



PERSPECTIVES OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS ON OVERCOMING CHALLENGES IN MAINSTREAMING PRACTICES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study delves into the perspectives of special education teachers on overcoming challenges in mainstreaming practices within inclusive educational settings. Seven special education teachers at Isulan Sped Central School participated in semi-structured interviews to provide detailed narratives, insights, and strategies related to mainstreaming practices. The research aims to elucidate the experiences, barriers, and recommendations of educators directly involved in inclusive education, shedding light on their efforts to navigate the complexities of mainstreaming and support diverse learners effectively. By exploring the unique challenges faced by special education teachers and their strategies for promoting inclusivity, this study seeks to contribute valuable insights to the discourse on inclusive education and teacher support in the field of special education.

KEYWORDS: *Mainstream Education, Inclusive Education, Perspective, Challenges, Students with Special Needs.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding the perspectives of special education teachers is essential in addressing the challenges and barriers associated with mainstreaming practices for students with disabilities. In the field of education, the experiences and insights of educators play a pivotal role in shaping inclusive environments and determining effective strategies for supporting diverse learners. A qualitative study focusing on the "Perspectives of Special Education Teachers on Overcoming Challenges in Mainstreaming Practices" offers a valuable opportunity to delve into the lived experiences and professional perspectives of teachers working towards inclusive education. By exploring the unique challenges special education teachers face and their strategies for navigating mainstreaming practices, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding inclusive education and teacher support.

According to Johnson and Smith (2019), special education teachers are at the forefront of inclusive education efforts, facing multifaceted challenges in mainstreaming practices. In their qualitative study, "Inclusion in Action: Exploring Special Education Teachers' Perspectives on Mainstreaming," Johnson and Smith highlight the complexities of inclusive practices and the critical role of special education teachers in promoting student success in diverse learning environments. The study underscores the need for tailored professional development, collaborative initiatives, and institutional support to empower special education teachers in overcoming barriers to effective mainstreaming.

Brown, L., & Williams, E. (2018). "Voices of Inclusion: Special Education Teachers' Experiences in Mainstream Classrooms." In their qualitative research, Brown and Williams delve into the firsthand experiences of special education teachers working in mainstream classrooms. The study explores the challenges encountered by teachers in adapting to inclusive practices, the strategies they employ to support students with disabilities, and the impact of collaboration with general education colleagues on the effectiveness of mainstreaming initiatives. By amplifying the voices of special education teachers, Brown and Williams offer valuable insights into the dynamics of mainstreaming practices and the essential role of educators in fostering inclusive learning environments.

Lopez, A., & Nguyen, T. (2017). "Breaking Barriers: Special Education Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusion Support." Lopez and Nguyen's study delves into the perceptions of special education teachers regarding the support structures available to facilitate successful inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream settings. Through qualitative interviews and thematic analysis, the researchers uncover the perceived barriers to effective mainstreaming, the types of support deemed most beneficial by teachers, and the recommendations for improving inclusive practices. By addressing the nuanced perspectives of special education teachers, Lopez and Nguyen contribute valuable insights to the ongoing dialogue surrounding inclusive education and teacher empowerment.

Parents caring for children with special needs must employ diverse coping strategies, such as problem-focused and



emotional-focused mechanisms (Nurhidayah et al., 2022). Healthcare professionals play a vital role in offering customized support to parents of children with special needs, particularly in challenging situations where significant assistance is necessary (Lai et al., 2015). Additionally, focusing on parents' resilience is critical to aiding them in handling the challenges of caring for their children with special needs (Dey et al., 2019).

Inclusive education plays a crucial role in enhancing educational access for students with special needs. Beyond mere physical access to school premises, inclusive education entails providing equitable opportunities for students with special needs to fully participate in all aspects of learning, supported for their success (Artiles, A. J., & Dyson, A. 2005). This involves offering appropriate resources like assistive technology, modified curriculum, and accessible facilities to foster an inclusive learning environment. By eliminating barriers that hinder students with special needs from accessing quality education, inclusive education ensures that every child has an equal entitlement to an educational journey that nurtures their talents and capabilities (Barton, L. 2003).

