

## Q&amp;A

# 'Private tutoring can corrupt public education systems'

*As education rapidly expands the world over, so does its shadow, the private tutoring system. Mark Bray, director of UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning, Paris, has tracked what he describes as the shadow education system through a series of pioneering studies spanning all the continents. In an email interview to Subodh Varma, he summarises the situation:*

## What is 'shadow education'?

It is a term used for private supplementary tutoring that parallels the mainstream school system. It has become a global phenomenon, but with different types. Shadow systems catering to high achievers have been prominent in East Asia for several decades. In Eastern Europe, it greatly expanded among all income groups in the early 1990s after economies collapsed. Tutoring has also become more visible in Africa. In part, this reflects teachers' awareness of revenue-generating opportunities available to them in education systems with weak accountability and supervision. In this respect, Africa may begin to resemble South Asia, where tutoring has become an established part of daily life, especially in urban areas. In Western Europe, North America and Australasia, tutoring remains modest in scale, but has greatly expanded due to competition between schools and as parents see the rewards from investing in it. In Latin America, tutoring is relatively modest except at the upper secondary level.

## Why does it arise?

Demand arises from competition and rewards from educational achievement, particularly in countries with high-stakes testing and with stratified education systems (either few people going to universities or few people going to good universities). In general, rich families pay for greater quantities and better qualities of tutoring than do middle-income and poor families. But then the competition works down the ladder, so that middle-income and even low-income families find themselves forced to pay for tutoring in order not to be left behind.

## What effect does it have on children and the society?

In some countries, parents, educators and politicians are highly critical of the way private tutoring has come to dominate the lives of families and pupils. School plus homework plus tutoring does not leave much time for anything else. It can corrupt public education systems, particularly when teachers pay more attention to their private lessons and neglect what they are paid to do. Tutoring can have a backwash on the school system, leading to inequalities in the classroom and to conflicts in approaches to learning (such as mathematics for understanding as opposed to mathematics by formula and by rote). Tutoring commonly creates and perpetuates social inequalities, and it consumes human and financial resources, which perhaps could be used more appropriately in other activities.

The first thing to do is to recognise its existence – and potential danger. Some regulations can be appropriate, particularly to prohibit teachers from accepting payment for tutoring the pupils for whom those teachers already have responsibility during their normal classes.



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