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EXPLORING PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF PRIVATE SUPPLEMENTARY TUTORING IN EAST MALAYSIA

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Abstract:

In East Malaysia, private supplementary tutoring or shadow education known as *"tuisyen"* which complements formal schooling, has become a prominent aspect of the region's educational landscape. This study explores parents' perceptions of shadow education in Penampang, Sabah, and the factors influencing their engagement with private tutoring services. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight parents, each representing different educational levels. The respondents came from lower primary, upper primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary. The findings indicate that parents feel mainstream schooling alone is not sufficient. While families with higher socioeconomic status (SES) can afford private tutoring, those with lower SES face financial barriers. Parents view shadow education as a strategic investment in their academic success, particularly in preparation for high-stakes examinations. This study highlights critical implications for policymakers to address disparities in access to private tutoring and promote equitable educational opportunities.

Keywords:

Educational, Cultural, East Malaysia, Parental, Private Supplementary Tutoring

Introduction

Private supplementary tutoring, also known as shadow education and locally known as *"tuisyen class"* refers to the provision of paid, organized, and structured supplementary tutoring on academic subjects provided outside mainstream schooling (Bray & Zhang, 2022) while mimicking the formal school curriculum (Bray, 2009; Kuan, 2011; Zhang & Liu, 2016). It has

emerged as a significant feature of the global educational landscape, including in Malaysia. Many parents in Malaysia are increasingly turning to private tutoring to boost their children's academic performance (Jelani & Tan, 2012; Kenyatullah, 2017; Krishnaswamy et al.,2019). This tutoring occurs in various forms, such as sessions at private tuition centers, individual or small group lessons at a tutor's or student's home, and more recently, online tutoring. Recently, shadow education has attracted attention in East Asian regions like South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, where competitive education systems see private tutoring as essential for academic success. In these contexts, shadow education plays a critical role in preparing students for high stakes exams and university admissions, driven by societal and cultural pressures towards educational attainment. This global trend signifies a growing emphasis on supplementary education as a strategy to improve academic performance.

In East Malaysia, the rise of shadow education mirrors the broader trend of increasing academic competition and the pursuit of educational advancement (Loi, et al., 2024). According to the Ministry of Education Malaysia, the number of registered tuition centers grew by 28.41% from 2013 to 2023, with 119,517 students enrolled nationwide and significant growth observed in Sabah. Presently, private tutoring and supplementary education services have become central in East Malaysia, reflecting the efforts parents and students invest to improve academic performance (Da Wan & Weerasena, 2017).

Families with higher socioeconomic status (SES) can afford private tutoring, while those with lower SES face financial barriers. This disparity in access to private tutoring services is a critical issue that needs to be addressed such that parents' support of children's tuition fees in private schools can be prohibitive for many families and those with limited financial (Garcia et.al,2025). Parents view shadow education as a strategic investment in their children's academic success, particularly in preparation for high stakes examinations (Rathinam et. al, 2024). This highlights the importance of private tutoring in improving academic outcomes. In addition, The study has critical implications for policymakers to address disparities in access to private tutoring and promote equitable educational opportunities. Therefore, this study aims to bridge that gap by examining parents' perceptions of shadow education in Penampang, Sabah. However, this study is confined to the urban areas of Penampang and does not encompass more remote or rural regions, meaning the findings may not fully captured the experiences of those in isolated or other urban areas in Sabah.

Literature Review

This study draws on the recent trend of practicing shadow education in the East Malaysia context. The primary concern of the research was to explore parents' perceptions of shadow education practices. The review covers areas and issues explored by researchers regarding shadow education.

Table 1: Summary of Past Findings Related to Perception of Private Supplementary Tutoring

Study	*Year*	*Key focus*	*Findings*
Mahmud	2021	Parental investment in SE	Parental spending on shadow education **strains families and burdens students, limiting their social and recreational time.**
Gao, X. & Xue, H	2021	Family background, parent involvement, and shadow education participation	Parents play an important role in **how family income affects shadow education, as richer families are more involved and help their children take part in it in different ways.**
Zhou	2023	The effectiveness of shadow education is deeply shaped by **family dynamics**, where various forms of capital, parental involvement, and a supportive home environment play crucial roles in shaping student engagement and educational outcomes."	**Family capital and active parental involvement are key to maximizing the benefits of shadow education,** with supportive home environments and strategic awareness enhancing student success.
Rathinam et.al	2024	The study explores how the rise of shadow education is reshaping learning by supporting academic success, influencing student well-being, and complementing formal schooling in the context of competitive exams.	Shadow education is rapidly expanding **as a key driver of academic success in competitive exams, though it brings both motivational benefits and stress**, while highlighting issues of equity and access.

