

THE ROLE OF NOVICE SHADOW TEACHERS IN SUPPORTING EFL LEARNING IN INCLUSIVE PRIMARY CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education aims to provide equal learning opportunities for all students, including students with special needs. In this context, shadow teachers play a role in supporting English language learning through instructional adaptations, individualized support, and strategies tailored to students' needs. This study aims to explore the pedagogical roles of novice shadow teachers in supporting English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning in inclusive primary classrooms and to identify the challenges they face during the learning process. This study employs a qualitative case study approach involving four shadow teachers at an elementary school that supports inclusive education in Indonesia. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations and analyzed using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings reveal three main pedagogical roles: (1) instructional adaptation and individualized support, (2) the use of various strategies to support English language learning, and (3) supporting student participation and social interaction. The study also identifies three main challenges: maintaining students' attention and engagement, responding to differences in students' learning abilities and characteristics, managing students' behavioral and emotional conditions. The findings further highlight challenges in balancing direct assistance with opportunities for student independence and balancing the use of Indonesian with opportunities for English interaction. These findings provide insights into the pedagogical roles and challenges of novice shadow teachers in supporting EFL learning in inclusive primary classrooms in Indonesia. However, the findings are limited to four shadow teachers in one school and do not directly measure students' English language development or learning outcomes.

Keywords: *Challenges, English language learning, Inclusive classroom, Pedagogical roles, Teacher assistants.*

Introduction

Inclusive education aims to provide equal learning opportunities and prevent discrimination, ensuring that all children, including children with special needs, have access to quality education in regular classrooms (Nisa et al., 2024). Globally, inclusive education is grounded in the principle that all students should have equal opportunities to participate in meaningful learning experiences that accommodate their diverse needs (Eun, 2016). Although inclusive education has become a global educational priority, its implementation continues to face various challenges, particularly at the elementary school level (Rahmi et al., 2024; Wulandani et al., 2025). In Indonesia, inclusive education policies have been implemented;

however, school practices remain constrained by limitations in teacher competence, facilities, and professional support (Putri, 2024; Rahmi et al., 2024; Widodo, 2020; Wulandani et al., 2025). Teachers may also feel unprepared to accommodate diverse student needs because they have not received adequate training in inclusive education (Guo & Wang, 2025; Rahmi et al., 2024).

These challenges become more complex at the elementary school level, where teachers are responsible for supporting students with and without special needs within the same classroom. Previous studies have reported that classroom teachers experience difficulties implementing inclusive education independently, particularly in adapting curricula, managing

student behavior, and monitoring the development of students with special needs (Hijrivani & Andriani, 2021; Putri, 2024; Widodo, 2020). In this context, shadow teachers can provide additional assistance by helping classroom teachers address the learning needs of students with special needs in regular classroom settings. Their involvement may help teachers respond to individual learning needs while facilitating students' participation in classroom activities.

These challenges also warrant attention in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, which involves understanding unfamiliar vocabulary, language structures, and instructions, as well as participating in communicative activities (Brown, 2007; Benzerroug, 2021). In inclusive primary classrooms, teachers need to accommodate individual learning needs while facilitating English language learning for students with and without special needs. Limited time and attention may further complicate the provision of appropriate support to every student (Putri, 2024). Previous studies have indicated that inclusive English language learning still requires improvements in pedagogical guidance, teacher training, and structural support (Putri, 2024; Rahmi et al., 2024; Yap, 2026). These conditions highlight the importance of understanding how students with special needs are supported during EFL instruction.

Shadow teachers can contribute to supporting students' participation and learning during classroom activities. From the perspective of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, teachers' pedagogical roles can be demonstrated through the provision of gradual instructional support (scaffolding) to help learners progress from their actual level of development toward their potential level of development, enabling them to achieve greater independence in learning (Suardipa, 2020). In this context, the roles of shadow teachers may include collaborating with classroom teachers, providing individualized assistance, adapting learning materials, facilitating communication, and offering emotional support to students (Kumar, 2018; Lee, 2021; Agourida, 2024; Dewi et al., 2021; Nisa et al., 2024). Thus, the responsibilities of shadow teachers extend beyond providing academic assistance to supporting students' engagement in classroom activities and their progress toward independent learning.

