A ‘shadow education’ timescape: An empirical investigation of the temporal arrangements of private tutoring vis-à-vis formal schooling in India

# Achala Guptaa

*a Southampton Education School, University of Southampton, Southampton, United Kingdom*

Achala.Gupta@soton.ac.uk

Dr Achala Gupta is a lecturer in the Southampton Education School at the University of Southampton. Her research focuses on investigating educational issues sociologically. Achala’s current interests include education delivery systems (formal and supplementary) and schooling practices in Asia, and students’ aspirations and transition into higher education in Europe. She has published research on the heterogeneity of middle-class advantage, teacher-entrepreneurialism, social legitimacy and the organisational arrangements of private tutoring in India, as well as on how students are made sense of by policy, staff, the media and students themselves in Denmark, England, Germany, Ireland, Poland, and Spain.

A ‘shadow education’ timescape: An empirical investigation of the temporal arrangements of private tutoring vis-à-vis formal schooling in India

Private tutoring is a globally pervasive phenomenon. While scholars have explored the demand for and supply of private tutoring, how tutoring centres organise their services, and the role of temporality in this, remains underexplored. To address this gap in the scholarship, this article draws on ethnographic data, produced during 2014-15 in Dehradun (India), to discuss four aspects of a ‘shadow education’ timescape: how tutoring services are mapped onto the formal schooling structure (Mapping); how tutorial centres benefit from having more time to allocate to educational services over formal schools (Advantage); how tutorial centres diversify the nature of academic support they offer throughout an academic year (Diversity); and, how tutoring services accommodate changing schooling practices over time (Adaptability). This discussion unveils the specific ways in which the temporal facets of private tutoring help tutoring businesses *circumvent* the schooling system to secure their space *alongside* – rather than by attempting to replace – the formal institutions of education within the Indian educational landscape. Although this article is empirically grounded in India, the conceptualisation of *temporalities of private tutoring* it generates will be valuable to the investigations of organisational framings, structural arrangements and practices of tutoring provisions in other contexts.

Keywords: Private tutoring; Shadow education; Time; Schooling; Sociology of Education; India

# **Introduction**

A growing body of research has shown that private tutoring is a globally pervasive phenomenon (Bray & Kobakhidze, 2014). Most scholars refer to private tutoring as ‘shadow education’, primarily because this metaphor helps identify tutoring practices that mimic the structure and practices of formal schooling. Recent research into the process of ‘shadowing’ illustrates the intricate, inextricable, and deeply entwined relationship between tutoring and formal schooling (Gupta, 2021a; Gupta, 2021b). However, this relationship is not entirely without consequences. Studies have shown the impact of private tutoring on the quality of education delivered in schools, educational economy, teachers’ identity and work, and teaching practices (see, for example, Bray, 2003; Gupta, 2019; Liu & Bray, 2020).

While the nature and scope of private tutoring have been extensively explored, relatively little attention is given to its organisational framework (see Zhang & Bray, 2020 for discussion). However, where it has been given attention, scholars have focused on specific aspects such as the ‘shadow education’ curriculum, and how it supplants the formal education syllabi (Kim & Jung, 2019). The institutional features of private tutoring have also been revealed through the analysis of the tactical ‘shadowing process’– in which both the adherence to specific schooling norms and divergence from other less favoured practices of formal schooling are used by tutorial centres to gain public trust within the highly marketised education sector (see Gupta, 2021a; Gupta 2021b). As such, some scholars argue that private supplementary tutoring is an ‘evolving ecosystem’ within the global educational landscape (for example, see Bray & Kobakhidze, 2015).

Contributing to the scholarship on private tutoring in general, and on its organisational arrangement specifically, this article explores a timescape of ‘shadow education’. Timescape is used here to refer to the ways in which ‘time is irrecoverably bound up with the spatial constitution of society (and vice versa)’ (May and Thrift, 2001, p.3; also see Adam, 2004). Reflecting on the diversity of private tutoring businesses within and across countries, there are likely to be multiple, parallel, and perhaps overlapping and intersecting ‘shadow education timescapes’. This article explores only one such timescape within a particular empirical context. In doing so, it explains the relationship between time and private tutoring enterprises and reveals how the temporalities of tutoring businesses shape their spatiality within an educational landscape.

This article explores the ‘shadow education’ phenomenon through a novel angle – the lens of time. Specifically, the article discusses four features of a ‘shadow education’ timescape: how tutoring services are mapped onto the structure of formal schooling (Mapping); how tutorial centres benefit from having greater time to allocate to educational services over formal schools (Advantage); how tutorial centres diversify the nature of the educational support that they offer throughout an academic year (Diversity); and, how tutoring services accommodate changing schooling practices over time (Adaptability). This discussion unveils the strategies tutorial centres in this study adopted in order to successfully carve out space (by *circumventing*, rather than *mimicking* or *deviating* from the norms and practices of formal schooling) for themselves. It shows how, in doing so, these tutoring centres gained social legitimacy and sustained it over time, alongside formal educational institutions within the larger Indian educational landscape.