Socioeconomic Disparities in Education

The phenomenon of shadow education, which encompasses private supplementary tutoring outside of formal schooling, has garnered significant attention in educational research, particularly concerning the role of parents. Parents are pivotal in shaping their children's engagement with shadow education, influencing the decision to participate and the type of

tutoring sought. This literature review synthesizes current findings on parental involvement in shadow education, highlighting the socio-economic, cultural, and psychological dimensions that inform parental choices.

Research indicates that parents' socio-economic status (SES) significantly affects their children's participation in shadow education. Families with higher income and educational levels are more likely to invest in supplementary tutoring, as they perceive it as essential for maintaining educational advantages in a competitive environment (Tan, 2023; Wei & Bray, 2017). Research has demonstrated that parents with higher socioeconomic status frequently provide their children with more extensive tutoring resources, thereby worsening educational inequities. (Gao & Xue, 2021; Yousaf, 2023). This trend is evident across various cultural contexts, where shadow education is often viewed as a necessary investment for academic success (Entrich, 2020; Xue, 2019).

Cultural Expectations and Shadow Education

Cultural factors also play a crucial role in shaping parental attitudes towards shadow education. In many East Asian societies, for example, there is a strong cultural emphasis on academic achievement, which drives parents to seek additional educational resources for their children (Zhang, 2020; Lee & Shouse, 2011). This phenomenon is often linked to "tiger parenting," where parents adopt rigorous educational strategies to ensure their children excel academically (Zhang, 2020). Such cultural pressures can lead to significant financial burdens on families, particularly in disadvantaged contexts where parents may feel compelled to invest in shadow education despite limited resources (Mahmud, 2021; Zhang & Gao, 2019). Furthermore, the psychological dimensions of parental involvement in shadow education cannot be overlooked. Parents often experience anxiety regarding their children's academic performance, which can lead to increased investment in tutoring as a means of alleviating these concerns (Zhan, 2023). This dynamic creates a cycle where parental worry about educational outcomes drives the demand for shadow education, reinforcing the notion that such tutoring is a necessary component of academic success (Zhou, 2023).

Policy Implications

While shadow education fills critical gaps in formal schooling, it raises concerns about equity and accessibility. Policymakers must address these disparities by promoting affordable and quality supplementary education services (Da Wan & Weerasena, 2017). Various internal and external factors, including parental beliefs, family environment, and the perceived quality of tutoring institutions also influence the selection of shadow education options. Parents navigate a complex landscape of choices, often relying on social networks and community norms to guide their decisions (Su, 2018). This decision-making process is further complicated by the emergence of policies aimed at regulating shadow education, which can alter parental perceptions and behaviours regarding tutoring (Zhan, 2023).

While shadow education has been extensively studied in global contexts, research on its role in East Malaysia remains limited. Most studies on shadow education in Malaysia focus on urban areas in Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia (Sarawak) (Da Wan,& Weerasena, 2017) and (Jayaraman, & Koon,2019), and (Loi, et.al, 2024) overlooking the unique challenges faced by parents and students in East Malaysia. This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring parents' perceptions of shadow education in Penampang, Sabah. The scope of this study is limited to urban areas in Penampang and does not extend to remote or rural regions. As a result, the

findings may not fully capture the experiences of parents in more isolated areas. Thus,a deeper understanding of how East Malaysian parents perceive shadow education and its role in academic performance is essential.

RQ1: How do parents in East Malaysia perceive private supplementary tutoring?

RQ2: What factors influence parents in East Malaysia to utilize private supplementary services?

Theoretical Framework

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital served as the theoretical lens for interpreting the data. This framework helped to explore how different forms of capital in social, cultural, and economic manifest through networks, trust, and access to resources, shaping parents' decisions to engage their children in shadow education. The analysis focused on understanding how these various forms of capital influence parents' perceptions of the necessity for supplementary tutoring and how these perceptions ultimately impact their children's academic performance.

