

Breaking Down Barriers to Inclusion: Stories of Grade Four Teachers in Mainstream Classrooms

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Abstract:- This qualitative phenomenological study examined the experiences, coping mechanisms, and educational insights gleaned by eight elementary school teachers in Tibungco District, Davao City as they broke down barriers of inclusion in modern classrooms. Themes of their experiences that were identified included feeling overwhelmed and unprepared, facing resistance from parents and colleagues, and feeling like they are not making a difference. Coping mechanisms employed were building a supportive classroom environment, seeking professional guidance, and advocating for policy changes. Educational insights included promoting a supportive learning environment, differentiated instruction and learning materials, and collaboration with support services and stakeholders. These findings highlight the interconnectedness of diverse skills in handling and breaking down inclusion barriers. Furthermore, exploring teachers' experiences not only contributes to a nuanced understanding of modern teaching demands but also provides valuable insights for both educators and educational institutions, potentially leading to improvements in classroom management and inclusive teaching strategies.

Keywords:- Contemporary Classroom, Inclusion, Grade Four Teachers, Davao City, Philippines.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Problem and Its Setting

Breaking down barriers to inclusion in mainstream classrooms is essential in providing all students with the opportunity to learn and grow. There are many barriers that can prevent students from being included in the general education classroom, such as physical, attitudinal, and systemic barriers. Schools, teachers, parents, and students can work together to break down these barriers and create more inclusive classrooms where all students feel welcome, valued, and supported.

In Italy, Italian education has made significant strides in breaking down barriers to inclusion in grade four mainstream classrooms through a combination of legislative frameworks and inclusive pedagogical practices. The Italian education system operates under the principle of "Inclusione Scolastica," which promotes the integration of students with special needs into regular classrooms, fostering a more equitable and diverse learning environment. The legislative acts have played

a pivotal role in ensuring the right to education for all students, regardless of their disabilities, emphasizing individualized support plans and collaborative efforts between general and special education teachers (Rinaldi & Manca, 2019).

Additionally, Italy invests in continuous professional development for teachers, providing them with the skills and knowledge needed to create inclusive classrooms (Nocentini et al., 2018). Furthermore, the Italian education system encourages parental involvement and collaboration with school staff to tailor support for each student (Canevaro & Mastroleo, 2020). These concerted efforts have led to increased social integration, improved academic outcomes, and a more inclusive educational environment for grade four students in Italy, contributing to the broader goals of inclusive education.

In Montenegro, educational system has been actively working to break down barriers to inclusion in grade four mainstream classrooms through several initiatives and policies. The country has implemented an inclusive education strategy, aligned with international standards and supported by laws such as the Law on Elementary Education, which emphasizes the right to inclusive education for all students, including those with disabilities (UNICEF, 2016). Teachers in Montenegro receive training and professional development in inclusive teaching methods to effectively address the diverse needs of students, focusing on differentiated instruction and collaborative teaching approaches (UNESCO, 2020).

Moreover, the government collaborates with non-governmental organizations and international agencies like UNICEF and UNESCO to provide resources and support for inclusive education practices (UNICEF, 2021). This collaborative effort has contributed to fostering a more inclusive educational environment in grade four mainstream classrooms, enhancing the social integration and academic progress of all students, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds.

In South Sudan, educational system has faced significant challenges in breaking down barriers to inclusion in grade four mainstream classrooms. The nation's education system has been hindered by ongoing conflicts, lack of infrastructure, inadequate resources, and a shortage of trained teachers, which have made it extremely difficult to provide inclusive education for all children, including those with disabilities

(UNESCO, 2020). Additionally, cultural beliefs and stigmatization of disabilities have posed significant obstacles to inclusive practices (Human Rights Watch, 2016). However, efforts by various humanitarian organizations, including UNICEF, have aimed to improve access to education for marginalized and disabled children in South Sudan, but significant challenges remain due to the volatile political and security situation (UNICEF, 2021).

In the Philippines, educational system has made some steps in breaking down barriers to inclusion in grade four mainstream classrooms. The country's Department of Education implemented the Inclusive Education Policy Framework, emphasizing the rights of all learners to access quality education, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds (DepEd, 2012). This framework promotes inclusive practices such as individualized education plans and the use of support personnel like special education teachers or aides to assist students with disabilities (DepEd, 2015). Teachers in the Philippines receive training and support in inclusive education methods, focusing on adapting curriculum and teaching strategies to meet diverse learning needs (DepEd, 2014). Furthermore, the K to 12 Basic Education Program includes provisions for inclusive education and recognizes the importance of accommodating diverse learners (DepEd, 2015). While challenges remain, such as resource limitations and the need for more inclusive facilities, the Philippines has demonstrated a commitment to fostering inclusion in grade four mainstream classrooms, thereby promoting social integration and equitable access to education for all students.

In the local scenario, particularly in the schools of Tibungco District, Division of Davao City, grade four teachers encountered a lot of experiences in breaking down barriers to inclusion in mainstream classrooms. Some of the experiences are positive ones, while others negatively affect our effort in inclusive education. It is in this context that this study was conceptualized to collect the experiences of grade four teachers as they break down barriers to inclusion in mainstream classroom. Through this research, we aspire to shed light on the importance of breaking down barriers to inclusion in mainstream classrooms, offering valuable insights that can form part of the educational development.

B. Research Questions

The study purpose of this study is to get the insights and the experiences of grade four teachers as they break down barriers to inclusion in mainstream classroom. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

- What are the experiences of grade four teachers in breaking down barriers to inclusion in mainstream classroom?
- How do grade four teachers cope with challenges in breaking down barriers to inclusion in mainstream classroom?
- What educational management insights gained are drawn from the experiences of the informants?

C. Theoretical Lens

This study is anchored on Social Constructivism by Lev Vygotsky, (1978). This theory focuses on the role of social interaction and collaboration in the learning process. This theory emphasizes that learning occurs through interactions with others, and it has significant relevance in the context of inclusion. Vygotsky's work highlights the importance of peer collaboration and scaffolding, which can be instrumental in breaking down barriers to inclusion in the mainstream classroom. Teachers can employ social constructivist strategies to promote peer support and cooperative learning, fostering a more inclusive and supportive classroom environment.

Social Constructivism Theory posits that learning is a social and collaborative process. In the context of breaking down barriers to inclusion in mainstream classrooms, this theory underscores the importance of peer interactions and cooperative learning. Teachers can leverage social constructivist strategies to create inclusive environments where students collaborate, support each other, and collectively overcome learning challenges. By fostering a culture of peer-assisted learning and scaffolding, educators can mitigate barriers to inclusion and promote a more equitable educational experience for all students (Vygotsky, L. S. 1978).

