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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Exploring the Status and Effects of Shadow Education in Teaching English in Iran: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Approach

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**Abstract:** Shadow education, defined as private supplementary tutoring provided beyond the mainstream educational systems and formal learning spaces, has become a widespread phenomenon throughout the world. The present study adopted a hermeneutic phenomenological research approach to investigate the status and effects of shadow education practice in general education and teaching the English language in Iran. Through the purposive sampling technique, 10 ELT teachers and 10 EFL college students who had the experience of being engaged in such teaching practices and learning experiences were selected and interviewed. After conducting a thematic analysis of the transcribed data, the researcher obtained the following themes with regard to the nature and influence of shadow education in teaching English in Iran: (1) shadow education compensating for inefficiency in teaching, (2) shadow education providing more student-centered and humanistic teaching methods, (3) shadow education facilitating access to higher education, (4), shadow education creating business opportunities and (5) shadow education perpetuating social inequalities in the society. Finally, it was suggested that due to its tremendous growth and ubiquitous presence along with the mainstream curriculum in educational ecology, shadow education must receive appropriate attention from educational authorities, teachers and researchers in the country.

**Keywords:** Shadow Education; Hermeneutic Phenomenology; English Language Teaching (ELT) in Iran.

## Introduction

The expansion of private supplementary teaching/tutoring beyond the hours of mainstream formal schooling and curriculum programs, known as 'shadow education', 'supplementary education', 'private tuition', or 'cram schools', has become an increasingly visible phenomenon in many communities of the world (Kim et al., 2018). Among these, the term shadow education is most frequently used because much content and procedures of private supplementary tutoring imitate what is used and conducted in formal educational systems. The term shadow education emerged from the East Asian countries in the early 1990s and from that time has extensively expanded in many parts of the world and has attracted the attention of international scholars (Bray, 2010; Bray & Lykins, 2012; Silova, 2010). Shadow metaphor is used to reflect the idea that this worldwide phenomenon is working beside and imitating the content and procedures of formal schooling, but does not enjoy the same level of legitimacy and acceptability in academic settings (Bray, 2014). This rather large-scale industry provided through one-to-one tutoring, before- and after-school programs or even internet-based tutoring is expanding and even compensating for traditional classroom-based education in different parts of the world (Mori

& Baker, 2010) and is considered as a method or 'secret ingredient' leading to students' high academic performance and achievement. In fact, shadow education has become a major global phenomenon and a significant educational trend in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Entirch, 2018, 2021; Kim & Yung, 2019; Kobakhidzeh & Suter, 2020).

Despite the fact that some scholars believe that shadow education creates a negative washback effect and is often accused of reproducing educational inequalities and hence regarded as a form of educational corruption (Stevenson & Baker, 1992), it has been considered as a significant object of inquiry since many students worldwide participate in shadow education and this massively growing industry is highly expanding its forms and functions; it contributes to students' academic achievement (i.e., as a way of making education more cost-effective) and provides further resources (e.g., workbooks, reference books, and other systematically and meticulously designed materials) that enhance the level of students' achievements. It is considered as an indispensable part of students' lives and thus understanding its processes and outcomes is essential for grasping the whole picture of education and students' personal, intellectual, and social development (Kim et

al., 2018). Shadow education, compared to public educational systems, has more in-built flexibility and enables students and parents to freely make decisions about courses, curriculum materials and even instructors (Kim & Jung, 2019). Therefore, “in an era when shadow education is reshaping student learning and arguably the whole landscape of education in many countries worldwide, shadow education, and more specifically shadow curriculum, should emerge as a new research area in the field of curriculum studies” (Kim & Jung, 2019, p. 16).

This emerging phenomenon has been studied in areas such as comparative education, educational policy, sociology of education, education and economics, lifelong learning and curriculum studies (see e.g., Bray & Kwo, 2014; Entrich, 2014, 2021; Ozaki, 2015; Yamamoto & Brinton, 2010). Current research endeavors targeting shadow education has focused upon issues such as nature of its provision, users and purposes, drivers of demand, its socio-economic and educational impacts, and the policy responses to both demand and supply (Bray, 2009, 2010; Entrich, 2018; Manzon & Areepattamannil, 2014), patterns of use across world regions (Bray et al., 2013; Entrich, 2021), the relationship between private tutoring and formal educational systems (Dawson, 2010),

disciplinary theories, methodological issues and implications of studies conducted (Bray, 2010b; Bray & Kobakhidze, 2014) confirming the embeddedness of private tutoring within contexts of culture, political history and social hierarchies in the societies. Nevertheless, the picture surrounding this phenomenon is more complex and understanding its significance and effects requires richer data (i.e., thick description) than what is testable and quantifiable. In fact, most of the previous studies conducted on shadow education are quantitative and statistics-based and there is a demand for more fundamental, experience-based and discovery-oriented research approaches (Entrich, 2021). Accordingly, the present study by adopting a qualitative-oriented research method (i.e., hermeneutic phenomenological approach) seeks to understand the essence and particularities of this trend from the eyes of teachers and students who have been engaged in such experiences (i.e., their lived experiences). However, the focus of this inquiry would be limited to the teaching of English in the Iranian educational system and the researcher attempts to reach a local knowledge in this regard.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Theoretical Framework***

The term shadow education dates from the early 1990s and it has tremendously expanded

and its practices have been further documented (Bray, 2010; Lee et al., 2010; Zhang & Bray, 2020). This practice is mainly understood by three main parameters (a) supplementation: a tutoring that addresses and complements content and procedures already covered in schools; (b) privateness: tutoring provided in exchange for a fee and beyond the teachers' professional formal responsibilities; (c) focus: targets specific academic subjects like languages, mathematics and other examinable subjects (Bray, 2010, 2014; Duong & Silova, 2021). Based on Bray's (2011) categorization, shadow education has five key forms: (1) Private tutoring institute which is the most school-like form of shadow education since it has its own physical space, classrooms, and buildings, and its own curriculum, instruction, and assessment/evaluation strategies; (2) Home-visit private tutoring which is the most individualized form of shadow education that takes place at students' home based on one student to one instructor interaction and instruction is tailored to the students' level and targets their areas of strengths and weaknesses; (3) Internet-based private tutoring which is conducted by highly developed internet technologies (in the form of online lectures or downloadable lessons) and overcomes geographical and temporal barriers to keep up with the individual students' academic levels

and learning paces; (4) Subscribed learning program which is a highly standardized and systematic tutoring program provided by large, franchised enterprises that develop their own materials using their own curricular and instructional objectives and instructors evaluate the students' degree of understanding, check their assignments, guide them in issues related to different subject matter and learning strategies and (5) After-school programs which provide supervised learning in educational environments targeting various sociocultural aspects of learning and more specifically is "a set of student-centered learning and development activities which are school-based operations but are not a part of the regular curriculum" (Kim et al., 2018, p. 15). These various modes may have different implications for students' learning, tutor's pedagogy, costs and government policies (Bray & Kwo, 2014, p. 19). The scale of this tutoring varies across the world; nevertheless, this trend has turned into a big industry that has influenced economies and provided some formal/informal employment opportunities (Dang & Rodgers, 2008; Heynemen, 2011; Mahmud & Kenayathulla, 2017). In fact, this "activity consumes considerable household resources, occupies much of the time of children and youths and has far-reaching social and economic implications" (Bray, 2014, p. 381).

