

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENT-TEACHERS DURING TEACHING PRACTICE EXERCISE IN SELECTED SPECIAL SCHOOLS IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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Article History

Received: 24/ 05/ 2025

Accepted: 10/ 06/ 2025

Published: 13/ 06/ 2025

Abstract: All forms of professional education and training that will mould responsible and productive teachers should have both theoretical and practical components. Hence, teaching practice becomes an integral part of teacher training programme for all educational strata. The study examines challenges encountered by prospective special education teachers during teaching practice exercise in selected special schools in Oyo State, Nigeria. The main research instrument was questionnaire of modified 4-likert type scale. A reliability coefficient of 0.87 was obtained through the use of test-retest approach. The participants for the study were teaching practice student-teachers that were purposively selected within special schools in Oyo State, Nigeria. The findings of the study revealed that, a number of student teachers demonstrated inadequate teaching skills and requisite competence to effectively execute teaching practice. Further, the study's outcomes showed that, student-teachers in school for learners with hearing impairments had the most challenges, particularly those who are not familiar with the use of sign language or other communication strategies during teaching practice exercise, this was followed by student-teachers in school for the visually impaired students, while student-teachers in school for the intellectual disabilities had the least challenges during teaching practice exercise. The study also revealed that, there is no significant difference in the challenges experienced by male and female student teachers during teaching practice. The study concludes by recommending that, certain variables such as relatively small class size, effective methods of teaching and motivation and interest believe to be critical factors in the effective teaching practice should be encouraged. And again, teacher training programme that prioritises effective and adequate teacher education programme should be put in place.

Keywords: Teaching Practice, Special Education, Student-Teachers, Challenges.

How to Cite in APA format: ANTHONY, K. I., IDEMUDIA, E. S., OYEWOLE, A. E., (2025). CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENT-TEACHERS DURING TEACHING PRACTICE EXERCISE IN SELECTED SPECIAL SCHOOLS IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA. *IRASS Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(6)155-161.

Introduction

The importance of teaching practice to any who-would-be special education teacher cannot be overemphasised as there cannot be any meaningful teacher development without teaching practice exercise. Teaching practice and teacher preparation are integral part and basic element of teacher education programme. Although teaching practice and teacher preparation may seem like separate components of teacher education programmes, they are, in essence, two complementary aspects of a unified whole, each informing and enriching the other, because, there is no teacher development without teaching practice and there is no teaching practice without teacher development.

Teachers are the fulcrum of education. They are the most valued assets of any country. The quality of teachers determines the quality of education delivery. Hanushek & Rifkin (2006), state that, the quality of education system depends on the quality, quantity and devotion of its teaching workforce. In the opinion of Fajonyomi (2007), the success or failure of any educational programme rests majorly on the adequate and availability of qualified, competent and dedicated teachers. National Policy on Education (2013) rightly remarks that, no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers. This further lends credence and underscore the federal government efforts and commitments This is an open access article under the [CC BY-NC](#) license

not only to sensitise the public about the importance of qualitative and quantitative teacher education but also to actually produce teachers who are highly motivated, conscientious and efficient. It is an attempt to accomplish this noble goal that the federal government decided that all teachers in educational institutions shall be professionally trained and that, Colleges of Education, Institutes of Education, and National Teachers Institutes are saddled with the responsibility of giving the most cherished professional training. A special education teacher is a trained educator who works with children with special needs, such as intellectual disability, visual impairments, hearing impairments, specific learning disabilities, gifted and talented, physical disabilities and health impairments, communication disorders in speech and language, emotional and behavioural disorders, multiple and severe disabilities among others.

Literature Review

Teaching is a deliberate, intentional, purposeful and partnership activity involving the teacher and students in the act of sharing of a word or concept. In teaching, the teacher gives the learners the subject matter to examine, the amount of knowledge a teacher has about instructional methods, efficiency and proficiency



in teaching-learning process, and ability to implement a very large number of diagnostic, instructional, managerial and therapeutic skills, tailoring behaviour in specific contexts and situations to the specific needs of the moment would be determined by the training such a teacher is given. The veritable tool for achieving this laudable adventure is through effective teaching practice and teacher education programme. Therefore, all forms of professional education and training that will mould responsible and productive teacher should have both theoretical and practical components with reference to other professions such as medicine, law, accountancy, pharmacy and engineering. Hence, teaching practice must be an integral part of functional teacher training programmes for all educational strata.