Thus, the article makes a case for recognising ‘shadow education’ as a socially embedded system within the social institution of education. It also illustrates the importance of investigating temporalities and other timescapes of ‘shadow education’ globally, to fully comprehend the impact of private tutoring on contemporary schooling practices. Although this article provides a specific case for private tutoring in India, the discussion it generates will hold relevance to ‘shadow education’ research worldwide.

In what follows, I will first outline the role of time and temporality in private tutoring research and then briefly discuss the aspects of the Indian case of ‘shadow education’ that are relevant to the analysis that follows. Next, I will introduce the study and describe the broader research project and the specific dataset on which this article is based. The next section will offer a thematic analysis of the temporality of ‘shadow education’ in the empirical case, and finally, I will synthesise the usefulness of analysing ‘shadow education’ timescapes, for advancing the debates and discussions in this field.

# **Temporal arrangements of ‘shadow education’**

There is a rising insistence on ‘doing time in the sociology of education’, to explore and fully understand contemporary schooling practices (Lingard & Thompson, 2017). This article considers *timescape* as an analytical lens to capture the relationship between ‘shadow education’ and time. Time, here, comprises both objective clock time as well as its related subjectivities (temporalities). The analysis of this relationship unveils the times and spaces that ‘shadow education’ occupies within an education system and society more broadly.

Historically, this concept has been extensively used to explore a variety of schooling practices, such as habit inculcation during childhood, discipline and social inequality (see, for example, Adam, 2004). Such explorations, however, are often limited to the formal education system. Although no study on private tutoring has yet explored the tutoring phenomenon exclusively from the lens of time – a knowledge gap this article attempts to redress – some studies that have *alluded* to different facets of ‘shadow education’ temporality and temporal-spatiality are discussed below.

The most commonly reported temporal feature of private tutoring is that the time allocated for its service delivery does not typically clash with the time for the delivery of formal education, i.e. tutoring services are offered – and solicited – outside formal schooling hours (Bray & Lykins, 2012). However, studies have also provided evidence of encroachment of school time by tutoring businesses. For example, in their study based in Myanmar, Liu and Bray (2020) found that students skip school to participate in tuition classes to prepare for excelling in high-stakes assessments. Another way in which this encroachment occurs is when students and teachers, whilst attending school regularly, fail to effectively utilise their time at school because they are also engaged in private tutoring lessons. In the same study, Liu and Bray note that since the students relied on their tutors much more than their schoolteachers, they showed ‘no desire to learn [in school], but just fulfilled the attendance’; similarly, teachers who also offered paid tutoring support would ‘leave in a rush at or even before the time when school gets off in order to have many tutoring classes in the evening’ (p.4). Although the authors analysed these instances as the backwash effect of ‘shadow education’, these observations are crucial to understanding how *school time* is invaded by *tuition time* in both the delivery and reception of education.

Furthermore, some of the studies on the demand for private tutoring support across societies have looked at social perceptions of the ‘effective’ use of time in educational settings. Indeed, the popularity of private tutoring is often justified by the inefficient and insufficient use of time in schools. For example, teachers and students in India have been reported to attend private tutoring to compensate for the inadequate time use in providing valuable educational support in schools (Gupta, 2021b). In Cambodia, studies have reported that teachers who offer tuition to their students claim that they are unable to deliver the full curriculum within the hours they are allocated in the formal education system (Brehm et al., 2012; similar concerns were shared by teachers in India, see Gupta, 2019). In some cases, this perception of the lack of desirable instructional time in school to meet the educational requirements also impacts the decision of policymakers regarding the supply of private tutoring. For example, in Vietnam, while teachers are not allowed to offer tuition to students enrolled in full-day schools, such practice is permissible in double-shift schools, to make up for the limited time teachers have during regular schooling hours (Ko & Xing, 2009).

Another element of the temporality of ‘shadow education’ is its popularity among students during specific periods of their time at school. Studies have shown that while private tutoring support is usually offered throughout schooling years, it is particularly prominent at certain levels, such as Grade 10 and 12 in India (see Gupta, 2021a), at the transitional stage from primary to secondary education level in Germany (see Guill & Lintorf, 2018) and in preparation for college entrance examinations in Korea (Kwon et al., 2017). What is common about these educational levels is that they culminate in high-stakes assessments. Indeed, students’ performance in these tests tends to have implications for their educational and career trajectories and, therefore, life chances. Hence the popularity of private tutoring at specific time periods during schooling years is shaped by the ways in which high stakes exams are structured within the formal education system.