The second theory used in this study is Ecological Systems Theory by Bronfenbrenner (1979). This theory provides a framework for understanding how individuals are influenced by multiple interconnected systems within their environment. This theory can be applied to examine the various layers of influence on inclusion, including the individual, classroom, school, family, and community levels. By analyzing the dynamic interactions between these systems, researchers can gain insights into the barriers and facilitators of inclusion and identify strategies to enhance inclusive practices. Understanding the ecological context of inclusion can inform policy and practice changes to promote greater inclusivity in mainstream classrooms.

Ecological Systems Theory offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing the multifaceted influences on inclusion within mainstream classrooms. This theory recognizes that individuals are embedded within various interconnected systems, including the microsystem (classroom), mesosystem (school and family interactions), exosystem (community resources), and macrosystem (cultural norms and policies). Researchers can employ this theory to explore how these ecological layers interact and impact inclusion, shedding light on the barriers that exist at different levels and informing strategies to create a more inclusive educational environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The third theory used in this study is Critical Disability Theory by Tregaskis, C. (2002). This theory offers a critical perspective on disability and inclusion, highlighting the social, cultural, and political dimensions of disability. It challenges traditional notions of disability as an individual deficit and instead examines how societal structures and attitudes contribute to the exclusion of individuals with

disabilities. In the context of breaking down barriers to inclusion, this theory encourages researchers to critically analyze power dynamics, stereotypes, and discrimination that may hinder inclusive practices. It also promotes advocacy for policy changes and social justice to advance the inclusion agenda.

Critical Disability Theory takes a critical and socially informed perspective on disability and inclusion. It challenges traditional notions of disability as a personal

deficit and instead examines how societal structures, attitudes, and power dynamics contribute to exclusion. In the context of mainstream classrooms, this theory encourages researchers to analyze how societal biases and discriminatory practices can create barriers to inclusion. By adopting a critical disability perspective, studies can advocate for policy changes, challenge stereotypes, and promote social justice to advance inclusive education and dismantle systemic barriers (Tregaskis, C. 2002).

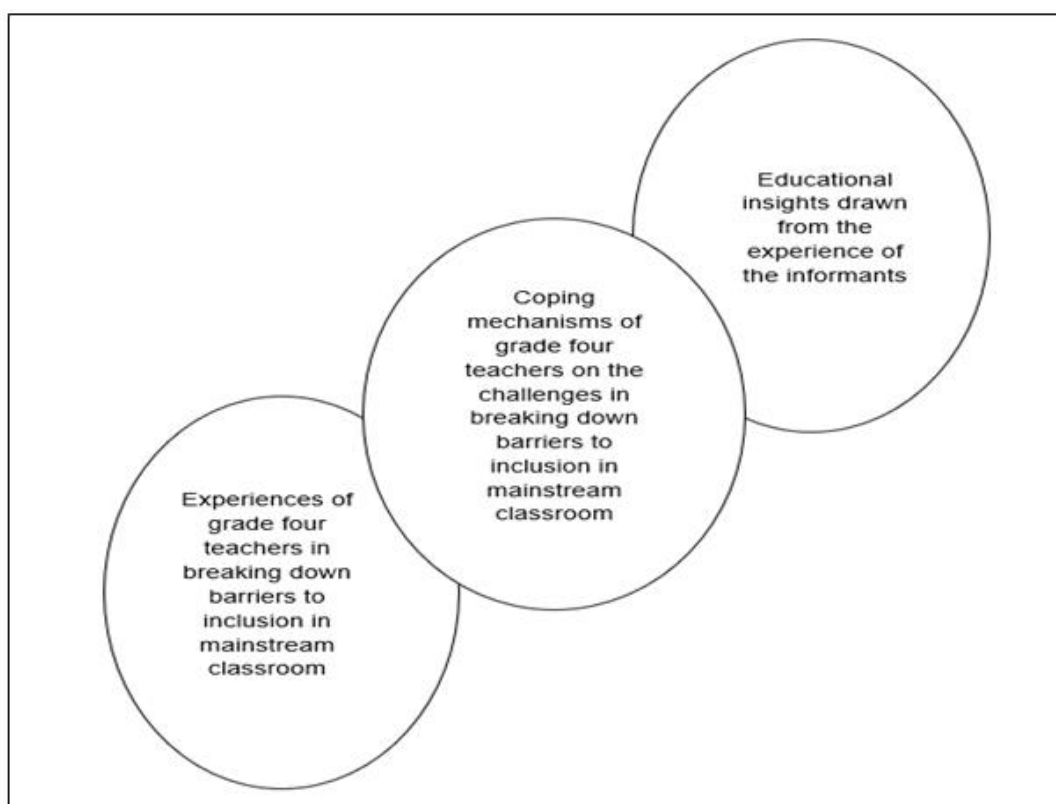


Fig. 1. Conceptual Paper of the Study

The conceptual framework of the study is presented in figure 1. Based on the figure, there are three interconnected variables. These variables are the (1) Experiences of grade four teachers in breaking down barriers to inclusion in mainstream classroom; (2) coping mechanisms of grade four teachers on the challenges in breaking down barriers to inclusion in mainstream classroom; and (3) Educational insights drawn from the experiences of the informants.

II. METHOD

A. Design and Procedure

This study employed a qualitative approach to research, specifically a phenomenological research design. According to Creswell, (2012), phenomenology was an approach to qualitative research that focused on the commonality of lived experiences within a particular group. The fundamental goal of the approach was to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon. Typically, interviews were conducted with a group of individuals who have first-hand knowledge of an event, situation or experience. Other forms

of data such as documents, observations and art were also used. The data were read and reread and was culled for phrases and themes that were grouped into clusters of meanings. Through this process, the researcher was able to construct the universal meaning of the event, situation or experience and arrived at a more profound understanding of the phenomenon.

Moreover, Maxwell (2013) also added that with the roots in philosophy, psychology and education, phenomenology attempt to extract the purest, untainted data and in some interpretations of the approach, bracketing were used by the researcher to document personal experiences with the subject to help remove him or herself from the process. One method of bracketing is taking notes.

According to Corbetta (2003), the phenomenological research design was a qualitative type of research for which interviews provide in-depth methods that can grant access to deep knowledge and explanations and help grasp the subjects' perspective. Creswell, (2012) also claimed that interviews

were primarily done in qualitative research and occur when researchers ask one or more participants general, open-ended questions and record their answers. Often audio tapes were utilized to allow more consistent transcription. Interviews are also useful to follow-up with individual respondents after questionnaires, such as to further investigate their responses.

In qualitative research, interviews were used to pursue the meanings of central themes in the world of their subjects. The main task in doing interviews was to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say (McNamara, 1999). Withal, based on the statements of Quad (2016), the researcher transcribed and typed the data into a computer file, in order to analyze it after interviewing. Interviews particularly be useful for uncovering the story behind a participant's experiences and pursuing in-depth information around a topic.

