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## The Shadow Education System in Bangladesh: A Blessing or a Curse?

### Abstract

This paper defines shadow education as private supplementary tutoring that is fee-based and parallel to mainstream schooling. The study focuses specific attention on the underlying determinants of this private tutoring. This research covers the costs, patterns, intensity, and scale of private tutoring. It also provides detailed insight into the negative and positive implications of coaching, and on the impact that private education has on the educational and social lives of learners in Bangladesh. The paper also analyses the different private tutoring patterns in English, as well as the amount of tutoring offered and not offered in Bangladesh. These key points lead to determining whether the shadow education system in Bangladesh is a curse or a blessing. According to the research conducted in 5 regions in Bangladesh using qualitative method and research design questionnaire 70% support private supplementary education, 30% do not support its development and 100% of participants stated that the emergence of private tutoring was brought about by the low salary of teachers and desires of parents for the academic success of their children.

Keywords: shadow education, scale and pattern of tutoring, impact, private tutoring in English

### Introduction

The number of students from Bangladesh attending top-ranking institutions of higher learning is on the increase yearly (Hamid, Sussex & Khan, 2009, p. 291). Many students will not sit for their examinations unless they have received intense tutoring outside the school environment (Holmes, 1981). They are coached on every subject, which means that more than one private tutor is involved.

The top schools in Dhaka, Bangladesh have strict selection policies and operate with the intention of student equality in all aspects. Schools are expected to offer the best platform for students to pursue life goals in leadership and sports (Carnoy & Levin, 1985). However, the top schools in Bangladesh should revisit their roles if they want students to depend on them as coaching centers.

Two critical policy issues arise from the education system of Bangladesh. Firstly, it appears that subjects are poorly taught in regular schools since students have to resort to private tutoring to achieve better examination performance. The question, therefore, arises as to the use of school funds. The second issue is the question as to whether the schools are providing students with the skills they need to cope with life and be able to participate as engaged citizens? (Bray, 2007, p. 67).

### *Research questions*

1. What are the benefits of private tutoring in Bangladesh?
2. What are the repercussions of private tutoring in Bangladesh?

3. What are the main factors that lead to the spread of private tutoring in Bangladesh?

### *Research objectives*

1. To establish the benefits of private tutoring to students, parents, teachers, and community in Bangladesh.
2. To identify the repercussions associated with private tutoring in Bangladesh.
3. To discuss the factors that lead to the spread of private tutoring in Bangladesh.

### *Definition of key terms*

Many parameters need to be introduced to identify the nature of shadow education in Bangladesh.

- Firstly, I define supplementation. In this paper, I will focus on tutoring related to subjects that are covered in the schools.
- Secondly, the focus will be on the tutoring services that are provided by private business persons or organizations for making a profit.
- Thirdly, the paper comprehensively focuses on how subjects taught help pupils acquire advanced levels of understanding.

The research does not include artistic, musical or sporting skills learned for pleasure and personal development.

### **Literature review**

Hazelkorn (2007, p. 15) states that decision makers and education planners around the globe have focused on promoting education across institutions, from primary to university. However, the development of a parallel system of education has continuously captured the attention of many people but has evaded policymakers and researchers. The practice has spread to developed countries as well and has had an impact on the mainstream system of education.

Nonetheless, the parallel education method has some advantages, including increasing teacher-student interaction and the income levels of teachers (Wolhuter et al., 2013). Guardians or parents have also employed private tutoring as a means of encouraging their children to focus on their future. The Indian researcher Sujata stated that since teachers are involved in coaching, they rarely attach importance to classroom teaching, but instead try to convince students to attend private coaching (Mahmud & Kenayathulla, 2018, p. 703).