Hence, temporal arrangements of private tutoring are intricately entwined with that of the formal education system, and they vary in specific ways across societies. Nevertheless, the lack of conceptualisation of *time* in appraising ‘shadow education’ has resulted in a limited understanding of the operation and functions of private tutoring. In turn, this leads to a lack of knowledge of the full impact of tutoring provisions on contemporary schooling experiences and educational practices. By exploring the relationship between ‘shadow education’ and time, this article makes the first attempt to redress this gap in the scholarship. The following section provides an overview of private tutoring practices in India.

# **‘Shadow education’ in India: an overview**

Private tutoring is ubiquitous and has an intricate relationship with the formal education system and its practices in India. In research, policy and practice, tutoring is referred to as ‘private coaching’, ‘coaching’, and ‘tuition’ within the empirical context. According to the 2017-18 *Household Social Consumption on Education in India* report (based on the National Statistical Office’s 75th round of its household sample survey), more than one-fifth of students receive ‘private coaching’ support across educational levels – from pre-primary through to postgraduate education (Government of India, 2019). This report usefully provides an overall picture of private tutoring in India, specifying some of the key variations in the pattern of soliciting tutoring support, many of which have been investigated more closely in smaller-scale studies. Here, I will provide an overview of the nature of ‘shadow education’ in India, relevant to the scope of this article.

The consumption report mentioned above notes that although private tutoring is offered across schooling levels, the proportion of students attending it is much higher at secondary educational levels as compared to elementary levels. As I argue elsewhere, the intense need felt at secondary and senior secondary levels relates to the fact that it is at these stages when students’ academic scores are instrumental for determining their educational track (science or arts and humanities, for example) and their preparation for college entrance exams (Gupta, 2021a). Similar observations have been made in studies carried out in Kerala, Maharashtra, Andra Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh (see Sujatha, 2014). There is also state-level and regional (rural and urban) variations in access – for example, while in the state of Telangana, only 2.3% of students receive such support, the corresponding proportion is 75.2% in West Bengal. In addition, there are significant regional disparities between rural and urban areas in the supply of private tutoring (see Sujatha, 2014). The reason for this variation is still unclear. However, it is likely that multiple political-economic-social factors – such as the quality of formal schooling, parental involvement in children’s education, the state and market mechanisms (formal and informal) for regulating the tutoring market – are at play here.

Moreover, a key aspect of private tutoring in India is its relationship to wider social processes. Private tutoring makes up for a significant proportion of household expenditure (Government of India, 2019). Many families enrol their children in tuition centres presumably to make up for the teaching and learning deficits that many parents feel are inevitable in formal schools – this has been reported in both rural and urban areas and across socio-economic groups (for example, see Wadhwa, 2013; Gupta, 2020). Nevertheless, only those who can afford the cost of this informal, *additional* educational support tend to have access to the resources tutoring centres have on offer. As such, as Sujatha (2014) argues, private tutoring ‘becomes an instrument to perpetuate the locational disparities in educational attainment’ (also see Majumdar, 2014). While the effectiveness of private tuition in improving one’s academic performance is debatable, the centres themselves are still *perceived* to be effective. Indeed, private tutoring gains social legitimacy by not just the academic support it claims to offer but also the embodied resources, in the form of teacher-tutors (Gupta, 2019) as well as affective teaching and learning practices (Gupta, 2021b). Thus, private tutoring contributes in remarkable ways to educational – and, by extension, social – inequalities in the empirical context.

This article contributes to this ongoing discussion on private tutoring at the school-level by focusing particularly on its temporally-shaped structural attributes. This is the first study to unveil the temporal arrangements of private tutoring – to make sense of the ways in which it operates within the empirical context. In so doing, the article will offer a novel and nuanced understanding of the ways in which temporality could be a useful tool to assess the nature as well as the influence of private tutoring on contemporary schooling practices, both within and beyond the empirical context.

# **The study**

This article is a part of a larger project that examines schooling practices from the vantage point of ‘shadow education’ in Dehradun (India). The fieldwork for this project was conducted between December 2014 and December 2015. This article focuses on a specific part of the project that involved interactions with tutors in tutorial centres. These interactions are supplemented with the data produced through my conversations with teachers and parents. Key aspects of the larger project, methodological considerations involved in producing data, and the ways in which data were analysed for this article are discussed below.

The larger research project investigated three aspects of the Indian educational landscape: the processes that produce the need for tutoring support, the institutional arrangements of tutoring businesses, and the implications of private tutoring for the larger system of education delivery within the empirical context. The private tutoring industry is a complex system of education delivery – it concerns schools, transition to higher education, higher education and even employment. Appreciating this complexity, this article aims to unpack only *one aspect* ofprivate tutoring. It focuses on the institutional arrangements of private tutoring centres that offer educational services for students to excel in the school appraisal system. As such, the findings may not apply to private coaching for entrance examinations for medical, engineering, management, and similar professional courses.