The researcher collected data, typically via long interviews, from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation. Next, the data analysis involved triangulation that extracted significant statements from the transcribed interviews. The significant statements were transformed into clusters of meanings according to how each statement fell under specific psychological and phenomenological concepts. Moreover, these transformations were tied up together to make a general description of the experience both the textural description of what was experienced and the structural description of how it was experienced. The researcher incorporated his or her personal meaning of the experiences here. Finally, the report was written such that readers understand better the essential, invariant structure of the essence of the experience.

Conversely, several challenges have been pointed out. The researcher required a solid grounding in the philosophical guidelines of phenomenology. The subjects that were selected into the study were individuals who have actually experienced the phenomenon. The researcher needed to bracket his or her own experiences and observations, which was difficult to do. The researcher also needed to decide as to how and when his or her personal observations were incorporated into the study.

Epistemologically, phenomenological approaches was based on the paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity, and emphasized the importance of personal perspective and interpretation. As such they were powerful tools for understanding subjective experience, gaining insights into people's motivations and actions, and cutting through the cluster of taken-for-granted assumptions and conventional wisdom.

Since the focus of this study was to explore and assess the grade four teacher's experience and feelings towards breaking down barriers to inclusion in mainstream classroom, thus the researcher employed phenomenology type of qualitative method research.

B. Research Participants

Qualitative analyses typically require a smaller sample size the quantitative analyses. Qualitative sample sizes should be large enough to obtain feedback for most or all perceptions. Obtaining most or all of the perceptions will lead to the attainment of saturation. Saturation occurs when adding more participants to the study does not result in additional perspectives or information. Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommend the concept of saturation for achieving an appropriate sample size in qualitative studies. For phenomenological studies, Creswell (1998) recommends five (5) to 25 and Morse (1994) suggests at least six (6). There are no specific rules when determining an appropriate sample size in qualitative research. Qualitative sample size may best be determined by the time allotted, resources available, and study objectives (Patton, 1990).

The participants of this study were Eight (8) teachers from Tibungco District, Division of Davao City. The participants were chosen based on the following criteria: (1) must be in the service for at least 5 years; (2) grade four teachers; and (3) experienced in breaking down barriers to inclusion.

The researcher utilized the purposive sampling design since the participants were chosen based on the criteria or purpose of the study (Creswell, 2014). It is also known as judgmental, selective or subjective sampling. The selection of the participants was purposefully done to ensure that the findings would be authentic (Marshall, 1996).

C. Data Analysis

In this study, thematic analysis was utilized to analyze the gathered data. The researcher analyzed the answers of the participants from the conducted interviews with the use of Creswell's Model specifically the identifying of themes approach. According to Creswell (2012) themes in qualitative research are similar codes aggregated together to form a major idea in the database.

Familiarization with the data was common to all forms of qualitative analysis, the researcher immersed herself in, and became intimately familiar with, their data; reading and re-reading the data and noting any initial analytic observations.

Coding was also a common element of many approaches to qualitative analysis, involves generating pithy labels for important features of the data of relevance to the (broad) research question guiding the analysis. Coding was not simply a method of data reduction; it was also an analytic process, so codes capture both a semantic and conceptual reading of the data. The researcher coded every data item and ends this phase by collating all their codes and relevant data extracts. Searching for themes was coherent and meaningful pattern in the data relevant to the research question. The researcher ended this phase by collating all the coded data relevant to each theme.

➤ *Reviewing Themes*

The researcher reflected on whether the themes tell a convincing and compelling story about the data and began to define the nature of each individual theme, and the relationship between the themes. For these, Thematic Content Analysis was employed by the researcher. Thematic Content Analysis was a descriptive presentation of qualitative data in which a detailed analysis of each theme was made by identifying the ‘essence’ of each theme and constructing a concise, punchy and informative name for each theme (Andersen, 2013). In addition, to enhance validity and to create a more in-depth picture of the phenomenon, Environmental Triangulation was also employed by the researcher. It was a technique to analyze the results of the same study using different methods of data collection. The key was identifying which environmental factors, if any, might influence the information that is received during the study.

These environmental factors are changed to see if the findings are the same across the settings (David, 2015). This type of triangulation uses different settings, locations and other factors such as time, day, season in which the study took place. The idea was to determine which of these factors influence the information received, these factors are then changed to see if the findings are the same. If the findings remain unaltered under varying environmental factors, then validity can be established (Naeem, Saira, 2019). In this study, such triangulation was used considering that the requirements as mentioned was the use of environmental triangulation best suited the environment of the research being conducted.

Writing-up involves weaving together the analytic narrative and data extracts to tell the reader a coherent and persuasive story about the data and contextualizing it in relation to existing literature.

D. Some Common Mistakes

The framework analysis of this research was flexible to allow the researcher to either collect all the data and then analyze it or do data analysis during the collection process. In the analysis stage the gathered data was sifted, charted and sorted in accordance with key issues and themes. This involves a five-step process: (1) familiarization; (2) identifying a thematic framework; (3) indexing; (4) charting; and (5) mapping and interpretation (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994).

Familiarization refers to the process during which the researcher becomes familiarized with the transcripts of the data collected (i.e. interview or focus group transcripts, observation or field notes) and gains an overview of the collected data (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). In other words, the researcher becomes immersed in the data by listening to audiotapes, studying the field or reading the transcripts. Throughout this process the researcher will become aware of key ideas and recurrent themes and make a note of them. Due to the sheer volume of data that can be collected in qualitative research the researcher may not be able to review all of the material. Thus, a selection of the data set would be utilized. The selection would depend on several aspects of the data collection process. For example, the mix of methods used (e.g. interviews, documents, observations),

Identifying a thematic framework, the second stage, occurs after familiarization when the researcher recognizes emerging themes or issues in the data set. These emerging themes or issues may have arisen from priori themes are issues however it is at this stage that the researcher must allow the data to dictate the themes and issues. To achieve this end the researcher uses the notes taken during the familiarization stage. The key issues, concepts and themes that have been expressed by the participants now form the basis of a thematic framework that can be used to filter and classify the data (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994).

Indexing means that one identifies portions or sections of the data that correspond to a particular theme. This process is applied to all the textual data that has been gathered (i.e. transcripts of interviews). For the sake of convenience Ritchie and Spencer recommend that a numerical system be used for the indexing references and annotated in the margin beside the text (1994). Qualitative data analysis tools are ideal for such a task.

The final stage, mapping and interpretation, involves the analysis of the key characteristics as laid out in the charts. This analysis should be able to provide a schematic diagram of the event/phenomenon thus guiding the researcher in their interpretation of the data set. It was at this point that the researcher was cognizant of the objectives of qualitative analysis, which are: “defining concepts, mapping range and nature of phenomena, creating typologies, finding associations, providing explanations, and developing strategies” (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994:186). Once again, these concepts, technologies, and associations are reflective of the participant. Therefore, any strategy or recommendations made by the researcher echo the true attitudes, beliefs, and values of the participants.

