INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY AND COUNSELLING (IJEPC)

www.ijepc.com

SHADOW EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA AFTER THE PANDEMIC: A QUALITATIVE STUDY FROM PERSPECTIVES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS, PARENTS, TEACHERS AND PRIVATE TUTORS

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Abstract:

The COVID-19 pandemic has primarily changed educational systems worldwide, introducing a new hybrid learning mode. In Malaysia, shadow education— private tutoring offered an outside support system to the formal school system for the students increasing their academic achievements. This qualitative study explores the perspectives of 7 secondary school students and 5 numbers of each parent, schoolteachers and private tutors on shadow education in Malaysia after the pandemic using a semi-structured interview. The number of participants were determined by saturated data obtained and they were chosen using purposive sampling method. Then, the data was analyzed using Braun and Clarke thematic analysis. This research aims to understand the impacts of the pandemic on the underlying forces of shadow education, the challenges encountered, and the potential future trends. Overall, in Malaysian context, secondary school students and parents agreed that shadow education able to help the student's academic performance based on their personalized attention, flexibility learning opportunities, personality, innovative and creativity of the private tutors. Schoolteachers also admit the importance of shadow education based on the enhanced achievement of the students attending shadow education, but other elements need to be improved such as internet coverage and efficiency.

Keywords:

Malaysia, Pandemic, Private Tutoring, Qualitative, Shadow Education, Thematic Analysis

Introduction

Shadow education (SE), repeatedly described as private supplementary tutoring, mimics the formal school system's syllabus incorporates a variety of educational activities. SE often operates outside the formal school system. Previous research has proven that SE is able to enhance student's academic performance and help them get better career and educational possibilities (Alam & Zhu, 2023; Jamil & Othman, 2023) In contrast to the old fashion school curriculum, SE is typically fee-based, but able to give personalized training and often offering intensive educational guidance to students (Hajar & Karakuş, 2022).

The main reason for increasing demand of SE is that the tutors have developed more creative and fun ways of teaching, making the students easily understand the concept (Shen, 2023). Furthermore, formal government classes usually consist of many students making the students with introvert characteristics very shy to ask any question to the teacher (Alam & Zhu, 2023). Bray and Hajar (2023) mentioned that the scenario is different in SE institution where the number of students is in a small number making it easier for the students to ask without any judgmental from other students.

On the other hand, SE also has dark side impacts as well such as creates social inequalities due to the fee charges, only those affordable parents send their children to join SE (Jansen *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, misconception of understanding of a concept might happen since most of the tutors are not a well-trained teacher (Xiang et al., 2023). Zhao *et al.* (2023) also mentioned that the increased stress level to the children might increase due to higher parent's expectation.

In 2020, COVID-19 pandemic has triggered extraordinary disturbances in many sectors including the education sector. The private educational sector such as shadow education institutions (SEI) has been affected the most since they are not allowed to be operated on during pandemic to prevent the spreading of this virus (WHO, 2020). Hence, many SEI have shifted their mode of teaching from physical into online distance tutoring (ODL) to maintain their business (Taghap, 2023). Eventually, researcher mentioned that the main challenge in SE is to manage the quality of delivering towards the students using ODL system (Ismail *et al.*, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far reaching consequences for education systems globally, affecting over 1.6 billion leaners in more than 190 countries (United Nations, 2020). School closures and the rapid transition to online learning have exposed and exacerbated existing inequalities in access to quality education (UNESCO, 2021). In Malaysia, the pandemic has disrupted the education of approximately 4.9 million students, with many facing challenges such as limited access to digital devices and internet connectivity (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2020. These issues have particularly impacted students from low-income families and those living in rural areas, widening the education gay (Aziz et al., 2021).

Eventually, Syamsudin *et al.* (2022) reported that online learning is a failure in delivering knowledge due to lack of teacher's skill in using technologies. Hence, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the education landscape, leading to school closures, remote learning, and concerns about learning loss (Yung *et al.*, 2023). The role of shadow education has become even more prominent, as families have sought to mitigate the academic challenges posed by the pandemic (Dazuka *et al.*, 2023).

Shadow Education in Worldwide
The expansion of shadow education research over the past two decades has shed light on the complex interplay of factors that shape the demand for private tutoring (Xiang et al., 2023). In the European and North America context, the prevalence of shadow education has been on the rise, with increasing numbers of students receiving after-school private supplementary tutoring (Bray, 2020). This tutoring may be provided through informal channels or by companies, and can take various forms, such as one-on-one, small group, or large class settings (Yu & Zhang, 2022). The spread of shadow education in Europe is part of a broader global shift towards increased involvement of the private sector in education (Christensen & Wei, 2021).

The research on shadow education in these continents has evolved over the past decades, moving from initial mapping and identification of factors shaping demand to more in-depth sociological and economic analyses as shown in table 1. Scholars have highlighted the need for continued attention to definitions, methods, and the changing landscape, such as the impact of technology on shadow education (Xiang et al., 2023). After the pandemic, shadow education in European countries has gained further prominence and significance (Hajar & Karakuş, 2022).