Previously, I have discussed private tutoring in relation to the ways in which it mirrors certain formal schooling practices (Gupta, 2021a) and deviates from others (Gupta, 2021b). Departing from these lines of thought, this article shows how tutorial centres *circumvent* (as opposed to either complying with or diverging from) the formal schooling system, its structure and practices. This aspect of the institutional arrangement of private tutoring emerges most clearly when exploring its relationship to time, temporality and tempo-spatiality. Hence, it is these three aspects that are examined here to make sense of a timescape of private tutoring in India.

This article draws primarily on interviews conducted with 22 tutors in 12 tutorial centres. Tutors were interviewed in the tuition centres they themselves owned or offered their educational services in. The majority of the interviews lasted for about 1-1.5 hours. It was rather challenging to set an appointment with tutors for a number of reasons. Many of them were suspicious of my intentions at first. Later, during our conversations, they revealed they had assumed I was an undercover journalist and was seeking information that may potentially put them at risk. This is important to note because many of the tutors were not paying tax on the income they earned from their edu-businesses. I managed to gain the trust of tutors I interviewed through getting in touch with them with the help of other research participants (parents, schoolteachers, and students, for example), with whom I had interacted and had a trusted relationship as part of the larger project. Two out of the 12 centres were chosen for further investigation. This involved informal conversations with five tutors who were affiliated with these two centres as well as students who had subscribed to their services. Moreover, in one of these centres, I observed ten sessions of Grade 10 mathematics.

These data are supported by my interactions with schoolteachers and their parents. I spoke with 38 schoolteachers in two senior secondary private schools. Although Dehradun is indeed one of the few cities in India with close clusters of reputed schools (such as Doon school), alongside government and a growing number of low-cost private schools, these were *not* part of this research. The two private schools where I conducted fieldwork charged INR 40,000 to INR 78,000 (equivalent to USD 549 to USD 1,070) fees annually and targeted mostly middle-class families in the city. I conducted interviews with teachers (lasting about 1 hour) and interacted with them on multiple occasions throughout the fieldwork period. In addition, I interviewed parents in 53 middle-class families (annual household income between INR 300,000 and 500,000, which is equivalent to USD 4,115 and USD 6,858, respectively). Data produced through my interactions with parents and teachers, as mentioned above, are used only to supplement the material generated through my engagement with tutorial centres and conversations with tutors.

All the interviews were audio-recorded, and the informal interactions were documented in fieldnotes. All the material thus produced – by various methods and from multiple stakeholders – was transcribed and analysed inductively from the data as well as deductively with the use of existing literature on ‘shadow education’. The analysis was conducted using NVivo software. This involved coding the data by assigning different categories to the excerpts and then bringing these coded materials together to look for patterns (Boeije, 2010). The four themes that emerged through this process and which related to the focus of this article – temporal arrangement of private tutoring – are discussed in the next section.

# **A ‘Shadow education’ timescape**

This section discusses four aspects of a ‘shadow education’ timescape: mapping, time-use advantage, diversity, and adaptability of tutoring services. All of these features are not strictly independent of each other; instead, as shown below, they inform, shape and are shaped by one another. For example, temporal mapping and time-use patterns of tutorial centres facilitate the diversification of their services; and, the temporal adaptability allows tutorial centres to map their services onto schools’ assessment schedules, thus helping them to use their time more effectively. These temporal features of private tutoring, nevertheless, signify the market-centric, -flexible, and -accommodative nature of tutoring businesses.

## ***Temporal mapping: tutoring services’ arrangement and school calendars***

One of the most prominent features of private tutoring in this study was the temporal mapping of tutoring services onto schools’ assessments schedule. All tutors spoke about charting their services in close connection to the schedule of school exams throughout an academic year. The exam schedule, which is part of a typical school calendar, was designed in both schools by senior teachers (principal and class teachers) in association with the management. This planning was done based on the general guidelines provided by the education board with which each of these schools were affiliated. As common practice, both schools tended to issue this calendar to each student in the first week of their new academic year. Providing the school calendar to students was deemed by the school management as an exercise for ensuring teachers’ accountability and providing parents with a tool to monitor their children’s educational progress throughout an academic year.

During interviews, tutors said that they would ask students to supply their school calendar, so that they clearly understood the yearly assessment schedule. Although some tutorial centres that aim to provide coaching to school-leaving students to crack college entrance tests may supplant the curriculum offered in school (as shown in Bhorkar & Bray, 2018; Punjabi, 2020), all tutors who participated in this study focused primarily on the academic performance of their subscribers in school tests. As such, they considered the school assessment schedule crucial to map their own educational services. For example, similarly to schools, tutorial centres in this study divided their teaching tasks for the entire year into two terms – from April to September (Term I) and from November to March (Term II). In each term, tutorial services were designed to prepare students for two Formative Assessments (FAs) and one Summative Assessment (SA).

The specific tutoring services throughout these two terms tended to be mainly threefold for each assessment: completing the assigned syllabus, reviewing and revising the syllabus, and testing students’ grasp of the taught syllabus on mock tests. Each of these services was delivered before the targeted exam was scheduled in the school calendar. For example, the first half of the syllabus (assessment target for the first SA) was taught, reviewed, and students’ understanding of this was already assessed before the first SA was scheduled to be conducted in mid-September in schools.