Concept of Teaching Practice

Teaching practice is a practical teaching activity by which the student teachers are given an opportunity in actual school situations to demonstrate and improve training in pedagogical skills over a period of time (Oyekan, 2015). For Teaching Practice Committee (1991), it is a kind of apprenticeship stage during which the student teachers are sent out to schools to gain practical and professional experiences by translating all the educational theories they have acquired during training into practice. From the foregoing, teaching practice is a preservice professional preparation for interested persons aspiring to become teachers with credible vision for sustainable human development. It aims at inculcating in the student-teachers various practical skills and habits which will facilitate learning and achievement. Oyekan (2015) further remarked that, to become a progressive efficient teacher, teaching practice is a ground for meaningful studies in professional skills, methods, theories and principles of instruction which the student-teachers have already acquired in education courses. Above all, teaching practice should be a compulsory training requirement for the award of certificate or degree in education.

Before entering the actual teaching profession, a student-teacher is permitted to practice teaching (Ebrahim et al., 2017). Teaching practice aims to develop a variety of competences in the trainee teacher, including interpersonal, pedagogical, intercultural, and psychological competencies. It goes beyond simply knowing what to teach and how to teach it (Chikezie, 2017). This exercise (Teaching Practice) affords who-would-be teacher to gain first-hand experience about the nitty-gritty of teaching as a profession. No teacher performs well in the classroom except she is taking through the stages and procedures of teaching practice exercise. Therefore, teaching practice is regarded as a cardinal pre-requisite for any professional teacher development.

For special education student teachers, teaching practice allows them to get to know more about children with disabilities, acceptance of their conditions, given them special help in getting their academics, psycho-social, emotional needs met; and specifically, teaching practice enables them to acquire the basic teaching skills and ethical values which facilitate teaching-learning process; it provides the student-teachers an opportunity to imbibe practical classroom life experiences; it exposes the student-teachers to the dynamic of social system of the school as they interact with the learners and staff, use physical facilities, and participate in curricular activities and lastly, it affords them the opportunity to identify their strengths and weaknesses in lesson presentation while thinking on possible means to improve their teaching capacity

(Oyekan, 2015). Teaching practice is an important component of becoming a teacher.

Teaching students with special needs is challenging for every special education teacher (Crispel & Kasperski, 2021). During the teaching practice exercise, special education student-teachers are faced with enormous challenges. These challenges if not identified on time and addressed adequately may affect prospective teachers' perceptions about teaching profession and can mar or make them to pursuing a career in teaching profession. That is why it is important that these challenges are quickly identified and solutions proffered in order to change their perception.

It is worrisome to note that special education student teachers are faced with enormous challenges during teaching practice. These challenges some time may be attributed to school heads rejection of student teachers posted to their schools; this could lead to frustration and anger, population explosion of student-teachers in some schools, poor school environment, dilapidated buildings and classrooms, overcrowded staff rooms are likely to make teaching profession unattractive to student teachers, besides, poor instructional methods, acute shortage of instructional materials, supervisors' remarks, comments and suggestions that are often derogatory, discouraging and unnecessary may have left many student-teachers uninterested in teaching profession. In addition, truancy being displayed by student-teachers, lack of mastery of subject matter, inaudible voice, lack of clarity of expression, irrelevant and inappropriate and blatant disregard of using teaching aids and many more may make teaching practice challenging for special education student teachers, consequently, they may not have passion for teaching profession and this may account for dearth of special education teachers. It has been observed that, the deserved attention is not given to this category of student teachers and this has grave implications in a number of ways, especially building career in teaching profession.

In addition, as the number of special education students enrolment in teacher education programme decreases, so is the need for effective interventions that target teacher development becomes imperative. This is because, student-teachers who are never taught on the skills in teaching may develop their own habits and devices for getting their needs met. These habits and devices are often unethical and unacceptable to the teaching profession.

