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### Private Substractory Tutoring: The Negative Impact of Shadow Education on Public Schooling in Myanmar



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**Abstract:** An expanding literature focuses on the so-called shadow education system of private supplementary tutoring, and contributes to understandings of the nexus between in-school and out-of-school learning. This paper, contextualised in broader literature, draws on questionnaire and interview data from students, teachers, principals, parents and other stakeholders in Myanmar, and observes that shadow education may subtract as well as supplement. For some decades, public education in Myanmar has suffered from financial stringency, large classes, and overloaded curriculum. Students and their families have sought private tutoring, particularly from public school teachers, to supplement school education; and teachers and other providers have welcomed the revenue that they can earn. As a result, private tutoring has become embedded in the lives of many students and teachers, and has consumed time and energy supposed to be spent on school education. However, the private tutoring has also helped to keep the school system running.

**Key words:** Myanmar, private supplementary tutoring, public education, shadow education

Private supplementary tutoring has become a significant focus within the broader literature on education (see e.g. Dang & Rogers, 2008; Joshi, 2019; Park et al., 2016; Zhang & Yamato, 2018), including in this journal (e.g. Bray et al., 2016; Jheng, 2015; Pallegedara & Mottaleb, 2018; Yung, 2020). Such tutoring has been widely called shadow education because large parts of its content mimic mainstream schooling: as the curriculum changes in the schools, so it changes in the shadow (Bray, 1999; Aurini et al., 2013). Yet an expanding literature (e.g. Bhorkar & Bray, 2018; Gupta, 2019; Punjabi, 2020) shows that the shadow is not neutral: it has a backwash, and affects the body that it imitates. This paper builds on that literature. It shows ways in which private tutoring that claims to be supplementary can also subtract from public schooling. This fact has relevance to wider literature on time for learning and the efficiency of education systems.

As in other parts of the literature (e.g. Bray, 1999; Tan, 2009; Zhang, 2014), shadow education is here defined with three components: privateness, i.e. tutoring provided in exchange for a fee; supplementation, i.e. tutoring in subjects taught in regular schooling but beyond the standard duties of the schools; and academic,

i.e. tutoring in examinable subjects taught in schools. The paper presents findings from a mixed-methods study in Yangon, which is Myanmar's largest city, focusing particularly on the transition point between lower and upper secondary schooling and on the last year of secondary schooling when students sit terminal examinations. Although the paper focuses only on Yangon, its core themes are likely to have pertinence elsewhere in the country, especially in urban areas.

The paper commences with literature on links between mainstream schooling and shadow education, and expansion of the latter in neoliberal environments. It then turns to background information on Myanmar and its education system. Next the paper presents information on methodology, following which it examines the data, particularly drawing on interviews. The final section links the findings to the broader literature.

## **Components of a Conceptual Framework**

This paper leads up to a conceptual framework that shows relationships between a collection of forces presented in diagrammatic form in the concluding section. To understand the elements of this framework, as explored and confirmed in Myanmar, it is necessary to review components of the existing literature.

A longstanding section of the literature has considered time-on-task and its relationship with learning. Carroll (1963) is historically among the key figures, having made foundational remarks about variables that shape in-school learning (see also Carroll, 1989). Subsequent attention has addressed combinations of in-school and out-of-school learning. For example, a 2011 study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reviewed findings from the 2006 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). It found, as might be expected, that the country average of learning time in regular school lessons was positively related to country average performance; but it added, somewhat counterintuitively, that “learning time in out-of-school time lessons and individual study is negatively related to performance” (OECD, 2011, p.13).

Especially because the OECD's latter finding was counterintuitive, various researchers have followed up (e.g. Chang, 2019; Hof, 2014; Park et al., 2016; Suter, 2016). The OECD had itself recognised significant limitations in the ways that 2006 PISA data could be used to investigate the theme (2011, pp.22-23), and in that respect the finding was not as firm as it might have appeared; and although subsequent PISA iterations brought some strengthening of instruments, from the perspective of the present paper they remained problematic in the precise questions asked and answered (Bray & Kobakhidze, 2014; Bray et al., 2020). Other researchers on the theme have also encountered major methodological challenges, and equally have not been fully conclusive because much depends on the nature, duration and timing of both in-school and out-of-school learning, the quality of the teachers and tutors, and the abilities and motivations of the students. The present paper, focusing on a low-income country, addresses a rather different context from that in OECD countries and their affiliates in the PISA test. As such, it adds to the wider picture alongside research in more prosperous settings.

One core question for the present paper, less likely to arise in OECD countries and their affiliates, concerns the provision of private tutoring by regular classroom teachers as a ‘moonlighting’ activity. This has been common in low-income countries, since teachers have felt a need to supplement official salaries in order to make ends meet. Many commentators consider the practice potentially corrupting, particularly when teachers provide supplementary lessons for their existing students. In Cambodia, Dawson (2009) described ‘the tricks of the teacher’, among which may be deliberate withholding of important curriculum content so that the students have to take additional lessons privately from that teacher. Jayachandran (2014) echoed this theme, drawing on data from Nepal and highlighting ‘incentives to teach badly’.