Table 1: Summary of key Findings from Shadow Education Research

Author	Region	Findings
Bray & Lykins (2012)	East Asia	Driven by factors such as high-stakes exams and cultural emphasis on academic achievement. High prevalence of shadow education in countries like South Korea, Japan and China
Kim & Jung (2019)	South Korea	Emphasis that shadow education helps in university admission exam. Participation rates in shadow education can be as high as 70-80%
Zhang & Bray (2020)	China	Equity concerns, as access often depends on family resources. Rapid growth of shadow education in recent decades
Hallsen & Karlsson (2019)	Sweden	Driven by factors such as competition for university admissions and parental concerns about mainstream education quality. Increasing prevalence of shadow education in Europe
Entrich (2020)	63 societies	Inequalities in access can exacerbate social inequalities. Socioeconomic gaps in access to shadow education vary across societies.

In Europe and North America, while shadow education is less prevalent than in East Asia, it has been growing in recent decades (Bray, 2020). Research has identified factors such as increasing competition for university admissions and parental concerns about the quality of mainstream education as key drivers (Bray, 2020; Hallsén & Karlsson, 2019). Studies have also highlighted equity concerns, as access to shadow education often depends on family resources (Bray, 2020; Entrich, 2020).

On the other hand, research on shadow education has grown significantly in recent years, with studies examining its prevalence, drivers, and impacts across various contexts. In East Asian countries like South Korea, Japan, and China, shadow education has been a long-standing phenomenon, driven by factors such as high-stakes exams and cultural emphases on academic achievement (Bray & Lykins, 2012; Zhang & Bray, 2020). Studies have found that

participation rates in these countries can be as high as 70-80% (Kim & Jung, 2019; Zhang & Bray, 2020).

Accordingly, Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) provides a useful framework for understanding the mechanisms through which shadow education can support student learning (Li & Weilin, 2024). The ZPD refers to the distance between a student's actual developmental level and their potential level of development when supported by more knowledgeable others (Vygotsky, 1978). In the context of shadow education, private tutors and be seen as these more knowledgeable others who help students navigate challenges and reach new levels of understanding (Malik, 2024). Private tutors, by offering personalized attention and scaffolding, help students navigate challenging academic content and achieve higher levels of understanding (Alam & Zhu, 2022). This aligns with Vygotsky's premise that learners can accomplish more with the guidance of more knowledgeable others.

For instance, in Hong Kong, the demand for private tutoring is higher due to the need for personalized attention, innovative teaching methods, and flexible learning schedules - factors that resonate with Vygotsky's emphasis on the role of more knowledgeable others in facilitating learning (Eng, 2019). Similarly, a study in Macao found that while parents often perceive a greater need for tutoring than their children, the personalized support provided by tutors can be valuable in helping students grasp difficult concepts (Zheng *et al.*, 2020; Chan, 2019).

This differentiated demand for private tutoring can be attributed to a variety of schools, socioeconomic, educational background, family, and individual factors (International Handbook on Education Development in Asia-Pacific, 2022; Zheng *et al.*, 2020). School-related factors, such as the curriculum, teaching methods, and examination pressures, have been found to drive students' pursuit of private tutoring. Family socioeconomic status and parental educational background also shape the household demand for supplementary education preferences (Jansen *et al.*, 2021).

Shadow Education In Malaysia
In Malaysia, shadow education has emerged as a critical supplement to the formal education system, offering students additional support and resources to ensure their academic progress same as other countries before pandemic (Loganathan et al., 2022). The rapid expansion of shadow education in Malaysia can be attributed to several factors, including the highly competitive education system, the emphasis on academic achievement, and the perception that private tutoring can provide a competitive edge (Shahrill et al., 2023).

However, after the pandemic, there was a drastic changing in Malaysia educational landscape where two major exams were abolished named Primary School Achievement Test, also known as Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) before student entering secondary level and Form Three Assessment called Pentaksiran Tingkatan 3 (PT3) at the end of year three secondary level. The students' interest towards education has been decreasing due to this change (Abdul Aziz, 2021). However, the existence of shadow education institutions can still be seen despite these changes.

Hence, in this study, researcher seeks to explore how the pandemic has influenced shadow education from the perspectives of secondary school students, parents, teachers and private tutors under Malaysia context. Specifically, this research aims to answer the following questions:

1. How do the students' and private tutors' general impressions help in online tutoring?
2. What are some of the parts that private tutors need to be aware of in online tutoring?
3. Can this online tutoring method become a future trend for shadow education in Malaysia?

