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**School systems as breeding grounds for shadow education:**

**Factors contributing to private supplementary tutoring in West Bengal, India**

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**Abstract**

In the academic literature, private supplementary tutoring is widely known as shadow education, in part because it is commonly indistinct and because much of its content mimics that in mainstream schooling. Around the world, shadow education has become an important part of students’ lives and in some places it diminishes the body that it mimics. This paper builds on studies that have focused on relationships between schooling and shadow education. The paper uses the conceptual lens of privatisation-by-default, and employs qualitative methods to understand the roles of both government and private schools in promoting tutoring in West Bengal, India. It finds that substantial proportions of shadow education emanate from and are fostered by school systems. On the one hand private tutoring as a form of privatisation-by-default gives freedom of choice, but on the other hand it limits choice. Further, school-bred tutoring can have a negative backwash on school systems. As such, private supplementary tutoring is not just a neutral shadow but affects the body that it imitates. The study recommends researchers to look back at schools to gain a deeper understanding of private supplementary tutoring.

**KEYWORDS**: privatisation-by-default, private supplementary tutoring, shadow education, corruption, West Bengal, India.

**1 INTRODUCTION**

Throughout the world, much formal and nonformal instruction is received by children and youth outside their schools. Private supplementary tutoring, which is the focus of this paper, is a prominent and expanding form of such instruction. It is defined here as tutoring in academic subjects provided to students in addition to mainstream schooling for financial gain. Such tutoring is often called shadow education, partly because of its indistinct characteristics and operation largely beyond the purview of policymakers, and also because when the curriculum changes in the mainstream it subsequently changes in the shadow (Bray, 1999; 2009).

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Shadow education can have a significant impact on society. On the positive side, it provides academic support to students and a conducive atmosphere for learning (de Castro & de Guzman, 2014; Manzon & Areepattamanil, 2014). It also provides employment for tutors and in ancillary services such as advertising, transport and food. However, tutoring commonly exacerbates social inequalities by bolstering the academic performance of students in families that can afford high quality services. It may also increase parental and student anxiety (Dierkes, 2013; Kim, 2012; Park, 2012), and can foment corruption among teachers (Ille & Peacey, 2019; Kobakhidze, 2014; Bray, 2013).

In India shadow education is commonly called tuition or coaching and has long been an integral part of students’ lives. It is especially prominent in the senior secondary grades, and has expanded during recent years (see e.g. Azam, 2016; Punjabi, 2019). Among the Indian states, West Bengal has the highest tutoring participation rate among secondary students (National Sample Survey Office [NSSO], 2015), but has received little research attention. The small number of West Bengal studies includes Maheshwari (2013), Majumdar (2014, 2018), Nandi, Paul & Baskey (2014), and the State Council on Educational Research and Training (SCERT, 2009), which mainly focus on the primary and lower secondary levels. The present study focuses on Grades 11 and 12 (ISCED 3) and addresses the science stream which is particularly competitive.

Factors shaping the demand for shadow education range from macro-level structural aspects such as credentialism and entrance examinations to micro-level aspects such as individual motivations for academic achievement. The present study focuses on the meso-level institutional component of school systems. Previous studies have shown that although private tutoring mostly operates alongside schooling, it is in some respects intertwined (see e.g. Bray, 2010; Brehm & Silova, 2014; Zhang & Bray, 2017). The present study elaborates by examining the roles of school systems in fostering private tutoring. The paper views the phenomenon through the conceptual lens of privatisation-by-default, which is also known as *de facto* privatisation. The few studies on how school systems facilitate tutoring have mostly looked only at government schools, but the present study focuses on both government and private schools. It shows that even private schools are not able to avoid the demand for (and embrace of) private tutoring; and students who attend private schools and then also receive private tutoring are in effect receiving private plus more private.

West Bengal has a population of 91 million (Central Statistics Office, 2011, p.12), and on this measure is considerably larger than many countries. It also has a high degree of self-government within India. Other important contextual dimensions include political turmoil and decades of economic slowdown, combined with inadequate infrastructure, unemployment and brain drain. These factors provide a distinctive environment, but the paper nevertheless has significant implications for other societies. The study shows that both government and private school systems foster tutoring by facilitating various market functions. The means through which such facilitation occurs vary according to school-based arrangements, and have mixed implications. Consumers have freedom of choice to receive tutoring from teachers that they prefer, but coercive forces reduce other dimensions of freedom. Further, the fostered tutoring has a negative backwash on the school systems themselves.

The paper first elaborates on the Indian and West Bengali contexts before turning to the scale and nature of private tutoring and to the conceptual framework. The next section discusses the research methods, and is followed by the findings. The final section links back to the conceptual framework in conclusion.

**2 SOCIETY AND EDUCATION IN WEST BENGAL**

West Bengal is one of India’s 29 states, which operate alongside seven union territories. Its capital city is Kolkata, previously called Calcutta. Historically, West Bengal was widely perceived as a progressive and economically successful hub, but towards the end of the 20th century it experienced economic decline. The state was governed by a Left Front coalition led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) from 1977 to 2011. The first two decades of their rule brought agricultural growth following land reforms, but a decline in industrialisation related to strong unionisation marked with strikes and lockouts (Sarkar, 2006; 2010). This decline occurred at a time when the country as a whole experienced industrial growth. Unlike states such as Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka which successfully attracted foreign investments after the Indian economic liberalisation policy launched in 1991, investors did not view West Bengal as a promising business site (Banerjee et al., 2002; Ganguly-Scrase, 2000). Revitalisation of the sector under the subsequent Trinamool Congress government failed to bring significant economic improvement (Bose, 2019). A 2015/16 employment survey reported that 34.5% of households had earnings below Rs5,000,[[1]](#footnote-1) which was almost the highest poverty rate in the country (Ministry of Labour & Employment Labour Bureau, 2016). Deficiencies in the formal sector of the economy pushed many people into the informal sector, including shadow education (Shaw, 2016; Chowdhury & Chakraborty, 2016).

