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Private Tutoring in Bangladesh: Its Implications and Suggestions for Policy Change, in Order to Mitigate Its Adverse Effects on the Education System

Abstract

Private tutoring has become a pervasive phenomenon in Bangladesh, with significant implications for educational equity and quality. This paper examines the policy landscape surrounding private tutoring and proposes comprehensive strategies to mitigate its adverse effects on the education system. Through a systematic review of existing literature and policy documents, this study elucidates the multifaceted challenges posed by private tutoring, including exacerbating educational inequalities, compromising teacher accountability, and perpetuating a two-tiered education system. Drawing on insights from international experiences and stakeholder consultations, the paper presents a framework for policy interventions tailored to the context of Bangladesh. These interventions encompass regulatory measures, teacher training and capacity-building initiatives, curriculum reforms, and community engagement strategies. Furthermore, the paper explores the potential synergies between formal schooling and supplementary tutoring services to harness the benefits of private tutoring while addressing its negative externalities. By illuminating the complex dynamics surrounding private tutoring and offering evidence-based policy recommendations, this research aims to catalyze informed dialogue and action among policymakers, educators, and civil society stakeholders to foster a more equitable and inclusive education system in Bangladesh.

Keywords: private tutoring, educational equity, policy responses, Bangladesh curriculum reforms

Introduction

Today's education system in Bangladesh is challenged by the widespread and growing phenomenon of private tutoring. According to a recent survey, about 75% of secondary school students and 35% of primary school students in Bangladesh receive some form of private tutoring (Alam & Zhu, 2021). This paper examines its effects on the quality and equity of education and proposes policy responses. It explores the causes and consequences of private tutoring, its impact on students' learning and opportunities, the current policies and regulations, the best practices and lessons learned from other countries, and the possible policy interventions. This topic is significant and relevant for the learning and well-being of millions of students, the professional and ethical standards of teachers, the education system as a whole, and the society and the economy (Bray, 2017).

Private tutoring in Bangladesh, the history behind it

Private tutoring in Bangladesh has a rich and intricate history that stretches back to the colonial period and the evolution of the modern education framework. In the era of British rule, private tutoring was primarily accessible to the affluent classes who had the means to engage tutors for their children, particularly to ready them for rigorous competitive examinations. After the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, private tutoring became more widespread and accessible, as the demand for education increased and the supply of public schools and teachers remained inadequate (Alam & Zhu, 2022). It has also become more diverse and differentiated, as various types and modes of tutoring emerged, such as individual, group, coaching center, online, and home-based tutoring (Hamid et al., 2009).

This system of private tutoring has been influenced by several socio-economic and cultural factors, such as the high-stakes examination system, the low quality of public education, parental aspirations and expectations, the social norms and pressures, and the economic opportunities and incentives (Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2016). Classroom environments which facilitate a positive culture, as well as healthy associations, are critical for motivating learners to study more (Mustary, 2019).

Private tutoring has also been affected by political and policy developments, such as the introduction of the National Education Policy in 2010, the expansion of the madrasah education system, and the regulation of the coaching centers (Majumder, 2014). Private tutoring in Bangladesh has thus evolved and expanded over time, reflecting the changing needs and realities of the society and the education system.

Existing literature on private tutoring and its impact on educational equity and quality

While private tutoring has been extensively researched, and debated, there are still gaps and limitations in the existing literature and knowledge on this phenomenon, especially in the context of Bangladesh. Most of the studies have adopted a quantitative approach, using survey data and statistical methods, to measure and compare the prevalence, expenditure, and impact of private tutoring (Bray, 2017). However, these studies have not sufficiently explored the qualitative aspects, such as the perspectives, experiences, and motivations of the stakeholders, and the dynamics and complexities of the tutoring phenomenon. For instance, Subedi (2018) conducted a qualitative study on private tutoring in Bangladesh, using interviews and focus group discussions with students, parents, teachers, and tutors. They found that private tutoring was influenced by various factors, such as the examination system, the quality of public education, the parental aspirations and expectations, the social norms and pressures, and the economic opportunities and incentives.

