



Book Review

Shadow Education in the Middle East: Private Supplementary Tutoring and Its Policy Implications By Mark Bray and Anas Hajar. Taylor & Francis. £39.19. August 2022. ISBN: 9781032329802

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Received: April 14, 2023
Accepted: June 30, 2023
Published: July 28, 2023

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Managing Editor:
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Mark Bray and Anas Hajar's book *Shadow Education in the Middle East: Private Supplementary Tutoring and its Policy Implications* (2022) offers a comprehensive summary of the available academic literature on private tutoring practices in the Middle East.¹ Outlining the foci of various country-specific studies pertaining to shadow education, the authors attempt to further unpack these in greater depth throughout the book to fill the notable gap on research in private tutoring in the Middle East. These region-specific studies are complemented by a discussion of other perspectives on shadow education that underlines existing geographic and cultural variations, while further addressing the definition and scope of private tutoring. For the purpose of this study, private tutoring is understood to mean that which is academic, supplementary, fee-charging, and taught in primary and secondary education (pg. xiii–xiv).

The authors discuss private tutoring in the global and Middle Eastern contexts before addressing the scale, nature, and impact of such tutoring practices on students, parents, and teachers. In attempting to map the scale and nature of private tutoring in Middle Eastern countries, the authors provide a list of sources, such as surveys and studies, that refer to the incidence of private tutoring in each of the respective countries. They also comment on its mode of delivery, such in the form of one-to-one tutoring and group tutoring, and the drivers of supply and demand that encourage private tutoring. They additionally address the educational and social impact of private tutoring, commenting on the learning gains achieved but also the backwash of this practice on education systems and the social values of recipients (as well as non-recipients) of tutoring. Further reflecting on the policy implications of shadow education, Bray and Hajar conclude their

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work by emphasizing the need to understand the context within which tutoring practices occur and conduct additional research on the effects of such supplementary education.

Bray and Hajar's work serves as one of the few to compile and examine existing studies on private supplementary tutoring across the Middle East. In doing so, it both creates an impetus for the continued study of such practices in the region, while also underscoring the need to examine the impact of shadow education on student achievement as well as the efficacy of education systems more broadly. The authors' research contributes significantly to the literature on shadow education in 12 Arab countries, including the six Gulf Cooperation Council states – Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Yemen, and Palestine. Their emphasis on the need to better understand the nuances of private supplementary tutoring coupled with the lack of prior studies on this phenomenon makes this research both timely and relevant to education scholars and policymakers. However, the small number of studies conducted on this topic in the Middle East also limit certain claims they make pertaining to social inequality. This review begins by addressing the contributions of Bray and Hajar's work to the field of education before addressing the need to further investigate the source of education-related social inequality in the region.

The relevance of their work is particularly reflected in their policy implications, which include tangible and achievable suggestions to policymakers, especially in their recommendation to better regulate private tutoring practices and make them less necessary. Notably, Bray and Hajar adopt a holistic approach in emphasizing the need to pay teachers adequately for their work (pg. 70). In outlining how resources can be used to help teachers who resort to tutoring to supplement their meager incomes, Bray and Hajar demonstrate how policymakers can support the provision of fair wages to underpaid educators. Moreover, emphasizing the need to have more inclusive discussions on education also provides societies with the agency to decide how they can best improve their education systems in a way that benefits all parties involved.

While the provided policy implications reflect the need to conduct more research to study how private tutoring affects students, the authors nonetheless maintain that private tutoring is "a major instrument for maintaining and exacerbating social inequalities" (pg. xvi). This is based on the premise that families with higher incomes are capable of investing more in private tutoring than those from lower-income backgrounds. Bray and Hajar additionally cite studies from England and Wales, Japan, and Egypt which indicate that higher income families invest more in supplementary tutoring than lower-income ones. Accordingly, the authors suggest that access to private tutoring can increase social inequality because it is an economic good that can be purchased by wealthier parents.

However, this is also true of high-quality schools and educational tools, which afford those from wealthier backgrounds with better educational opportunities in general.

In addition, the authors do not comment on how social inequality may also be a driver of private tutoring, in that many people act as self-employed tutors – including “many university students and even some secondary students” (pg. 5). Aside from this category of informal providers, Bray and Hajar (2022) further identify full-time teachers “who offer tutoring on a part-time basis to earn extra incomes” (pg. 5). To bolster the supposition that private tutoring perpetuates social inequality, it is necessary to investigate whether those who receive supplementary instruction in the region actually excel academically, or benefit in other ways, beyond their peers. However, it is as important to identify whether tutors providing such services are driven to do so by their own limited economic means and financial backgrounds. Thus, it becomes crucial from a policymaking perspective to identify the source of social inequality and how the education system can seek to redress such issues more equitably.

To conclude, Bray and Hajar’s work is important, outlining the contours of private tutoring in the region. In offering an overview of the existing literature on the topic, their work significantly addresses the lack of existing documentation of certain education practices – including private tutoring – in the Middle East. The book is also particularly valuable to policymakers who may wish to understand how private tutoring manifests in countries in the region, while also raising significant questions pertaining to access to quality education in the region.

Notes

¹Private tutoring is also known as shadow education because it parallels formal schooling and its contents.