Methodology

Research Design

This qualitative study adopts a phenomenological approach to explore parents' perceptions of shadow education and the factors that shape their engagement with private tutoring services in Penampang, Sabah. A semi-structured interview questions were conducted to gain narrative responses and explore their perspectives on the private tutoring role.

The interviews were conducted with eight parents who had children at least 1 year of experience in participating in any tuition centres. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, ensuring a diverse range of subject specialties and age groups taught. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility in the conversation, enabling the researchers to probe deeper into emerging themes and gather rich, detailed data on the parents' experiences and perceptions.

Therefore, this study is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, which assumes that reality is socially constructed and best understood through the lived experiences of individuals. The research aims to capture the subjective meanings that parents attach to shadow education within their sociocultural and economic contexts.

A phenomenological methodology is employed to delve into the lived experiences and perceptions of parents regarding shadow education. This approach is suitable for uncovering the depth and complexity of parental motivations, beliefs, and challenges associated with engaging in private tutoring services.

Rationale for Sample Selection

The decision to select eight respondents purposively was driven to capture diverse parental experiences across different stages of schooling. Each level presents its unique challenges, such as foundational skill development in primary education and preparation for high-stakes national exams in secondary school. Including parents at these varied stages allowed this study to provide a holistic understanding of the factors driving their decisions to invest in private tutoring. The small sample size also enabled an in-depth exploration of individual experiences, which is crucial to the phenomenological approach adopted in this research.

Measures to Ensure Data Reliability

Several strategies were employed to ensure the reliability and validity of the data. Interviews were conducted bilingually in both Bahasa Melayu and English, allowing respondents to communicate in their most comfortable language, thereby reducing potential misunderstandings and ensuring clearer communication. All interviews were audio-recorded, enabling verbatim transcription to capture the full breadth of respondents' perspectives. A peer-checking strategy was used to confirm the accuracy of the transcriptions and ensure that the key themes identified during the thematic analysis accurately reflected respondents' views.

Open and axial coding were employed to systematically categorize the data, ensuring a methodical exploration of the themes. To further enhance reliability, data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis framework, which provided a consistent approach to identifying, reviewing, and defining emerging themes from the interviews. Additionally, cross-checking the findings with existing literature on shadow education added another layer of reliability, helping to ensure the credibility of the research within the broader field of educational studies.

Research Procedures

This study followed a structured series of procedures to ensure methodological rigor in exploring parents' perceptions of shadow education in Penampang, Sabah. The research procedures consisted of the following phases:

Participant selection → Interviews → Data analysis → Validating → Reporting

Figure 1: The process of Data Collection

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process for this study carefully designed to ensure the acquisition of rich and meaningful information from parents regarding their perceptions of shadow education in Penampang, Sabah. A semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the research objectives and questions. This guide included open-ended questions that explored various themes such as parents' views on mainstream schooling, their motivations for enrolling their children in private tutoring, challenges faced in accessing such services, and their expectations regarding academic outcomes.
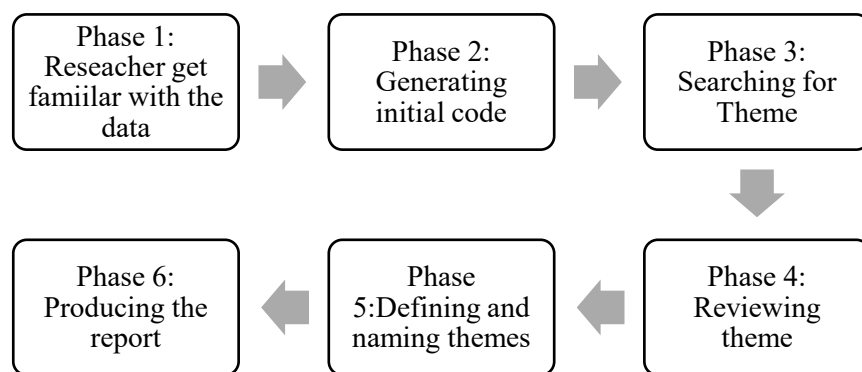
Before conducting the interviews, ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Participants were fully informed about the nature and purpose of the research, their rights as participants, and the voluntary nature of their involvement. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were assured that their identities would be kept confidential and anonymous throughout the study.

