentiated instruction for students who experience learning difficulties (Cassady, 2011; Francis, 2004) as teachers need more time to communicate instructions in the classroom (Kebbi, 2018). In addition, teachers have reported experiencing stress related to crowded classrooms and excessive workload as high stressors (Paquette & Rieg, 2016; Şahin & Levent, 2015) in special education and inclusive classrooms where there are students with LDs.

Another prominent source of stress in the classroom according to literature is limited resources and support (Shernoff et al., 2011). Children with LDs need a lot of additional assistance and resources and the absence of these resources increases teachers' workload resulting in distress if adequate and effective coping mechanisms are not in place (Francis, 2004). Findings have indicated that most teachers' training have not equipped them completely to deal with learning difficulties making them feel incompetent to teach students with special educational needs effectively (Cassady, 2011; Horne & Timmons, 2009; Francis, 2004). This phenomenon has been predicted to lead to tension and distress in both teachers and their students (Ross-Hill, 2009). Challenges experienced by teachers have been found to affect their psychological health; examples of these effects include depression, anxiety, feeling withdrawn and irritability (Shernoff et al., 2011).

Teachers have a lot of responsibilities towards the children they teach. These responsibilities go beyond the classroom environment towards supervisors and parents. Some teachers provide instruction to only schoolchildren with special education needs in a separated special school environment whereas others educate students with special needs as well as those without special needs in inclusive classrooms. Considering that teaching has been reported to be stressful both groups of teachers in special and inclusive classrooms (regular school) are likely to experience different levels of distress in the face of the responsibilities accompanying the discharge of their duties.

Teachers encounter several challenges in educating children with LDs and in order to keep going, they adopt strategies to cope with the situation. Some of the strategies used are emotion-focused coping, problem-focused coping and avoidant coping. However, teachers who are overwhelmed with the distress and find it difficult coping tend to manifest some signs of psychological ill-health such as depression, anxiety, fatigue (Kebbi & Al-Hroub, 2018).

A number of occupations are demanding but teaching has been described as one of the most demanding jobs. Psychological distress, which is viewed as concerned with negative functioning is associated with teaching as a result of the numerous factors linked with teaching children with learning difficulties. High workload, huge class sizes, lack of adequate teaching and learning materials, inadequate training for teachers and student behavior are a few of the many sources of distress for teachers. However, teachers make use of various coping strategies such as problem-focused and emotion-focused coping to deal with the distress. In the event of the inability to cope effectively with the distress, teachers tend to manifest symptoms such as anxiety, depression, irritability and social disengagement.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Inclusive education, which promotes the education of persons with disabilities in typical classroom settings, has received increased attention internationally. However, its practice in many developing countries is associated with challenges (Ametepee & Anastasiou, 2015; Adera & Asimeng-Boahene, 2011). In Ghana, efforts to fully implement inclusive education have been characterized by a great deal of caution as demonstrated by the slow advancement towards inclusive education (Adera & Asimeng-Boahene, 2011). This notwithstanding, issues related to the inclusion of schoolchildren with disabilities continue to receive some recognition and these are gradually becoming a significant part of the educational practice and discourse in Ghana (Botts & Owusu, 2013; Adera & Asimeng-Boahene, 2011; Gyimah, Sugden & Pearson, 2009).

Inclusive education has been saddled with major problems like the scarcity of qualified teachers and support staff, inadequate training opportunities for general classroom teachers, the absence of appropriate professional development for special school instructors and the inadequacy of teaching and learning materials (Adera & Asimeng-Boahene, 2011). Research have revealed that some sources of distress for teachers are time constraints, inadequate resources, lack of parental support, lack of pre-service training (Bartlett, 2004; Gash, 2006), and high workload (Addison & Yankyera, 2015). Teaching children with learning difficulties tend to lead to an increase in these stressors and increasing demands and pressures have been found to negatively impact the psychological health of teachers (Burchielli & Bartram, 2006).

The system of education in Ghana is basically made up of the mainstream and special school units. The adoption and practice of inclusive education witnessed some regular schools transform into inclusive ones to meet the demands of children with disabilities. Consequently, these regular schools as well as the traditional special schools educate students with LDs in

addition to teaching students without LDs and this is expected to lead to high levels of distress in regular school teachers considering the large class sizes in most public schools. Special school teachers have received special education training unlike regular school teachers who are trained to teach general classrooms. This suggests that mainstream school instructors may not possess suitable training in special education to meet the diverse needs of children with LDs considering the inadequate numbers of special educators attached to these cluster of regular schools. As a result, it is predicted that both groups of teachers would vary in their levels of distress. This therefore draws for the need to compare the experiences of special and regular school teachers as well as an investigation of how they cope with the distress associated with teaching children with LDs.

Again, the adoption of inclusive education means teachers would have to modify the content of learning material for students with LDs besides teaching students without disabilities, and this might be time consuming for the teacher and consequently lead to psychological distress (Chaplain, 2008; Francis, 2004). A look at inclusive education in Ghana reveals inadequate infrastructure, unavailability of necessary resources to facilitate teaching and learning (Ofori, 2018) as well as the lack of teachers' adequate competence in providing adaptive instruction in inclusive classrooms (Alhassan & Abosi, 2014). These can be potential sources of distress for the teacher. Consequently, teachers may need to adopt coping strategies to overcome the distress that accompanies teaching, but the question is whether these coping strategies are enough and effective to enhance teachers' wellbeing. It is suspected that teachers in the Ghanaian context may have been using diverse coping approaches to manage the distress they experience from teaching children with learning difficulties. However, not much information is known about the effectiveness of these strategies. Again, it is reported that problem-focused coping is more

effective for teachers and so the study sought to ascertain whether this case is the same in the Ghanaian context.

Most teachers are more familiar with the traditional disabilities i.e. hearing, visual impairments and physical disabilities, hence if a student is not learning in the manner expected of him/her at a certain age, the student is suspected of being hard at hearing, having a visual impairment or being intellectually challenged. Hence, students with learning difficulties in Ghana are either categorized as having any of these forms of traditional disabilities based on the teacher's observation and judgment which may result in labeling and misdiagnosis. This is often the case because disability is classified into three broad groups (vision loss, hearing problem and 'mental/intellectual disability') in special schools in Ghana. As such the category of 'mental/intellectual disability' implies that students with learning difficulties are also bunched up with other students who do not fit into the other two categories of disabilities (Anthony, 2011).

This classification therefore makes it difficult for students with learning difficulties to be identified with ease, coupled with the fact that most teachers are aware of the condition but are not adequately informed of its characteristics, hence encounter problems in identifying students with learning difficulties and managing them appropriately (Narh, 2015). Therefore, it is imperative to explore the knowledge level of teachers about learning difficulties, their experiences and psychological experiences reported as well as how they cope with their challenges.

1.2 Aims and objectives of the study

This study is designed to investigate and understand the experiences of school teachers in educating children with learning difficulties, how these experiences result in psychological distress

as well as the coping strategies adopted by teachers of children with learning difficulties. The specific objectives of this research are to:

1. Examine the psychological distress of special and regular school teachers in teaching children with learning difficulties
2. Investigate the impact of gender on psychological distress among special school teachers
3. Investigate the coping strategies adopted by special and regular school teachers in teaching children with learning difficulties
4. Explore the experiences of special and regular school teachers in teaching children with learning difficulties and the coping resources available to them.

1.3 Relevance of the study

The present study would reveal the knowledge teachers have about the concept of learning difficulties as well as the genuine experiences of both special school teachers and regular teachers in inclusive classrooms. The study would also identify the impact of challenges teachers experience on their psychological health as they teach children with learning difficulties in both special and inclusive classrooms. Coping strategies adopted by teachers when they experience psychological distress in the classroom would be discovered in the present study. These findings may be valuable to teachers in helping them gain insight about how they experience distress and the procedures they follow in coping. Additionally, these identifications could be helpful to teachers in terms of the suggestions and propositions they make to ensure that effective distress management programs are adopted to address teachers' psychological deficiencies.

It is expected that special school teachers would report poorer psychological well-being than regular school teachers. Therefore, findings from this study would inform school management

practices on stress management techniques like relaxation, aerobic workouts, social support programs and anger management to enhance the wellbeing of teachers to safeguard their psychological health. Also, findings would inform training programs on classroom distress management as well as help teachers develop cognitive behavioural skills as an approach in eliminating negative coping responses to safeguard the wellbeing of teachers to increase productivity in the classroom. The study's outcome will also serve as a foundation for future studies and add to literature in the area of learning difficulties.

1.4 Scope of the study

This study investigated the experiences of both special and regular school teachers in inclusive classrooms and the coping resources available to both groups of teachers in educating children with learning difficulties. The study further sought to examine the psychological distress experienced by both groups of teachers in relation to their anxiety and depression levels and how teachers cope with the distress. Again, the challenges faced by teachers in the classroom and their effect on teachers' psychological wellbeing was explored in-depth. However, the study did not focus on the experiences of students with LDs and the impact of these experiences on their psychological health.

Elementary school teachers are particularly relevant for the present study because of the peculiar nature of their classroom set-up. Students spend most part of a typical school day with the same teacher who provides instruction for most of the subjects taught students. This system of primary education may contribute more distress for the teacher since students spend most part of the day with their teachers. This suggests that students would require the attention of the teacher for several hours in a day and this becomes more complicated with the presence of students with learning difficulties who require more attention. Therefore, it is probable that the appraisals made

by primary school teachers concerning classroom demands and resources could be relatively stable throughout their workday, unlike a secondary school teacher, who usually works with different sets of students and possibly different academic subjects in a typical school day (McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, 2009).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents theories to help explain the experiences teachers have as a result of teaching children with learning difficulties. Related studies on forms of education, teachers' experiences, psychological distress and coping have been reviewed. The chapter also presents the study's rationale, statement of hypotheses and research questions.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theories which underpinned this study were the Theory of Learned Helplessness (Seligman, 1975) and the Revised Stress and Coping Model (Folkman, 2008).

2.1.1 The reformulated theory of Learned Helplessness (Abramson, Seligman & Teasdale, 1978)

The theory of learned helplessness was originally formulated by Seligman (1975). Due to various deficiencies identified in this theory, Abramson, Seligman and Teasdale (1978) incorporated attributional theory into the theory of learned helplessness. The reformulated theory of learned helplessness explained why some people are not depressed after facing unpleasant events in their lives. The theory incorporated one's cognitive thinking style as a factor to determine whether learned helplessness would occur or not.

Learned helplessness has been described as a phenomenon in humans and other animals whereby they do not avoid or escape negative situations because they have learned to expect suffering and pain. This means that when humans start to believe that they cannot regulate what occurs, they begin to engage in deep thoughts, feel and act helpless. Learned helplessness is a

learned behavior as a result of an individual's experiences where he/she is either truly not in control over his circumstances or simply thinks that he has no control.

According to Abramson and his colleagues when people are exposed to negative situations over which they have no control, this results in three deficits: cognitive deficit, motivational deficit and emotional deficit (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978). Cognitive deficit refers to an individual's perception that his circumstances are uncontrollable, whereas motivational deficit occurs when an individual fails to respond to potential ways of escaping or avoiding negative situations. Emotional deficit refers to the depression associated with the feeling of helplessness an individual experiences when he/she perceives a negative situation as uncontrollable.

Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale (1978) proposed two types of learned helplessness namely universal helplessness and personal helplessness to explain the association between learned helplessness and depression. Universal helplessness is a sense of helplessness experienced by a person who perceives that nothing can be done about his/her situation, whereas with personal helplessness, the person perceives that others could find a solution to the situation. In relation to the latter, the person perceives that finding a solution to the problem is not within his/her power. Both types of helplessness can cause depression, but the severity of the depression varies.

Individuals who are universally helpless make external attributions to their problems and their failure to solve them, while those who feel personally helpless make internal attributions. Hence, individuals with personal helplessness exhibit low self-esteem because they perceive others to be able to solve problems, they are incapable of. As a result, personally and universally helpless people experience similar cognitive and motivational deficits, however, their emotional deficits

are experienced differently. Consequently, personally helpless people experience higher levels of emotional deficit which are more impactful than experienced by universally helpless individuals.

Teachers are faced with difficult situations in their daily working life that they have minimal or no control over (Ferguson, Frost, & Hall, 2012). Workload, students' behavior, employment conditions, school board and government initiatives, job security and promotion are examples of the situations teachers have no control over. Again, in the inclusive and special classroom settings, the teacher has no control over the categories of learners placed in the classroom, large class sizes and invariably has no control over the workload associated with teaching different groups of learners in the face of insufficient resources. Teachers who experience universal and personal helplessness make external attributions to their problems. Some of these reasons include lack of social support from school management and colleagues, lack of cooperation from parents of students with LDs, inadequate school resources, and large class sizes of diverse learners associated with high workload. The feeling of helplessness in these uncontrollable classroom situations can lead to depression. The thought of teachers coming to work to deal with these negative classroom situations daily may lead to the development of anxiety.

2.1.2 The Transactional Stress and Coping Model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explain stress as being a result of the interaction between a person and his or her immediate environment. These interactions are termed transactions. The model suggests that when a person experiences a challenging situation, an appraisal of the situation is done to determine whether the immediate situation is a danger, loss or a challenge. This process is termed primary appraisal. Primary appraisal is the judgment a person makes about the significance of a situation to his/her well-being. Following primary appraisal is secondary appraisal which is the assessment of personal and social coping resources, the options available to

address the challenging situation and the expected outcome. These appraisals lead to physiological, cognitive, behavioural and emotional responses.

Coping refers to the cognitive and behavioural exertions an individual utilizes to control the demands of the event and the emotions produced from the situation. Coping strategies are adopted to lessen the effect of the stress associated with the given situation and these efforts are categorized into mainly problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. In adopting problem-focused strategies, an individual seeks to increase the resources available or reduce the source of stress in order to change the stressful situation through direct action. Emotion-focused approaches on the other hand seeks to regulate unpleasant emotions linked with challenging situations, hence reducing the negative impact of the source of stress (Beers, 2012). When an appraisal of a situation suggest that nothing can be done about it, emotion-focused is most often adopted (Mitchell, 2004).

Seeking social support is concerned with all the attempts an individual makes to find help or sympathy from others and this strategy can be a problem-focused one or an emotion-focused one depending on the intent associated with it. Lower levels of distress are experienced when an individual applies effective coping strategies. In the event where ineffective coping strategies are used, the individual adjusts poorly and experiences psychological distress.

Regular school teachers in inclusive classrooms are saddled with additional responsibilities of teaching students with LDs besides teaching students without disabilities. Hence, they face challenging situations such as increased workload, modification of teaching and learning materials to accommodate diverse learners, large class sizes, students' disruptive behaviours and deficiency in appropriate school infrastructure. Special school teachers on the other hand also experience

difficult situations in the classroom such as challenging behaviours, low level of autonomy and lack of motivation and engagement in school activities (Baghdadli as cited in Boujut, Dean, Grouselle, & Cappe, 2016). If a teacher perceives that he/she can successfully cope with a situation, distress levels are reduced. However, if he/she doubts his/her ability to control or cope with a situation, distress levels are increased. In the event of the latter, coping strategies are adopted to help manage the situation.

Teachers engage in problem-focused coping once the situation has been assessed to be amenable to change. Problem-focused coping has been suggested to be very effective for educators as they are action-based. These strategies include definition of problem, development of alternative solutions, evaluation of the alternatives, decision making and taking an action (Kyriacou, 2001). Emotion-focused coping, however, comprises defensive approaches such as avoidance, distancing as well as minimization. These strategies rather than addressing the source of the challenging situation focus on the emotions associated with the situation (Kyriacou, 2001).

Emotion-focused coping is adopted when a teacher perceives that absolutely nothing can be done to change the challenging situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Challenging situations over which a teacher may have no control include school systems, lack of social support, the number of students in the classroom, high workload associated with large class sizes and unavailability of school resources. Fewer health complaints and depressive symptoms have been associated with problem-focused coping in contrast to emotion-focused coping which leads to health challenges and depression (Vollink et al., 2013). Teachers can make use of social support to cope with challenging situations ranging from the work environment to family and friends. Some teachers may solicit for sympathy or help from superiors, colleagues, family and friends.

The stress model has been criticized as being overly cognitive and overly conscious. Contemporary models in relation to responses to stressful situations have suggested that appraisals are not necessarily cognitive, nor are they necessarily conscious. A person may make nonconscious demands and resource appraisals in the event of a stressful situation (Blascovich & Mendes, 2000).

