

Parents Satisfaction with Services Provided by Shadow Aides in an Inclusive Classroom

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Abstract—Parents’ perspectives regarding their child’s education is important to be investigated. Hence, the main purpose of this study is to examine parents’ satisfaction with the services provided by shadow aides to support their children in inclusive settings and to explore the strategies on how to improve the services of these shadow aides. Specifically, parents’ satisfaction of the aides’ personal value, self-initiative, job execution, communication, report preparation and ability to follow school rules was measured. A mixed-method research approach based on questionnaires and semi-structured interviews was employed. Eighteen parents whose children with autism attending inclusive program with shadow aides participated in this study. Data were analyzed via SPSS and NVivo. Data revealed that most parents were satisfied with the services provided by the shadow aides. They also felt that the quality of shadow aides’ skills could be improved by having more practical training.

Keywords—parents satisfaction; shadow aide; inclusive classroom; autism

I. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education for children with disabilities is internationally accepted as a standard and rights for all children. On the same note; Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 elucidates that inclusion is the expected norm for any child with disabilities and has set a target of achieving 30% special education needs students in the inclusive program by 2015 and 75% by 2025. Nevertheless; Malaysia faces an acute shortage of qualified teachers and special education needs specialists. In 2013; the Blueprint reported that there were only 50 clinical psychologists; 157 speech therapists and 157 audiologists employed by the government. The Ministry of Education; however; plans to allocate more resources to support the training of specialists and special education needs teachers; and the sharing and dissemination of knowledge; experience as well as best practices [1].

The existence of specialists or special needs education teachers or also known as shadow aides in inclusive classrooms has enabled students with autism to participate in a far greater kaleidoscopic variety of educational experiences with their non-disabled peers than they ever did when taught in separate classrooms. Having said that; shadow aides should be highly valued by teachers; parents; administrators and students themselves. Moreover; they have unquestionably

eased a teacher’s job in an inclusive classroom. This notion; nevertheless appears to be unsettled as there are researches which investigate on parents’ perspectives regarding the roles of shadow aides in inclusive classrooms reveal some undesirable findings.

With this in mind; the major purpose of this study is twofold: i) to explore parents’ satisfaction with the services provided by shadow aides to support their children in inclusive settings; and ii) to explore the strategies on how to improve the services of these shadow aides. Specifically; the research questions are stated as; i) what is parents’ satisfaction on the aspects of shadow aides’ personal value; self-initiative; job execution; communication; report preparation and ability to follow school rules in supporting their children in inclusive settings; and ii) what are the possible strategies that may improve the services of these shadow aides.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Inclusive Classrooms*

Creating an inclusive classroom; where we have a space for all that allows participation and exchange between all is an enormous challenge [2]. This is because inclusive practice entails the creation of learning environments where all students can learn whatever their characteristics are. Moreover; the current inclusive education model focuses on the students; but involves the participation and devotion of the teachers [3]. As cited in [4]; stated that “it is unlikely that there will be good teaching practices where there has been no relevant preparation (in values; beliefs; conceptions; methods; etc.); where it has not been possible to have access to good materials and the experiences of others; or where it has not been possible to set up teaching teams”. There are six most significant principles actions in the implementation of good inclusive practices in a classroom [5]; which include:

- i) the children with autism that were guided by shadow aides had fewer opportunities to learn in an independent way [6];
- ii) the children with autism that had a shadow aide had fewer chances to interact with their peers and be socially included when the shadow aide was present [7];

- iii) major contact between the shadow aides and the autistic children diminished the attention of the main teacher [8];
- iv) the shadow aides that worked with small groups were more effective than those that worked with children with autism individually [9];
- v) the shadow aides requested more hours of planning together with the class teachers because they often went to class without knowing what they were expected to do; and
- vi) if the shadow aide sat next to an autistic child; this child lost all the opportunities for interaction with the others; who would direct themselves to the shadow aide and not directly to the child. If inclusion is to improve social abilities; and help promote knowledge and understanding between peers; it is crucial that the shadow aide helps facilitate this process and not act as another member of the group [10].

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-method approach. Data were collected from 18 parents whose children with autism (ASD) and attended the inclusive program with shadow aides. Questionnaires which consisted of four items on demographic data (age; type of school; class arrangement and school arrangement program) and six items on parents' satisfaction with shadow aides (personal value; self-initiative; job execution; communication; report preparation and ability to follow school rules) were administered to all participants (18 parents).

Parents' agreement to be interviewed was also obtained. The interviews were then conducted with all the 18 parents to attain their perspectives on how well the shadow aides support their children.

Data from the questionnaires were then computed and analyzed using the IBM SPSS Statistics v25 software. Percentage and frequency are used to answer the first research question on parents' satisfaction with shadow aides. Interview data were transcribed and analyzed using Nvivo. Themes were identified to answer the second research question on the strategies to improve the services of shadow aides.