According to previous studies, burnout is more common among aspiring special education teachers than it is in the majority of other occupations. Unfortunately, teacher burnout causes many special education students in training to quit the teaching profession because they are unable to handle the demanding demands (Brunsting, Srekovic & Lane, 2014). Long-term, continuous work-related stress leads to burnout, which manifests as emotional tiredness, depersonalization, and a sense of unfulfilled professional potential (Brunsting et al., 2014). According to Pietarienen, Pyhalto, Soini, and Salmela-Aro (2013), teacher burnout occurs gradually and is the primary cause of the high number of teachers quitting their jobs in the twenty-first century (Rumschlag, 2017). From this perspective, it is interesting that the teaching profession stands out and have been identified as one of the most stressful occupations with a potential to cause poor health (Johnson et al, 2005)

One of the biggest issues for aspiring special education teachers is controlling classroom behavior, according to a review of the literature. If the student teacher is unfamiliar with the

classroom atmosphere or if the kids are unresponsive or challenging to control, this could be very challenging. As a result, they struggle greatly to adapt to the expectations of a perfect classroom. According to Ali and Saleh (2008), teachers who work with pupils who have special needs need to receive specialized training. The efficacy of the teaching and learning process is further diminished by a lack of expertise and experience in managing pupils who exhibit problematic behavior in the classroom.

Another problem confronting special education teachers during teaching practice is not knowing how to handle children with multiple disabilities in the classroom. Mba (1995) noted that, children with hearing disabilities for example, could have cerebral palsy. The scholar further stressed that, cerebral palsy rarely occurs in isolation. It usually involves other disabilities, especially hearing loss. In addition, hearing impaired school children could have some behavioural or emotional disorders (Ibudeh, 2006). Special education teachers in training may have such students with various disabilities in their classrooms, since each student is a unique case, therefore teachers must as a matter of fact make necessary changes in their lessons to suit each students with disabilities. This is often a huge challenge to student teachers during teaching practice particularly when they are asked to teach students with multiple disabilities. Communication problem with the hearing impaired students is also considered as a challenge to student teachers during teaching practice. In the views of Ntinda et al (2019), the biggest challenge for a teacher is communication with hearing impaired students. In most cases, teachers need specialised instruction because a gesture can mean the opposite in sign language, so communication is one of the many challenges teachers face.

Handling the problems of an inclusive classroom is another challenge special education student teachers encountered during teaching practice. According to UNESCO (2005), inclusive education is founded on the principle that all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, have the right to receive a quality education in a fully supportive environment. As reported by UNESCO (2009), inclusive education promotes the participation and learning of all students, including those with disabilities, ensuring that all have access to a quality education that prepares them for life. The concept of having classrooms that contain both special needs students and students without disability under the same roof and learning contents is becoming a popular one. This type of education poses new challenges for special education teachers in training. For example, many students who have no disabilities are unaccustomed to dealing with those who do. Student teachers in these classes are charged with eliminating cruelty and insensitivity from among their students ensuring that those with special needs are treated with respect.

Another challenge facing special education student teachers during teaching practice is how to formulate behavioural objectives. How to generate suitable instructional objectives for the students with disabilities in both cognitive and affective domains, and to use these objectives as the ground for regular assessment of progress is a big challenge for prospective teachers during practice. In order for the student teachers to be able to formulate appropriate instructional objectives targeted at the growth and development of students, such prospective teachers should as a matter of fact know what to teach, when to teach, where to teach, and how to teach.

Besides, learning environment is another challenge facing special education teachers during teaching practice. Dilapidated

building, overcrowded classroom, insufficient facilities, acute shortage of digital tools, lack of technology infrastructure, poor classroom management, poor school location and unattractive school environment can affect teachers in training. In special education, it is important that learning environment be made attractive in order to encourage and motivate young teachers to stay compared to other professions like banking, law and medicine that their environment is always beautify and attractive. It should therefore, be observed that teaching is a uniquely difficult job, the kind that comes with a set of huge responsibilities, however, many people fail to recognise the teacher's role.

Furthermore, lack of support has been identified as one of the challenges faced by special education teachers in training. Special education teachers in training may experience lack of support in the classroom especially when they encountered students with behavioural disorders. Managing such students in the classroom demands that student teachers should have a full support of cooperative teachers and absolute knowledge of class control and management and skills in Applied Behaviour Analysis.