In Indonesia, previous studies have

examined the contributions of shadow teachers to inclusive education, including the adaptation of learning materials, differentiated instruction, the provision of resource rooms, and individualized support (Krisma et al., 2024; Putri, 2024). In the context of English language learning, shadow teachers have also been reported to be involved in designing and modifying individualized English language learning programs for students with special needs (Parli et al., 2026). Several studies have examined English language learning in inclusive educational settings. Fauziah et al. (2023) investigated efforts to support English language learning among students with special needs in elementary schools, highlighting assessment, individualized instruction, therapy, and training for teachers and shadow teachers. Krisma et al. (2024) examined inclusive education practices in elementary-level EFL learning and reported the use of adapted learning media, teaching assistant support, seating arrangements, resource rooms, and differentiated tasks and materials. Putri and Maharsi (2025) identified challenges faced by EFL teachers in inclusive primary schools, while Tiraeni et al. (2024) examined pedagogical strategies used by English teachers to accommodate students with special needs at the junior high school level.

Research has also begun to address shadow teachers specifically in EFL contexts. Wardani and Nurhayati (2026) examined shadow teachers' roles in supporting students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in English language learning at an international school. Parli et al. (2026) focused on developing an inclusive English teaching module for shadow teachers at Sekolah Alam Langit Biru in Bengkulu. In Ecuador, Figueroa-Arteaga et al. (2025) investigated shadow teachers' roles in assisting students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in EFL learning. These studies provide important insights into inclusive EFL practices and the support provided by shadow teachers. However, they address varied educational contexts, including international schools, junior high schools, and settings outside Indonesia. Further investigation is therefore needed into how novice shadow teachers carry out their pedagogical roles and address instructional challenges in the lower grades of regular elementary schools that include students with special needs. This focus is relevant because shadow teachers with limited professional experience may encounter particular challenges

in responding to students’ individual needs and supporting their participation during EFL instruction.

The term novice generally refers to teachers in the early stages of their teaching careers. Haynes (2011), for example, defines novice teachers as those with two years of teaching experience or less. Adapting this definition to the context of shadow teaching, this study uses the term novice shadow teachers to refer to participants with six months to one year of experience. Experience, training, and an understanding of professional responsibilities and collaboration may influence how shadow teachers provide support in inclusive classrooms (Guo & Wang, 2025; Hanur et al., 2025; Yudhani & Fauziati, 2025). Examining the practices of novice shadow teachers in the lower grades can therefore provide insight into how they carry out their pedagogical responsibilities and respond to the challenges encountered during EFL instruction.

The focus on the lower grades is also relevant because students in the early years of elementary education are developing foundational academic skills and may require additional assistance to follow instructions and participate in English language learning activities (Masri & Wati, 2026; Nisa et al., 2024; Putri, 2024). Accordingly, this study aims to explore the pedagogical roles of novice shadow teachers in supporting EFL learning and to identify the challenges they encounter during instruction in the lower grades of regular elementary schools that include students with special needs. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions:

- 1. What are the pedagogical roles of novice shadow teachers in supporting EFL learning in inclusive primary classrooms?
- 2. What challenges do novice shadow teachers encounter in carrying out these roles?

Method

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive case study design to explore the pedagogical roles of shadow teachers in supporting English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning in inclusive primary classrooms. The case study approach was selected because it enables an in-depth exploration of a particular phenomenon within its specific context (Creswell, 2017). In this study, the approach was used to examine how shadow teachers provided pedagogical support,

assisted students in understanding English learning materials, and facilitated their participation in classroom activities. Therefore, this study aimed to develop a contextual understanding of shadow teachers’ pedagogical practices during EFL instruction.

Research Participants

The participants were selected using purposive sampling. They consisted of four female shadow teachers who provided direct assistance to 3 students with autism and 1 student with down syndrom during EFL learning activities in regular primary classrooms. The students were enrolled in Grades 1 and 2, and each shadow teacher assisted one student. The participants had approximately six months to one year of experience as shadow teachers and were willing to participate in the study. The study was conducted in four regular classrooms at an elementary school in Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia. The school supported inclusive education by integrating students with special educational needs into regular classroom settings. Each shadow teacher provided support to one inclusive student during English learning activities in their respective classroom. Further demographic information about the participants and the students they accompanied is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Data Demographic of Participants

P	Ages (Years)	Educational Background	Teacher Practice Experience
P1	22	Bachelor’s Degree in Islamic Education	6 Months
P2	23	Bachelor’s Degree in Elementary School Teacher Education	9 Months
P3	25	Bachelor’s Degree in Islamic Education	1 Year
P4	23	Bachelor’s Degree in Elementary School Teacher Education	6 Months

