

Exploring the Challenges and Benefits of Shadow Education in English Language

Education: A Phenomenological Study

Ramu Tandan, MPhil Candidate

*Department of Language Education
Kathmandu University, Nepal*

Email: ramutandan2052@gmail.com

Orchid ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-9108-5471>

Article History: Received 12 June 2025; Reviewed 23 September 2025; Revised 28 September 2025; Accepted 15 November 2025

Abstract

This paper explores the benefits and challenges of shadow education in English language learning in Nepal. This study adopts phenomenology as a research method to explore the benefits and challenges through the lived experiences of participants. While previous research has largely focused on quantitative outcomes such as test scores and enrolment rates, only a few studies have explored students' lived experiences. To address this gap, four secondary-level students (two boys and two girls) engaged in shadow education for English language learning from two community and two private schools in the Rupandehi district were selected for in-depth semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) method of thematic analysis. The study revealed four interconnected themes: motivation, benefits, challenges, and the socio-cultural dimensions of shadow education. Students were motivated by the exam pressure, dissatisfaction with mainstream classrooms, parental expectations, and aspirations for future mobility, particularly studying abroad. The benefits mentioned by participants included improved academic achievement, higher levels of general confidence, better communicative competence, and individualized attention or instruction. In contrast, some of the disadvantages that participants expressed were financial implications for families, social inequality, over-reliance on tuition, and increased teacher workloads. Shadow education also emerged as a socially acceptable cultural practice that became part of the students' identities, as well as an ethical dilemma for issues of fairness and equity. The author concluded that though shadow education may empower some students and create pathways to broader possibilities globally, it also serves as a mirror to the shortcomings of public and private schooling, and a mechanism that exacerbates social divisions. The insights of the study can contribute to the discourse on shadow education by informing reforms of Nepal's existing educational policies and minimizing its negative effects.

Keywords: *Shadow education, coaching class, English language learning, tuition class, and learner-centered.*

Introduction

English language learning can occur through different avenues and methods. An individual can learn English through various modalities including, formal setting in school, university, or college, language institution; technology-mediated either online or offline; interactions with another in face-to-face mode or through technology; and independent self-study (Rahmanu & Molnar, 2024). Among these avenues, one of them is the private supplementary tutoring also known as the shadow education that has become widespread. When additional courses, tuition, or coaching is provided to students to improve English and to achieve good grades on examinations, these classes can be considered a form of shadow education. Shadow education is currently increasing at a high rate. Shadow education is a process that requires additional financial resources and exceeds the normal school time Bray (2007). Shadow education is the name given to private education provided by informal education institutions or through informal tutoring by individual teachers or external persons in schools.

Shadow education refers to the additional education which resembles the mainstream education in content and intention but takes place during out of school time and involves an extra fee (Bray, 1999, 2007). It is referred to as 'shadow' because it mimics the formal system: as the mainstream curriculum changes, so does the shadow curriculum; as mainstream schooling expands or contracts, private tutoring follows a similar trend. This education can be in the form of group coaching facilities, one to one home studies, or special preparing schools, e.g., TPEFL, IELTS, or national board exams. The practice of private tutoring has grown at an alarming rate over the recent several decades and has become a new dimension of privatization of education and the multibillion-dollar business worldwide (UNESCO, 2017). It is also claimed by many scholars that shadow education is currently one of the most rapidly developing educational trends in the world (Bray and Silova, 2006; Kim, Gough and Jung, 2018).

In Nepal and many Asian countries, shadow education has increased rapidly, particularly in the area of English language (Bray, 2022). Parents devote considerable financial resources to private tutoring for their children out of a desire for their children to be academically successful and subsequent options for the future. Additionally, students often believe that mainstream classrooms are not effective and cite class sizes, lack of teacher support, and examination-based curricula as reason for their beliefs about effective learning (Adhikari, 2022; Kshetree, 2020). Moreover, shadow education can serve two purposes: for struggling students it is an intervention and additional support to address misdirected learning in the formal schooling context; for the stronger student it becomes a competitive edge to remain "ahead" in the academic context (Yu & Zhang, 2022).