A search into literature reveals that, prospective special education teachers during teaching practice are faced with a lot of psychosocial challenges in the classroom. The expectations of prospective teachers and classroom realities are different (Melnick & Meister, 2008; Yildiz, Gecikli, & Yesilyurt, 2016). The profession is far more complex than prospective teachers' expectations. The fact that they are still undergoing training and the required esoteric skills teaching deserves may not have been acquired makes it much more difficult for them to experience adjustment problems. The adjustment problems faced by special education teachers in training may get them disorganised and often make many mistakes. Also, they may demonstrate their adjustment problems by working or playing quietly, talking excessively and squirming. Adjustment problems may be a trigger to inability to adjust to the demands of interpersonal relationships and stresses of daily living.

Further, adjustment problems often encountered by special education teachers in training vary from individual teachers. Adjustment problems are characterised by a maladaptive emotional response to a stressful event among fresh in service training, such as the loss of a job, divorce, or failure in school (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). It is well documented that all teachers in training without adequate skills may experience adjustment problems in behaviour and poor job performance. It worth mentioning that teachers' adjustment would ultimately be necessary to succeed in the working world, as it plays a major role in classroom success. It is hoped that the earlier teachers in training get adjusted, the less likely will boredom, lack of motivation and interest set in.

Visual impairment is one of the constructs considered in this study. It is inability to vision accurately. The eye is an important organ of the body. It is the organ responsible for sight. So, any time the eye is affected in a bad way, it brings about a bad eyesight, and therefore, creates difficulty in seeing. Students with visual impairment have difficulty accomplishing visual tasks, but they can learn through the visual sense by the use of various special technologies and teaching techniques. Students with visual impairment often display sensitivity of light to eyes, holding object very close or far from the eyes, awkwardness in games requiring eye-hand co-ordination, frequent complaint of inability to see, and frequent pus in the eye. Therefore, student teachers on teaching

practice are often confronted with problems of adapting instructional materials to accommodate different learning needs of these children, also, using assistive technology like screen readers and providing equal access to educational opportunities. Student teachers' challenges in handling these set of students during teaching practice exercise were looked into in this study.

Another category of exceptionality considered in this study is mental retardation, now commonly referred to as intellectual disability, is essentially due to brain damage. Since brain cells or nerves are not repairable or replaceable, mental retardation therefore is neither reversible nor curable. Children who suffer from intellectual disability are markedly slower than their age mates in using memory effectively, in association and classifying information, in reasoning, and in making sound judgments the types of performance measured on intelligence tests (Lerner, 2006). This condition present notable deficiencies in cognitive abilities and life skills areas such as communication, self-care, home living, social skills, community use, self-direction, health and safety, functional academics, leisure, and work. Challenges of prospective special education teachers who taught these children during teaching practice were examined in this study.

Hearing losses are defined in terms of the degree of loss, the age at which the loss occurs, and the type of loss. There are two main groups under hearing impairment. These are the hard of hearing and the deaf. Students classified as deaf experience inability to hear at all so that verbal communication is impossible. Since the deaf cannot hear, they cannot therefore speak because it is what one hears, one speaks. The hard of hearing are those who hear well only by the use of hearing aids, without which they find it difficult to communicate verbally. Children with hearing impairment experience poor and slow response to low sound, preference of visual work than auditory activities, give wrong answers to oral questions, and often shouting when talking Tuoyo & Anthony, 2018). Student-teachers teaching children with this type of disability were examined in order to find out challenges they encountered during teaching practice.

It is essential to note here that challenges student teachers are faced with in handling different population of disabilities may be significantly different and how they cope is largely dependent on the individual student-teacher's abilities and unique strengths. Thus, their challenges should be considered and appropriate measures be instituted to addressing these challenges in order to produce teachers that are willing and pride themselves to becoming special education teachers. Therefore, it is important that special education teachers in training are exposed to the nitty-gritty of teaching world in order to produce viable and conscientious teachers through effective and productive teacher education programme. Numerous attempts had been made and several studies conducted on challenges encountered by regular education student-teachers in practicing teaching (Aldhabi, 2020; Ebrahim, et al., 2017; Al-Momani, 2016 & Adeyanju, 2012). Observably, little or no studies have been conducted in Nigeria on challenges facing special education student-teachers during teaching practice. Hence, the present study became very crucial at this point in time to address these problems in order not to have acute shortage of personnel in the field of special education.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were generated and tested at 0.05 level of significance

- H_{01} . There will be no significant difference in the challenges of hearing impairment and visual impairment student-teachers.
- H_{02} . There will be no significant difference between the challenges of hearing impairment and intellectual disability student-teachers.
- H_{03} . There will be no significant difference between the challenges of male and female student-teachers.
- H_{04} . There will be no significant difference in the challenges student-teachers handling children with hearing impairment, visual impairments and intellectual disabilities.

