

Implications of Grade-Oriented Shadow Education in Children's Sustainability of Physical, Emotional and Academic Development

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ABSTRACT. *Shadow education becomes a global phenomenon and is prevalent in many parts of teachers, parents, and educators. Some parents send their children to private tutoring classes when children are very young, still in nurseries or kindergartens. Critics often remark that with such practices, parents “steal their childhoods.” Based on the premise that sustainability is one of the most critical variables in children’s childhood, the essay will focus on answering the question that how shadow education undermines children’s sustainability of childhood by discussing the negative influences of grade-oriented shadow education in children’s physical, emotional and academic development.*

KEYWORDS: *Shadow education; Sustainable development; Private tutoring, Children’s development; Motivation*

1. Introduction

Shadow education is a “a set of educational activities that occur outside formal schooling and are designed to enhance the student’s formal school career” (Stevenson & Baker, 1992, 1639), and commonly, they are fee-paying. Shadow education is a metaphor for private supplementary tutoring because it functions as a shadow of formal schools by mimicking regular curriculum. Both positive and negative social influences can be found in shadow education. On the bright side, shadow education can contribute to economic development, precious educational resources, and promote students’ academic achievements. By contrast, it may cause education inequalities, forms of corruption, inefficiencies in the education system, and stress for family and individuals. (Bray & Lykins, 2012). In places such as Singapore or China, where education plays an essential role, and high-stakes exam can be a turning point in children’s development, parents are eager to send their children to private tutoring classes to get advantages so that they can succeed on the exams (Tan, 2017). Some children without any interest have to sacrifice their time to receive supplementary classes to avoid being pushed out in the transition points. Because some private tutoring is sharp grades-oriented, criticisms such as “parents steal students’ childhood by sending them to private tutoring classes” emerged. Biologically, childhood cannot be stolen since it means a period of being a child, and it is a stage that every adult must experience (Childhood, 2019). Nevertheless, childhood should be sustainable, with a time dedicated to the safe physical, emotional, and social development (The Lancet, 2017), but it is conflict to the consequences that grades-oriented private tutoring generates intellectual dependence and superficial knowledge (Hussein, 1987). Hence, the “stolen childhood” implies that children are losing their natural curiosity, creativity, communication, interests, passions, happiness, and even hope through attending to private tutoring classes. The essay will argue that parents with grade-oriented motivation send their children with no interest in private tutoring classes, which will undermine children’s sustainability of childhood in physical, emotional, and social development.

2. Grade-Oriented Motivation

Drivers of demand for shadow education are diversiform, which include competition of high-stake exams, culture, school quality, families wealth. According to Mark Bray and Chad Lykins (2012, pg 23), “the main driver of demand for supplementary tutoring is the awareness that investment in education can generate strong returns from good performance in key examinations and entrance to high-status secondary schools and universities”. Families also acknowledge that unsatisfied performance in school and on examinations will limit choices of the entrance to high-status universities and employment opportunities. Therefore, competition is a strong factor behind the parents’ motivation. Singapore, for example, has a highly stratified system of secondary schooling (Singapore 2011). It is requested that all children above the age of six years must be educated for six

years in a public primary school and sit for a terminal exam, Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) (Tan,2017). A mother of a primary school child in Singapore commented on the pressure to pay for private tutoring for her child: “PSLE is a ranking exam and decides which stream and secondary school my child will enter. If everyone else is getting tuition to improve their results, then how can I not provide tuition for my child? She will lose out” (Davie 2015b. para. 32). Hence, most parents in Singapore perceive private supplementary tutoring as a tool to improve their children’s test scores (Tan,2017), and it can be represented in other places where share similar education systems such as China and Japan. (Bray & Lykins,2012). It also shows the competitive nature of the educational process in shadow education, and the deep-seated anxiety parents have over their children’s education(Bray & Lykins,2012); consequently, the intense competition encourages parents to invest in children’s education in the earlier school years (Ramey and Ramey 2010).

3. Implications

Findings in effect of private tutoring on student’s academic achievement are not consistent (Hof,2014) because of confounding variables such as the motivation, attitudes, learning styles of the learners, and teaching styles of the tutors. (Bray & Lykins,2012). Although there is no cause-effect in children’s development, insights from solid data and interviews should be considered in children’s physical, emotional, and academic development.

3.1 Children’s Physical Condition

Data collected from around 461 primary students shows 56% of students received shadow education; among them, 13.8% of students go to private tutoring classes after the formal school end, which is mostly held on a weekday, while majority students receive it on the weekend. Moreover, over 60% percent of students receive shadow education under 2 hours per week, while 26.7% of students will have 2-4 hours of private classes. Moreover, most of them have additional homework from their private tutoring classes, and it usually takes half to one hour to finish their extra homework (Zhou,2016). Students who work long hours at tutoring centers may be exhausted for formal schooling. In some countries students who are receiving much tutoring are tired and therefore sleep in school classrooms, some students will even choose to be absent in the formal school. It is following the report by Silova and Kazimzade (2006:128):

“...numerous interviews with school directors, teachers, and students reveal that school nonattendance increases shortly before the end of the school year (especially in the last grade of secondary school), when students begin skipping classes to attend private tutoring lessons during school hours. Some students pay bribes to their teachers or school administrators to be excused from school and instead attend private tutoring lessons. Many interviewed teachers and education officials reported instances of empty classes in secondary schools, when students would leave schools en mass to attend private tutoring lessons instead. Consequently, they were unable to perform well in class eventually” (Huang 2004:296).