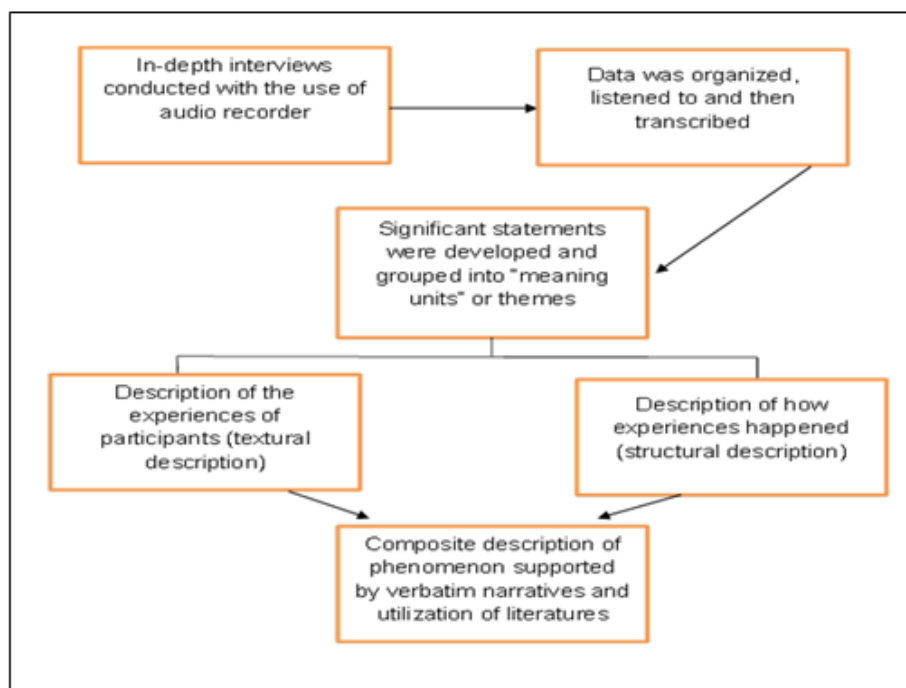


Fig. 2. Analytical Framework of the Study

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Breaking Down Barriers to Inclusion in Mainstream Classrooms

Breaking down barriers to inclusion in mainstream classrooms is a multifaceted endeavor that lies at the heart of the global effort to create more equitable and accessible educational environments. Inclusion, as a fundamental principle, advocates for equal participation and educational opportunities of all students, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or differences. It encompasses the removal of various barriers that hinder full access to quality education, aiming to create learning spaces where diversity is celebrated, and every learner is provided with the support and resources needed to thrive academically and socially. Achieving inclusion in mainstream classrooms is a complex and ongoing process that involves systemic, structural, and attitudinal changes, all with the overarching goal of ensuring that no student is left behind (UNESCO, 2009).

The importance of breaking down these barriers cannot be overstated, as it aligns with international frameworks and conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emphasize the right to inclusive and quality education for all. This commitment to inclusive education acknowledges that students with disabilities, diverse learning needs, and varied backgrounds have the same fundamental right to access and benefit from education as their peers. Therefore, this introductory exploration delves into the multifaceted aspects of breaking down barriers to inclusion in mainstream classrooms, examining the policies, practices, challenges, and successes in the ongoing global pursuit of educational equity and social justice (UNESCO, 2009; United Nations, 2006).

B. Experiences of Grade four Teachers in Breaking Down Barriers to Inclusion in a Mainstream Classroom

The experiences of grade four teachers in breaking down barriers to inclusion within mainstream classrooms represent a crucial aspect of the broader effort to create truly inclusive educational environments. Inclusion is a concept that advocates for the education of all students, regardless of their diverse abilities, backgrounds, or learning needs, in regular classrooms. Grade four marks a critical stage in a student's educational journey, and the role of teachers becomes pivotal in fostering an inclusive classroom culture where every child can learn and thrive. This exploration delves into the firsthand experiences of grade four teachers as they navigate the challenges and successes of promoting inclusion, examining the strategies they employ, the support systems they access, and the impact of their efforts on both students and the broader educational community.

Understanding these experiences is vital not only for improving the educational outcomes of students but also for aligning educational practices with international frameworks and conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emphasize the importance of inclusive education in achieving equitable and quality learning opportunities for all (UNESCO, 2009; United Nations, 2006). It is within the context of these global commitments that the experiences of grade four teachers in breaking down barriers to inclusion in mainstream classrooms come to the forefront as a catalyst for transformative change in the field of education. This exploration aims to shed light on the multifaceted nature of this endeavor, highlighting both the challenges and the inspiring stories of success that shape the inclusive classroom landscape.

➤ *Theme #1: Feeling Overwhelmed and Unprepared.*

Feeling overwhelmed and unprepared is a common experience for grade four teachers who are breaking down barriers to inclusion in mainstream classrooms. This may be due to a lack of training in inclusive education, a lack of resources, or a lack of support from administrators (Everhart & Keyes, 2015). Grade four classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse, with students from a variety of backgrounds and abilities. This can make it overwhelming for teachers to meet the needs of all students, especially if they do not have the training or resources to do so.

The general education curriculum is designed to be taught to all students, regardless of their abilities. This can be a challenge for teachers who are trying to meet the needs of students with disabilities. The curriculum may be too difficult for some students, or it may not be relevant to their interests or needs. Schools often do not have the resources that teachers need to provide effective instruction to students with disabilities. This can make it difficult for teachers to feel prepared to meet the needs of these students. They may not have access to assistive technology, specialized materials, or professional development opportunities (Peters, 2017).

Research by Friend and Bursuck (2018) highlights the importance of adequate teacher preparation for inclusion, emphasizing that teachers must be equipped with strategies and resources to effectively address the diverse needs of their students. Grade four teachers, who may have limited experience with inclusion, can find themselves grappling with the demands of accommodating students with disabilities, language barriers, and different learning styles. This lack of preparedness can lead to heightened stress levels and feelings of inadequacy, hindering the successful implementation of inclusive practices in their classrooms. To address these challenges, it is crucial for grade four teachers and their school districts to invest in professional development and ongoing training in inclusive education (Turnbull et al., 2015). Collaborative efforts between educators, special education professionals, and administrators can help alleviate feelings of overwhelm by providing grade four teachers with the necessary knowledge and resources to create inclusive learning environments. Additionally, mentoring programs and peer support networks can offer valuable guidance and emotional support for teachers navigating the complexities of inclusion (Peters, 2017). In conclusion, while the journey to break down barriers to inclusion in grade four classrooms may be daunting, with proper preparation and support, teachers can create more inclusive and equitable learning environments for all students.