A point worth-mentioning is that "the mainstream discourses of public education are reluctant to accept shadow education as a curriculum, and it has suffered denial, rejection, and marginalization under the political project that constructs it as a mere *shadow*" (Kim, et al., 2018, p.14). Despite such conceptualizations, shadow education is highly proliferating and many scholars have been engaged in studying its processes and outcomes since there is a general belief that participating in the experiences of shadow education can expand versatility and increase human capital in the general population (Dang & Rogers, 2008), can influence the learners' intellectual and social development (Kassotakis & Verdis, 2013) and, as a result, they can learn self-regulation and self-management skills and enhance their knowledge, values and attitudes towards learning (Hartmann, 2013). Nevertheless, the "scale of private tutoring might be higher in some places due to factors related to the sociopolitical realities and policies of a country" (Nath, 2007, p.16). Studies conducted on this phenomenon in various nations of the world have focused on issues such as its scale (that is, the proportion of enrolment), intensity (that is, the mean duration of enrollment and training received) and its composition (that is, in the form of private tutoring or shadow

schools) (see e.g., Entrich, 2021; Yung & Bray, 2017). Regarding its existence, scale and intensity in countries in the world, it has been reported that private tutoring has profound economic, social and educational impacts and strong implications for equity of opportunities, sources of employment and incomes, work of mainstream educational institutions and schools, lives of students and their families and even the curriculums and examination system of countries (see e.g., Byun, 2010).

In some countries in which access to educational facilities is somehow competitive, shadow education enjoys from a good status because it has the capacity to improve students' school performance and grades since families feel formal schools might not provide them with adequate knowledge; students attending such supplementary courses can have better performance in highly competitive entrance examinations because prestigious departments in higher education centers due to limited facilities and accommodations have strict admission processes and can only admit highly qualified candidates (Heyneman, 2011; Kim, 2016; Loyalka & Zakharov, 2016). In other words, it is part of an enrichment strategy by which families can equip their children with educational qualifications that help them pass ladders of success (Addi-Raccah & Dana, 2015; Tsiplakides, 2018). This means that

education is often considered as “an investment in human capital” that will positively affect students’ future status and welfare (Heyneman, 2011, p. 184). Using Bourdieu’s cultural reproduction theory, it can be argued that private supplementary tutoring makes closer the relationship between social class, familial cultural and economic capital and educational outcomes.

### ***Related Studies***

Shadow education is at the heart of empirical research since it is often seen as an instance of the marketization of educational systems, that is, “transformation to a market-based system” (Silova et al., 2006, p. 7). This phenomenon, a substantial topic in educational sociology and comparative education research, exists worldwide and by continuously expanding alongside mainstream education has become part of the culture of education and part of mass schooling in many countries; though this system varies across countries in terms of institutionalization, scale, intensity of use and composition/structure (Bray, 2017, 2020; Byun & Baker, 2015; Entrich, 2018; Mori & Baker, 2010). Zhang and Bray (2020) categorized the studies on this phenomenon into three decades: global mapping, ecosystems and conceptualizations for the futures of education. Global mapping focused

on the history, nature, scale and identification of shadow education enrollment and participation in different parts of the world besides analyzing the variations in terms of socio-economic status of families, and learners' cultural and educational backgrounds. Studies in the second decade, using sound methodological foundations, applied an ecological lens pondering on sociological, economic and (national and subnational governments) policy analysis and more specifically focused on the issues of power and class, neoliberal and institutional theories related to the demand and supply of private tutoring, different categories of providers, and recognition of role of technology in such tutoring. Studies in the third decade conceptualized shadow education as a platform for interdisciplinary partnerships and a laboratory for innovations to provide solutions for educational and social issues and intended to regulate and develop shadow education policies and refine and develop sociological, philosophical and educational theories related to curriculum planning, teacher development and other institutional and pedagogical perspectives.

In one of the earliest studies on shadow education, Bray (1999) integrated studies from a wide range of countries and regions with the intention of documenting the growth of this

phenomenon across nations; he also examined the background and impacts of this phenomenon and some policy issues. His analysis showed that while this practice has been banned in some countries due to the fact that it distorted formal education and sustained social inequalities, it has been encouraged in some countries on the ground that it can create opportunities for remedial and student-centered instruction. In addition, Baker et al. (2001), having an international focus on this phenomenon, confirmed high rates of participation in shadow education in many countries of the world. More recent studies focused on policy formation which consider shadow education as an industry possessing its own robust social institutional power growing along with the institutional development of formal educational systems in general (e.g., Aurini & Davies, 2004; Silova et al., 2006). In particular, Bray et al. (2013) believe that policy makers would benefit from having available qualitative data investigating the voices of different stakeholders: parents, teachers, tutors, and school administrators with regard to shadow education practice.

Moreover, Bray and Kwo (2014), examining the relationship between mainstream schooling and shadow education from the perspective of students, found mismatches between students' learning

objectives and mainstream teachers' pedagogical orientations; this issue has resulted in the students' engagement in private tutoring to address their learning gaps especially for examination purposes. In the same vein, de Castro and de Guzman (2014) found also attitudinal differences in favor of shadow education, which consider this system as a means for success, compensation for the declining quality of education and efficiency of academic study and learning due to its student-centered classroom innovations and delivery modes which address adequately students' learning needs and interests. Zhang (2014) and Kobakhidze (2014), examining the supply part of this system by exploring teachers' performance in providing tutoring services, found this practice both praiseworthy in terms of being a survival strategy or a commodity providing opportunities for social mobility, and corrupting in terms of creating social inequalities and the backwash effects it has on mainstream schooling. These researchers demanded regulation of shadow education and policy making with regard to its relationship with mainstream schooling as supplementary, complementary and/or competitive endeavor.

Some studies have investigated the social and pedagogical effects of shadow education. For example, Zhan et al. (2013), exploring effectiveness of different types of tutoring,

found that based on the students' perceptions, the one-to-one and small-group tutoring is more effective, lecture-style tutoring is less effective, and Internet tutoring is the least effective. Byun and Park (2012) and Byun (2014) confirmed the positive effect of commercial exam preparation courses similar to cram schools in large class sizes compared to one-to-one tutoring in improving the test performance of students. In fact, it is believed that one-to-one or small group tutoring, which generally offers students more interactions with tutors, may be effective in improving students' learning strategy, revision skills and confidence while performing on tests (Liu, 2016). Zhang and Bray (2017), using the metaphor of "the confluence of mainstream and shadow streams that converge in mixing zones" (p. 4), explored the influence of macro-neoliberal issues on shadow education at institutional, family and individual levels. They maintained that "shadow education can sometimes be perceived as a 'pollutant' in the mixing zone, because some forms of collaboration between private tutoring providers and public schools undermined government policies aimed at the equalization of opportunities and corrupted the system" (p. 4).