Study Issues

Problems of research in Malaysia on the resilience and practices of shadow education post-pandemic involve several challenges and advantages perceived through qualitative research. These issues are very important in understanding the dynamics and impacts of shadow education in the post-pandemic era. One of the most common problems identified is that of accessibility and affordability. Consequently, there are bound to be some financial obstacles that certainly render it difficult for students from poorer families to access shadow education and, in turn, further increase pre-existing educational inequalities. The pandemic has further put the squeeze on household finances, and for most it is a stretch to pay for private tutoring. This access gap to supplementary resources exacerbates the divides and substantially widens the prospect of social mobility; hence, society becomes very stratified. Making sure that there is effective equity in access to shadow education can go a long way to help in reducing such disparities and in promoting more inclusion in education.

Another major challenge, therefore, is that shadow education is widely varying in terms of teaching quality, as there is no uniform quality control. Variations in tutor qualifications and teaching skills determine the quality of educational experience acquired across all the students. This variability in tutoring quality calls into question the overall tautness and worth of shadow education. It is also important to ensure that the tutors have the necessary pedagogical skills and content knowledge that would maintain quality standards within the shadow education sector. This could be addressed through the implementation of mandatory training and certification of every tutor to ensure quality across the sector.

The mainstreaming of shadow education into formal education structures also calls for a very important challenge. Curricula and approaches variate both in shadow and formal schooling, therefore that discrepancy may lead to disorder and additional stress for a student. Mismatch of content between schools and shadow education institutions only hinders a student's academic progression, especially when the tutoring at hand does not manage to effectively supplement for what is taught in school. There is, therefore, need to develop mechanisms that bring shadow education in line with the formal system for the coherence of learning experience for the student.

The lockdown and virtual shift in learning have brought challenges that people have never experienced. Not only schools, but many shadow education providers have been caught off guard with the move to online platforms, exposing gaps in digital infrastructure and the skills that educators need to teach effectively online. All these technologies do is form the gaps and spaces in the effective quality of online learning, which ultimately affects the outcome effects of these technologies. In light of the technological challenges outlined, improvements hinge on investments in digital infrastructure and building teachers' capacity to effectively carry out their duties in the furtherance of online learning. Lower-income students are affected the most by

unequal access to technology as well as digital learning resources, which bring about the weakened participation by them. This digital divide further propagates bifurcation in education, with the underprivileged students finding it quite challenging to keep abreast of their more affluent counterparts. Efforts toward the closing of such a digital divide, where affordable internet access and proper digital devices are given to underprivileged students, will in fact equalize access to shadow education.

Shadow education puts a strain on students, which in turn affects them negatively when it comes to their mental health. For sure, high expectations from the parents and tutors, coupled with intense academic demands, are the sources for heightened stress and anxiety in students. The competitive nature of shadow education, for example, very highly competitive education systems, further escalates these recondite mental health predicaments. In that case, the shadow education programs should embed mental health support and strategies for stress management in order to care for their general well-being. Despite these challenges, there are several noticeable advantages shadow education can provide, making it more resilient and effective. One of them deals with the matter of personalized learning. Tailored instruction helps students receive teaching according to their individual demands, assisting them in processing difficult concepts and enhancing academic outcomes. In other words, personal attention from private tutors helps students to overcome educational obstacles and to reach success in the academic domain. This individualized approach is particularly useful for students that need more support beyond that which is provided in a formal school setup.

Lower academic pressure, flexibility, and convenience in timetables are also other gains in shadow education. The system generally has flexible programs of scheduling and pacing involved in their learning so that it can accommodate the various student needs. This flexibility would enable students to manage effectively the academic burden and be guided in the right manner towards educational success. This further makes shadow education appealing to these students, as they can choose to attend classes on campus or online, depending on their preference or in relation to the situation.

Another benefit of shadow education would be enhanced academic achievement. The additional instructional support present in personal tutors will help students improve their academic outcomes. The academic outcome of a student who gets personal attention is always good as compared to a student who does not receive the same. They better understand concepts. This supplementary support goes a long way in supporting students, especially in the subjects with which they might be struggling. There is an approach to individual learning plan focus and targeted support toward attainment for each and every student.

Additionally, it may support formal education by offering more resources with teaching support in certain gaps of students' understanding and thereby reinforcing the learning at school. Such supplementary reinforcing helps the students consolidate a better realization of the curriculum and consequently scoot well in school work. Hence, unlike formal education, shadow education ensures that students go through the whole learning process, whereby they are exposed to all possible sources through which knowledge can be passed to them.

However, technological integration has further raised the efficiency for delivery in shadow education. As in other cases, this sector's use of digital tools and online platforms assures interactive, engaging learning available to a very wide pool of learners. Advances in technology

make the quality and reach of shadow education effective for the students, and their studies can continue without interruption that can be caused due to the pandemic. The educationally teaching content can be creatively delivered with additional flexibility, aided by the use of digital platforms.

