

**Editorial**

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# Addressing learner diversity in Ghanaian classrooms using the theory and practice of Differentiated Instruction (DI) and Inclusive Education: Potentials, challenges, and practical applications

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**Abstract:** Learners in a typical class are highly diverse. As a result, instructors often struggle to address learner variability by using one-size-fits-all curriculum and approaches. This results in segregation and high forms of marginalisation of some students, especially those who fail to conform to the usual standards. This editorial critically evaluates the theory and the practice of Differentiated Instruction (DI) and Inclusive Education (IE) from the lens of an international and contextual perspective in addressing learner variability in Ghanaian classrooms. It highlights the possibilities, challenges, and practices of Differentiated Instruction and Inclusive Educational practices in relation to learner diversity in Ghanaian

classroom contexts and suggests a possible evidence-based framework of Differentiated Instruction and Inclusive Education in practice. It contends that every learner is important and, as such, educational practices, especially instruction in Ghanaian classrooms, must find ways of deploying strategies in Differentiated Instruction and Inclusive Education in addressing learner diversities.

**Keywords** – Differentiated Instruction, Inclusive education, Learner variability, Ghanaian classrooms, Instructional strategies, One-size-fits-all curriculum

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Differentiated Instruction (DI) is an instructional method that adjusts teaching to suit the individual needs of students, based on their readiness, interests, and learning profiles, thereby creating equitable learning opportunities through adaptable content, processes, products, and environments (Palmieri et al., 2025). Inclusive Education, based on the rationale of human rights, calls for all learners, including learners with access needs, to be taught in general classrooms with appropriate amenities to support their participation and equity (Saani, 2024). In Ghana, we can see that classrooms are significantly diverse in terms of language, socio-economic status, and disabilities. Cultural and resource issues also compound these diversity issues. The Ghana Inclusive Education Policy of 2015 aims to integrate all learners into the education system. Nevertheless, the process of enactment is further complicated by issues, such as overcrowded classrooms and untrained instructors (Osman, 2024). Both DI and Inclusive Education are necessary to address issues of diversity; however, we must also examine and critique

the extent to which DI and Inclusive Education theory overlap and to what extent DI theory applies in different contexts. This editorial follows this outline: Section II discusses the theory of DI and Inclusive Education; Section III examines their practical implications; Section IV discusses their relevance in the classroom context in Ghana; Section V develops a framework for implementation and practice; and Section VI presents impact and recommendations for practice and future research.

### **1.1. Rationale for evaluation**

The worldwide agenda for educational equity, as outlined in UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goal 4, underscores the drive towards inclusive and flexible pedagogical approaches in the classroom, with a focus on meeting the needs of all learners (Awini, 2025). In Ghana, a nation struggling with issues of educational inequality due to limited resources, large classroom sizes, and negative societal attitudes towards disability, it is of critical importance to evaluate DI and Inclusive Education to isolate solutions that can be adapted at a greater scale. Scholarly literature mentions cases that indicate improvements in equitable learning outcomes resulting from DI and Inclusive Education; nonetheless, it also suggests challenges to realization and sustainability, especially in low- and middle-income countries (Nketsia et al., 2024). An assessment is timely, as Ghana aims to formalize an inclusive education system and address issues related to practical implementation, such as teacher readiness and inadequate facilities.

## **II. Theoretical Foundations of Differentiated Instruction and Inclusive Education**

### **Theory of Differentiated Instruction**

Differentiated instruction (DI) promotes a constructivist approach to pedagogy (Tomlinson, 2013). DI is supported through research suggesting that students learn best when instruction is aligned with their individual needs (Palmieri et al., 2025). DI requires providing students with a different product (how they demonstrate learning), process (how they will learn), and/or environment (classroom settings), and adjusting the content (what is taught) to meet the needs of individual learners. For example, in the area of mathematics education, DI might include multilevel assignments that allow students to engage with problem-solving at different levels of complexity (Maryani et al., 2025). DI links to Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, which proposes that various types of cognitive strengths can be observed in Ghanaian teachers' conceptions of applying numerous intelligences in their math classes (Yakubu et al., 2024). Significantly, DI is factoring into the skill set of teachers, enabling them to assess and accommodate individual differences, which can be dependent on an extensive training program and support from that training, all of which may not be available in extremely low-budget schooling systems. Furthermore, too much emphasis is placed on individual learners. In such cases, DI may lose its focus on the collaborative aspects of learning, and in some instances, the cultural relevance of the learning curriculum (Nketsia et al., 2024).