Indian research has also showed ways in which shadow education can have a backwash on regular schooling. Bhorakar and Bray (2018), presenting interview findings from Maharashtra State, showed ways in which the role of private supplementary tutoring progressively expanded from lower to higher grades and became especially visible in Grades 11 and 12 when to a large extent it supplanted mainstream schooling. This supplantation occurred through several forces, chief among which was the perception that coaching centres and private tutors provided more effective training than schools for the all-important Grade 12 external examinations. Schools did provide some training, but considered themselves also responsible for all-round development of their pupils and not necessarily so well versed in the techniques for specific examinations or motivated to acquire those techniques. The profit motive kept the coaching centres and individual tutors at the cutting edge, though schools retained some leverage through the requirement for examination candidates to be registered in schools. Schools also had laboratories that many coaching centres lacked, though coaching centres commonly made payments to the schools to mark students as having attended practical classes when in fact the students had not done so. The coaching centres passed the costs of these payments onto the students, and persuaded the students that the money was spent well as a way to avoid ‘wasting’ time in schooling.

Also in India, Gupta’s (2019) qualitative study in Uttarakhand State considered ways in which teachers who also worked as tutors legitimised their tutoring activities. Framed by concepts of neoliberalism and teacher-entrepreneurialism, the paper noted that provision of education by private entrepreneurs rather than the state was increasingly accepted both in India and more widely. With this lens, Gupta explored “why and how educators adopt specific entrepreneurial strategies to navigate precarious, competitive market conditions” (p.1). A significant number of the interviewed teachers offered supplementary lessons through coaching centres, in one case operated by the teacher himself. This teacher (quoted by Gupta, 2019, p.9) reported that:

I run my own centre and offer five physics sessions each day to Class XI and XII students. From 40 tutees each, I earn INR 1,000 per month ..., which is about double the salary I receive for my full-time job as a school teacher.

Some of Gupta’s interviewees distanced themselves from teachers who treated schools as their market site, and stressed that they had been ‘chosen’ by families with the necessary finance in an open and fair competition with other tutors. Nevertheless, the parallel tutoring activities were inevitably intertwined with

their roles as teachers in schools. Gupta asserted that the dynamics reflected wider neoliberal processes, which indeed seems valid in the Indian setting but, as will be explained below, might need some further consideration as a lens to interpret patterns in Myanmar.

Other studies have noted the impact of shadow education even when school teachers are not themselves providers of tutoring. One factor is that students who learn in advance from their tutors lose interest in schooling which merely repeats the content in school (see e.g. Lee, 2013; Mwanja & Moronge, 2016; Punjabi, 2019). Private tutoring may also consume too much of students' time and energy and lead to fatigue in school classes and/or a need for 'time-stealing' in which students do assignments for their tutors during regular school classes (Jheng, 2015). Further, students may respect their tutors more than their teachers because they have a choice and also pay money (Mariya, 2012; Yung, 2020), which can bring challenges to the teachers who feel disrespected. A further side-effect of expansion of tutorial centres that operate in parallel to schools is that some of the best teachers leave the schools (or are never recruited), thereby weakening the school sector and then perhaps making tutoring even more necessary. When families have reduced trust in school education and students prioritise tutoring over school learning, the relationship between school education and private tutoring may change as "the logic of the latter expands and heads toward a universal practice" (Mori & Baker, 2010, p.40).

A further component concerns teachers' motivation. Research in industrialised countries (e.g. Kiziltepe, 2006; Reeve & Su, 2014; Watt & Richardson, 2015) has commented on the negative impact of bureaucratisation on motivation, especially when combined with passive and/or uncooperative students. Such matters may apply equally in low-income countries, and commonly lead to attrition from the profession. Less fully explored are dynamics in which teachers remain in the profession but secure their satisfaction through shadow education rather than their mainstream teaching. In their private supplementary activities, teachers can choose the students with whom they want to work and can employ teaching approaches that are less fettered by bureaucratic constraints. However, the satisfaction that the teachers gain from their parallel activities may again undermine their commitment to their principal locus of employment.

In summary, large-scale quantitative studies such as PISA and smaller-scale qualitative studies such as those in Cambodia and India indicate that indeed shadow education may not be just a positive supplement operating alongside regular schooling and, on the contrary, can have dimensions that undermine it. Much depends on macro-level factors including broad cultures and economics, but significant factors also operate at the micro levels of schools, families and individuals. With these perspectives, it is now pertinent to turn to the specifics of Myanmar.

