



Research Article

The role of emotion regulation in mitigating work stress among shadow teachers in inclusive schools

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Abstract

Shadow teachers play a vital role in supporting students with special educational needs in inclusive schools. High job demands, intensive emotional involvement, and continuous support responsibilities may increase their vulnerability to work-related stress. This study aimed to examine the effect of emotion regulation on work stress among shadow teachers in inclusive schools. A quantitative non-experimental correlational design was employed. Participants consisted of 255 shadow teachers who actively supported students with special educational needs and were selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected using an Emotion Regulation Scale based on Gross's theory and the Job Stress Scale adapted from Parker and DeCotiis. Data were analyzed using simple linear regression. The results indicated that emotion regulation significantly predicted work stress among shadow teachers ($\beta = .541$, $t = 10.228$, $p = .001$). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .293$) showed that emotion regulation accounted for 29.3% of the variance in work stress, while the remaining 70.7% was explained by other factors outside the study. Descriptive findings revealed that most participants reported moderate levels of emotion regulation (60%) and work stress (66%). These findings suggest that emotion regulation plays an important role in the work stress experienced by shadow teachers. Therefore, strengthening emotion regulation competencies and providing psychological support within inclusive schools may help improve the well-being and professional effectiveness of shadow teachers.

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Introduction

Inclusive education has become a global educational priority aimed at ensuring equitable access to quality education for all learners, including students with special educational needs (SEN). The successful implementation of inclusive education requires not only inclusive policies and accessible learning environments but also adequate educational personnel capable of addressing students' diverse academic, behavioral, and socio-emotional needs. Among these professionals, shadow teachers play an important role in supporting students with SEN by facilitating classroom participation, managing behavioral challenges, promoting social interaction, and assisting students in adapting to school routines. As a result, shadow teachers are required to maintain intensive interactions with students and provide continuous individualized support throughout the learning process (Hriday et al., 2024).

Teaching has long been recognized as an emotionally demanding profession. The challenges become more complex in inclusive educational settings where teachers and support personnel must respond to diverse student characteristics and needs. Shadow teachers often encounter emotionally challenging situations, including behavioral problems,

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communication difficulties, emotional outbursts, and learning barriers experienced by students with SEN. These conditions require sustained emotional involvement and may increase vulnerability to occupational stress (Sessiani & Syukur, 2020).

Occupational stress refers to a psychological condition that arises when perceived job demands exceed an individual's resources and coping capacities. In educational contexts, prolonged occupational stress may negatively affect psychological well-being, job satisfaction, teaching effectiveness, and professional performance. High levels of stress have also been associated with emotional exhaustion, burnout, and increased intentions to leave the profession, making occupational stress a significant concern for educational institutions (McLean et al., 2023).

One psychological factor that may help individuals cope with workplace demands is emotion regulation. Gross (1998) defined emotion regulation as the processes through which individuals influence which emotions they experience, when they experience them, and how they express those emotions. According to the Process Model of Emotion Regulation, individuals regulate emotions through several strategies, including situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation. Effective emotion regulation enables individuals to manage negative emotional reactions and adapt more successfully to stressful situations (Gross, 1998, 2002).

Emotion regulation has received increasing attention in educational research because of its contribution to teacher well-being and professional effectiveness. Teachers who possess effective emotion regulation skills tend to demonstrate greater resilience, higher occupational well-being, and lower levels of stress and burnout. Conversely, difficulties in regulating emotions are associated with psychological distress and reduced professional functioning. A recent meta-analysis found that adaptive emotion regulation strategies are positively associated with teacher well-being, motivation, and teaching effectiveness, whereas maladaptive strategies tend to predict poorer outcomes (Wang et al., 2023).