### **Theory of Inclusive Education**

Inclusive Education originates from the social model of disability, which identifies barriers to learning as a societal rather than a personal issue and reinforces the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Saani, 2024). The goal of Inclusive Education is to achieve system-wide changes that allow all students, regardless of ability, to attend regular education classrooms with supports such as assistive technology and modified curricula. Inclusive Education prioritizes equity, access, and social inclusion, which extends beyond a physical education setting to include meaningful participation (Bunbun & Owusu, 2024). The underlying theory of Inclusive Education assumes schools can adequately support educational needs, which is especially difficult in under-resourced settings. Some scholarly articles contend that students who experience severe disabilities may be better supported through alternative educational settings, and this is still debated (Mpolomoka et al., 2025).

### Intersections Between DI and Inclusive Education

Differentiated Instruction (DI) and Inclusive Education overlap and function as complementary approaches to education. DI offers tangible methods (e.g., flexible grouping, tiered tasks) for inclusive education by permitting different preferences and needs to be simultaneously served within a mainstream classroom (Awini, 2025). For instance, UDL principles, consistent with DI, provide multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression to further inclusion for students with visual impairments using tactile and auditory supports (Nurubome, 2025). In this case, the tension lies between the variability of individualization that DI promotes and inclusion, which is collective-based participation, ultimately leading to unintentional segregation in classrooms. Its differentiation has never ceased to separate ability (Spyropoulou et al., 2025). Working at both intersections requires intentional design to address individual and group needs while also supporting a fusion of technology that facilitates teacher collaboration (Yakubu et al., 2024).

### Critical perspectives

DI's emphasis on individuality may also overlook institutional factors, such as socioeconomic divides or entrenched cultural biases in curricula, which can hinder the ability to transform education (Nketsia et al., 2024). Inclusive Education may also adopt an idealistic stance that can easily lead to tokenism and advocacy based on qualitative representations. Parker & Sido (in Saani, 2024) have suggested that too often launcher or supporting students in various environments has led to "hollow" placement due to a disconnect between pedagogy and the various barriers. Despite these pressures, both approaches require contextualization and cannot portray contextual depth in theory, especially in developing contexts with observable structural barriers.

## III. Critical Evaluation of Practice

### Practices in Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction (DI) practices can include flexible grouping, where students complete tasks together but sit in different groupings; a tiered assignment practice, where students are assigned tasks with varying levels of complexity; and formative assessments to check for understanding and adjust instruction (Maryani et al., 2025). We have seen data from systematic reviews that suggest students can become more engaged and achieve better outcomes in mathematics and English when supported, for example, with verbal support or peer tutoring (Anonymous, 2025). For example, in Tanzania, DI in secondary math classrooms improved algebraic thinking by using activities that were differentiated according to a student's current level of understanding (Mtweve et al., 2025). Although this teacher-directed practice increased teachers' workloads, their professional development needs, and a genuine understanding of student outcomes, all of which are often present in low-resourced contexts (Nketsia et al., 2024), and often teachers do not feel as though they could balance the demands of differentiation with a teacher-led curriculum; thus, instruction is often superficial.

### Practices in Inclusive Education

Inclusive practices include co-teaching, which occurs when general and special education teachers work together, UDL (Universal Design for Learning), which prioritizes designing curricula with flexible approaches, and assistive technologies, such as screen readers (Saani, 2024). Research indicates that Nigerian student teachers reported greater social desirability because they felt more accepted by their peers when the environment was inclusive of students with disabilities (Nwosu et al., 2025). In stark contrast to the idea of an inclusive environment is the critique that students with disabilities are "dumped" into general education classrooms with limited access to the support or resources that would enable them to participate, thus excluding them in the name of inclusion (Oliveros et al., 2025). In Zambia, single-course inclusive education training provided teachers with theoretical knowledge but lacked practical application in mentorship, which hindered the effectiveness of the knowledge (Mpolomoka et

al., 2025). Technology (e.g., digital technology) promotes inclusive practices, but teachers' willingness or ability to utilize it limits its effectiveness (Spyropoulou et al., 2025).

