



Journal of the Institute for Educational Research
Volume 56 • Number 2 • December 2024 • 203–220
UDC 37.018.1(497.11)

ISSN 0579-6431
ISSN 1820-9270 (Online)
<https://doi.org/10.2298/ZIPI2402203S>
Original research paper

PRIVATE TUTORING AS SHADOW EDUCATION: COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW*

Vera Spasenović* ➤ ORCID: 0000-0003-2222-5801

University of Belgrade – Faculty of Philosophy, Belgrade, Serbia

ABSTRACT

Private supplementary tutoring in school subjects, which takes place outside of regular school classes and is paid, is not unfamiliar in many education systems. However, it has become more prevalent and widespread today than it was previously and is now discussed as a global phenomenon. The term “shadow education” is commonly used to describe private tutoring in academic literature. This paper provides an overview and analysis of the conceptualization of shadow education, its prevalence in practice, the factors influencing this phenomenon, and the effects it generates in education systems worldwide. It also highlights the characteristic responses of education authorities to the rise of private tutoring. Given the significant impact of private tutoring on individuals, education system, and society as a whole, the paper emphasizes the need for educational authorities, as well as the academic and professional community, to address this issue rather than ignore it. Furthermore, the paper examines the emergence of private tutoring in Serbia and advocates for the need to establish a proactive approach to understanding and addressing this issue.

Key words:

private tutoring, private lessons, preparatory courses, shadow education, education policy.

* *Note.* The realization of this research was financially supported by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development, and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia as part of the funding for scientific research at the University of Belgrade – Faculty of Philosophy (contract number 451-03-66/2024-03/200163).

** E-mail: vspaseno@f.bg.ac.rs

■ INTRODUCTION

Private supplementary tutoring in academic school subjects, provided with monetary compensation, is often referred to in academic literature as “shadow education”¹ (Bray, 2009; Bray & Hajar, 2023; Bray & Silova, 2006a; Stevenson & Baker, 1992; Zhang, 2023). Although it has been present in many education systems, it is becoming significantly more prevalent and widespread in recent times. A considerable number of students worldwide utilize private tutoring during their primary and secondary education to improve their academic performance and/or increase admission chances to desired educational institution at the next education level. Private tutoring was perceived as an exotic phenomenon thirty years ago, primarily associated with East Asian countries (notably Japan). However, it is now recognized as an unavoidable, universal phenomenon that is likely to continue intensifying (Baker, 2020; Zhang, 2023).

Although it might be mistakenly assumed that private tutoring is a personal family matter unrelated to educational authorities and society as a whole, it is undoubtedly an education policy issue. It represents a highly complex phenomenon influenced by various educational, cultural, and economic factors, impacting students and the quality of teaching and learning in schools while producing broader societal and economic implications as well (Jokić & Ristić Dedić, 2007). Consequently, one would expect private tutoring to be a challenging issue for researchers, education policymakers, the media, professional associations, and the broader public (Ibid.). However, this phenomenon was neither thoroughly scrutinized, widely discussed in professional circles, nor has it attracted the education policymakers attention in most countries for a long period of time (Bray et al., 2013). It is only over the past two decades that interest in the causes, characteristics, and implications of so-called shadow education has grown.

A significant contribution to understanding this phenomenon has been made by authors who analyzed the prevalence and characteristics of private tutoring from a comparative perspective across different social, economic, and cultural contexts, highlighting certain similarities and differences depending on the local context specifics. The first major cross-national study of this phenomenon was conducted by Mark Bray under the auspices of UNESCO in 1999 (Bray, 1999) and which was followed by a series of studies in individual countries and various regions of the world, such as former socialist countries (Silova et al., 2006); Central Asia (Silova, 2009); Europe (Bray, 2011, 2021a); the Mediterranean (Bray et al., 2013); East Asia

¹ Other terms are also used in denoting shadow education in English-language literature, such as “private tutoring”, “supplemental education”, “parallel education”, and “after-school tutoring”, among others.

and the Pacific (Bray, 2022; Zhang & Yamato, 2018); Africa (Bray, 2021b); and the Middle East (Bray & Hajar, 2023).

Relying on the literature review, this paper aims to provide an overview and analysis of shadow education conceptualization, its prevalence in practice, the factors influencing it, and its effects on worldwide education systems. Additionally, it examines the typical responses of educational authorities to the shadow education phenomenon. Furthermore, the paper addresses private tutoring in Serbia, highlighting a desirable approach for educational authorities in addressing this issue. Given that the private tutoring phenomenon has not yet attracted significant attention from researchers and education policymakers in Serbia, we hope this paper may inspire professional discussions and analyses of this topic within the local context as well.

Types and Forms of Shadow Education

The now well-known “shadow education” metaphor highlights the fact that this phenomenon would not exist without formal schooling and the adoption of private tutoring to formal education demands, i.e. it keeps up with changes and evolves based on what is taught in schools and what is expected of students (Bray, 2003, 2009; Bray & Silova, 2006a).