On the other hand, the expansion of shadow education raises important issues. On the positive side, it improves students' English education, more confidently prepares students to compete with other students for higher education programs and/or jobs (Bhandari, 2022). On the negative side, it creates a financial burden for families, creates disincentives for teachers to be committed at the formal school location, and often amplifies social disparities (Mahmud

& Kenayathulla, 2017). These mixed results highlight the need for a deeper investigation into both the benefits and challenges of shadow education in English. A vast majority of research carried out on shadow education employed quantitative studies and focused on quantifiable results, such as test scores or enrolment (Bray, 1999, 2007; Bray & Silova, 2006; Mahmud & Kenayathulla, 2018; Kim, Gough, & Jung, 2018). Not many studies have investigated the lived experiences of learners with shadow education especially in Nepal. In the context of Nepal, tuitions centers are rapidly expanding, and the involvement and a variety of motivation are increasing due to the enrolment. In this context, the shadow education is not only to be viewed as an academic addition but also as a social and cultural practice that deterministically influences the identity and path of students. Thus, this study adopted a phenomenological approach to examine the experience, meaning-making, and navigation of the advantages and obstacles of shadow education in learning English as a second language among learners.

Literature Review

Scholars tend to concur that the key features of shadow education are threefold: it focuses on academic subjects, it supplements mainstream schooling, and it requires payment. It is contrasted with the informal learning activities such as self-study or peer learning in that it involves structured instruction delivered for gain. Bray and Silova (2006) have underlined its widespread presence in competitive education systems internationally. In many cultures, shadow education has been used to talk about the different connections and relationships to pedagogy, the use of money in education, and social inequality. In the context of Iran, shadow education in English is viewed as a means of both addressing gaps in the mainstream classroom and perpetuating social inequalities (Mallahi, 2022). Tutoring classes are often more student-centered than mainstream school lessons, as they allow students to engage more actively, a benefit that primarily families who can afford it. Popa & Acedo (2006) revealed that private tutoring in Romania provides teachers with a sense of professional respect and financial security amid challenging reforms in education; though this raises additional questions related to reliance on external income. Comparative studies indicate the same trends, such as that the private tutoring usually has a positive influence on students' language proficiency and test results, but there are financial and ethical concerns. Sain et al. (2024) illustrates that coaching classes in China offer students personalized attention and relatively good preparation for high stakes tests at a cost to the family, thereby illustrating the shortcomings of formal education.

A global viewpoint portrays that shadow education is not just an educational practice but a social phenomenon and issue influenced by cultural values and structural inequality. Research suggests that shadow education has a beneficial impact on learners. Compared to traditional classroom settings, those in shadow classes tend to be more interactive, flexible, and student-centered (Adhikari, 2022). Shadow education provides immediate feedback and personalized learning interactions and opportunities for students to actively participate in learning in a useful and positive way, these are important for developing language skills that are relevant to students. Besides improving performance academically, tutoring encourages learners' self-confidence and a strong sense of control over their learning. According to Bhandari (2022), tutoring can assist students in raising their grades, thus increasing the

probability of being accepted to top universities, as well as performing better on key assessments, such as entrance exams. In addition, extra or private tutoring provides student with engagement in practice skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing that are relevant for international assessments like IELTS or TOFEL or TOEIC (Khamkaew & Trussat, 2023). These advantages are not limited to students. Teachers also gain from shadow education. According to Popa and Acedo (2006), tutoring provides professional recognition and legitimacy, especially in the context school teachers face low salaries and limited institutional respect.

Despite its advantages, shadow education has also several challenges. Teachers can be motivated by the financial gain of private tutoring and can pay less attention and responsibilities to their regular classroom duties. (Bray, 2007). This leads to disparities between students who can obtain tutoring services and those who cannot (Mahmud & Kenavathulla, 2018). A related issue is the financial burden placed on some families. In many cases, however, tuition payments can take up a significant portion of household income, thus reinforcing existing socio-economic divides (Sain et al., 2024). In Nepal, for example, Kshetree (2020) found some unethical practices, including showing favoritism towards students who attended their tutoring services during tests which disadvantaged other students. A recent study by Kshetree & Bhusal (2024) found that students who begin in shadow education in high school often continue to the bachelor level. The research also notes a shift in how this tutoring is delivered: Although many student still rely on in-person tuition and coaching, a growing trend involves the use of e-resources and online technologies for academic support. Moreover, even if tutors claim to improve students' learning, the pedagogical approaches in shadow education are often just exam-centered pedagogy as those in mainstream classrooms rather than focusing on developing communicative competence (Subedi, 2018). What is interesting is that the rapid growth of shadow education in Nepal is often cited as a response to the examination system, parental expectations, and overall perceptions that public schools are failing. Many students have cited that they are more likely to be successful in education more from their tutoring than from formal schooling (Adhikari, 2022).