They also found that private tutoring had diverse and contradictory effects on the stakeholders, such as enhancing or reducing the students' learning and well-being, increasing or decreasing the teachers' income and professional development, and creating or resolving the educational inequalities and conflict (Subedi, 2018).

Additionally, the existing literature on private tutoring and its impact on educational equity and quality has also revealed mixed and contradictory findings, which may reflect the different contexts, methods, and perspectives of the studies. On the one hand, some studies have suggested that private tutoring can have positive effects on the students'

academic performance, confidence, and motivation, as well as on the teachers' income and professional development. Dongre and Tewary (2015) conducted a randomized controlled trial in India, where they provided free private tutoring to a group of low-performing students, and compared their outcomes with a control group of students who did not receive tutoring. They found that private tutoring improved the students' test scores, attendance, and self-confidence, and also increased the teachers' earnings and satisfaction. On the other hand, some studies have indicated that private tutoring can have negative effects on the students' learning and well-being, as well as on the teachers' accountability and ethics.

Similarly, private tutoring might sometimes create stress and anxiety for students hence reducing their interest and creativity in learning, and compromise their physical and mental health. It can also undermine the accountability and responsibility of the teachers in the public schools, as they neglected their duties, reduced their efforts, or lowered their standards, and instead focused on their private tutoring activities (Rahman et al., 2018). Private tutoring can also create or widen educational inequalities, as it may favor the students who can afford and access quality tutoring, and disadvantage the students who cannot. For example, Azmat et al. (2021) found that private tutoring had a positive and significant effect on the students' test scores, but this effect varied across different groups of students, depending on their socio-economic status, gender, location, and type of school.

The study stressed that private tutoring increased the achievement gap between the rich and the poor, the urban and the rural, and the English-medium and the Bangla-medium students. Furthermore, some studies have argued that private tutoring can undermine the quality and relevance of the formal education system, as it may distort the curriculum, the assessment, and the learning outcomes. Chowdhury and Haque (2018) conducted a qualitative study in Bangladesh, where they interviewed students, parents, teachers, and tutors, and analyzed the curriculum and the assessment of the secondary English education. They found that private tutoring deviated from or contradicted the official syllabus, objectives, and standards of the English education, and instead focused on rote memorization, exam preparation, and grammar rules. They also found that private tutoring distorted the balance and breadth of the English curriculum, as it emphasized or overemphasized certain topics or skills, and neglected or ignored others.

Identification of key challenges associated with private tutoring in Bangladesh

Based on the review of the existing literature, the following key challenges and issues associated with private tutoring in Bangladesh can be identified:

- **Educational inequalities:** Private tutoring can exacerbate the existing disparities and gaps in the education system, such as the urban-rural divide, the gender gap, the socio-economic stratification, and the religious segmentation (Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2016). Private tutoring can also create new forms of inequalities, such as the quality and cost of tutoring, the availability and accessibility of tutoring, and the opportunity and outcome of tutoring (Nath & Sylva, 2015).
- **Teacher accountability:** Private tutoring can compromise the accountability and responsibility of the teachers in the public schools, as they may neglect their duties, reduce their efforts, or lower their standards, and instead focus on their

private tutoring activities (Rahman & Pandian, 2018). Private tutoring can also create conflicts of interest and ethical dilemmas for the teachers, as they may favor or pressure their students to join their private tutoring classes, or manipulate the curriculum or the examination to suit their tutoring interests (Hamid et al., 2009).