A critical element that multiplies the effectiveness of shadow education is the involvement of parents. Active engagement of the parents in the life of their child creates supportive learning environments in the schools and positively influences learning experiences with good academic outcomes. Parents close to guidance who follow up on the progress of their children, coupled with constant communication with tutors, means extra support that can be translated into good academic performance. The interaction amongst parents, tutors, and students creates this very congenial academic success.

The resilience and practices of shadow education in a post-pandemic Malaysian context underscore the challenging benefits that shadow education comes with. Although in the future shadow education has the potential to provide personalized services in learning and better performance in academics, it is fraught with issues regarding access, quality control, and socio-economic disparities. A realization of this will be best achieved through a multifaced approach that requires intervention at the policy level, investments in technology, and continuous professional development for teachers. In this regard, policymakers ought to endeavor to make the benefits accruing from private tuition accessible to all learners, no matter the backgrounds they come from, thus making the system more equitable. Further research in this area could take into consideration the long-term effects of shadow education on student outcomes and the effectiveness of various regulatory and financial assistance options in ameliorating the challenges of this industry.

Method

This study uses a qualitative research design to investigate the opinion of parents, teachers, private tutors, and secondary school students on shadow education effects after the pandemic. The interview questioned was adopted from Zhao *et al*. (2023). A total number of 22 participants interviewed using semi-structured interview questions. All interviewed sessions consuming 40 - 60 minutes per session were recorded using a mobile phone and the data was later been verbatim transcribed. Then, the data was analyzed using Braun and Clerk (2006) thematic analysis as described in Lange *et al.*, 2024. The steps are simplified as in figure 1.
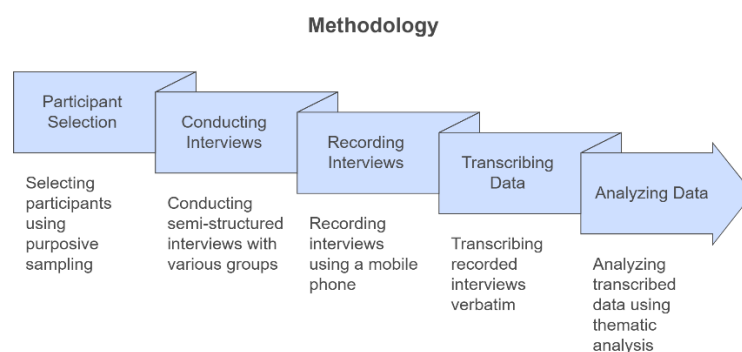

Figure 1: Research Process

Participants and Settings

The participants in this study included 7 secondary school students and a total of 5 participants consisted of parents, teachers and private tutors registered under shadow education institution. The number of participants was determined by saturation of the data obtained. The participants were chosen from different parts of Malaysia using purposive sampling to ensure a varied portrayal of experiences. In selecting the students and parents, their participation in the private tutoring session both before, during and after the pandemic are considered. Then the teachers of these students were selected as a participant to do the triangulation of the data. Meanwhile the selection of tutors was based on their background and level of experience throughout the pandemic. The settings for this research were primarily urban and suburban areas where shadow education is more prevalent.

Informants' Demographic Background

The students and parents' participants were varied in terms of their academic achievement and socioeconomic backgrounds. This variety made it possible to get a through grasp of how shadow education affects various demographic groups. The tutors' and teachers' ages ranged from 25 to 55 years old, and their levels of in-person and shadow education experiences varied. Table 2, 3, 4 and 5 provide detailed demographic information on the students, parents, teachers and private tutor respectively. Pseudo names were used in exchange for the real name to protect the participant's identity and it was chosen by resembling the character and background of the participants. In the table, the indicator of M, C, I, L, H and T is for Malay, Chinese, Indian, Islam, Hindu and Christian respectively.

Table 2: Students' Demographic Information Background

Pseudo name	Age	Gender	Academic Performance	Family Income Level	Race	Religion	Area
Aishah	17	Female	High	Low	M	L	Rural
Lim	16	Male	Medium	Low	C	T	Urban
Rayyan	17	Male	Medium	High	M	L	Urban
Kumar	17	Male	High	Medium	I	H	Rural
Christine	16	Female	Low	High	C	T	Urban
Haris	17	Male	Medium	Low	M	L	Rural
Haziq	16	Male	Medium	Medium	M	L	Rural

Table 3: Parents' Demographic Information Background

Pseudo name	Age	Gender	Academic Background	Family Income Level	Race	Religion	Area
Mrs. Maimon	60	Female	SPM	Low	M	L	Rural
Mrs. Syllia	38	Female	SPM	Low	I	H	Urban
Mr. Tan	41	Male	Master	High	C	T	Urban
Mr. Vishen	42	Female	Degree	Medium	I	H	Rural
Mrs. Lina	45	Female	Diploma	Medium	M	L	Rural