## **Myanmar and its Education System**

This study was conducted during a period of far-reaching political and economic transition. Five decades of Myanmar's military rule commencing in 1962 were characterised by international isolation and by strong government controls over education and other sectors. Elections in 2010 brought transition towards a more

open society, which was consolidated in 2016 with the ascendance of a democratic government led by Aung Sang Suu Kyi (David & Holliday, 2019; Kipgen, 2016). Although education was among the sectors prioritised for reform, the new initiatives had to operate in the context of longstanding and ingrained cultures.

With a 2018 per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) equivalent to US\$1,140 (Central Statistical Organization [CSO], 2018, p.255), Myanmar is a low-income country. The 2014 national census indicated a total population of 51.5 million (CSO, 2018, p.20), within which Yangon Region around the former capital had a population of 7.4 million. Yangon Region contains the core of Yangon city plus a peri-urban sector and a rural periphery.

At the time of this study, Myanmar's education system had a 1+4+4+2 structure, i.e. one year of kindergarten and four years of primary education (together called Grades 1-5 or Standards 0 to 4), four years of lower-secondary education from Grades 6 to 9 (or Standards 5 to 8), and two years of upper-secondary education in Grades 10 and 11 (or Standards 9 and 10) (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2016, p.34). The government mandated fee-free and compulsory primary education in 2013, and extended fee-free education to lower-secondary schooling in 2014 and then to upper-secondary schooling in 2015 (Tanaka & Myat Myat Khine, 2019, p.9). In 2014/15, net enrolment rates for primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary schooling were 86.4%, 63.5% and 32.1% (MoE, 2016, p.69). Legislation introduced in 2011 permitted the establishment of private schools, but initially they remained few in number. In 2015/16, alongside 45,387 public schools run by the MoE were only 438 private schools (MoE, 2016, p.34).

Concerning assessment, students sit a district-wide examination at the end of Grade 5 and a national Middle School Examination at the end of Grade 9. Officially, a pass in the latter is required for proceeding to Grade 10, but in practice most students are waved through in line with policies for automatic promotion in other grades. By contrast, the Grade 11 nation-wide Matriculation examination is highly competitive as a watershed point that determines opportunities for higher education and careers. In 2017/18, only 32.8% of students passed the examination (MoE, reported by Myanmar News Agency, 2018). Within each academic year, students' performance is assessed by five Chapter-End Tests (CETs) and two Semester-End Tests (SETs) (MoE, 2016, p.38; Tanaka & Myat Myat Khine, 2019, p.15). The curriculum is segmented to fit these tests, and regular inspections demand accountability.

Compared with other countries, Myanmar has a long history of low government funding of education. Households have to some extent bridged gaps: in 2009 for example the government only accounted for 31% of total education expenditures while households accounted for 63% (World Bank, 2015, p.47). Within household expenditures on education in 2009/10, an estimated 41.5% was devoted to private tutoring (MoE, 2016, p.239). Government investments subsequently increased significantly, but at an estimated 1.9% of GDP in 2017/18 remained lower than those of most other countries in the region and beyond (World Bank, 2018, p.32).

Low government funding has imposed constraints on teachers' salaries. Although salaries were increased in 2012 and again in 2015 (MoE, 2016, p.38), the raises were widely considered inadequate and quickly

eroded by inflation. Meagre salaries have made the teaching profession unattractive, and as one teacher remarked in a focus-group interview with the present authors, “in Myanmar, we will only become teachers if we can’t find other jobs”. An NGO staff member added that because of insufficient applicants in the labour market, teachers were “recruited without a proper examination of their qualities” and were still in short supply. Serving teachers were not motivated to work hard, since “no matter how hard they work, they get the same low salary”.

Private tutoring is not a new phenomenon in Myanmar, as evidenced by the fact that in 1984 the authorities promulgated regulations to control it (Burma 1984).<sup>1</sup> This was a period of harsh military dictatorship, and a core objective underlying the regulations was a desire to limit the political influence of a sector that operated outside the state school system. Statistics from that period are not readily available, but a 1990 survey in nine Yangon schools found that 90.7% of sampled upper-secondary students and 65.6% of lower-secondary students were receiving private tutoring (Gibson, 1992, p.10). The report did not indicate from whom they received tutoring, but it may be assumed that providers were a mix of teachers, specialist tutorial centres, and informal providers such as housewives and university students. Tutoring was said to be sought by families to supplement schooling that was perceived to be inadequate. The current paper shows continuities in this view despite changes in wider circumstances.

## **Methodology**

The paper is based on a mixed-methods study that secured questionnaire and interview data from students, teachers, principals, parents and other stakeholders in Yangon Region. The main study was conducted between December 2016 and August 2017, and follow-up work was conducted in September 2018. The research was conducted under a partnership between the University of Hong Kong and the Yangon University of Education (Bray et al., 2020).