IV. FINDINGS

Children with ASD whose parents were involved in this study are 7 years old (27.8%; n=5) and 8 years old (72.2%; n=13). All of them are at the national type primary schools where 88.9% (n=16) are in Standard One and 11.1% (n=2) are in Standard Two. 83.3% (n=15) of the children are in the fully inclusive program; 5.6% (n=1) is in the partial inclusive program while 11.1% (n=2) are in the Integrated Special Education Program.

Data extracted from questionnaires showed that parents were satisfied with the shadow aides. Specifically; parents

were satisfied with the aides' personal value (94.4% ; n=17); self-initiative (83.3%; n=15); job execution (83.3%; n=15); communication (77.8%; n=14); report preparation (83.3%; n=15); and ability to follow school rules (94.4%; n=17). Parents' satisfaction with shadow aides is shown in Table 1.

TABLE I. PARENTS SATISFACTION WITH SHADOW AIDES

| No. | Items | Agree | Not Sure | Disagree |
|-----|--------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1. | Personal value | 94.4% n=17 | 5.6% n=1 | 0 |
| 2. | Self-initiative | 83.3% n=15 | 11.1% n=2 | 5.6% n=1 |
| 3. | Job execution | 83.3% n=15 | 11.1% n=2 | 5.6% n=1 |
| 4. | Communication | 77.8% n=14 | 3 (16.6%) | 5.6% n=1 |
| 5. | Report preparation | 83.3% n=15 | 5.6% n=1 | 11.1% n=2 |

Interview data on parents' satisfaction with shadow aides concurred with the findings from the questionnaires. Parents were asked whether shadow aides were able to support their children in the inclusive classes. 16 parents (88.9%) agreed that shadow aides are helpful in assisting their children and two parents (11.1%) viewed the shadow aides' roles as satisfactory. Their comments showed parents perceived shadow aides to be helpful and important in supporting their children to adapt themselves in the new school environment.

According to parents; employing shadow aides for children in inclusive classes brings about positive effects. Children are calmer; show interests in class and adapt faster in the new environment.

Interview data also shows that parents are satisfied with the shadow aides' roles in executing their various tasks. The tasks include teaching routines to the children; managing behaviour; helping with social skills; instilling confidence and independence in the children.

There are four themes which emerge from the parents' interview data on the strategies to improve the services of shadow aides. The themes are job execution; personal value; self-initiative and report preparation.

Parents think that the job execution aspect should be the focus of improvement on the shadow aides' service. Shadow aides should be made clear of their job specification. They should be allowed to be in the classroom during the first two weeks the children are at school and monitor the children consistently. The training on behaviour and attitude management should be intensified. These are to ensure the shadow aides' service is well executed.

Parents opined that the shadow aides' personal value should be looked at in order to improve their services. They should be carefully selected among the mature ones; who can have good relationship with the parents; the inclusive teachers and the children with autism. The most suitable shadow aides would be the ones who are willing to learn; and consistently have ideas on how to help the children in school. Parents also stressed the importance of shadow aides to be proactive and consistent in preparing reports. Parents also stressed the importance of shadow aides to be proactive and consistent in preparing reports.

V. DISCUSSION

The current study reports on the responses to the survey and interviews of parents' satisfaction on the aspects of shadow aides' personal value; self-initiative; job execution; communication; report preparation and ability to follow school rules in supporting their children in inclusive settings as well as exploring the possible strategies that may improve the services of these shadow aides. Quantitative analysis clearly shows that parents were satisfied with the services given by shadow aides. The highest satisfaction could be seen on the aides' personal value and their ability to follow school rules. The findings are similar with the previous research on parents' satisfaction on shadow aides' services [11]. Parents acknowledged shadow aides' contribution in the areas of social inclusion; social interaction with peers and communication with peers and teachers; in managing child's behaviour and in the toilet training; teaching their child academics and advocating their child's participation in class and with their peers.

This study stresses the importance of selecting shadow aides with appropriate personal values such as maturity and self initiative. It also emphasizes the importance of careful

selection of shadow aides with suitable personality traits as suggested in another study [12]. The training of shadow aides is of equal importance. The previous research indicates that in inclusive classrooms support is often provided by untrained shadow aides [13]. This study suggests that the training of shadow aides should cover the aspects of job execution such as training on behaviour management and carrying the tasks according to job scope. In order to improve their services; shadow aides should be given adequate training and should be done on site i.e in the classrooms. Although Genius Kurnia shadow aides were given one week training; parents still echoed the need for training to be given. Hence; continuous professional development for shadow aides should be considered and planned.

Further investigations need to be carried out with a bigger sample of parents whose children have gone through the programme in Genius Kurnia. Input from these future studies could be used to further refine the programme in order to give the best services of shadow aides to assist children with autism to maximize their independence in inclusive classrooms.

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