### Collaboration and challenges

Differentiated Instruction (DI) and Inclusive Education build equity by providing supports in mainstream contexts, which have systematically been shown to improve outcomes in diverse classrooms (Ani et al., 2025). DI's flexibility with grouping supports inclusion-oriented aims by facilitating peer-to-peer collaboration among students. The collaboration becomes less attainable in the face of materials that are lacking and due to different definitions of what is inclusive. Configurative reviews identify variable outcomes when there are no systemic supports and professional development (Awini, 2025). The combination works best when additional training and resources are implemented, but these supports seem to be lacking, especially in developing contexts.

## IV. Analysis in the Ghanaian Context: Potentials, Challenges, and Practical Applications

### Learner Diversity in Ghanaian Classrooms

Ghanaian classrooms showcase different forms of disabilities (e.g., visual impairment, hearing impairment, cognitive impairment), linguistic backgrounds (over eighty languages), and socio-economic gaps, with the divide between urban and rural further exacerbating differences (Nurubome, 2025). The impetus for inclusive education has advanced due to the 2015 Inclusive Education Policy, which has established a commitment to including children with special needs through pilot inclusive education projects as a starting point in some districts (Osman, 2024). However, the outcomes have differed in form due to inadequate resources, cultural stigma, and the inconsistent enforcement of policies put in place, especially within rural areas.

### Potentials

**DI:** In Ghana, DI facilitates learning in mathematics and the sciences through the use of tiered tasks and peer tutoring, which cater to the diverse needs of students, including those with visual impairments, via tactile materials (Nurubome, 2025). The literature reports that scalable and low-cost methods for improving algebraic thinking and engagement can be implemented in primary schools (Yakubu et al., 2024).

**Inclusive education** is a catalyst for social cohesion; for example, students with visual impairments in Cape Coast reported having friends in inclusive educational environments (Palmieri et al., 2025). Pilot programs suggest that when supported by non-governmental organizations, such as UNICEF, access for more students can potentially increase (Saani, 2024).

**Combined:** DI in inclusive classrooms addresses diverse and complex needs, including how non-verbal supports enhance language learning, thereby promoting equity and participation (Awini, 2025).

### Challenges

Challenges such as overcrowded classrooms (50+ students), limited teachers' knowledge of DI strategies, and exam-driven curricula that restrict flexibility are present (Nketsia et al., 2024). In the Volta Region, pre-service teachers stated low DI adoption, which they attributed to inadequate training (Bunbun & Owusu, 2024).

Barriers to Inclusive Education include insufficient resources (e.g., a lack of Braille resources), poor teacher preparedness, and attitudinal stigma towards disability, which is more prevalent in the Tamale Metropolis (Osman, 2024). Inequity already exists, with additional inequities at the district level, where, primarily due to a lack of infrastructure, rural schools face even greater disadvantage (Nyamekye et al., 2025).

Several examples of contextual issues in the primary school context illustrate this contradiction between policy and practice. Teachers remain mostly unprepared for disabilities that are behavioural or cognitive (Nurubome, 2025), and there are few available pieces of assistive technologies (Awini, 2025).

### Practical applications

Differentiated Instruction (DI) practices in mathematics and English language subjects in Ghana, such as peer tutoring and tiered tasks, have all enabled a form of inclusion by creatively utilizing strategies to teach the English language (Agbevivi, 2024). Blended pedagogy, which uses low-tech tools (e.g., group work) in conjunction with some digital tools during discontinuities (for instance, COVID-19), illustrates that it is best done flexibly (Spyropoulou et al., 2025). However, the issue of scaling up remains limited by teachers' access to resources and their available capacity to prepare instructional materials. These two issues need to be addressed when educating a population that requires high-impact interventions (Nyamekye et al., 2025).