Regardless of how individual authors define shadow education or private tutoring, there is general agreement on the key determinants of this phenomenon. In fact, in existing empirical and comparative studies, shadow education is usually operationalized in the following manner: a) it encompasses supplementary tutoring in relation to that taking place in school, i.e. an addition to what is provided by formal school education; b) it is fee-charging (excluding fee free assistance provided by friends, relatives, or teachers as part of their regular school activities); c) it refers to school subjects (typically the ones covered by national tests and exams, whereas private lessons aimed at satisfying a child’s interests or developing their potential—such as playing an instrument, drawing, or sports training—do not fall under this phenomenon, although they are paid for) (Bray & Silova, 2006a; Bray & Hajar, 2023).

Private tutoring can be provided for in various ways, conducted by different actors, and encompass varying numbers of students. Two main types of private tutoring are most common among many countries: a) private lessons conducted by individuals and b) courses/preparatory classes that are typically offered by market-oriented private companies or organizations², but can also be provided by public educational institutions or even individuals. In the first case, the service is

² Such private tutoring centres are known, for example, as *juku* in Japan, *frontistiria* in Greece, and *dersane* in Turkey (Bray & Silova, 2006a).

mainly provided individually or possibly in a small group, while in the second case, it primarily involves larger groups of students, which may consist of, for example, twenty students, but can also be much larger, even exceeding one hundred, with students following the instructor's presentation on a screen in a large auditorium (Bray & Silova, 2006a; Bray & Hajar, 2023). Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the online tutoring share has increased as well, and online sessions were also being conducted individually or in small or large groups, either in real-time (synchronously) or asynchronously.

Individuals implementing private tutoring are typically qualified teachers, professionals in a particular field, or students who engage in this activity in order to provide (additional) income. In many countries, their work operates in a gray area, often without contracts and tax payments. Commercial informal education providers sometimes are smaller, locally oriented companies, but there are also large organizations operating globally, having branches in different countries and a significant number of employees (Jokić & Ristić Dedić, 2007).

Although both types of private tutoring are present in almost all countries, their prevalence varies. For example, a comparative study which was carried out in 12 Eastern Europe and Central Asia countries found that in some countries (including Mongolia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Lithuania), students more often utilized individual private lessons in their final year of secondary school education, whereas in others (such as Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Slovakia), group courses offered by institutions, such as university entrance exams preparation, were more common (Silova, 2010; Silova et al., 2006).

Examining the types and forms of private tutoring throughout the entire school education period, it could be said that individual private lessons are more prevalent in European countries, while group tutoring within educational centers is more characteristic of East Asian countries.

Furthermore, distinctions are also made regarding the purpose and reasons for utilizing private tutoring, as well as the schooling periods during which the demand for this service is more pronounced. For some users of private tutoring, the primary motivation is mastering what they missed during regular classes and improving their academic performance. In such cases, private tutoring serves a "remedial" i.e. "corrective" function (Silova & Bray, 2006a). Although it might be expected that students with poorer academic performance, i.e. those in need of additional learning support, are predominantly the ones seeking private tutoring services, the situation is not entirely as anticipated (Bray, 2021a). A larger group, especially in education systems with highly selective exams and intense competition for enrollment in desired educational institutions, comprises of high academic performers and a wish of maintaining or enhancing their position in the future (Bray, 2011). In this case, private tutoring activities serve as an "enrichment"

function, i.e. aimed at knowledge expanding and deepening and/or preparing for high-stakes exams/tests.

Prevalence of Shadow Education

Findings from previous studies on private tutoring in specific environments, as well as comparative studies in this field, provide insights into the prevalence of this phenomenon globally while highlighting local specificities shaped by particular social contexts (Bray, 2009, 2013; 2021a; 2021b; Bray et al., 2013; Silova, 2009; Zhang & Yamato, 2018).

From a regional perspective, there is no doubt that East Asian countries/territories have the highest participation rates in private tutoring, with Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan standing out in this regard (Bray, 2022; Zhang, 2023). Attending private educational centers after regular school hours is a common activity for large numbers of children and young people in this part of the world. For instance, it is estimated that Japan has approximately 55,000 private educational centers (*juku*), with 33.7% of primary school students, 51.9% of lower secondary school students, and 29.3% of upper secondary school students attending these centers for additional tutoring (Yu & Zhang, 2022). Around seven million children attend private educational centers in South Korea (*hakwon*), including 80.9% of primary school students, 70.6% of lower secondary school students, and 50.7% of upper secondary school students (Kim, 2016, cited in Yu & Zhang, 2022). A survey conducted in Hong Kong involving 1,624 secondary school students showed that 53.8% of final-year lower secondary school students and 71.8% of final-year upper secondary school students participated in some form of private tutoring within the previous 12 months, as well as spending an average of 4.76 hours per week on these activities (Bray, 2013).