Table 4: Teachers' Demographic Information Background

Pseudo Name	Age	Gender	Year Experiences In Teaching	Race	Religion	Area
Mrs. Hasmah	58	Female	36	M	L	Rural
Mrs. Chua	31	Female	7	C	T	Urban
Mr. David	33	Male	8	I	H	Urban
Mr. Aqil	42	Male	12	M	L	Urban
Mrs. Siti	45	Female	20	M	L	Rural

Table 5: Private Tutors' Demographic Information Background

Pseudo Name	Age	Gender	Year Experiences In Teaching	Expertise	Race	Religion	Area
Mrs. Farah	55	Female	28	Offline	M	L	Rural
Mrs. Devi	30	Female	17	Online/ Offline	I	H	Urban
Mr. Chan	27	Male	8	Online	C	T	Urban
Mr. Ahmad	38	Male	10	Online/ Offline	M	L	Rural
Mrs. Tan	51	Male	25	Offline	C	T	Rural

Data Collection Procedures

Survey conducted through collection of semi-structured interviews session for about 40- 60 minutes per session for three-month period by researcher. For students, parents and private tutors, interviews were conducted via face-to face session at the SEI enabling researchers to observe the real environment of the situation and to observe participants' character as well. For teachers, interview sessions were conducted outside of the school session but in school area enable the researcher to evaluate the students' academic achievement and background. Whole interview sessions were recorded using a mobile phone and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework which consists of adaptation with the data, creating initial codes, probing for themes, evaluating themes, naming and defining themes and generating the report.

Challenges and Limitations

Conducting this study during the COVID-19 pandemic presented several challenges. Due to movement restrictions and social distancing guidelines, some interviews had to be conducted online instead of face-to-face. This may have affected the rapport between the researcher and participants, as well as the depth of responses. Additionally, the purposive sampling method used in this study may limit the generalizability of the findings to the wider population. While this sampling method allowed for the selection of participants with specific characteristics relevant to the research questions, it may not be fully representative of the broader population of students, parents, teachers, and tutors involved in shadow education in Malaysia.

Furthermore, the sample size of 22 participants, while sufficient for achieving data saturation in qualitative research, may not capture the full range of experiences and perspectives related to shadow education in the post-pandemic context. Future research could consider using a larger sample size and a more representative sampling method to address these limitations and enhance the transferability of the findings.

Research Findings

How Shadow Education Helps Students' Achievements

Students' Perspectives

In Malaysia, shadow education class were normally known as tuition class, whereas shadow education institution was called as tuition center. Most of the students mentioned that shadow education helps them in understanding better the syllabus, especially during the pandemic. The small number of students, teachers' creativity, teachers' personality and flexibility of shadow

education mode of classes, pressure to get good results in the final Malaysian Certificate of Education making their pace and interest towards studies maintained and even increased.

- "Even though I enjoyed attending classes from home, sometimes I was distracted easily by other things such as Netflix and games. But by attending online classes from Mr. Chan, I can stay focused as he likes to call our name and ask questions throughout the class." - Rayyan, 17.
- "I love tuition at tuition center because they have hybrid classes. Sometimes, I could not attend the classes physically, so I can attend it online. It helps my grades." - Christine, 17.
- "Sometimes, I was unable to join the class, but they have recorded the session. So, I was able to review the recorded session if I missed or forgotten about the lesson on the spot, which helped my grades. " - Lim, 16.
- "I Prefer tuition class better than my formal school classes because of the small number of students. Easy for me to ask questions." – Haziq, 16

Parents' Perspectives

Parents found that private tutoring helped maintain their children's academic progress during and after pandemic. The uniqueness, flexibility and the creativeness of the private tutors help their children increase their academic performance. In addition, the desire to see their children success in the Final Malaysian Certificate of Education making parents continue sending their children to SE.

- "My child said he can understand better in the tuition compared to the formal school class. Recently, the schoolteacher has told me that he manages to get an A in mathematics which he never got before." – Mrs. Maimon, 60
- "It's a must to send your children to a tuition since I'm very busy teaching them. Furthermore, the tuition center has many holistic education, not just academic classes. Good to enhance students' soft skills and get better result in SPM" – Mr. Tan, 41.
- "Sometimes, when I'm outstation and cannot send my kids to their center, they can join through online sessions. So, they won't miss any session." – Mr. Vishen, 42

Teachers' Perspectives

Teachers seen that students who participated in shadow education were more motivated, well prepared in class, active in class and get better academic results.

- "I observed that students who went for tuition class, were active in class and performed better in exams" - Ms. Siti, 45.
- "I can see that students attend tuition class, often active in question-and-answer sessions. They often score better in exams as well" – Mr. Aqil, 42.
- "Yes, I have one student that suddenly increased her score in exam recently. Since I'm curious, I 've asked her and she said because she attends a tuition [shadow education]" – Mrs. Chua, 31.

Tutors' Perspectives

Tutors mentioned that shadow education can increase students' academic achievement in a physical class better than in online class. However, online tutoring also able to help students if it's conducted in a small number of students, allowing two-way communication with every

student with all allowed them to provide tailored support to students, helping them to achieve their academic goals.