Purposive sampling was employed to recruit eight parents whose children were enrolled at different educational levels, including lower primary, upper primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary. Participants were selected to reflect a diversity of socioeconomic backgrounds in order to examine how financial and social factors influence engagement with shadow education. Recruitment was carried out through school networks, tuition centers, and community contacts in Penampang.

Interviews were conducted either face-to-face depending on the participants' preferences and availability. Each session lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' permission. The researcher also took field notes during and after the interviews to capture contextual insights and non-verbal cues that could enrich the data analysis.

Technique of Data Analysis

Data collection took place between September 2 and September 6, 2024, using semi-structured interviews with eight respondents. Each interview lasted about 30 to 45 minutes, allowing enough time for respondents to share comprehensive insights based on their experiences. The interviews were conducted bilingually, in both Bahasa Melayu and English, depending on the language preferences of the participants. All interview sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and then analyzed.

Phase 1: Reseacher get famiilar with the data → Phase 2: Generating initial code → Phase 3: Searching for Theme → Phase 4: Reviewing theme → Phase 5: Defining and naming themes → Phase 6: Producing the report

(Braun & Clake,2006)

Figure 2: Phase Of Thematic Analysis

The analysis process involved a systematic approach to coding. First, open coding was applied to the transcripts to identify and label key concepts and recurring themes. This allowed the data to be segmented into meaningful units. Following this, axial coding was employed to refine and group these open codes into broader thematic categories, enabling deeper exploration of relationships between emerging themes (Morse & Richard, 2002; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The thematic development followed a six step framework by Braun and Clarke (2006). To ensure the trustworthiness of the identified themes, a peer checking strategy was utilized to verify the accuracy and reliability of the translated themes (Whitting &Sure).

Results and Discussion

Table 2: Emerging Themes From Data Analysis

	Themes	Sub-themes	Frequency (n)	Illustrative quotes
RQ1	Unmet needs in formal education	Lack of personalized attention	8	"Teachers at school just teach but don't ensure the students fully understand the material."(P1)
				"Classroom teaching focuses on covering the syllabus, often leaving students struggling to fully understand the material."(P3)
		Curriculum gaps	8	"My child struggled with Mathematics until we sent them to tuition."(p2)
		Advance concepts for improving engagement	5	"Schools are better now, focusing more on critical thinking rather than rote memorization."(P3)
	Tuition as an Academic Enabler	Academic improvement	8	At tuition, the teacher approaches the students to check if they can solve problems. This personalized attention makes a big difference."(P4)
		Structured learning environment	4	Tuition provides a structured and distraction-free space to focus on subjects."(P2)
		Exam preparation	8	My child's grades in Chemistry and Add Maths improved after six months of tuition (P3)
	Personal Growth Through Tuition	Boost in confidence	8	Her confidence has improved. She's now brave enough to say no when she doesn't want to do something."(P8)
RQ2		Better communication and social skills	6	After tuition, she socialized better and became more interactive."(P3)
	Parental Decision-Making Factors	Teaching quality	8	The most important factor is the environment and the quality of teaching."(P4)
		Environment and safety	6	The tuition center's environment must be conducive to learning and safe."(P1)
		Recommendations from family and peers	8	My husband's niece recommended the tuition center based on her own children's improvement."(P3)
	Challenges of Tuition	Financial sacrifices	7	we can only afford tuition for two subjects. More than that would strain our budget."(P4)
		Time management and fatigue	8	"She feels tired from school and tuition, but she tries her best to cope.(P3)
	Parental Aspirations	Education as a long-term investment	8	Knowledge and skills are the only things that stay with you forever (P1)
		Independence in learning	3	"Tuition has helped my child take responsibility for her studies."(P2)

Table 3: Summary of Main Findings

Theme / Main Finding	Description / Explanation	Supporting Quotes / Evidence	Implications
(i) Perceived Insufficiency of Mainstream Schooling	Parents believe school alone doesn't meet students' academic needs.	"The teacher cannot focus on each student… that's why we send her to tuition." – P1	Highlights gaps in public education; suggests policy review or resource support.
(ii) Academic Performance as a Priority	Parents enrol children in tuition to improve exam performance.	" My child's grades in Chemistry and Add Maths improved after six months of tuition - P3	Shadow education is seen as a necessity for competitive exam results.
(iii) Socioeconomic Constraints Influence Access	Financially well-off families enrol in multiple tuition classes, while others struggle.	"We can only afford tuition for two subjects. More than that would strain our budget."P4	Equity issues in education access
(iv) Shadow Education as Investment in Future Success	Tuition is viewed as a long-term educational investment.	Knowledge and skills are the only things that stay with you forever." P1	Shadow education seen as part of social mobility strategy