Below is the transcript of the participants as transcribed:

- P1: *I found myself grappling with the diverse needs of my students. The realization of the barriers to inclusion hit me hard. Different learning styles, abilities, and needs left me feeling overwhelmed. The lack of specialized training made me question my ability to cater to everyone.*
- P4: *I felt unprepared for the depth of individualized attention some students required. The learning curve was steep. Balancing the needs of neurotypical and neurodivergent students left me emotionally drained.*

- P7: *The responsibilities seemed endless. From adapting lesson plans to managing behavioral challenges, I felt pulled in all directions. The lack of preparation for handling diverse behavioral needs was a constant source of stress.*
- P8: *Limited resources compounded the challenges. Classroom materials and support services were stretched thin. Addressing diverse learning styles became a puzzle with missing pieces. Navigating through these limitations without compromising the quality of education was a daunting task.*

➤ *Theme #2: Facing Resistance from Parents and Colleagues.*

Grade four teachers who are committed to breaking down barriers to inclusion often find themselves navigating complex interpersonal dynamics within their school communities. Resistance from parents can stem from misconceptions or concerns about how inclusion may impact their child's educational experience. It is crucial for teachers to engage in open and empathetic communication with parents, addressing their fears and providing evidence of the benefits of inclusive education (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012). Building trust and involving parents in the decision-making process can help alleviate resistance and foster a collaborative partnership in support of inclusion.

Resistance from colleagues can also be a significant obstacle for grade four teachers. Colleagues who are accustomed to traditional teaching methods may resist changing their practices to accommodate students with diverse needs. Collaborative planning and professional development are essential strategies to address this challenge (Sapon-Shevin, 2015). Building a culture of inclusivity within the school community can help alleviate resistance from colleagues and create a more supportive environment for grade four teachers striving to break down barriers to inclusion. In conclusion, while facing resistance from parents and colleagues can be a formidable challenge, grade four teachers can overcome it by fostering open communication, providing evidence of the benefits of inclusion, and working collaboratively to create inclusive classrooms.

Colleagues who are resistant to change may need professional development opportunities that focus on inclusive teaching practices (Turnbull et al., 2015). Grade four teachers can serve as advocates for inclusive education by sharing successful strategies and outcomes with their peers. Collaborative planning and team-based approaches can also help create a sense of shared responsibility for inclusion within the school environment (Sapon-Shevin, 2015). By addressing colleagues' concerns and demonstrating the benefits of inclusion, grade four teachers can work towards a more inclusive school culture.

Moreover, it is essential for grade four teachers to build a support network both within and outside their school community. Professional organizations, such as the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), offer resources and forums for educators to connect and share experiences related to inclusive education (CEC, 2010.). These networks can

provide emotional support and a platform to learn from others who have faced similar challenges in their journey towards inclusion.

Here are transcripts of the participants as transcribed:

- P2: *Initially, introducing inclusive practices faced skepticism from some parents. The concern for their child's individual attention clashed with the idea of a more diverse classroom. Navigating these conversations required diplomacy and constant communication to assure parents of the benefits of inclusion.*
- P3: *Not all colleagues shared my enthusiasm for inclusive education. Some questioned the feasibility of adapting the curriculum for diverse learners. Overcoming this resistance involved open discussions, sharing success stories, and demonstrating the positive impact of inclusion on the overall classroom dynamic.*
- P5: *Resistance stemmed from concerns about resource allocation. Colleagues were worried that inclusive practices might divert resources away from the rest of the class. Addressing this required transparent communication about how inclusion can enhance the learning environment for all students.*
- P6: *Convincing both parents and colleagues to shift their mindsets was a persistent challenge. The fear of the unknown and resistance to change were palpable. Patiently engaging in ongoing conversations, providing workshops, and showcasing positive outcomes gradually shifted perceptions.*

➤ *Theme #3: Feeling Like they are not Making a Difference.*

Feeling like they are not making a difference can be a disheartening experience for grade four teachers who are passionately committed to breaking down barriers to inclusion in their classrooms. Inclusion is not just about providing equal access to education but also about fostering an environment where all students can thrive and reach their full potential. However, teachers often encounter challenges that can make them question the impact of their efforts, leading to feelings of frustration and inadequacy.

One significant factor contributing to this sense of not making a difference is the slow pace of change in inclusive education. Implementing inclusive practices and achieving meaningful outcomes can be a gradual process, and teachers may not see immediate results. Research by Forest and Pearpoint (2012) emphasizes the importance of long-term vision and persistence when working towards inclusive education goals. Grade four teachers may need to remind themselves that the impact of their efforts may become evident over time as students' confidence and abilities grow.

Additionally, grade four teachers may feel discouraged when they encounter resistance from various stakeholders, as discussed earlier. Overcoming resistance from parents, colleagues, or administrators can be exhausting, and it may lead teachers to question whether their advocacy for inclusion is having any effect. It is crucial for teachers to build alliances and support networks, both within and outside the school, to gain strength from shared experiences and strategies

(Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012). These networks can provide emotional support and validation, helping teachers sustain their commitment to inclusion.

Moreover, the feeling of not making a difference can be exacerbated by the lack of resources and support for inclusive education. Grade four teachers may struggle with limited budgets, inadequate training, or insufficient accommodations for students with diverse needs. Research by Ruijs and Peetsma (2009) highlights the importance of adequate resources and support systems in facilitating the successful implementation of inclusive education. To address this issue, teachers, along with parents and advocacy groups, can work together to lobby for increased funding and improved infrastructure that supports inclusive practices.

Furthermore, it is essential for grade four teachers to focus on the small victories and daily progress they observe in their students. Celebrating individual achievements, no matter how modest they may seem, can help teachers recognize the positive impact they are making (Sapon-Shevin, 2015). Each step towards breaking down barriers to inclusion contributes to a more equitable and inclusive educational environment, even if the change is gradual and not immediately evident.

Shown below are the transcripts from the participants:

- P1: *Despite implementing inclusive strategies, I often felt overwhelmed by the persistent challenges. It seemed like the progress was slow, and I questioned whether my efforts were truly making a difference.*
- P3: *External pressures, such as standardized testing, often overshadowed the inclusive practices I was trying to establish. It led to moments of self-doubt, questioning if my approach was truly effective.*
- P6: *Despite efforts to foster an inclusive environment, there were instances when some students still felt isolated. Witnessing this, I questioned the impact of my strategies.*
- P8: *A significant hurdle in my journey was the scarcity of resources tailored for inclusive education. It made me wonder if I could truly provide the best for each student.*

C. Mechanisms of Grade Four Teachers on the Challenges in Breaking Down Barriers to Inclusion in the Mainstream Classroom

In the pursuit of creating inclusive learning environments, grade four teachers encounter various mechanisms that pose significant challenges to break down barriers within mainstream classrooms. Inclusion, the practice of ensuring that students of all abilities and backgrounds have equal access to educational opportunities, is a complex endeavor that demands the navigation of multifaceted obstacles. These challenges include feelings of overwhelm and unpreparedness, resistance from both parents and colleagues, as well as the perception of not making a meaningful difference. Addressing these issues is crucial for grade four teachers, as they play a pivotal role in fostering inclusive education, promoting equity, and ensuring that every student can thrive. This exploration delves into the mechanisms that educators face in their mission to facilitate inclusion, drawing upon relevant research and scholarly

insights to shed light on these intricate challenges (Friend & Bursuck, 2018).