Bengalis are widely described as lovers of knowledge who accord high status to the well-educated. According to this depiction, the middle-class Bengali *bhadralok* (roughly translated as gentlefolk) value stable jobs more than entrepreneurship. This perspective contrasts with dominant patterns in other Indian states such as Gujarat and Rajasthan where entrepreneurship is well respected by the middle-class. Ganguly-Scrase (2000, p.146) described the *bhadralok* as “distinguished by their refined behaviour and cultivated taste but not necessarily substantial wealth and power”. She added that although originally linked to upper castes, “in contemporary Bengali society they are a distinct status group (in the Weberian sense), which is not coterminous with caste or class”. The downward mobility of the *bhadralok* began with the 1947 partition of West Bengal and what is now Bangladesh, but they may still be said to value education above all for their children.

Due to West Bengal’s stumbling economy, the resulting dearth of jobs, and strong student politicisation in higher education, many lower-middle and middle-middle class parents with limited financial means send their children outside the state for higher education. Institutions in more developed Indian states serve as launching pads for lucrative jobs in India and abroad. For the *bhadralok*, investing in education is of utmost importance for their children’s financial stability and related opportunities. Further, since children still look after their parents in old age, tutoring is seen as an investment for the older as well as the younger generations.

The Indian education system follows a 5+3+2+2 structure. Grades 1 to 5 comprise primary school, grades 6 to 8 upper primary or middle school, grades 9 and 10 secondary school, and grades 11 and 12 senior secondary school. Public examinations (known as board examinations) are held at the end of grades 10 and 12, the latter being school-leaving examinations. At the beginning of grade 11, students are streamed into science, commerce or humanities tracks. The science stream is widely considered the most prestigious, and the most coveted higher education fields for these students are engineering and medicine. However, the shortage of quality engineering and medicine degree programmes in the country results in intense competition. Examinations to enter these institutions are held at the national and regional levels. After taking the school-leaving board examinations at the end of grade 12, students take multiple entrance examinations for elite institutions. The results of both board and entrance examinations are considered for admission. The many students who do not qualify in these examinations commonly enrol in less famous institutions or non-technical streams in universities that are considered less rewarding (Bertrand, Hanna & Mullainathan, 2010, p.18). Students who do not aspire to move out or who lack resources for relocation prepare for board examinations and regional examinations to secure university seats within the state.

The main categories of school providers in West Bengal are central government, state government, local bodies, private bodies, and aided bodies. In general, government school teachers receive higher salaries than counterparts in private schools, though the private institutions charge substantially higher fees. Students in higher grades of state government schools pay nominal school fees and also incur costs for books, travel and ancillaries. Science students pay more than students of other streams because they incur laboratory expenses. If they can afford the fees, parents generally prefer private schools over government schools as the former are perceived to have higher quality and usually provide instruction in English (see Das, 2015). Government schools generally suffer from poor infrastructure and inferior teaching (see Bagchi, 2017; Das, 2015; Rana, Santra, Mukherjee, Banerjee & Kundu, 2005).

The problem of poor school quality is not new to the state. The 1991 Ashok Mitra Commission highlighted the dearth of infrastructural facilities in schools, lack of school inspection, inadequate teacher evaluation and the malpractice of school teachers extracting money from their students through private tutoring. Common perceptions are that improvement has been limited. The Commission recommended that teachers be prohibited from providing private tutoring and that teachers’ attendance and performance be monitored, but these proposals were not seriously implemented (Bagchi, 2017; Majumdar, 1993; Singh, 1993). More recently, the Pratichi Trust, founded and chaired by Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen, drew attention to the challenges faced by government primary schools due to loopholes in official policies. The challenges included shortage of funds, uneven teacher distribution due to nepotism, inadequate teacher training, weak academic planning, and uncommitted teachers (Pratichi Institute, 2018, pp.50-63). The report asserted that schools’ poor performance largely drove tutoring participation (p.65).

Schools can also be classified according to the examination boards that they follow. The most commonly-followed boards are the West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education (WBCHSE) which is a state-level board, and the national-level Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE). State government schools follow the WBCHSE, while English-medium private schools may follow the WBCHSE, CBSE or CISCE.

**3 SHADOW EDUCATION IN INDIA AND WEST BENGAL**

Shadow education has been a longstanding phenomenon in India. Nationally representative data collected through household surveys over three decades by the National Sample Survey Office of the Government of India showed a growing trend across the country. Participation rates increased from 20.7% in 1986/87 to 28.1% in 2014/15 among primary and secondary school students (Azam, 2016; NSSO, 2015). In comparison to the 2014/15 national level participation rate of 28.1%, the rate in West Bengal was 81.3%. When compared to the 29 other Indian states, West Bengal was behind only Tripura (83.2%), which is another Bengali-speaking state. At the secondary level, West Bengal reported the highest percentage (90.5%) of students receiving tutoring (NSSO, 2015, p.A-23), and private tutoring was reported to consume 58.0% of household expenditures on secondary education.[[2]](#footnote-2) Urban/rural differences were minimal, with 93.1% of urban students receiving tutoring compared to 89.7% of rural students. This was unusual when compared to other regions of India and countries such as China and Bangladesh where urban regions report higher participation than rural regions (Azam, 2016; Mahmud & Bray, 2017; Nath, 2008; Sujatha & Rani, 2011; Xue & Fang, 2018). The proportions of students receiving tutoring in West Bengal increased from lower grades to higher grades (Ministry of Human Resource Development [MHRD], 2016). This largely reflected the increased pressure to perform well in the higher grades, as scores in the competitive examinations determined future career trajectories.