Apart from the influence on academic development, sleep deprivation can treat children’s physical development by impairing their immune function, appetite regulation, and other physiological processes influencing health (Khalaila,2014). Although it is not determined that attending to private tutoring classes will cause sleep deprivation, this potential risk caused by intense competition environment should not be ignored by both parents and educators.

3.2 Child Emotional Stage

Academic self-concept plays the most crucial role in students’ academic motivation and achievement, and it covers a set of student’s attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of one’s own intellectual abilities and performance. (Cokley, 2000; Ferla et al., 2009). When students feel competent when performing academic tasks, they experience an increased drive to succeed in their studies, leading to achieving higher scores on their exams.

However, “Some children [who] attended cram schools prelearned the lessons, giving them a false impression about their mathematical competence; thus, they tended to be less attentive or were frequently distracted.” (Huang 2004:296).

The research illustrated that students who have low self-concept would lead them to anxiety and consequently make their academic performance worse (Khalaila,2015). Moreover, as a result, since views of themselves are distorted, anxious children often tend to withdraw from schools because they are afraid of failing evaluative tasks (Rapee & Heimberg,1997)

3.3 Children's Academic Development

Hussein (1987) elaborated that shadow education will reduce student's interest, limit their creativity, and weak their curiosity. Students may be lacking in intrinsic motivations to learn subjects; instead, study dependency will be encouraged, they may expect to be given an answer to solve problems without any wish to understand how that key was constructed since they are grade-motivated.

"Cram schools place emphasis on 'short-cut' and 'effectiveness' and focus solely on producing the correct answers to problems rather than exploring the systematic structure of mathematical concepts. Children frequently fail to solve problems that look novel to them. They just learn to mechanically apply a formula when solving problems through drill and practice. Such rote practice may enhance their homework performance or term tests that cover only content retention but may weaken their meaningful construction of mathematical knowledge" (Huang, pp.296-297).

Even though the promotion of informed, skilled behaviors and ways of thinking, provided by private tutoring classes are useful in the short-term where the need for this is clearly identified and agreed, it is suggested that too much of it will not only narrow domains of achievement (Bray & Lykins, 2012), but also make students less sustainable by decreasing their capacity of manage themselves and think critically (Vare&Scott, 2007).

4. Suggestion

Implementations such as securing data, monitoring trends, reforming assessment and selection system, changing the curriculum are encouraged by Mark Bray and Chad Lykins (2012) for policymakers. Furthermore, regarding the situation that many students are asked to receive shadow education by their parents, parent's knowledge of shadow education and children's development are also essential factors to help them to avoid undermining their children's "childhood" by sending them to private tutoring classes. It is believed that knowing the following three suggestions will help parents to promote their children's development without merely giving up shadow education.

Firstly, it is unnecessary to provide shadow education to children who have received sufficient help from parents since parental support is known to be an influential factor in children's learning and achievement, particularly in the early years before school (Desforges & Abouchaar 2003). The time saved from receiving shadow education can assure that children will have more time to explore their interests or get enough sleep for their physical development.

Secondly, for parents of year six children, psychological construction and emotional health should be seen as the most critical factor in children's development. Hence, it is suggested that increased confidence was the most important reason for employing a tutor, whereas the understanding of the subject was a more critical factor for parents of older children (Zhang&Xie, 2016).

Thirdly, parents should substantially see their children's development. "Sustainability" has been seen as the most essential idea in the twentieth century (Dernbach, 2011), according to Broom (2005, page 3), "A system or procedure is sustainable if it is acceptable now and if its expected future effects are acceptable, in particular about resource availability, consequences of functioning and morality of action." As mentioned above, knowledge and practices provided by grade-oriented private tutoring classes are useful in the short-term. However, it will not work when students have to face practical problems rather than tests. Therefore, "building capacity to think critically about what experts say and to test ideas, exploring the dilemmas and contradictions inherent in sustainable living" (Vare&Scott, 2007, pg2).

5. Conclusion

This essay did not conclude that all children who were sent to private tutoring classes will lose their childhood, the argument that this essay made was based on premises that parents are grade-motivated and students with no intrinsic interest. The nature of shadow education can be seen as a response to the demand in the current educational system, in the educational system with intense competitions; parents are often grade-oriented because they do not want their children to be kicked out in the important transition points in the educational system. Under grade motivation or grade-oriented private tutoring classes, children's physical, emotional, and academic development can be undermined implicitly. Regarding this global phenomenon, knowledge such as implications of shadow education should be aware by both policymakers and parents, in order to reduce the potential risks in children's development.

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