➤ *Theme #1: Building a Supportive Classroom Environment*

Building a supportive classroom environment is a critical coping mechanism for grade four teachers facing the challenges of breaking down barriers to inclusion in the mainstream classroom. An inclusive classroom environment that values diversity, fosters respect, and promotes collaboration is essential for creating a space where all students can thrive. This approach aligns with research emphasizing the significance of classroom climate in successful inclusive education (Turnbull et al., 2015). Here, we delve into six key aspects of building a supportive classroom environment to cope with inclusion challenges.

Grade four teachers establish the foundation for inclusion by fostering respect and acceptance among students. Creating a classroom culture that celebrates individual differences and encourages empathy helps mitigate potential conflicts and enhances the overall learning experience (Friend & Bursuck, 2018). Through activities, discussions, and modeling inclusive behavior, teachers can instill the values of respect and acceptance.

Developing clear expectations and routines is crucial in maintaining an inclusive classroom environment. Grade four teachers can establish routines that support students with diverse needs, helping them understand what to expect and how to navigate the classroom effectively (Sapon-Shevin, 2015). Consistency in classroom management promotes a sense of stability and security for all students.

Implementing UDL principles in lesson planning and curriculum development is another essential coping mechanism (Turnbull et al., 2015). By incorporating various modalities, materials, and assessments into instruction, grade four teachers ensure that learning is accessible to every student, regardless of their abilities or learning styles.

Encouraging peer support and collaboration within the classroom reinforces the idea that everyone has a role to play in creating an inclusive environment (Sapon-Shevin, 2015). Grade four teachers can facilitate activities that promote teamwork, empathy, and mutual assistance among students. Peer support can also alleviate feelings of isolation and foster a sense of belonging among students with disabilities.

Tailoring support plans to meet the specific needs of students is vital for creating an inclusive classroom (Friend & Bursuck, 2018). Grade four teachers can work with special education professionals to develop individualized accommodations and modifications that ensure equitable access to the curriculum for all students. Regularly reviewing and adjusting these plans as needed is essential to maintain an inclusive environment.

To cope with potential conflicts that may arise in an inclusive classroom, grade four teachers equip students with conflict resolution and problem-solving skills (Turnbull et al., 2015). Teaching students how to communicate effectively,

resolve conflicts peacefully, and collaborate on solutions empowers them to navigate challenges constructively, promoting a harmonious classroom environment.

Presented below are the transcripts from the participants:

- P1: *Recognizing the importance of empathy, I initiated activities that encouraged students to share personal stories. This created a culture of understanding, where everyone's experiences were valued.*
- P4: *I empowered students to take the lead in inclusive projects. From selecting topics to working in diverse groups, students became the architects of their learning. This not only broke down barriers but also built a supportive environment where each student's strengths contributed to the collective success.*
- P7: *Introducing a peer partnership system was my way of fostering connections. Students with varying abilities were paired up, creating a buddy system. This not only provided academic support but also formed friendships that extended beyond the classroom.*
- P8: *Leveraging responsive classroom strategies, I prioritized morning meetings and class circles to build a sense of community. These sessions provided a platform for open discussions, problem-solving, and celebrations, creating a positive and supportive atmosphere that embraced diversity and inclusion.*

➤ *Theme #2: Seeking Professional Guidance*

Seeking professional guidance is a vital coping mechanism for grade four teachers as they confront the challenges in dismantling barriers to inclusion within mainstream classrooms. Inclusive education demands a nuanced understanding of various disabilities, learning styles, and strategies to provide equitable opportunities for all students. Therefore, accessing expertise from professionals well-versed in special education is crucial for educators to navigate this complex terrain successfully.

Grade four teachers often seek advice from special education experts or consultants who possess in-depth knowledge of inclusive practices (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012). These experts offer guidance on evidence-based strategies, assistive technologies, and individualized accommodations tailored to the unique needs of students with disabilities. Their expertise helps teachers make informed decisions and design effective instructional plans that support the diverse range of learners in their classrooms.

Furthermore, professional development opportunities that facilitate interaction with experts in inclusive education are essential for grade four teachers (Friend & Bursuck, 2018). Workshops, seminars, and conferences led by specialists allow teachers to stay abreast of current research, innovative practices, and legal requirements in the field of special education. By attending such events, teachers not only gain valuable knowledge but also build professional networks that can provide ongoing guidance and support.

Collaborating closely with special education professionals within the school or district is another significant aspect of seeking professional guidance (Sapon-Shevin, 2015). Grade four teachers work in tandem with these experts, such as special educators, speech therapists, and counselors, to develop comprehensive strategies and accommodations tailored to the specific needs of students with disabilities. This collaborative approach ensures that students receive the most effective support, fostering a more inclusive learning environment.

Shown below are the transcripts from the participants:

- P2: *Acknowledging the need for continuous learning, I actively sought collaborative professional development opportunities. Workshops on inclusive teaching practices and collaborating with special education professionals helped me refine my strategies and build a more inclusive classroom.*
- P3: *Recognizing the complexities of inclusive education, I sought mentorship from experienced teachers and formed peer support groups. Regular discussions with mentors and colleagues provided valuable insights and guidance.*
- P5: *Understanding that inclusive teaching requires specialized skills, I pursued additional training in special education. This not only enhanced my understanding of diverse learning needs but also equipped me with practical strategies to address individual differences within the classroom.*
- P6: *To better support students with diverse needs, I actively sought consultation with special education experts. Collaborating with professionals who specialize in inclusive education allowed me to tailor my teaching methods to the unique requirements of each student.*

➤ Theme #3: Advocating for Policy Changes

Advocating for policy changes is a pivotal coping mechanism employed by grade four teachers as they grapple with the challenges of breaking down barriers to inclusion in mainstream classrooms. Recognizing that systemic shifts are often necessary to support inclusive education effectively, these teachers actively engage in advocating for policy changes that can enhance the inclusive learning environment.

Grade four teachers concentrate their advocacy efforts on influencing inclusive policies at various levels, from the school and district to the state or national level. These policies encompass resource allocation, teacher training, curriculum development, and administrative procedures that directly impact the implementation of inclusive practices (Turnbull et al., 2015).

One critical aspect of policy advocacy was the allocation of resources. Grade four teachers often advocate for policies that secure increased funding for inclusive education. This funding ensures that classrooms have the essential materials, assistive technology, and specialized personnel required to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities (Bunch & Valeo, 2004).

Additionally, teachers champion policies aimed at expanding professional development opportunities. Such advocacy ensures that teachers receive ongoing training and access to experts in the field of inclusive education. These efforts are instrumental in equipping educators with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively support all students (Friend & Bursuck, 2018).