P	Grade Level	Students’ Characteristic
P1	1	Down Syndrom
P2	2	Autism
P3	2	Autism
P4	1	Autism

Note. P = Participant.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. Classroom observations were conducted during English lessons to examine the pedagogical support provided by shadow teachers, including

simplifying instructions, providing linguistic scaffolding, adapting learning activities, and supporting students' participation and interaction. Each shadow teacher was observed twice, with each observation session lasting approximately 30 minutes. An observation sheet was used to document the actions of the shadow teachers, instructional support, and their interactions with students during the lessons. One semi-structured interview was conducted with each of the four shadow teachers. The interviews explored their pedagogical roles, teaching strategies, and challenges in supporting inclusive students during EFL learning. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to explore the participants' experiences and responses in greater depth (Chand, 2025).

Data Analysis Techniques

Data obtained from classroom observations and semi-structured interviews were analyzed using the interactive data analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. These three processes occur cyclically and are interrelated to develop an in-depth understanding of the pedagogical roles of shadow teachers in supporting students with special needs during English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. During the data condensation stage, interview recordings were transcribed, while field notes from classroom observations were compiled and reviewed. The researcher examined both data sources to identify information relevant to the research focus. Interview data concerning the experiences, roles, and strategies of shadow teachers, as well as observation data concerning their practices and interactions during learning, were coded and grouped into meaningful categories. Coding was performed to organize the data into more structured categories and themes (Yin, 2009, as cited in Tapiwa Muzari, 2022). This process focused on instructional support, teaching strategies, learning accommodations, and student participation.

Furthermore, data from interviews and observations were compared to identify consistencies and differences between the experiences reported by participants and the practices observed in the classroom. The coded data were then grouped into broader categories and themes based on recurring patterns. The results of the analysis were presented in the form of descriptive narratives and thematic groupings

to facilitate interpretation. The analysis was conducted inductively by developing themes based on patterns emerging from both data sources (Tapiwa Muzari, 2022). In the conclusion drawing and verification stage, the researcher interpreted the identified themes and patterns to address the research question concerning the pedagogical roles of shadow teachers in supporting students with special needs during EFL instruction. The interpretations were continuously verified by comparing interview and observation data. This triangulation process was conducted to examine the consistency of the findings and obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the practices and experiences of shadow teachers (Miles et al., 2014).

Trustworthiness

To enhance the credibility of the findings, the researcher triangulated data from classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The two data sources were compared to identify consistencies and differences between the participants' reported experiences and their observed practices. The researcher acted as a non-participant observer and did not intervene in classroom activities. To support the dependability and confirmability of the analysis, the research process was documented through classroom observation notes, interview transcripts, and records of data coding and categorization. These records provided a basis for tracing the analytical process from the raw data to the development of themes.

Findings and Discussion

This study aims to identify the pedagogical roles performed by shadow teachers in supporting English language learning in inclusive classrooms and to uncover the challenges they face during the mentoring process. Based on the results research findings were grouped into two main categories corresponding to the research questions: (1) the role of shadow teachers in supporting English language learning and (2) the challenges faced by shadow teachers in facilitating English language learning. The results of the analysis for each category are presented in the following sections.

The role of shadow teachers in supporting English language learning

The findings indicate that shadow teachers provide pedagogical support to facilitate students' participation and understanding during English language learning in inclusive classrooms. The findings are organized into three interconnected themes: (1) instructional

adaptation and individualized support, (2) strategies for supporting English language learning, and (3) supporting students' participation and social interaction.

Instructional Adaptation and Individualized Support

The interview data indicated that shadow teachers adapted classroom explanations and provided individualized assistance according to students' learning needs. P3 explained that formal explanations delivered by the classroom teacher were sometimes difficult for students to understand: "Because not all the material the teacher explains formally in front of the class is something they can understand... so I try to keep those explanations to a minimum." (Interview, P3). This explanation was supported by classroom observations. After the classroom teacher instructed students to complete exercises in their textbooks, P3 provided additional guidance by instructing the student to begin with question number one. She also spelled out letters individually, such as "W-H-E-N" and "D-O," and guided the student throughout the task (Observation, P3). This shows how P3 simplified the learning process by breaking the task into smaller and more manageable steps.