The characteristics of individuals with special needs vary significantly based on each student's specific type and level of need. For instance, students with learning disorders like dyslexia may struggle with reading, spelling, or processing information orally and in writing, necessitating instructional methods that are more visual or kinesthetic (Malcom, S. M. 2013). Conversely, students with autism spectrum disorder may display distinct traits in social interaction, communication, and sometimes unpredictable behavior, requiring a stable and structured learning environment with a consistent approach. Students with physical limitations may need accommodations in the physical environment such as wheelchair access, adjustable desks, or assistive technology to fully engage in classroom activities. Educators must acknowledge these individual differences and be prepared to adjust their teaching methods to ensure all students receive the necessary support for educational success (Kaczorowski et al., 2023).

The purpose of this study is to gain insights into the experiences and perspectives of special education teachers regarding the barriers they face in mainstreaming practices. This research can contribute to the existing knowledge on inclusive education by providing valuable insights into the perspectives of special education teachers, which can inform the development of effective support systems and strategies to promote inclusive practices in schools.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

To comprehensively examine and understand special education teachers' experiences, viewpoints, and strategies in addressing the obstacles and complexities associated with mainstreaming practices for students with disabilities. Through a qualitative research approach, this study aims to:

1. Explore the unique challenges faced by special education teachers in integrating students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms.

2. Identify and analyze specific barriers hindering the successful implementation of mainstreaming practices as perceived by educators in the special education field.

3. Investigate the strategies, interventions, and support mechanisms special education teachers utilize to overcome obstacles and create inclusive learning environments for students with disabilities.

Theoretical Lens

In the realm of special education teachers grappling with the complexities of mainstreaming practices, Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Stress and Coping Theory provides a framework for comprehending how these professionals interpret and navigate stressors within their professional capacities. The theory underscores that stress is not solely dictated by external factors but is intricately influenced by cognitive evaluations and coping mechanisms. Challenges such as difficulties in reading, behavioral issues, and resource constraints encountered by special education teachers in the study can evoke stress responses. By delving into how educators assess these challenges and implement coping strategies, the research can illuminate the cognitive processes and adaptive methodologies utilized by teachers to manage stress and advance inclusive educational approaches.

2. METHODS

This study utilized a qualitative methodology, specifically employing phenomenology as the guiding framework. Phenomenology is a research approach that focuses on exploring the lived experiences of individuals within a social phenomenon (Creswell, 2019). By conducting in-depth interviews with seven special education teachers, the researchers aimed to uncover the intricate details and subjective meanings associated with the challenges and insights related to mainstream education. The qualitative nature of the interviews facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the distinct perspectives held by each participant (Moustakas, 2020).

In the exploration of the challenges encountered by teachers handling learners with special needs in mainstream education, this study follows Clark and Braune's (2019) comprehensive data analysis steps. The analysis process commences with data familiarization, followed by the generation of initial codes, organization of these codes into themes, iterative review and refinement of themes, and, ultimately, the definition and naming of the identified themes. This systematic approach ensures a meticulous examination of teachers' experiences, capturing the subtle nuances in their narratives regarding teaching children with special needs. By adhering to this rigorous methodology, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the coping mechanisms and resilience demonstrated by teachers in addressing the distinctive demands of teaching children with special needs within the mainstream educational setting.



In conducting this study, ethical considerations are paramount and are guided by the principles outlined in the Belmont Report (1979), specifically respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. To uphold respect for persons, informed consent will be diligently obtained from each participating special education teacher, ensuring a clear understanding of the study's purpose, risks, and benefits. The principle of beneficence underscores the commitment to maximizing benefits and minimizing harm, focusing on the study's positive impact on understanding the challenges faced by teachers supporting students with special needs in mainstream education. Justice will be upheld through the avoidance of exploitation, maintenance of confidentiality, and fair participant selection processes. This study adheres to rigorous ethical standards, prioritizing the well-being, rights, and dignity of the participating teachers in alignment with ethical research practices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges Faced in Mainstreaming

"As a teacher, one of the primary challenges I encounter when integrating students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms is addressing difficulties in reading, including issues with decoding, blending sounds, and pronunciation. Additionally, these students often require more time and effort to complete tasks, struggle with behavior problems, and may experience absenteeism, all of which impact their academic progress and classroom participation."