- **Curriculum alignment:** Private tutoring can undermine the alignment and coherence of the curriculum and the assessment in the formal education system, as it may deviate from or contradict the official syllabus, objectives, and standards (Chowdhury & Haque, 2018). Private tutoring can also distort the balance and breadth of the curriculum, as it may emphasize or overemphasize certain subjects, topics, or skills, and neglect or ignore others (Alam et al., 2022).
- **Quality assurance:** Private tutoring can pose challenges and difficulties for the quality assurance and regulation of the education system, as it may operate in an informal, unregulated, or unmonitored manner. Private tutoring can also vary widely in terms of the quality and effectiveness of the tutoring services, depending on the qualifications, competencies, and practices of the tutors, and the expectations and satisfaction of the students and parents (Sujauddin & Hossain, 2017).

Research objectives and questions

The research objectives of this study are to understand and address the adverse effects of private tutoring on students, teachers, and society in Bangladesh. It has become a widespread phenomenon in many countries, especially in Bangladesh, where it is seen as a means to enhance academic achievement and competitiveness. However, private tutoring also has negative consequences, such as increasing educational inequality, undermining the quality and relevance of formal schooling, and creating psychological and financial burdens for students and parents. To achieve the research objectives, the study will address the following specific research questions:

1. What are the main factors that influence the demand and supply of private tutoring in Bangladesh?
2. What are the impacts of private tutoring on students' academic performance, motivation, well-being, and socialization in Bangladesh?
3. What are the impacts of private tutoring on teachers' professional development, workload, and ethics?
4. What are the impacts of private tutoring on the formal education system, the labor market, and the social cohesion in Bangladesh?
5. What are the existing policies and practices that regulate, monitor, or support private tutoring in Bangladesh?
6. What are the best practices and recommendations for improving the quality and equity of education and reducing the negative effects of private tutoring?

Research methodology

This research paper employs a mixed-methods approach to investigate the phenomenon of private tutoring in Bangladesh and other countries. The main method used is a systematic review of the existing literature and policy documents on private tutoring, which provides a comprehensive and objective overview of the current state of

knowledge and practice on the topic. The systematic review follows a rigorous and transparent process of identifying, selecting, evaluating, and synthesizing the relevant sources and data, using predefined and explicit criteria and procedures. The systematic review also uses a quality assessment framework and a thematic analysis approach to appraise and analyze the sources and data, and to identify and present the key findings and themes (Bento & Ribeiro, 2011).

In addition to the systematic review, this research paper also conducts some stakeholder consultations or interviews to collect and analyze primary data on private tutoring in Bangladesh. The stakeholder consultations or interviews are a valuable and useful method to obtain more qualitative and in-depth insights and perspectives from the key actors and participants involved in or affected by private tutoring, such as the students, parents, teachers, tutors, policymakers, and researchers (Dongre & Tewary, 2015). The stakeholder consultations or interviews follow a purposive and convenience sampling strategy and a semi-structured and open-ended question design. The stakeholder consultations or interviews are conducted and recorded using online or phone interviews, and are transcribed and analyzed using a thematic analysis technique.

The mixed-methods approach adopted in this research paper allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon of private tutoring in Bangladesh and other countries. The systematic review provides a broad and general picture of the causes, consequences, and characteristics of private tutoring, as well as the policy responses and recommendations to address its challenges and issues. The stakeholder consultations or interviews provide a specific and detailed picture of the perspectives, experiences, and motivations of the stakeholders, as well as the dynamics and complexities of the tutoring phenomenon. The mixed-methods approach also enables the validation and triangulation of the findings and themes from the secondary and primary data sources, and enhances the reliability and validity of the research paper (Kaur & Agnihotri, 2021).

Research analysis

In some way, it can be argued that private tutoring is a symptom of the underlying problems and gaps in the formal education system in Bangladesh, as well as a response to the changing needs and demands of the society and the economy. Private tutoring reflects the dissatisfaction and distrust of the students and parents with the quality and equity of the public education, as well as the aspiration and expectation of the students and parents for better educational outcomes and opportunities.