Individualized support was also evident in P1's explanation of her assistance: "At first, I helped her so that I could encourage her to write on her own." (Interview, P1). During the observation, P1 demonstrated how to write letters according to their shapes and monitored the student's writing. When the student wrote vocabulary such as "Shoes: sepatu," P1 reminded the student to add a colon by saying, "Add a colon next to it" (Observation, P1). Similarly, the observations showed that the four shadow teachers provided assistance with opening books, holding pencils, writing vocabulary, memorizing words, and practicing pronunciation (Observations, P1-4). The shadow teachers also used concrete examples to clarify vocabulary and concepts. P3 explained that she used real objects when teaching students:

"For me, I'd say, 'This is called money...' and I'd ask them to hold it... 'It's made of paper...'" (Interview, P 3). When a vocabulary item could not be demonstrated directly, P3 encouraged the student to explore its meaning through questions. For example, when teaching the word "hospital," she asked what could be found in a hospital. The student responded that there were doctors and nurses (Observation, P3). These findings indicate that

shadow teachers did not merely repeat the classroom teacher's explanations. Instead, they adapted explanations, provided step-by-step guidance, and used concrete examples to make English learning more accessible to individual students.

Strategies for Supporting English Language Learning

The interview and observation data showed that shadow teachers used repetition, translation, visual materials, and game-based activities to support students' English learning. P3 explained that she repeatedly asked questions about vocabulary in different situations to help students remember the words:

"I say, 'What is the color?' You know, every time he holds a toy or something, I ask, 'What color is this, Boy?' So he doesn't forget that English vocabulary." (Interview, P3). This strategy was supported by observations of all four shadow teachers. P1, P2, P3, and P4 repeatedly presented English vocabulary and its meanings approximately two to three times. They also encouraged students to listen to and follow their pronunciation (Observations, P1-4). For example, P2 reinforced the expression "What are you doing?" after the classroom teacher played a related video. P3 translated English vocabulary into Indonesian and repeated its meaning, while P4 repeatedly pronounced the word "running" and encouraged the student to follow the pronunciation (Observations, P2-4).

P4 also emphasized the importance of repetition in the interview: "Like earlier, 'berenang' is 'swimming.' They'll be able to do it, right? They can. But that's just how it is; we have to get there. Then repeat it over and over..." (Interview, P4). This explanation was reflected in the observation when P4 taught the word "swimming." The student was asked to pronounce the word three times before writing it down. Thus, the interview and observation data together indicate that repetition was a commonly used strategy to reinforce vocabulary comprehension and pronunciation.

In addition to repetition, shadow teachers used games and visual materials to make learning more engaging. P3 explained: "So it's like they're learning while playing with me... because if they just focus on studying, they'll definitely get bored..." (Interview, P3)

During the observations, P1 asked the student to identify the picture representing "longan," while P3 asked the student to identify the picture representing "bookstore"

(Observations, P1, 3). These activities were accompanied by playful feedback, such as the sound “tet tot” when an answer was incorrect and praise when the student answered correctly.

P3 also explained that visual materials were helpful because the student had a visual learning preference: “He really pays attention because his learning style is visual, so he has to hear it and see it...” (Interview, P3). The interview and observation findings therefore show that shadow teachers combined repetition, translation, visual materials, and playful activities to support students’ understanding, memory, and pronunciation of English vocabulary.

Supporting Students’ Participation and Social Interaction

The interview data showed that shadow teachers supported students’ participation in classroom activities and social interaction with peers. P3 explained that students were encouraged to communicate more specifically when interacting with classmates: “You can’t say ‘this.’ What’s the proper word for it?... We teach him to be specific and use concrete terms.” (Interview, P3)

P3 also described how she supported students when they were invited to play with classmates: “Sometimes his friends also want to invite him to play... To explain to him how to do it, you have to demonstrate it first...” (Interview, P3). According to P3, she explained the rules of the game and demonstrated what the student needed to do. This support enabled the student to participate in play activities with classmates (Interview, P3).

The observations also showed that shadow teachers supported students’ participation in classroom communication. For example, when the classroom teacher asked the student, “Do you have a blue T-shirt?” P1 helped the student produce the response “Yes, I do” by supporting the student’s pronunciation (Observation, P1). In this situation, the classroom teacher initiated the interaction, while the shadow teacher provided additional linguistic support.