In this way, tutoring services not only included the tasks that are performed in schools (such as completing the part of the syllabus on which the assessment would be based), but they also offered services that are not provided there (such as conducting sessions to review key concepts, and revise each section of the syllabus, as well as testing students’ performance in mock exams before students had their scheduled school tests). This process of temporal mapping helped tutorial centres to manoeuvre through the formal schools’ schedule, to slot in their services, such that these are seen as valuable.

## ***Temporal advantage: time-use benefits of tutorial centres over formal schools***

Another temporal feature of private tutoring is the time-use advantage that tutorial centres tended to have over schools. This was talked about by tutors in terms of their overall use of time throughout an academic year – during specific periods (such as summer and winter vacations at school), particular days (school holidays throughout an academic year) as well as its day-to-day functioning (daily hours allocated for tutoring) – in comparison to the yearly time-use for academic teaching and learning in schools. Each of these elements is discussed below.

Tutorial centres simply had more working days and hours than schools. The majority of tutors relied on substantial vacation periods (winter and summer breaks in formal schools) to complete a large portion of syllabi. Tutors mentioned that these specific services, although subscribed to by students across educational levels, were mostly accessed by students who were preparing for Grade 10 and 12 high-stakes examinations. Tutorial centres also operated during holidays, when schools were closed to observe events of cultural and national significance.

Moreover, during regular term time, all tutoring centres scheduled their sessions such that they circumvent the school timetable. For example, sessions were scheduled just before or just after regular schooling hours. Furthermore, as shown below in an excerpt from an interview with a tutor, any shifts in schools’ opening hours also tended to change the tutoring hours.

Usually, I teach seven sessions and the timetable changes by season. In winter, I teach from 6 to 8 AM and 4 to 9 PM. During summer, I teach from 5 to 7 AM and from 3 to 8 PM. The vacation period is freer, so I teach from 10 AM to 1 PM and later from 3 to 7 PM.

The time-use benefit of private tutoring was also spoken about by participants in terms of the actual time educators were able to devote to their academic engagement with students. Schoolteachers, for example, spoke about a wide range of tasks and duties that they were expected to perform, *alongside* their regular teaching. In contrast, offering students academic support was tutors’ *primary* task. So, there was a clear time-use deficit in academic services offered by schools when the corresponding practices were compared with in tutorial centres. Furthermore, there was a clear discrepancy between the effectiveness of time-use in both – formal and ‘shadow’ – educational institutions. This is illustrated in the two interview excerpts below:

The workload is usually pretty heavy throughout the year, but it is particularly so towards the end of the year. While in the beginning, most of us tend to be slower in pace at covering the syllabus, we rush through it closer to the assessment deadlines. Term II tends to cover the majority of the syllabus. (schoolteacher)

We operate more evenly throughout the academic year. Our focus remains on the assessment deadlines and what would be covered for each assessment exercise…there is usually a fixed number of chapters allocated to be assessed in each test, so maintaining a pace that [ensures] students have enough time for preparation is important to us. (tutor)

As illustrated here, the time-use difference in education delivery in both schools and tutorial centres had implications for the perceived quality of teaching and learning support offered at these educational spaces. As shown above, while many schoolteachers spoke about ‘rushing to finish the syllabus’, tutors discussed ‘pacing’ themselves to efficiently map on to the school’s assessment schedule. Moreover, the tutors I spoke with maintained that they tend to stay ‘ahead of the schoolteachers’ in completing parts of the syllabi. This meant that students already knew the concepts before they were introduced by schoolteachers. As such, students who sought these tutorial services were ideally placed to effectively participate in classroom activities. Doing so also offered tutors a longer period for reviewing the concepts and addressing students’ queries and doubts, which in turn allowed them to provide their students with more time and space to prepare for assessments. Hence, the temporal arrangement and pace at which the tutorial centres operated appeared to circumvent the issue of a lack of time (or poorly allocated time) in the formal schooling system, and thus positioned them as relevant, useful, and in some cases, necessary institutions of education delivery.

## ***Temporal diversity: tutorial services as wide-ranging ‘outside school’ academic support***

The third time-specific attribute of private tutoring is the diversity of their education services. As discussed previously, tutorial centres that were part of this study offered a range of educational services – completing the syllabus, reviewing it and test preparation – for all the exams conducted in schools. Tutors maintained that while most students subscribed to all of these services, the variety they offered presented a possibility for tutees to customise the support they needed, in a variety of combinations. This diversification allowed tutoring centres to appear student-centric, focusing on meeting the requirements of each student.