Private tutoring also reveals the challenges and difficulties of the teachers and the policymakers in ensuring the accountability and effectiveness of the public education, as well as the innovation and adaptation of the teachers and the tutors in providing the supplementary and complementary education. Therefore, private tutoring poses multifaceted and complex challenges for the education system in Bangladesh, which require comprehensive and contextualized policy responses. Based on the systematic review of the literature and policy documents, and the stakeholder consultations or interviews, the following common themes or patterns emerged from the research analysis:

1. Private tutoring is shaped by a variety of interconnected factors, including the demanding nature of examination systems, the inadequacies of public education, parental ambitions and expectations, societal norms and pressures, and

economic incentives and opportunities. These elements collectively impact the supply and demand for private tutoring, as well as its specific characteristics and dynamics, such as the varieties, methods, costs, and standards of tutoring services.

2. Private tutoring has diverse and contradictory effects on the stakeholders, such as the students, parents, teachers, and tutors. Private tutoring can have positive effects, such as improving the students' academic performance, confidence, and motivation, and increasing the teachers' income and professional development. Private tutoring can also have negative effects, such as creating stress and anxiety for the students, reducing their interest and creativity in learning, and compromising their physical and mental health, and undermining the accountability and responsibility of the teachers in the public schools.
3. Private tutoring creates or widens educational inequalities, as it may favor the students who can afford and access quality tutoring, and disadvantage the students who cannot. Private tutoring can exacerbate the existing disparities and gaps in the education system, such as the urban-rural divide, the gender gap, the socio-economic stratification, and the religious segmentation. Additionally, it can also create new forms of inequalities, such as the quality and cost of tutoring, the availability and accessibility of tutoring, and the opportunity and outcome of tutoring (Nath & Sylva, 2015).
4. Private tutoring undermines the quality and relevance of the formal education system, as it may distort the curriculum, the assessment, and the learning outcomes. Private tutoring may deviate from or contradict the official syllabus, objectives, and standards of the public education, and instead focus on rote memorization, exam preparation, and grammar rules.

Research result discussion

The research analysis also examined the international experiences and best practices in addressing the similar challenges and issues of private tutoring, and compared and contrasted them with the situation in Bangladesh. The research analysis found that different countries have adopted different policy responses and strategies to regulate, monitor, or improve the quality and equity of private tutoring, such as legal and administrative measures, such as banning, licensing, or registering the private tutoring providers, imposing taxes or fees on the private tutoring services, or enforcing rules or codes of conduct for the private tutoring activities.

Similarly, teacher training and capacity-building initiatives, such as providing professional development opportunities, incentives, or recognition for the teachers in the public schools, or enhancing the qualifications, competencies, or practices of the tutors in the private tutoring sector is very important (Dongre & Tewary, 2015). Curriculum reforms and alignment, such as revising or updating the syllabus, objectives, and standards of the public education, or ensuring the coherence and consistency of the curriculum and the assessment between the public and the private tutoring sectors (Chowdhury & Haque, 2018).

Lastly, community engagement and awareness-raising, including involving or consulting the stakeholders, such as the students, parents, teachers, and tutors, in the policy formulation and implementation, or providing information or guidance for the stakeholders on the benefits and risks of private tutoring (Bento & Ribeiro, 2011).

However, the research analysis also recognized that the policy responses and strategies that work in one country may not work in another country, as the context and the conditions of private tutoring may vary widely across different countries. Therefore, the research analysis suggested that the policy responses and strategies for private tutoring in Bangladesh should be tailored and adapted to the specific context and needs of the country, and should take into account the perspectives and experiences of the stakeholders.

Conclusion

Overall, while private tutoring is a prevalent and significant phenomenon in Bangladesh, it also poses complex challenges for the education system. This paper has analyzed the causes, consequences, and characteristics of private tutoring, and has suggested policy responses and strategies to address its adverse effects. This paper has also contributed to the literature and knowledge on private tutoring, and has called for further research and action to foster equity and inclusivity in education.

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