P2 also explained that students were encouraged to use simple English expressions in daily activities: “For example, when we go home or when we arrive at school, we say, ‘Assalamualaikum, good morning, sir,’ and it’s the same when we leave.” (Interview, P2). These findings indicate that shadow teachers supported participation not only by helping students answer classroom questions but also by encouraging

communication with peers and the use of simple English expressions in everyday situations. Their role involved mediating communication between students, classroom teachers, and classmates.

The challenges faced by shadow teachers in facilitating English language learning

The challenges encountered by shadow teachers are discussed in a separate section comprising three themes: (1) maintaining students’ attention and engagement, (2) responding to differences in students’ learning abilities and characteristics, and (3) managing students’ behavioral and emotional conditions.

Maintaining Students’ Attention and Engagement

The interview data indicated that maintaining students’ attention was one of the main challenges faced by shadow teachers. P3 explained that students often had difficulty focusing on explanations delivered by the classroom teacher: “They aren’t focused, so when the teacher is speaking at the front, they can’t focus on the teacher who’s speaking; they’ll just be focused on their own world...” (Interview, P3)

P2 similarly explained that students needed continuous encouragement when completing written tasks: “He wants to write, but he can’t focus... It’s hard to focus, right? So you have to ask him questions.” (Interview, P2). These statements were supported by observations showing that students frequently lost focus, particularly while writing vocabulary. The shadow teachers responded through verbal reminders, direct guidance, and motivational strategies. P1 encouraged the student by saying, “Come on, Ca, write so you don’t fall behind” (Observation, P1). P2 used a reward-related statement: “Come on, Kepil, write so we can get a star” (Observation, P2).

P3 redirected the student’s attention by guiding the student’s hand when the student stopped writing. Meanwhile, P4 encouraged the student to continue writing by saying, “Write again, Osman,” and supported the student by spelling the letters individually (Observations, P3,4). These findings show that maintaining students’ attention required repeated reminders, encouragement, and individualized assistance throughout the learning process.

Responding to Differences in Students’ Learning Abilities and Characteristics

The interview data showed that shadow teachers needed to adjust their explanations and strategies according to students’ different

abilities and levels of understanding. P3 explained: “They can’t focus on just one teacher, right? Especially since the explanations given are definitely hard for them to grasp because the language is quite difficult for them to understand. So, our role is to simplify things even further...” (Interview, P3)

P4 similarly stated: “Keep it simple, make it easier.” (Interview, P4). The participants also explained that repetition was necessary because students required additional opportunities to understand and remember English vocabulary. P4 stated: “We ask them questions too. So it has to be repeated over and over...” (Interview, P4). These explanations were supported by observations of the four shadow teachers. During English learning activities, the teachers provided repeated instructions and assistance with writing, memorizing, and pronouncing vocabulary (Observations, P1-4). Students frequently required prompts before initiating or continuing a task. The shadow teachers therefore provided step-by-step support, including helping students open their books, hold pencils, write words, and practice pronunciation.

P4 also acknowledged that students’ abilities could differ: “Because, for example, with typical students, they aren’t able to do it yet. Their abilities are definitely different...” (Interview, P4). The findings indicate that differences in students’ learning abilities required shadow teachers to adjust the level of explanation, repetition, and physical or verbal assistance provided during English learning activities.

Managing Students’ Behavioral and Emotional Conditions

The interview data indicated that students’ emotional states and behavior could affect the learning process. P3 explained: “Sometimes I also pay attention to their mood in class...” (Interview, P3). She explained that learning strategies were adjusted according to students’ moods. When students were in a bad mood, she used more engaging activities, whereas more structured instruction was used when students were ready to learn.

P4 also emphasized the patience required when students refused to complete tasks: “In these cases, you have to be extra patient, really patient, and the student also doesn’t want to write too much...” (Interview, P4). This explanation was supported by the observation of P4’s classroom. When the student refused to follow the instruction to write, P4 took the student for a

walk along the school corridor approximately two or three times to help calm the student (Observation, P 4). In another situation, the student became distracted while completing a writing task. Although classmates who had finished their work were allowed to go to the front of the classroom to recite memorized vocabulary, P4 asked the student to finish writing first. P4 also encouraged the student by saying, “Come on, Osman, you will get a snack when you finish” (Observation, P4).

