

# BOOK REVIEW

**Shadow Education in the Middle East: Private Supplementary Tutoring and its Policy Implications.** By Mark Bray and Anas Hajar (2022), 122 pages. ISBN: 978-1-0323-2980-2. London: Routledge.

This insightful book is the first study of private supplementary tutoring in the Middle East. It uses the common metaphor of ‘shadow education’ because such tutoring mimics daytime schooling: as the cultural or curriculum changes in the schools, it changes in the shadow accordingly. Previous research in the region only scrutinized single countries, or parts of those countries. The book presents a comprehensive picture of the demand and supply of private tutoring in the 12 Arabic-speaking countries of the Middle East. It also provides detailed updated information on the geographical span and socio-economic intensity of demand for private tutoring with intra-country and inter-country variations. Special attention has been paid to online and public media advertisements of various types of tutoring, and to various forms of internet tutoring that expanded with the impact of COVID-19.

The book focuses on the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, namely Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and contrasts their contextual diversities with the other six Arabic-speaking countries of the region, namely Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and Yemen. It portrays the multi-level impacts of shadow education on primary and secondary students’ academic achievement, social and educational inequalities, and ethical and social values. The book captures a massive volume of qualitative and quantitative data, which is neatly presented in boxes, charts, figures, and tables in plain English, easily accessible to general readers without academic jargon. It also benefits from questionnaire data distributed by the UNESCO Regional Center for Educational Planning (RCEP), based in the UAE, and from a 2021 Policy Forum hosted by that body.

Among the treasurable components of each chapter is the lengthy reference list of English-language and Arabic-language research literature. The titles of the latter items are translated into English, and the supplementary notes in most chapters ease the understanding for general readers. The references will help shadow education researchers have a comprehensive overview of relevant and updated literature for further research in the Middle East and other world regions.

The book contains seven chapters after a clear definition of private supplementary tutoring (p. xiii) in the executive summary. Chapter one initiates the main objectives and rationale for the study. Chapter two describes related global and cross-regional, and cross-national perspectives on private tutoring, the span and intensity of demand for and supply of tutoring, and geographic and cultural variations. Most importantly, it outlines the merits and demerits of tutoring. Chapter three summarizes some educational and cultural commonalities and depicts some socio-economic and political diversities. Chapter four then outlines student enrolment rates, modes of operations, and durations of demand for tutoring in the 12 countries. Socio-economic, sociocultural, and political drivers of demand and supply are highlighted, including teaching deficiencies, and low teacher salaries. Chapter five highlights the educational and social impact of shadow education, including possible learning gains after tutoring, skeptical views towards its quality, its backwash effects on daytime schooling, the effects of corruption caused by tutoring, student over-reliance on tutoring, and some critical harassment cases of female tutees.

Chapter six draws some significant policy implications toward shadow education and daytime schooling. In particular, fruitful comparative lessons are identified from a list of various regulations concerning the provision of tutoring services by serving teachers in 10 Middle East countries (Lebanon and Yemen are omitted because they are laissez-faire on the matter) and regulations on tutorial

centres in four countries (Iraq, Lebanon, Qatar, and Syria). The practicality of such regulations is evaluated by the authors regarding lessons in other countries and regions.

Chapter seven concludes. It draws some conceptual discussion first by pinpointing the commonalities in the role of the Arabic language and cultural traits across the region. It then highlights cross-national differences in economic growth and other sub-regional variations. Among major themes are possibilities for partnership between state and non-state actors. Educational reformers need to know the whole picture concerning commonalities and diversities and multiple roles of the state and the market.

Alongside this book is a spin-off article (Bray & Hajar, 2022) on complexities and units for comparative analysis in the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members, using the three-dimensional Bray and Thomas (1995) cube. Both illuminate the phenomenon, showing the deep roots of shadow education in parts of the region. This long history has not previously been presented in English-language literature.

Bray and Hajar fully understand the social and educational issues concerning shadow education. You should not miss reading the book not only for its analysis of patterns in the Middle East but also for a wider understanding of the phenomenon.

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