Kshetree (2020) documents a case where students feel that regular classrooms fail to support their development, with some tuition teachers offering unethical help during exams. At the same time, shadow education in Nepal is not about academic outcomes; it also provides students with opportunities for empowerment, identity building, and personal growth (Regmi, 2023). In this regard, tuition is not simply an additive to schooling, but a system alongside schooling which has a powerful influence on learners' English experiences. The rapid growth of private tuition centers in urban and suburban centers illustrate how much of a central role teaching has become in contemporary education. Even though scholarly literature has examined the prevalence, benefits, and challenges of shadow education in Nepal and elsewhere, there are still considerable gaps in our understanding. The majority of studies have focused on quantitative outcomes, such as grades, number of participants, number of sessions, performance in standardized tests, and

economic factors. Only a small number of studies actually explored the lived experience of the learners, that is, the experience of learners with respect to their perception of tutoring, how they navigate tutoring, and what meanings they associate with their involvement in shadow education. Furthermore, there is only a limited number of studies in Nepal that have documented the dual role of shadow education as both a form of academic support and a source of inequality.

This study seeks to address these gaps through phenomenological exploration from student voice. Thus, the objective is to explore the benefits and challenges of shadow education in English language learning in Nepal. In particular, this study attempts to deal with the following research questions: How do students experience shadow education in Nepal? What benefits and challenges do students experience in shadow education?

Research Methodology

The research design adopted in this study is the phenomenological research, which has been used to understand the lived experiences of English language learning students in shadow education in Nepal. Phenomenology is an appropriate choice as it aids the researcher in comprehending how individuals make sense of their experiences and the meanings they give them (Creswell, 2013; van Manen, 1990). Though most quantitative research would be on a scale of measuring results like test scores or enrolment figures, using a phenomenological methodology will enable a better investigation of the subjective viewpoints (Khan, 2014). This allowed for an exploration of the benefits they derive from shadow education, and the hardships they face.

The participants were purposively selected to represent diverse contexts, backgrounds, schooling experiences and experiences with shadow education. The current research had four (4) students (two boys and two girls) to ensure gender balance and to explore their experiences in depth. Students were chosen from different schools to capture diverse educational contexts. All four participants attended private English tuition classes and voluntarily agreed to share their lived experiences of learning English language. Purposive sampling is an appropriate method for identifying participants who can offer rich, in-depth information about the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2002). Semi-structured in-depth interviews were mainly used in data collection. Semi-structured interviews were used to give flexibility in exploring participants' lived experiences by focusing on key research questions (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The interviews were conducted in Nepali or the English language, depending on the language selected by each participant. The average duration of all the interviews was between 20 and 30 minutes. Besides the interviews, the researcher used field notes in the study, reflective journals, as well as recorded observations and rich contextual information. These supplementary data sources helped to achieve data saturation and validate the information collected from the interview.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method. This approach consisted of a process of sequentially collecting significant statements, interpreting their meanings, thematically arranging the statements, and developing a detailed description of the overall experience. To bolster the credibility of the findings, member checking was conducted by presenting the preliminary findings to

participants for feedback, and peer researchers were also consulted, as means to alleviate bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, ethical considerations were applied appropriately throughout the study. At the start of the study, participants provided informed consent and emerged anonymously by referring to them using pseudonyms. This project captures student perspectives, ultimately contributing to further enriching understandings of shadow education in the context of English language learning in Nepal.

Results and Discussion

This section discusses the phenomenological study finding and relates it to the existing literature. The present study has investigated the lived experiences of four secondary-level students who had participated in English shadow education. Data from semi-structured interviews supplemented by field notes and researcher reflections were analyzed thematically using Colaizzi's (1978) method. Four major themes emerged from the study, 1. Motivation of shadow education, 2. Benefits of shadow education, 3. Challenges of shadow education and 4. Broader socio-cultural dimension of shadow education. In this section, I give a detailed account of these findings, weaving in participants' voices and situating their experiences within broader research on shadow education in Nepal and other contexts.

Motivation of Shadow Education.