P1 similarly explained that students’ interaction with friends could interfere with learning activities: “If, for example, she’s playing with her friend, we have to get him to focus. And we also have to tell their friend, ‘Later, okay? I need to write,’ for example.” (Interview, P 1). The interview and observation data show that shadow teachers needed to manage students’ emotional responses, reluctance to complete tasks, and distractions from peers. Their responses included calming activities, verbal encouragement, motivational support, and reminders to return to learning tasks. These challenges often required additional time and continuous adjustment during the learning process.

The findings show that shadow teachers perform pedagogical roles through instructional adaptation, individualized support, the use of various teaching strategies, and the facilitation of students’ participation in classroom activities. This finding is consistent with previous studies identifying shadow teachers as providers of individualized support, instructional adaptation, and communication assistance for students with special needs (Krisma et al., 2024; Nisa et al., 2024). However, the findings of this study indicate that these roles involve more than providing additional assistance. Shadow teachers also help connect classroom teachers’ explanations, English learning materials, and students’ levels of understanding. In EFL learning, this role is important because students need to understand instructions and vocabulary in a language that is not commonly used in everyday interactions. The observations showed that all four shadow teachers consistently repeated vocabulary, explained meanings in Indonesian, and guided students’ pronunciation (Observations, P1-4). These strategies indicate that shadow teachers adjusted the language and ways of presenting materials to make them easier for students to understand.

One form of this adjustment was the

simplification of instructional instructions. P3 explained that formal explanations provided by the classroom teacher were not always understood by the student, so she attempted to simplify them (Interview, P3). Shadow teachers also provided assistance when students experienced difficulties, lost focus, or were unable to initiate tasks. These practices indicate that their roles were influenced by students' learning needs and the immediate classroom situation. The participants' backgrounds provide additional context for understanding these practices. The participants had educational backgrounds in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and Primary School Teacher Education (PGSD), limited experience as shadow teachers, and no specific training in EFL instruction. This condition may help explain their use of practical strategies, such as translation, repetition, and the simplification of instructions, when responding to students' learning difficulties. However, their educational backgrounds and limited experience cannot automatically be interpreted as evidence of inadequate pedagogical competence.

The use of these strategies also highlights the importance of considering how learning support is provided. The use of Indonesian helped students understand vocabulary meanings and follow instructions more easily. However, when translation is used too frequently, students may have fewer opportunities to understand and use English through context and direct interaction. Therefore, the use of Indonesian needs to be adjusted to students' needs and balanced with opportunities to hear and use English. Repetition was another strategy consistently identified in the observations. All four shadow teachers repeated English vocabulary, meanings, and pronunciation during learning activities (Observations, P1-4). P4 also explained that learning materials needed to be repeated several times so that students could understand them (Interview, P4). Repetition can support students who require more time to process information or remember new materials. In EFL learning, this strategy can also strengthen the connection between word forms, pronunciation, and meaning.

However, most of the observed repetition focused on pronunciation and recalling vocabulary. Although this strategy may help students remember words, vocabulary learning should also provide opportunities to use those words in meaningful communicative contexts (Teng, 2025). Therefore, repetition can be

complemented by activities that allow students to use vocabulary in simple sentences, respond to questions, or interact with their peers. P3's explanation of using vocabulary in everyday situations indicates an effort to connect English with real-life contexts. For example, P3 asked about the color of an object held by the student so that the student would remember the relevant English vocabulary (Interview, P3). This strategy helped the student understand that vocabulary should not only be memorized but also used in particular situations. Thus, repetition can become more meaningful when combined with contextualized and communicative activities.

In addition to adapting instruction, shadow teachers provided individualized support through assistance with writing, pronunciation practice, opening books, and completing classroom tasks. This support helped students participate in learning activities with their classmates and facilitated their access to inclusive education (Kumar, 2018; Lee, 2021). Nevertheless, the findings also showed that students often waited for instructions before starting or continuing their tasks. Shadow teachers repeatedly encouraged students to write, read, or complete classroom activities. This situation indicates a challenge in balancing direct assistance with the development of student autonomy. Excessive assistance may reduce students' opportunities to attempt tasks independently. However, this study does not demonstrate that the students had become dependent on their shadow teachers.