For the quantitative component, three-stage stratified random sampling was employed to select eight public schools in Yangon, among which five were urban and three were peri-urban. Within each sampled school, classes of Grades 9 and 11 were selected since they were the last grades of lower-secondary and upper-secondary schooling. Questionnaire data were solicited from 1,637 students by random selection of their classes, and from 331 teachers according to availability. The instruments, in the Myanmar language, consisted mainly of closed-ended questions plus a few open-ended ones.

For the qualitative component, four schools were chosen from those already selected, among which two were urban and two were peri-urban. Within each school, the research team had planned to recruit four students in each of Grades 9 and 11 (one boy receiving tutoring, one girl receiving tutoring, one boy not receiving tutoring, and one girl not receiving tutoring); eight teachers, preferably teachers of those grades and with a diversity of subjects; the principal; and four parents, preferably of selected students. In practice, 32

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<sup>1</sup> At that time the official name of the country was the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma. In 1989 the military authorities changed the name to the Socialist Republic of the Union of Myanmar. The change was not universally accepted at that time, but is now in common parlance.

students, 36 teachers, four principals and 17 parents were recruited for interview in these schools. A few *ad hoc* interviews with personnel from other schools were also conducted. Thus the final dataset was slightly larger than initially envisaged, and even more valuable.

In addition, the team interviewed other stakeholders including government personnel, members of the teachers' professional bodies, tutors, and staff of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The interviews with government personnel were conducted through meetings in the Ministry of Education and the Yangon Regional Office of Education. Information was also solicited from meetings in the Myanmar Teachers' Federation (MTF) and the Private Teachers' Association (PTA). These meetings were not audio-recorded, but the researchers took extensive notes. Alongside these meetings were audio-recorded interviews with six NGO personnel, two professional tutors who were also PTA officers, and one curriculum committee member of the National Education Policy Commission (NEPC).

After securing preliminary findings, the research team conducted further individual interviews with three principals from the four schools and a fourth principal from one of the other schools. In addition, a focus-group interview was conducted with five teachers from three of the eight sampled schools. These follow-up interviews permitted the research team to hear interviewees' reactions to the preliminary findings.

Most interviews were conducted in the Myanmar language, though some were in English. The majority lasted for 30-45 minutes, and a few extended to 90 minutes. The interviews conducted in the Myanmar language were first transcribed that language and then translated into English. Interview transcripts were processed and analysed with NVivo 11 software, which enabled systematic analysis of 107 transcripts. In the open coding, ideas and concepts relevant to the research topic were identified as basic codes across all transcripts. The basic codes then were merged into larger themes in the axial coding, after which the themes were lifted to the next level of analytical categories.

The initial findings were taken to a pair of workshops for verification and triangulation, and to explore themes further. The first workshop comprised the principals and two teachers selected by the principals from each of the eight schools. They were asked to comment on what they found surprising or unsurprising in the preliminary findings, and remarked on their perceptions of policy implications. The second workshop was for other stakeholders, including NGOs, international organisations, teachers' professional bodies, and the NEPC. These participants also commented on the initial findings, and identified policy implications at various levels.

## **The Scale and Nature of Shadow Education**

Questionnaire data indicated that private tutoring was widespread. Overall, 84.9% of students reported that they had received tutoring within the previous 12 months, with little variation between grades, genders, and locations. The participation rate for Grade 9 students was 83.4% compared with 86.2% for Grade 11 students; for males the proportion was 86.4% compared with 84.5% for females; and for urban students the figure was 88.2% compared with 79.4% for peri-urban students.

Most of the sampled students received private tutoring in several different subjects. Among the Grade 9

students who received tutoring, 82.8% did so in six or more subjects, and the proportion among Grade 11 students was 93.6%. English, Mathematics and Myanmar were the most popular subjects. The students mostly received private tutoring in small groups (40.4%) or large groups (51.6%), and only 10.6% indicated having received individual tutoring.

Concerning providers, 11.3% of students received tutoring from their own teachers, 3.5% from other teachers in their schools, and 10.6% from teachers in other schools. Adding these proportions, therefore, 25.4% of students receiving tutoring did so from serving teachers. Another 31.9% received tutoring from freelance teachers not attached to schools. The remaining tutors were university teachers, university students and what in Myanmar are called study guides, i.e. secondary school students or recent school leavers.

The most common venues for the instruction were tutorial centres, serving 53.2% of sampled students. Teachers' homes were also common places, in which 34.7% of students reported that they received tutoring. Some tutoring was received in students' own homes (12.2%), while 4.5% of students received tutoring in after-school boarding institutions that provided an "all in one" service including accommodation, food and tutoring.