2.2 Review of Related Studies

2.2.1 Experiences of teachers in teaching children with LDs

Children with learning problems are traditionally educated in special schools. Nevertheless, the practice of inclusive education by the Ghana Education Service means that children with LDs are also being educated in regular or mainstream classrooms together with their peers with no identified form of LDs. Teachers are considered to be key in the success of inclusive education (Forlin, Keen, & Barrett, 2008) and this warrants a focus on documenting teachers' experiences.

Deku and Vanderpuye (2017) explored teachers' perception of inclusive education in Ghana with respect to the curriculum, infrastructure and teacher training. A survey design was used in data collection from 120 teachers in inclusive settings. The programme was rated as unsuccessful by 75% of the teachers and they viewed the curriculum as inappropriate. Infrastructure in these inclusive schools was perceived by teachers as unsatisfactory and more than half of the educators sampled perceived themselves as incompetent in teaching inclusive classrooms. Similarly, 59.2% of the teachers indicated that they lacked adequate training to teach diverse learners. However, gender had no impact on teachers' views about the curriculum, infrastructure and teacher training for inclusive education.

Inclusive education requires that teachers tailor lessons to meet the needs of varied class of learners. Therefore, in line with this principle Alhassan and Abosi (2014) conducted a study to determine how effective teachers were in modifying tuition to the needs of pupils with learning problems in regular primary schools in Ghana. A mixed-design (descriptive and correlational surveys) was used in the data collection process involving 387 teachers from the northern region of Ghana. The research revealed that majority of teachers were incompetent in adaptive instruction, implying that regular teachers were unlikely to create any efficient adaptation to the needs of pupils with LDs. This suggests a gap in the level of knowledge that teachers have about learning difficulties that could be connected with inadequate professional development and training (Ali, Fysal, Thasneem, & Aswathy, 2019). In as much as the study found no difference in teacher competence in providing adaptive instruction with respect to gender and class size, it was observed that huge class sizes in some of the schools had positive effects on the inclusion of children with learning difficulties making class management difficult. Consequently, teachers were not likely to provide adaptive instruction. Similarly, Kuyini and Desai (2008) discovered that large class sizes make instruction difficult considering that there are no teaching assistants to help the regular class teacher with class work. The situation becomes complex in the face of constraints such as inadequate resources and insufficient teaching and learning materials. Hence, these issues may make it difficult for teachers to support effectively children with peculiar educational needs (Alhassan & Abosi, 2014).

Additionally, Betoret (2006) investigated the relationship between coping resources and burnout among 247 teachers in Spanish secondary schools. He examined the role of school coping resources on the stressor-burnout relationship. Findings indicated that teachers who had access to school coping resources such as school equipment and psychologists reported low levels of

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

burnout than teachers with fewer coping resources, and vice versa. To confirm these findings, Betoret (2009) later used structural equation modeling to examine the role of school resources on job stressors and teacher burnout among 724 primary and secondary teachers in Spain. The results revealed that among primary school teachers, external coping resources affected job stressors negatively resulting in high levels of emotional exhaustion dimension of burnout. Findings highlighted the importance of school support resources in helping teachers overcome job stressors which interfere with their work. As a result teachers would be able to achieve learning objectives.

Planinc and Kolnik (2016) explored the opinions and experiences of 13 geography teachers in Slovenia who taught students with special educational needs. This qualitative study employed interviews to find out what previous experiences teachers had in inclusive schools and how they rated their ability (competence) to teach students with special educational needs. Findings showed the teachers had positive attitudes towards inclusion as well as both positive and negative experiences in teaching students with special educational needs. Teachers indicated that support from parents, was most appreciated, while a lack of support was a significant impediment to progress. The high number of students requiring various special educational needs was expressed as a major shortcoming in inclusive classrooms. Emphasis was laid on the fact that the inclusion of more than two students with different special educational needs affected teachers' ability to effectively manage the class and posed some difficulty in working with such students. Findings also indicated that most teachers could not find sufficient suitable guidance for students with various special educational needs because not all of them had adequate assistance from counselling services in their schools. Consequently, the teachers not only requested for additional professional training but also for the adaptation of standards and norms for teaching.

Teachers' experiences in educating children with LDs and their effect on 10 primary teachers were studied using interviews in Western Australia by Francis (2004). A main theme, 'experience with LD' revealed that teachers' knowledge of LD mainly came from exposure to them on-the-job. One-on-one tuition for students with LDs was also emphasized by all the teachers, however, it was indicated that there was insufficient time to plan and modify programmes to achieve this end. This notwithstanding, finding extra time to plan and modify these programmes for children with LDs created extra workload which resulted in distress for teachers. The lack of time was attributed to the large class sizes; a solution to this issue suggested that smaller class sizes and more teaching assistants could be employed. To bridge up the gap in their knowledge levels, teachers sought the experience and knowledge of their colleagues. As a result, professional development was seen as an appropriate means for teachers to learn more about strategies and programme modifications for learning difficulties. Assistance provided by specialist consultants were also valued.

Lindsay, Proulx, Scott, and Thomson (2014) in a descriptive qualitative study using in-depth interviews explored strategies employed by 13 teachers in including autistic children in regular classrooms in Ontario. They found that several strategies teachers used included advocacy for resources and vital training, differentiated instruction focusing on children's skills rather than their disabilities, teamwork among school staff, building relationships with parents and students and nurturing a climate of acceptance through the promotion of disability awareness in the classroom.

Brackenreed (2011) examined teachers' stressors and how they coped with stress associated with teaching students with special educational needs among 269 teachers in Ontario. The findings suggested that the inclusion of children with special needs into mainstream

classrooms was associated with high distress levels. This was attributed to teachers' use of inadequate coping strategies due to their increased worries. Findings pointed out that teachers were not well informed about the adaptations needed to promote conducive learning conditions for children with learning difficulties because they lacked adequate training. In similar fashion, Lecavalier et al. (2006) conducted a study which demonstrated that a negative correlation existed between past experience in teaching children with special needs and distress among teachers.

Additionally, Boujut, Dean, Grouselle, and Cappe (2016) compared the experiences of teachers' working with children with autistic spectrum disorder in different classroom settings. They also studied the influence of transactional variables (distress, social support and coping strategies) on burnout among 245 teachers in France. Special school teachers viewed their experience more as challenges rather than threats or losses, felt they got more social support from colleagues and experts, used more problem-focused coping strategies and were less burned out than regular school teachers. In contrast the lack of perceived social support and the use of emotion-focused coping were associated with more burnout in regular teachers.

A qualitative study by Potter (2008) explored the experiences of nine teachers educating students with learning difficulties. Five themes generated from teachers' experiences were professional development and experience, emotions and coping, support, management of individual differences and emotions and coping. Teachers acknowledged that students needed help especially those with learning difficulties, however, not all teachers received adequate professional development and support resulting in high distress levels. Challenges found to compromise teachers' abilities to satisfy students' educational needs included lack of adequate resources, large class sizes, curriculum modifications and time limitations.

Similarly, Morton (2007) explored the experiences of teachers working with children with learning difficulties. Seven primary school teachers in Western Australia were interviewed. Findings revealed that teachers lacked resources (for example support and specific training programmes), professional development and support to enhance effective teaching. It was also indicated that students with learning difficulties needed one-on-one tuition but large class sizes contributed to teachers' inability to offer such service. Therefore, smaller class sizes and more resource teachers were advocated for students with LDs. Social support from colleague teachers was indicated as essential for the well-being of teachers as they benefitted from the sharing of experiences and techniques with respect to teaching students with learning difficulties. Again, it was found that parents of students with learning difficulties either expressed no interest in the learning process of their wards or refused to accept their wards' difficulty posing a challenge for these teachers. Despite the negative experiences reported, teachers indicated that they experienced feelings of satisfaction and fulfillment when their students made academic progress.

The experiences of five special educators providing instruction to learning disabled children in the USA were explored by Johnstone (2017). The findings showed that the lack of an appropriate curriculum and materials for teaching in special schools contributed to teachers' feeling of incompetence to adequately instruct their students. Similarly, Dayan (2017) explored the experiences of teachers educating children with multiple disabilities in inclusive classrooms in Accra. The qualitative study involving fifteen (15) teachers revealed that the teachers lacked adequate training for teaching in the inclusive education setting. Limited teaching and learning materials coupled with large class sizes posed a lot of challenges to the teachers. Reports from teachers indicated that teaching children with multiple disabilities was time consuming leaving very little time to teach children without disabilities, and this contributed to teachers' stress.

Knowledge has been posited to be crucial for the development of positive teacher attitudes toward inclusive education (Vaidya & Zaslavsky, 2000). Farrell and Ainscow (2002) have argued that if a teacher feels incompetent to meet the needs of a child with disability in the regular classroom, not much success can be achieved. Abraham (2014) explored teachers' awareness and beliefs about dyslexia among 40 teachers in inclusive schools in the Effutu District, Winneba-Ghana. Special and general educators did not differ in their level of awareness of dyslexia. However, the study reported that teachers with postgraduate qualification had fewer misconceptions about dyslexia as compared to teachers with a diploma in education. Additionally, evidence pointed to the fact that teachers showed a considerable amount of passiveness and helplessness when faced with children with dyslexia, indicating the negative attitudes of the teachers. As a result, dyslexic children in those classrooms received very little instructional modifications as teachers perceived educating them as stressful and frustrating.

Unfavourable work conditions have been linked to poor mental health and suggestions indicate that most teachers are at risk. Poor mental health in teachers was found to correlate with high job demand and low levels of social support; these factors were discovered to lead to high levels of depression. Also, high levels of anxiety are associated with high workload (Borrelli, Benevene, Fiorilli, D'amelio, & Pozzi, 2014; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Similarly, research has suggested that work overload or high workload in teachers can result in physiological disorders, fatigue manifestations and psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression (Mahan et al., 2010; Vedovato & Monteiro, 2014). These manifestations can lead to behavioural changes such as impaired relationships and low levels of work performance (Betoret, 2006).

Mapfumo, Mukwidzwa, and Chireshe (2014) compared general and special school teachers on their distress levels and coping strategies. Eighty teachers in Zimbabwe were sampled for the

study. Both groups indicated that they were distressed by a lack of government support for the sector, limited teaching and learning materials, high workload. For special school teachers they indicated that an additional source of distress was related to the amount of time allocated to students with special educational needs. Strategies teachers used in coping with the distress associated with their jobs included exercise, seeking for social support from family and friends and sharing of problems with colleagues.

Pepe and Addimando (2013) explored the impact of students' disruptive behaviours on the distress teachers experience among 306 special and general education teachers in Italy. Special education teachers recorded low distress levels in relation to frequency and perceived stress associated with disruptive behaviours than general education teachers, resulting in low distress levels experienced in comparison to regular school teachers. Contrasting findings reported by Kebbi and Al-Hroub (2018) however revealed that, special and general classroom teachers did not differ in all their sources of distress and the effects of distress among 139 teachers in Lebanon. Again, most sources of distress had a weak positive correlation with the coping strategies; yet most effects of stress had a weak negative correlation with the coping strategies. The most effective coping strategies indicated by teachers were 'organization of time and setting of priorities' and 'engagement in hobbies to relax'. 'The usage of substances or prescribed medication' and 'smoking of cigarettes' were found to be the least used ways of coping by both groups of teachers.

2.2.2 Depression and anxiety

Teachers have been reported to be relatively at high risk of mental disorders and work-related distress compared to other workers. In Great Britain it has been indicated that teaching professionals consistently record a high prevalence of work-related anxiety and distress (Kidger et al., 2015). Asa and Lasebikan (2016) explored the prevalence of depression and Generalized

Anxiety Disorder (GAD) among 471 secondary school teachers in Ibadan, Nigeria in a descriptive cross-sectional study. It was observed that the prevalence of depression was 29.3% and that of generalized anxiety disorder was 29.5%. Similarly, the prevalence of depression and anxiety among 568 Egyptian teachers in a cross-sectional study was found to be 67.5% and 23.2% respectively (Desouky & Allam, 2017). Anxiety and depression scores were significantly higher among female than male teachers and among teachers with higher workload. However, a significant weak positive correlation was found between occupational stress scores, anxiety and depression scores which suggested a direct relationship between challenging work conditions in the school environment and depression and anxiety. The use of self-report questionnaires in data collection could have been affected by personal or social values leading to a recall bias.

To ascertain the prevalence and severity of depression and anxiety levels among teachers in Libya, a cross-sectional study was conducted among 200 primary and secondary school teachers (Taher, Samud, Hashemi, & Kabuoli, 2016). Findings showed that majority of the teachers experienced mild levels of depression and moderate levels of anxiety. There were no differences in depression and anxiety levels on account of gender differences. The study revealed that increasing workload demand on teachers was associated with depression and anxiety. On the contrary, no significant difference was found in the depression levels of 194 Turkish teachers in terms of age, gender, years of teaching experience and marital status in a descriptive study by Dilekmen and Erdem (2013). Additionally, teachers with small class sizes (20 and fewer and 21-30 students) had low scores on depression as compared to teachers with large classes (31-40 students) suggesting that the teaching of large class sizes is associated with challenges which result in depression among teachers. Similarly, findings from an observational cross-sectional study by Gonçalves et al., (2015) revealed no significant statistical difference between the anxiety and

depression levels recorded between 139 elementary and high school teachers in Brazil; suggesting high teacher distress levels attributed to high workload.

In investigating predictors of anxiety, depression and job satisfaction among 274 teachers in northern Ontario, Ferguson, Frost, and Hall (2012) used data from self-report questionnaires. The study revealed that workload and student behavior were significant predictors of depression and anxiety whereas employment conditions significantly predicted anxiety in teachers. Again, depression was found to be a negative predictor of job satisfaction. Although teachers may have little or no control over workload, student behavior and employment conditions, social support could be made available to the teacher to ease the distress (Ferguson, Frost, & Hall, 2012).

The relationship between anxiety, depression and work environment stressors was examined in 168 teachers from two urban and five suburban high schools in central New Jersey in the USA (Mahan et al., 2010). The study also sought to find out the extent to which anxiety and depression may be predicted by work environment stressors (ongoing and episodic) and social support. Ongoing stressors are events that occur over an extended period, for example, lack of social support and a demanding workload. Episodic stressors on the other hand are events that occur temporarily, for example student misbehavior. Findings revealed that as ongoing stressors increased in teachers' work environment so did their anxiety and depressive symptoms, additionally, teachers with low coworker support reported high levels of anxiety and depression.

2.2.3 Gender Differences and Psychological Distress

Gender differences in mental health have consistently been reported in epidemiological and community-based surveys. Generally, women have been found to show higher rates of anxiety and mood disorders than men (Eaton et al., 2012; Kessler et al., 2005; Seedat et al., 2009). Depression

and anxiety are the common indicators of psychological distress as well as two of the most prevalent mental health problems (Cassidy, O'Connor, Howe, & Warden, 2004; Drapeau et al., 2010; Eaton et al., 2012). Population surveys have indicated that women report higher mean levels of psychological distress than men (Doherty & Kartalova-O'Doherty, 2010; Drapeau et al., 2010; Marchand, Drapeau, & Beaulieu-Prévost, 2011; Mirowsky & Ross, 1995; Nurullah, 2010; Roberts, Abbott, & Mckee, 2010). This is confirmed by Matud, Bethencourt, and Ibanez's (2015) study conducted in the Spanish general population to investigate gender differences in psychological distress. This study revealed that females experienced more psychological distress than males, additionally, women manifested more emotion focused coping and less problem focused coping styles indicating an increased risk of distress in women than men. A number of studies have been conducted to confirm this fact. For example, Husain et al.'s (2014) study showed that women were twice as likely to be depressed as men in urban Karachi, Pakistan; this occurrence was ascribed to marital challenges and role conflicts in the domestic spheres of life. Again, Nurullah (2010) also found out that women reported more psychological distress than men. In a related fashion, Sakurai et al. (2010) in their investigation of psychological distress in a Japanese general population found that the level of psychological distress was higher in women with lower social status than women with higher social statuses.

