

BOOK REVIEW

Bray, M. Kobakhidze, M. N., & Kwo, O. (2020). *Shadow Education in Myanmar. Private supplementary tutoring and its policy implications.* Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, The University of Hong Kong and UNESCO.¹

Reviewed by *Ildikó Lehotka**

Received: October 11, 2020 • Accepted: October 12, 2020

Published online: April 20, 2021

© 2021 The Author(s)



Ever since education has taken place in an organised form, the concept of shadow education has existed. Underperforming students need help, and talented ones can take extra lessons. Nowadays, shadow education has become an increasingly dynamic business worldwide.

Shadow education is the most widespread and most successful phenomenon in the East Asia (South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore). It is no coincidence that members of East Asian foreign communities living in East Asian and other countries performed best based on the results of the last three PISA tests. The term of shadow education has used the words *hakwon*, *sagyook* in South Korea, *juku* (the scene of afternoon and evening training) in Japan, *buxiban* and *anchiban* in Taiwan, *bimbel* or *bimbingan* in Indonesia, *sishu* in China, and *Nachhilfe* in Germany. The private teacher is named *gwawoe* in South Korea, *kateikyoshi* in Japan, *der/die HauslehrerIn* in Germany, *tutor de casa* in Spain. Not only institutions and teachers that give plus lessons but also parents who ensure the most effective development of their child have been named. Parents called “helicopter mothers” in the United States, “tiger mothers” and “gangnam mothers” in the Chinese and South Korean communities living in the USA.

As in other countries, the phenomenon of shadow education exists in Myanmar as well. Myanmar, formerly called Burma, is getting to enter a new political and economic era because Myanmar is one of the poorest nations in Southeast Asia. We can see many examples of developing countries that have recognised the importance and quality of education. In Myanmar, the main changes also affected education: the government reviewed the education sector and developed a long-term education strategy. In 2000 the 10% of Burmese/Myanmarese were illiterate. Thirty-six percent of the monthly household expenditures is spent on food, so the country, the economy and the population are in a difficult position.

The book of Mark Bray, Magda Nutsa Kobakhidze and Ora Kwo examines shadow education in Myanmar from the perspective of students, teachers and parents as well. The researchers analysed the responses among others of 1,637 students and 331 teachers (most of them

*University of Debrecen, Egyetem tér 1, 4032 Debrecen, Hungary. E-mail: lehotkaildiko@gmail.com

¹The incorrect mention of Hong Kong among East Asian countries in the Online First version of this article was corrected in the final version.

female), using a questionnaire method and interviews. The participants are from the Yangon Region's eight schools, and the students attend secondary schools and universities.

The first few pages of the study introduce the shadow education's essence. We can read about the positive and negative side of shadow education or about the fact that teaching or help doing homework is done not only by teachers or tutors but also by parents and relatives, for example. In some country is an ordinary (sometimes almost compulsory) activity that students develop themselves with a tutor. In Myanmar the private tutoring exists, it called in Myanmar language kyu shin. In Myanmar school teachers or full-time tutors give extra lessons officially, some of them are self-employed or work for firms. However, several teachers or other individuals giving lessons want to avoid paying tax. The government, to get money, has taken draconian strict rules, for example, a person who takes extra lessons without a contract has to be for three years in jail, or pays a fine (3.000.000 kyats). Every teacher must declare that she/he does not provide private tutoring (but s/he does) so both teachers, parents and students hide in the shadow.

The second chapter shows the society and economy in Myanmar and the changing education system. According to the National Education Law passed in 2014, the students spend 12 years in school nowadays. In every school, there is an ornate board with the following words: "Our vision. To create an education system that can generate a learning society capable of facing the challenges of the Knowledge Age". In this chapter, the authors describe private supplementary tutoring (private tuition) and its varieties, which is similar to other countries' one.

The third chapter meticulously focuses on the description of the research. The next chapter shows the opinions of students and parents why they attend or do not attend extra lessons. As reported to us, the most wanted subjects for students are mathematics, Myanmar language, and English. There are some extreme examples of when extra education happens. Some of the students go to tutoring at 8 pm. The others attend tutorial lessons before school, at 6 am. Of course, the tutorial fees have to pay for the families. In Myanmar. the salaries are low. Nevertheless, parents want to give proper education to their children, so people try to get extra incomes. According to the survey the urban people have more incomes than peri-urban ones, and living in the city parents can pay more for their children's extra lessons. Teachers at school "can't explain well", in the lessons there are "no practical activities", said the students. The teaching time is limited; there are around 60 students in the classes, so we agree that the circumstances are not ideal yet in Myanmar's schools.

The fifth chapter demonstrates the opinion of teachers in private tutoring. Almost half of the teachers provide private lessons. Their main motive is to get more money. The tutoring occurs one-to-one (40%), in small groups (36%), in large groups (29%), in the student' home teaches most of the respondents (76%), most of the teachers follow the curriculum, do not use different books from the school ones. Some teachers mentioned that students get mental stress because they have no enough free time. Some students lose interest in school-learning due to learning in holidays. Teachers report the same problem: they are tired, exhausted, do not enough time to prepare the lessons. The respondents who do not give private tutoring answered that they busy with their family or with teaching at school.

The last chapter deals with the policy of the government, including the management of schools and institutional level as well. The authors mentioned, for instance, the teachers' salary (which is low and eroding), the rights of parents and the shadow sector. The reader learns about



what is the proportion of the total amount spent by families on education: the cost of private tutoring is the highest (41%).

According to the authors, the positive feature of shadow education works in a personalized, child-centred and informal way. Students can ask the tutor (in formal education, it is almost unreal, or students do not dare to ask the teacher). Positive, an incentive relationship can develop between teacher and learner, so the quality of learning can also improve. Students take part these optional lessons for higher and more up-to-date knowledge and hopeful success in entrance exams. Participants in shadow education spend more time learning, so they are more successful in entrance exams or tests. However, shadow education is not affordable for everyone, thus increases and reinforces inequalities in education. Another negative feature of shadow education, according to the authors, is that participation in extra lessons is exhausting for many students (and teachers as well), and even the student does not develop.

In Myanmar, plenty of teachers give private lessons despite strict official prohibition. However, the government knows that shadow education is a useful phenomenon in the social and economic point of view.

The study is fascinating, with several data and interviews. The book readable, the reader learns lots of interesting information on the educational system or a students' and teachers' life in Myanmar. Southeast-Asian Myanmar is far from Hungary, but in both countries, the shadow education works in shadow.

Open Access. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial purposes, provided the original author and source are credited, a link to the CC License is provided, and changes – if any – are indicated.