The 2009 SCERT study reported on a survey of 9,547 students, headteachers, assistant teachers and guardians associated with 346 state government and local-body schools. The report indicated that 93.4% of surveyed grade 11 students were receiving tutoring, among whom 33.7% did so from their own school teachers (SCERT, 2009, p.145, 168).[[3]](#footnote-3) In addition to school teachers, tutoring was provided by retirees, college teachers, businessmen, full-time tutors and others who lacked alternative formal employment. The last group was particularly evident because of the high rates of educated unemployment (SCERT, 2009; see also Majumdar, 2014; 2018).

Various regulations have been framed by the state and central governments to control the negative implications of private tutoring. These regulations have been broad, however, and in West Bengal have largely remained on paper. In 2001, the West Bengal School Education Department banned permanent-scale primary school teachers from providing tutoring (West Bengal Primary Education Conduct of Service Rules, 2001), and in 2005 extended the requirement to secondary school teachers (Conduct and Discipline of Teachers and Non-Teaching Staff, 2005). These measures were applicable only to teachers of government and aided schools, but in 2012 the prohibition was extended to all teachers, with sanctions including the possibility of the teachers losing their jobs (West Bengal Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Rules, 2012). At the national level, the Right to Education (RTE) Act was passed in 2009 and applies to government, private and aided schools. Section 28 of the Act prohibits teachers from providing private tutoring (MHRD, 2014). More recently, the MHRD’s National Education Policy recognised the detrimental effects of private tutoring on secondary students and recommended measures to revamp the examination system (MHRD, 2019, pp.104-106).

**4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

**4.1 Private tutoring and school systems**

Reciprocal links between shadow education and mainstream schooling have been observed in various parts of the world (e.g. Brehm & Silova, 2014; Dawson, 2009; Jayachandran, 2014). While some associations are formal and/or direct, others are informal and/or indirect. In China, Zhang and Bray (2017) drew attention to four ‘mixing zones’, using the metaphor of confluence of running water often associated with pollutants in environmental management. The four zones were (1) collaboration between tutoring companies and school leaders for schools to recommend students for tutoring; (2) collaboration in which tutoring companies provided schools with referrals for admissions; (3) teachers providing tutoring to their own students; (4) teachers receiving kickbacks for referring tutees. The practice of referring tutees has also been observed elsewhere, including Croatia, Poland, and Bosnia & Herzegovina (Silova, Būdiene & Bray, 2006).

The phenomenon of school teachers providing private tutoring has drawn research attention because of its potential for corruption (Biswal, 1999; Ille & Peacey, 2019; Jayachandran, 2014; Kobakhidze, 2014; Sobhy, 2012). For example, research has focused on the hidden market of private tutoring in Cambodia where teachers provide private tutoring to their students in the school premises after school hours to supplement their low incomes (e.g. Dawson, 2009; Bray, Kobakhidze, Liu & Zhang, 2016). Brehm and Silova (2014) explained that the practice of teachers tutoring their students for a fee was embedded in Cambodia’s complex post-colonial context combined with the influence of international policies that conflicted with its local situation of economic austerity. Kobakhidze’s (2014) Georgian work showed that teacher corruption can be both demand-driven and supply-driven. It is demand-driven when parents solicit tutoring from school teachers, and it is supply-driven when teachers make students receive tutoring through coercion and favouritism. Patterns in West Bengal have some similarities with the above settings, despite significant differences which require careful attention.

**4.2 Privatisation-by-default**

Verger, Fontdevila and Zancajo (2016, p.7) defined privatisation in education as “a process through which private organisations and individuals participate increasingly and actively in a range of education activities and responsibilities that traditionally have been the remit of the state”. Also useful is Savas’ (2000, p.126) categorisation of privatisation in three broad forms of delegation, divestment, and displacement. Delegation is when the government takes responsibility for the entire function but delegates the production activity to the private sector for example by contracting, franchising, or issuing vouchers. Divestment is usually a one-time event in which governments transfer their responsibilities to private entities through sale or transfer. While delegation and divestment are deliberate actions, displacement takes place passively “when the public considers government production of goods or services to be inadequate, and the private sector recognizes and satisfies the demand” (Savas, 2000, p.132).

Privatisation-by-default in education has often been associated with low-income countries in which public provision has been considered inadequate (Moschetti, 2015; Tooley & Dixon, 2006; Verger et al., 2016). Hartmann (2008, p.17) pointed out that in some developing societies, privatisation might not be a choice and may be a result of the government’s inability to provide rising populations with basic services. In such situations, privatisation can occur at an informal level and be “out of the reach of state control”. By “informal”, Hartmann meant activities which were “unregulated and uncontrolled by the state”. Although conspicuous in low-income countries, privatisation-by-default is not limited to these settings. It has been noted in high-income countries as well, including Canada and the USA (see Davies, 2004; Lyall and Sell, 2006).

Privatisation-by-default can have significant consequences for the society. Rizvi (2016) has recognised positive dimensions, noting that privatisation has expanded access to education around the world in ways that would not have been feasible if left to state resources. However, he also observed ethical, political and educational issues. He contended (p.8) that privatisation can lead to the commodification of education and that “(w)hen people are encouraged to look primarily after their own economic interests, as the neoliberal notion of *homo economicus* clearly encourages, their concern for the fellow human being concurrently diminishes, and the foundations of ethics become eroded”.