Aftab and Khatoon (2012) examined the relationship between gender and distress of 608 Indian secondary school teachers. Evidence from the study showed that male teachers were more distressed than their female counterparts which contradicts results from other studies reporting the opposite (Timms et al., 2006; Antoniou, Polychroni, & Vlachakis, 2006) and no gender differences found in the burnout syndrome (Coulter & Abney, 2009; Dali, 2004). Similarly, the socio-demographic determinants of distress among secondary school teachers in Anambra State –

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

Nigeria were investigated by Mmaduokonam (2014) using the stratified random sampling technique to select 1,000 teachers. The study showed that male teachers exhibited a significantly higher level of distress than female teachers. In contrast, other studies did not find any difference in distress levels of male and female teachers (Rani & Singh, 2012; Ghani, Ahmad, & Ibrahim, 2014).

Differences in gender and age in relation to distress and professional burnout between 493 primary and high school teachers in Greece was studied by Antoniou, Polychroni, and Vlachakis (2006) using a cross-sectional design. It was found that occupational stressors of teachers included difficulties in the classroom such as congested classes, lack of motivation on the part of students, students under performance and behavioural problems. Additionally, the results also indicated that gender has an effect on distress and burnout, signifying that female teachers' occupational stress was higher among female teachers than their male counterparts. This was found in relation to the difficulties female teachers encountered both at work and their social environment. Furthermore, females reported higher levels of emotional exhaustion compared to their male counterparts, which perhaps indicated that either the females have not developed the appropriate psychological-coping resources geared towards the demands of the profession or they are not able to utilize these coping resources. Furthermore, younger instructors reported higher levels of emotional fatigue and disengagement from the profession, whereas older teachers reported higher distress levels in relation to the support they perceive to be provided by the government.

Some teachers teach regular students while others teach students with special educational needs, and this factor can determine the levels of distress they experience. Distress among special educators in Malaysia was studied by Ghani, Ahmad, and Ibrahim (2014), who investigated factors accounting for distress and distress levels among 92 special school teachers. Results showed that

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

five main factors contributed to distress among special educators namely: student misbehavior as the main source of teacher distress, followed by workload, time constraints and resources inadequacies, acknowledgement, and interpersonal relationship. The overall distress level among the teachers was moderate and no gender differences in distress levels were recorded.

Mapfumo, Mukwidzwa, and Chireshe (2014) conducted a comparative survey to compare distress levels among 80 regular and special school teachers in Zimbabwe. Both groups of teachers recorded high distress levels but female teachers showed elevated levels than male teachers. Similarly, Lazuras (2006) studied the relationship between occupational distress and negative affectivity among 70 special and general teachers in Greece. Findings indicated that mainstream classroom teachers had lower levels of distress in comparison to their counterparts in special school. However, special educators had lower scores in negative affectivity than mainstream education teachers despite the relatively higher distress scores of special educators. A potential explanation for this outcome was related to the self-monitoring impacts of a buffer mechanism which states different cognitive and emotional strategies are adopted by individuals who experience high levels of distress (Bowling, 2002).

Some studies have also been conducted on the distress that teachers experience with their work in Ghana. In line with this, an investigation into how 25 female teachers in the West Akim manage distress and teacher fatigue was carried out by Addison and Yankyera (2015). The study also explored the causes, effects of distress as well as ways of improving work-related distress. Results from the cross-sectional survey design showed that female teachers experienced high levels of distress. Findings regarding the causes of distress revealed two major causes: work overload and difficult interpersonal relationships. The effects of distress experienced by the female teachers were loss of concentration, confusion and low job performance. Additionally, findings

revealed that majority of the teachers used social support as ways of coping with the distress. Another study among Ghanaian teachers was conducted by Ansah-Hughes, Owusu-Darko, and Acheampong (2017). A descriptive survey design to examine the level of distress among private and public (government) sector teachers was conducted among 88 Junior High School (JHS) and Senior High School (SHS) teachers in the Techiman South Circuit of the Brong Ahafo region, Ghana. Findings from the study showed that teachers experienced above average levels of work-related distress with public school teachers reporting higher levels of distress than private school teachers. The study also supported the hypothesis that female teachers are more stressed than their male counterparts. Furthermore, distress levels were high among JHS teachers than SHS teachers.

2.2.4 Coping

In the classroom, teachers of students with LDs both in the special and inclusive settings are faced with challenging situations which may result in distress. Psychological distress develops as a result of the teacher's perception of his/her inability to cope with the situation. Consequently, individuals adopt strategies in order to cope and fulfill their mandate of educating students under their tutelage.

The association between primary school teachers' distress and their coping strategies in response to the teacher surplus in Taiwan was explored by Hung (2011). Teacher surplus has been described as the supply of teachers greater than the demand which could result in unemployment. Findings demonstrated that younger teachers adopted 'denial' as their coping strategy when faced with distress associated with teacher surplus. A significant relationship was found to exist between distress related to teacher surplus and coping strategies. In contrast, denial which was considered as a negative coping strategy (Austin, Shah, & Muncer, 2005) was rarely used by Chinese primary and secondary school teachers and 'turning to religion' was the least popular coping strategy

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

(Shen, 2009). Teachers with high distress levels have been found to use negative coping strategies such as denial and escape avoidance more frequently whereas teachers with low distress levels more frequently used positive coping strategies. Purposeful problem solving was the most frequently used coping strategy which was negatively associated to distress (Austin, Shah, & Muncer, 2005).

A phenomenology study design was adopted by Margaret et al. (2018) in exploring the coping strategies among teachers in borstal institutions in Kenya. With respect to the coping strategies adopted by the teachers, physical exercises emerged as the most common strategy. Twenty out of the sixty participants indicated that they engaged in walking, jogging, going to the gym or engaging in manual work in order to cope with the distress they experienced from the job. About 17% of the teachers sought social support from colleagues. Other strategies teachers engaged in were religious intervention, seeking psychological help, seeking alternative accommodation outside the institution, reading, and visiting the night club to drink alcohol. Lack of professional counseling services also emerged as a cause of high distress levels. While some of the ways of coping are positive, others like the use of alcohol are negative and may impair the teaching and learning process.

A study by Antoniou, Ploumpi, and Ntalla (2013) investigated levels of teacher distress, professional burnout and coping strategies among teachers as a consequence of task demands. One main finding was that rational coping behaviours served as a resource helping teachers overcome work-related stressors. This is because problem-solving strategies help people obtain information as to what needs to be done to change a challenging situation. The study revealed a positive correlation between avoidance coping and teacher distress indicating that when teachers deny the existence of a problem without changing the situation this would make it difficult for them to

overcome negative outcomes associated with challenges such as high workload, work conditions, low social support and lack of students' motivation.

This result indicated that teachers' distress levels would determine the type of coping strategies which would be adopted. Findings from the study is in synchrony with studies indicating that teachers with high distress levels used more passive strategies whilst low distress levels in teachers was associated with more active coping strategies (Austin, Shah, & Muncer, 2005). Additionally, coping strategies have been found to be related to burnout. Specifically, positive approach of a problem, task strategies and problem solving have predicted a high level of personal accomplishment whereas avoidance of a problem is a positive predictor of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization in teachers.

Brackenreed (2011) collected data from 269 teachers in north-eastern Ontario to examine the extent to which different coping strategies were perceived as useful for dealing with perceived stressors. Of the top 10 strategies identified by teachers as useful, 6 were personal coping strategies, 3 were professional coping strategies and 2 were institutional coping strategies. The teachers identified maintaining a sense of humour, drawing on past experiences, making a plan and following it, looking on the bright side, developing interests outside of school and engaging in physical activities constituted the personal coping strategies adopted by the teachers. The professional strategies included coming up with different solutions and concentrating on what has to be done next. Discussing the situation with colleagues and discussing with the principal were indicated as the two most useful institutional coping strategies. He posits that teachers generally need experience in order to use the most effective coping strategies, such as relying on past experience of following a pre-designed plan of action.

The relationship between strategies of dealing with distress and procrastination as a personal feature among 194 primary school teachers in Slovakia was examined by Verešová (2013). Procrastination is the irrational tendency to delay tasks that should be completed. The results indicated a significant negative correlation between procrastination and proactive coping, which is considered to be an effective coping strategy. This suggests that proactive teachers are unlikely to procrastinate/delay tasks to a later date when they encounter challenging situations. In contrast, the study revealed a significant positive correlation between avoidance coping and procrastination, indicating that teachers who procrastinate prefer avoidance coping as a coping strategy.

Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2015) conducted a qualitative study using interviews to explore the coping strategies adopted among 34 Norwegian teachers when they experience distress; 30 teachers in active service and 4 on retirement. The study was based on qualitative interviews with 30 teachers in elementary and middle schools and four retired teachers. It was found that the consequences of distress and coping strategies changed with age. In coping with the distress, young teachers (27-34 years) tend to invest a lot of time to prepare adequately for a class as they experienced a heavy workload, they had high career ambitions and avoided seeking for sick leave. They emphasized that sick leaves would hurt their students and their colleagues. One young teacher used exercises to recover from the distress. Middle aged teachers (35-50 years) on the other hand, used sick leave as a self-protective strategy whereas other middle-aged teachers had thoughts of reducing their employment duration or asked for partial disability pensions. Senior teachers (51-63 years), however, actively used short-term leave to escape from the distress and workload. Some senior teachers also reduced their employment duration and opted for a disability pension, additionally, they reduced the amount of time spent preparing for a lesson. Others exercised

regularly and had enough sleep and some also tried to relax after school hours. It is worthy of note that despite the large sample size for a qualitative study, it was not randomly selected and as such the results cannot be generalized beyond that population. Again, since the study was conducted in Norwegian and translated into the English Language, some nuances may be lost during the process of translation.

Alifanoviene, Sapelyte, and Orska (2016) conducted a study to reveal significant contrast in how teachers and specialists of educational support (social and special pedagogues, speech therapists) cope with distress with regard to their different professional experience and activities. The sample was made up of 478 Lithuanian respondents which was constituted of four categories of teachers: teachers, senior teachers, supervising teachers and experts, with experts at the apex of the qualification ladder. Findings with respect to the categories of professional qualification revealed that pedagogues with lower qualification used avoidance-oriented strategies when faced with stressful situations in comparison to those with higher qualifications. Again, it was indicated that teachers and senior teachers who had lower professional qualification as compared to supervising teachers and experts made more use of retreat and avoidance in stressful situations. It was emphasized that qualification categories involve practical skills, knowledge and personal abilities. Therefore, the lower the qualification category, the scarcer the skills, knowledge and abilities the individual would possess, hence the choice to retreat when faced with difficult situations. Contradictory findings also revealed that between teachers and specialists of educational support, the latter tend to retreat than see into a difficult or stressful situation. This was attributed to the fact that the work of a specialist was not clearly defined, hence strategies of retreat and avoidance are observed at work when there was a controversy between needs and expectations.

Kepalaite (2013) investigated teachers' stress coping peculiarities among 112 teachers in Lithuania and identified that teachers most often used planful problem solving and accepted responsibility as coping strategies. However, escape-avoidance and confrontation as ways of coping were rarely used. Female teachers used all coping strategies in the Ways of Coping Questionnaire (Lazarus, 1993) more often than male teachers. However, 'distancing' as a coping strategy was among the first three used strategies among the male teachers, whereas this strategy was among the most rarely used among the female teachers. Older female teachers used confrontation and distancing coping more rarely than younger women but used positive reappraisal and planful problem solving more than younger female teachers. Female teachers with more years of teaching experience more often used positive reappraisal and rarely used 'confrontation' as a coping strategy. No relationship was found between coping and age among male teachers but it was found that with more years of experience male teachers seek social support and assistance more rarely.

As stated previously, problem-focused coping was defined as dealing with the source of a problem directly (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Positive outcomes for teachers have been associated with problem-focused coping as it tends to decrease levels of psychological distress and have been reported to be an effective way of coping among teachers (Chan, 1998). Again, more usage of coping which is task-oriented coping has been linked to a greater feeling of personal achievement and reduced levels of depersonalization (Griva & Joeke, 2003; Pascual, Perez-Jover, Mirambell, Ivanez, & Terol, 2003). More physical symptoms associated with burnout have been predicted by less usage of task-oriented coping (Griva & Joeke, 2003). Disengagement has been found to be negatively linked to problem-focused coping and somatic problems (Rasku & Kinnunen, 2003)

and positively connected to job satisfaction (Griva & Joeke, 2003). These findings indicate that problem-focused coping can be useful to teachers (Beers, 2012).

Emotion-focused coping on the other hand can be conceptualized as dealing with the emotions that arise from challenging situations. Negative outcomes such as emotional exhaustion and somatic problems have been linked to the use of emotion-focused coping among teachers (Griva & Joeke, 2003; Pascual et al., 2003; Rasku & Kinnunen, 2003). Emotion-focused coping has predicted high levels of depersonalization, low levels of personal accomplishment (Pascual et al., 2003; Rasku & Kinnunen, 2003) and job satisfaction (Pascual et al., 2003; Pomaki & Anagnostopoulou, 2003; Rasku & Kinnunen, 2003). However, high levels of personal achievement have been related to low levels of emotion-focused coping leading to increased job satisfaction (Verhoeven, Kraaij, Joeke, & Maes, 2003).

Avoidance coping according to the teaching literature is described as efforts by an individual to withdraw from a challenging situation without tackling the source of the problem. Avoidance coping is perceived as a maladaptive approach owing to the individual's inability to fix the situation; as a result it is associated with negative outcomes. For example avoidance coping has been linked to high psychological distress' levels (Chan, 1998). Again, avoidance coping among teachers has resulted in their dissatisfaction with the outcomes and the perception of the problems as recurrent (Green & Ross, 1996).

2.3 Rationale of the study

The studies reviewed provide important information about teaching and distress, however there is a substantial gap with respect to context. Majority of the studies were conducted in developed countries with few in developing countries (e.g. Johnstone, 2017; Alhassan & Abosi,

2014; Potter, 2008; Morton, 2007). Most of the studies reviewed studied the variables of interest in separate studies. Hence the need to study these variables in one study to ascertain the outcome.

Learning difficulties have been a neglected area of research in Ghana (Opoku, 2017), as evidenced by few studies focusing on the teacher (Dayan, 2017; Alhassan & Abosi, 2014). Again few studies have focused on psychological distress and coping among teachers in Ghana (Addison & Yankyera, 2015). Therefore, the present study would help bridge this gap in literature. Some researchers have also argued that higher levels of distress may be experienced by special educators than teachers in general education (Hinds, Jones, Gau, Forrester, & Biglan, 2015; Kokkinos & Davazoglou, 2009; Pepe & Addimando, 2013; Lazuras, 2006), others do not support this view (Kebbi & Al-Hroub, 2018; Williams & Gersch, 2004) and others have found the contrary to be the case (Tamannaifer & Golmohammadi, 2016). The inconsistent results in relation to special and regular school teachers' distress indicate that further research is needful, to clarify the potential differences prevailing among teachers as pertaining to the Ghanaian context.

There is also a paucity of research when it comes to the comparison of teachers' experiences in educating children with LDs in the special and inclusive settings in Ghana and how these experiences affect them. Hence the need for this study to be conducted. Furthermore, a look at the reviewed studies revealed that most of the studies made use of cross-sectional designs (Goncalves et al., 2015; Antoniou, Polychroni, & Vlachakis, 2006; Asa & Lasebikan, 2016; Desouky & Allam, 2017; Taher, Samud, Hashemi, & Kabuoli, 2016) whereas a few of them used qualitative designs (Francis, 2004; Morton, 2007; Planinc & Kolnik, 2016; Potter, 2008) and only one study used a mixed-method design (Alhassan & Abosi, 2014). Again, there was the need to study gender differences in relation to psychological distress in the current study. This was because

findings from studies comparing levels of psychological distress in males and females indicated contrasting results. Whereas some studies found that females experienced higher levels of psychological distress than males (Doherty & Kartalova-O'Doherty, 2010; Drapeau et al., 2010; Marchand, Drapeau, & Beaulieu-Prévost, 2011; Matud, Bethencourt, & Ibanez (2015), others found that males were more psychologically distressed than their female counterparts (Aftab & Khatoon, 2012).

Qualitative studies would therefore provide additional insight into teachers' perspectives of their experience with students with LDs. Although qualitative techniques are usually more time consuming to conduct and analyze than quantitative strategies, exploring a subjective area such as experiences of teachers would yield in-depth information. Hence, using a mixed method in the present study will provide additional information about teachers' experiences and the coping strategies they adopt; offering a more comprehensive understanding about teachers' experiences in teaching children with LDs. This design is advantageous because in adopting both quantitative and qualitative approaches it offers strengths that counteract the weaknesses of both methods.