For shadow teachers, emotion regulation is particularly important because their professional responsibilities extend beyond academic assistance. They are expected to support students in managing behavioral difficulties, emotional challenges, attention problems, and social interaction barriers while simultaneously maintaining constructive relationships with classroom teachers, parents, and school administrators. These responsibilities expose shadow teachers to emotionally demanding situations that require patience, empathy, flexibility, and self-control. Consequently, emotion regulation may serve as an important psychological resource that helps shadow teachers cope with occupational stress and maintain professional effectiveness (Hriday et al., 2024; Sessiani & Syukur, 2020).

Previous studies have reported significant associations between emotion regulation and occupational well-being among teachers and educational professionals. Research has consistently shown that individuals with stronger emotion regulation abilities experience lower levels of stress, burnout, and psychological distress while demonstrating better coping capacities and overall well-being (Gross, 2002; Wang et al., 2023). However, empirical studies specifically examining the relationship between emotion regulation and occupational stress among shadow teachers remain limited. Existing research has predominantly focused on general education teachers, special education teachers, or educators in inclusive settings without specifically addressing the unique experiences of shadow teachers (Hriday et al., 2024).

This limitation is important because shadow teachers occupy a distinctive position within inclusive education. Unlike classroom teachers, shadow teachers provide individualized and intensive support to specific students with SEN, exposing them to unique emotional and occupational demands. Understanding factors that contribute to their occupational well-being is therefore essential for enhancing both the quality and sustainability of inclusive education services.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationship between emotion regulation and occupational stress among shadow teachers working in inclusive schools. The findings are expected to contribute to the literature on inclusive education and teacher well-being by providing empirical evidence regarding the role of emotion regulation as a protective psychological resource for managing occupational stress among shadow teachers.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, non-experimental correlational design to examine the relationship between emotion regulation and occupational stress among shadow teachers working in inclusive schools. A correlational approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to investigate naturally occurring relationships between variables without manipulating or controlling participants' experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition, simple regression analysis was used to examine the predictive role of emotion regulation in occupational stress.

Participants

The participants were 255 shadow teachers who actively provided educational support to students with special educational needs (SEN) in inclusive schools. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique in which respondents are chosen based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2022).

To be eligible for participation, individuals had to meet two inclusion criteria: (a) actively serve as a shadow teacher in an inclusive school and (b) have a minimum of six months of work experience. The sample size was determined based on the recommendation of Hair et al. (2010), which suggests a minimum sample size of five respondents per measurement item in multivariate research. Given that the instruments consisted of 51 items in total, the minimum required sample size was 255 participants.

Data were collected using both online and offline methods. Offline data collection was conducted directly in several inclusive schools, while online data were gathered through Google Forms distributed via social media platforms, including WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok.

Data Collection Tools

Emotion Regulation Scale

Emotion regulation was measured using a scale developed based on Gross's (2014) emotion regulation framework and adapted by Sari and Naqiyah (2023). The instrument assesses four dimensions of emotion regulation: (1) strategies to emotion regulation, (2) engaging in goal-directed behavior, (3) control of emotional responses, and (4) acceptance of emotional responses.

The scale consists of 38 items, including 19 favorable and 19 unfavorable statements. Participants responded using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Unfavorable items were reverse-scored. Higher scores indicate higher levels of emotion regulation.

Previous research reported excellent reliability for the scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .979$; Sari & Naqiyah, 2023). In the present study, the instrument demonstrated excellent internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .950. Item-total correlation coefficients ranged from .138 to .711. An example item is: "I clearly understand my own feelings."

Occupational Stress Scale

Occupational stress was measured using the Job Stress Scale developed by Parker and DeCotiis (1983) and adapted into the Indonesian context by Hadiyanti and Sari (2025). The instrument consists of 13 items representing two dimensions: time stress and anxiety.

Participants responded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate higher levels of occupational stress. The scale demonstrated high internal consistency in the present study, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .907.

Procedure

Participants were informed about the objectives of the study and assured that their participation was voluntary and confidential. Informed consent was obtained before data collection. The questionnaires were administered through both paper-based and online formats to facilitate broader participation among shadow teachers working in inclusive schools.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize participant characteristics and study variables. Prior to hypothesis testing, a normality test was conducted to examine the distribution of the data. Pearson correlation analysis was used to assess the relationship between emotion regulation and occupational stress, while simple linear regression analysis was performed to determine the predictive contribution of emotion regulation to occupational stress. Statistical significance was established at $p < .05$ (Field, 2018).