## V. Proposed Realistic Framework for Implementation in Ghanaian Classrooms

### Framework overview

The enhanced framework, which involves differentiating instruction in inclusive educational contexts, is based on the foundational concepts of Universal Design for Learning and whole-school approaches that account for resource limitations and cultural contexts in Ghana (Awini, 2025). Most significantly, it focuses on implementing solutions across multiple phases, collaborating with stakeholders, and utilizing cost-effective measures to enhance feasibility (Saani, 2024).

Table 1: Key components

Component	Description	Strategies for Ghana
Alignment of Systemic Policy	Conform with the IE Policy at the national level; include (stakeholders: parents; Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs)).	Roll out initially in districts whose advocacy is supported by UNICEF and assess externally with national standards (Osman, 2024).
Teacher Training	Increase capacity in Disciplinary-Inclusive (DI) techniques (e.g., include instructional approaches with inclusive pedagogies).	Professional development workshops with in-service activities focused on modifying plans for large class settings (Bunbun & Owusu, 2024; Nyamekye et al., 2025).
Resource Allocation	Provide inexpensive materials, such as tactile aids and materials for whole-group work, to address student support needs.	Building a community partnership to address classroom supply shortages will also enable blended usage of digital materials, offering students more teacher support (Spyropoulou et al., 2025).
Classroom Practice	Include DI strategies (e.g., assigning additional tasks) within an inclusive classroom environment.	Implement on a small scale to start, in larger group placements (such as math and science)-to try out and track progress using formative assessments & engagement with students (Maryani et al., 2025).
Assessment and Evaluation	Use indications of evaluation for equity and outcomes (i.e., participation rates).	Annual reviews using teacher input prior to asking for teacher replication (although this will not always be the case due to diversity in some districts) (Palmieri et al., 2025).

