

BRAY, M., KOBAKHIDZE, M. N., & KWO, O.

**Shadow Education in Myanmar: Private Supplementary Tutoring and its Policy Implications.**

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Almost a decade ago, Bray, accredited with drawing academic attention to the field of shadow education, analogised private tutoring research to assembly of a jigsaw puzzle with most of the pieces missing because of its nascent stage of research. He and his team of researchers have continued their pursuit to fill in missing pieces of the puzzle, resulting in a wide body of literature that has conceptualised and unravelled the private tutoring phenomenon in several regions of the world. In the book under review, Bray, along with his co-authors Kobakhidze and Kwo, shines the light on Myanmar, providing a very useful and rich account of private tutoring there. Drawing on their expertise and knowledge of private tutoring in other countries, the authors have collected rich data with the support of local teams, and have reported contextual findings to serve their purpose of identifying policy implications.

The book begins with a briefing on international and comparative private tutoring research. It then lays out the context of the political, economic and educational transformations in Myanmar, before delving into its private tutoring specificities. The first chapter on the scale and nature of tutoring around the world orients the reader to reflect on similarities while taking into account differences. It also helps in unpacking the heterogeneity of the phenomenon by pointing out the different formats of tutoring, the types of tutors, and the positive and negative outcomes for families, schools and the societies at large. The second chapter apprises the reader of the geographical and administrative features of contemporary Myanmar and portrays how recent political and economic reforms have influenced education for the masses. It also provides a layout of the schooling system along with statistics on literacy and enrolment rates. The system of assessments and examinations, which is closely associated with tutoring, is described in detail. The authors then specify the regulatory legal frameworks operating in the domain.

The methodology chapter builds upon Bray, Kwo, and Jokić's (2015) *Researching Private Supplementary Tutoring: Methodological Lessons from Diverse Cultures*, which is the first of its kind to offer detailed insights into the methodological aspects of shadow education research. One major challenge in the field is collection of data that is often considered sensitive because of perceived threats to the "business" of tutoring, complicated further by the power-plays between the multiple actors from both the formal and informal spheres of education. The research design of the study in Myanmar elaborated by the authors shows how they navigated the methodological and linguistic challenges by embarking on collaborative efforts across multiple organisations and further enlisting students and researchers from their own institution in Hong Kong. Another difficulty highlighted in the book is pertaining the restriction

106 of research sites to urban and peri-urban regions of Yangon, pointing to the need for national-level education surveys to include details of tutoring and overcome limitations of time and budget often faced by research teams.

The choice of mixed methods presents broad contours of the features of tutoring while at the same time, includes actors from government, NGOs and professional groups of teachers and tutors in addition to household and school level stakeholders. Repeat interviews and workshops on preliminary findings to validate the findings, deepen the analyses and provide directions for further interviews is another valuable technique employed by the researchers. This participatory approach enabling immediate dissemination of findings and interchange of knowledge elevates the research process by providing opportunities to participants and stakeholders to reflect on the tutoring process at an early earlier stage of research.

The chapters on findings commence with the demand-side perspectives of students and parents and then turn to the supply-side perspectives of teachers. They systematically show the complexity of private tutoring and ways in which it is inextricably linked with aspects of mainstream schooling. This approach also explicates the larger political economy in which education is embedded. In the details regarding the main drivers of tutoring, time and money spent and the subjects for which tutoring is received, the higher tutoring rates of high-achieving students comes across as a significant finding. The authors have skilfully brought out the contrasting perceptions of the teachers, some of whom believe that high-achieving students need not seek tutoring as the low-achieving students are more likely to benefit from it. These findings nevertheless indicate how tutoring serves the enrichment purpose more than the remedial purpose of learning, which the authors state match with findings in several other places. With this, the authors point out the association of the examination system with private tutoring usage. The authors raise the two fundamental questions of firstly, the perceived effect of tutoring in shaping one's educational and career path and secondly the (in)sufficiency of schooling in providing the required competitive edge. These questions are relevant to the wider education research community that is grappling with issues of poor learning outcomes, restrictive assessment formats, and emphasis on instrumental goals over the intrinsic values of learning.

The final chapter moves to the policy implications, which is also the key focus of the book. Several of the authors' earlier books and papers provide directions for regulating the private tutoring sector, indicating approaches that have been tried in the other countries and drawing upon those lessons to suggest innovative, realistic and multi-pronged approaches. Grounding the implications on Myanmar's economic situation and education budget, the authors make several institutional and national-level recommendations. At the same time, they acknowledge numerous predicaments. Some are to do with students and parents, who may not only want to receive tutoring to better their life chances but may also consider it as a personal right. From the teacher's point of view, tutoring is a way of increasing their earning potential. For teachers not working as tutors, tutoring can be seen as sharing their

burden of teaching. The government may consider it as contributing to improving learning outcomes.

Thus, the authors acquiesce that the need for tutoring can neither be eliminated nor is it something that can be easily regulated. Alongside, the readers are presented with evidence of countries where having a regulation has not been adequate for controlling problems arising from the tutoring sector. Yet despite these roadblocks, novel suggestions of self-regulation by the tutoring industry and extending the scope of tutoring to provide holistic learning experiences to students have been made.

An emerging interest in the field of education is the role of non-state actors, exemplified by its selection as the focus of UNESCO's 2021 Global Education Monitoring Report. This book therefore is extremely timely, and will interest academics, educational policy planners and research students alike. Each of the works on shadow education from the Comparative Education Research Centre at the University of Hong Kong contribute significantly to understanding of the tutoring phenomenon, and this book is a valuable addition to that literature. It provides a critical analysis of private tutoring situated at the intersections of economics, sociology and politics to move further beyond problematising private tutoring to recommending practical and implementable solutions. The limitations of the study are explicitly stated and so are further directions to continue assembling the jigsaw puzzle of tutoring. As pointed out by the authors, it is paramount to engage actively in dealing with the negative facets of private tutoring before tutoring reaches massive proportions and becomes deeply entrenched in the educational process.

Shalini Bhorkar  
shalini.tti@gmail.com