The picture is motley when it comes to European countries. Private tutoring is more prevalent in Southern European countries compared to other regions. This is particularly true for Greece, Cyprus, and Malta (Bray, 2011, 2021a), where the inclusion rate among students is quite high. For example, a survey conducted in Greece with a sample of 1,508 final-year upper secondary school students (*lyceum*) found that 90.2% of them had engaged in some private tutoring form during their schooling – 30.2% in group-organized activities, 20.3% were involved individually, and 39.7% in both forms (Katsillis, 2020).

On the other hand, with a strong public education trust, the private tutoring prevalence in Nordic countries is the lowest, although indications of private tutoring expansion are noticeable there as well (Bray, 2021a; Christensen et al., 2021). The education systems of Western European countries have traditionally not been featured by a high share of shadow education, but it has grown significantly in the recent years due to the promotion of competitiveness and the increasingly

socially acceptable marketization of education (Bray & Kobakhidze, 2014). Thus, for instance, data shows that 18% of students aged 11 to 16 in England had used private tutoring at some point during their schooling 30 years ago, whereas that figure has risen to 30% today, and it is as high as 46% in London (Cullinane & Montacute, 2023).

In Eastern European and former socialist countries, shadow education experienced significant growth during the 1990s, following the Soviet bloc collapse and the social and economic changes faced by post-socialist societies (Silova, 2010). For example, in Poland 52% of 3,479 surveyed final-year secondary school students attended private lessons (Długosz, 2017, as cited in Bray, 2021a). Research carried out in Croatia revealed that 54.5% of second-year secondary school students and 56.4% of final-year secondary school students attended private tutoring (private lessons, preparatory courses, or both types) (Jokić & Ristić Dedić, 2007). Findings from 2021 research, based on a representative sample (6,353 students), revealed that 24.5% of final-year secondary school students attended preparatory courses with private providers for the purpose of preparing for the state graduation exam and university entrance, 19.9% participated in school-based preparation, and 11.6% utilized both preparation modes (Jokić & Ristić Dedić, 2022).

Shadow education is expanding in the Middle East as well. It is estimated that about half of primary and secondary school students in Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates use private tutoring services, with the percentage rising to 85% toward the end of schooling (League of Arab States, 2012, as cited in Bray & Hajar, 2023).

On the African continent, private tutoring's notable presence and growth is recorded in countries such as Algeria, Angola, Egypt, Ghana, Nigeria, Tunisia, and South Africa (Bray, 2021b). In Latin America, private tutoring is of relatively modest scope, except at the upper secondary school education level (Bray, 2009). Actually, the private tutoring rate tends to increase during periods leading up to significant transitions, national assessments, or exams in most education systems.

Factors Influencing Shadow Education Phenomenon

When addressing the question of what determines the private tutoring scope and intensity, the emphasis is usually placed on educational, cultural, and economic factors (Bray, 2003, 2006; Bray & Silova, 2006a).

Factors related to the education system. Private tutoring is, quite naturally, linked to the organization of mainstream schooling and the education quality within a society. Shadow education is considered to be more widespread in education systems that: (a) are highly competitive; (b) have limited places available for progression to the next education level, with a strict selection criteria; (c) implement differentiation of

students by achievement and abilities at earlier ages; (d) show significant disparities in the prestige of educational institutions and the programs they offer (Jokić & Ristić Dedić, 2007: 25).

Education systems implementing high-stake exams or tests for admission to desired schools or academic programs, where high academic achievements provide individuals with advantages within the education system and the labor market, constitute fertile ground for shadow education development. In such cases, private tutoring can contribute to a more successful mastery of material, the expansion and deepening of knowledge, and thus facilitate the attainment of educational aspirations and the professional opportunities broadening (Bray & Silova, 2006a). Thus, high-stake tests/exams increase the likelihood of opting for additional tutoring, which in turn drives higher demand and leads to shadow education proliferation (Katsillis, 2020).

A favorable climate for shadow education development is also associated with fostering competitiveness within the education system, underpinned by the belief that this enhances education sector efficiency and the knowledge-based economy (Bodroški Spariosu & Duhanaj, 2024). For instance, such practice is evident in the United Kingdom, where the public ranking of schools based on results from national student performance assessments is a standard.

The quality of the teaching process in mainstream schools in some regions also acts as a trigger for using private tutoring. Findings from the aforementioned comparative study conducted in 12 Eastern European and Central Asian countries, involving nearly 12,000 young people, affirm that students opt for private tutoring because of dissatisfaction they feel with the teaching and learning process in schools, i.e. to compensate for the poor teaching quality (as seen Central Asia countries) or to be able to cope with an overly extensive curriculum and to master the prescribed content (for example, in Eastern European and Central European countries) (Silova, 2010).