Furthermore, Kim et al., (2018) demanded paying more attention to shadow education in

curriculum studies and encouraged conducting further research on areas such as: "how students study in the shadow education environment; what curricular characteristics attract students and parents to shadow education; what forms it takes in different contexts, and how it affects children's development" (p. 10). These researchers also presented five approaches to studying shadow education in the domain of worldwide curriculum inquiry (namely, considering shadow education as historical/political, autobiographical, critical, ethnic and decolonizing texts or discourses) and argue that "because shadow education seems likely to expand, curriculum scholars should seek new understandings that might complicate and complexify both shadow education and mainstream curriculum discourses" (p. 8). Kim and Jung (2019) provided a classification encompassing five forms of shadow education (mentioned above) and presented some implications regarding the distinctive features of instruction in shadow education, its major provides and other pedagogical issues such as size of classes and level of individualization. They asserted that in competition with mainstream schooling, shadow education is winning the ground in some aspects. Zhang (2020) explored the role of shadow education in reaching parental goals (termed as tiger



parenting). The results of the study indicated that this issue is mostly prevalent in middle class families and parents intensively invest in private tutoring in order to prepare their children to have access to elite schools and universities, to achieve higher in their academic trajectories and, in this regard, increase the families' economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital by transferring social advantages inter-generationally. Šťastný (2021) conceptualized shadow education-based courses as a 'double-edged sword' due to the fact that these courses acted as a 'weapon' in the quasi-market competition to attract more high-achieving students that might otherwise attend regular school. He further maintained that depending on the nature and scale of provision, shadow education might have both negative and positive consequences in terms of equity in education. Entrich (2021) investigated the cross-national differences in socioeconomic accessibility to shadow education across 63 societies, as a novel approach to understanding the role of shadow education for social inequality. The researcher attributed such differences to the incentives of high-performing students to use shadow education for reaching positional advantages in their lives, especially in communities with higher levels of institutional competition and differentiation.

On the whole, shadow education has become widely used in teaching various school subjects and the research conducted has revealed a rather mixed picture on the influences and consequences of shadow education on the students' lives and their academic achievement, their families' status and involvement, and its relationship with mainstream school systems and established curriculum (Jansen et al., 2021; Liu & Bray, 2022). The most dominant subject taught in shadow education system is foreign language, i.e., English. There are many institutions and individuals who work in this flourishing industry in the globalizing world. Since the use of information plays an important role in modern societies, knowledge of English language as the lingua franca of world communication and technology is necessary in many fields and contributes positively to individual's growth and social prosperity of the society (Castells, 2000). Despite the fact that Iranian students study English for six years in formal school, this teaching is rather ineffective and except for knowledge of some grammatical points and vocabularies they do not reach a good level of competence in other aspects of language such as reading, writing and especially speaking. The acknowledgement of continuing inefficiencies of the educational system in relation to the

teaching of English has made people resort to the private courses offering instruction to improve the knowledge and competence of students in this subject. In addition, in Iranian context, shadow education phenomenon has largely been ignored by policy makers and planners and it is generally left to private market forces. In fact, many of actors involved in educational decision making avoid transparency and engagement in this phenomenon and few research endeavors have been implemented to investigate its nature and effects in educational system of the country and lives of primary stakeholders (i.e., teachers, parents and students). Bearing the above discussion into consideration, the present study, by using a phenomenological approach, intends to examine the nature and influence of supplementary private tutoring in teaching this subject in Iran. More specifically, by using the following guiding questions, the researcher intended to reach a local understanding of shadow education practice in Iran:

1. How is shadow education conceptualized by Iranian EFL teachers and students?
2. What are the consequences of engagement in shadow practice for education, in general, and English

language teaching (ELT), in particular, in Iran?

## **Research Method**

### ***Design of the study***

The present study adopted a phenomenological research approach which is defined as a disciplined qualitative inquiry that focuses upon human perceptions of the world and the way meaning arises from their first-hand lived experiences (Langdrige, 2007). Hermeneutic phenomenology attempts to discover the world experiences by inspecting the individuals' life stories. Though there is no fixed method to conduct this type of study, Merriam (1998) suggests using purposive sampling and tools such as interview, observation, reflections and protocols to come up with rich data and subsequently uncovering the thematic aspects. Analyzing the collected data requires applying the hermeneutic cycle including the stages of reading the collected data, reflective writing and interpretation in a rigorous fashion (Laverty, 2003). Lueger and Vettori (2014) explained that this method is conducted in three stages:

1. Text production: collecting and transforming the data into texts

2. Text interpretation: reconstructing meanings to discover latent layers of issues and conditions
3. Text transformation: clarifying and justifying the discovered meanings for the readers.

### ***Setting and Participants***

In Iran, besides the mainstream English instruction in schools and universities, private language institutions offer intensive and extensive English courses for all proficiency levels and age groups using the principles of communicative language teaching and covering all language skills in an integrated fashion. Through purposeful sampling, 10 Iranian ELT teachers (5 males and 5 females) and 10 students (8 females and 2 males) who had experienced shadow education in their careers and lives were selected. The teachers had different degrees in ELT and at least 6 years of teaching English in the private tutoring industry and the students had at least two years of engagement in this practice. Their ages ranged from 20 to 40. Among these teachers, two individuals were assistant professors of TEFL teaching at the university level, four teachers having BA and MA degrees in TEFL and English Literature were working in various language institutes in Hormozgan province, and four teachers having BA and MA

degrees were teaching English in schools. The students were the BA students of TEFL at the University of Hormozgan in Bandarabbas, and had already attended private tutoring courses in various language institutes of the country. These participants were purposefully chosen from among those who were interested in our topic of inquiry and willingly accepted to share their experiences in this regard. After identifying these individuals, an email (and in some cases a WhatsApp message) accompanying a cover letter explaining the nature and purpose of the study was sent to them and those who accepted the invitation served as the main participants of the study.

### ***Procedures of Data Collection and Analysis***

As was stated, the present study used interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology procedures whereby the participants' experiences of the issues and phenomena could be interpreted according to the researchers' theoretical and personal knowledge (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). The required data were mainly collected through conducting interviews and inspecting the personal reflections of the participants. In the first stage, individual in-depth interviews (i.e., some guiding open-ended questions selected based on the aim of the study plus more detailed questions emerging from the constant dialogue with the

participants) were conducted with the participants to get their experiences about shadow education in the country and their own engagement in this practice. More specifically, in-depth interviews were based on a recursive model proposed by Minichiello et al. (1995), which follows a natural conversational process. For three participants who were not accessible for interview, the questions which were in the form of an open-ended survey were sent through online platforms and they were required to reflect upon their experiences and provide a comprehensive response for them. Following this stage, the transcriptions of the interviews and written responses and some possible interpretations of the data gathered were sent back to some of the participants for the purpose of cross-validation and provision of comments about the aspects identified, which could give them an opportunity to further reflect upon their experiences and thoughts and, in cases possible, provide further ideas and insights.

