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The Impact of Shadow Teaching on Students with Special Needs in Mainstream Schools

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Abstract

Inclusive education is the practice of providing equal opportunity for learning for all students in regular classrooms including students with special needs. These students require shadow teachers to provide individual support in academics, behavior, social skills and communication. The study focused on parents' perception of the effect of shadow teaching on special needs students in mainstream schools. Descriptive survey design was used in the study. Parents of shadow teacher assisted children (n=15) filled out a structured questionnaire. Data were analyzed descriptively. Findings The findings revealed that parents strongly perceived shadow teachers as effective. Parents were positive (66.7%) and very positive (33.3%) According to parents, shadow teachers enhanced students' academic engagement, classroom participation, behavior management, communication, social interaction, confidence and independence. They also said shadow teachers help families, classroom teachers and other professionals work together to keep the continuity between home and school. The study said shadow teachers aid inclusive education and holistic development of special needs students.

Keywords: Shadow teaching, inclusive education, parental perspectives, special needs, mainstream schools

Inclusive education is an important and growing area within the field of education. It focuses on ensuring that all children, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or learning needs, have equal access to quality education. It is based on the idea that rather than being kept separate or excluded, every child should have an opportunity to study with other kids in a regular classroom environment. Inclusive education recognises the natural diversity of learners. Children learn, communicate, behave and grasp information in different ways. Inclusive education promotes the adaptation of schools' curriculum, environment and teaching practices to meet the needs of all students. It recognizes diversity as a normal feature of classroom life. It signifies a movement from segregation to integration, emphasizing that all children have the right to quality education in a setting that respects and supports variety. This drive towards inclusive education is in line with the

human rights perspective on education as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and reaffirmed in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006). UNESCO (2005) asserts that, “Inclusive education is not just about including children with disabilities in mainstream schools, but about transforming education systems to respond to the diverse needs of all learners.” It aims to ensure equal learning opportunities for all students regardless of their abilities or disabilities (UNESCO, 2020). It also seeks to provide equal learning opportunities for kids with various learning needs within the normal school setting. Students with special needs usually need specialized support to access curriculum content, manage behavior, and engage meaningfully in classroom activities.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) established in 2006, represented a paradigm change from a charity-based approach to disability to a rights-based approach to disability globally. Article 24 of the Convention requires that the State Parties provide inclusive education for all and encourage lifelong learning opportunities. It demands for reasonable accommodation, individual support and accessibility in educational systems to enable persons with disabilities to participate completely and equally in education. India’s commitment to fair and inclusive education was further bolstered by the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009. It provides free and obligatory education to all children between the age of 6 and 14 years. clause 3 of the Act provides for the right to education for all children without discrimination and clause 12(1)(c) provides for 25% reservation for children belonging to disadvantaged and weaker sections in private schools. The RTE Act(2009) is the legal instrument to promote access, equity and inclusion in the education system of India. In 2016, India implemented the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act to align its legal framework with the principles of the UNCRPD. The Act expanded the definition of disability from seven to twenty-one categories recognizing more conditions. Section 16 clarifies that the government and local authorities have a duty to educate children with disabilities in inclusive community schools. It points out the need for fair accommodation, barrier-free access and individual support. The Act requires institutions that train teachers to include inclusive pedagogy in their teaching.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 aims to create an equitable, inclusive and quality education system that leads to the holistic development of the individual and allows each learner to reach his/her full potential irrespective of his/her social background and situation. The policy stresses on the requirement of universal access and retention, learner-centered pedagogy, adaptive curricula, inclusive assessment processes and teacher preparation to meet the diverse needs of students including children with special educational needs. The NCF 2023 continues with this aspiration by harnessing the strengths of curriculum and pedagogical innovations to enhance inclusive education by celebrating the variety of learners. Academician also points to the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, individual learning plans (ILPs), flexible assessment approaches, and continuous professional development for instructors. The NEP 2020 and NCF 2023 together provide a comprehensive framework to enable equal participation, access and quality education for all learners to inclusive classrooms.