Cultural Factors. Dominant societal values often stand out, along with the perception of the importance of effort in achieving educational outcomes are usually among the cultural factors influencing shadow education (Bray, 2003). In East Asian societies, where the Confucian heritage has left its mark, education and academic success are highly valued, alongside individual diligence, dedication, and self-discipline. Success in education is primarily attributed to effort rather than existing abilities. Many authors cite this as an explanation for why shadow education is so widespread in East Asian cultures (Bray & Silova, 2006a). Furthermore, it should be emphasized that the high prevalence of shadow education is often identified as a key determinant of the remarkable performance of East Asian students in international assessments of educational achievement (OECD, 2011a; Singer & Braun, 2018), rather than the quality of public schooling.

The prevalence of shadow education is linked to the degree of competitiveness fostered within a society, as well. Private tutoring is considered more widespread in cultures with higher competitiveness levels in both education and society at large, where it is viewed as an investment providing an advantage over others and facilitating achieving desired educational and economic outcomes (Jokić & Ristić Dedić, 2007).

Economic factors. The income range among individuals with varying educational levels is not uniform across societies. In some regions (such as the Far East), there are significant differences in economic and social status between highly educated individuals and the ones with modest education levels, whereas in other regions (such as Western countries), these differences are less influenced by education levels (Bray & Silova, 2006a; Jokić & Ristić Dedić, 2007). In societies where living standards and social prestige are conspicuously dependent on educational credentials, investing in education becomes worthwhile, as it is expected to yield a substantial return in the future. Consequently, the private tutoring rate tends to be quite high in such societies.

The up growth in private tutoring in Central and Southeast European countries and the former Soviet Union is also attributed to the economic and social changes initiated in the 1990s. Investment in education, including private tutoring, was seen as an opportunity in facilitating the path to obtaining a degree and increasing chances for securing better-paid jobs (Ibid.).

It is important to emphasize that these factors are not equally prominent in all contexts. On the contrary, certain educational, cultural, and economic features are attributive only for specific countries or some parts of the world.

Shadow Education Effects

Shadow education can obviously be classified neither as an absolutely desirable phenomenon nor as something completely useless or harmful. Experiences from various parts of the world indicate that it generates both positive and negative effects.

Educational achievements. It is reasonable to expect that private tutoring has a positive impact on students' academic achievement (Bray, 2009, 2023). For students progressing more slowly in learning or the ones who have missed certain lessons for some reason, additional tutoring helps them master the required material, make up for missed content, and catch up with their peers. The benefits for students are not limited to achieving the expected learning outcomes more easily, but these tutoring activities can also positively influence their motivation to learn.

Private tutoring has beneficial outcomes for high-achieving students as well, as it helps them maintain high academic performance, prepare thoroughly for tests/exams, and thus provide a comparative advantage over their peers. The positive relationship between private tutoring and students' educational achievements

has been confirmed in numerous studies such as the ones conducted in Greece, Kenya, Germany, and Mauritius, notwithstanding there are instances where no such link was found, such as in Egypt (Bray & Silova, 2006a). The extent to which students benefit from private tutoring depends, certainly, on their motivation, the tutoring type and form, the tutoring process quality itself, its duration, and tutoring intensity etc.

Pressure on students. In education systems where spending a significant amount of time in private educational centers for additional tutoring is a common practice for students, little free time is left for other activities important for the optimal development and well-being of a child. For example, in Macau (China), it is not unusual for students to spend an additional two to three hours daily in private educational institutions, in addition to regular classes (Bray, 2009). On the other hand, most students spend significantly less time on private tutoring activities in many European systems, typically one to two hours per week (Bray, 2021a).

Social inequalities. Considering the fact that private tutoring is not free, it is evident that not all parents can afford the financial resources required for it, or at least cannot provide the same quality and intensity of this service for their children. This raises the issue of fairness in education and the equality of educational opportunities for children from different social backgrounds. Taking into account the instrumental value of private tutoring for students' academic success and advancement, as well as the fact that children of wealthier parents are in a better position in this regard than their peers from lower socio-economic standing, private tutoring becomes a mechanism for maintaining and increasing social inequalities (Bray & Hajar, 2023). Research covering various education systems show that a higher percentage of children from families of privileged social status participate in private tutoring compared to children from families of socio-economical disadvantaged environments (Entrich, 2021; Park et al., 2016; Zwier et al., 2021). In addition to being able to afford private tutoring for their children, they tend to have high expectations regarding their children's academic achievements, they are being more involved in their education, and are better informed about the different offers and potential benefits of private tutoring (Bodroški Spariosu & Duhanaj, 2024; Zwier et al., 2021). Thus, not only do they have the means to pay for such type of activities but they can also ensure that their children receive more intensive and higher-quality private tutoring.