In the Indian context, Mooij and Jalal (2009) studied primary schooling in Delhi, Hyderabad and Kolkata and observed that when poor-quality public provision led to transfer of responsibility to the private sector, the government did not adequately amend its policies. The authors termed this process “governance by resignation, and privatisation by default” (p.135). The fact that privatisation took place with little meaningful regulation led to problems including abuse of students, corruption, and lack of accountability on the part of private schools. However, Mooij and Jalal paid little attention to private tutoring within the schooling sector.

**5 METHODS**

Considering the complex nature of shadow education, a qualitative approach was undertaken to gain a nuanced understanding. Data were collected through face-to-face, semi-structured individual and group interviews averaging an hour in duration, and through observations of schools and tutoring enterprises. Interviews were carried out in homes, schools, tutoring premises, and cafés according to participants’ preferences and keeping in mind the need for privacy.

Participants belonged to urban and peri-urban regions of the districts of Kolkata and Paschim Barddhaman. They were associated with eight private and eight state-government schools. A total of 47 participants were interviewed, comprising 27 science-stream students, six teacher-tutors (i.e. teachers who were also tutors), two tutors, two teachers, two principals, and eight parents of student participants. Among the 27 students, 17 were male and 10 were female; 22 were in grade 12 and five in grade 11; 16 studied in low- and medium-fee private schools; and 11 studied in state-government schools. Among the parents, five had children in private schools and three had children in government schools. Among the six teacher-tutors, four taught in government schools and two in private schools. All teacher-tutors had over 10 years of tutoring experience, with 40 years being the highest. Among the two tutors, one had seven years of tutoring experience and the other had 30 years. The teachers taught in private schools and had four to six years of experience. One principal was in a government school and the other in a private school. The medium of instruction was English in private schools and Bengali in state-government schools. State-government schools followed the WBCHSE curriculum, while the private schools followed either the CBSE or the CISCE curriculum. All schools were co-educational. Participants belonged to lower-middle and middle-middle class families (*bhadralok*), with reported monthly incomes ranging from Rs.20,000 (US$306) to Rs.150,000 (US$2,295).

Follow-up interviews were conducted with 11 students and two parents. Interviewing participants multiple times increased trust, added depth, and helped to check data reliability. Most interviews were one-to-one, but six were in groups of two to five people. Informal interviews were also carried out with five parents, seven students, two teacher-tutors, and one teacher. These informal interviews deepened understanding of the context, and assisted cross-validation. Data were collected between May 2017 and December 2018 with a combination of purposeful, snowball and opportunity sampling. Because teachers were legally prohibited from providing tutoring, the topic was sensitive among the teachers who did provide it. Some teacher-tutors even directed their tutees not to provide interviews. However, once contacts had been established and trust had been built, tutors and teacher-tutors became valuable sources of data and provided access to other sources including students and parents. Informed oral consent was obtained from the participants before commencing interviews.

Interviews were conducted in English and/or Bengali as per interviewees’ preference. Students from English-medium schools commonly preferred speaking in English. Bengali interviews were first translated into English and then transcribed, while English-medium interviews were transcribed directly. Data were analysed with the help of NVivo 11 software. An inductive analysis strategy was used in which data were iteratively explored to identify patterns and interrelationships. Themes emerging during the analysis were synthesised to build the findings along guidelines recommended by Patton (2015). Data from different sources were compared to check for credibility and inconsistencies. Consistency in participants’ responses over time was also examined. Participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

**6 FINDINGS**

This section first discusses findings on the nature of private tutoring received by the senior secondary science students. It then turns to ways in which government and private schools were breeding grounds for shadow education.

* 1. **The nature of private tutoring**

Most of the student participants had received tutoring since primary school, commencing with arrangements in which one tutor taught multiple subjects and then changing to tutors specialising in particular subjects from grade 11. Students received tutoring to prepare for board and entrance examinations, but most students gave greater importance to board examinations because the marks of entrance examinations were irrelevant if the students did not get sufficient scores in board examinations. On average, students reportedly spent Rs.62,400 (US$955) per annum on tutoring, especially in Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry but also in Bengali, Biology, Computer Science and English. Students received tutoring every day, including holidays. On average, students received tutoring for 24.1 hours in an ordinary week, which compared with 25 hours in the official curriculum of government schools and 30 hours for most private schools (though some students skipped part of their schooling in order to attend tutoring).

**6.1.1 Forms of tutoring**

Middle-class senior secondary students mainly received three forms of tutoring. First, one-to-one tutoringwas provided in either the tutors’ or the students’ homes. Second, group tutoring was provided to 10 to 50 students at a time. It was the least expensive and most common form, and venues were generally students’ homes, tutors’ homes, or hired spaces such as residences, garages or commercial areas. Group tutoring was commonly arranged by individual tutors or by two or more tutors of different subjects who collaborated to hire venues which were referred to as tuition centres. The third form was in coaching centres which provided lecture-style tutoring to large classes. Most coaching centres provided preparatory tutoring for higher education entrance examinations, but some also provided tutoring for school-leaving (board) examinations. The coaching centres’ fees were beyond the reach of most lower-middle class and working class families.

**6.1.2 Providers of tutoring**

The providers of private tutoring were diverse. Tutors employed in large coaching centres generally worked full-time, held engineering bachelors and masters degrees in the same or other fields from top higher education institutions, and received high salaries. Many providers of one-to-one and small-group tutoring were teachers who taught students of the schools in which they worked and/or students from other schools. Other providers included unemployed youth, government officials working as part-time tutors, college professors, retired persons, and higher education students who were preparing for other entrance examinations.

