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## In the shadow of the school system



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### POLICY BLIND SPOT: Shadow education can undermine relevance, quality and cost efficiency in education

SHADOW education is a phenomenon which occurs in many countries. In South Korea, Japan, India and Europe the experiences and varieties of shadow education is vast, occurring across many decades.

It is not home schooling and neither is it finishing education. Self-enhancement is not typical of shadow education. Shadow education is private supplementary tutoring which "mimics" mainstream education, as a desirable or undesirable form of education.

Education functions to reduce inequality, prepare students for inclusive economic growth and social development. While policymakers focus on mainstream education, there is a neglect on shadow education, which may undermine the agenda of development.

Among Muslims in Malaysia, religious tutoring can be considered shadow education. The alternative school system, which focuses on religious education, may also be considered as a "dual" system. There are different forms of shadow education.

Among the most popular and which is increasing in intensity are cram school, individual tutoring, group tutoring, home-visit corresponding courses, Internet tutoring and distance tutoring, even by tutors from other countries, for instance India.

Reasons for the need of private tutoring include to revise and practise examination questions, to complement and supplement exercises in school; to cover the syllabus not sufficiently covered in school; to ensure

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personal attention to the student, to get help for subjects considered difficult, to cover the work not done in schools because of lost time participation in extracurricular activities, to comply with the decisions of parents, to be involved in a smaller study group, to compensate and add on to the school knowledge considered insufficient and even to have fun amongst peers who are also attending tutorials,

However, shadow education is now about competition and not about remedial learning. Tutoring is assumed to help slow learners keep up and help high achievers push themselves to the highest levels.

Disparities may threaten social cohesion as rich families are able to pay for better education and more personal tutoring. Poor families cannot afford such supplementary opportunities. Tutoring can at once be the cause and consequences of the inefficiencies of the education system. There is the fear that teachers engaged in tutoring reduce their efforts to give of their best in their regular classes because they reserve their energies for tutoring.

The social-cultural rhythm of Malaysian society is, to a great extent, influenced by the school and university calendars. Parents plan holidays, weddings and other festivities around the school and university holidays.

Students in fully residential schools are not involved with shadow education. The daily lives of students are regimented, from the early hours of the morning with prayers, exercises, breakfast together and classes. In the evenings into the night, every hour of the day is accounted for, including preparation time as well as lights off and sleep. The hours during the weekends are also accounted for.

The lives of students in day schools are different. Except for travel to school, there are many hours within the day that could be filled by all sorts of activities for day school students.

One of the most important activities is shadow education activities, which families consider a constructive way to hone learning. Private tutoring, however, may dominate the lives of students and families and reduce time for well-rounded development.

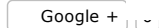
There is need to understand what drives demand and the determination of supply of the phenomenon because the monthly and yearly costs for private tutoring can be high. In some circumstances, eight out of 10 parents will send their children for private tutoring. Shadow education can, therefore, undermine relevance, quality and cost efficiency in education.

As Malaysia implements school-based assessment, it is not certain that shadow education will disappear. If school-based assessment is not monitored, shadow education may, in fact, expand and become the preferred alternative.

Policy dialogue on phenomena like shadow education, home schooling, finishing school and other related phenomenon are matters which education systems must take in their stride in the course of continuous policy and implementation improvements.

There is need to gather evidence of financial and non-financial consequences of shadow education to families and the nation. Malaysia has to decide whether shadow education will be a permanent or temporary feature of the educational landscape.

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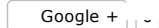
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