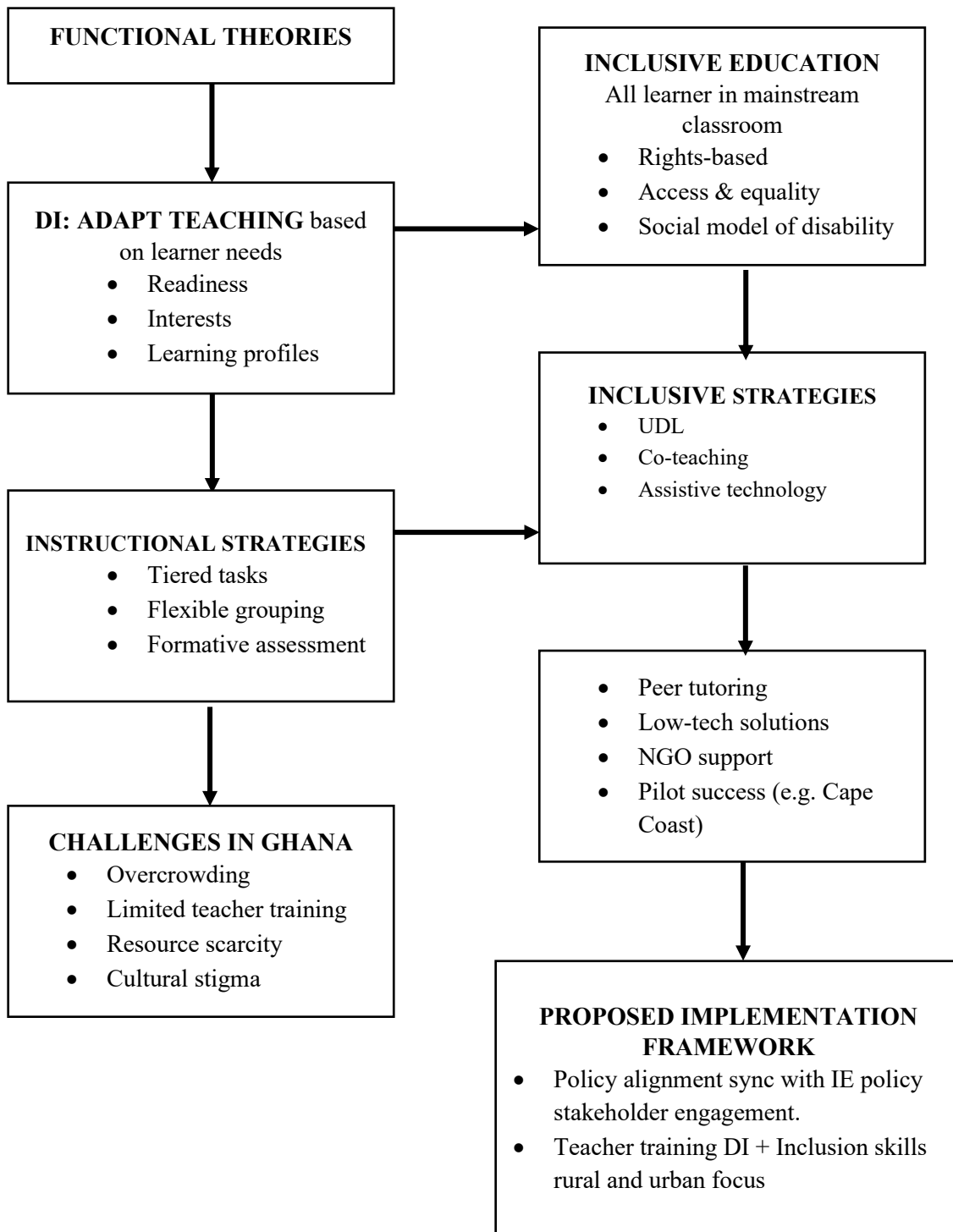


Figure 1: Integrated Framework for Differentiated Instruction & Inclusive Education in Ghana

Source: Author's Construct

The framework above demonstrates the melding of Differentiated Instruction (DI) and Inclusive Education (IE) to address learner diversity in Ghanaian classrooms. We will begin with the underlying theories of DI, which emphasize adjusting actual instruction to meet the needs of individuals (e.g., readiness, interests, learning profiles). We will then proceed to the IE framework, grounded in rights-based access and the social model of disability. These ideas underscore the practical strategies of DI (for example, tiered tasks and formative assessment) and IE (such as co-teaching and assistive technology). In Ghana, where many issues remain in terms of crowded classrooms, insufficient teacher preparation, fewer educational resources, and what some may intimately research as 'traditional' practices, there are opportunities to affordably integrate, peer tutored supports, the involvement of the NGO community, and any information that suggests collaborative networks could work towards constructive support in educational context(s). We concluded the framework with a potential model for implementation that advances policy ideals, specialty training of educators, community partnerships, and a phased implementation plan altogether designed to conceptualize potentially scalable, context-informed practices that afford equity and inclusion to all learners.

### Phased implementation

**Phase 1 (Preparation):** Launch educator training pilots that specifically use DI strategies, such as flexible grouping and UDL (for example), to complete the overall training within urban and rural districts (6-12 months).

**Phase 2 (Pilot):** Conduct the practical work at selected schools based on previously established cost-effective tools and partnerships within the community, with a cycle of feedback involving designated teachers and students (1-2 years).

**Phase 3 (Scale):** The plan for the scale stage is to replicate the program nationally across the various regions, consider regional bumps, and monitor or oversee what happens along the way (3-5 years).

### Realism and sustainability

The design uses existing NGO partnerships (e.g., UNICEF) to address funding vacancies, focusing on low-cost, scalable approaches such as peer tutoring. Continuous evaluation will be integrated into local problems in an organic manner, aiming to achieve measurable results, such as student engagement and inclusion rates (Saani, 2024).