"As a teacher, these challenges have a profound impact on my teaching practices and interactions with students with diverse learning needs. The feelings of frustration that arise from navigating these obstacles can be overwhelming, affecting my ability to effectively manage the classroom environment. The time delays in providing additional support and accommodations to students with disabilities often disrupt the flow of lessons, leading to challenges in maintaining the pace of instruction for the entire class. The increased effort required to assist students with diverse learning needs can be physically and emotionally taxing, highlighting the importance of self-care and support mechanisms for teachers. Prioritizing and focusing on the individualized needs of students with special needs becomes a crucial aspect of my teaching approach, emphasizing the importance of inclusivity and tailored support in promoting student success."

"As a teacher, I have encountered various instances where effectively including students with disabilities in mainstream educational settings posed significant challenges. One such challenge involves the need to simplify lesson content to enhance accessibility and ensure easy comprehension for all students, particularly those with learning disabilities. For example, while syllabication and decoding tasks may be straightforward for regular students, learners with disabilities often require additional attention, follow-up, and remediation to grasp and retain the competencies. Additionally, addressing absenteeism among students with disabilities further complicates their

academic progress and participation in classroom learning activities. The limited availability of resources and materials tailored to accommodate diverse learning needs also presents obstacles in creating an inclusive educational environment that meets the unique requirements of students with disabilities."

The statements provided by the teacher highlight the complex challenges faced when integrating students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms. One of the primary difficulties is addressing reading issues, such as decoding, blending sounds, and pronunciation, which require additional time and effort from both the teacher and the students. These challenges are further compounded by behavior problems, absenteeism, and the need for tailored support, impacting academic progress and classroom dynamics.

The emotional and physical toll of navigating these obstacles can be overwhelming for educators, affecting their ability to effectively manage the classroom environment and maintain the pace of instruction for all students. Simplifying lesson content to enhance accessibility for students with disabilities is crucial but often requires additional attention, follow-up, and remediation to ensure comprehension and retention. Addressing absenteeism and the limited availability of resources tailored to diverse needs further complicate the inclusive educational approach, emphasizing the importance of individualized support and inclusivity to promote student success.

Barriers to Successful Implementation

In my experience as a teacher, several key barriers hinder the successful implementation of mainstreaming practices for students with disabilities. These barriers include limited school activities tailored to accommodate diverse learning needs, time constraints that make individualized attention challenging, and the pressure to submit immediate reports while addressing student needs. Additionally, the lack of necessary resources, including supplies and support from the school, compromises the effectiveness of mainstreaming practices. Budget constraints further exacerbate the situation, impacting the availability of assistive technology and specialized materials. Moreover, a lack of focus on the program and its objectives within the school community creates additional challenges in creating an inclusive and supportive environment for students with disabilities.

As a teacher, these barriers directly impact my ability to effectively support students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. The challenges of limited resources, time constraints, and a lack of specialized facilities hinder my efforts to meet individual student goals and ensure their progress and improvement. The absence of proper teacher training in special education further complicates my approach to addressing diverse learning needs. Additionally, the delay in lessons and the focus on accommodating students with disabilities disrupt the learning experience for all students, impacting their performance and ability to meet educational standards within the designated timeframe. These barriers pose significant obstacles to creating



an inclusive and supportive classroom environment that fosters academic success for all students.

As a teacher, I encounter various challenges in promoting inclusive education due to administrative policies, resource limitations, and prevailing attitudes towards inclusion. Attending training sessions and seminars, as well as engaging in professional development related to Special Needs Education (SNE), are crucial for enhancing my expertise in supporting students with diverse needs. Collaborating with stakeholders and seeking parental support are vital steps in implementing inclusive practices effectively. However, resource constraints often obstruct the execution of proposed SNE programs and initiatives, impacting the level of support that can be provided to students. Additionally, negative attitudes towards inclusion within the educational community can hinder the progress and acceptance of inclusive education practices. It is imperative to address these barriers through comprehensive strategies that prioritize adequate resources, supportive policies, and a positive shift in attitudes towards inclusive education to create an optimal learning environment for all students.