Methodology

The descriptive research design was used in carrying out this study. The participants for the study were all full time NCE 3 student-teachers who were participating in the teaching practice exercise and they study special needs education. The study adopted purposive sampling technique in selecting the participants. Three public special schools that provide special education services were purposively selected from Oyo State. Moreover, all the three (3) public special schools were used for the study. The presence of different population of disabilities and schools with large number of students with disabilities were the major criterion for the selection at this level. In addition, student-teachers with specialisation in special education and who teach students with hearing impairment, visual impairment and intellectual disability were used for the study. Schools that were not special schools were excluded from the study. The instrument used to collect data for the study was a questionnaire on the challenges faced by special education student-teachers during teaching practice. The questionnaire comprises 20 items and is structured in the modified version of 4-Likert type scale point of 'Strongly Agree' (SA); 'Agree' (A); 'Disagree' (D); and 'Strongly Disagree' (SD) respectively. The content validity of the instrument was determined by experts in Tests and Measurement to validate. Their suggestions and comments on the items of relevance, sentence structure and adequacy of the instrument were utilised in preparing the final draft of the present form of the instrument. The instrument was then trial tested on a sample of 15 student-teachers who were not part of the main study but were found to be equivalent to the sample of the study. The reliability was determined through the use of the test-retest reliability technique. A reliability coefficient of 0.87 obtained shows that the instrument was reliable and consistent for the study. The questionnaires were scored, t-test and analysis of covariance statistics were used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Hypothesis One:

There will be no significant difference in the challenges of hearing impairment and visual impairment student-teachers.

Table 1: Summary of t-test analysis in the challenges between hearing impairment and visual impairment student-teachers

Variable	N	X	SD	Df	t-cal	t-tab
Hearing Impairments	38	72.5	8.22	72	2.78	1.96
Visual Impairments	36	47.8	9.02			

As indicated in the Table 1, the value of t-cal (2.78) was greater than t-tab (1.96). As such, the null hypothesis was rejected. This shows that there was a significant difference between the challenges encountered by student-teachers handling different population of disabilities during teaching practice.

Hypothesis Two

There will be no significant difference between challenges of hearing impairment and intellectual disability student-teachers.

Table 2: Summary of t-test analysis shows the difference between challenges of student-teachers teaching hearing impaired and intellectual disability

Variable	N	X	SD	Df	t-cal	t-tab
Intellectual Disability	42	47.8	5.8	78	.67	1.96
Hearing Impairment	38	87.5	7.3			

Table 2 shows the result of data collected on hypothesis two. From the result, it is revealed that no significant difference exists between the challenges of student teachers handling intellectual disabled and hearing impaired students. Since the t-cal (.67) is less than t-tab (1.96), the second hypothesis was therefore not rejected.

Hypothesis three

There will be no significant difference between the challenges of male and female student teachers.

Table 3: t-test analysis shows difference between the challenges male and female student teachers encountered during teaching practice

Variable	N	X	SD	Df	t-cal	t-tab
Male Students	48	40.0	40.8	114	.96	1.96
Female Student	58	58.0	59.2			

Table 3 shows the result obtained from testing hypothesis three. It reveals that there is no significant difference between male and female student-teachers challenges encountered during teaching practice. Since the t-cal (.96) is less than t-tab (1.96), therefore, the null hypothesis is hereby retained.

Hypothesis four

There will be no significant difference in the challenges of student-teachers handling children with hearing impairment, visual impairment and intellectual disabilities.