For the analysis of data, Lueger and Vettori's (2014) interpretation process of modern social science hermeneutics was used:

**Step 1:** Identification of literal meanings and contents of the texts with regard to shadow education. In fact, a paragraph was selected as a unit of analysis and the key contents were found and highlighted.

**Step 2:** Reconstruction of the participants' subjective meanings or intentions based on the topic of enquiry. Here the focus was upon identifying and reconstructing the intended meaning with regard to English language teaching, private tutoring, shadow education, government policy, educational system, schooling, social consequences, etc.

**Step 3:** Reconstruction of latent structures and meanings. At this stage, the text producers' word choices, sentence structures, and generalizations were carefully analyzed.

**Step 4:** Reconstruction of pragmatic meanings considering the context of the study and the rules governing actions and interactions. At this stage, based on the findings of the previous stage, each paragraph was analyzed through the lens of the context of the study (i.e., the shadow education context) to find out how the existing norms, conventions and practices could affect text producers' meanings and communications.

**Step 5:** Construction of the preliminary themes to provide tentative explanations for the findings.

**Step 6:** Reconstruction of the final themes. The identified themes were analyzed in terms of their fundamental features and dimensions and each was supported based on the comments of participants and findings in the literature about

the nature, role, and significance of shadow education/private tutoring practice.

In order to interpret the collected data or to understand meanings, the researcher used the thematic network explained by Attride-Stirling (2001),

*Thematic networks systematize the extraction of: (1) lowest-order premises evident in the text (Basic Themes); (2) categories of basic themes grouped together to summarize more abstract principles (Organizing Themes); and (3) super-ordinate themes encapsulating the principle metaphors in the text as a whole (Global Themes). (p. 388)*

In fact, these global themes served as the main findings of the study which are further elucidated below based on the researcher's theoretical and practical understanding of shadow education, the ideas and salient features obtained by analyzing the participants' experiences and reflections, and the main concepts covered in the relevant literature. Finally, in order to ensure the trustworthiness (here used instead of reliability and validity) of the themes identified, both intra-coder and inter-coder reliability (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020) had been applied. Initially, the researcher independently attended to the transcribed data and the derived codes at

different points to ensure consistency in the identified themes. Subsequently, in the inter-coder reliability check, the identified themes along with the transcribed interviews were sent to an experienced colleague for further analyses. After her comments and evaluation, the agreed upon themes were presented and discussed as the key findings of the study.

### **Findings and Discussion**

After conducting a thematic analysis on the transcribed data, the researcher obtained the following themes with regard to the nature and influence of shadow education in teaching English in Iran: (1) shadow education compensating for inefficiency in teaching, (2) shadow education providing more humanistic, flexible and student-centered teaching methods, (3) shadow education facilitating access to higher education, (4), shadow education creating business opportunities and (5) shadow education perpetuating social inequalities in the society.

#### ***Theme 1: Shadow education compensating for inefficiency in teaching***

The main justification for turning towards shadow education highlighted by most of the interviewees was the inefficiency of mainstream schooling, in particular, and educational system, in general, for preparing

the students to reach a good level of communicative competence after almost six years of receiving instruction in English. More than 80 percent of these students receive a score of zero in English section of Entrance Examination of universities and they enter the universities having only a very rudimentary and passive knowledge of structures and some vocabularies with their Persian equivalents (Soodmand-Afshar & Movassagh, 2016). One teacher points out some of the deficiencies:

*Language learners do not learn the language in schools at all. Pronunciation, grammar, speech, listening or even writing of language learners is about 10%. One of these reasons goes back to the education system, which has worn-out teachers and old methods of teaching. Lack of communication with the teacher, incompetence of the teacher, unpreparedness of the teacher, lack of the right way to teach any skill, lack of recycling of content, lack of simplicity of words, lack of fluency in productions, lack of positive atmosphere for teaching are some of the things that make more than 90% of language learners take refuge in language institutes. Shadow education in language institutes in Iran means real learning.*

*A student also reflects upon his experience:*

*When I entered the university, I found that I have only memorized rules of grammar and a number of vocabularies with Persian Equivalent and I couldn't cope with the requirements of our major to talk and write in English in the classes. So, following my instructors' recommendation, I attended some courses in a language institute to improve my competency in different language skills and perform satisfactorily in my university courses.*

This inefficiency can be mostly attributed to the deep chasm between the theorization and practice of language teaching in Iran which is probably the result of the highly centralized policymaking tradition in the Ministry of Education, whereby all the decisions are dictated by authorities, and the curriculum is centrally administered in a top-down manner (Aghagolzadeh & Davari, 2017). Based on this tradition, teachers, as the key stakeholder in the teaching and learning practice, have no voice and agency in determining the syllabus and course content, textbooks are written centrally without adequate involvement of teachers and assessment of real needs of the students and the teachers must follow them from cover-to-cover in order to respond to the students' immediate need which is passing exam requirements; this

agenda leaves little room for flexibility and change or modifications in public schools (Atai & Mazlum, 2013). In other words, the main responsibility of English teachers is to get the students prepared for their exams instead of making them communicatively proficient since they are only professionally evaluated by the students' pass rates. Supplementing this issue was the teachers' own low level of professional and pedagogical competence in effectively teaching English language skills and components because after completing their own education, they had not been effectively provided with any teaching guidelines, professional supervision and pre/in-service training programs to improve their performance in this regard (Kheirabadi & Alavi Moghaddam, 2019; Moradkhani & Shirazizadeh, 2017).

In the recent decade, due to the spread of globalization, scientific developments, technological advances, and opportunities for international interactions, authorities felt a need for a radical paradigm change and making modifications in the ELT curriculum by adoption of more effective teaching methods and development of new textbooks having a theme-based design, favoring the integration of four language skill, paying attention to the students' communicative needs and targeting to improve the students' strategic competence,

self-efficacy, autonomy, problem solving, and meaning making abilities (see e.g., Asadi et al., 2016; Gholaminejad & Raeisi-Vanani, 2021). Despite these positive remarks, it is believed that this reform movement has not been successful in fulfilling its objectives due to the top-down design whereby it had been implemented, in a system characterized by a hierarchical power distribution (Razavipour & Rezagah, 2018). In the same regard, Gholaminejad and Raeisi-Vanani (2021) maintain that despite of the reform towards adopting the principles of CLT in teaching methods and design of materials and textbooks in 2013, the situation had not changed greatly due to reasons such as

*low budget allotted at the planning and implementation levels; teachers' unpreparedness to teach and assess based on the new approach, due to lack of educational, and economic empowerment; inefficiency of the newly-designed textbooks; the regime of school accountability; heterogeneous classes; inadequate time; extreme class sizes; and students' demotivation to use English, due to the paucity of opportunities to use it. (p. 111)*