Differences in the prevalence of private tutoring are also noticeable along the urban–rural dimension, which is also being discussed in social inequalities context. A higher private tutoring rate is marked down in urban areas compared to rural ones, which is attributed to better financial capabilities of the local population, richer service offer, as well as a more competitive environment, in which the labor market requires a higher level of qualifications (Bray, 2009).

Corruption in education. In some countries, legal regulations prohibit teachers from providing private lessons to students attending the schools teachers are working in (e.g., Austria, England, Portugal) (Bray, 2009), in others, this is not formally prohibited but is rare, whereas in some places, it is a common practice (e.g., Cyprus, Indonesia, Lebanon, Nigeria, Russia) (Bray, 1999). The practice of teachers tutoring students to whom they also teach in regular school settings is particularly concerning for several reasons – apart from the fact that teachers may feel less motivated to invest adequate effort in regular teaching, prepare thoroughly for their work, and provide sufficient learning support to students during school hours itself – such a practice may also contain a kind of covert blackmail. For example, this occurs when teachers suggest to the students that achieving good grades or passing tests will be difficult unless students attend private lessons. Also, from an ethical and anti-corruption perspective, the practice is also questionable when public universities organize preparatory courses for their own admissions, since this raises doubts about the fairness of the classification procedure itself due to the possibility of favoring those who use the services provided (Jokić & Ristić Dedić, 2007; Silova, 2010).

Financial consequences. Shadow education represents a significant industry in many parts of the world, indicating substantial financial expenses for families using these services. Say, total household expenditure on private tutoring in South Korea is estimated at 2.8% of GDP, at 1.6% in Egypt, and at 0.96% in Turkey (Bray, 2009). The average family in South Korea spends nearly 20% of their earnings on extra tutoring for their children (Kim, 2016, cited in Yu & Zhang, 2022). Data originating from Greece show that half of those who use private tutoring allocate between €300 and €400 per month for the said purpose, and a fifth of them more than €400 (Kelpandis & Polymili, 2012, according to Giavrimis et al., 2018).

For self-employed teachers or students, providing private tutoring services can represent their sole source of income. For already employed teachers, it is an opportunity to earn additional income, which may even exceed their salary in some cases. However, this can lead to reduced dedication to their regular job or even intentional inefficiency in teaching, in order to increase private tutoring demand, as confirmed and evidenced by experiences from India (Bray, 2009, 2023). On the other hand, private tutoring, which is rarely regulated by domestic legislation, usually takes place as an informal activity and, as such, remains beyond the reach of state tax authorities.

Reactions of Educational Authorities to Shadow Education

Despite the fact that shadow education is a complex phenomenon which, much like any shadow, is difficult to grasp, it should not be and should not remain under the radar of the educational authorities. If private tutoring takes off and its volume increases significantly, and the competent authorities only then decide to take some steps, it may turn out that such efforts are too late and that the phenomenon can no longer be controlled, which is confirmed by the experiences of some countries (Zhang, 2023).

Comparative insights and analyses of education policies in various education systems reveal that the responses of educational authorities in regard to shadow education most often fall into one of the following approaches (Silova & Bray, 2006b):

- a) *Ignoring private tutoring.* This is the most common response of education policymakers to shadow education phenomenon. On one hand, in some systems, educational authorities lack the resources or capacity in regulating this sector (e.g., Sri Lanka, Nigeria). On the other hand, there are those with the capacity but who do not consider this within their responsibility domain, either because the phenomenon is present to a small extent or because they advocate this issue should be left to the free market of educational supply and demand, which will self-regulate through the balance between service quality and its cost (as is the case in Canada and the United Kingdom).
- b) *Regulating private tutoring.* In some countries, efforts have been made to regulate the functioning of shadow education, primarily focusing on private tutoring centers or organizations. In certain cases, regulations pertain only to more general conditions (e.g., procedures for business registration, physical and safety requirements) and a broader range of issues is addressed in others, which may incorporate service pricing, group sizes, the curriculum to be followed, banning teachers from tutoring their own students, control mechanisms, and similar measures.
- c) *Active private tutoring encouragement.* Policies promoting private tutoring are based on the belief that it can address the individual students needs more efficiently, as well as contribute to the development of human capital, which subsequently has advantageous effects on both students and society as a whole. Additionally, this approach is beneficial for some educational authorities, as it provides extra income to underpaid teachers or contributes to reducing unemployment rates. In some cases, such incentive policies remain merely declarative, whereas in others, they are being implemented

through measures, such as tax incentives, co-financing of private tutoring, providing information to connect service providers with users, etc.

- d) *Ban on private tutoring.* This rather extreme approach entails banning any private tutoring form which is commercially based, with the argument that it contributes to increasing social inequalities. It is rarely implemented, and even when it has been (e.g., in South Korea and Mauritius), it has not yielded results due to enforcement challenges.