Table 4: Analysis of variance showing the differences in the challenges faced by student-teachers handling students with hearing impairments, visual impairments and intellectual disabilities

Source of Variation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.of
Main Effects (Challenges)	1796.998	2	898.499	80.771	.000
Explained	1796.998	2	898.499	80.771	.000*
Residual	7052.600	114	11.124		
Total	8849.598	116	13.914		

P<0.05

Table 4 shows that the different population of disabilities had statistically significant effect on challenges encountered by special education student-teachers during teaching practice. The observed f value (f2, 116=80.771, P<0.05) was recorded. This

showed that there is a statistically significant main effect beyond the 0.05 alpha level. In order to further establish the extent of variation, Scheffe's post hoc analysis was carried out and the result is presented below in Table 5.

Table 5: Summary of Scheffe's post hoc analysis of challenges encountered

Measures	Comparison of Challenges encountered (Intellectual Disabilities (ID), Visual Impairments (VI), Hearing Impairments (HI))	Mean Difference	Decision at .05 alpha level
Challenges	ID Vs VI ID Vs HI VI Vs ID HI Vs VI Vs ID	1.02 7.26 6.24	HI > VI HI > ID VI > ID HI > VI > ID

Table 5 shows that, the mean difference between HI and VI was 1.02, between HI and ID was 7.26 and between VI and ID was 6.24. This implies that, student-teachers in school for hearing impairment students had the most challenges during teaching practice exercise, this was followed by students-teachers in school for the visually impaired students, while student-teachers in school for intellectual disabilities had the least challenges during teaching practice exercise.

Discussion

The findings show that a number of student-teachers demonstrated inadequate teaching skills and requisite competence to effectively execute teaching practice. This was shown in the findings from hypothesis one that revealed that a notable

challenges in teaching competence was observed among student-teachers who taught learners with hearing impairment had great challenges when compared with children with visual impairments. Studies have further shown that both children with visual impairments and hearing impairments can present unique challenges, however, student-teachers experienced more difficulties teaching students with hearing impairments, particularly those student-teachers who are not familiar with the use of sign language or other communication strategies. This study thereby aligned with the findings of previous researchers (Suarez, 2025; Bishop, 2018; Koenig & Holbrook, 2018; Marschark, 2018).

Another significant finding of the study from hypothesis two revealed that challenges experienced by student-teachers who taught children with hearing impairments and intellectual

disabilities were at par. This suggests that there was no significant difference in the challenges student-teachers experienced while handling different population of students with disabilities. The findings in this study on the challenges experienced by student-teachers in school for the deaf and intellectual disabilities was consistent with the findings made by (Bateman & Bateman, 2013; Browder & Spooner 2011). It can be inferred from the study that regardless of the different population of disabilities handled, student-teachers faced same challenges while teaching learners with intellectual disabilities and hearing impairments as a result of being ill-equipped, lack of experience, insufficient support and ratio of student-to-teacher.

The results of investigation as shown in Table 3 indicated that, a non-significant difference existed between challenges of male and female student-teachers handling different population of children with disabilities. This means that, both male and female student-teachers experienced equally same level of challenges during teaching practice exercise. It can be inferred from the study that both male and female student teachers can effectively teach students with disabilities, but their attitudes and knowledge may differ. The study supports the findings of Alkhateeb, Hadidi & Alkhateeb (2016) and Sharma & Sokal (2015), which emphasised that no significant gender difference exists in effective teaching of students with disabilities. This is as result of male and female student-teachers showing similar levels of knowledge about teaching learners with disabilities.

Significant difference was also recorded when comparing the challenges faced by student-teachers handling learners with intellectual disabilities, visual impairments and hearing impairments. The results of the study's outcomes in Table 4 & 5 further reveal that, for the intellectual disabilities group had the least challenges followed by the student-teachers in school for the blind while the hearing impairments group came out as the most challenging group, which signified that prospective special education student-teachers had major challenges in school for the hearing impaired during teaching practice exercise.

Conclusion

This study has revealed that, student teachers are faced with enormous challenges during teaching practice. It also showed that, student teachers experienced more difficulties teaching students with hearing impairments, particularly those who are not familiar with sign language or other communication strategies when it is compared with other population of disabilities. Teaching students with disabilities can be challenging however, the study therefore recommended that with sufficient training, sufficient support, keeping the ratio of student to teacher to the minimum, availability of resources, attractive learning environment, and prompt payment of incentives and other emoluments being given to other professions such as doctors, nurses and physiotherapists in training would encourage student teachers teaching in various schools.

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