Results

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1. Distribution of emotion regulation and work stress levels among shadow teachers

Variable	Category	f	%
Emotion Regulation	High	50	19
	Moderate	152	60
	Low	53	21
	Total	255	100
Work Stress	High	47	18
	Moderate	167	66
	Low	41	16
	Total	255	100

As presented in Table 1, the majority of shadow teachers demonstrated a moderate level of emotion regulation, accounting for 152 participants (60%). This was followed by low emotion regulation (21%) and high emotion regulation (19%). Similarly, most participants reported a moderate level of work stress (66%), whereas 18% experienced high work stress and 16% reported low work stress. These findings suggest that, overall, shadow teachers in inclusive schools tend to exhibit moderate levels of both emotion regulation and work-related stress.

Regression Analysis

Table 2. Results of simple linear regression analysis

Predictor Variable	R	R ²	B	β	t	p
Emotion Regulation	0.541	0.293	0.204	0.541	10.228	0.001

The results of the simple linear regression analysis revealed a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.541 and a coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.293. These findings indicate that emotion regulation explained 29.3% of the variance in work stress among shadow teachers, while the remaining 70.7% was attributable to other factors not examined in the present study.

Furthermore, the standardized regression coefficient showed a significant effect of emotion regulation on work stress ($\beta = 0.541$, $t = 10.228$, $p = .001$). Therefore, emotion regulation was found to be a significant predictor of work stress among shadow teachers working in inclusive schools. Accordingly, the research hypothesis was supported.

Hypothesis Testing

The findings demonstrate that emotion regulation significantly influences work stress among shadow teachers in inclusive educational settings. The regression model indicates that emotion regulation contributes substantially to explaining variations in work stress levels. Consequently, individuals with better emotion regulation abilities are likely to experience different levels of work stress compared to those with poorer emotion regulation skills, confirming the proposed hypothesis.

Discussion

The present study found that emotion regulation had a significant positive effect on work stress among shadow teachers working in inclusive schools. This finding differs from the majority of previous studies, which generally report that effective emotion regulation is associated with lower levels of stress and better psychological well-being (Gross, 2015; Aldao et al., 2010). The positive relationship observed in this study may be explained by the unique occupational

characteristics of shadow teachers, whose roles require intensive emotional involvement and continuous interaction with students with special educational needs (SEN).

Shadow teachers are expected to provide individualized support, manage students' behavioral and emotional challenges, and facilitate communication between students, classroom teachers, and parents. Such responsibilities require substantial emotional investment and constant adaptation to complex educational situations. Consequently, individuals experiencing higher levels of occupational demands may engage more frequently in emotion regulation strategies as a means of coping with workplace stressors. In this context, higher emotion regulation scores may reflect greater efforts to manage emotional strain rather than indicating the absence of stress. Similar findings have been reported among special education professionals, where emotion regulation functions as a coping mechanism in response to demanding work environments (Mulyani et al., 2021).

Within inclusive educational settings, the role of shadow teachers extends beyond academic assistance. They are responsible for supporting students' social participation, behavioral adjustment, emotional development, and successful integration into classroom activities. According to Kadriu et al. (2024), support assistants for students with special educational needs play a crucial role in promoting student engagement and educational success in inclusive schools. However, the complexity of these responsibilities may simultaneously increase emotional burden and contribute to elevated levels of occupational stress. Therefore, the positive association identified in this study may indicate that shadow teachers who encounter greater workplace challenges are also required to employ more extensive emotion regulation strategies.