Riazi (2005) maintains that with the, "increasing pace of globalization and the role

that English takes in this process, the need on the part of learners and their families for learning English in a communicative way is not being met by the formal curricula" (p. 111). Accordingly, the unreasonably weak performance of the English language teaching in the mainstream education paved the way for the private sector to grow and flourish (Davari & Aghagolzadeh, 2015). In fact, since language needs of Iranian students are not satisfied by mainstream educational system, private language institutes have undertaken the responsibility for improving the students' language proficiency and increasing their practical skills (Ganji et al., 2018). Shadow education by exposing and highlighting the shortcomings in the teaching of English in mainstream schools and by providing more effective ELT instruction compared to the practice of such schools can be a highly rewarding ground for preparing the students for the realities of globalized world and equipping them with a good command of language proficiency to perform better in their future academic studies and occupational endeavors. In the same regard, it can be said that the shadow education practice in teaching English, which is mostly conducted in private institutes in Iran, can promote global citizenship education by providing an avenue for "appreciation, and commitment to,

universal values, including interconnectedness, intercultural understanding and diversity, multiple levels of identity, social justice, peace, and sustainability" (Ghosn-Chelala, 2020, p.3). In fact, Iranian educational policy-makers should bear in mind that in order to perform well in today's competing scientific, political, financial and information explosion era, as well as to access the state-of-the-art technology and scientific resources, an efficient proficiency level in English is essential for Iranian experts and more effective plans and procedures for reforming the current state of teaching English in the country must be implemented (Gholaminejad & Raeisi-Vanani, 2021).

***Theme 2: Shadow education providing more student-centered and humanistic teaching methods***

While public schools intend to provide a one-size-fits-all teaching approach in teaching various subjects, shadow education programs attempt to provide a more flexible and personalized learning experience and are mostly focused on and attempt to respond to the specific academic needs, levels and objectives of the students. Kim and Jung (2019) also maintain that "because shadow curriculum is consumer-oriented and need-



based, personalized learning is better actualized in shadow curriculum” (p. 155). Such practice is rather missing in the mainstream educational system of our country and policy-makers intend to provide an assumed standard approach for teaching all the students in order to reach a kind of conformity and preserve the learners' national culture and identity. The same trend runs for teaching English in Iran with the result that few students even reach a rudimentary level of competence in English. Atai and Mazlum (2013) after inspecting the curriculum for teaching English in Iran found the absence of any ELT specific document and research-based needs analysis as the foundation of ELT program. They further argued that the "top-down policymaking nature of Iran's ELT curriculum development means that practice-level realities are neglected, which, in turn, results in a planning–practice gap" (p. 407). As a solution for this problem, they demanded further involvement of key stakeholders, that is, teachers and students, in the ELT planning. Xiao (2020) also maintains that in ordinary schools, there is not a balance between the number of teachers and students, teachers do not have much agency and teaching content must be presented based on a rather fixed syllabus and cannot be attuned to the individual needs and levels of the students; in fact, there is no possibility for individualized

instruction and all the students' problems cannot be attended and resolved. However, shadow education teaching has more flexibility and by selecting one-to-one teaching pattern and small class systems can be more student-centered and responsive to the needs of the students. Teachers' agencies and students' potential for engagement are further emphasized and respected in the domain of shadow education. One of the teachers also presents ideas and experiences in teaching in a language institute confirming these assertions:

*Shadow training in the language center of Iran (ILI), which has more than 90 years of background and experience, has made teaching sweet and easy, so that language learners can learn the most in the shortest time. The teachers follow the conventions of communicative approaches and the students are motivated to learn. There are many group works and experiential learning activities. Teachers' performances are observed regularly- pointing to the positive and negative aspects of their teaching and receiving feedback from their supervisors for growth and promotion- and they need to update their teaching practice to resolve the deficiencies and obstacles.*

A student also emphasizes the humanistic nature of instruction provided by shadow education:

*Because language institutes use communicative language teaching approach, you are more engaged in the learning process and the use of role plays creates a cooperative atmosphere in the classrooms. Also, the textbooks, tasks and activities are more interesting and related to the everyday life of the students. In fact, you are more motivated to learn in those contexts because you are not a passive learner.*

In fact, since the purpose of these private institutes is to improve the language competence of the learners, they have employed teachers who have a rather good command of communicative and functional aspects of language and are skillful in teaching language skills and components; they are more qualified in teaching English due to taking part in some teacher training courses or workshops (besides their own ELT-related academic degrees) and might have received national or international certificates in this regard. They conduct classes based on the principles of cooperative and experiential approaches and try to engage the learners more fully in the communicative and task-based activities.

These teachers are required to follow a particular syllabus but their agencies and innovative actions are respected, and they have more freedom in selecting teaching methods and procedures and using rich and authentic supplementary and extracurricular resources and materials. All language skills are taught in an integrated fashion using the internationally-produced textbooks and multimedia resources which teach the language systematically and follow the current principles of effective learning and teaching. Teachers also favor more dynamic and formative assessment approaches and are more willing to provide feedback on the students' spoken and written outputs due to having further chances of interaction, clarification and provision of immediate feedback.

These institutes are somehow compensating for the shortage of physical and human resources in public schools and the classes are equipped with more technological facilities and other required infrastructure and multimedia resources which can account for different learning styles and preferences of the learners. The atmosphere is friendlier, learners' personal characteristics and needs are respected, the teaching methodology and textbooks are adjusted to the level of students and due to the initial screening and placement procedure most learners receive an instruction

that they need and, consequently, the students are more willing to communicate and do classroom tasks and assignments. These positive points have added to the success and popularity of these institutes in enabling the learners to gain a good level of communicative competence and fulfill some of their academic, financial or even social needs. A point worth-mentioning here is that not all language institutes have the aforementioned characteristics or follow these procedures fully, but compared to the public schools' performance in teaching English, they are more successful in assisting the learners in gaining basic communicative skills or performing better in the English exams, albeit to various degrees. On the whole, shadow education, compared to school curricula, has a higher capacity to respond to the students' academic needs and help them achieve their goal by selecting more student-centered teaching approaches and addressing content and skills that are sometimes not effectively covered in public schooling systems (Bray & Kwo, 2013; Kim, 2016; Kim & Jung, 2019).

### ***Theme 3: Shadow education creating business opportunities***

Shadow education, in the form of private tutoring or group teaching language institutes, is gaining dominance and many families are

sending their children to such institutes to benefit from the assets offered in such educational settings. Aghagolzadeh and Davari (2017) predict that the future for ELT in the mainstream schools of Iran is not a promising one. They further argued that the peremptory control and management of the educational centers by political decision-makers and the shortcomings in the current status of governmental educational systems in terms of existing resources and facilities and the rather low quality of teaching practices offered can put mainstream schools in a difficult position in the competition against its prestigious private sector counterpart. Currently, many individuals for academic or communicative purposes are attending private tutoring sessions and it has created a business opportunity for language institutes, ELT teachers and free market organizations publishing and selling books and other resources for learning English. Private tutoring is a rising and flourishing industry having its own market-based principles and organizations. This business endeavor is either informally managed and conducted or officially run by some administrations or institutes offering ELT courses. They benefit from the existing requirements in our country for learning English for migration or pursuing

educational and career objectives among the Iranian youth.