I approached this study with an interpretative perspective to explore perceptions of the role of shadow education, using narrative inquiry with parents. The results are structured into each research question (I) RQ1: How do parents in East Malaysia perceive Shadow education? Main themes (1) Bridging the Gap Left by Formal Education, (2) A Complement to National Education) (II) RQ2: What factors influence parents in East Malaysia utilize private tutoring services? Main themes (1) Academic Concerns and Weaknesses, (2) Recommendations and Social Norms (3) Practical Considerations (4) Financial and Time Constraints

SE bridging the Gap Left by Formal Education
All parents involved in the study viewed supplementary education as a crucial addition to regular schooling. *Tuisyen*, or private supplementary tutoring, addresses deficiencies in the educational system, such as insufficient individual attention. The large number of students in classrooms prevents teachers from focusing on each student's needs. Additionally, tutoring centers help bridge curriculum gaps by assisting students in grasping difficult subjects like Mathematics and History. Tuition was seen as playing a beneficial role by providing structured settings that encourage academic improvement and personal development. The prevailing opinion among parents was that their children could receive individualized attention from tutors.

P1: "At tuition, the teacher approaches the students to check if they can solve problems. This personalized attention makes a big difference."

P2: The teachers just teach, but they don't help to ensure that students truly understand and grasp what is being taught."

P3: Sometimes, school teachers can't manage the situation and don't know the weaknesses of each student."

Shadow education, particularly private tutoring or "Tuisyen," is widely regarded by parents as a crucial complement to formal schooling. This perception stems from the belief that tuition addresses several shortcomings in the mainstream education system. One of the primary concerns is the lack of personalized attention in regular schools, where large class sizes often prevent teachers from focusing on individual students' needs. Tuition centers are seen as a solution to this issue, offering smaller class sizes and more individualized instruction. Additionally, these centers are viewed as filling curriculum gaps, especially in challenging subjects like Mathematics and History, helping students gain a deeper understanding of complex topics.

A Source of Academic and Personal Development

Parents perceive shadow education as more than just academic assistance. They see it as a transformative experience for their children. Many believes that tuition boosts students' confidence and helping them become more them become more self-assured and assertive in their daily lives. It also enhances communication skills, enabling students to interact more effectively with peers and teachers. Furthermore, tuition is considered a critical tool for exam readiness, providing tailored support to prepare students for high-stakes exams like SPM. As one parent shared,

P1: "After attending tuition, my child has a better understanding of Mathematics topics and has shown improvement."

P2: "There are many positive changes... they complete their homework and continue studying."

P3: "Her level of confidence has increased, and her self-esteem has improved as well."

Students engaged in private tutoring often develop a stronger sense of responsibility for their learning, as they actively participate in setting goals and tracking their progress. This highlights how shadow education improves academic performance and fosters personal growth.

A Complement to National Education

Many parents consider tutoring as a valuable complement to traditional schooling, enhancing their children's educational experiences. They see it as a way to alleviate the burden on overworked teachers by offering personalized attention that is often lacking in schools. This individualized support enhances understanding and academic performance, especially for struggling students who may find it challenging to keep up in larger classroom environments. By augmenting school-based education, tutoring not only improves academic results but also develops essential skills that students need for future success.

P1: "In school, there are too many students, and teachers can't focus on everyone. At tuition, my child gets the attention they need."

P2: "She dreams of becoming a forensic expert, so tuition has really helped her build confidence in her studies. Even though she's only in Form 3, she already has a clear goal, and we want her to succeed in her SPM and achieve her dreams."

P3: "Tuition is very important to help children better understand their lessons. As parents, we are often busy with work, so tuition classes are essential to prepare our children to pass their SPM and succeed in life."

Research Question 2: What Factors Influence Parents In East Malaysia To Utilize Shadow Education Services?

Academic Concerns and Weaknesses

The main factor influencing parents to seek tuition is the need to improve their children's academic weaknesses. Subjects like Mathematics and History are often highlighted as particularly challenging for students. Tuition provides tailored support, offering focused teaching to help students overcome their struggle in academic and improve their understanding in particular subjects. As one parent explained:

P4: Teachers at school just teach but don't ensure the students fully understand the material. My child struggled with Mathematics until we sent them to tuition."