2.4 Statement of Hypotheses

The quantitative part of the present study tested the following hypotheses:

1. Special school teachers will experience higher levels of depression and anxiety than regular school teachers.
2. Female special school teachers will experience higher levels of depression and anxiety than male special school teachers.
3. There will be a significant negative relationship between perceptions of the effectiveness of coping strategies and psychological distress among special school teachers.

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

4. There will be a significant negative relationship between perceptions of the effectiveness of coping strategies and psychological distress among regular school teachers.
5. There will be a positive relationship between years of teaching experience and perceptions of the effectiveness of coping among both special and regular school teachers.

The qualitative part of the present study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do teachers understand the term 'learning difficulties'?
2. What are the experiences of teachers in special and regular schools in teaching children with learning difficulties?
3. How do teachers in special and regular schools cope with the distress from teaching children with learning difficulties?
4. What resources are available to help special and regular teachers cope with the distress they experience from teaching children with learning difficulties?

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter highlights the methodology of the study. This is made up of a description of the population from which participants were sampled for the study. The chapter also presents information on the sample, sampling technique, the research design and procedure used in the study. The instruments used for the data collection process and the statistical tools used for analyzing the data are also presented. The ethical issues considered in the present study are also highlighted.

3.1 Research Design

A mixed methods was used in this study. The mixed method approach is a procedure through which research data are collected and analyzed by combining both quantitative and qualitative data in one study. The core purpose of using a mixed design is that it helps in understanding and explaining the research problem better than when a quantitative or qualitative method is used (Creswell, 2012). This method counterbalances the weaknesses of both methods and draws on the strengths of both. By using mixed method approach, the researcher gains a better understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Essentially, implementing a mixed method approach, offers both the breadth and depth of data required to address the aims of the present study.

Specifically, a sequential explanatory mixed methods design was adopted for collecting data in this study. This design is in two phases where the quantitative data is collected first, followed by the qualitative data. The qualitative data helps to further explain and interpret the

findings in the quantitative study (Creswell, 2003). In this design, the researcher first collected the quantitative data followed by the qualitative data collection. The purpose of using this design was to use the qualitative study to further explain the coping strategies adopted by teachers in the quantitative study. With respect to the quantitative method, a cross-sectional survey design was used. Participants in this study were drawn from different backgrounds in terms of age, gender, marital status, level of education and years of teaching experience.

With respect to the qualitative data collection, one-on-one interviews were conducted to explore the experiences of teachers, their coping strategies and the resources available to them to help them cope with the distress associated with teaching children with learning difficulties. One-on-one interviews were used to obtain in-depth information about the individual experiences of teachers. Additionally, it gave each participant the time to share their experiences without any interruptions or intimidation from others.

3.2 Research setting

The present study was conducted in Accra, the capital city of Ghana. Due to the cosmopolitan nature of the city, it accommodates people from all walks of life making it a suitable research setting. The population of the study which is special school teachers and regular school teachers teaching children with LDs was accessible via the schools where they taught. The special schools from which data was collected were Dzorwulu Special School, New Horizon Special School, Castle Road Special School, and Epicentre Special School. The regular schools offering the inclusive education were the Madina No. 1 Cluster of Schools and the Dansoman No. 5 Cluster of Schools where information was collected about regular school teachers.

3.3 Population

The population for the study was special and regular school teachers in the Dzorwulu Special School, New Horizon Special School, Castle Road Special School, Epicentre Special School, Madina No. 1 Cluster of Schools and the Dansoman No. 5 Cluster of Schools. For the purpose of this study primary school teachers in regular schools practicing inclusive education and primary teachers in special schools were selected. These two groups of teachers teach children with learning difficulties in their classrooms as a result, they encounter diverse learners.

3.4 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Ghanaian primary school teachers who were teaching children with learning difficulties in special schools and regular schools offering inclusive education for at least a year were included in the study. Teachers aged 19 years and above were eligible to participate in the study. Conversely, teachers below the age of 19 years who had not taught children with learning difficulties and those who had taught this student population for less than a year were excluded from the study.

3.5 Sample and Sampling Technique

For the quantitative study, the research sample was determined by using G*Power 3.1.9.2 (Faul, Erdfelder, & Buchner, 2007). It is an easy-to-use computer program designed to enable social and behavioral researchers to easily conduct power analysis for statistical tests. To generate the sample required for the study, an a priori power analysis based on Cohen's (1988; 1992) acceptable power of .80, an alpha of 0.05 and a medium effect size of 0.15 was conducted. Outcome of the analysis estimated a required number of 107 participants as sufficient to accept the alternative hypotheses over the null hypotheses. Therefore, a sample size of 200 participants was deemed adequate taking into consideration response rate. All participants were included in the

study after meeting the inclusion criteria. Consequently, a total of 200 questionnaires were distributed but 147 were retrieved. A further examination revealed that all the 147 retrieved were valid questionnaires to be used for the analysis. This represented a response rate of 73.5%. The sample size of 147 comprised of 50 regular school teachers and 97 special school teachers.

Teachers were recruited using the purposive and convenient sampling techniques which are both types of non-probability sampling. Purposive sampling technique guarantees that research participants are recruited based on distinguishable features that is suitable and measured in a study (Cozby, 2009). This technique was used because participants of interest could only be accessible in schools where students with learning difficulties are educated. Convenient sampling technique was further used to recruit teachers who were available and willing to participate during the period of data collection.

For the qualitative study, 10 participants were sampled from the 147 tested in the qualitative study. Krueger (2014) suggests that 10 participants are large enough to get a variety of perspectives on a phenomenon and small enough not to become fragmented; hence the 10 participants sampled for the study. Five teachers each for both groups of regular school and special school teachers were sampled.

3.6 Demographic characteristics of Participants

Table 1 shows the distribution of the participants across all demographic variables examined in the study. Of the 147 participants, 34% (n=50) were regular school teachers and 66% (n= 97) represented special school teachers. The mean age of the participants was 39.98 and the standard deviation was 6.52 years whereas mean years of teaching experience was 8.01 with a

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

standard deviation of 4.48 years. In terms of educational qualification, majority of participants had their first degrees (30.6%, n=45) and were married (68%, n=100).

Table 1: Summary of demographic characteristics of teachers of students with learning difficulties

Characteristics	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>Mean (SD)</i>
Teachers (<i>N</i> =147)		
<i>Special teachers</i>	50 (34.01)	
<i>Regular teachers</i>	97 (65.98)	
Age		39.98 (6.52)
Gender		
<i>Special teachers (Males)</i>	30 (58.8%)	
<i>Special teachers (Females)</i>	21 (41.2%)	
<i>Regular teachers (Males)</i>	32 (33.3%)	
<i>Regular teachers (Females)</i>	64 (66.7%)	
Teaching experience		8.01(4.48)
Educational Qualification		
<i>BECE</i>	8 (5.4)	
<i>SSSCE/WASSCE</i>	28 (19)	
<i>Diploma</i>	65 (44.2)	
<i>First Degree</i>	45 (30.6)	
<i>Postgraduate/ Masters</i>	1 (.7)	

3.7 Measures

All constructs were measured using multi-item standardized questionnaires. The measures were divided into three sections. Section A obtained responses on the demographic characteristics

of the participants. Section B obtained data on teachers' psychological distress levels in terms of depression and anxiety as a result of teaching students with LDs in the classrooms. Section C measured the effectiveness of coping strategies adopted by these teachers in the face of the distress they encounter in educating children with LDs.

3.7.1 Section A: Demographic Variables

Demographic variables measured included such as gender, age, educational qualification, years of teaching experience and marital status, since these variables were deemed important in the present study. These demographic variables were obtained from participants who indicated this information on the questionnaires provided (See Appendix IV)

3.7.2 Section B: Psychological distress (Kessler, 2003)

This construct was measured with a 10-item scale. This scale assessed how frequent and severe anxiety and depression symptoms are experienced by an individual. The Kessler Psychological Scale (K-10) has two sub-scales with 5 items each on its two subscales (depression and anxiety). Items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (none of the time) to 5 (all of the time) and scores are added to obtain a total K10 score. The lowest possible score is 10 and the highest possible score is 50. Scores between 20-24 are indicative of a mild level of psychological distress, whereas scores of between 25-29 signify a moderate level of psychological distress and scores ranging between 30-50 indicate a severe level of psychological distress. The internal consistency of this instrument is .92 (Cornelius, Groothoff, van der Klink, & Brouwer, 2013). In the present study, a Cronbach alpha of .80 was obtained. Sample items on the scale include "In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel tired out for no good reason?" and "In

the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel so sad that nothing could cheer you up?" (See Appendix IV)

3.7.3 Section C: Coping (Kyriacou & Chien, 2004)

This construct was measured using the 25-item Teacher Stress and Coping Strategies (TSCS) Scale developed by Kyriacou & Chien (2004). This scale assesses the effectiveness of coping strategies adopted by teachers of students with learning difficulties when they are distressed. The scale was measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (ineffective or never used) to 5 (extremely effective). The original coping section of the scale contained 25 items but this was modified after pilot testing to exclude 4 items which had very low 'item-related correlation'. Thus, 21 items were used for the present study. The internal consistency of the TSCS instrument has been reported to be .82 (Meng & Liu, 2008). The main study produced a Cronbach alpha of .93. Sample items on the scale include "I discuss my problems with colleagues or friends" and "I start the term with clearly defined classroom rules and expectations" (See Appendix IV).

3.7.4 Section D: Semi-structured Interview Guide

A semi-structured interview guide was developed by the researcher purposely for the current study. Developing a semi-structured interview guide essentially contributes to the trustworthiness of the interview as a qualitative research method (Kallio, Pietilla, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). The interview guide was developed from a broader set of research questions that needed to be answered in the study. It consisted of 10 questions each with probes. The interview guide asked questions about teachers' understanding of the term 'Learning Difficulties', their experiences, coping resources available and how they cope with the distress associated with teaching children with learning difficulties (See Appendix IV).

3.8 Pilot Study

Prior to the main study, a pilot study was conducted to test the comprehensibility and establish the reliability of the measures for data collection. Even though these instruments have good reliability values, nuances within the Ghanaian cultural context and the population under study could affect the responses and consequently the reliability of the instruments. Approval was sought from the Pentecost School in Madina, Reyo Paddock Special Needs School and the Woodfield Manor Autism and Special Needs School for the pilot study to be carried out in these institutions. After permission was granted by the head teachers of these schools, a sample size comprising 30 teachers were selected based on Connelly's (2008) recommendation of 10% of the total sample for any study. This sample consisted of 20 teachers from the Pentecost School and 5 teachers each from the Reyo Paddock and the Woodfield Manor Autism and Special Needs Schools. The reliability index of the K-10 was $\alpha = .81$, but the Brief COPE which was originally used to measure the coping actions of teachers yielded a rather low reliability, hence, the need for the questionnaire to be replaced. Therefore, the Teacher Stress and Coping Strategies Scale (TSCSS) was finally adopted and piloted among 25 regular school teachers of the Pentecost School, Madina. Four items on the scale which yielded low reliability were deleted. This second pilot study using the TSCS Scale yielded a Cronbach alpha of .78 after four items had been deleted.

3.9 Research Procedure

An introductory letter was sought from the Department of Psychology, University of Ghana and this together with the ethical clearance form were sent to the various head teachers of the selected schools where the research was to take place. After approval was received from the schools, the researcher proceeded to the schools at a later date for the commencement of data collection.

The teachers were briefed about the study and they were given the opportunity to seek clarification on issues pertaining to the study. Following this procedure, some teachers agreed to participate in the study. Informed consent was sought from the teachers. Details of the study such as the aims and objectives, benefits and harm (if any) that may be associated or inherent in the study were discussed with the teachers. After informed consent was obtained participants were required to sign the consent form before completing the questionnaire. They were also informed of their freedom to withdraw from the study if they so desired to discontinue the process without any retribution. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured. Questionnaires administered to the participants took a maximum period of 15 minutes to complete. The researcher made herself available to participants for clarification on issues they did not easily understand. The quantitative data was collected first using the questionnaires, followed by the collection of the qualitative data using interviews at a later date agreed upon by the researcher and the participant.

For the qualitative study, one-on-one interviews were conducted in a secluded part of the classroom after school sessions were over to avoid any distractions. A semi-structured interview guide was used to conduct the interview as it allowed for the use of probes to elicit information from the participants. Information given by participants were noted as well as recorded with an audio recorder to ensure that verbatim quotes were obtained to prevent the loss of essential information. The average duration of an interview was 35 mins with the range being between 25 to 40 minutes.

3.10 Ethical Consideration

The ethical considerations that were highlighted in this study were informed consent, freedom to participate or decline participation and confidentiality and anonymity in accordance with the principles enshrined in the APA (2002) Ethical Code in relation to the use of humans as

participants in research. Ethical approval was sought from the Ethics Committee for the Humanities, University of Ghana stating the aims and objectives of the study, the population, the method of enquiry as well as ways by which ethical issues would be addressed by the researcher.

All participants were provided with the right and relevant information regarding the research. This included the purpose of the research, any possible harm associated with their participation as well as benefits of the research to the society at large. After this information had been provided and discussed participants' consent was sought by the signing of the consent form. Participants' consent was also sought in order to use audio recorders to record information. Participants were informed of their freedom to decline participation and their freedom to withdraw at any point in time during the study, as such, the signing of the consent form was not used to coerce participants to complete the study.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity of participants were not tagged with their responses. Information shared by participants was not communicated to a third party and audio recordings were kept under a password. The researcher ensured that scientific integrity was espoused through honest conduct and reporting of data.

3.11 Trustworthiness

To guarantee the trustworthiness of the qualitative results, some recommended procedures by Shenton (2004) were followed. Participants' thoughts and ideas during the interview process were reechoed or reflected upon in order to ensure that their precise accounts about the events were well captured. Also, probes were made use of in the data collection so as to gain comprehensive information from the participants. Frequent sessions were held between the researcher and the supervisor in order to generate ideas for the study. Again, back and forth engagement were made between the researcher and the supervisor until the data was completely analysed. During this

process, a colleague postgraduate student versed in qualitative work read through the codes, themes and subthemes generated by the researcher for inter-rater reliability.

Williams and Morrow (2009) suggests that trustworthiness can be ensured through three ways: integrity of data, balance between reflexivity, and clear communication of results. The study employed all these strategies to enhance integrity. Steps were taken to avoid biases, for instance, in the course of coding, the researcher generated codes which were independent of the second coder to allow for comparison. Therefore, this study is the outcome of re-written drafts that sort to ensure analysis was grounded in the data. In order to bracket the biases of the researcher from affecting the outcome of the study, utmost honesty was ensured in the course of coding and subjecting coded extracts to comparison from a second coder.

3.12 Data Analysis

The sequential mixed methods design was used in this study; therefore, data was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 21). Hypotheses 1 and 2 were analyzed using the Factorial Multivariate Analysis of Variance (Factorial MANOVA) whereas Pearson Moment Correlation (Pearson r) was used to analyze hypotheses 3, 4 and 5. Factorial MANOVA was used because the independent variables were on two levels and there were two dependent variables each. The Pearson Moment Correlation (Pearson r) was made use of because the dependent variables were measured on an interval scale and the hypotheses are simply testing the relationship between two variables.

3.13 Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative study was analyzed using thematic analysis. First the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and transcripts were read and re-read to ensure familiarity with their

content. The researcher then used the Braun and Clarke's (2006) suggested six stages of thematic analysis to identify recurrent themes within the responses. These stages encompass data familiarization, initial generation of codes, searching of themes based on initial codes, reviewing of themes, defining and naming themes and writing a report after a thorough process. The first step involved a familiarization process where the researcher immersed herself in the data by listening attentively to the audiotaped interviews in order to find meaning and patterns. Immediately after listening thoroughly to the audio, transcription was done. Initial codes were generated after the researcher had familiarized with the data, and this was done by writing notes and highlighting texts to identify patterns within the data.

After codes were identified, a theme search based on initial codes was done and this involved organizing all codes into potential themes. Thus codes were sorted into potential themes and all relevant codes were collated. The codes were analyzed to determine which could become a main theme. The fourth stage involved the review of themes where codes were reviewed to find out if they formed a coherent pattern. Again, the various themes were checked to find out how relevant they were in relation to the codes and the entire data. As part of this stage a thematic map of the analysis is generated and checked to ascertain whether it represents the meaning provided in the data.

