

BOOK REVIEW

Shadow Education in Africa: Private Supplementary Tutoring and its Policy Implications. By: Mark Bray (2021), 91 pages. ISBN 978-988-14241-9-8. Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, The University of Hong Kong.

The shadow presented in this book is a vivid metaphor for private supplementary tutoring in Africa. The metaphor is used because much tutoring mimics schooling: as the curriculum changes in the schools, so it changes in the shadow; and as the school sector grows, so does the shadow sector.

Mark Bray is well known for his comparative work on this theme across the world. This specific volume draws on his experience as a teacher first in Kenya and then in Nigeria, his postgraduate training in African Studies, and his multiple visits to countries across Africa when Director of UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP). The book presents intricate information about private tutoring and the forces that shape it. Africa is treated as a whole, i.e. including Arabic-speaking North Africa as well as Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone Sub-Saharan Africa. This presents an instructive arena for examining commonality and diversity, and for comparing African patterns with those in other world regions.

The book originates in a background paper for UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report. These regular UNESCO reports assess progress towards the fourth of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG4). The 2021/22 edition focused on non-state actors in education. Most obvious among these actors are private schools, but also among them are tutorial companies and school teachers, including teachers in public schools who in their spare time provide private tutoring.

The introductory chapter shows the significance of shadow education within the Education for All (EFA) agenda launched by UNESCO and partners in 1990, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set by the United Nations in 2000, and the SDGs set in 2015. The chapter vividly shows why shadow education is important and outlines the roles that different stakeholders play.

Chapter two presents the definitions and scope of the book. The focus is on paid private supplementary tutoring in academic subjects outside school hours. The chapter outlines key demographic, economic and political factors which have shaped education around the continent and leave continuing legacies. Forces include neoliberalism, privatization, and ongoing neocolonial influences.

The scale of shadow education is highlighted in chapter three. The author presents a picture of the whole continent but also highlights gaps needing attention in many countries. Some shadow education is provided on company premises, but much is informal in the homes of teachers or students. The chapter comments on the factors underlying the choice of location, and the reasons why many serving teachers decide to offer tutoring. Among these reasons, most obvious is the pressure on teachers to increase incomes in the context of low official salaries.

The powerful interplay between the provision and receipt of private tutoring is discussed in chapter four. The book examines the factors contributing to the shadow education marketplace from both international and local perspectives. The fragility of schooling, but also of shadow education, are discussed from social, political, and economic angles. Different school policies and curricula are also discussed, affirming the intricate role that education plays in communities. The chapter also highlights the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic when schools were closed and private tutoring was therefore given added impetus to bridge gaps.

The overall pros and cons of private tutoring are assessed in chapter five. Effects of shadow education on learners, teachers and parents are carefully unveiled. Despite helping learners to access quality education, private tutoring to some extent tampers with the instruction processes of 'legitimate' schools. It also contributes to social inequalities, especially since low-income families cannot afford shadow education.

Chapter six turns to the policy implications. First, it suggests, is the need to secure better data on the scale and nature of the shadow sector. Then possibilities are presented for regulation, both of companies and of teachers who provide tutoring. A priority might be to prohibit teachers from providing private tutoring to their existing students, in order to reduce the dangers of conflict of interest between public and private roles. As the chapter points out, teachers who offer private tutoring to their students might deliberately cut the content in their regular classes in order to expand demand. Other regulatory policies may focus on teachers who provide tutoring to other students in their schools and/or in different schools, though a starting point should be to ensure that basic salaries are adequate and therefore that teachers do not need to secure extra incomes. Academics can help by improving data collection and by identifying paths that can be considered by policymakers in local contexts.

The concluding chapter links back to SDG4. It considers not only the quantity and quality of education but also the interplay of public and private actors. Shadow education, it points out, will not disappear even if the quality of schooling improves. This is because societies are increasingly competitive and families find themselves forced to secure supplements. In all its complexities, therefore, shadow education is a reality to be confronted with. It is a powerful force, with both sweet and bitter elements alongside mainstream schooling.

In summary, Mark Bray has presented a well-structured book that both specialists and newcomers will find informative and easy to read. It addresses a significant issue that has received inadequate attention worldwide and particularly in Africa. Specialists in comparative education will find insights from multiple levels. Within countries are comparisons of schools, companies, provinces, socio-economic groups, and rural/urban areas. Cross-nationally are comparisons of Arabic-speaking, Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone regions; and globally the book compares Africa as a whole with other continents and world regions.

Bandera Lihoma
Sophia University