Shadow teaching is an important support service in inclusive education that allows students with special educational needs to participate effectively in mainstream classrooms. A shadow teacher is a trained professional who provides one-to-one individualised support to promote academic learning, behavioural regulation, social interaction, communication and participation in classroom activities. Shadow teachers, also known as learning support assistants, teaching assistants or educational aides, work alongside classroom teachers and parents to enable effective inclusion and improve students' overall participation in school activities (Peters, 2018). Shadow teaching refers to a specialized form of in-class, one-to-one support designed to facilitate the inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms. Unlike private tutoring, the purpose of shadow teaching is not academic supplementation but the promotion of meaningful participation, social integration, and independence within inclusive settings.

The shadow teacher is not a replacement for the classroom teacher, but is a partner to the teacher in making the curriculum accessible and in allowing students to participate meaningfully in the regular classroom. Shadow teachers provide individualised academic, behavioural and social support based on each student's specific strengths and needs. They provide support to students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) and other developmental disabilities. Friend and Cook (2017), Hallahan et al. (2019), and Cooper et al. (2020) mentioned that they were required to support classroom routines, adapt instructional strategies, support communication, support positive behaviors, support peer interaction, and support students during transitions between classroom activities. They work in partnership with classroom teachers, parents, therapists and other professionals to promote consistency of intervention and educational planning. Three key ideas underpin excellent shadow teaching: independence, bespoke assistance and partnership. An individualized approach emphasizes that each child has varying characteristics of learning and hence needs individual teaching and behavioral strategies. Good shadow teachers are always watching how their pupils are doing and changing the help they give so it is right for each student. Fitria et al. (2025) said that shadow teaching is useful as long as it gives individual assistance, positive reinforcement, and is adapted to the students' growth. The second principle is to build independence. The primary aim of shadow teaching is not to promote long-term dependence on adult support, but to enhance students' confidence, self-regulation, and independent operation. The support should be gradually withdrawn through a planned process as the student acquires the requisite academic, behavioral, and social skills. Giangreco et al (2005) pointed out the need of planning support to foster independence and not dependence on adult care. In the same way, Butterfly Learnings (2024) noted that the gradual withdrawal of help enables kids to become more independent and to actively participate in learning in the classroom. The third principle of good shadow teaching is cooperation. Shadow teachers are a link between the students, classroom teachers, parents, special educators, therapists and school administrators. Open communication and established educational objectives are the foundation for frequent teaching practices and successful inclusion. Collaborative planning is also effective in the implementation of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and evidence-based interventions, and it supports

consistency across the school and home environments (Friend & Cook, 2017; IDEA, 2004). Shadow instructors have responsibilities that go beyond just academic support. They carry out behavioural interventions, encourage suitable peer contact, help in communication, supervise student progress and preserve organized records of learning outcomes. They assist students in developing organizational skills, self-management strategies, and positive social relationships while respecting the authority of the classroom teacher and maintaining student dignity and confidentiality (CEC, 2015; Salend, 2016). Shadow teachers scaffold instruction so that students are able to complete tasks independently over time, consistent with the Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the Zone of Proximal Development. However, despite the educational value of shadow teaching, it has its challenges. Families usually bear the entire financial burden for employing private shadow teachers. In addition, the lack of standardized training programs, professional certification and regulatory guidelines also raise concerns about the quality and consistency of services. Role ambiguity and inconsistent collaboration between stakeholders may also result from differing willingness of schools to accept shadow teachers. Another important concern is the risk of student dependency. If support is not gradually removed too much adult support may limit opportunities for independent learning and natural peer interaction. Therefore, literature highlights that shadow teaching should promote autonomy instead of dependency, while reducing stigma and increasing participation in natural classroom environments (Giangreco & Doyle, 2007; Carter et al., 2016). Parents are in a unique position to evaluate the effectiveness of shadow teaching, as they closely observe changes in their children's academic achievement, behaviour, emotional adjustment, communication and social participation. Their views provide useful evidence of the advantages and difficulties of shadow teaching and can inform improvements in inclusive educational practices. Previous studies show that parents generally consider shadow teachers as valuable partners in their children's education. However, concerns exist over rising dependence on shadow teachers, inconsistent school practices, and lack of a standardized professional training (Kalyanpur & Rao, 2018; Mukhopadhyay & Dutta, 2021). Previous studies have found that shadow teachers improve classroom participation, academic engagement, behaviour, communication and social inclusion of students with special educational needs (Sharma & Loreman, 2019; Das, 2020). However, there is little empirical research on parents' perceptions of the long-term academic, behavioural, social and communication outcomes of shadow teaching in mainstream schools. This gap emphasizes the necessity for systematic research to investigate parental views regarding the effectiveness of shadow teaching in promoting meaningful inclusion and holistic development of students with special educational needs.