**6.2 Privatisation as a result of dissatisfaction with school system**

As noted above, privatisation-by-default occurs when government services are perceived to be inadequate and private providers bridge gaps. Almost all student interviewees – in government as well as private institutions – cited dissatisfaction with school as an important reason for seeking tutoring. Dissatisfaction among the private school students was especially noteworthy since parents perceived private schools to have superior quality. Students of both school types expressed dissatisfaction with regard to curricular load and feedback, but high teacher-pupil ratio, teacher absenteeism, and poor infrastructure were mainly mentioned by government-school students.

Almost all students (from both school types) cited lack of quality teachers as a dominant reason for seeking tutoring, but this matter was brought up more frequently by government-school students. Some of these students felt that some teachers of other sections taught better than the teachers assigned to them, and therefore sought tutoring from those teachers. Government-school students complained of teacher absenteeism, of demotivating actions such as mockery of individual students and/or whole classes, and of teachers’ inability to answer students’ queries. Staff in government schools themselves brought up the issue of school quality during interviews. This is illustrated by the words of a principal and a teacher when asked about student-teacher interaction during a group interview in Paschim Barddhaman, August, 2018:

Principal: We return the assessed examination papers to the students. We have this honesty and courage. Other [government] schools do not do this. They just show them the papers and take them back. We give students a chance to improve.

Teacher: We take attendance here… grades 11 and 12. Unlike other government schools, our teachers go to classes. No class goes empty.

The principal and the teacher were proud to conduct such duties which to them seemed like good deeds.

Government-school students also reported poor infrastructure and high teacher-pupil ratios as reasons for taking tutoring. This was echoed by teacher-tutors. Elaborating, one government-school teacher-tutor said:

The problem is the number. There are 70 students in my class. It is impossible to reach them, to stand in front of them. The classroom is so crowded. A class period spans 45 minutes out of which 10 are wasted, leaving me with 35 minutes. This means, I can give half a minute per student. Is it possible that all students will understand? Imagine the condition! (Sudhin Sir, teacher-tutor, Kolkata, July, 2018)

While poor infrastructure was not a frequently-cited reason among private-school students, like their counterparts in government schools the interviewees complained about curricular load and feedback. Teachers and students commonly described the transition from grade 10 to 11 as “falling from the river to the sea”. While teachers voiced their difficulty in covering the syllabus gap within a limited time, students expressed that it would be “impossible to cover the gap without additional guidance”. Four parents highlighted better feedback in tutoring since families could interact with tutors regularly. One remarked:

My son asked me to request Bikram Sir [tutor] to explain the *vectors* chapter first instead of *optics*. I just called Bikram Sir and told him so. He said that he will look into it. And he will. I can never tell this to a school teacher! Never! He will say: ‘Should I listen to you or to the other 50 students in class?’ (Bornali, parent, Paschim Barddhaman, August, 2018)

Also, students and parents felt that in forms of group tutoring that did not collect the fees in advance, there was always the option of changing the tutor. This choice was not available in schooling, where teachers were assigned by the school authorities. Further, in neither government nor private schools were parents or students willing to lodge complaints against poor performing teachers, for fear of negative consequences.

Privatisation-by-default offered choice to families to receive the forms of education they perceived to be appropriate. In case of private schools, privatisation-by-default was observed in different interconnected layers. Financially-endowed parents chose private schools over government schools due to the perceived inadequacy of government schools. However, their dissatisfaction with private schools drove them to opt for another form of default privatisation, namely private tutoring. While for government-school students private tutoring was a direct consequence of dissatisfaction from government services, for private-school students it was a form of indirect default privatisation as it was a secondary choice of paid education after the primary choice of private schooling.

* 1. **School systems as marketplaces for tutoring**

Schools supplied tutoring, and constituted spaces for competition and cooperation among suppliers and consumers. However, while in government schools tutoring was promoted at the individual level, in private schools it was promoted at both individual and institutional levels.

**6.3.1 Supplying tutoring**

**6.3.1.1 Individual level**

Teachers provided tutoring to their own school students either by coercing students into taking tutoring from them, thereby creating demand, or simply by meeting students’ existing demand. Teacher-tutors were either freelance tutoring providers or affiliated to group-tutoring centres.

**Creating demand by using coercion**

Interviewees in one government school and two private schools stated that school regulations prohibited teachers from tutoring students of the same school and therefore those teachers did not provide tutoring to them. Nevertheless, students in the other schools reported that some teachers directly asked students to take tutoring from them and that most used covert practices. The most common strategy was discrimination against students who did not receive tutoring from them. Two primary forms were discrimination through classroom behaviour (e.g. ignoring or humiliating students in the class), which was common in both school types, and discrimination based on examination assessment which was more conspicuous in the accounts shared by government-school students. Although school leaving examinations in grade 12 were evaluated by external examiners, 30% of the marks in the WBCHSE examination were for practical components and/or projects that were internally assessed in government schools. The majority of government-school students and two teachers revealed that many teachers abused this power to discriminate against non-tutees. In government schools, one subject was often taught by several teachers. Multiple same-subject teachers blackmailed students in school classrooms, each saying that they were in charge of evaluating practical examination papers, thereby confusing students about from whom they should receive tutoring.