Advocacy for policy changes also addresses administrative barriers that can hinder the implementation of inclusive practices. Grade four teachers may lobby for streamlined administrative processes, especially those related to Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and accommodations. Simplifying these bureaucratic procedures can save time and resources, allowing teachers to focus more on students (Turnbull et al., 2015).

Furthermore, teachers may advocate for increased access to support personnel within mainstream classrooms. Policies promoting such access can lead to greater availability of special education assistants, speech therapists, and other specialists. This, in turn, empowers grade four teachers to provide more comprehensive support for students with diverse needs (Bunch & Valeo, 2004).

Below are the transcripts from the participants:

- P1: *Faced with barriers to inclusion, I realized the need for systemic change. I became an active advocate within the school community, initiating conversations with administrators and participating in school board meetings.*
- P3: *I collaborated with fellow educators to form an advocacy group. Together, we researched and drafted proposals for policy changes that would address barriers to inclusion. We sought to bring about positive transformations at both the school and district levels.*
- P6: *Hosting informational sessions, I collaborated with parents to draft petitions and letters advocating for inclusive policies. This collaborative approach aimed to create a united front and amplify our voices in the call for change.*
- P8: *To strengthen my advocacy efforts, I collected data on the benefits of inclusive education. I presented this evidence to school administrators and policymakers, emphasizing how policy changes could improve academic outcomes and a more supportive learning environment for all students.*

D. Insights Gained from the Experiences of Grade four Teachers

In the dynamic landscape of modern education, the imperative to break down barriers of inclusion in mainstream classrooms has become a pivotal focus for teachers committed to fostering an equitable and supportive learning environment. Educators, each with their unique insights, have navigated the complexities of creating inclusive spaces where diverse learners can thrive. Through these experiences, valuable perspectives are gained on the transformative power of tailored pedagogies, cultural understanding, collaboration, and

personalized learning in the pursuit of inclusivity within mainstream junior high school classrooms.

➤ *Theme #1: Promoting a Supportive Learning Environment*

Promoting a supportive learning environment is critical for grade four teachers aiming to break down barriers to inclusion in the mainstream classroom. It underscores the importance of fostering a positive atmosphere that embraces diversity and encourages the participation of all students, regardless of their background, abilities, or differences.

Educational literature provides insights into the significance of a positive and inclusive classroom climate. Research by Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1990) emphasizes that a positive learning environment is conducive to academic achievement and positive social interactions among students. In the context of inclusion, the work of Friend and Bursuck (2018) highlights the role of a supportive classroom environment in creating a sense of belonging for students with diverse needs.

Teachers may share experiences of implementing strategies such as cooperative learning, peer support systems, and inclusive classroom management techniques. Cooperative learning, as suggested by Johnson and Johnson (1999), encourages positive interdependence among students, fostering a collaborative spirit that breaks down social barriers. Additionally, fostering empathy and understanding through activities that promote diversity and inclusivity aligns with the principles of social-emotional learning (SEL) (CASEL, 2020).

The promotion of a supportive learning environment also involves addressing issues of discrimination and bias. Inclusive practices, as advocated by Salend (2016), require educators to be proactive in preventing and addressing instances of discrimination, creating an environment where all students feel valued and respected.

In essence, broader educational goals of creating inclusive and positive learning environments, which have been shown to enhance academic outcomes and social interactions among students. By promoting a supportive learning environment, grade four teachers contribute to the foundational principles of inclusive education.

Here are the transcripts from the participants as transcribed:

- P1: *Establishing a supportive learning environment starts with setting inclusive classroom norms. I introduced activities that celebrate diversity, encouraged empathy, and fostered a sense of belonging. By promoting a culture of acceptance, I aimed to break down barriers and create an atmosphere where every student feels valued.*
- P4: *Recognizing the diverse needs of students, I embraced differentiated instruction strategies. This involved tailoring lessons to accommodate various learning styles and abilities. Through flexible grouping and personalized learning plans, I aimed to create an environment where each student could thrive based on their unique strengths and challenges.*

- P7: *I focused on nurturing collaborative peer relationships among students. Implementing buddy systems and group projects encouraged students to work together, fostering a sense of camaraderie. This not only facilitated academic growth but also contributed to breaking down social barriers and building lasting friendships.*

- P8: *Building a supportive environment requires open communication. I established regular channels for communication with students, parents, and support staff. Through newsletters, parent-teacher conferences, and collaborative meetings, I ensured that everyone involved in a student's education was well-informed and actively engaged in the process.*

➤ *Theme #2: Differentiated Instruction and Learning Materials*

It is a crucial theme in the experiences of grade four teachers as they strive to break down barriers to inclusion in the mainstream classroom. This emphasizes the importance of tailoring teaching strategies and materials to meet the diverse needs and abilities of students.

Research by Tomlinson (2001) supports the concept of differentiated instruction, which involves adjusting the content, process, and products of learning to accommodate various student readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles. By employing differentiated instruction, teachers can address the unique strengths and challenges of each student, fostering a more inclusive educational environment.

Furthermore, the use of varied learning materials is integral to differentiated instruction. The work of Rose and Meyer (2002) on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) suggests that providing multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression in instructional materials can enhance accessibility for all learners. This aligns with the inclusive education principle of accommodating diverse learning styles and preferences.

Teachers may share experiences of creating or adapting learning materials to accommodate students with different abilities and learning preferences. For instance, utilizing multimedia resources, incorporating visuals, and offering alternative formats can cater to diverse learning needs (CAST, 2018).

The theme of differentiated instruction and learning materials also connects with the principles of inclusive curriculum development. According to Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), an inclusive curriculum is responsive to the needs of all learners and provides equitable opportunities for success. It reflects a commitment to addressing individual differences among students through personalized instruction and accessible learning materials, fostering an inclusive classroom where every student can thrive.

Educational literature provides insights into the significance of a positive and inclusive classroom climate. Research by Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1990) emphasizes that a positive learning environment is conducive to academic

achievement and positive social interactions among students. In the context of inclusion, the work of Friend and Bursuck (2018) highlights the role of a supportive classroom environment in creating a sense of belonging for students with diverse needs.

Here are the transcripts from the participants as transcribed:

- P2: *Embracing differentiated instruction, I tailored lessons to meet the individual needs of each student. By recognizing and accommodating different learning styles, I aimed to ensure that every student had the opportunity to grasp and apply concepts.*
- P3: *To address diverse learning needs, I curated a range of learning materials. This included visual aids, audio resources, and hands-on activities. By offering materials in different formats, I sought to make the curriculum accessible to all students, regardless of their preferred learning modality.*
- P5: *I implemented flexible grouping strategies to facilitate collaborative learning experiences. By organizing students based on their strengths and challenges, I created opportunities for peer support.*
- P6: *I developed personalized learning plans for students with diverse needs. This involved setting specific learning goals, tracking progress, and adjusting instructional strategies accordingly. By emphasizing personalized learning, I aimed to empower each student on their educational journey.*

➤ Theme #3: Collaboration with Support Services and Stakeholders

It is pivotal in the experiences of grade four teachers seeking to break down barriers to inclusion in the mainstream classroom to work with parents and organizations. This theme underscores the importance of forging partnerships with various support services and engaging stakeholders to create a comprehensive and supportive learning environment for all students.