Private teaching has a positive social impact; many articles note that it provides a chance for learners to establish relationships with neighbors, peer students, and students of the other gender (Manzon & Arepattamannil, 2014, p. 390). Nath shows in his 2005 research that, of Bangladeshi primary students, 28.1% boys and 33.8% girls sought the services of a private tutor (Nath, 2008, p. 55). Another study states that in Cambodia, village school students in grades one to three did not attend individual tutoring, but they sought these services in higher grade levels (Bray et al., 2016, p. 291).

Private education is understood to be more important in urban as opposed to rural settings. This is due to the higher levels of income in urban areas that cannot be

matched in country settings. Secondly, the levels of competition are more intense in urban centers due to the influence of the labor market that calls for higher quality education (Chambers, 2014).

### **Social, economic and educational impact**

This section introduces the impact of shadow education as noted by various studies. The shadow system of Bangladesh is different from others, because of the way in which it affects the mainstream system that it tries to copy. The influence of private tutoring on the nation's economic and social development will also be explored.

#### *Impact on academic achievement*

The effects of private tutoring on academic achievement are challenging to identify because of the many factors that are in play. Malleable factors such as homework frequency, human resources, family interest and interactions between parents and teachers influence the rate of private tutoring. The need for extra instruction is regarded as the most significant malleable factor since it is essential to understand how it relates to academic achievement. The students who are benefiting from supplementary tutoring have improved and now have excellent academic performance.

#### *Private tutoring and mainstream schooling*

This section explores the impact that individual supplementary tutoring has on the dimensions of mainstream schooling. For example, if all the students in the urban centers of Dhaka have private tutoring, mainstream teachers would need to increase their efforts in the classroom (Zhan et al., 2013, p. 495). The difference in knowledge levels may cause some teachers to actively respond by helping slower learners.

For many years now since the 1990s, the mainstream education system in Bangladesh has lost its most talented mainstream teachers to the shadow system. Some teachers practice a deliberate decline in their syllabus delivery in order to create an opportunity for outside classes that are more profitable.

In Bangladesh public schools, students are expected to achieve many goals. These include developing as a well-rounded person, with the musical, sporting, and academic interests, as well as civic awareness, courtesy and national pride. In retaliation, the mainstream education system could be required to keep all students of a given grade together for the purpose of reducing the number of low achievers. By contrast, examination-oriented institutions cut the irrelevant content as a means to achieving high exam scores.

#### *Social implications*

The shadow school movement has incurred social repercussions, such as pressure placed on students, social relationships and increasing social inequalities. These will be further explored in this section.

### *Social relationships*

The education system can affect students' positive social relationships, including family connections. If children are forced to spend most of their time on school subjects, this would keep them away from their parents for long periods and weaken the family bonds of affection. The risk of poor youth supervision may also compound critical social problems. Furthermore, some studies claim that children attend classes without proper rest or food, and they return home very late and tired. Some of them suffer from stress, depression and drop out of school. Some of them look for employment opportunities and get mistreated when they are very young. Tutoring has been viewed as a significant catalyst for racial inequalities, where mainly only rich and wealth are able to access it (Bray, 1999).

### *Implications for the economy*

Much literature has focused on the degree of interest among people in education, which has covered mainstreams systems, and this can be expanded into private tutoring. Much empirical evidence has demonstrated that individuals having higher formal education have a greater chance of attracting higher earnings, compared to those with lower levels (Aurini, Dierkes & Davies, 2013). Education has also been viewed as an integral mechanism for economic development and this could also include tutoring.

## **Policy responses and options**

The above discussion indicates that the government policies on education related to supplementary tutoring must start with an assessment of the context. The underpayment of teachers encourages them to provide private education as a means of gaining adequate income. In the locations where teachers are paid well, they do not need to work outside the classroom. Similarly, the setting of supplementary tutoring offered by personnel not teaching in the mainstream schools are different from those where mainstream teachers provide private instruction. In Bangladesh, the following alternative approaches have been identified as relevant to shadow education. They are explained, as follows.