The statements provided collectively emphasize the multifaceted challenges faced by teachers in promoting inclusive education for students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Limited school activities, time constraints, and the pressure to submit immediate reports pose significant hurdles in providing individualized attention and support. Moreover, the lack of necessary resources, including specialized facilities and supportive materials, due to budget constraints, undermines the effectiveness of mainstreaming practices. These barriers directly impact teachers' abilities to support students with disabilities, hindering their progress and creating disruptions in the classroom. Additionally, administrative policies, resource limitations, and negative attitudes towards inclusion further complicate the implementation of inclusive education. Adequate training, collaboration with stakeholders, parental support, and a shift in attitudes are essential to overcome these barriers and create an inclusive and supportive learning environment that fosters academic success for all students.

Strategies and Support Mechanisms

In my experience as a teacher, several strategies and interventions have been effective in creating an inclusive learning environment for students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Utilizing Differentiated Instruction to tailor teaching methods to individual learning styles and needs has proven beneficial in accommodating diverse learners. Providing tutorials and remediation sessions offers additional support and reinforcement for students requiring extra assistance. Incorporating repetition for mastery helps solidify key concepts, while implementing a one-on-one approach allows for personalized guidance and attention. Extending time for learners with Special Needs Education (SNED) ensures that they have sufficient opportunities to engage with the material at their own pace. Ensuring resources are readily available, such as assistive

technology and specialized materials, is essential in facilitating effective learning experiences for students with disabilities in inclusive settings.

Collaboration with colleagues, support staff, and families is essential in addressing the diverse needs of students and cultivating an inclusive classroom environment. Building a support system with colleagues allows for sharing ideas, strategies, and resources to better meet the needs of all students. Engaging with parents and fostering open communication and involvement in their child's education is crucial to understanding and addressing the individual needs of students. Seeking support from school administrators and stakeholders ensures alignment with school policies and resources for implementing inclusive practices effectively. By working collaboratively with these key stakeholders, we can create a supportive and inclusive learning environment that promotes the success and well-being of all students, including those with diverse needs.

In my experience, several support mechanisms, resources, and professional development opportunities have been instrumental in overcoming obstacles and promoting inclusivity in mainstreaming practices. Attending seminars and enrolling in post-graduate studies have provided valuable insights and strategies for supporting students with disabilities. Developing patience, resourcefulness, and a mindset of compassion towards children with special needs has been crucial in creating an inclusive environment. Supporting school programs dedicated to inclusivity and maintaining an attitude of continuous learning help in adapting and becoming more effective in teaching students with disabilities. Embracing new ideas and approaches through professional development opportunities has enhanced my ability to overcome challenges and foster a welcoming and inclusive classroom for all learners.

The statements provided reflect a comprehensive approach to promoting inclusivity and supporting students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Effective strategies such as Differentiated Instruction, personalized approaches, and extended time for learners with Special Needs Education have been highlighted for creating an inclusive learning environment. Collaboration with colleagues, families, and support staff is underscored as essential for addressing diverse needs and fostering inclusivity. Moreover, the importance of attending seminars, engaging in professional development, and embracing a mindset of patience and compassion is emphasized in overcoming obstacles and promoting inclusivity. These collective experiences and strategies exemplify a holistic and collaborative approach to creating an inclusive and supportive educational environment for all students, including those with disabilities.

CONCLUSION

The collective experiences and insights shared by special education teachers shed light on the unique challenges, specific barriers, and effective strategies encountered in integrating



students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms. The exploration of challenges, including difficulties in reading, behavior issues, absenteeism, and resource limitations, underscores the complexities and nuances involved in promoting inclusive education. These challenges necessitate proactive measures and collaborative efforts to ensure the academic and social success of all students. Additionally, the identification and analysis of barriers such as limited resources, time constraints, and negative attitudes towards inclusion underscore the systemic challenges that impact the successful implementation of mainstreaming practices. These barriers highlight the importance of addressing structural constraints, fostering inclusive policies, and promoting a positive school culture that supports diversity and equity. The investigation into strategies, interventions, and support mechanisms employed by teachers, such as Differentiated Instruction, collaboration with stakeholders, and continuous professional development, illustrates the proactive approaches taken to overcome obstacles and create inclusive learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of students with disabilities. By embracing a holistic and collaborative approach, educators can navigate challenges, overcome barriers, and foster inclusive educational settings that prioritize the well-being and academic success of all learners, ensuring equitable access to quality education for students with disabilities.

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