It is apparent that education policymakers approach the shadow education issue in different ways, which should not be surprising given that each system operates within a specific local context. It is certain that policies and measures implemented will not, nor should they, be identical in systems where, for instance, the dominant motive for using private tutoring services is maintaining individuals' competitive positions, or in ones where weaker students require additional support, due to issues related to the mainstream schooling (an overloaded curriculum, teaching methods not tailored to students' needs, etc.) (Jokić & Ristić Dedić, 2007). Similarly, different strategies are applied in countries where private tutoring operates mostly in the informal economy compared to environments where it is a legally regulated and profitable activity (Ibid.).

Private Tutoring in Serbia: Current State and Education Policy Recommendations

Regardless of the fact that shadow education has attracted the attention of academic and professional communities, as well as educational authorities in numerous education systems, there are countries where this has not occurred, as is the case in Serbia. Not only is private tutoring entirely unregulated by the current legislation, but it is also noticeable that educational authorities show no concern regarding this issue; neither in their statements and reports nor in education policy documents is this topic even referred to. Such a situation cannot be explained by assuming that private tutoring is a marginal phenomenon in Serbia and thus not deserving of attention.

Little, but nevertheless available, data indicates that private tutoring is still present, even among younger age groups. For instance, 22% of students aged 10 to 14 attend private lessons in school subjects, with an additional 18% taking foreign language classes (UNICEF, 2022). It is likely that the percentage of high school students who receive private tutoring or attend preparatory courses offered by commercial providers is even higher.

As evidenced by other countries' experiences, private tutoring in Serbia is also more common among students from wealthier families. For instance, PISA study data show that nearly half of students from high socio-economic backgrounds attended private individual lessons (with teachers outside school), compared to just over a

quarter of students from low socio-economic backgrounds (OECD, 2011b). When the formal education system fails to provide necessary support and assistance to students – either through regular or supplementary lessons – this disproportionately impacts students from poorer families, whose parents cannot afford private tutoring, and consequently, educational inequalities are being further exacerbated.

Although there is no data on the dominant reasons for using private tutoring in Serbia, it makes sense to assume that these reasons are closely linked to the teaching quality and learning in current school practice. Particularly, overloaded curricula and traditional teaching methods dominate, with a focus on teacher's lectures and assessments, individualized approaches are rare, the material is covered too quickly, and there are limited opportunities for meaningful engagement, understanding, or critical thinking, students are often disengaged and lack interest in classroom activities (Group of Authors, 2024). According to PISA 2022 data, between 35% and 43% of 15-year-olds fail to reach basic literacy levels (OECD, 2023), with these indicators remaining relatively unchanged over several recent cycles. In order for students to master the missed material and/or better prepare for final exams at the end of compulsory education, and for university entrance exams, a quarter of parents of school-age children in Serbia opt to pay for private lessons, which at the same time represents the most common form of private education investment (OECD, 2012).

The employed teachers' motivation to offer private tutoring is easily understandable given that their average wages are about 70% of the wages of other employees with higher education in the public sector, as well as the fact that almost every other teacher is employed part-time (UNICEF, 2022). In order to increase their workload percentage, teachers often work at multiple schools, which can negatively impact the quality of the services provided (such as their ability to consistently provide additional or remedial classes). Additionally, nearly half of primary and secondary school teachers are not in permanent employment (Ivić et al., 2021), contributing to feelings of uncertainty and the need to secure income elsewhere. University students and unemployed teachers provide private tutoring as well, which is not surprising given that only 69% of individuals aged 20–34 with a higher education degree have managed to find employment (UNICEF, 2022). The reluctance of educational authorities to address the private tutoring issue may also stem from a desire to mitigate social peace and the general dissatisfaction of school staff.

Given the private tutoring implications, educational authorities, as well as the academic and professional community in Serbia, more attention should dedicate to this phenomenon instead of ignoring it. Two key questions for Serbia's education policy is why there is a need for additional, private tutoring in addition to formal schooling and why parents are willing to dedicate funds for this purpose. Answering these questions requires a comprehensive analysis of private tutoring in order to

determine who uses these services, when and why are they used, which school subjects are most in demand, with what frequency, and at what cost. It would also be crucial to investigate who provides private tutoring services, where they are being offered, motivations, pricing, and the quality thereof (Bray, 2021b).

It would also be important to examine the private tutoring implications arising thereof. Such analysis would help in providing insights into the extent to which weaknesses in mainstream schooling drive private tutoring services demand. Subsequently, it would clarify whether private tutoring primarily serves struggling students who lack adequate support within own schools or those who already perform at high levels. Ultimately, it would shed light on the extent to which private tutoring, as a covert form of education privatization, poses a threat to equity in education. The shadow education regulation and oversight should be focusing on establishing a balance between meeting students' private tutoring needs, on one hand, and maintaining fairness and equity in education, on the other hand (Yu & Zhang, 2022).