This signalling of individual-oriented academic support resonated strongly with the perceived educational need of the majority of parents I spoke with. These middle-class parents invested heavily in their children’s schooling by choosing high-fee private schools. Nevertheless, they still sought private tutoring to compensate for the inadequate resources available at school for meeting the perceived academic needs of their children (see, for example, Gupta, 2020; 2021a). Most tutors felt that, more broadly, their services met three kinds of needs: *Comprehensive* curricular support, *complementary* review and revision, and finally, *enrichment* through test preparation. A tutor explained this as follows:

The first thing is to ensure that the students have notes – good notes – to go back to whenever they need. So, we complete the syllabus properly and not just for the sake of it – like teachers do – but in a way that students understand what they are writing. After that, we revisit those notes and give students a chance to ask further questions. Finally, I conduct tests to see whether or not students have actually grasped the concepts and would be able to perform in school tests.

This excerpt suggests that not only did tutors disparage teachers’ work to claim the legitimacy of their services (Gupta, 2021b), to substantiate this, they would also diversify their services and offer these strategically at different time periods throughout an academic year. Indeed, as alluded to earlier, the majority of students saw the value of time-specific interventions of tutoring centres. As a result, they were likely to subscribe to tutorial support for the entire year, utilising all three sets of services. This was the most expensive option but also the most popular one among students. It offered them steady, continuous, and holistic outside-school academic support throughout the year.

The tutorial centres also offered just ‘review and revision’ sessions to students who felt that they needed ‘extra’ educational support, alongside what they were taught in schools. Finally, those students who wanted to improve their performance in tests and assessments were given the option of signing up for exam preparation sessions only. Hence, instead of aiming for one specific kind of support, tutorial centres in this study offered varied kinds of support that tutors thought would respond to wide-ranging market demands. Indeed, students could select how their *education-time* is spent from a diverse range of options, unlike in schools where the way the time is utilised is pre-determined and fixed. In this way, private tutoring circumvents the issues that usually emerge from the temporal arrangements of formal schooling. As such, private tutoring is socially perceived as both desirable and legitimate, occupying a valued space for teaching and learning within the Indian education system.

## ***Temporal Adaptability: reconfiguring tutoring services with changing schooling practices***

Another crucial temporal feature of private tutoring is its adaptability. As tutorial centres rely on the assessment schedule of formal schools to curate their own sets of services, all tutors in this study emphasised the necessity to be flexible. They valued this flexibility to accommodate tutoring services in alignment with any reconfigurations in the formal appraisal system. For example, many experienced tutors spoke about how they used to run popular ‘crash courses’ for students sitting for high-stakes exams – locally referred to as ‘board exams’ – a few years ago when schools used to conduct only one main exam towards the end of an academic year. In the following excerpt, one of these tutors explained how the crash courses were designed to meet the then assessment requirements.

Board exams used to be very difficult because students’ knowledge was assessed based on their performance in only one exam, which covered the entire syllabus and was conducted towards the end of the academic year. Many students would come rushing to us right before their scheduled exams, and we used to run a 3-month long crash course for Grade 10 and 12 students. In this course, we would cover the syllabus in its entirety, conduct reviewing sessions and a series of mock tests. The crash course was a systematic way for students to revise the syllabus and enhance their performance in answering questions timely and efficiently.

This way of assessment was deemed stressful for many students, and after years of consultation, it changed in favour of conducting continuous (comprised of both FAs and SAs) assessments at all educational levels. Many schoolteachers and parents also spoke about how the nature of high-stakes assessments had changed substantially since *they* were students in this way. This change, however, did not impact the demand for private tuition and thus the industry. Instead, tutors who experienced this change shared that for them, it was an opportunity to transform their services to meet a new set of market demands. This sense of adaptability over time in tutors’ narratives is typified in an interview excerpt from a tutor below:

Since the exam pattern changed to continuous assessment, the crash courses are no longer run. There is no point in carrying out such courses; they have no value for formative assessments, and they are relatively less helpful for the preparation of the summative assessment. We now focus on each formative and summative test instead. We pace ourselves [services provided at a specific time period throughout an academic year] to be of use to those who subscribe to us.

In a Continuous Assessment system, which both schools that participated in this study had adopted at the time of the fieldwork, students were evaluated in multiple tests, and the scores they would obtain in each of these tests accounted for students’ overall grade for a specific academic level. The distribution of overall grades was based on this formula, which also held relevance for tutorial centres:

Academic Year (100 percent) = Term 1 [FA1 (10 percent) + FA2 (10 percent) + SA1 (20 percent)] + Term 2 [FA3 (10 percent) + FA4 (10 percent) + SA2 (40 percent)]

As alluded to earlier, the delivery of education services in tutorial centres was carefully mapped onto this formula. Importantly, this formula was based on a more generic guideline issued by education boards, and according to this, the syllabi were to be distributed equally between terms so that the two halves could be assessed at the end of each term. However, in both schools, as referred to earlier, teachers mentioned that they tended to be slow in the first term and would rush the syllabi in the second term. Correspondingly, tutors would slow down to match the teachers’ pace. Furthermore, the majority of tutors directed their academic services to prepare students mainly for the SAs, as these carried more weight in the overall academic score.