Over three quarters (77.3%) of students received tutoring during weekdays, while 29.6% did so during weekends and 7.4% during holidays. Respondents commonly viewed private tutoring as a "tradition" or "a usual task" in their lives, and many students had received tutoring since the early stages of their schooling. The 15.1% of respondents in the total sample of students who did not receive tutoring may also have viewed tutoring as a norm, even though they did not themselves receive tutoring. Among them, 41.5% felt that they were doing well enough in school, in the case of one interviewee because her own mother was a teacher-tutor. Other major reasons cited for not receiving tutoring were lack of money (39.4%) and lack of time (15.7%).

## **Components in the Backwash of Shadow Education**

This section considers components in the backwash of shadow education under three headings. The first, concerning organisational flexibility, timetabling and prioritisation of tutoring, mainly concerns the backwash on school structures. The second, focusing on teachers who are also tutors, mainly concerns the backwash on teachers' morale, the nature of teaching, and teachers' professionalism. The third, addressing schools' contradictory attitudes towards tutoring, mainly concerns institutional compromises.

### *Organisational Flexibility, Timetabling and Prioritisation of Tutoring*

Compared with public schooling, private tutoring had fewer bureaucratic constraints. First, tutoring providers could choose the seasons for their work. The school year began in June, but tutoring providers commonly commenced in March or April with the curriculum for that grade. As a result, reported one teacher interviewee, "when schools start teaching Unit 1, students have already learned Unit 5 in tutoring". One implication was that "students may not find interest in repeating at school".

Second, school teachers were forced by the Chapter-End Tests, Semester-End Tests and frequent



inspections to cover specific course units each month, with neither more nor less than the content in the manuals. By contrast, private tutors, whether operating from tutorial centres or freelancing (and including teachers working as tutors) could organise their work to satisfy students' needs, commonly with particular emphasis on the Matriculation examination. The tutors determined which units were more valuable, and then focused on those units. As one teacher observed:

From 2002 to 2018, there were around 200 sets of exam papers. Tutors can understand the pattern by looking at all these exam papers. That's why they pay more attention to important chapters during tutoring.... They may tell students: "If you master [units] 5, 7, 10, 12, you will pass the exam for sure."

Such operation without bureaucratic constraints might be viewed as positive for learning (and clearly was so perceived by many students and their families), but also had negative dimensions. Students commonly devoted greater attention to tutoring, for which their families had paid, than to schooling. These students had learned the content in advance or would learn it later in tutoring classes, and so had less motivation to learn in school classes. In the words of interviewed teachers: "they attended class but didn't listen well"; and "they had no desire to learn [in school], but just fulfilled the attendance". One principal echoed, observing that "students only rely on tutoring, and even when they come to school ... some students attend classes just to meet classmates."

Private tutoring also took much of the students' energy that they would have devoted to schooling. On weekdays, students commonly attended tutorial classes after school for two hours, and some also received them before school started, e.g. from 6.00 to 8.00 am. As one student explained:

From Monday to Friday, I return home at about 4.30 pm, and between 8.00 and 10.30 pm I go to tutoring. On Saturday, I go to tutoring from 7.00 am to 12.00 noon and in the evening from 4.00 pm to 7.30 pm. On Sunday, I go to tutoring from 8.00 pm to 10.30 pm.

As in other countries, mentioned above, students were weary and some even slept during school classes.

Schools also faced problems of absenteeism as in other countries. During interviews, 23 of the 36 teachers indicated that private tutoring negatively affected school attendance, for example explaining that "students don't care about school classes.... If there is a conflict, they usually skip classes at school to attend tutoring." Parents might support their children to do this. As one teacher explained:

Some students attend private tutoring and they usually miss the school.... When they miss the classes for one or two days, we call and inform their parents. The parents sometimes lie to us that their children are sick. But we know they just skip classes to take tutoring.

Absenteeism became more severe close to the Matriculation examination when students received private tutoring more intensively. The examination was held in March each year, but Grade 11 students commonly skipped school from December onwards or, according to some teachers, even from October. This absenteeism negatively affected the teachers' enthusiasm for teaching. As one interviewee complained:

It's tough for teachers to face the reality of no children in the classroom. All kinds of tutors such as engineers, university students and high school graduates who even don't know the pedagogy are providing tutoring to secondary students outside, [while] teachers have to sit in the empty classroom. This offends our pride.

Similarly, in the words of another interviewee:

From October, almost nobody was left around. Imagine if you have no students left in the classroom for so long. Teachers become less careful of their roles as teachers.

Allied to these factors, many students tutored by outsiders respected those tutors more than their school teachers. As remarked by one: "Since taking tutoring, in our mind only tutors are right." Both student and teacher interviewees remarked that students receiving tutoring had diminished attention to their teachers in school classes. One principal added: "Students who receive tutoring are arrogant in class. We need to scold them sometimes in order to manage the class well." Thus, students' reliance on private tutoring and lack of respect for teachers increased the teachers' difficulties in classroom management.