While intimidation techniques were direct in government schools, in private schools they were more subtle. In private schools, one subject was generally taught by one teacher, and accounts of evaluation-based discrimination were more related to class tests and internal examinations. Grade 12 practical examinations constituted 30% of marks for science subjects in the CBSE and CISCE examinations but were evaluated by external examiners. Private-school teachers were believed to have the power to influence practical examination marks through covert means. Unlike government schools, private-school authorities urged teachers to ensure full marks in practical examinations to safeguard the reputation of the schools for a profit motive. However, students and parents were wary of teachers’ power to influence practical examination marks. Explaining students’ helplessness in this regard, one parent rationalised:

That day, during the parent-teacher meeting, students complained against the mathematics teacher to the principal, but they did not say anything against the physics teacher. That is because of the practicals! There are no practicals in mathematics, but the physics teacher can show his anger on physics practical marks. (Sudipa, parent, Kolkata, December, 2018)

The following account by a student (Preeti, Paschim Barddhaman, December, 2018) elaborates on patterns:

Interviewer: Among the teachers who teach your class, how many provide tutoring?

Student: All teachers give tutoring. Well, except the games teacher [laughs]. Among those who specifically teach us… physics, maths, chemistry teachers … hmmm and a Sir in Biology.

Interviewer: Have you ever taken tutoring from a school teacher?

Student: Yes. I took up one last month itself. She reduced my marks, so I had to take tuition from her. Our physics miss. Just for this month. Once the practical exams are done, I will leave her tuition.

Interviewer: Can you take tutoring just for a month?

Student: Yes, I had to, for the practical marks. Let’s see what happens.

Interviewer: How did you approach her?

Student: I just told her “I need tuition since my practical marks in class are poor”. She said “It’ll be fine after you take tuition”. Previously she hated me. She ignored me in school. Since I have joined her tuition, she talks to me sometimes, replies to my questions.

Discrimination was thus related to the level of power handed to teachers through institutional arrangements. This practice of evaluation-based discrimination echoed patterns in Azerbaijan, Mongolia and Ukraine reported by Silova et al. (2006).

Some teacher-tutors were said to teach better in tutoring classes compared to schooling. When they taught in school they read aloud from textbooks and did not explain concepts, but in their tutoring classes they explained the chapters in depth with catchy examples. However, other teachers who coerced students to receive tutoring provided the same standard of teaching in tutoring as in schooling. In such circumstances, students did not benefit much from either schooling or tutoring, and had to seek additional support from outside tutors in the same subject. Some private-school students therefore had to pay three times: first to the school, then to their teachers, and then again to other tutors. Some government-school students also reported receiving multiple tutoring, which not only drained their finances but also consumed time and added stress.

Nevertheless, the practice of coerced tutoring varied from school to school, and not all teachers forced their students to take tutoring. Further, some teacher-tutors who tutored their own students were known to teach well in school.

**Supplying tutoring to meet existing market demand**

Teachers stated that they were often approached by parents and students for provide tutoring. Students explained that such teachers often taught for the love of teaching (although their tutoring was not free). One set of interviews comprised a teacher-tutor and later four of his students. The teacher-tutor showed deep involvement with how he could help his students master examination techniques and build their careers. His student-tutees (who were unaware of the interview with their tutor) stated that the teacher-tutor did not solicit tutees in school. They were the ones who sought tutoring lessons from him because they appreciated his pedagogic style and desired additional attention outside crowded classrooms and limited class hours.

One reason why parents and students solicited tutoring from school teachers was that those teachers were easily accessible. Parents met them during parent-teacher meetings, and commonly made requests while discussing their children’s academic performance; and students approached teachers during school hours to ask whether they provided tutoring. Second, school teachers were respected in the marketplace because they were known to be qualified and experienced. Third, receiving tutoring from school teachers promoted relationships between teachers and students; and fourth, teachers commonly shared examination questions or hints during tutoring classes.

Several teachers stated that they welcomed students’ requests as they not only brought additional income but also job satisfaction. One teacher-tutor stated that “tutoring at home is way better than teaching in school because in my tuition class I get students who are desirous of learning; I am not restricted as in school, and can use my own teaching techniques”. Teachers from two private schools expressed their desire to provide tutoring to supplement their low incomes, but complained that they could not do so since they were prohibited by school regulations.

**6.3.1.2 Institutional level**

Institutional partnerships, known as integrated coaching, were only reported in private schools. Companies provided tutoring to students in school classrooms after school hours, particularly for entrance examination preparation. The state governments of Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have banned such partnerships on the grounds that schools can force students to receive tutoring from their partner tutoring institutions (Bhatkhande, 2018; “No NEET Coaching in Schools: TN Government”, 2018; “Despite ban, integrated courses flourishing”, 2018;Belur, 2018). However, no such action has been taken in West Bengal.

**6.3.2 Facilitating market functions**

School systems facilitated tutoring market operations in several ways. As explained below, they served as venues for information exchange and for forms of competition and cooperation.

**Information exchange**

Schools formed the most easily accessible marketplaces for students and parents to shop for tutoring and exchange tutoring-related information. One government-school student who lived in a peri-urban area remarked: “We do not have good tutors in our area, so we need to seek tutoring from our school teachers”. When asked how to find tutors, one parent replied: “I first ask the school teachers during parent-teacher meetings”. Almost all students reported that while searching for tutors, they first asked their classmates and then asked their seniors in school. They also mentioned sharing their tutoring experiences with their juniors. The information about tutors included pedagogic practices, the ambience of tutoring classes, the numbers and types of tutees, and fees. Some students indicated that before the new school term commenced, they learned from their seniors which teachers provided coerced tutoring and the procedures required to register under them.

**Competition**

Tutors used various means to differentiate their services from others. One common element was branding: tutors preferred to be affiliated with schools, and preferably reputed ones, as the label of a school teacher attracted more tutees. Parents reasoned that tutors who were attached to schools were abreast with the current syllabi and examination systems.