P5: As a result of the COVID pandemic, my children fell far behind in their studies. During COVID, the school only used WhatsApp to send homework, and as parents, we didn't fully understand the content provided by the teachers. We could only teach them a little bit. This is why they became very weak in their studies, and it's also the reason we sought out a tuition center to help our children improve their academic performance.

P6: My child is already 9 years old but still struggles with reading and math. That's why I send them to tuition. Besides, I don't want them spending too much time on their phone at home.

This individualized attention helps bridge gaps in learning and enhances academic performance. Tutors can tailor their teaching methods to match each student's unique learning style and pace. This personalized approach allows students to grasp difficult concepts more easily and build confidence in their abilities. Moreover, one-on-one tutoring provides a safe environment for students to ask questions and seek clarification without fear of judgment from peers.

Recommendations and Social Norms

Parents' decisions to enrol their children in tuition are often influenced by recommendation and social pressures. Positives feedback from family or friends plays a significant role, as parents are encouraged by success stories and outcomes shared by others. Social expectations also contribute, with many parents feeling obligated to enrol their children in tuition to keep up with societal norms. One parent shared:

P1: "My husband's niece recommended tuition. At first, we thought it wasn't necessary, but seeing the results, we decided to send our child"

P2: "Everyone in my family sends their children to tuition I think it has truly become a necessity for their future"

P7: Most of her friends at school attend tuition classes outside, so our child asked to join tuition classes as well because her good friends also going to tuition class"

These factors highlight how external influences shape parents' choices in seeking additional educational support.

Practical Considerations

A Few factors influence parents' choices when selecting tuition for their children. Teaching quality is a top priority, with parents seeking skilled and knowledgeable tutors who can effectively support their child's learning. Additionally, a conducive and safe environment is highly valued, as parents want assurance that their children are studying in a secure and productive setting. Affordability also plays a role, though it is often considered secondary to the quality of teaching and the outcomes achieved. As one parent explained:

> P2: "The most important factor is the environment. If my child can learn there and it's safe, that's what matters. (P2)"

These considerations reflect the multifaceted decision-making process parents undertake in choosing tuition services.

Financial and Time Constraints

Parents in East Malaysia perceive shadow education as an essential support system that complements formal schooling. While tuition is highly valued for its role in addressing educational gaps, boosting academic performance, and fostering personal growth, parents also face challenges in utilizing these services. The cost of tuition is a significant concern with many families making financial sacrifices to afford it. As one parent shared :

> P2: We can't enrol her in too many tuition subjects because it takes up a lot of our budget.
>
> P3: My husband and I work full-time, so we only have time on Saturdays to take our child to the tuition center. On regular weekdays, they are already tired after coming home from school.
>
> P4: "We only can afford tuition for two subjects. More than that would strain our budget.
>
> P8: My child often feels tired after coming home from school, but we insist that they attend tuition to help them better understand their difficult subjects, especially Mathematics.

Additionally, balancing school, extracurricular activities, and tuition can lead to fatigue for students, making it challenging to maintain their overall well being. These factors underscore the importance of quality, affordability, and accessibility in shadow education services to better support families and students.

Discussion

Parents' Perception of Shadow Education (RQ1)

Parents in East Malaysia view shadow education as necessary complement to mainstream education, reflecting global trends where shadow education fills gaps in formal schooling. According to Bray (1999), shadow education "mimics the content and scope of formal education" to support learning and improve academic outcomes. This aligns with parents' perceptions that shadow education provides targeted supported to overcome educational challenges and enhances academic performance. As mentioned by Wei (2021), shadow education serves as a mirror that can reflect the missing parts of formal education, addressing area where mainstream schools fall short.

Shadow education is valued not only for enhancing academic performance but also for promoting self-assurance and individual development. According to Saengboon (2019), students who engage in shadow education experience increased confidence and a better grasp of previously difficult subjects, resulting in improved academic outcomes. This aligns with the perception that parents view shadow education as a means for both personal and scholastic advancement. Additionally, it corroborates a study by Anas Hajar in Kazakhstan (2024), which found that shadow education effectively addresses students' social and emotional requirements.