Further, the teaching and learning approaches used by tutors sometimes clashed with those of school teachers. In the words of one mathematics teacher:

We teach differently from tutors, and students prefer the way from tutoring. Because of that, we sometimes get angry and scold the students to follow our way, especially in my subject... But in the end, they still follow the way learned from tutors, which may be simple but can't help them to understand the knowledge clearly.

Such factors again created challenges of classroom management for the teachers.

### *Teachers as Tutors*

The fact that 47.7% of teachers responding to the questionnaire indicated they were providing tutoring shows that the activity was very common – and since the activity was against regulations, some respondents may have chosen not to declare it, in which case the actual number may have been higher. During interviews both teachers and principals indicated that most colleagues provided tutoring either to students for whom they were responsible in school or to other students in their schools.

Compared to the low and standardised salary from school, income from tutoring which relied on their performance encouraged teachers who also provided tutoring to prioritise the latter. In the private domain, teachers had to "comply with the expectations of students and their parents" from whom they received money. Teachers sought to meet their clients' needs by teaching with detailed explanations and innovative ways like making poems into songs for easy memorisation, providing supplementary handouts, and helping students to do exercises.

Private tutoring also distracted teachers from their regular duties, since "everyone has the same amount of time every day, and they have to divide their time for all responsibilities". Teachers who also served as tutors

“had to leave in a rush at or even before the time when school gets off in order to have many tutoring classes in the evening.” Interviewees stated that the school lessons of many teachers who provided tutoring were delivered in slipshod manner: “Some teachers just ask one student to write the lesson on the blackboard without proper explanations, and ask other students to follow what is written.” Even worse, a few teachers “took school as their resting place”. They took naps during school hours, or “spent most of their time on social media Apps on their smartphones rather than teaching”.

Teachers who provided tutoring of course needed clients. One principal noted that “teachers want to teach classes of rich students, because these students will take tutoring from them.” The popular subjects for private tutoring, especially English and Mathematics, were also favoured. Principals complained that they could not easily assign other subjects to these teachers.

The teachers’ marketing strategies were both direct and indirect. Direct marketing included public announcement of their private classes and asking students to register. Indirect marketing included teaching lessons in tutoring class ahead of school class, which helped the tutored students to perform better than their peers when repeating in the school class. Further, some teachers disclosed examination questions and even answers in advance to students who took their tutoring. One interviewee suggested that “maybe 30% to 40% of teachers do like this.” To combat the strategy, one principal prepared his own set of question papers rather than using the two sets from teachers.

Other ways in which teachers treated their tutees differently included differential assignment of homework. As explained by another interviewee: “If a student goes to a tutoring class, he [or she] has less homework to do, which is really important for exam”. Students not in their teacher’s tutoring class might also be ignored or teased in school classes. Parents stated that they invested in tutoring to avoid possible discrimination against their children.

Some teachers also stressed that while the extra incomes were valued they also engaged in tutoring for professional satisfaction. Finding themselves with empty classrooms during the period close to the Matriculation examination and with students who were disrespectful because they had alternative sources of teaching through their private lessons, many teachers experienced greater satisfaction in the tutorial sector. One interviewee observed that: “Some teachers feel that their pride is offended and want to prove their abilities by providing good quality teaching [through private tutoring].” Another stated that: “If we cannot teach in the school, we will teach outside where students will be as we don’t want our knowledge and skills to be rusty from not using it.” Some teachers were even willing to offer tutoring at a low price to secure such satisfaction, but noted complexities in the marketplace when price was equated with quality. As explained by one interviewee:

Some teachers are considerate of parents’ expenses on tutoring for their children, and provide tutoring with cheaper price than outside tutors. However, some parents may compare the price and they think cheaper tutoring may not be as good as the expensive one. Then these teachers ask higher price at the end.

Whatever the reason, teachers' involvement in private tutoring had negative influences on school education. One teacher worried about the overall impact on the ethics of the profession. While some interviewees compared themselves with the medical profession and felt that they should be allowed to undertake private practice in the way that was permitted for government doctors, this teacher felt that:

Our role as a teacher is different from a doctor or a nurse. A doctor, if he diagnoses wrong and provides the wrong treatment, only a patient will die. If the conduct of teacher is wrong, we will harm the whole generation.

This perspective was indeed broader than the self-interest displayed by most other interviewees.

Although space constraints here precludes detailed examination of the perspectives of the 52.3% of sampled teachers who said that they did not provide private tutoring, a few remarks provide a counterpoint to the perspectives of the teachers who did provide it. The strongest reason, stated by 68.3% of these teachers in the quantitative survey, was that the regulations discouraged teachers from providing tutoring. Next, cited by 65.9% of respondents, was that they were busy with their families, followed by 64.5% citing ethical concerns and 63.7% indicating that they were busy with school teaching. Only 20.7% indicated that they had enough salary from their school work.

