

BOOK REVIEW

Bray, M. (2021). *Shadow education in Africa. Private supplementary tutoring and its policy implications*. Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre (CERC).

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This book focuses on the development of shadow education in Africa and analyzes the supply and demand for this type of supplementary schooling. African education systems have experienced during the last decades a quantitative and qualitative expansion of public and private education. Furthermore, the voices of parents and other education stakeholders are reflected in the desire to access adequate learning and qualifications.

The first quality of this book is that it addresses the lack of comprehensive and high-quality data on Shadow education in most African countries. Some indicators provided in the book give some insights on the scope of the phenomenon:

“In Algeria: 34.5% of surveyed Grade 9 students were receiving private tutoring.

In Angola: 94% of surveyed students in Grades 11 and 12 were receiving or had received tutoring at some time;

Burkina Faso: 46% of surveyed upper primary students were receiving private tutoring at the time of the study;

Egypt: Focusing on Grade 12, 91% of respondents indicated that they were either currently receiving shadow education or, if they had graduated, had done so when they were in that grade;

Ethiopia: 67% of surveyed upper primary students had received private tutoring at some time;

Mauritius: 81% of surveyed Grade 6 students were receiving private tutoring at the time of the study;

South Africa: 29% of surveyed Grade 6 students were receiving private tutoring at the time of the study” (p. ix and p. 13).

These statistics show that no region of the African continent remains immune to the development of private tutoring. Shadow education is present in both rich and poor countries, North-South, East-Quest of the continent.

One of the first challenges in exploring shadow education in Africa is the difficulty to outline its scope and cover its many definitions throughout the African continent. Thereupon the author provides an interesting discussion on terminology. Although he uses the concept of shadow education, he recognizes that the term is not used worldwide and is not always easy to

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translate from English into other languages. In English, ‘private tutoring’ is commonly used in Kenya and Nigeria and ‘coaching’ is used in countries such as Rwanda and Uganda. Other English-speaking countries use ‘studies’ or ‘extra lessons’. In French speaking Africa, common terms are *tutorat privé* (private tutoring), *soutien scolaire* (school support) and *accompagnement* (backing); while in lusophone Africa, the main terms are ‘*explicações*’ (explanation) and ‘*reforço escolar*’ (school reinforcement). In Egypt, the Arabic words used can be translated as ‘private lessons’ taught on a one-to-one basis and ‘study groups’ (or ‘reinforcement classes’) in small groups organized in tutorial centers, mosques and churches, or at school. And at the end of the school year, shortly before the examinations, many teachers provide fee-charging ‘final revisions’.

As pointed out by the author, this plurality calls for caution in regard to the terminology used in the area of shadow education, especially across national and cultural boundaries or when researchers aim to conduct comparative studies. It is also important to see that terminology issues are subject to debate on *public versus private education* and on the *search of quality instruction and better learning outcomes* by families.

Despite the various definitions and terms used in the area of shadow education, Bray managed to identify the structure of this specific educational provision in Africa. He distinguishes three main providers: (1) commercial suppliers of tutoring, (2) teachers in regular schools who provide tutoring as an extra occupation, and (3) informal suppliers such as students and other self-employed personnel.

The first provider is fueled by the opportunity to “do business” in the education sector. Urban areas in Africa are generally host to a large range of commercial-driven private shadow education enterprises, mostly working within the scale of a neighborhood, although some have a national and even an international reach.

The second provider is based on a more individual parent-teacher relationship. Regular teachers provide *tutoring as a supplementary activity*, either on school premises or externally, especially in rural areas which are not served by companies or other providers.

The third provider identified by Bray may be referred to as informal shadow tutoring. Many graduate students are interested in securing extra pocket money through private tutoring. Urban areas are often home to a large number of educated unemployed people who provide tutoring as a temporary activity. In Burkina Faso, for instance, 49% of the tutors of primary school children in the capital Ouagadougou were university students or unemployed university graduates.

Although African comparative statistics are lacking, we can consider that the three main suppliers of shadow education are present in all countries in varying degrees, depending on the capacity of the state to control the education sector. Bray rightly pointed out that one of the most sensitive issues in shadow education is *regulation of teacher’ involvement* in this activity:

“Turning to regulations on private tutoring provided by practicing teachers, the main questions are (i) whether teachers should be permitted to provide private supplementary tutoring, (ii) if so, for whom, and perhaps when and where, and (iii) if not, how this regulation can be enforced. The majority of African countries have no regulations on this matter, and leave it to a *laissez faire* environment”. (p. 59).

Regarding the difficulties encountered by African countries in governing shadow education, it seems important to stress that these difficulties are to be linked to the deficient governance of the education sector as a whole. Thus, African states rarely succeed in regulating private schools for lack of adequate resources and instruments (d’Aiglepierre, 2018).



Bray's book enriches the debate on ways to improve quality of education in Africa. Indeed, both the international education agenda 2030 and current national education policies attempt to build inclusive quality education for all. If the development of shadow education in Africa can contribute to the improvement of learning, which remains weak (PASEC, 2020), it can also make inclusion more problematic insofar as benefiting from private tutoring is dependent on family income as the book has clearly shown. The improving of public education may be an alternative: *"because shadow education does contribute to social and economic development. A better idea is to enhance the quality of public education so that families see less need for supplementary support."* (p. 66). However, even improved public education will not cause shadow education to disappear according to Bray. Indeed, shadow education occurs in Africa within a wider perspective of privatization of education in a context where the state is weaker and private actors are more active (Silva & Oliveira, 2020).

One of the most interesting proposals of the book is its call to broaden the fields covered in faculties of educational sciences and further include informal and non-formal education. In Africa, private supplementary tutoring as well as non-formal education must be widely recognized and discussed in university Faculties of Educational sciences.

To conclude this review, it seems important to state that this book gives a balanced assessment (both positive and negative) of the development of shadow education in Africa. On the one hand, this phenomenon is a means to enhance learning outcomes, benefiting individual, social and economic development. It is also an additional source of income for teachers which helps them to retain in the profession. Furthermore, private tutoring enables governments to stretch their budgets since teachers can supplement their incomes. Finally, it can provide much needed employment opportunities for graduates and support local economic activity. On the other hand, shadow education exacerbates the already existing social and urban/rural inequalities. It is also susceptible to corruption and a source of disturbance, especially when teachers provide private tutoring to their own pupils and prove to be more engaged and accountable for their private lessons compared to their teaching in public schools in which the average absenteeism rate is alarmingly high.

African education systems are currently a space where several simultaneous phenomena are played out: the emergence of a shadow education market, the development of low-cost private schools, the increasingly visible presence of NGOs and local communities in schooling, growing investments in education from religious organizations and private actors, and the transformation of public education funding characterized by an increased involvement of international cooperation through the Global Partnership for Education. This book sheds light on one of these important transformations of education in Africa taking place in the first quarter of the 21 Century. It clearly shows that Africa is not isolated from the international trends and offers a valuable insight to its specific configurations.

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Abdeljalil Akkari is a Professor and the director of the research group on international education at the University of Geneva, Switzerland. His main experience and major publications include studies on international cooperation, educational planning, multicultural education, teacher training and educational inequalities. His principal research interests are currently centered on



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