
Book review: Shadow Education in Africa: Private Supplementary Tutoring and its Policy Implications

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163

by *Mark Bray*

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91 pages. [Also available in Arabic, French and Portuguese]

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This book provides a much-needed overview of the status of shadow education, also known as private supplementary tutoring, on the African continent (i.e. including North Africa as well as sub-Saharan Africa). The book is motivated by awareness of the paucity of analysis in the literature on this theme despite the widespread presence of shadow education in the region. It was developed from a Background Paper for UNESCO's 2021/22 Global Education Monitoring Report, which focused on non-state actors in education. As such, the book stresses the implications for education equity and justice in achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.

The book first introduces the concept of shadow education and its significance for the SDG agenda (Chapter 1). It then outlines the African context, highlighting economic variations and changing roles of the state (Chapter 2). This is followed by data on shadow education enrolment rates, noting geographic and demographic variations, and by remarks on modes, locations and costs of shadow education (Chapter 3). The book then analyses the triggers for expansion and development of shadow education (Chapter 4). Data on the academic impact of shadow education are inconclusive, in part because of wide variations in the nature of provision, though students' perceptions towards shadow education are usually positive (Chapter 5). Shadow education also raises some ethical concerns, including teacher absenteeism and differential treatment of students in mainstream classes who have or have not received shadow education. To tackle these problematics of shadow education, the author submits several policy recommendations starting with securing data and monitoring trends, and including reforming the curriculum and assessment systems, devising regulations and developing partnerships (Chapter 6). Concluding the book, the author returns to the SDG agenda and stresses the need to take the topic "out of the shadows" (Chapter 7). The book conveys a strong message despite the fact that available evidence is patchy compared with other parts of the world.

Inevitably, some materials presented in the book are partial and unbalanced. For example, strong attention is given to Egypt – chiefly because it has a particularly long history of



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shadow education and the longest history of regulation on the African continent, starting in 1947 (p. 59). Strong attention is also given to Kenya, where a relatively large number of studies have been conducted and where businesses have been attracted by the country's growing economy and population (pp. 33–34). In contrast, Chad, Libya and São Tomé & Príncipe are among countries receiving no attention. These variations reflect the skewed availability of evidence and underline the author's message that more research is needed. Yet this also begs the question of how representative of "Africa" this book is. A map of the literature used in the book might have elucidated which countries and issues need particularly urgent attention.

Related, due partly to the unavailability of the data and partly to the nature of the work as a synthesis, the book presents few detailed case studies. Although the author presents examples to illustrate the issues and includes boxes with some narratives, the book does not go into depth concerning what happens on the ground. This reflects the fact that the book is mainly based on available literature rather than original research. As the author carried out several field visits (as mentioned in Chapter 1), in-depth analysis of cases with examples from these visits would have shone the light on local particularities while offering a big picture of shadow education in Africa. Nevertheless, such limitations are understandable and again show the pathway for future research.

The book will interest students and researchers in the field of Comparative and International Education, education policy makers at international, national, regional and local levels, and providers of shadow education including private companies and philanthropists. Considering the implications that shadow education carries for the equity and quality of mainstream education, moreover, the book will also attract broader audiences working on educational issues in Africa and the Global South.

The book has significance in providing a bird's-eye view of shadow education in Africa. By laying out the pieces of the "jigsaw puzzle" available on the continent, the work maps the phenomenon, unveils characteristics and concerns unique to the region, and suggests ways forward in improving the quality of shadow education. It is a must-have book for those concerned with shadow education and social justice in Africa and beyond.

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