Some teacher-tutors conducted demonstration classes for a day or two; and some government-school students reported that they sat for a month in teacher-tutors’ classes by paying fees to test their usefulness. Teacher-tutors used various pedagogical practices to attract and retain students, such as use of interesting examples to explain concepts, cracking jokes during intervals, and being available for clarification of queries. In teacher-tutors’ efforts to compete, school teaching took a back seat. This is illustrated with the following interview in August, 2018 with RP Sir, a government-school teacher-tutor in Paschim Barddhaman:

RP Sir: The pressure of private tutoring is different from that of [government] school. In school, the teacher knows that he has to work for a fixed time period. After the fixed time, he walks off. In tuition, even at 10 o’clock, I receive phone calls.

Interviewer: At 10 o’clock in the night?

RP Sir: Not just 10 o’clock, even at 12 midnight! Students ask, “Sir, would you please tell me the answer to this problem?” or “Can you WhatsApp this answer to me?”

Interviewer: You send answers by WhatsApp?

RP Sir: You have to do all this for your survival! Tomorrow some better person will pop in and take your place if you don’t do this. You will fall behind.

Interviewer: Is it stressful?

RP Sir: Of course! Wherever you want to make money you have to take stress! Irrespective of the quality and expertise you possess, you have to take stress. Satisfaction or saturation level differs from person to person. Some are satisfied with Rs.30,000 per month, some with 40,000 and some with 50,000. And there will be some who will not be satisfied even with 100,000 per month! The more the income, more will be the volume of stress. If he is my school student, I can always tell him, “Go away! I shall answer you tomorrow in the school.” There is no such option in tuition.

Nevertheless, some teacher-tutors still recognised the need for diligence at school. Amit Sir, a government-school teacher-tutor said: “Remember one thing, if I don’t teach well in school, no one will come to me for tuition. My actual reputation will spread from the school.”

Some teacher-tutors also leaked examination questions to improve their competitiveness. Parents and students sought teacher-tutors who gave good “suggestions”, but students were often not satisfied with a few suggestions and asked their tutors for more or changed their tutors if ‘proper’ suggestions were not received. The term “suggestion” had different connotations. For internal examinations it referred to hints regarding examination questions, and for external examinations it referred to questions which tutors predicted based on past papers. Tutors were in greater demand when their suggestions matched the examination questions. Students reported that some tutors made false claims of inside information about external examinations in order to lure students.

In government schools, teachers competed to acquire as many tutees as they could. During a group interview in a government-school staffroom, a teacher expressed envy about another teacher having a flourishing tutoring business. Teacher-tutors poached tutees of other teacher-tutors from school classrooms. Illustrating this point, a government-school student recalled:

Parijat Sir came to class [in school] and asked some tough questions to Abhik Sir’s students [tutees]. When they were unable to answer, he humiliated them saying “You are receiving tuition from the wrong people; you will never pass”, indicating that they should receive tutoring from him instead. Naturally, one of Abhik Sir’s students [tutees] changed to Parijat Sir’s tuition.

(Chiranjit, student, Paschim Barddhaman, July, 2018)

Such incidents of student poaching were not reported by private-school students.

However, private schools partnered with tutoring institutions. Schools shared students’ contact information with tutoring companies so that the companies could make promotional phone calls. Students reported that they often attended these information sessions and demonstration classes to decide in which ones they should enrol. Schools also provided their classrooms and class hours for demonstration classes, mock tests and promotional talks. The school authorities did not clarify whether these partnerships involved monetary transactions.

**Cooperation**

Teacher-tutors referred each other to students and parents, and collaborated in renting tutoring venues. Two teacher-tutor interviewees, SR Sir (a private-school physics teacher) and RP Sir (a government-school biology teacher) co-rented a garage for tutoring. The pair recommended each other to students and parents in their respective schools, so both teacher-tutors tutored students from both government and private schools. While sometimes they segregated students into batches according to school type, other batches mixed government and private school students. Referral was not common among same-subject tutors, in contrast to patterns in Georgia reported by Kobakhidze (2014). This was probably due to the competition between same-subject tutors to secure more tutees. However, same-subject teacher-tutors did collaborate when evaluating examination papers. Tutors tried to ensure that their tutees received high marks to maintain their reputations, so when answer-sheets were exchanged for evaluation, teachers agreed to give more marks to each other’s tutees.

School principals in both school types believed that students needed tutoring and stressed that schools could not adequately support students in smooth transitions to quality higher education institutions. Both interviewed principals had been famous tutors during their careers as school teachers.[[4]](#footnote-4) Differentiating between board and entrance examinations, the private-school principal contended that:

School teaching alone is not sufficient for qualifying the entrance examination ... Honestly speaking, outside support is required whether in the form of tuitions, whether in the form of coaching. But that support is required because mostly in school, they focus on the board [examination] syllabus.   
(Shyam Adhikari, principal, Paschim Barddhaman, July, 2018)

Very few quality higher education institutions solely consider board examination results for admission. Ironically, the school flaunted a wall-to-wall board outside the principal’s office with the names of the alumni who had achieved high ranks in engineering and medicine entrance examinations.

Further, government-school authorities and teachers passively supported shadow education by excusing student absenteeism. Students on an average only attended school twice or thrice a week. They were mainly present on days of science practical classes since practical examinations were marked internally and tutoring classes did not have laboratory facilities. During fieldwork, government-school principals asked the researcher to visit on days of laboratory classes because no students came on other days. A teacher interviewee sympathising with students conceded that “they would rather take tutoring than waste their time in school.” Students were marked present irrespective of their actual attendance.

In contrast, mass absenteeism was less tolerated by private-school authorities. Teachers were reported to be more vigilant on student attendance. On average, private-school students went to school four days a week. Yet although private schools maintained in front of students and parents that they discouraged tutoring, they covertly supported it. Two private-school students reported that some teachers expressed strong disapproval of tutoring but themselves tutored other school students in their homes.