P3 attempted to encourage the student to find answers independently by asking questions such as "What's this?" and allowing the student to try to understand the answer independently (Interview, P3). This practice indicates that shadow teachers did not always provide answers directly but also attempted to encourage students to think and respond independently. Therefore, individualized support should not be assessed only based on the amount of assistance provided but also on its contribution to students' participation and autonomy. Shadow teachers also played a role in encouraging students to participate in classroom activities and interact with their peers. For example, P1 helped a student respond to the classroom teacher's question in English, while P3 encouraged a student to raise her hand and answer a question when she knew the answer (Observation, P1; Interview, P3). These findings indicate that

shadow teachers helped students engage in communication and participate in classroom learning activities.

In one classroom situation, the classroom teacher asked a question, while the shadow teacher helped the student pronounce the answer (Observation, P1). This situation illustrates a potential form of collaboration because the classroom teacher remained responsible for initiating the learning activity, while the shadow teacher provided additional support according to the student's needs. Such collaboration can support inclusive learning when the role of the shadow teacher is understood as complementary to, rather than a replacement for, the classroom teacher. Although these practices helped students access learning and participate in classroom activities, the findings also revealed several challenges faced by shadow teachers in facilitating English language learning. These challenges included maintaining students' attention, responding to differences in learning abilities, and managing students' behavioral and emotional conditions. These difficulties reflected the complexity of supporting students with diverse learning needs during EFL instruction in regular classrooms. Shadow teachers need to provide support to students with special needs without disrupting the overall learning process in the classroom. In this situation, their limited experience as shadow teachers and the absence of specific EFL training provide important context for understanding their instructional choices. However, their decisions were also influenced by students' responses, the types of tasks, and the classroom situations in which learning took place.

The use of repetition, Indonesian translation, and direct assistance indicates that shadow teachers attempted to respond to students' needs immediately. These strategies could help students understand instructions and complete tasks. However, the findings also indicate the need to develop strategies that focus not only on task completion but also on providing opportunities for students to use English, participate in classroom interactions, and develop autonomy. Relevant training and collaboration with classroom teachers could help shadow teachers adjust their support to students' needs. For example, Indonesian may be maintained as a form of assistance when students experience difficulties, but it should be accompanied by simple English use and activities relevant to the learning context. In

addition, direct assistance can be combined with questions or prompts that allow students to attempt tasks independently.

Collaboration with classroom teachers is also important to ensure that shadow teachers and classroom teachers have a clear understanding of their respective roles in the learning process. Classroom teachers can remain responsible for leading the overall instruction, while shadow teachers provide individualized support without separating students from classroom activities. Clear role distribution may help create more focused support for students with special needs (Hanur et al., 2025; Yudhani & Fauziati, 2025). Overall, this study shows that shadow teachers play an important role in helping students access English language learning in inclusive classrooms. Their roles include adapting instructions, providing individualized support, facilitating communication, using various instructional strategies, and encouraging student participation. However, the implementation of these roles also presents challenges in balancing the use of Indonesian and English, direct assistance and student autonomy, as well as individual needs and classroom activities as a whole.

Therefore, the support provided by shadow teachers should be understood not only in terms of the amount of assistance given but also its suitability to students' needs and its contribution to classroom participation. Relevant training, reflection on instructional practices, and collaboration with classroom teachers may help shadow teachers develop more appropriate support for EFL learning in inclusive educational settings.

Conclusion

This study examined the pedagogical roles and challenges faced by four shadow teachers in supporting English language learning for students with special needs in an inclusive primary school. The findings show that shadow teachers provided pedagogical support to help students understand instruction and participate in English learning activities in the inclusive classroom. More specifically, the findings were organized into three main themes: (1) instructional adaptation and individualized support, (2) strategies for supporting English language learning, and (3) support for students' participation and social interaction. Meanwhile, the challenges faced by the shadow teachers included (1) maintaining students' attention and engagement, (2) responding to differences in

students' learning abilities and characteristics, and (3) managing students' behavioral and emotional conditions. The findings also indicate challenges in balancing direct assistance with opportunities for students to develop independence, as well as the use of Indonesian with opportunities to engage with English.

Based on these findings, shadow teachers may benefit from relevant guidance, clear coordination with classroom teachers, and support in developing strategies that address students' needs in EFL learning. However, the conclusions are limited to four shadow teachers in one school and should be understood within the context of this study. The study also did not directly measure students' English language development or learning outcomes. Future research could involve more participants, different school contexts, and longer observation periods to develop a broader understanding of shadow teachers' practices and their support for students' participation and independence in inclusive EFL classrooms.

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