The descriptive findings revealed that most participants demonstrated moderate levels of both emotion regulation and work stress. This pattern suggests that shadow teachers possess a relatively adequate capacity to manage their emotional experiences while continuing to face occupational pressures associated with their professional responsibilities. These findings further indicate that emotion regulation is not the sole determinant of work stress. Previous research has shown that occupational stress is influenced by multiple psychological and environmental factors, including self-compassion, emotional labor, resilience, social support, and other psychological resources (Hu, 2023). Additionally, work experience, collegial support, positive relationships with students, and supportive school environments may contribute to teachers' ability to cope effectively with professional demands.

Although most respondents reported moderate levels of work stress, the presence of individuals experiencing high levels of occupational stress warrants particular attention. Research has consistently demonstrated that special education professionals are vulnerable to psychological strain resulting from job demands, student characteristics, and organizational factors (McGrew et al., 2023). For shadow teachers, stress may arise from prolonged interactions with students who require intensive support, expectations to provide optimal assistance, and pressures from both schools and parents. If such demands persist without adequate institutional support, they may negatively affect job satisfaction, concentration, professional performance, and overall psychological well-being.

The significant contribution of emotion regulation to work stress identified in this study highlights the importance of emotional competencies among shadow teachers. In practice, emotion regulation can be reflected in teachers' ability to manage emotional reactions, respond adaptively to stressful situations, and maintain constructive interactions with students and other educational stakeholders. Furthermore, intervention studies suggest that mindfulness-based programs may help educational professionals enhance emotional awareness and reduce occupational stress (Hidajat et al., 2023). Therefore, strengthening emotion regulation skills through professional development programs, psychological support services, and stress-management interventions may be beneficial for improving the well-being and effectiveness of shadow teachers in inclusive educational settings.

Overall, the present findings contribute to the growing literature on occupational well-being among inclusive education professionals by demonstrating that emotion regulation is significantly associated with work stress among shadow teachers. Future research should explore additional psychological and contextual factors that may influence occupational stress, including self-efficacy, resilience, organizational support, workload, and burnout, in order to

develop a more comprehensive understanding of psychological functioning among professionals working in inclusive education.

Conclusion

This study examined the effect of emotion regulation on work stress among shadow teachers working in inclusive schools. The findings revealed that emotion regulation significantly predicted work stress, supporting the proposed hypothesis. Specifically, a positive relationship was identified, indicating that higher levels of emotion regulation were associated with higher levels of work stress among shadow teachers.

This finding suggests that shadow teachers who experience greater occupational demands may engage more intensively in emotion regulation strategies to manage the emotional challenges arising from their professional responsibilities. Given the complex nature of their role, which involves continuous support for students with special educational needs, communication with teachers and parents, and behavioral management, emotion regulation may function as an adaptive response to demanding work conditions rather than solely as a protective factor against stress.

Furthermore, the descriptive results indicated that most participants reported moderate levels of both emotion regulation and work stress. This pattern suggests that shadow teachers generally possess adequate emotional management skills; however, they continue to encounter moderate levels of occupational stress due to the complexity and intensity of their work. Therefore, emotion regulation should not be considered the sole determinant of work stress, as other psychological, interpersonal, and organizational factors may also contribute to occupational well-being among shadow teachers.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on inclusive education by highlighting the significant role of emotion regulation in understanding work stress among shadow teachers and emphasizing the importance of supporting their psychological well-being within inclusive educational environments.

Recommendations

Practical Implications

The findings underscore the importance of strengthening emotion regulation competencies among shadow teachers. Educational institutions and inclusive schools are encouraged to provide professional development programs that focus on emotional competence, stress management, mindfulness practices, and psychological well-being. Establishing supportive work environments through peer support, supervision, and access to mental health resources may also help shadow teachers cope more effectively with occupational demands and reduce the risk of prolonged work-related stress.

Future Research Directions

Future studies are encouraged to investigate additional factors that may influence work stress among shadow teachers, including self-compassion, emotional labor, resilience, social support, self-efficacy, and organizational support. Moreover, longitudinal and mixed-methods research designs may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamic relationship between emotion regulation and occupational stress in inclusive educational settings.

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