In fact, shadow education can be the main source of income for tutors who do not have other jobs. In some contexts, this situation has resulted in "brain-drain from the education sector to 'greener pastures' of private tutoring" (Bonsuuri, 2012, p. 63). One university instructor asserts:

*In the context of Iran that each year we have many graduates of ELT-related majors, most of them cannot find a job in the official schools of the country or they are forced to work in the fields not directly related to their majors. Consequently, some of them work in language institutes or teach English in private sessions. Even some official teachers due to the low salaries they receive attend to such private tutoring practices, which reflects a financially difficult situation in which teachers work. Generally, language institutes highly benefit from the current situation by attracting both teachers and learners.*

A teacher who works in a language institutes also comments:

*When I graduated from the university, I searched for a job related to our field of study everywhere, but I couldn't get a job. I even participated in the recruitment exam*

*conducted by the ministry of education for employing teachers, but due to low admission, I was not accepted. So I applied for a language institute and I am also teaching private courses. I have flexible working hours that allow me attend to my household duties and earn a good income.*

Bray (2020) has also commented that tutorial sector in many countries of the world has generated substantial sources of incomes and employment opportunities, and thus has become a significant component of the social fabric. Duong & Silova (2021) used the concept of "entrepreneurial teacher" as a response for "the rising prevalence of fee-paying private tutoring to a market-driven economy" (p. 9). Obeegadoo (2007) considers this phenomenon as a shift in teachers' professionalism due to widespread ramifications of neoliberalism and consumerism economies that "create a constant urge among teachers to make money as a measure of professional success and favors the flowering of an entrepreneurial culture within the teaching profession" (as cited in Bray, 2009, p. 102). Many public school teachers also in order to compensate for their low salaries indispensably work in the domain of private tutoring as well in order to make their ends meet. Bray and Lykins (2012) also

maintain that in many developing countries, teacher salaries are not satisfactory compared to their living expenses and suggest that "the pattern of classroom teachers supplementing their incomes by tutoring students after school hours could be explained in terms of a necessity than a choice" (pp. 29–30).

In order to attract further 'customers', both individual teachers and administrations must try to provide the best quality teaching and learning environments and win the competitive edge in the society because the participants attend such courses based on the providers' reputation, competence of teachers, quality of instruction and their previous accomplishments. Bray (2020) believe that such possibilities provide avenues for innovation in terms of applying new techniques and approaches for teaching and learning and even employing technology and multimedia resources to retain and attract further clients, and this, in turn, positively influence teachers' expertise and competence and the quality of instruction provided which might lead to higher levels of achievement in the learners. In addition, those students who have attended such courses for learning English might have a better chance of being employed in organizations or companies needing their qualification for translation or making other correspondences in English.

They can also work as freelance translators and content writers and earn revenues in this regard. International communication can also put the companies to export and sell their products and services throughout the world and for this purpose they employ English language experts to conduct the correspondences, prepare the manuals and brochures for their products and services in English and so on; these possibilities can positively influence the economic status of a society as well.

#### ***Theme 4: Shadow education facilitating access to higher education***

The institutional characteristics of some educational systems such as the dominance of high-stake tests, that is the standardized and centrally-administered examinations, for the students' selection and certification in the institutes of higher education have also influenced the prevalence of shadow education worldwide because families attempt to respond to the competitive pressures caused by the exam-oriented culture of high-stakes testing by seeking assistance from shadow system and investing in this growing enterprise (Baker et al., 2001; Hannum et al., 2019; Zwier et al., 2021). In fact, "in the era of heightened competition for 'positional advantage', students' performance in examinations has become a key determinant for entry into

professional courses at elite institutions of higher learning" (Punjabi, 2020, p. 15). In the same vein, Iranian educational system is overshadowed by the rather extreme washback effect of the nation-wide entrance examination (called Konkur) which has tremendously influenced the quality of teaching and learning processes and experiences. It has a strong rituality behind it and many stakeholders, teachers, families and individual learners face a challenge to prepare the optimal condition for holding and participating in this endeavor. For the same purpose, there are many individuals and organizations, which besides the performance of mainstream schools for preparing the students for entrance examination, conduct private courses claiming to provide higher quality trainings that can assist the students in winning the competition for positional advantages in the society by being accepted in the most prestigious fields of studies (especially medicine and engineering) in the top universities of the country. For example, one student maintains:

*It is very difficult to be accepted in top majors by only attending the usual classes in the public schools; you should at least register in one of the institutes or get a private tutor to receive a better quality instruction that targets the subjects being tested in Konkur. You should spend a lot of*

*money to buy textbooks designed for such purposes or take part in trial examinations that simulate the actual testing condition.*

In fact, since the infrastructures, accommodations and facilities of the prestigious universities and institutes of higher learning are limited and they cannot afford to provide a position for pursuing professional courses for all the candidates, only the most competent ones can be accepted; this pursuit of credentialism has further exacerbated the spirit of rivalry and competition among the aspirants and has been a driving force for learners to attend supplementary courses offered by shadow education market (Bray, 2011; Punjabi, 2020). In fact, these high-stake tests function as "public gatekeeper to education and labor market opportunities" (Baker et al., 2001, p. 3). Many parents in hope of increasing the chances of their children to be accepted in top majors such as engineering and medicine in elite institutes of higher education and also enhancing the opportunities for their future occupational attainment, and thus improving their social status and positions, are sending them and paying high expenses for such courses; this situation has created a fertile ground for the expansion and development of private institutes as well. Entrich (2019) also highlighted the use of shadow education in

Germany (termed as *Nachhilfe*) as status attainment and compensatory strategy to help students improve their performances and maintain or achieve more advantageous educational levels. It is believed that these courses can provide a richer content and pedagogy for the students and teach them test-taking strategies and techniques for solving the questions that not only influences the students' understanding of the subject matter being taught and their academic achievement but also increases their prospect of success in high-stake tests (Bray & Lykins, 2012; Orkodashvili 2016; Zhang 2014).

As for being accepted in English-related majors the same procedure goes on in the country. Since English has its own unique exam and question sets, the students must have already attended such private tutoring courses to be successful in answering the technical questions which are beyond the content of materials taught in public schools. Since English is also one of the key four topics assessed in the general section of entrance examination for all fields of studies, receiving good scores in this subject can also improve the rank and final standing of the students compared to the other competitors. In addition, as Duong and Silova (2021) maintain, the private tutoring courses have specific goals and are task-oriented assisting the learners in

reaching their specific objectives. For example, some students might attend English courses as a preparation for national English exams (e.g., MSRT and EPT) as a requirement for certification or international English exams (e.g., TOEFL and IELTS) especially for those who want to pursue their higher education in American or European universities. One university instructor presents his ideas in their regard.