  - "The recorded sessions often help students to do revision and focus on specific problem areas for better understanding " - Mrs. Devi, 30.
  - "I often do online classes with a small number of students only, because I believe in quality, not quantity." Mr. Chan, 27.
  - "I like to do physical class better than online class because is easy for me to monitor each student's exercises and correct them on the spot." – Mrs. Farah, 55.

The findings from this study demonstrate how important shadow education is for enhancing a student's academic performance and the desire of students and parents to get good results in the Malaysian Certificate of Education called as Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM). The study found that personalized attention, innovative teaching approaches, and flexible learning schedules were key factors contributing to enhanced academic performance, as reported by students, parents, teachers, and tutors engaged in shadow education for all races and religion. This is consistent with Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development, which suggests that students can attain higher levels of comprehension with the support of more proficient individuals.

In the shadow education realm, private tutors play a vital role by offering the essential support needed for students to comprehend complex ideas and enhance their academic achievements. Students in the shadow education system indicated that the individualized instruction and small group sizes provided by private tutors enabled them to pose queries freely and receive customized guidance, which was frequently not feasible in the larger, more impersonal school classroom settings. The personalized instruction and small class sizes of private tutors in the shadow education system facilitated students' ability to freely pose questions and receive tailored guidance, which was often unavailable in the larger, more impersonal school classroom settings. This individualized support helped sustain students' academic engagement and addressed their specific learning requirements. Furthermore, the tutors' use of innovative and interactive teaching techniques, such as gamified activities and hands-on experiments, enhanced the effectiveness and appeal of the learning process.

Notably, parents and teachers reported substantial improvements in student academic performance, which they attributed to the supplementary support and innovative instructional methods offered by private tutors. Additionally, students' capacity to attend tutoring sessions online or in a blended format enhanced their flexibility in managing their studies, allowing them to sustain their educational progress despite the disruptions stemming from the pandemic.

Why Shadow Education Remains Recognized Post-Pandemic

Students' Perspectives
Students appreciated the individualized attention and flexibility that shadow education offered, which were not always available in the formal school system through hybrid class.

  - "Even after schools reopened, I continued with online tutoring because it helped me understand difficult subjects better than my schoolteacher. Their hybrid mode of classes makes it easier for me to attend" - Lim, 17.

- "I like tuition teacher better because He likes to motivate me whenever I'm not in a mood, making me feel motivated to study. He likes to praise me even though I manage to answer an easy question, which I never get from my schoolteacher" – Haris, 17.
- "Some topics were hard for me to understand, compared to our schoolteacher, she likes to teach very fast to finish syllabus". – Christine, 16.

Parents' Perspectives

Parents recognized the benefits of continued academic support outside of school, especially for subjects where their children needed extra help, extra attention, and due to the teacher's personality.

- "Private tutoring has boosted up my child's academic achievement, and I plan to stay at it even after the pandemic" – Mr. Vishen, 42.
- I noticed that my child could score better in exams after he joined tuition. He always said he can understand better in tuition because the teacher likes to motivate him and give rewards whenever he manages to answer a question" – Mr. Tan, 41.
- "I like sending my children to tuition because of the small number of students in the class, making my children get attention more" -Mrs. Lina, 45.

Teachers' Perspectives

Teachers admitted that shadow education filled up the gaps left by the formal school education system, especially in giving personalized attention.

- "Shadow education adds what we teach in school and helps students who need extra support since most of our class have at least 30 students, it's hard for us to give personal attention like shadow education did" - Mrs. Chua, 31.
- "I strongly agree with shadow education since most of them are also experienced teachers. I'm also sending my children to shadow education class since I'm very busy with my school schedule" – Mr. Aqil, 42.

Tutors' Perspectives

Tutors thought that the extra added curriculum, organized, yet flexible nature of shadow education made it an essential part of the education system.

- "We always add extra holistic education syllabus to our students enabling their soft skill as this is very important in answering critical questions. Our online recorded sessions really help students to understand better since they can access it anywhere" – Mrs. Devi, 30.
- "We always make connections with parents, letting them know their children's attitude and performance. It makes easier for us to know the students personally since there are small number of students in our institution." – Mrs. farah, 55.

Students valued the personalized attention and adaptability provided by shadow education, which was frequently absent from the formal school system. The blended format of learning, integrating online and in-person instruction, facilitated students' attendance and participation in supplementary tutoring. This flexibility proved particularly crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic, when conventional schooling was disrupted (Hashim & Hamidon, 2022). Moreover, shadow education programs often employed innovative teaching methods that catered to

diverse learning styles, such as interactive activities, hands-on experimentation, and multimedia presentations.