### *Schools' Contradictory Attitudes towards Tutoring*

Schools chose to tolerate students' absence because they recognised that private tutoring could raise the passing rate in public examinations, which were among their major foci. As one principal explained: "We have to achieve the passing rate required by the Ministry.... If lower than the required percentage, we have to write an explanation letter to the Yangon authorities." Since they perceived that "tutoring has advantages over schooling due to the freedom in curriculum and classroom management", and "a lot of parents believe there are higher chances for their children to pass the exam if they receive tutoring", schools were not inclined to enforce the 75% attendance regulation. As one teacher explained:

Let's say we have reported the names of the students who do not have 75% attendance, at the end the blame will be on us and on our school. The Ministry will ask "Don't teachers ask their students to attend the school regularly?"

Further, if the teachers do report, the Ministry is likely to ask the school to provide extra classes. This would increase the workload of the teachers, which they would prefer to avoid. In turn, the schools' soft attitude towards absenteeism was noticed by the tutoring providers, who further encouraged students to skip school classes with words like: "Don't care about the 75% attendance rule. You won't be expelled from school."

Schools also gave tacit approval to teachers providing tutoring despite the slackness in regular lessons because they desired to retain the teachers. The regulations required teachers to sign declarations each year indicating that they would not provide tutoring, and teachers in one school were asked to do so every month. This was generally regarded as just routine token behaviour, however, and principals neither reported nor

punished teachers who provided tutoring. As one principal indicated: “It is just a declaration and no action. No one gets fired because of providing tutoring.” Principals just took the declaration as a form of self-protection: “I have all my teachers sign so that if there comes a problem relating to tutoring, the school has nothing to do with it.”

With contradictory attitudes towards tutoring, schools could keep running with limited funding and inadequate teachers. However, this pattern further damaged public confidence, pushing more students and teachers to private tutoring and causing further backwash.

## **Conclusions**

This paper began by noting literature on time-on-task and its relationship with learning. Educators are increasingly mindful of the scale and nature of out-of-school as well as in-school learning. This awareness caused the OECD to include pertinent items in PISA questionnaires, and for analysts to consider the relationships between time for learning and average student achievement scores. Analysis of PISA 2006 data produced a counterintuitive finding that “learning time in out-of-school time lessons and individual study is negatively related to performance” (OECD, 2011, p.13). This is a complex domain, and other researchers with more refined instruments and data have reached both similar and different findings according to contexts and variables (see e.g. Berberoğlu & Tansel, 2014; Chang, 2019; Hof, 2014; Park et al., 2016). A great deal depends on the nature of the education system and the setting in which it operates.

The present paper, focusing on Myanmar, addresses a type of country very different from those participating in PISA 2006. The paper does not provide quantitative analysis of the sort that can be offered by PISA and similar surveys, but it does provide qualitative insights on why private tutoring that claims to supplement may also subtract. Of course the balance of supplementation and subtraction cannot be determined mathematically by this paper; and since any attempt at such mathematics would have to place a value on children’s tiredness, teachers’ overtime, family stress and other matters, no calculation of precise balance could ever be fully convincing. Nevertheless, the overall observation is clear.

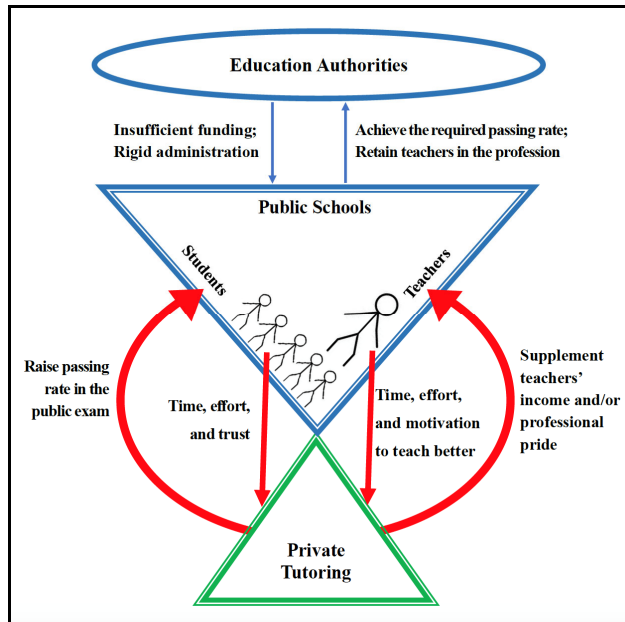
In making this point, the paper notes parallels with some other societies. Research has been cited from Cambodia, India and Nepal, and certainly other countries could be added (see e.g. Dang & Rogers, 2008; Mahmud, 2019; Sieverding et al., 2019). Again, however, differences should be noted even with relatively low-income countries in Asia. For example, Gupta (2019) employed neoliberalism as her lens for analysis of patterns in India, making a specific contextual link (p.4) to the Structural Adjustment Programme advocated by the International Monetary Fund and adopted in 1991. This measure promoted the marketisation of education among other sectors, and encouraged teachers to navigate the changed environment by adopting new practices including tutoring. Certainly tutoring in Myanmar currently operates in a relatively free marketplace, but that was not the case in 1984 when the military regime introduced fierce regulations and in 1990 when Gibson (1992, p.10) found that 90.7% of sampled upper-secondary students – i.e. comparable to the proportion in the present study – were receiving private tutoring. Thus in large measure contemporary