Prior to deciding on specific measures, it would be prudent for education policymakers to thoroughly evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of potential actions, with the goal of determining the optimal approach to addressing this issue (Jokić & Ristić Dedić, 2007). Comparative studies can be highly beneficial in this regard, not for uncritical adoption of other contexts' solutions, but for gaining descriptive and explanatory insights enabling for diverse approaches in vastly different contexts (Spasenović, 2013).

■ CONCLUSION

Shadow education is widespread today in various countries and regions worldwide, and is increasingly being discussed as a global phenomenon. This paper provides an overview of current knowledge on prevalence, types, and implications of this phenomenon, as well as education authorities' approaches taken in confronting it. It is determined that complex phenomenon is reflecting on students, the education system, and society as a whole, and that as such it should not be neglected, either by policymakers or researchers. Grappling with this phenomenon should not begin only after it becomes a deeply rooted practice, since it may then already be too late.

Serbia is among the countries where private tutoring is recognized by the general public but ignored in education policy. Furthermore, comprehensive research on this issue is lacking. In this context, the paper advocates for a need of attitude shift towards private tutoring phenomenon in Serbia and for taking a proactive approach to understanding and addressing this issue. The first step for policymakers in Serbia in this regard could be to start collecting and analyzing data

on the prevalence, characteristics, and effects of private tutoring. Subsequently, solutions should be sought in providing students with the learning support they need without compromising equality and equity in education. The other countries' experiences can be invaluable in this regard.

■ REFERENCES

- 📖 Baker, D. (2020). An inevitable phenomenon: Reflections on the origins and future of worldwide shadow education. *European Journal of Education*, 55(3), 311–315. DOI: 10.1111/ejed.12410
- 📖 Bodroški Spariosu, B. & Duhanaj, N. (2024). Roditeljska uključenost u dečje obrazovanje – koncept i modeli [Parental involvement in children's education: Concept and models]. *Inovacije u nastavi*, 37(1), 1–15. DOI: 10.5937/inovacije2401001B
- 📖 Bray, M., & Hajar, A. (2023). *Shadow education in the Middle East: Private supplementary tutoring and its policy implications*. Routledge.
- 📖 Bray, M., & Kobakhidze, M. N. (2014). Measurement issues in research on shadow education: Challenges and pitfalls encountered in TIMSS and PISA. *Comparative Education Review*, 58(4), 590–620.
- 📖 Bray, M., & Silova, I. (2006a). The private tutoring phenomenon: International patterns and perspectives. In I. Silova, V. Būdienė, & M. Bray (Eds.), *Education in a hidden marketplace: Monitoring of private tutoring* (pp. 27–40). Open Society Institute.
- 📖 Bray, M. (2003). *Adverse effects of private supplementary tutoring: Dimensions, implications, and government responses*. UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP).
- 📖 Bray, M. (2006). Private supplementary tutoring: Comparative perspectives on patterns and implications. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 36(4), 515–530.
- 📖 Bray, M. (2009). *Confronting the shadow education system: What government policies for what private tutoring?* UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP).
- 📖 Bray, M. (2011). *The challenge of shadow education: Private tutoring and its implications for policy makers in the European Union*. European Commission.
- 📖 Bray, M. (2013). Benefits and tensions of shadow education: Comparative perspectives on the roles and impact of private supplementary tutoring in the lives of Hong Kong students. *Journal of International and Comparative Education*, 2(1), 18–30. DOI: 10.14425/00.45.72
- 📖 Bray, M. (2021a). Shadow education in Europe: Growing prevalence, underlying forces, and policy implications. *ECNU Review of Education*, 4(3), 442–475. DOI: 10.1177/2096531119890142
- 📖 Bray, M. (2021b). *Shadow education in Africa: Private supplementary tutoring and its policy implications*. Comparative Education Research Centre.
- 📖 Bray, M. (2022). Shadow education in Asia and the Pacific: Features and implications of private supplementary tutoring. In W.O Lee, P. Brown, A. L. Goodwin & A. Green (Eds.), *International Handbook on Education Development in Asia-Pacific*. Springer. DOI: 10.1007/978-981-16-2327-1_10-2
- 📖 Bray, M. Mazawi, A., & Sultana, R. (Eds.) (2013). *Private tutoring across the Mediterranean: Power dynamics, and implications for learning and equity*. Sense.
- 📖 Bray, M. (1999). The shadow education system: Private tutoring and its implications for planners. UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP).
- 📖 Christensen, S., Grønbek, T., & Bækdahl, F. (2020). The private tutoring industry in Denmark: Market making and modes of moral justification. *ECNU Review of Education*, 4(3), 520–545. DOI: 10.1177/2096531120960742
- 📖 Cullinane, C., & Montague, R. (2022). *Tutoring – The new landscape*. Sutton Trust.
- 📖 Entrich, S. (2021). Worldwide shadow education and social inequality: Explaining differences in the socioeconomic gap in access to shadow education across 63 societies. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 61(6) 441–475. DOI: 10.1177/0020715220987861