The next stage involved the definition and naming of themes which implied explaining what each theme was about and directing each theme to the aspect of data it captured. The aim was to identify the essence of what each theme is talking about. Finally, after themes were fully identified, a report was done when there was a full set of well-established themes. This report captured the findings of the study in relation to the research questions the study sought to answer.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

4.0 Introduction

The study was conducted purposely to examine the influence of coping strategies on the psychological distress of teachers in the regular and special schools. One-hundred and forty-seven (147) teachers from special and regular schools were tested for the quantitative analysis. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 was used to analyze the quantitative data. This chapter presents reports on preliminary analysis and inferential statistics of the quantitative data as well as thematic analysis of the qualitative data.

4.1 Quantitative Findings

Preliminary Analysis

The preliminary analysis of the quantitative study was done in four steps. They consist of normal distribution analysis, descriptive analysis and correlation matrix using Pearson Product's Moment correlation coefficient.

4.1.1 Analysis of Normal Distribution of Variables

Test for normal distribution was done by examining the skewness and kurtosis of the scores obtained for the variables in the study. From Table 2 below, the skewness and kurtosis fall within the range of -0.997 to $+0.579$. This data is said to be normally distributed since Garson (2012) indicates that a data is normally distributed when the skewness and kurtosis falls with the range of -2 to $+2$.

4.1.2 Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive statistics of the data was done by summarizing the raw data obtained in order to find the mean and standard deviation. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Summary of Descriptive Statistics of Variables in the Study

Variable	Mean	(SD)	(Min.)	(Max.)	Skewness	Kurtosis
Psychological Distress	26.00	7.55	12	43	.47	-.81
Anxiety	12.05	4.30	5	23	.58	-.65
Depression	13.95	4.04	5	24	.12	-.63
Coping Strategies	66.92	17.65	35	105	-.18	-1.0

N = 150

From Table 2, the mean and standard deviation for psychological distress was 26 and 7.55 respectively. The minimum and maximum score for psychological distress are 12 and 43 respectively. This indicates that the sample had an above average score on psychological distress. Similarly, the sample scores for depression and anxiety indicated an above average score. The mean and standard deviation for coping strategies was 66.92 and 17.65 respectively, and this indicates that it is closer to the maximum score.

4.1.3 Intercorrelation Matrix for Study Variables

The Inter-correlation matrix for the various study variables was analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation and the results are presented in Table 3. Table 3 showed a correlation between the dependent variables (depression and anxiety). Tabachnick and Fidell (2012) emphasized that for one to use Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA), there should be linearity between the dependent variables. The table further indicates that the correlation

coefficient between the two dependent variables is within .80. Hence, there is no violation of multicollinearity as suggested by Tabachnick and Fidell (2012).

Table 3: Inter-correlation matrix of study main variables

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Depression	-			
2. Anxiety	.64***	-		
3. Coping Strategies	-.53***	-.68**	-	
4. Years of Experience	-.02	.05	.08	-

** $p < .01$

4.1.4 Hypotheses Testing

The various hypotheses were analyzed by following the data analysis procedure presented in chapter 3, methodology.

Hypothesis 1: Special school teachers will experience higher levels of depression and anxiety than regular school teachers.

The Factorial MANOVA results from the analysis of this hypothesis is presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Factorial MANOVA Comparing Gender and Type of School on Anxiety and Depression

Source	Dependent Variable	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
Gender	Anxiety	1	3.36	.07	.02
	Depression	1	3.12	.08	.02
Type of School	Anxiety	1	5.76	.02	.04
	Depression	1	.68	.41	.01
Gender and Type of School	Anxiety	1	.27	.61	.00
	Depression	1	.00	.98	.00
Error	Anxiety	143			
	Depression	143			
Total	Anxiety	147			
	Depression	147			
Corrected Total	Anxiety	146			
	Depression	146			

Results from Table 4, indicated a statistical significant difference between special and regular school teachers on the combined dependent variables (anxiety and depression), Wilks' Lambda =

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

.96, $F(2, 142) = 3.24, p < .05; \eta^2 = .044$. Hence, the hypothesis that anxiety and depression will significantly differ among special and regular school teachers was supported by the data.

Table 5: Univariate effect for special and regular school teachers

Variables	Special		Regular		F	p	η^2
	(n = 96)		(n = 51)				
	M	SD	M	SD			
Anxiety	12.72	4.38	10.76	3.85	5.76	.018	.039
Depression	14.21	4.20	13.42	3.71	.68	.412	.005

Furthermore, subsequent univariate analysis revealed no statistical significant difference between regular and special school teachers on their depression levels ($p = .412$). Thus, there was no significant difference between regular school teachers and special school teachers on their depression, [$F(1, 143) = .677, p > .05, \eta^2 = .005$]. However, the univariate analysis from Table 5, revealed a statistically significant difference between regular and special school teachers on their anxiety levels ($p = .018$). That is, there was a statistical significant difference between regular school teachers and special school teachers on their anxiety, [$F(1, 143) = 5.760, p < .05, \eta^2 = .039$]. This implies that, special school teachers significantly reported higher levels of anxiety than regular school teachers. Therefore, the hypothesis that “special needs school teachers will experience higher levels of depression and anxiety than regular school teachers” was partially supported.

Hypothesis 2: Female special school teachers will experience higher levels of depression and anxiety than male special school teachers.

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

Results from Table 4, indicated there is no significant difference between gender and type of school on the combined dependent variables (anxiety and depression), Wilks' Lambda = 1.00, $F(2, 142) = .21, p > .05; \eta^2 = .003$. Hence, the hypothesis that depression and anxiety will significantly differ among male special and female special school teachers was not supported by the data. This therefore implies that there is no difference existing between male special school teachers and female special school teachers on their depression and anxiety levels.

Hypothesis 3: There will be a significant negative relationship between perceptions of the effectiveness of coping strategies and psychological distress among special school teachers.

Table 6: Pearson correlation between perceptions of the effectiveness of coping strategies and psychological distress among special school teachers

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>R</i>
Special School Teachers			
Psychological Distress	26.94	7.81	-.62**
Coping Strategies	63.26	16.87	
Regular School Teachers			
Psychological Distress	24.18	6.71	-.74**
Coping Strategies	74.02	17.12	
Teaching Experience	8.01	4.49	.078
Coping Strategies	66.92	17.65	

** $p < .01$

As indicated in Table 6, psychological distress had a significant negative relationship with perceptions of the effectiveness of coping strategies [$r_{(147)} = -.62, p < .01$]. Therefore, the hypothesis was supported, indicating that the more psychological distress special school teachers experienced, the less effective they perceived coping strategies.

Hypothesis 4: There will be a significant negative relationship between perceptions of the effectiveness of coping strategies and psychological distress among regular school teachers.

As indicated in Table 6, psychological distress had a significant negative relationship with coping strategies [$r_{(147)} = -.742, p < .01$]. Therefore, the hypothesis was supported, indicating that the more psychological distress regular school teachers experienced, the less effective they perceived coping strategies.

Hypothesis 5: There will be a positive relationship between years of teaching experience and perceptions of the effectiveness of coping among both special and regular school teachers.

As indicated in Table 6, there was no significant relationship between years of teaching experience and coping [$r_{(147)} = -.078, p > .05$]. Therefore, the hypothesis was not supported, indicating that there is no relationship between teachers' years of teaching experience and their perceptions of the effectiveness of coping strategies.

4.1.5 Summary of Findings

The findings from the analysis indicated that perceived effectiveness of coping strategies had a significant negative relationship with psychological distress among both special and regular school teachers. Special school teachers significantly experienced higher levels of anxiety than regular school teachers whereas there was no significant difference between special and regular school teachers on depression. More so, there was no significant difference between male and

female special school teachers on both depression and anxiety levels. It was further noted that there was no relationship between teachers' years of teaching experience and their perception of the effectiveness of coping strategies.

4.2 Findings of Qualitative Phase

4.2.1 Introduction

The objective of the qualitative study was to explore the experiences of teachers in teaching students with learning difficulties and how they cope with the challenges they face in the classroom. The demographic characteristics of teachers were related to age, educational qualification, years of teaching experience and type of school. In addition, the study generated themes capturing the objectives of the qualitative study.

4.2.2 Demographic information

Ten participants with their ages ranging between 29 to 40 years took part in the study; this sample consisted of four males and six females. Table 8 below is a summary of the demographic characteristics of participants.

Table 7: Demographic characteristics of study participants

Participant	Age	Educational Qualification	Gender	Years of teaching experience
SST 1	33	Degree	Female	6
SST 2	40	Masters	Male	13
SST 3	36	Diploma in Education	Female	11
SST 4	40	Post Graduate Diploma in Education	Female	4
SST 5	40	Masters	Male	15
RST 1	35	Degree	Female	10
RST 2	33	Degree	Female	5
RST 3	35	Degree	Female	7
RST 4	36	Degree	Female	5
RST 5	29	Degree	Female	5

*SST= Special school teacher; RST= Regular school teacher

Emerging Themes

The qualitative data obtained from teachers of students with learning difficulties were analyzed using thematic analysis. Three main themes emerged from the data. These include experiences of teachers, coping strategies adopted by teachers and coping resources available to teachers. The themes had sub-themes reflecting their meaning. Table 9 below is a summary of the themes and subthemes generated from the pool of data.

Table 8: Summary of themes and subthemes

Themes	Sub-themes
Experiences of teachers	Knowledge and identification of LDs Challenges of teaching students with LDs Health implications Managing students with LDs
Coping strategies	Problem-focused coping Emotion-focused coping
School coping resources	Availability of resources Accessibility of resources

4.2.3 Experiences of teachers

This theme draws on narratives from both special and regular school teachers in inclusive classrooms as both groups teach students with learning difficulties in their classroom settings. This theme reflects teachers' knowledge of learning difficulties and how they identify students exhibiting characteristics of learning difficulties. Also, the experiences of these teachers highlight the challenges they encounter in the process of teaching as well as the effects of these challenges on their psychological health. In the face of these challenges, how teachers manage students with learning difficulties to ensure an effective teaching and learning process was explored. From the results of the study, the subthemes generated were knowledge and identification of LDs, challenges of teaching students with LDs, LDs and teacher health implications and managing students with LDs. These emergent subthemes are described below.

Knowledge and identification of LDs

With respect to knowledge and identification of LDs, the narratives generated from both groups of teachers indicated that most of them had some knowledge about LDs. Their description of LDs indicated that the term is associated with problems in learning in areas such as writing, reading, pronunciation, math, motor movement and letter identification and therefore such learners were considered as slow in learning (slow learners). The analyses indicated that participants' views about learning difficulties suggested that an individual with a learning difficulty would encounter problems learning through the 'normal' teaching and learning process. This difficulty associated with learning made students learn at a slow pace making them unable to perform certain activities expected of them in the classroom in comparison to their peers without learning difficulties. The accounts of some participants support these points:

"They are slow learners and with their condition they cannot match the fast ones in the classroom"
(SST 2)

"Learning difficulty is a situation where some of the children are not able to perform certain things as they are expected to do. For example some are mentally retarded so they cannot cope with the normal teaching and learning" (RST 1)

"Learning difficulty is like the person has a problem with learning" (SST 4)

"....when it comes to the learning that is where the part of the brain for learning has a problem"
(SST 1)

In exploring ways through which teachers are able to identify students with learning difficulties in the classroom, teachers expressed that they do so by observing the student's participation and performance in class activities. Participants indicated that teachers identified students with LDs

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

basically through observable activities such as writing, reading, speech, pronunciation, movement, math and letter identification using personal judgment. This suggested that in the event that a child had learned some information but is unable to perform these observable activities, he/she is labelled as learning disabled. Again, the use of personal judgment only without any clinical confirmation may lead to faulty diagnoses. Below are some accounts of teachers' ways of identifying LDs:

“For some it affects their fine motor skills and some cannot even write. Also a child at a certain age should be able to read some words, two or three letter words at a certain age, and if at age 18 too that person is not able to do that then that person has a disability ” (SST 1)

“For some too, they have pronunciation problems. Yes, some can draw well but when it comes to reading and writing they have problems and some cannot copy correctly from the board and even from their exercise books” (RST 1)

“....one common thing with our kids here is that they have a short attention span; they cannot sit for long to learn” (SST 5)

“So we identify them when they are unable to perform or grasp what has been taught in the classroom” (SST 2)

“As I said Maths phobia, for some children, they have a phobia for math but do well in other subjects” (SST 5)

Challenges of teaching students with LDs

With respect to challenges teachers face in teaching students with learning difficulties, participants indicated several problems they are saddled with. These challenges were indicated as emanating from four sources: the Ministry of Education, school level, parents and the students themselves. The inappropriateness of the special education curriculum, lack of infrastructure and

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

the inadequate supply of teaching and learning materials were linked to the ministry of education. These views indicated that the curriculum for special schools did not serve its intended purpose towards some students with learning difficulties as it was not up-to-date. Views of participants about the lack of infrastructure and teaching and learning materials suggest that these resources may not have not seen any revisions in recent times necessitating their update.

One participant indicated the inappropriateness of the special education curriculum as thus:

“The curriculum that we have for children with LDs or special education is below them now especially my class or my previous class that I taught, it is below (SST 1)

The lack of infrastructure was also highlighted by some participants. This is what they had to say:

“First of all is infrastructure. Some of the classrooms are not cut to fit. These children, some of them are supposed to make use of some facilities. Like there should be in-built toilet and bath with water running through them” (Special school teacher, Female, 40 years old, 4 years teaching experience, PGDE)

“Most of the facilities here have broken down and are in very poor states because there have been no maintenance works on them. This makes it very difficult for them to serve their intended purpose today. Because of that we lack a number of facilities which the children need like rails on the walls to help with their movement...” (SST 2)

Emphasis was also laid on the lack of teaching and learning materials in their classrooms. Below are some of the quotes indicating this challenge:

And then teaching and learning materials; it is not forth coming. It should come from the ministry but it doesn't come but we sometimes get some through donations. But we don't get all that we need (SST 4)

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

...And then getting textbooks is a challenge, because most a time we have to teach getting resources from the internet (SST 1)

Lack of teacher support, high workload, poor classroom management, nature of work and constant supervision were indicated as being sourced at the school level. The narratives suggested that large class size results in a high workload for teachers and this results in teachers spending more time on students especially when there is a large number of students with learning difficulties who need constant supervision. The problem is compounded because most of the teachers do not have assistants to help with the work, hence, classroom management problems erupt. With respect to the high workload associated with teaching students with learning difficulties, these are what participants said:

“It’s a bit difficult. It makes the workload too much because as the class is moving the one with the problem is drawing you back. So supposing you have more than one child with a learning difficulty in the class the one-on-one tuition becomes stressful” (RST 1)

“Hmmm...as for the work I have do on a daily basis deir, it’s not easy at all. Preparing lesson notes, teaching, giving and marking exercises, ensuring that corrections are done for all of these more than 30 students. I have to attend to the two who have difficulties too. The work is too much for me alone...” (RST 5)

The narratives revealed that large class sizes results in poor classroom management; this assertion is supported by the quote below:

“Yes, it’s very difficult. Looking at this large number controlling them is very difficult” (RST 2)

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

“Because the children are many in the class, when I am taking care of for instance students with learning difficulties, the rest of the children would be disturbing especially which makes it difficult for their friends to concentrate on what is being taught them” (RST 5)

Another participant indicated that her work is time-consuming and consequently she is unable to achieve her objectives for a lesson. Below are quotes to support this assertion:

“It is also very time-consuming teaching children with learning difficulties because at the end of the day you would not be able to cover all that you are supposed to do. Even what I have prepared in my lesson notebook for a day I am not able to achieve it” (RST 1)

“I don’t have time for anything because every day I am busy. Even when school is over I have excess work from the day’s activities to finish up before leaving school. Especially the children with learning problems, teaching them involves a lot of time” (RST 5)

The lack of teacher support in the classroom was also emphasized as making teaching stressful.

The quotes below are illustrative:

“And when you are the only teacher in the class that is when it becomes more stressful uhhmmm....” (RST 2)

“I am alone here with no one to help. This makes the work very difficult because I cannot do everything. If I had a teaching assistant, he/she could take care of may be those with problems whilst I attend to the others without any learning difficulties” (RST 4)

According to the narratives, the lack of cooperation from parents and the non-disclosure of pupils’ true conditions by parents to the school administration were also found as challenging. Participants from both regular and special schools indicated that they do not receive the necessary support from parents to ensure the continuity of the learning process when the students are with their families.