Factors influencing the use of Shadow Education

Several factors drive parents in East Malaysia to utilize shadow education services. One of the primary motivations is addressing their children's academic weaknesses. As observed by Gupta (2023), parents invest in tutoring as a form of "capital exchange," transferring economic capital to secure cultural capital through improved educational outcomes for their children. This reflects a broader societal trend where parents actively seek shadow education to support their children's academic success.

Social expectations and competitive pressures also play a significant role. Jansen et al. (2023) emphasize that shadow education often fulfils a "competitive function," helping families maintain or secure an educational advantage in an increasingly competitive academic environment. This resonates with findings that parents feel societal pressure to enrol their children in tuition, particularly in urban areas where competition for educational success is heightened. Practical considerations such as teaching quality and affordability are also significant factors. As Wei (2021) stated, shadow education provides further knowledge and techniques for exams while offering a more individualized and need-oriented approach than formal education. However, affordability remains a challenge, particularly for families with limited financial resources. This is supported by Jansen et. al, (2023) observed that "students from advantaged families buy into more intensive and often more expensive form of shadow education to stay ahead of the competition, underscoring the financial inequalities inherent in access to these services.

The findings of this study highlight the critical role of shadow education in addressing gaps in formal education and the need the need for policy interventions to ensure equity. Shadow education has been criticized for exacerbating social inequalities, as it often favors families with higher socioeconomic status (SES). According to Gupta (2023), high-SES families leverage shadow education to "reproduce their social class position" and secure long-term advantages for their children. This underscores the need for policymakers to address the affordability and accessibility of shadow education services.

Greater collaboration between formal education systems and shadow education providers could help mitigate inequalities while enhancing educational outcomes. As Wei (2021) suggests, a dynamic synergy between mainstream schools, shadow education providers, and parents can optimize the benefits of shadow education while addressing its limitations.

Conclusion

This study's findings highlight the factors driving parental decisions regarding shadow education in East Malaysia. The perceived inadequacies in mainstream schooling, socioeconomic pressures, and cultural expectations create a compelling case for parents to invest in supplementary tutoring. Bourdieu's concept of capital provides a nuanced lens through

which to analyse these influences, highlighting how social networks, cultural norms, and economic resources shape educational choices. The prevalence of shadow education in this context reflects a broader societal emphasis on academic achievement and the pursuit of competitive advantage in high-stakes examinations (McCoy & Byrne, 2024). However, the reliance on private tutoring raises significant concerns about educational equity and access.

Although shadow education can improve academic performance for those who can afford it, it also worsens the existing socioeconomic inequalities in educational achievement. This scenario results in a dual-layered education system, where students from wealthier families have extra chances to succeed (Hu, Q, 2024) which could potentially increase the disparity in academic achievement. To address these issues, policymakers must focus on improving the quality and effectiveness of public education, ensuring that all students have access to high-quality learning experiences within the mainstream system. This approach would not only reduce the perceived need for shadow education but also promote a more equitable educational landscape that provides fair opportunities for academic success to all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

The research achieved its primary objectives, providing valuable insights into the reasons parents in East Malaysia choose shadow education. The research contributes to the understanding of educational decision-making in this specific context, extending the application of Bourdieu's capital theory to shadow education practices. The findings have significant implications for educational policy and practice. They highlight the need for improvements in mainstream education to address perceived inadequacies and reduce reliance on private tutoring. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of addressing educational inequities exacerbated by shadow education.

Limitations of the current study include its focus on a specific geographic area, which may limit generalizability to other contexts. The study also primarily captures parental perspectives, potentially overlooking other stakeholders' views. Future research could explore the long-term impacts of shadow education on academic outcomes and social mobility. Additionally, comparative studies across different regions or countries could provide a broader understanding of shadow education phenomenon. Investigating effective strategies to improve public education quality and reduce the perceived need for supplementary tutoring would be valuable for policymakers and educators.

In conclusion, this study shows that parents in East Malaysia consider shadow education essential due to perceived deficiencies in mainstream schooling, socioeconomic pressures, and cultural expectations. Bourdieu's concept of capital social, cultural, and economic offers a valuable framework for understanding these influences on parental decisions. While shadow education enhances academic outcomes, particularly in high-stakes exams, it also raises concerns about educational equity, as access to tutoring is often limited by financial resources. Policymakers must address gaps in public education to ensure equal academic opportunities for all students, reducing reliance on private tutoring and promoting educational fairness.

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