Effective collaboration with support services, such as special education professionals, counselors, and speech therapists, is highlighted in the work of Friend and Bursuck (2018). They emphasize the significance of a collaborative approach to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities. Grade four teachers may share experiences of teaming up with specialists to develop Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), implement accommodations, and provide targeted interventions.

Furthermore, partnerships with stakeholders, including parents, guardians, and community members, are essential for inclusive education. Research by Pijl and Meijer (2011) emphasizes the crucial role of involving parents in the educational process, fostering a collaborative relationship between home and school. Grade four teachers might share insights into effective communication strategies and collaborative initiatives with parents to create a united front in supporting the diverse needs of students.

Moreover, the involvement of external stakeholders, such as local community organizations and advocacy groups, contributes to a more inclusive learning environment. The work of Ainscow (2005) on inclusive education highlights the importance of broader community involvement in breaking down barriers. Grade four teachers may describe experiences of organizing community events, awareness campaigns, or collaborating with external agencies to enhance support services and resources.

In summary, collaboration with support services and stakeholders aligns with the principles of inclusive education by recognizing the importance of a collective effort in meeting the needs of all students.

Below are the transcribed transcripts of the participants:

- P1: *Collaborating with support services became a cornerstone of my teaching approach. This collaborative effort ensured that every child received the tailored support necessary for their academic and social development.*
- P3: *By regularly meeting with support service providers, we shared insights, strategies, and best practices. This collaborative approach not only benefited students with special needs but enhanced the overall learning environment for all.*
- P6: *Recognizing that students often require multifaceted support, I worked closely with support services to integrate various interventions seamlessly into the classroom. This holistic approach addressed not only academic challenges but also social and emotional needs, fostering a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.*
- P8: *Building strong partnerships with parents and support service providers was key to overcoming barriers. This united front ensured a consistent and comprehensive support system for each child.*

IV. IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

A. Implications

The results of my analysis revealed the following significant findings.

Based on the experiences of the grade four teachers in breaking down barriers to inclusion in a mainstream classroom, results of the interview revealed the following themes: First, feeling overwhelmed and unprepared. Grade four teachers frequently encounter feelings of being overwhelmed and unprepared when striving to promote inclusion in mainstream classrooms. This can stem from insufficient training in inclusive education, a shortage of resources, or a lack of support from administrators. The increasing diversity of grade four classrooms, with students from various backgrounds and abilities, adds to the challenge. Meeting the needs of all students becomes particularly daunting for teachers, especially when they lack the necessary training or resources.

Second, facing resistance from parents and colleagues. Parental resistance may arise due to misconceptions or concerns about the potential impact of inclusion on their child's educational experience. It is vital for teachers to engage in transparent and empathetic communication with parents, addressing their concerns and presenting evidence of the positive outcomes associated with inclusive education. Establishing trust and involving parents in decision-making can effectively reduce resistance and promote a collaborative partnership in support of inclusion. Third, feeling like they are not making a difference. Experiencing a sense of ineffectiveness can be disheartening for educators. Inclusion goes beyond ensuring equal access to education; it involves creating an environment where every student can flourish and realize their full potential. Nevertheless, teachers frequently face obstacles that may prompt doubts about the effectiveness of their endeavors, resulting in feelings of frustration and inadequacy.

On the coping mechanisms of the grade four teachers in breaking down barriers to inclusion in a mainstream classroom, one of the themes that was shown was building a supportive classroom environment. Establishing a classroom environment that embraces diversity, cultivates respect, and encourages collaboration is vital for developing a space where every student can excel. This strategy aligns with research underlining the importance of the classroom atmosphere in successful inclusive education. Building a classroom culture that appreciates individual distinctions and promotes empathy serves to alleviate potential conflicts and enrich the overall learning experience.

The second theme identified was: seeking professional guidance. Grade four teachers find seeking professional guidance to be a crucial coping strategy. Inclusive education requires a nuanced grasp of diverse disabilities, learning styles, and strategies to ensure fair opportunities for all students. Hence, tapping into the knowledge of professionals knowledgeable in special education is essential for educators to navigate this intricate terrain effectively. The third theme identified was: advocating for policy changes. Advocating for policy changes is a crucial coping strategy utilized by grade four teachers as they address the difficulties of promoting inclusion in mainstream classrooms. Understanding that systemic changes are often required for effective support of inclusive education, these teachers actively participate in advocating for policy adjustments that can improve the inclusive learning environment.

On the educational management insights gained from the grade four teachers in breaking down barriers to inclusion in a mainstream classroom, the first theme identified was promoting a supportive learning environment. Fostering a nurturing learning environment is essential for grade four teachers striving to eliminate barriers to inclusion in the mainstream classroom. This emphasizes the significance of cultivating a positive atmosphere that welcomes diversity and promotes the involvement of all students, regardless of their background, abilities, or differences.

The second theme identified as differentiated instruction and learning materials. Grade four teachers highlight the importance of customizing teaching methods and resources to address the varied needs and capabilities of students. It is crucial to actively create or modify learning materials to suit the diverse abilities and preferences of students. The third theme was collaboration with support services and stakeholders. Collaborating with parents and organizations is crucial for grade four teachers working to eliminate barriers to inclusion in the mainstream classroom. This emphasizes the significance of establishing partnerships with diverse support services and involving stakeholders to develop a comprehensive and supportive learning environment for all students.

B. Future Directions

Analyzing the encounters of educators in overcoming barriers to inclusion in contemporary classrooms provides a valuable perspective for understanding the intricate complexities within the classroom setting. The study's findings on the experiences of grade four teachers in fostering inclusion may pave the way for several future directions. Firstly, implementing targeted professional development programs can enhance teachers' skills in addressing diverse needs effectively. Secondly, advocating for policy changes within educational institutions could ensure sustained support for inclusive practices. Additionally, fostering stronger collaboration between teachers, parents, and organizations may contribute to creating a more comprehensive and supportive learning environment. Finally, disseminating the study's insights widely could influence broader educational practices and policies, promoting a more inclusive approach across various school settings.

Furthermore, the study suggests practical steps that grade four teachers can take to break down barriers to inclusion in mainstream classrooms. First and foremost, tailoring teaching strategies and materials to accommodate diverse needs and learning preferences is essential. Teachers can also actively engage with parents, encouraging open communication to better understand and address individual student requirements. Establishing a supportive classroom culture that celebrates diversity and promotes collaboration among students can contribute significantly to inclusive learning environments. Additionally, ongoing professional development opportunities can empower teachers to stay abreast of evolving inclusion strategies and best practices, ensuring they are well-equipped to meet the unique needs of their diverse student population.

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