*Each year many MA and PhD. Students from other departments in the university come to our office to receive some guidelines about how to prepare themselves for the national and international language proficiency tests as a requirement for graduation or applying for academic positions abroad. Unfortunately, most of these students have a basic or intermediate proficiency level and after doing many hours of self-study and spending a lot of money cannot get a desired passing score. Our suggestion for most of them is attending private tutoring or particular courses designed for preparing the students for such exams.*

On the whole, "shadow curriculum is oriented towards academic success, and customer satisfaction is determined by outcomes such as school grades and passing university entrance

examinations” (Kim & Jung, 2019b, p. 153). This curriculum mainly provides academic content knowledge related to exams and focuses on test-taking skill trainings instead of empowering the learners to reach personal development and appreciate the significance of learning experience (Bray & Kwo, 2013; Kim & Jung, 2019a). As a reaction towards this trend, Nelson and Dawson (2017) emphasized "the restoration of the integrity of learning by abandon[ing] the assumption that education is about sorting people with discriminatory marks that necessarily sets them up in competition with one another” (p. 11). Yung (2020) also asserted that this examination for selection or learning for assessment, which has overshadowed education and training in various subject areas such as English, must not be considered as the dominant approach in the curriculum, but be regarded as an opportunity for learners to critically reflect upon their real needs and experiences and, thus, enhance the quality of their learning.

***Theme 5: Shadow education perpetuating social inequalities in the society***

The families' socioeconomic background and status affect the students' access to both public and shadow education. Shadow curriculum is “highly subject to parental investment in terms of what, where, and how students learn... and

[this investment] affects the types, quality, and intensity of shadow education students receive” (Kim & Jung, 2019b, p. 153) that can further increase the extent of social and educational inequalities in favor of students from economically privileged families who can afford purchasing such services. As was previously discussed, the existing problems in teaching English in Iranian mainstream schools, the strong competition for the existing seats in prestigious universities and the status of English language as a lingua franca of world communication, science, politics and economy have led many Iranian families to register their children at very young ages to such institutes that offer better quality trainings for this subject. Nevertheless, not all families are socioeconomically able to invest and send their children to study for such courses, which might in turn exacerbate the existing social inequalities in the society. The following comment reflects the same issue:

*Not all families can afford to send their children to such courses to learn English.*

*They cannot even pay for the usual requirements of their children in public schools let alone sending them to such courses that demand a high fee. Even in some cities and villages far from the centers, we do not have any institutes or individuals offering supplementary courses*



*for the students which might put them at disadvantage compared to the students from higher social class and sectors that benefit from both public and private tutors.*

This is a natural phenomenon in most developing countries and many students from low socioeconomic status families cannot afford to pay for such classes, which limits their access to departments of higher education or even influences the quality of their performance in their studies (see e.g., Bray, 2011, 2013; Buchmann et al., 2010). Consequently, this phenomenon is considered as one of the factors leading to social inequity in education because many students from “disadvantaged social backgrounds” (Choi & Park, 2016, p. 22) cannot attend and benefit from such trainings in shadow education. On the other hand, families with higher socioeconomic backgrounds “invest in shadow education as a form of concerted cultivation, seeking to improve their children’s school achievement. Shadow education appears to fulfill a competitive function for privileged families who seek to secure advantage in educational competition” (Jensen et al., 2021, p. 1). In fact, it is believed that participation in shadow education, which is influenced by the cultural and economic capital of families, can improve the students' educational outcomes

and their future career prospects since educational credentials and certificates are considered as decisive and essential factors for their selection and employment (Zwier et al., 2021). Parents' educational background has also been considered as a determining factor in investing in private tutoring and registering their children in particular subject matter courses such as English either as a compensatory or remedial strategy to increase their level of performance or give them a positional advantage over their peers in their competition for attaining the limited educational and occupational avenues and resources in the future (Guerrero, 2020) and thus enhancing the “intergenerational transmission of social privilege through schooling” (Jansen et al., 2021, p. 18).

As was mentioned, the positive attitudes towards private institutes and their methods of teaching in response to the inefficiency of language teaching in the school environment have been increasing. Teaching English in public school is limited to words and grammar, which has not been able to empower learners in terms of acquiring communication skills. The growing desire to interact with the wider world by strengthening speech skills and the interest in learning English culture have drawn many families and their children to such private language institutes as well, but this

practice has not been conducted effectively in many contexts since these private sectors see English as a commodity to be sold and not as a resource for learning or enhancing global communication and engagement. The following two comments present the result of current situation in teaching English in Iran:

*Language institutes and the emphasis on modern methods and, of course, native speakerism limit students to the English language and culture, eliminating the possibility of interaction between two languages and two cultures, and marginalizing the learners as well as the non-native teacher.*

*Undoubtedly, this shadow education increases the social gap, makes public education more inefficient and generally stagnant, and leads education to teach for testing rather than training for learning. Because of the financial issues and political nature of mainstream schooling many good teachers are attracted to these institutions and the public education environment becomes more inefficient than before.*

Attending both public and private institutes can also add to the students' workloads furthering their anxiety levels, and even it is claimed that since these courses are exam-oriented, the

students might not be cognitively and affectively engaged in the learning process, which might destroy their creativity and originality. In addition, the students might not experience the joys of learning and face difficulties in reaching the required personal and educational development. In addition, Yung and Bray (2017) assert that "the intensive academic schedule may also deprive students of time for sports, socialization and hobbies, which are important for all-round education" (p. 107).

Shadow education practice has also affected the status of teachers in the society. In fact, we have the idea of 'corrupted teacher' which refers to the individuals who withhold presenting the key information and abstain from teaching effectively in the regular classroom hours so that the students must attend their private tutoring sessions to receive a more effective instruction. This corruption can range from "teachers purposefully withholding official curriculum, to blackmailing students to enroll in their private tutoring lessons, to preferentially treating those students who participate in tutoring" (Duong & Silova, 2021, p. 8). The professional role of teachers is also being distorted since the students are considering the teachers in private institutes more knowledgeable and professional since they use more sophisticated

teaching methods, the syllabus and content is more directed towards the students' needs, and thus they provide a better response for their pragmatic needs for test-taking/examination techniques (Yung & Bray, 2017). These learners might also have a more positive attitude towards private tutors because they have had a chance to select their own teachers instead of a teacher being imposed on them and also since they pay for such courses, they might respect these teachers more than public-school free of charge teachers (Bray & Kobakhidze, 2014). In some contexts, private teachers even “secure advantages that are otherwise denied to them: it is rather as private tutors than as professionals that they enjoy a relatively respectable social status, economic rewards, and even political influence” (Popa & Acedo, 2006, p. 98). Public school teachers, on the other hand, are at the frontline of educational programs and reform efforts and are directly responsible for the students' performance and learning, but their competence and expertise is only evaluated based on the students' exam scores and are mostly considered as the main culprits of low quality education in case of students' failures. This situation highly overlooks their sincere efforts that might demotivate them to pursue avenues for further professional development and improvement of their pedagogical practice.