**7 CONCLUSIONS**

The findings show that school systems may play a major role in fostering shadow education. Schools serve as tutoring marketplaces, by facilitating supply of tutoring to meet existing demand, creating demand through supply, and by facilitating market functions like information exchange, competition, and cooperation. The paper has its own West Bengal context of economic decline, aspirations by the *bhadralok*, and operation not only of schools administered by different types of bodies but also aiming for different types of examinations. Nevertheless, the paper adds to wider understanding of the processes of privatisation-by-default. It goes beyond previous studies that have shown associations between schools and tutoring (e.g. Brehm & Silova, 2014; Sobhy, 2012; Zhang & Bray, 2017), and provides a more nuanced understanding of processes through which school systems may support and facilitate tutoring markets. The findings show that both government and private school systems fostered tutoring, albeit in slightly different ways. Figure 1 presents patterns in diagrammatic form.

*Figure 1: Ways through which government and private schools foster private tutoring in West Bengal*



Source: Authors

In the West Bengal government schools, tutoring was promoted at the individual level but no direct promotion was reported at the institutional level. In private schools, by contrast, tutoring was promoted at both individual and institutional levels. As pointed out in previous literature (e.g. Mooij & Jalal, 2009; Rizvi, 2016), privatisation-by-default can have negative social implications. Unethical practices were common in these West Bengal school-based tutoring markets. Coerced supply of tutoring and competing through corrupt means was conspicuous in both school types, and in addition to its direct impact, to some extent shaped students’ values. As pointed out elsewhere (e.g. Kobakhidze, 2014; Transparency International, 2013), corrupt practices in school not only diminish trust in school systems and increase stress but also commonly contribute to future corruption by these individuals after they have left school.

The findings highlighted the role of institutional arrangements in use of unethical tutoring practices. The forms of corruption varied according to the power held by teachers which was allied to institutional arrangements. Partial (and complete) internal assessment systems, lack of monitoring and passive encouragement/lack of discouragement handed power to teachers in government schools in particular. Government-school teachers tutored their own students despite earning higher salaries than private-school counterparts. Although private-school teachers held less power than government-school teachers, some teachers found loopholes to assume power and coerce students. If the study had focused on lower grades, perhaps forced tutoring would have been more evident in both school types due to the absence of external examinations in lower grades, giving teachers even more power.

The importance of institutional regulations in controlling corrupt practices of teacher-tutors is highlighted in the finding that forced tutoring was not reported in three schools (one government and two private) where school authorities prohibited teachers from providing tutoring and warned of serious consequences for infringement. This showed that when broad government regulations were rarely enforced, institutional regulations which perhaps were easier to enforce could reduce unethical market practices.

Schools’ facilitation of shadow education had a negative backwash on schooling. Misuse of school hours for tutoring promotion and conscious encouragement of absenteeism reduced the available time for school instruction. It also required teachers to rush coverage of the syllabus, and decreased students’ satisfaction with schooling. Teachers’ unethical means to promote tutoring such as coercion and leakage of examination questions, and school authorities’ passive encouragement of tutoring, created a culture of fear and eroded trust in the school system. When dissatisfaction with schooling drove students and parents towards shadow education, it led to a vicious circle in which schools facilitated tutoring that deepened distrust in schooling and in turn promoted tutoring.

The findings show that shadow education through unregulated default privatisation can have mixed implications for society. It can give choice to students and their families to avail forms of education which they perceive to be better than schooling, but it can limit their choice when tutoring is forced upon them. Some students received both coerced tutoring and tutoring of their choice in the same subject. To the authors’ knowledge, the combination of these two tutoring forms has not been reported in earlier studies. Previous studies have mainly focused on either rational choice or corruption in tutoring (e.g. Ille & Peacey, 2019; Kim, 2012; Kobakhidze, 2014; Liu & Bray 2019; Park, 2012). The present study highlights the mixed implications of private tutoring through unregulated default privatisation where students often face a combination of choice and compulsion. Government-school students purchase tutoring out of coercion and pay additionally to secure tutoring of their choice. Private-school students not only spend more on school fees but also pay for coerced tutoring and then tutoring of their choice. The middle-class Bengali *bhadralok* who put their children in the science stream and aspire for social mobility incur heavy expenses for their children’s transition into higher education. Since many middle-class households cannot afford these expenses at every step, some families lose out.

The study contributes to the field by deepening the understanding of how school systems feed shadow education. It emphasises the need for implementing policies at the institutional level to tackle the negative impact of private tutoring through privatisation-by-default. Attention to shadow education is growing internationally, but much further research is needed particularly in India where the topic has received little investigative or policy attention. The present study indicates that much tutoring emanates from and is supported by schooling. Therefore, it suggests that future researchers and policy-makers direct adequate focus to school systems to gain a deeper understanding of the meso-level forces influencing shadow education and to reduce its adverse implications.

**Data availability statement**: *The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.*

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Notes

At that time, one rupee was equivalent to approximately US$0.0153.

2 The National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) is a government body, and its data are used for development planning and policy formulation especially in the areas of employment, education, health and migration. The 2014/15 survey gathered information on participation and consumption in education among persons aged five to 29 years.

3 The report did not state what proportion of students reported receiving tutoring from teachers of other classes in their schools or what proportion received tutoring from teachers in other schools.

4 They did not state the reasons for no longer providing tutoring, but it may have been because it was considered below their dignity in the new role and because they did not have adequate time. Also, principals would be under more scrutiny than teachers by the school authorities and state government.

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)