It (the schedule of services) depends on the assessment dates and how much syllabus is covered for each assessment. Typically, FAs cover only a few chapters, so it is easy to complete that part of the curriculum and yet have sufficient time to review relevant concepts and help students to prepare for tests. However, as more [part of the syllabus] is covered for SAs, [for these assessments], we need more time to focus on finishing the syllabus and then manage to review and revise concepts as well as prepare for tests. Our special focus remains on the second summative [assessment] in term two as it carries a greater proportion of the final grades.

Hence, through temporal adaptability – evident in this section as ways in which tutors recrafted their educational services as per the changing appraisal system and everyday teaching practices – tutoring centres (re)create space for themselves within the educational landscape. Indeed, all tutors indisputably considered adaptability and flexibility as their mantra to survive and thrive in the education market. This discussion is particularly vital in the context of the 2020 National Education Policy that aims to reconfigure the examination system in India ‘to eliminate the need for undertaking coaching classes’ at high-stakes educational levels (Government of India, 2020, p.18).

Whilst the ways in which assessments are conducted does indeed influence the institutional arrangements of private tutoring, these arrangements – as shown above – can change with any alterations made in formal assessment practices. As such, it is highly unlikely that tutoring centres would be made redundant with transformed examination practices, as the Policy suggests. Instead, they are likely to emerge in different shapes and forms to offer academic training to students to excel in a revised form of the formal appraisal system. Thus again, the temporal adaptability of private tutoring renders the industry more than capable of circumventing any implications following changes to the formal appraisal system.

# **Conclusion**

This article has provided insights into a ‘shadow education’ timescape. It has focused on tutoring processes such as mapping, time-use, diversification, and adaptability within the empirical context. The article illustrates the specific ways in which the temporal facets of private tutoring help it to circumvent the schooling system and secure itself a space *alongside* – rather than by *replacing* – the formal institutions of education. In this way, the article departs from the more prevalent ways in which scholars have understood the organisational arrangement of private tutoring – i.e. how private tutoring either mimics or diverges from schooling practices. Instead, it uses temporality as an analytical approach to examine how tutoring businesses manoeuvre themselves *around* the institutional arrangements of the formal education system.

The discussion of the ability of tutorial centres to circumvent formal schooling practices (which emerged in all the temporal aspects of private tutoring discussed above) offers a novel understanding of the complex relationship between the formal and ‘shadow education’ systems. It also provides evidence for how these tutoring centres gained public trust. For example, the mapping process distinguishes formal schools from tutorial centres, illustrating that these centres have the luxury of being able to dedicate their services to only academic learning, whereas schools must offer more holistic education. Moreover, tutorial centres had a temporal advantage for achieving this goal, and much more efficiently, than schools do. Furthermore, these tutoring centres showed their ability to diversify their services to meet the needs of individual students as well as display adaptability to the changing formal schooling system. This way of organising themselves allowed private tutoring centres in this study to offer their students systematic and time-efficient academic training to excel in schools’ activities (such as everyday classroom engagement and exams). In so doing, these educational centres not only crafted for themselves spaces of *learning and academic exploring* but, in turn, rendered schools as mere sites of academic *performance*.

The article has also shown the all-encompassing quality of private tutoring in offering a diverse range of educational services. Specifically, the discussion on the temporal diversity within the empirical case critiques the general belief that tutoring centres provide a singular nature of educational services (e.g., comprehensive, complementary, or enrichment). Instead, this article argues that tutorial services may vary in accordance with the needs of individual students – ranging on a spectrum *from* offering full outside-school educational support *to* just helping students practice how to sit formal exams. Hence, the tutoring provisions explored in this study met varied demands for academic support for each of their subscribers. Furthermore, as shown in this article, temporal adaptability – the ability of tutorial centres to alter their services in response to changing schooling practices – facilitates this process over time. Thus, both of these aspects of this ‘shadow education’ timescape– diversity and adaptability – create new and innovative avenues for commodifying educational resources, leading to intensifying educational inequality within society.

Finally, the timescape analysis of ‘shadow education’ this article offers may have implications for how the impact of private tuition is considered, going forward. It provides scope for comprehending how tutoring provisions shape contemporary schooling practices. For example, various discussions presented in this article signal the expansion of *education-time* beyond school within contemporary society – students are expected to not only study in their school but also participate in learning before and after schooling hours, depending on the number of subjects and the type of support they have signed up for in tutorial centres. Thus, the academic engagement of students is extended beyond typical schooling hours, resulting in the production of new ‘non-school’ teaching and learning times and spaces. This extension of *education-time* not only changes the social perceptions and practices concerning the purposes of education in both schools and tutorial centres, but, through this, it has implications for child rights and issues concerning their welfare and wellbeing. This will be a vital consideration for future research exploring the interplay between private tutoring and formal schooling within educational landscapes and its impact on wider societal processes and practices.