Parents acknowledged the advantages of continuous academic support beyond the formal school system, particularly in subjects where their children required supplementary assistance. The distinctive instructional methods, adaptability, and innovative approaches utilized by private tutors facilitated their children enhanced academic performance. Teachers recognized that shadow education effectively addressed the gaps left by the formal education system, furnishing the supplementary support essential for students to achieve academic success. The personalized attention and flexible schedules offered by private tutors enabled students to overcome barriers and excel in areas where they had previously struggled (Ghosh & Bray, 2020).

Tutors emphasized that the small class sizes and personalized attention are crucial for addressing individual student needs. This approach allows tutors to provide targeted support and feedback, which i6s often not feasible in larger and more impersonal school classes. The ability to establish a close rapport with students and comprehend their specific learning challenges enables tutors to tailor their instruction effectively, thereby enhancing student learning outcomes (Alam & Zhu, 2023).

The adaptability of shadow education to incorporate both online and in-person methods has demonstrated its advantages. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the transition to online tutoring enabled learning to continue uninterrupted, underscoring the resilience and flexibility of shadow education. This adaptability is anticipated to remain an asset in the post-pandemic educational landscape, serving as a model for the integration of technology and traditional teaching approaches. Despite the growing prominence of shadow education, research on its efficacy remains inconclusive, with some studies highlighting its positive impact on student achievement while others report mixed or negligible effects (Li & Weilin, 2024).

Can Shadow Education Become a Future Trend in Malaysia?

Students' Perspectives
Students expressed that the tutors' personality and creativity, flexibility, uniqueness, holistic education, positive environment and approachability of shadow education class made it an extreme option for future learning.

> - "I like to study at my own pace since my mood of learning is not every time, so I prefer online tutoring since they provided recorded session where I can access anywhere and anytime" - Rayyan, 17.
> - "My tutors are more creative, and fun compared to my schoolteachers. I can easily understand what my tutors teach me" -Christine, 17.
> - "I really need tuition since there are 32 other students besides me in my class. My friend likes to tease me when I ask questions in class." – Haziq, 16

On top of that, technology adaptation modes are very important. The students need to have a suitable gadget, sufficient data, good internet connection in making online classes a success.

"Sometimes when it's raining, I really can't get into the online classes. It's frustrating because I really don't want to miss any important lesson – Rayyan, 17.
- "I personally prefer physical tuition class because I don't have gadget of my own. I need to share it with my other siblings. We can't afford to buy many gadgets. It's expensive." – Aishah, 17.

Parents' Perspectives

Due to the shadow educations' proven positive impacts throughout the epidemic, parents expressed a willingness to keep spending money on it. However, there are some thoughts that shadow education will be exchanged with artificial intelligence. The demand for shadow education might also decrease due to the emergence of jobs that don't need a high level of education.

- "Given how well my children have done with tuition, I see it as a worthwhile investment for their future, but for the future I'm not sure since there are many jobs nowadays that don't need education" – Mrs. Maimon, 60.
- "I'm not sure whether shadow education still can be a trend in future because there are so many artificial intelligence applications and software nowadays such as ChatGPT that are able to help students in education. Plus, there are so many jobs doesn't require you to have high education nowadays such as Grab rider…" – Mrs. Syllia, 38.

Parents with lower incomes also have the challenge of providing a suitable gadget for their children. Whereas for rural areas, parents facing challenge with the bad internet connection making their children miss the class if it's conducted online.

- "I prefer physical class since the internet connection at my area is very bad, especially during raining. I also don't have a high budget to buy suitable handphone for online class. I pity my child was not able to join the class during pandemic." – Mrs. Maimon, 60.

Teachers' Perspectives

Teachers suggested that integrating online elements into traditional tutoring could enhance the overall educational experience. Shadow education will always have demands due to its guanine emotional expression.

- "A hybrid model combining face-to-face tutoring and online could provide the best educational experiences that are able to enhance the students' academic achievements" – Mr. David, 35.
- "Even there are many artificial intelligence applications nowadays, but it surely cannot beat the guanine love, empathy and sympathy towards the children's need." - Mrs. Hasmah, 58.
- "Yes, shadow education will always have demand in future because the syllabus exchanging too fast. Even we teacher needs time to familiarize with the latest syllabus, how can student do? If they can attend shadow education, at least they can catch up a bit faster" – Mrs. Siti, 45.

Tutors' Perspectives

Tutors were optimistic about the potential of online tutoring to become a sustainable and effective mode of education post-pandemic. The small number of students in class always made shadow education preferable compared to formal education class.

- "The suitability and flexibility of online tutoring make it a practicable option for the future, especially for students who have busy schedules with other curriculum activities" - Mr. Chan, 50.
- "Conventional Shadow education will always have a demand because we don't only give education to the students, but we give our love as well." -Mrs. Farah, 55.
- "The syllabus is getting tougher and harder nowadays, shadow education will always have a demand. Throughout pandemic, I've helped many students that have fallen behind in their academics. It's easier for me because I only have five students per class." – Mr. Ahmad, 38.