3. Objectives of the Study

The study was undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To study the parents' perception on the effect of shadow teaching on academic development of students with special needs.
2. To study the parents' perception on the effect of shadow teaching on on the behavioural development of students with special needs.

3. To study the parents' perception on the effect of shadow teaching on social development of students with special needs.
4. To study the parents' perception on the effect of shadow teaching on communication development of special needs students.

4. Methodology

A quantitative descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The sample comprised 15 parents of students with special needs including those diagnosed Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Cerebral Palsy (CP), Intellectual Developmental Disorder (IDD), Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Specific Learning Disability (SLD) enrolled in mainstream schools with shadow teacher support in Delhi-NCR. Participants were chosen using purposive sampling, ensuring relevance to the research focus. A questionnaire was developed by the researcher which constitutes an integral component of a comprehensive research study dedicated to evaluating the Parental Perspectives on the Effects of shadow teaching for students with special needs in mainstream Schools. The information provided through the questionnaire was very crucial for conducting a thorough analysis of the impact of current shadow teaching practices. A structured rating scale comprising 20 statements was developed to measure parental perceptions across academic, communication, behavioural, and social domains. Responses were recorded on a five-point scale ranging from *Strongly Agree (5)* to *Strongly Disagree (1)*.

Results and Discussion

Table-1 Gender-wise Distribution of parents

Variable	Category	n	Percentage
Parents	Male	4	26.7
	Female	11	77.3
	Total	15	100.0

Table 1 shows the gender distribution of parents who took part in the study. 11 of the 15 parents (73.3%) were females, and 4 parents (26.7%) were males. The results show that the majority of the respondents were mothers, which suggests that they were more involved in seeking and participating in educational support services for their children who received shadow teacher support. The higher involvement of mothers is related to their primary role in monitoring their children's educational progress and coordinating school-based interventions.

Table-2 Gender-wise Children Receiving Shadow Teacher Support (N = 15)

Variable	Category	n	Percentage
Children	Boys	11	73.3
	Girls	4	26.7
	Total	15	100.0

Table 2: Gender composition of the children included in the study of the 15 children, 11 (73.3%) were male and 4 (26.7%) were female. Results show that boys were the majority of children who received shadow teacher support in the present study. In terms of demographic distribution, the participating children were predominantly male; only just over one quarter of the sample consisted of female children.

Table-3 Gender-wise Distribution of Shadow Teachers (N = 15)

Variable	Category	n	Percentage
Shadow Teacher	Male	2	13.3
	Female	13	86.7
	Total	15	100.0

Table 3 presents the gender distribution of shadow teachers supporting children in the present study. Of the 15 shadow teachers, 13 (86.7%) were female, whereas 2 (13.3%) were male. These findings indicate that female shadow teachers constituted the majority of professionals providing individualized educational support to children with special educational needs in mainstream schools.

Table-4 Disability-wise Distribution of Children (N = 15)

Variable	Category	n	Percentage
Disability	Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	7	46.7
	Intellectual Developmental Disorder (IDD)	3	20.0
	Cerebral Palsy (CP)	2	13.3
	Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	2	13.3
	Specific Learning Disability (SLD)	1	6.7
	Total	15	100.0

Table 4 presents the distribution of children by categories of disability. The largest disability group was Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) with 7 children (46.7%) diagnosed with ASD out of 15 children included in the study. Three children (20.0%) were detected with Intellectual Developmental Disorder (IDD). Two children (13.3%) had been diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy (CP) and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The lowest proportion was one child (6.7%) diagnosed with a Specific Learning Disability (SLD)

Table 5 Parents' Perception Towards the Effectiveness of Shadow Teachers (N = 15)