- Giavrimis, P., Eleftherakis, T., & Koustourakis, G. (2018). An approach of shadow education in Greece: Sociological perspectives. *Open Journal for Sociological Studies*, 2, 71–82. DOI: 10.32591/coas.ojss.0202.03071g
- Grupa autora (2024). *Kako do kvalitetnog obrazovanja i vaspitanja za našu decu? Predlozi za unapređivanje postojećeg stanja* [How to achieve quality education and upbringing for our children? Suggestions for improving the current state]. <https://obrazovnepolitike.obrazovanjeisport.org/>
- Ivić, I., Pešikan, A., & Kostić, A. (2021). *Ključni podaci o obrazovanju u Srbiji* [Key data on education in Serbia]. SANU.
- Jokić, B., & Ristić Dedić, Z. (2007). *U sjeni: private instrukcije u obrazovanju Hrvatske* [In the shadows: Private tutoring in education in Croatia]. Institut za društvena istraživanja u Zagrebu.
- Jokić, B., & Ristić Dedić, Z. (2022). *Organizirane pripreme za državnu maturu i prijemne ispite: obrazovni biznis koji u Hrvatskoj i dalje raste. Izveštaj s projekta* [Organized preparations for the State Matura and college entrance exams: The educational business that continues to grow in Croatia. Project report]. Institut za društvena istraživanja.
- Katsillis, M. (2020). *Factors and processes of educational and social stratification in Greece: The role of shadow education*. [Doctoral thesis]. University of Oxford.
- OECD (2011a). *Education reform in Japan*. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/economics/education-reform-in-japan_5kg58z7g95np-en
- OECD (2011b). *Quality time for students: Learning in and out of school*. DOI: 10.1787/9789264087057-en
- OECD (2012). *Jačanje integriteta i borba protiv korupcije u obrazovanju: Srbija*. DOI: 10.1787/9789264185777-sr
- OECD (2023). *PISA 2022 results factsheets Serbia*. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/pisa-2022-results-volume-i-and-ii-country-notes_ed6fbcc5-en/serbia_961b99f9-en.html
- Park, H., Buchmann, C., Choi, J., & Merry, J. J. (2016). Learning beyond the school walls: Trends and implications. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 42, 231–252. DOI: 10.1146/annurev-soc-081715-074341
- Silova, I., & Bray, M. (2006a). The hidden marketplace: Private tutoring in former socialist countries. In I. Silova, V. Būdienė, & M. Bray (Eds.), *Education in a hidden marketplace: Monitoring of private tutoring* (pp. 71–98). Open Society Institute.
- Silova, I., & Bray, M. (2006b). Implications for policy and practice. In I. Silova, V. Būdienė, & M. Bray (Eds.), *Education in a hidden marketplace: Monitoring of private tutoring* (pp. 99–109). Open Society Institute.
- Silova, I. (2010). Private tutoring in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: Policy choices and implications. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 40(3), 327–344.
- Silova, I. (Ed.) (2009). *Private supplementary tutoring in Central Asia: New opportunities and burdens*. UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP).
- Silova, I., Būdienė, V., & Bray, M. (Eds.) (2006). *Education in a Hidden Marketplace: Monitoring of Private Tutoring*. Open Society Institute.
- Singer, J., & Braun, H. (2018). Testing international education assessments. *Science*, 360(6384), 38–40. DOI: 10.1126/science.aar4952
- Spasenović, V. (2013). *Školski sistemi iz komparativne perspective* [School systems from a comparative perspective]. Institut za pedagogiju i andragogiju Filozofskog fakulteta Univerziteta u Beogradu.
- Stevenson, D. L., & Baker, D. P. (1992). Shadow education and allocation in formal schooling: Transition to university in Japan. *American Journal of Sociology*, 97(6), 1639–1657.
- UNICEF (2022). *Pregled javne potrošnje u obrazovanju u Srbiji*. UNICEF.

-  Yu, J., & Zhang, R. (2022). A review of shadow education. *Science Insights Education Frontiers*, 11(2), 1579-1593. DOI: 10.15354/sief.22.or058
-  Zhang, W., & Yamato, Y. (2018). Shadow education in East Asia: Entrenched but evolving private supplementary tutoring. In K. Kennedy, & J. C. K. Lee (Eds.), *Routledge International Handbook on Schools and Schooling in Asia* (pp. 323–332). Routledge.
-  Zhang, W. (2023). *Taming the wild horse of shadow education: The global expansion of private tutoring and regulatory responses*. Routledge.
-  Zwier, D., Geven, S., & van de Werfhorst, H. (2021). Social inequality in shadow education: The role of high-stakes testing. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 61(6), 412–440. DOI: 10.1177/0020715220984500

Received 17.08.2024; accepted for publishing 20.11.2024.