patterns in Myanmar are a continuation of patterns predating the easing of economic restrictions rather than a response to government policies of neoliberalism. It may be pertinent that most of the people who were students when Gibson conducted his research are now parents. Patterns are part of what Suante (2019) has called ‘normalisation’ of the phenomenon, meaning that families have for some time sent their children for tutoring as a normal and unquestioned practice in the same way that they have sent them for schooling.

Nevertheless, it is true that in the contemporary era multiple actors have to “adopt specific entrepreneurial strategies to navigate precarious, competitive market conditions” (Gupta, 2019, p.1). This observation applies not only to teachers but also to parents. Thus, while some Myanmar teachers behaved in ways similar to their Cambodian counterparts in deploying “the tricks of the teacher” (Dawson, 2009), parents also needed to play tricks for example by claiming, when they wanted their children to attend tutorial classes instead of school ones, that the children were sick. Principals also needed to play various tricks, for example avoiding reporting absenteeism to the authorities because they knew that they could not prevent such absenteeism yet also did not want to be held accountable for it.

Indeed, in such matters private tutoring had become part of a circle in which all components supported each other (Figure 1). Students sought tutoring because it was ‘normal’ to do so, because of pressures from teachers, peers and others, and because it was better to avoid the risks that might arise from not doing so. Teachers provided tutoring because they considered their salaries to be inadequate, and again felt that it was normal to do so. Schools accepted the existence of tutoring because it was perceived to help meet the examination pass rates required by the authorities and because higher pass rates conferred prestige. And despite the promulgation of regulations, the government tolerated tutoring because it helped to retain teachers in the profession and reduced pressures to raise salaries. Shadow education had costs in time for students, and had other backwash effects as noted in this paper that much reduced the efficiency of the education system. However, the fact that shadow education was among the hidden strings that held the system together was among the reasons why it had not been seriously challenged. Families at the end of the second decade of the present century sought tutoring to supplement schooling that was perceived as inadequate, just as their counterparts had done a quarter of a century earlier (Gibson, 1992); but the system did somehow still work.

Figure 1: Interrelationships between Public Schooling and Private Tutoring



Nevertheless, the facts that the model is inefficient, has corrupting elements, and has inequitable aspects insofar as it excludes some children whose families cannot pay for tutoring are among reasons why it does deserve attention from policymakers. A starting point would be to take themes out of the shadows and place them in arenas for public discussion. In Myanmar's centralised and top-down hierarchy this might imply commencing with the Ministry of Education and then the Regional Education Offices, but perhaps even more valuable would be discussions at the school level involving identifiable individuals rather than abstract policies. These discussions could usefully bring together administrators, teachers, parents, and perhaps students. The research for this paper did note variations among schools, showing among other features the potential for school-based leadership even within the centralised education system. Further, we stress that the present study has focused only on Yangon; but there is reason to think that its core themes have pertinence throughout the country, and if in fact there are variations around the country, those variations are also best addressed at school and community levels.

As part of these discussions, the authorities should pay particular attention to matters of social equity. This is not just a matter of who can or cannot afford shadow education, but also of the scale and types of shadow education received by those who do receive it. Such themes have appropriately received considerable attention in the literature, both in OECD countries (e.g. Holloway & Kirby, 2020) and in less developed countries (e.g. Marshall & Fukao, 2019). Alongside issues of social class, they also have a geographic dimension; and they also apply to different levels of schooling. These considerations point to the need for further research and policy attention in Myanmar.

Returning to the parental feelings that schooling by itself was inadequate, some commentators have felt that shadow education chiefly exists because of weaknesses in school systems with the implication that as

those school systems become stronger the shadow will disappear. Evidence elsewhere points in a very different direction, showing that once shadow education becomes entrenched in the culture then it is very unlikely to be removed. Indeed, some of the strongest performers in PISA and other tests, such as those in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Japan, and the Republic of Korea, also receive much shadow education. The forms may differ, and in particular serving teachers in these systems are less likely to provide shadow education on a moonlighting basis; but insofar as demand for shadow education is driven by competition between families and socio-economic groups, the greater economic prosperity that may be anticipated for Myanmar during the coming decades is likely to consolidate rather than remove the shadow education. Again, this fact underlines the need to take the themes ‘out of the shadows’ for careful discussion and policy analysis.

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