Perception Level	n	Percentage %
Highly Positive	10	66.7
Positive	5	33.3
Neutral	0	0.0
Negative	0	0.0
Total	15	100.0

Table 5 shows the distribution of parents' perceptions of the effectiveness of shadow teachers. Most of the respondents (66.7%) had a very positive perception and the remaining 33.3% had a positive perception. The findings indicate that parents' perceptions of shadow teachers are overwhelmingly positive. This suggests that parents are aware of the important role that shadow teachers play in enhancing the educational experiences and inclusion of children with special educational needs. Overall finding: 100% of parents reported positive and highly positive perceptions of the effectiveness of shadow teachers. This shows that there is a strong belief in the support of shadow teachers in inclusive education settings.

Table-6 Domain-wise Distribution of Parents' Perception Towards the Effectiveness of Shadow Teachers (N = 15)

Domain	Strongly Disagree n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)	Strongly Agree n (%)
Academic	0 (0.0%)	1 (6.7%)	2 (13.3%)	5 (33.3%)	7 (46.7%)
Behavioural	0 (0.0%)	2 (13.3%)	2 (13.3%)	4 (26.7%)	7 (46.7%)
Social	0 (0.0%)	2 (13.3%)	1 (6.7%)	3 (20.0%)	9 (60.0%)
Communication	0 (0.0%)	2 (13.3%)	2 (13.3%)	5 (33.3%)	6 (40.0%)

Table 6 shows the research findings that in the Academic area 46.7% of the parents strongly agreed and 33.3% agreed that shadow instructors boosted the academic achievement of their children. 13.3% of parents were neutral, 6.7% disapproved and no one strongly disagreed. In the Behavioural domain, 46.7% of parents strongly agreed and 26.7% agreed that shadow instructors made a beneficial change to their children's behaviour. 13.3% were neutral and 13.3% disapproved and none of the parents strongly disagreed. For the Social category, 60.0% of parents strongly agreed and 20.0% agreed that shadow instructors boosted their children's social connection and involvement. Only 6.7% were neutral and 13.3% disagreed, with no respondents strongly disagreeing. In the Communication sector, 40.0% of parents strongly agreed and 33.3% agreed that shadow instructors improved their children's communication skills. Also 13.3% were neutral, 13.3% disagreed and none strongly disagreed. Generally, the data indicate that most parents agreed or strongly agreed that shadow instructors had a beneficial impact on all four aspects. The highest proportion of strong agreement (60.0%) in the social domain.

Conclusion

The current study examined parent perceptions regarding the impact of shadow teaching on children with special needs in mainstream schools. Shadow teachers work one-to-one with students to improve their participation in academic, behavioural, social and communication activities in inclusive classrooms. The results revealed that parents generally had positive perceptions of the effectiveness of shadow teaching. Most parents felt shadow teachers helped improve students' engagement in their studies, participation in class, behaviour, communication skills, social interaction, confidence and independence. Shadow teachers provided an important link between

students, classroom teachers and families, supporting consistency in learning and behavioural support, parents said. The key strengths of shadow teaching were found to be individualised teaching, behaviour management, emotional support and facilitating peer interactions. However, the parents also reported challenges such as high financial cost for hiring shadow teachers, lack of availability of professionally trained personnel, inconsistent support from schools, and lack of standardized policies and professional guidelines. There was also an element of concern that students could become overly reliant on shadow teachers if support is not withdrawn gradually. The results revealed that shadow teaching is an effective support service to promote inclusion and holistic development of students with special needs in mainstream schools. The findings of this study have significant implications for policy and practice in inclusive education. Shadow teachers are required for students with special needs in regular classrooms. Shadow teachers' roles and responsibilities should be clearly established to enable collaboration between classroom teachers, special educators, therapists and parents. Comprehensive training, certification and continuing professional development in evidence-based instruction, behavior management, communication, assistive technology and inclusive pedagogy should be provided to them. Shadow teacher support should be linked to the Individualised Education Plan (IEP) and tapered down as learners become more independent and self-regulated. Future study should investigate the impact of shadow teaching among different groups of persons with disabilities, in other educational environments and with technology-supported inclusive practices, using bigger and more diverse samples and employing longitudinal and comparative methodologies.

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