These participants had these to say:

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

“...but often parents say it once, expecting the child to jump at it and when they don't they don't even bother again because 'me p3 ntem' (meaning I'm in a hurry) so they end up doing the things for the children. So you see progress at school but you don't get progress at home. So the child is a different child at school and a different child at home. So you wouldn't be able to tell how the child is learning, so the challenge for me is not the children, but the people around them (SST 3)

“It is very stressful because support from parents is not good; it's not good at all. Because sometimes you see the child facing a certain problem, you invite the parent and they would not come. The child needs certain things to be helped, they are not having, certain books they need to buy the child is not having (RST 2)

Again, participants from the special school setting made it known that some parents do not disclose fully the state of their wards' condition, which makes the teaching and learning process very problematic. This is supported by the voice below:

“Parents bring their kids without telling the administration the truth about their conditions and this makes it very difficult for us to work with the kids in terms of knowing their strengths and weaknesses in order to plan the teaching and learning process” (SST 4)

“Sometimes parents bring their children and tell us that this is the child's problem, meanwhile there are other problems with the child which they would not tell you. During the teaching and learning process before you would detect that there are other things parents failed to tell the school and teachers” (SST 4)

With respect to challenges associated with the students with learning difficulties themselves, participants expressed that some of the pupils exhibit behavioural problems in the classroom. There are also communication challenges between the teacher and the student due to the learning difficulty. Below are quotes which speak to the existence of these problems:

“Sometimes some of these children have behavioural problems and they tend to disturb and beat their friends, you see them misbehaving most of the time” (RST 1)

“The children with the learning difficulties, some are not able to still to focus on what is being taught. So they tend to disturb the class and make noise. Some also worry their friends by laughing and giggling unnecessarily” (RST 3)

“Communication through language between the teacher and the student to the understanding of the student is also a challenge” (SST 5)

LDs and teacher health implications

The challenges experienced by the participants had some effects on their psychological and physical (medical) health. The psychological health effects reported were restlessness, worry, frustration and fatigue whereas some of the physiological health problems include common cold, headache and tiredness. For example some participants mentioned that they get frustrated when their efforts do not yield any results, while another participant reported restlessness and worry from teaching students with learning difficulties. The quotes below are illustrative of the psychological effects teachers experience.

“Every teacher wants the best for their children, but when you are teaching and the children are not getting it after putting in a lot of effort you get tired and you get frustrated” (SST 2)

“Sometimes when I have to wake up and come to school and even after weekends and vacations, I feel restless and become worried because I am coming to face all the challenges of talking ‘aaaaa’ for the whole day” (RST 5)

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

“Teaching itself is not easy ooo, the talking alone brings me fatigue especially primary school ‘deir’ it is not easy. So you get home and you are so tired” (RST 3)

“You do what you know best but sometimes still you do not see any progress in the child in relation to what you have taught. And because you desire that the child would learn something you become frustrated after several effort without any success” (SST 3)

With the physiological effects of challenges on teachers’ health, a participant mentioned tiredness. A special school teacher mentioned that an effect she suffers as a result of the challenges she experiences is common cold. Other participants also indicated that they experience headache. All the effects of the challenges associated with teaching students with learning difficulties were all negative suggesting that the participants only experienced negative health effects. The quotes below are illustrative.

“It is really a challenging job to do ooo....by the time you are able to finish just half of it you are so tired already” (RST 5)

“It is very stressful; ... yesterday like this I caught a cold “(SST 1)

“When we reopened school, the first day I could not report to school because I had this severe headache and the doctor said its stress” (SST 3)

“Sometimes I talk aaahhh... when I get to the house my head would be aching” (RST 2)

Managing students with LDs

Despite the challenges that participants faced, coupled with the effects of these challenges on their health, they were still able to manage students with learning difficulties. The narratives

indicated that teachers adopted a number of positive strategies in managing these students to help them learn. Some teachers made use of everyday items from the environment in the teaching process so students could relate to concepts being taught to aid understanding. Some participants reported:

“... we try to use concrete objects if we don't get we use pictures or photographs to get them to understand what we are talking about” (SST 1)

“With the math I use everyday items the child is familiar with for simple additions and subtraction” (SST 5)

In order to cater for the learning needs of students with learning difficulties some participants provided differentiated instruction where instruction is tailor-made to meet the needs of different learners. This was done via one-on-one tuition and extra tuition. Some participants had these to say:

“I try to give the child one-on-one tuition. I try to explain what I have already taught the whole class at a slower pace when I have some time. I also try to give them just a few exercises, something lesser in difficulty and number to help them learn something”(RST 3)

“Before that when I was teaching in a village I realised that there was one girl whatever you teach her she had challenges with it, so I started having early morning classes. And even after school tried to help out with some lessons” (SST 5)

Some participants also mentioned that they made their lessons fun and relaxing in order not to bore the students. Below are extracts from some participants speaking to these ways of managing students with learning difficulties.

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

“...I try to make my class fun, not so much humour but, if you give a wrong answer instead of me saying ‘No’ I would say ‘yaaay’ (SST 3)

“These children their reaction depends on the environment so you as a teacher does not need to make the classroom tense so you have to create humour to make it less tense and lively” (SST 4)

Other participants also emphasized the need for students with learning difficulties to be encouraged and motivated through positive reinforcement whenever they put up a good response or behaviour. This is to motivate them to put up the desirable behaviour again in the future. Two participants indicated that:

“It is through motivation, encouragement and pampering that I help them to learn. So I say “say this, after saying this we would clap for you, you would be given a toffee”. When they say it and they are clapped for, the way it encourages them. That is how it works here” (SST 4)

“And sometimes we have to psych the children because I don’t know but some of them face a lot of problems in the house, so you talk to them, ask them and continually talking to them also helps a lot“(RST 3)

For one participant who recognized classroom setup to be a source of challenge for these students with LDs, she made changes in the seating arrangement to suit the students. Another method by which students with LDs were managed was by building a climate of acceptance within the classroom through disability awareness. Students without LDs were educated on the need to help their colleagues with LDs instead of making fun of them. The teaching of one concept at a time

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

and getting students to understand and master it before moving on to teach another was another way by which some teachers managed students with LDs. Some participants pointed out that:

“So when I see that the person is suffering from hearing impairment I first of all look at where the person sits in the class and if it’s far I try to bring the child to the front row”
(RST 2)

“...I tried to encourage them and asked their friends to stop laughing at someone when the person makes mistakes. I also ensured that their friends stopped laughing at them and helped them” (RST 5)

“So you take one small chunk at a time and try and get them to master it, and then, once that is done, they get themselves confident. So moving on to the second level is not that hard” (SST 3)

A special school teacher’s response with regard to how students with LDs are managed indicated the use of the technique of skill development in addition to some academic work in the special school setting. Collaboration with parents also emerged as a way students with LDs were managed. The contribution of parents in the teaching and learning process was deemed necessary for successful learning to occur. These are illustrated by the quotes below.

“Here, we deal mostly with skill development, so we don’t write exams or whatever. So as we group them into the ability level we start from the entry class and the exit or transition point is Agriculture, Home economics and Education. Therefore as they progress in the various classes, we identify where each student best fits and we make the appropriate placements and after these points they are prepared for graduation” (SST 5)

“...we also give parents suggestions on how to help them (students with LDs) at home because if it’s one-sided, when they go home there is discontinuity in the learning process”
(SST 3)

“Whenever I invite parents to the school and when I realise that they are willing to work with me, I also offer suggestions by which they can help. Such as providing books and resources for their wards and giving timely feedback on children’s progress back home”
(RST 4)

4.2.4 Coping Strategies

Coping strategies are ways that individual teachers employ to cope with the distress they experience in teaching students with LDs. The subthemes generated from this main theme are problem focused coping and emotion focused coping. Most of the participants engaged in emotion focused coping when faced with distress. Strategies that indicated emotion focused coping were taking short walks, acceptance, religion, social support, rest and relaxation, humour and forgetting all about school once school was over.

Some participants also accepted the situation they found themselves in and also accepted teaching students with LDs. Another participant indicated that she prayed when she experienced distress, while another engaged in short walks. These strategies are illustrated below:

“Sometimes too I tell myself that is where I find myself so I just have to accept it and cope with the situation” (RST 5)

“It was the first three years that I was so stressed out and tired but I came to realise that I would be with them for so many years so I accepted it and I’m living with it” (SST 5)

I also pray when I am stressed (RST 2)

“...so maybe you get up to walk around for some few minutes then you come back”
(RST 1)

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

About half of the participants indicated that they get social support from family, friends and colleagues and that helped them cope with the distress in the classroom. Narratives about social support as a coping strategy suggested that it provided participants with some relieve from the unpleasant emotional states they experience as a result of the distress they face. Below are extracts from participants indicating the support they receive.

“I hang out with friends at my free time just to relax” (RST 3)

“...and my husband also supports me when I get home” (RST 2)

“Sometimes when I go back home I get support from my family” (RST 5)

“I usually get support from colleagues to cope with my stress. I speak to them when I have a problem and they encourage me that I should relax and that things would get better with time” (RST 1)

“Sometimes you consult another teacher and you laugh it over and you see that you are ok” (SST 4)

Rest and relaxation was also used as a coping strategy by some participants whilst others expressed that they made use of humour to cope with distress. The voices below illustrate these points.

“I rest after school but if you are in school there is no time to rest” (RST 1)

“I try to rest whenever I get the time after school” (RST 2)

“These children, their reaction depends on the environment so you as a teacher does not need to make the classroom tense so you have to create humour to make it less tense and lively. Once you are doing that it is also helping you” (SST 4)

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

“We chat with them and some of them even tell you things about life. Sometimes they create humour and make you laugh and you sometimes forget what you are going through. The humour helps you to release the tension and stress within you helping you to relax” (SST 5)

Two participants also mentioned they forget about school and all its challenges once school was over, as reported below:

“After school, I forget all about what goes on here” (RST 3)

“...so anything about school I forget about it once I step out of the school compound” (RST 5)

Other participants made use of problem focused coping; an example of which is discussing with other colleagues on what to do. Two of the participants said:

“So what I do is to stop teaching, call a colleague and discuss what I am trying to teach the children which they are not getting to him/her. Then we would discuss and he/she would give suggestions as to where to start from” (SST 2)

In school, sometimes I speak to my colleague teachers about what I can do and they try to encourage me that it would be well (RST 5)

Another problem focused coping strategy was discussing with the head teacher so possible suggestions could be given as to what to be done. These participants mentioned that:

“Sometimes it is just a one-on-one meeting if you have a problem you can go to the head if he can help you” (RST 1)

“Sometimes I discuss the problem I am facing with the headmaster” (SST 2)

Reflection on the challenging situation and thinking of what next to do about the situation is also a problem focused coping used by a participant. The voice below illustrates this point:

“About the frustration, eeeerrmm...you sit back and think of what next. So I stop teaching and reassess my methodology and plan again on how to teach the concept the next time around. Sometimes you go home, the whole night you don't sleep well, thinking of what to do next so this child can also do well” (SST 2)

For another participant, planning the term's activities ahead is a problem focused coping strategy she makes use of. She mentioned that:

“Sometimes I try to plan ahead for the next term's activities having in mind my students with learning difficulties. And when the term begins too I clearly specify my goals and take steps to achieve them; this helps me a lot and does not make me get stressed out easily” (SST 3)

4.2.5 School Coping Resources

Coping resources in this study refers to the accessibility and availability of resources for teachers. External resources (physical, psychological, social or material) provided by schools help individual teachers cope with the effects of the challenges (distress) they face in teaching students with LDs. The narratives indicated that for most of the participants besides talking to their colleague teachers and school management (heads of school) about the challenges they face there were no adequate available resources. In the case of another participant, the school chaplain acts

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

as a counsellor to provide counselling services to teachers who would need it and access it. The quotes below are illustrative.

“I won’t say there is. I won’t say there is because eeerrhmm... apart from speaking to your colleague about how a child is behaving and about how that is stressing you, basically there is nothing” (SST 3)

“I would say there is none apart from going to talk to the head teacher about any problem if only you want to” (RST 2)

Yes, we have the school management and the chaplain; the chaplain acts as a counsellor sometimes (SST 4)

Accessibility of coping resources related to whether the atmosphere was conducive for participants to discuss the distress they faced in teaching students with learning difficulties. It was also concerned with whether participants felt comfortable talking to their superiors at school about the challenges they faced at work. It was indicated from the narratives that for some teachers resources especially human personnel (superiors) were available and open to the teachers; making them accessible to the teachers. These are illustrated by the quotes below:

“The school management i.e. the head and the assistant, they are free so you can go to them with any challenge if you want to. We have periodic staff interactions and there is even a platform (WhatsApp) where the head and the assistant are available. It doesn’t solve the problems but it helps with coping” (SST 4)

“errrrmm...when we have challenges we mostly go to our principal or Aunty Jocelyn (Head of school); they are the ones we go to” (SST 1)

*You need to go through a procedure to assess the management in case you have any issue.
Most often management communicates with us to find out what our needs are (SST 5)*

Whereas in other cases too, coping resources were not available suggesting their inaccessibility.

One participant said that:

“Not accessible since the resources are unavailable” (SST 2)

4.2.6 Summary of qualitative findings

Overall, the qualitative phase of the study revealed three main themes. The first theme related to teachers' experiences in teaching students with learning difficulties. Four subthemes generated from teachers' experiences were knowledge and identification of LDs, challenges of teaching students with LDs, LDs and teacher health implications and managing students with LDs. The second theme generated from the data was coping strategies adopted by teachers of students with LDs. The subthemes derived from this theme were problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. The final theme related to school coping resources with two subthemes namely availability of resources and accessibility of resources.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

The present study was conducted to examine the psychological distress levels of special school and regular school teachers as well as to investigate the impact of gender on distress levels among both groups. Furthermore, the study sought to investigate the coping strategies teachers adopted and to explore their experiences in educating children with learning difficulties.

5.1 Teaching, Psychological distress and Coping

The quantitative study revealed that special school teachers reported higher levels of anxiety and not depression in comparison to regular school teachers and gender was not found to have any influence on psychological distress among special school teachers. From the qualitative study it was found that teachers largely had negative experiences in relation to the challenges faced and their impact on teachers' health.

The first hypothesis predicted that special school teachers would experience higher levels of depression and anxiety than regular school teachers; this prediction was partially supported as both groups had similar levels of depression. This result is inconsistent with the findings from the study by Srivastava and Sharma (2017) reporting higher levels of depression among special school teachers than regular school teachers. It is probable that the challenges encountered by special school teachers were not ones that could cause teachers becoming depressed. Again, the specialized training received by special school teachers may have prepared them to accept their work conditions and consequently cope effectively with the challenges associated with teaching

children with learning difficulties. As a result, special school teachers may have better adjustment which is reflected in the similar depression levels reported by regular school teachers (Boujut, Dean, Grouselle & Cappe, 2016).

Again, the analysis suggested that special school teachers experienced significantly higher levels of anxiety in comparison to regular school teachers. The transactional stress and coping model by Lazarus & Folkman (1984) posits that when an individual encounters a challenging situation, an appraisal of the situation is done. Distress levels are increased when the person perceives that he/she lacks the ability and resources to cope with the situation. Similarly, when teachers are faced with challenging situations such as increased workload, large class size and modification of lesson content to accommodate students with learning difficulties, an appraisal is conducted. In the event that the teacher perceives the demands of the situation to outweigh his/her resources, he/she would experience distress.

Teachers undergo distress which can be manifested as anxiety making teachers uneasy as they look forward to face the negative experiences in the course of performing their duties and activities in the classroom daily (Kyriacou, 2001). For special school teachers, the diverse nature of children with special educational needs in the classroom including those with learning difficulties can be a very challenging situation. This is the case because these students need special care and attention individually and to fulfill each student's need can be distressful for the special school teacher (Olivier & Williams, 2005). Lack of facilities and resources needed for the successful education of students with LDs, their progress, social development and safety are all factors that can lead to more levels of distress in special school teachers (Srivastava & Sharma, 2017).

Based on the above premise, special school teachers probably experience more anxiety levels than their colleagues in the regular school. The results of the current study confirms Lazuras's (2006) finding that special educators experience more distress than general educators. However, the finding of this study failed to confirm the results by Srivastava & Sharma (2017) that special school teachers and general education teachers experienced the same levels of anxiety.