Another point of inequity which has created a ubiquitous challenge and problem for both the teachers and students is the heterogeneity of classes that makes the management of classes highly difficult (Asadi et al., 2016). The reality is that in many of such mixed-level classrooms, which are mainly the result of the mushrooming growth of private institutes teaching English at early ages, many students have already attended English classes in private institutes and might have language proficiency levels beyond the content presented in the classrooms that might cause them to be bored and unmotivated; on the other hand, there are students, from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, who had not benefited from such private courses and consider the content of the textbooks used highly challenging. One participant pinpoints the same problem in her comments:

*In my opinion, English students at school are divided into two types: those who are participating in private institutions, and those students who don't have any English background. English class at school is boring for type one and it is difficult for type two. I have an experience in this regard when I was a student at high school. During one of the English sessions, an argument occurred between these two types of students. Those students who were*

*participating in institutions wanted to learn more than what was on the book, and those who didn't go to the private institutions claim that they can't even understand the book very well. So I think this experience is a drop in the ocean of the problems that inequality can bring to our society.*

In the present situation, the students from different sectors of the society (i.e. privileged or otherwise), are considered the same and treated similarly in the ELT curriculum, regardless of their socioeconomic and previous educational backgrounds (Foroozandeh & Forouzani, 2015) and the teachers who are at the forefront must deal with such a challenge. This is against the notions of critical and emancipatory pedagogy that emphasizes the critical role of education in creating a just and democratic society by designing programs that focus upon the revelation of values and enterprises and empower educators and students (as transformative intellectuals or cultural workers) to develop a critical consciousness and understand better the conditions that affect their lives and studies, identify and address injustices and inequalities and make informed actions to make a reform or change in the existing curriculum (Eisner, 1994; Freire, 2003; Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 2000). Yung (2020) also, borrowing from

Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed notion, maintained that besides disturbing the students with washback effects of high-stake testing and fueling educational competition for positional advantages and credentials, "shadow education further oppresses the students by (1) intensifying the "banking" concept of education, (2) teaching as the "authority", (3) emphasizing performativity and (4) offering "false generosity" (p. 1).

In the same regard, educational authorities and reform planners must take into account the fact that the population of students in the school system is not limited to only the privileged students with good English backgrounds (Asadi et al., 2016) and must revise the curriculum and syllabus (content and methodology) to respond to the requirements of unprivileged students as well. The teachers must also be equipped with adequate level of knowledge and expertise to consider these differences and plan their courses to suit all the learners. In fact, they must be mobilized to embrace the challenges and complexities of English language education in mainstream schools and develop the learners' competency in the most effective ways. These language educators should address the issues of social justice, equity and human diversity and act as change agents in the distribution of opportunities for quality education despite the

fact that their practices might be limited by the top-down curriculum imposed by the ministry of education favoring a one-size-fits-all teaching approach and enhancing the ideological and sociopolitical concern of the authorities in the country (Atai & Mazlum, 2013). It is believed that implementing informed modifications in the existing programs and "the introduction of counter-measures such as state-sponsored supplementary education services" (Entrich, 2021, p. 442) can somehow alleviate the concerns for inequality in educational opportunities and growing social class divides.

### **Conclusion**

The present study investigated the status of shadow education in teaching English in Iran by adopting hermeneutic phenomenological approach. The findings of the study revealed the following key themes: shadow education as a compensatory approach for resolving inefficiencies in teaching English in mainstream public schools, shadow education providing more humanistic teaching approaches by considering the students' individual needs and characteristics, shadow education facilitating access to higher education by enhancing the students' performance on high-stake tests, shadow education creating business and employment

opportunities for language-related major graduates, and shadow education creating social inequalities at student, teacher, class and social levels. Generally, qualitative shortcomings in the educational system of mainstream schools for teaching English in Iran has led many families to invest in the private sector which offer better learning opportunities and resources with higher expectable returns and development in the future. Silova (2010) also asserted the status of shadow education has improved in many countries due to some transformations such as "increased privatization (and declining state expenditures), the declining professional status and legitimacy of the teaching profession, the deteriorating quality of public schooling and increasing demand for higher education" (as cited in Duong & Silova, 2021, p. 3).

On the whole, it can be mentioned that despite the fact that shadow education might have compensated for some shortcoming in teaching of English in mainstream schools and has enhanced the students' performance on high-stake tests, it has to some extent undermined and overshadowed the educational reforms (e.g., the change in the curriculum for teacher training and modification of textbooks) for teaching this subject in public schools and also has deepened social inequalities. Nevertheless, it has also been effective in

teaching certain knowledge, values, attitudes and certain personal and social skills and due to its tremendous growth and ubiquitous presence along with the mainstream curriculum in educational ecology must receive appropriate attention from educational authorities, teachers and researchers in the country. As Jung (2018) maintains, “existing research has revealed enough of shadow education’s pervasiveness, seriousness, and negative effects to alarm educators and researchers, and to ensure that shadow education shall not be ignored” (p. 272). In fact, policy makers must recognize its significance, properly evaluate the scale, intensity and nature of shadow education and devise regulations for the practices of this

educational system. Zhang and Bray (2020) maintain that “government regulators (like researchers) have been slow to catch up with reality in expansion and diversification; but as they do catch up, to some extent they take the sector out of the shadows and confer legitimacy” (p. 10). In the attempt for reaching more pragmatic and normative legitimacy in the domain of shadow education, further studies must be conducted to investigate its social, political and economic aspects and meanings and to gain further insights into the precise nature of the impacts it might have on educational systems, policies, schools, teachers, students, parents and the quality and equity of educational opportunities provided.

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## بررسی وضعیت و تاثیرات آموزش سایه در حیطه آموزش زبان انگلیسی در ایران: رویکرد پدیدارشناختی هرمنیوتیک

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**چکیده:** آموزش سایه، که به عنوان تدریس خصوصی تکمیلی فراتر از نظام آموزشی رایج و فضاهای آموزشی رسمی تعریف می شود، به یک پدیده در حال گسترش در جهان تبدیل گشته است. مطالعه کنونی از رویکرد تحقیقی پدیدارشناختی هرمنیوتیک استفاده نمود تا وضعیت و تاثیرات آموزش سایه در آموزش عمومی و تدریس زبان انگلیسی را مورد بررسی قرار دهد. با استفاده از روش نمونه گیری هدفمند، ده نفر مدرس زبان انگلیسی و ده نفر دانشجوی رشته زبان که تجربه تدریس و شرکت در چنین فعالیت های آموزشی را داشتند انتخاب گردیده و از آنها مصاحبه به عمل آمد. پس از انجام تحلیل مضمون بر داده های رونویسی شده، محقق مضامین ذیل را براساس ماهیت و تاثیر آموزش سایه بر تدریس زبان انگلیسی در ایران بدست آورد: (۱) آموزش سایه به عنوان چهرانی برای ناکارآمدی در امر تدریس؛ (۲) آموزش سایه به عنوان ارایه دهنده روشهای تدریس فراگیر-محور و انسان گرایانه؛ (۳) آموزش سایه به عنوان ابزاری برای تسهیل دسترسی به مقاطع آموزش عالی؛ (۴) آموزش سایه به عنوان ارایه دهنده فرصت های شغلی و (۵) آموزش سایه به عنوان عاملی برای تداوم نابرابری های اجتماعی در جامعه. در نهایت پیشنهاد شد که آموزش سایه با توجه به رشد چشمگیر و حضور همه جانبه آن در کنار برنامه درسی اصلی در بوم شناسی آموزشی، باید مورد توجه مناسب مسئولان آموزشی، معلمان و پژوهشگران کشور قرار گیرد.

**واژه های کلیدی:** آموزش سایه، رویکرد پدیدارشناسی هرمنیوتیک، آموزش زبان انگلیسی در ایران