## 2. CONCLUSION

### Summary of key insights

Upon diligently reviewing Differentiated Instruction (DI) and Inclusive Education, their prospects for responding to learners' differences in Ghanaian classrooms appear promising, provided that fundamental systemic challenges are addressed. DI engages students in learning and enhances their academic achievement when a variety of approaches are utilized to address differences in learning needs, such as tiered tasks in mathematics and peer tutoring in literacy classes, which led to improved algebraic thinking and greater engagement in math in primary schools (Nurubome, 2025; Yakubu et al., 2024). Inclusive Education facilitates social cohesion and equity. A study in Cape Coast found that children with visual impairments interacted positively with their peers when placed in a general education classroom (Palmieri et al., 2025). DI and Inclusive Education, supported by frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), create inclusive environments for all learners that account for individual and social and academic impact as a whole (Awini, 2025). However, problems such as overcrowded classrooms, limited teacher training, and resource shortages in rural areas persist and may lead to marginal implementation or exclusion from inclusive environments (Osman, 2024; Nketsia et al., 2024). Examples of recent cases include the low adoption of DI in the Volta Region due to training gaps and policy-practice disconnects in primary schools (Bunbun & Owusu, 2024; Nurubome, 2025; Bulunbun & Owusu, 2024; Bunbun & Owusu, 2025). To overcome these barriers, the proposed framework offers a practical approach that utilizes community partners and pilot programs

to achieve scalability, fosters community engagement, and implements a strategy to enhance their effectiveness (Saani, 2024).

### Implications

**Policy implications:** These findings underscore Ghana's need to refine the 2015 Inclusive Education Policy and enhance the existing funding mechanism, as well as implement more effective strategies. In a way, policymakers should invest in continued investments in teacher training programs that combine DI and inclusive practices, as existing in-service training is often inadequate for responding to diverse needs in large classrooms (Nyamekye et al., 2025), and collaboratively with NGO groups like UNICEF can help alleviate resource-related gaps. However, policies must address embodied attitudinal challenges by encouraging awareness campaigns to promote the acceptance of disabilities (Osman, 2024).

**Practice implications:** For teachers to thrive in different classrooms, they need to have practical DI strategies, such as flexible grouping and formative assessment. Spyropoulou et al. (2025) report using inexpensive tools, such as peer tutoring and tactile aids, to enhance utility in resource-limited settings. To support inclusive practices, schools should consider co-teaching models, drawing on pilots from Ghanaian districts (Saani, 2024). At the same time, professional development and mentoring play a crucial role in bridging the gap between theory and practice (Mpolomoka et al., 2025).

**Research implication:** The study should still focus on future research, specifically conducting longitudinal studies that track the long-term impacts of integrating DI and Inclusive Education strategies on Ghana's academic and social outcomes. Comparative studies of urban and rural populations would be instrumental in adapting the evidence to identify some local barriers and solutions. Along this line, as alluded to earlier, future efforts could explore possibilities for a more efficient integration of technologies to address the needs of students with difficult-to-reach and limited resources (Spyropoulou et al., 2025). The research should extend beyond traditional educational contexts and also draw on student and family perspectives when assessing inclusionary practices to address neighbourhood needs (Palmieri et al., 2025).

### Final recommendations

Incorporating DI and inclusive education through local capacity development, supported by community engagement and NGOs, would be part of this holistic model of equitable education in Ghana. The key recommendations here could be:

**Develop the Capacities of Teachers:** All teachers should have access to mandatory and continuous training programs that emphasize practical DI strategies and inclusive pedagogies, as well as mentoring or support on how to put these in the classroom (Bunbun & Owusu, 2024).

**Utilize budget-friendly solutions:** At the outset, apply scalable, low-technology solutions, such as peer tutoring and group work, as much as possible, and digital solutions when resources are limited (Spyropoulou et al., 2025).

**Modify policies:** Utilize piloting to align national policies with district student needs and continue implementing policies with ongoing tracking to ensure equitable resource allocation (Osman, 2024). Promote Community Engagement: Involve parents and local communities in awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and support inclusive practices, as seen in successful pilot districts (Saani, 2024).

**Monitor and adjust:** Establish robust tracking structures that feature clear equity indicators (e.g., participation rate, academic progress) to modify and enhance approaches based on evidence from teachers and learners (Palmieri et al., 2025).

These evidence-based recommendations seek to create equitable and sustainable educational contexts that recognize the diversity of learners in Ghana, while also addressing systemic challenges.

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