The second hypothesis predicted that female teachers in special schools would experience higher levels of depression and anxiety when compared to male special school teachers. This prediction was not confirmed by the data as the study showed that gender had no influence on special school teachers' experience of depression. This finding confirms the finding reported by Ahola et al. (2005) that gender had no connection to overall burnout levels. Again, it is possible that the levels of special school teachers' educational qualification contributed to this finding. This could be the case because the least educational qualification among special school teachers was a first degree with some teachers having postgraduate degrees indicating that male and female teachers could have been equally exposed to information in relation to coping with distress, hence no gender differences found in their levels of depression. Additionally, the special training received by both male and female teachers could account for their exposure to information on effective coping strategies and equipped them equally to adopt effective ways of coping leading to male and female teachers reporting similar levels of depression.

Additionally, the finding showed that gender was not related to special school teachers' anxiety. It is probable that teachers' educational qualification adequately equipped male and females equally with information on coping effectively with distress, hence the result that gender was not related to the distress levels of special school teachers. Again, teachers' training could

result in equal levels of information regarding coping strategies. This finding supports Ahola et al.'s (2005) finding that gender had no influence on burnout.

Hypothesis three predicted a negative relationship between teachers' perception of the effectiveness of coping strategies and psychological distress among special school teachers. This hypothesis was supported. This finding is explained by the reformulated theory of learned helplessness (Abramson, Seligman & Teasdale, 1978) which suggests that when an individual encounters a situation over which he/she has no control over, he/she becomes helpless. This sense of learned helplessness may not motivate the person to find ways of escaping the negative situation. Therefore, teachers who become depressed as a result of their helplessness when they perceive a negative situation as uncontrollable may perceive coping strategies as less effective. Hence, their lack of motivation to deal with the distress they experience using problem-focused coping strategies. Similarly, teachers of special schools who experience high levels of depressive symptoms may not perceive coping strategies as effective enough to help them deal with the challenging situation, hence they do not tend to cope using problem-focused coping strategies.

On the other hand, it is probable that some special school teachers as a result of their specialized training in handling students with learning difficulties may experience low levels of depression which may result in them perceiving coping strategies as effective. Therefore, they tend to be motivated to cope with problem-focused coping strategies. Previous studies suggest problem-focused coping strategies result in low levels of psychological distress (Boujut et al., 2016; Austin, Shah, & Muncer, 2005; Veresova, 2013).

Boujut et al. (2016) for instance pointed out that more problem-focused coping resulted in special school teachers experiencing low levels of emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion has been positively connected to the levels of distress of teachers in special schools (Ruble, Usher

& McGrew, 2013). Low distress levels in teachers have also predicted by the usage of more task-oriented coping strategies (Austin, Shah, & Muncer, 2005), similarly, problem-focused coping resulted in low levels of distress and burnout (Nistor & Chilin, 2013).

Similarly, a negative relationship was predicted to exist between psychological distress and the perception of the effectiveness of coping strategies among regular school teachers. This hypothesis was also confirmed. This finding confirms those by Boujut, Dean, Grouselle and Cappe (2016) and Austin, Shah, & Muncer (2005). Emotion-focused coping has been linked to more burnout among general educators because they perceived their experience more as threats and losses in relation to educating students having learning problems (Boujut et al., 2016).

Additionally, teachers with high levels of distress are more likely to adopt negative coping strategies than positive ones to deal with the distress they experience (Austin, Shah, & Muncer, 2005). Suggesting that high distress levels among teachers would tend to make them feel helpless and therefore use emotion-focused cope to manage their distressing emotions as a result of the negative situations they are faced with. This finding can be linked to the absence of special training among regular school teachers as they are provided general training to enable them work in general classrooms. Inclusive education in mainstream schools suggests that these teachers may have feelings of incompetence about meeting the needs of students with learning difficulties owing to inadequate training and resources. Consequently, regular school teachers may experience frustration and distress leading to the use of emotion-focused coping strategies to cope with the unpleasant emotions associated with their distress.

Hypothesis five predicted a positive relationship to exist between experience and perception of the effectiveness of coping strategies among both special and regular school teachers. This prediction was not confirmed. The finding suggests no relationship between years of teaching

experience and coping. This finding is inconsistent with findings by Alhija (2015), Kepalaite (2013) and Smith (2003) that the more teaching experience teachers had, the higher the probability of them adopting positive coping strategies. They suggested that as teachers spent more time in the classroom they saw stressful events as ways by which they could refocus their energies in bettering themselves. Hence, they perceived changes in behavior and the control of emotions as more effective ways of coping than less experienced teachers.

It is possible that the more years teachers spent in the classroom, the more they got exposed to challenging events resulting in high distress levels. Due to the fact that most teachers may have accepted this field of occupation, they tend to console themselves that this is where they find themselves and so they tend to be helpless. As a result they may not adopt problem-focused coping strategies in any different fashion in comparison to teachers with few years of teaching experience. Hence, no difference was recorded between the perception of the effectiveness of coping strategies and years of teaching experience among both groups of special and regular school teachers.

5.2 Teachers' experiences and coping strategies

With the qualitative findings, three organizing themes were generated and discussed based on the research questions put forward. These themes are experiences of teachers, teachers' coping strategies and school coping resources. The emergent themes from each of these themes are presented.

5.2.1 Experiences of teachers

The findings indicated that teachers had some knowledge about learning difficulties and largely identified students with learning difficulties using the characteristics of learning difficulties. All the teachers were able to indicate that learning difficulties were associated with problems in learning which made it difficult for the student to perform tasks expected of him/her

corresponding with his/her age peers. Problem areas identified in learning included writing, reading, pronunciation, math, letter identification and motor movement. As a result of deficiencies in these areas, children with learning difficulties were classified as 'slow learners'.

However, most regular school teachers indicated that their training was inadequate to effectively teach students with LDs as the education they received in training college was not in detail compared to their colleagues in special schools. This suggests that teachers develop feelings of incompetence about adequately handling students with LDs in inclusive settings. This feeling of inadequacy among teachers may result in forms of distress such as frustration, anxiety, depression (Masse et al., 1998), hopelessness and tension (Dilekmen & Erdem, 2013), consequently students with LDs may not have their educational needs met. This would in turn defeat the purpose of inclusive education in the Ghanaian context.

This finding is consistent with Francis's (2004) study who reported experience with LD was mainly attributed to exposure on the job as most teachers indicated that personal experience was one of the means by which they learned of LDs besides being taught in the teacher training colleges. Again, the feelings of inadequacy among regular school teachers in meeting the needs of students with LDs was consistent with findings by Alhassan and Abosi (2014) who found that teachers' lack of competence suggested that most of students' learning problems were not met in the mainstream classroom.

Teachers indicated in the narratives that they encountered a lot of challenges in the process of educating children with LDs. The inappropriateness of the curriculum as a challenge encountered by special school teachers suggested that the curriculum may not have been revised in a while which did not adequately meet the educational needs of students with learning difficulties. It was possible that the special education curriculum was not specific to the needs of

different groups of learners. This means that it was probable that there would be a discrepancy between the needs of these students and the curriculum content. This can result in distress for teachers as they would have to struggle in order to teach these students. This finding is consistent with those of Deku and Vanderpuye (2017) and Johnstone (2017) who reported that teachers underrated their ability to instruct students with learning difficulties effectively due to the lack of a specified curriculum for special education.

The infrastructure in the public special schools were described as inappropriate as most of them lacked maintenance works and therefore were in deplorable states. The lack of facilities such as in-built toilets and bathrooms with running water made teaching difficult for the teachers as students had to be accompanied by teachers when they needed to use the bathroom. This situation brought lessons to a halt abruptly and consequently wasted instructional time. This could have been avoided with the presence of teaching assistants who could have provided assistance to students with these needs. The unsatisfactory nature of infrastructure in these schools confirms Deku and Vanderpuye's (2017) finding that teachers viewed the physical environment of inclusive schools as substandard.

Another challenge both groups of teachers faced was the limited supply of teaching and learning materials which was more pronounced in the public schools. Although these schools received their funding from the government, funds were inadequate and delayed for long periods and so most of these schools had to rely heavily on the benevolence of donors. The inadequacy of materials for teaching and learning meant that teachers improvised even basic materials and this increased teachers' distress levels. These findings are consistent with those of Alhassan and Abosi (2014), Johnstone (2017), Morton (2007) and Potter (2008). All these studies revealed that the lack

of resources available to teachers resulted in their inability to effectively instruct students with learning difficulties.

On the school level, challenges which were found were the lack of support for teachers, high workload, poor classroom management, nature of work and constant supervision. The narratives suggested that most of the teachers taught large class sizes resulting in high workload coupled with the fact that teachers spent more time attending to students; especially students with learning difficulties who needed constant supervision. The narratives additionally suggested that because most of these teachers had no support from teaching assistants, this resulted in poor classroom management which increased the distress levels of teachers.

Again, the time-consuming nature of teaching students with learning difficulties was associated with teachers' inability to achieve all lesson objectives outlined for a particular duration. These findings are also consistent with findings by Alhassan and Abosi (2014) and Kuyini and Desai (2008). Alhassan and Abosi (2014) revealed that large class size had a negative impact on the inclusion of children experiencing learning difficulties and was often associated with management difficulties. Kuyini and Desai (2008) also found that in the absence of teacher assistants, teachers of large class sizes found teaching challenging. They added that the problem becomes complicated where there are limited resources and teaching and learning materials making it difficult for children with difficulties to be instructed effectively.

Lack of cooperation from parents and the non-disclosure of students' true conditions by parents to school administrations also came through as challenges teachers encounter. Both special and regular school teachers reported that they did not receive the necessary support required from parents to ensure the continuity of the teaching and learning process. Some of the support mentioned were involvement in the activities of their children, providing the necessary resources

for their wards and attending parent-teacher meetings to collaborate with the teachers. Failure by parents to disclose the conditions of their wards to teachers made the planning of teaching and learning activities quite difficult as teachers were not adequately informed of the abilities and challenges of students with LDs, hampering effective teaching and learning. These were also noted as making teaching stressful for teachers. This finding confirms findings by Morton (2007) that teachers experienced problems with parents of students with LDs because they expressed no interest in the educational needs of the child or denied the reality of the difficulty the child had. A lack of support from parents was reported to impede the progress of the teaching and learning process (Planinc & Kolnik, 2016) which is synchrony with the finding from the present study.

Disabilities are not easily accepted in Ghana as in developed countries and so sometimes parents know about their children's difficulties, but may be in denial and therefore may not disclose such information. Non-disclosure of students' true state of condition by parents may be attributed to fear associated with the attitude of the community towards their child (Slikker, 2009) which are largely negative. Some children with learning difficulties face stigmatization (Mohamed & Laher, 2012) as the Ghanaian society consider them to be 'doomed', and so because parents do not want their children to be tagged with such labels they prefer to keep such information discreet.

It was noted that behavioural and communication challenges were associated with students with learning difficulties. Some of the students with LDs exhibit some behavioural challenges such as aggressiveness and hyperactivity, which make them to disturb and beat their friends. It is obvious that in the face of large class sizes and no teacher support, teachers would encounter management difficulties which could lead to an increase in the psychological distress levels of teachers in such classrooms. Due to the cognitive deficit in students with LDs, it was indicated that teachers had communication challenges when teaching children with LDs, such that it was difficult

for the student to understand and carry out instructions from the teacher without the necessary resources. These findings confirm Hassan's (2015) finding that children with learning difficulties also exhibit emotional and behavioural problems including attention deficit, aggression, hyperactivity, lack of interaction, emotional distractions, poor concentration and thinking problems. This finding confirms that of Diakakis et al. (2008), who found that behavior problems such as increased irritability, fighting with other children and loneliness are exhibited by children with learning difficulties.

These numerous challenges faced by both special and regular school teachers not only resulted in psychological consequences but also physiological effects as well. The narratives indicated that the psychological effects suffered by the teachers were anxiety, worry, fatigue and frustration. Anxiety was expressed in restlessness whenever the thought of returning to school came to them during vacations or weekend breaks. This was the case because of the challenges they continually thought of facing when they returned to school. They were worried about how they would cope with the distress associated with teaching students with learning problems. Frustration also set in when teachers explained concepts over and over again without students grasping an understanding of the concept. This was because teachers perceived their efforts as yielding no results. As a result of teachers efforts invested into the teaching and learning process they experienced fatigue because of the absence of teaching assistants. Large classes complicated teachers' problems in teaching students with LDs.

Medically, teachers experienced cold and headache and these appeared to be a common occurrence among the teachers. These psychological and physiological findings confirm findings that high levels of psychological distress such as depression and anxiety are associated with high workload and low levels of social support (Borrelli, Benevene, Fiorilli, D'amelio, & Pozzi, 2014;

Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). These findings again confirm those of Mahan et al. (2010) and (Vedovato & Monteiro, 2014) that work overload among teachers can result in medical disorders, fatigue manifestations and psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression.

In spite of the challenges teachers face, coupled with the health challenges, they still manage to teach students with LDs. Teachers adopted a number of management strategies in order for students with LD to learn in the classroom. Objects such as pictures and real objects were made use of so students could relate concepts being taught to everyday life to aid understanding. As a result of the cognitive deficits suffered by students with LDs, they were usually provided differentiated instruction. This was carried out via one-on-one tuition at a slower pace as students needed more attention for concepts to be broken down further for their understanding.

Differentiated instruction also included giving students with LDs fewer exercises to evaluate the understanding of concepts taught. This was also done because of the different educational needs of the diverse learners especially in inclusive education settings. Extra tuition was also another strategy teachers adopted to teach students outside the normal classroom hours in order for them to catch up with the class due to the slow pace at which they learn. Furthermore, some teachers teach one concept at a time and ensure that students understand and master the concept before progressing to another.

Additionally, teachers made efforts to make their lessons fun and relaxing using humour, used positive reinforcement to motivate students, collaborated with parents and changed seating arrangements for students who also had challenges with hearing or sight. The building of an atmosphere of acceptance through disability awareness is a very important strategy especially in the inclusive classrooms as the tendency that students without LDs would tend to tease and mock at their peers with LDs is high. All these strategies employed in managing students with LDs

implies work overload as teachers would need to add these additional responsibilities to the existing ones hence increasing their distress levels. High distress levels would lead to manifestations of anxiety, depression, frustration, fatigue and hopelessness.

A strategy which was peculiar in the special school setting was the technique of skill development over academic performance. Students were taught skills based on their abilities to prepare them for life after school; this was lacking in regular schools. Children in special classrooms may not be able to achieve academic heights, but may develop technical skills as a result of the focus on skill development. However, students with learning difficulties in the regular schools may not be able to achieve academic heights, and also leave school with no technical skills. This suggests that the curriculum for inclusive schools may be deficient in meeting the special needs of students with learning difficulties.

Findings from this study are consistent with a number of studies (e.g. Alhassan & Abosi, (2014); Brackenreed (2011); Francis (2004); Lindsay et al. (2014). For example Lindsay et al. (2014) reported that teachers who included autistic children in the mainstream classroom tailored teaching methods which focused on the abilities of the children instead of their disabilities. Teachers in that study also adopted the technique of building a relationship between both parents and students to make them feel comfortable. Also, teachers created an environment of acceptance by educating children without learning problems to prevent stigmatization of children with autistic spectrum disorder. Alhassan and Abosi (2014) and Francis (2004) also emphasized the importance of one-on-one tuition for students with learning problems. Teachers making use of humour in their classrooms was consistent with findings by Brackenreed (2011) in order to motivate students to learn.

5.2.2 Coping Strategies

Majority of teachers engaged in emotion-focused coping. The strategies which indicated emotion-focused coping were taking short walks, acceptance, religion, social support, rest and relaxation, humour and forgetting about school. Some teachers engaged in short walks in and around the classroom for a short time as the children in the class could not be left unattended to for long. Teachers also accepted their work environment was a stressful one, which made them helpless as they could only manage with the facilities at their disposal. They perceived they could not change their situation, hence their acceptance of the stressful situation. Surprisingly, only one teacher resorted to prayer when faced with distress, as it was expected that since most Ghanaians are religious, most teachers would use religion as a means to cope with the distress associated with teaching.

Half of the teachers indicated that they relied on social support from colleagues, friends and family as a coping strategy. Teachers indicated that when they were stressed with work conditions and they discussed with their colleagues, they were encouraged to relax and be hopeful that conditions would improve with time. Some colleagues also made fun of the situation to change the mood of the teacher experiencing the distress, and this was seen as helpful. Other teachers also hanged out with their friends in order for them to relax, while others received encouragement from family members. These ways of coping with distress may be helpful because the Ghanaian society is viewed as collectivistic in nature, therefore the individual is not perceived in isolation. The individual is viewed as needing others such as family, friends and peers to survive. Therefore, it is not surprising that about half of teachers made use of social support to obtain emotional support to cope with their distress.