### *Laissez-faire approach*

In many nations, government planners and policymakers have established long traditions that ignore the shadow education system. This policy of non-intervention is a reflection of the laissez-faire approach. In other communities, the system is in existence by default, mainly because the personnel has been overwhelmed by pressing demands (Yang, 2015).

Supporters of the laissez-faire approach to private supplementary tutoring have put forth strong arguments for their views. One is that the markets provide self-regulation by securing the balance of prices and quality. The forces in the market can provide diversity and match consumers with producers. Another argument is that governments should stay out of the private tutoring domain due to the complexity of the arena. In many countries, the states are already involved in mainstream schooling, so the national authorities try to minimize their engagement as a means of reducing the burden on taxpayers and giving the market forces greater superiority.

### *Monitoring*

This type of approach involves securing information on the size and impact of the shadow sector. The resulting information can be added to mainstream education planning, alongside other social services. The government also must have information on the income that tutors receive for tax collection purposes, as well as to determine the wages of mainstream teachers (Bray, 1999).

### *Regulation and control*

This active form of government engagement covers a wide range of alternatives regarding shadow education. For instance, they may develop regulations on non-educational issues, such as adequate ventilation at tutoring sites. Additionally, more extensive rules may be needed to cover fees as well as the size of classes. These regulations would need to be backed up with sanctions and inspections. An example of this situation in Hong Kong, where specifications have been developed for organizations that provide lessons to 1-20 people; they are required to register with the education department of the government (Bray, 1999).

### *Encouragement*

This type of alternative approach, involving active support, offers a policy based on the idea that tutoring provides tailored instruction for pupils' needs and contributes to human capital. This approach affects individuals in terms of capital and not a society's capital where it is taking place. The Singapore government gives non-profit organizations the prestige of running private tutoring, which has improved the income levels of tutors (Bray, 1999). Private education has been viewed, then, as an employment opportunity.

### *Prohibition*

The most extreme approach to private tutoring is implementing a total ban on all commercial activities related to the practice. Examples of this approach can be seen in Mauritius, Cambodia, Republic of Korea and Myanmar; however, this ban has not been enforced in all these countries.

## **Methodology**

This research paper utilized a qualitative methodology, where random sampling was conducted. To be specific, 5 urban-based regions were randomly chosen for qualitative analysis. 20 people were chosen from every region, where they represented teachers, parents, students, government and non-government agents to represent the whole population of Bangladesh. The questionnaire research design was used where each participant provided the benefits, effects, and ways that lead to emerging private tutoring.

## **Results**

After the survey was conducted the following results were drawn:

- 70% of the participants agreed that private tutoring has assisted students to perform well in schools.

- 25% of the participants were against private tutoring as it leads to inequality in society.
- 5% of the participants stated that lack of good salary for teachers and parents' desires for their children to perform well in school are the main factors that lead to emergence of private tutoring in Bangladesh.

## Recommendations

The strategies that may be effective towards the realization of this course are listed below. These recommendations can be considered and used by the government, policymakers, education ministries or even school heads to improve the learning process in their institutions.

- Convincing parents and students the mainstream system will give their children the necessary skills and education will reduce the need for private tutoring.
- The system of assessment should be reformed to omit the ranking of students.
- Teachers should also be encouraged to support slow learners. This task can be achieved through the involvement of professional bodies that offer guidance and training services.
- Public awareness should be created, in order to reduce the demand for excessive private tutoring.

## Conclusion

This research shows the widespread nature of shadow education and its organic nature in Bangladesh. Supplementary tutoring has significant economic and social implications, as well as an effect on the mainstream education system. The key message of this paper is that shadow education needs more attention from planners, researchers, and policymakers. Private tutoring can have positive effects, ranging from increasing knowledge to providing a framework for youth's afterschool time. However, researchers need to study the nature and influence of different types of private tutoring on economic development and social inequalities. Therefore, individual tutoring is not currently an unmixed blessing in Bangladesh but in many respects a curse, its negative sides outweigh the minimal positive ones.

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