The competency of tutors managing online class, updated with the latest Artificial Intelligence, student engagement, good internet connection and usage of powerful gadget are very important in maintaining good quality of hybrid class.

- "I feel very frustrated every time it's raining. My internet connection here is bad when it's raining. I must cancel the class and refund their money whenever it happens because my schedule is too packed to reschedule. That's why I do hybrid class. We cannot just focus on only one mode of teaching class" – Mr. Ahmad, 38.
- "I had tried to do online class before, but I've found out it's too complicated. So many new things you need to familiarize yourself with." - Mrs. Farah, 55.
- "It's hard to make sure whether your students are in front of the laptop. They refused to put on their camera and didn't even reply to my call. It's very frustrating." – Mrs. Farah, 55

The practical ramifications of this study are equally significant. For policymakers and educators, the results emphasize the necessity of contemplating the function of shadow education within the broader educational landscape. Incorporating elements of shadow education, such as personalized attention and flexible learning opportunities, into formal educational settings could augment the overall educational experience for students. Furthermore, understanding the factors that drive student participation in shadow education can inform efforts to address potential inequities, ensuring that all learners have access to the academic support they require to thrive (Goldhaber *et al.*, 2022). Despite the race, religion and living area, most parents and students, the findings mentioned that shadow education is a pathway to academic achievement. The adaptability and personalized support provided by private tutors can assist students in overcoming learning challenges and improving their academic performance.

Future Research Directions

Firstly, future research should examine the influence of technological innovations, such as AI and digital learning platforms, on the demand and efficacy of shadow education. As technology becomes increasingly integrated into the educational landscape, it is essential to understand how these tools can enhance or complement conventional tutoring approaches. Specifically, investigating the role of AI in personalized learning and its capacity to support or potentially

replace human tutors would be particularly relevant. Scholars should also consider the implications of a "shadow curriculum" as an emerging focus in curriculum studies (Ahmad *et al.*, 2023).

Secondly, comparative analyses between different regions and educational systems can offer deeper insights into how cultural and contextual factors shape the role and efficacy of shadow education. By examining the practices and outcomes of shadow education across diverse settings, researchers can identify effective strategies and develop more tailored approaches to meet the varying needs of student populations. Additionally, integrating qualitative and quantitative methodologies can provide a more holistic understanding of shadow education's multifaceted impacts, including its influence on students' academic performance, socio-emotional development, and long-term educational a career trajectory (Yu & Zhang, 2022).

Lastly, examining the socioeconomic aspects of shadow education is crucial. Future studies should investigate how access to and engagement in shadow education differs across various socioeconomic groups, and the implications for educational equity. Understanding these disparities can inform policies designed to make shadow education more accessible to disadvantaged students. Shadow education has been shown to have a positive impact on student performance and well-being, particularly for high-achieving students. However, research suggests that low-achieving students may participate in lower-quality shadow education, which can contribute to inequality in college access (Xiang et al., 2023). To fully understand the role of shadow education, future research should examine how access and engagement in shadow education vary across socioeconomic groups, and the implications for educational equity.

The global health crisis has also highlighted the importance of digital literacy and the need for education systems to adapt to the changing landscape (Miao et al., 2020). As countries worldwide grapple with the challenges posed by the pandemic, it is crucial to address the digital divide and ensure that all students have access to quality education, regardless of their socioeconomic background (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020).

Conclusion

This qualitative study aimed to explore the perspectives of secondary school students, parents, teachers, and private tutors on shadow education in Malaysia after the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings suggest that shadow education has played a crucial role in supporting students' academic performance during and after the pandemic. The personalized attention, flexible learning opportunities, and innovative teaching approaches provided by private tutors have been key factors in maintaining and enhancing students' academic achievement.

The study's objectives were largely achieved through the in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives. The findings shed light on the reasons behind the continued recognition of shadow education in the post-pandemic era, including its ability to provide customized learning experiences that cater to individual student needs and foster a sense of competence and intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, the study highlights the potential for shadow education to become a prominent trend in the Malaysian context, particularly with the integration of online tutoring approaches. The flexibility, accessibility, and convenience of online tutoring make it an appealing option for students, parents, and tutors, especially in light of the challenges posed by the pandemic.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the study, such as the purposive sampling method and the relatively small sample size, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader population. Future research could address these limitations by employing more representative sampling methods and larger sample sizes to further investigate the impact of shadow education in the post-pandemic landscape. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the role of shadow education in supporting students' academic success and its potential to become an integral part of the education system in Malaysia.

The findings emphasize the importance of personalized guidance and support in fostering student achievement and suggest that shadow education is likely to remain a necessary component of the education system as it continues to evolve in response to changing needs and circumstances. In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of research on shadow education and its implications for education policy and practice. The findings underscore the need for policymakers and educators to consider the role of shadow education in the broader educational landscape and to explore ways to incorporate its beneficial aspects into formal education settings to support student learning and success.

Acknowledgements

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