Teachers also mentioned that they coped with distress by resting and relaxing after school, made use of humour to relax and cope as well as forget all about school once school was over. These coping strategies adopted by teachers suggested that teachers perceived that nothing could be done about the situation, hence the need to regulate the unpleasant emotions associated with the source of distress to reduce its negative impact. The adoption of less pleasant emotions such as humour and forgetfulness brings teachers some relief from the distress experienced.

This finding is consistent with a number of studies. Margaret et al. (2018) reported that teachers mostly sought for social support from colleagues and resorted to religious intervention to cope with the distress they experienced. Again, one teacher's use of religion confirms a finding by Shen (2009) that religion was rarely used by teachers as a coping strategy. Teachers' use of humour and discussing situation with colleagues and principals is consistent with Brackenreed's (2011) finding which reported humour and discussing situation with colleagues and principals as most useful in the work place.

The study also revealed that other participants adopted problem-focused coping strategies by discussing with their colleagues and head teachers whenever they were at a crossroad with a stressful situation, to solicit suggestions to improve the situation. This finding again is consistent with findings by Brackenreed (2011) that teachers perceived discussing situations with colleagues and principals as most helpful. It was noticed that problem-focused coping was used by both regular and special school teachers. It is probable that with the current trends of internet usage making information easily available, teachers may have had access to various information in relation to coping with distress. However, the use of strategies indicating emotion-focused coping as well as problem-focused coping suggested that they may not have been adequately informed on

the impact of these strategies; calling for the need for teachers to be educated on coping strategies to equip them to make informed and effective choices.

5.2.3 School Coping Resources

Coping resources refers to the availability and accessibility of resources for teachers. External resources provided by schools can help teachers overcome sources of distress on the job as well as achieve value outcomes with students. External support describes the social resources which may come from within the school (e.g. principal, colleagues, psychologists) as well as school facilities such as a counselling centre. Findings indicated that teachers had available social support from colleague teachers and heads of schools and most teachers often accessed social support from their colleagues.

Most teachers indicated that their head teachers were open and that teachers could speak to them about their problems only if they so wished. In a special school, some teachers indicated that the school chaplain sometimes acted as a counsellor to provide counselling services to those in need of them. Additionally, a social media page was mentioned as being available in a special school for staff interactions but that medium was not perceived as a solution. Rather, it helped teachers cope with the distress.

Accessibility of coping resources in the study related to whether a conducive atmosphere existed for teachers to discuss the distress they faced with their superiors. Findings indicated that despite the availability of superiors, some teachers felt uncomfortable to open up for fear that others would get to know what they are going through. Thus, for most of these teachers school coping resources were not accessible. Again, it was noted that for majority of the teachers, they did not have access to psychological resources such as psychological services from certified psychologists to help them deal effectively with their distress. The absence of such resources is an

indication of the level of attention given to teacher well-being in relation to school coping resources.

These findings are consistent with findings by Betoret (2006, 2009) who reported that school support resources led to reduced levels of emotional exhaustion and helped teachers deal with obstacles that interfered with their work. Findings from the current study also confirms findings by Kuyini and Desai (2008) and Morton (2007) that the unavailability of teaching assistants in inclusive classrooms makes teaching very challenging and this becomes even more complicated when there are inadequate resources and teaching and learning materials. Consequently, teachers are unable to effectively render the needed support to children experiencing difficulties in the classroom.

5.3 Limitations of the study

The current study is not short of limitations. The first has to do with the use of self-reports. Data on teachers' experiences was based solely on self-report, and this probably could result in teachers' magnifying their reports in order to seek attention. There were challenges associated with recruitment; the large number of special school teachers recruited for the quantitative phase as compared to the number of regular school teachers could affect the findings of the study. There may be individual characteristics such as personality traits which could make a person susceptible to psychological distress and adopt certain coping strategies which the study did not consider and this might limit the findings.

5.4 Suggestions for future studies

Again, the scope of the study should be expanded to include other schools particularly regular schools in other geographical locations in the country. Thus, further research should examine these variables in different schools. This would increase the degree to which results can

be generalized to a larger proportion of Ghanaian teachers. Furthermore, individual characteristics of teachers such as personality traits could be investigated in relation to the coping strategies teachers adopt to cope with challenging situations.

5.5 Recommendations of the Study

The findings of the study have implications in that an increased awareness of teachers' exposure to negative work conditions and their potential health consequences may lead to mental health promotion and disease prevention programs in schools. The study revealed that negative work conditions leads to psychological distress such as depression and anxiety. Therefore, adequate resources and essential training programs need to be channelled in promoting mental health among teachers in schools. Sometimes, teachers have need for psychological services as a result of the mental hazards associated with the occupation, but due to societal perception that the teacher is knowledgeable, attention is not paid to this area.

Furthermore, Guidance and Counselling coordinators should be empowered to include training packages on mental health and how teachers can adopt effective coping strategies to safeguard their mental health. Additionally, district directorates of education should liaise with the Ghana Psychological Council so as to ensure that professionals such as clinical psychologists are deployed to schools to conduct necessary clinical assessment and interventions for teachers with mental health challenges.

It is also important to address the sources of psychological distress among teachers. As much as possible, class sizes should be limited to small numbers in order to reduce work overload among teachers to ensure that classes are properly managed to meet the needs of students with learning problems. It is essential that regular teachers working in inclusive classrooms are adequately trained to make them feel competent in addressing the needs of diverse groups of

students. The curriculum of both special and inclusive schools need to be looked into to ensure that they are appropriate and adequate in serving their purpose of educating students with peculiar educational needs.

Based on the scarcity of external resources, school resources should be provided for teachers and regular essential training programs organized for the professional development of teachers who teach students with LDs. Appropriate infrastructure should be provided by the local government authorities to ensure that students with special educational needs get the right environment to develop holistically and hence reduce the burden on teachers. This is to ensure that teachers are able to adequately support students with LDs to achieve value outcomes.

Additionally, school management boards should adopt methods to educate parents on the need to get involved in the learning needs of their wards to ensure that teachers get the necessary support from parents to effectively teach students with LDs. Again, parents need to be assured of teachers' trust and confidence, the need to partner with teachers and not conceal information about their children's difficulties for the success of their wards' learning process.

5.6 Conclusion

Teaching is a challenging occupation; more so teaching in special schools and inclusive classrooms present teachers with more distress as a result of the teaching of students with learning difficulties. As such sources of distress for teachers such as work overload, large class sizes, the lack of adequate teaching and learning resources and curriculum appropriateness need to be addressed to ensure that teachers feel competent enough to address the needs of students with learning problems. Finally, teachers in both special and inclusive classrooms need to be educated on the effects and effectiveness of coping strategies when faced with distress.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA



Official Use only Protocol number

Ethics Committee for Humanities (ECH)

PROTOCOL CONSENTFORM

Section A- BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Title of Study:	Experiences, psychological distress and coping among teachers of students with learning difficulties
Principal Investigator:	Theresa Nutsugah
Certified Protocol Number	

Section B- CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

General Information about Research

The study aims at investigating the experiences, psychological distress and coping strategies of school teachers in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. It is aimed at exploring the experiences teachers have in teaching children with learning disabilities, and how these lead to psychological distress in teachers. This study would also focus on the coping strategies teachers employ in

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

dealing with the distress as well as exploring the resources available to these distressed teachers. Significantly, understanding teachers' experiences in teaching children with learning abilities and how these experiences lead to psychological distress will provide some insight to stakeholders such as school management teams and mental health professionals.

The study will require that you fill a questionnaire on psychological distress and another on coping strategies. In total, you will require at most ten minutes to complete the questionnaires.

Benefits/Risk of the study

There is no risk associated with this study. As such, all that is required of you is your availability and patience for your responses.

Actually, this study was not designed to benefit you directly, however, participation in the study will enhance our understanding of the experiences, psychological distress and coping strategies school teachers employ as a result of teaching children with learning disabilities. Understanding teachers' experiences and psychological distress among school teachers will provide some insight to the national policy makers and mental health professionals.

Confidentiality

You are highly assured that your responses will be kept confidential. In line with this, though it is meant for academic purposes, your consent to this study implies making the findings available to the general public in academia.

Compensation

Due to the academic nature of this research presently, no rewards would be given, however any expenses made for the sake of this research such as transportation would be compensated.

Withdrawal from Study

It is important to note that you are not under obligation to participate in this study. Thus, your participation is highly respected and voluntary. In the course of participating in the study and you wish to withdraw your participation, you can do so. As such, you will by no means be affected after you withdraw your participation from the study.

Contact for Additional Information

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

You can contact the following for any answers to any questions about the research.

Theresa Nutsugah, Legon South. Post Office Box LG 254. Legon. Contact: +233(0)540711724

Also, if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant in this study you may contact the Administrator of the Ethics Committee for Humanities, ISSER, University of Ghana at ech@isser.edu.gh / ech@ug.edu.gh or 00233- 303-933-866.

Section C-VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT

"I have read or have had someone read all of the above, asked questions, received answers regarding participation in this study, and am willing to give consent for me, my child/ward to participate in this study. I will not have waived any of my rights by signing this consent form. Upon signing this consent form, I will receive a copy for my personal records."

Name of Volunteer

Signature or mark of volunteer

Date

I certify that the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research have been explained to the above individual.

Theresa Nutsugah

Name of Person who Obtained Consent

Signature of Person Who Obtained Consent

Date

APPENDIX II

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION



UNIVERSITY OF GHANA
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Ref. No.....

January 23, 2018

Dear Sir/Madam,

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION
MISS. THERESA NUTSUGAH – ID: 10185745

The above-named student is a Clinical Psychology graduate student in the University of Ghana, Legon.

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of MPhil degree, Miss. Theresa Nutsugah has to write and submit an original thesis. She has selected the topic: **“Educating Children with Learning Disabilities: Experiences, Psychological Distress and Coping Strategies of School Teachers”**.

She has received approval from the Department of Psychology, Graduate Studies Committee and the Ethics Committee for the Humanities, University of Ghana.

To enable her collect data for her work she would need to administer questionnaires and/or conduct interviews. She has selected Regular and Special Basic Schools in Accra as suitable for her data collection.

Any assistance you may give her would be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Maxwell Asumeng
(Head of Department)

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

P. O. Box Lg 84, Legon, Accra-ghana

• Telephone: +233 (0) 289 550 463

• Email: Psychology@ug.edu.gh

• Website: www.ug.edu.gh

APPENDIX III

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA – LEGON
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

**EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING
AMONG TEACHERS OF STUDENTS WITH LEARNING
DIFFICULTIES**

Theresa Nutsugah

Supervisors: Dr. Margaret Amankwah-Poku

Dr. Kingsley Nyarko

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

1. Invitation to Participate and Description of the Project: You are being invited to willingly participate in the study: **Experiences, psychological distress and coping among teachers of students with learning difficulties**. The outcome of this study will enable us have a better understanding of mental health issues so that necessary interventions would be put in place by mental health professionals and stakeholders such as school management teams as well as provide some insight to national policy makers. Your participation in the research is entirely voluntary. Before agreeing to be part of this study, please read carefully the information and feel free to ask questions if you do not understand something.

2. Description of Procedure: If you participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- a. Participate in a brief selected information about your gender, age, educational background, number of years of experience, marital status and type of class you teach (lower or upper primary).
- b. This study consists of asking several questions about your experience, psychological distress level and coping strategies you adopt in teaching children with learning disabilities.
- c. The entire research pertaining to your involvement will last for about 10 minutes.

3. Risks and Inconveniences: Be assured that this research does not contain any procedures that would cause pain or discomfort to you, however, you may experience some tiredness. As a result, be willing to let me know if you are tired so that we take some short breaks or continue at a later time.

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

4. Benefits: Participation in this study is not designed to benefit you directly, however, participation in the study will enhance our understanding of the experiences, psychological distress and coping strategies of school teachers in teaching children with learning disabilities. Understanding these experiences, psychological distress and coping strategies among school teachers will provide some insight about teachers' mental health to school management teams and mental health professionals.

5. Confidentiality: In order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, you are not supposed to write your name, contact number, email or mark the questionnaires that might reveal your identity. Information shared by you would be termed as confidential and thus, information would not be released or shared to a third party without your authorization. Assurance would be given that the ultimate purpose of this study is for academic purpose.

6. Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary; due to that, you may refuse to participate in this research even without explanation. As a result, there would be no retribution in situations whereby you decide not to participate or withdraw from their study. If you begin to participate in the research, you may at any time, for any reason, discontinue your participation without any negative consequences.

7. Other Considerations and Questions: Kindly read through the consent form carefully before you sign and please feel free to ask any questions about anything that seems unclear to you.

8. Authorization: I have read or listened to the above information and I have decided that I will participate in the project described above. The researcher has explained the study to me and answered my questions. As a matter of fact, I know what will be asked of me and I also understand that the purpose of the study is to examine school teachers' experiences, psychological distress and coping strategies. If I don't participate in the research, there will be no penalty or loss of rights, and that I can stop participating at any time even when I have started.

By signing, I agree to participate in this research and to have a copy of the consent form

Name: _____ ID#: _____

Phone Number: _____ Email: _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

If you have further questions about this research project and about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Department of psychology – Legon or tanklenut@yahoo.co.uk (the researcher).

SECTION A

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please answer the following by filling in the blank spaces

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Educational background
4. Number of years of teaching experience
5. Marital status
6. Type of class being taught- Lower primary Upper Primary

SECTION B

PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS

Read the following behaviors and indicate how frequently you have done them in the PAST MONTH using the following scale:

1 = none of the time

2 = A little of the time

3 = Some of the time

4 = Most of the time

5 = All of the time

1. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel tired out for no good reason?	1	2	3	4	5
2. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel nervous?	1	2	3	4	5
3. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel so nervous that nothing could calm you down?	1	2	3	4	5
4. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel hopeless?	1	2	3	4	5
5. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you restlessness or fidgety?	1	2	3	4	5
6. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel so restless you could not sit still?	1	2	3	4	5
7. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel depressed?	1	2	3	4	5
8. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel that everything was an effort?	1	2	3	4	5
9. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel so sad that nothing could cheer you up?	1	2	3	4	5
10. In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel worthless?	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION C

TEACHER STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES SCALE

(KYRIACOU & CHIEN, 2004)

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

When you experience stress, how effective do you find these coping actions?

	Ineffective or never used 1	A little effective 2	Moderately effective 3	Very effective 4	Extremely Effective 5
1. I discuss my problems with colleagues or friends					
2. I start the term with clearly defined classroom rules and expectations					
3. I relax after work					
4. I absent myself from work					
5. I analyze and try to keep problems in perspective					
6. I seek psychological counselling					
7. I engage in deep breathing					
8. I ensure that I understand the work I am about to teach					
9. I devote myself to free-time activities					
10. I try to get to know my pupils as individuals					
11. I spend more time communicating with parents					

EXPERIENCES, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND COPING OF TEACHERS

12. I try to think about the coming vacation					
13. I engage in religious practices					
14. I spend time alone					
15. I try to have a healthy home life					
16. I learn how to control my emotion					
17. I focus on the humour in the situation					
18. I seek further education to move on to a less stressful environment (secondary level and beyond)					
19. I share my failures					
20. I ensure someone understands me and stands by me					
21. I plan ahead and prioritize					

Thank you most sincerely for your effort

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Questions:

1. Let's start the discussion by talking about how you understand the term 'learning disabilities' (LDs)?
2. What are the types of LDs you know of?
3. How did you know of the types of LDs (source of information)?
4. a. Have you ever taught a child with learning disabilities?
b. Which types of LDs have you had to deal with?
5. How were you able to identify children with LDs?
6. How did you or do you manage children with learning disabilities?
(Probe: What are some of the things you do to help children with LDs learn in the classroom?)
7. What challenges do you encounter in teaching children with LDs?
(Probe: Do you experience any psychological problems such as distress/stress? Tell me about the problems you face.)
8. How do you cope with these challenges which come with teaching children with LDs?
(Probe: What are some of the things you do when you experience distress from teaching children with LDs?)
9. Are there resources in your school to help you cope with the challenges you experience in teaching children with LDs?
b. How accessible are these resources to you as a teacher of children with learning disabilities?
10. Any additional information you would want to add to the information you have provided is welcome