**Ethics statement**

This study was approved by the Departmental Ethics Review Committee (DERC) of the Department of Sociology in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the National University of Singapore.

# **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the reviewers and the editor for their time and useful feedback, amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, on this manuscript. Fieldwork for this project was supported by the Lee Kong Chian Graduate Scholarship and the Graduate Student Research Support Scheme for Thesis-related Fieldwork (FY2015-1), provided by the National University of Singapore.

# **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

# **References**

Adam, B. (2004). *Time*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bhorkar, S., & Bray, M. (2018). The expansion and roles of private tutoring in India: From supplementation to supplantation. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *62*, 148-156.

Boeije, H. (2010). *Analysis in qualitative research*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Bray, M. (2003). *Adverse effects of private supplementary tutoring: Dimensions, implications and government responses*. Paris: UNESCO IIEP.

Bray M. & Kobakhidze M.N. (2014) The Global Spread of Shadow Education. In: Napier D.B. (eds) Qualities of Education in a Globalised World. The World Council of Comparative Education Societies. SensePublishers, Rotterdam. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6209-650-9_11>

Bray, M., & Kobakhidze, M. N. (2015). Evolving ecosystems in education: The nature and implications of private supplementary tutoring in Hong Kong. *Prospects*, *45*(4), 465-481.

Bray, M., & Lykins, C. (2012). *Shadow education: Private supplementary tutoring and its implications for policy makers in Asia*. Mandaluyong City: Asian Development Bank, and Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, The University of Hong Kong.

Brehm, W., Silova, I., & Tuot, M. (2012). Hidden privatisation of public education in Cambodia: The impact and implications of private tutoring *(Education Support Programme Working Paper Series 29)*. Budapest: Open Society Foundations.

Government of India. (2019). *Key indicators of household social consumption on education in India*. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

Government of India. (2020). *National education policy 2020*. Ministry of Human Resource Development.

Gupta, A. (2019). Teacher-entrepreneurialism: A case of teacher identity formation in neoliberalizing education space in contemporary India. *Critical Studies in Education*, DOI: [10.1080/17508487.2019.1708765](https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2019.1708765)

Gupta, A. (2020). Heterogeneous middle-class and disparate educational advantage: Parental investment in their children’s schooling in Dehradun, India. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *41*(1), 48–63.

Gupta, A. (2021a). Exposing the “shadow”: an empirical scrutiny of the “shadowing process” of private tutoring in India. *Educational Review*, DOI: [10.1080/00131911.2021.1931038](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2021.1931038)

Gupta, A. (2021b). Social legitimacy of private tutoring: an investigation of institutional and affective educational practices in India. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education DOI:* [10.1080/01596306.2020.1868978](https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2020.1868978)

Guill, K., & Lintorf, K. (2019). Private tutoring when stakes are high: Insights from the transition from primary to secondary school in Germany. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *65*, 172-182.

Kim, YC, Jung, J-H (2019) Shadow Education as Worldwide Curriculum Studies. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ko, I., & Xing, J. (2009). *Extra classes and subjective well-being: Empirical evidence from Vietnamese children*. Young Lives Working Paper No. 49. Oxford: Department of International Development, University of Oxford.

Kwon, S. K., Lee, M., & Shin, D. (2017). Educational assessment in the Republic of Korea: lights and shadows of high-stake exam-based education system. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, *24*(1), 60-77.

Lingard, B., & Thompson, G. (2017). Doing time in the sociology of education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *38*(1), 1–12. doi: 10.1080/01425692.2016.1260854

Liu, J., & Bray, M. (2020). Private subtractory tutoring: The negative impact of shadow education on public schooling in Myanmar. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *76*, 102213.

Majumdar, M. (2014). *The Shadow School System and New Class Divisions in India*. London: Max Weber Stiftung.

May, J, Thrift, N (2001) Introduction. In: May, J, Thrift, N (eds) *Timespace: Geographies of Temporality*. London: Routledge, 1–46.

Punjabi, S. (2020). Is shadow education becoming the ‘new’ formal? Effects of pedagogical approaches of IIT-JEE coaching on school education in the City of Delhi. *Contemporary Education Dialogue*, *17*(1), 14-44.

Sujatha, K. (2014). Private tuition in India: Trends and issues. *Revue Internationale d’éducation de Sèvres*. [https://journals.openedition.org/ries/3913](http://ries.revues.org/3796)

Wadhwa, W. (2013). Private inputs into schooling: Bang for the buck. *Annual Status of Education Report*. Retrieved from <http://img.asercentre.org/docs/Publications/ASER%20Reports/ASER_2013/ASER2013_report%20sections/willimawadhwaarticle.pdf>

Zhang, W., & Bray, M. (2020). Comparative research on shadow education: Achievements, challenges, and the agenda ahead. *European Journal of Education*, 55(3), 322–341. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12413>.