The first theme is relates to the motivation of students to engage in shadow education. Although there was a variation among the participants, the analysis brought out four key drivers including academic aspiration related examinations, lack of satisfaction with mainstream schooling, parental expectations and investment and future mobility and opportunities aspirations. The issue of better academic performance became, in fact, the priority of all respondents. The majority of the students reported that tuition was useful in enhancing grades in specific courses, to pass high-stakes wide exams. One of the respondents was a 16-year old male student attending a government school. He said that he was scared of exams and this is what made him enroll in tuition:

"English is taught in my school, which is mandatory, though in the majority of cases, the teacher is focused on completing the syllabus or textbook. There is not a lot of time he has to explain grammar step by step. I become nervous when it is time to do exams, as I cannot answer the grammar questions on my own. My friends were already with tuition and they informed me that the teacher explained everything using examples and repeated them several times. I was also enrolled because I felt that without additional guidance through tuition classes, I would fail in English"

The foregoing description illustrates how shadow education follows the mainstream curriculum closely while offering additional support for exams preparation. This goes along with the notion of Bray (1999, 2007) conceptualizing of shadow education as a parallel system that is continually present in the shadow of formal schooling but is always adjusted in line with the demand of curriculum and examination requirements. The exam-focused motivation reported by the participants is also echoed in other studies in Asian settings. Indicatively, Kim, Gough, and Jung (2018) reported that South Korean students tend to engage in extensive private coaching on how to pass university entrance exams. Likewise,

Sain et al. (2024) also found that Chinese students regard shadow education as a necessity to deal with exceptionally competitive testing conditions. Board exams have been extremely determinant in the academic development and the prospects of an individual in Nepal; the pressure to succeed is a major impetus for students to tuition. The discontent with the mainstream education was also a significant factor that encouraged the students to find further education. Most of the interviewees indicated that in public school, they did not learn effectively due to crowded classrooms and a lack of teacher attention. Another interviewee a 15-year girl who is in public school described her discontent with classroom instruction:

"There are over 50 students in my class. The English teacher arrives, notes to us on the board and instructs us to memorize the notes. It is one-way delivery where the teacher provides little interaction and feedback. At times he gets irritated due to time when we start asking questions. I feel lost in such a big class. I also attend tuition there and there are not over 20 students. The teacher talks about all of our questions with numerous examples and provides additional content. That is why I prefer tuition. In fact sometimes I learn more at tuition than at school."

Her story reflects the larger issue that previous studies have identified. Adhikari (2022) reported that based on their perceptions, many Nepali students feel that mainstream classrooms are teacher-centered and examination-focused and do not create any room for individual attention. Similarly, Kshetree (2020) reported that Nepali schools have a large population of students attending classes with limited resources, which pushes them into private tuition. These are the stories that are also echoed in foreign literature. Mallahi (2022) found that Iranian students' use of shadow education was an attempt to fill the gaps and inefficiencies in mainstream education. Thus, these testimonies indicate that the role of shadow education is not only as a supplementary support system, but also as a remedy for the failures of formal education. Parental expectations were also influential in determining whether the students would attend tuition classes. Students asserted that their parents were not only encouraging but at times mandatory with regards to tuition. They tend to refer to tuition as an investment into the future of their children. The third interviewee was a 17-year-old boy who said that his father was a major influence in the formation of his motivation:

"In fact, I did not make the first decision to attend tuition. My father insisted that I was to go. According to him, English is very crucial and that nowadays, almost everyone enrolls their children in tuition. Though this was costly, my parents were able to shoulder the tuition fees because they think that tuition will enable me to perform well in examinations and further studies. I sometimes feel pressured because they have high expectations, but I am also grateful that they are investing for my future."

It presents the way Bray & Silova 2006, note that in competitive systems, parents tend to perceive private tutoring as a type of educational insurance. In Nepal, considered to have poor quality public schooling and most families not able to afford their children any form of education, tuition has become a compromise strategy where parents, keen to have their children excel in school, invest in the system. The fact that families are ready to make financial sacrifices to get an opportunity to learn more contributes to the argument by Mahmud & Kenayathulla of 2018 that shadow education is not merely an academic resource

but a financial burden family has to get long-term gains. The future mobility and opportunities were also a great desire of the students, which motivated them to take part in shadow education. Specifically, English was always referred to as a gateway to better education, work and relocation abroad. The last respondent, a 16 years old girl relates her motivation to her future dream:

“I plan to go overseas following 12th grade exam, probably to obtain higher education in Australia or another developed country. I am aware that I cannot go there without it. In tuition, not only do we prepare to take exams but also we improve our competency in the English which is useful for achieving a good score in exams that follow the IELTS format. The teacher informed us that this is going to assist us during our time of application to abroad. I believe that tuition is not only examination based but an international study bridge as well. This is the reason why I do not skip my tuition classes.”

Her life is true to the presence of English as lingua franca and the beacon of hope in foreign land. As Bhandari (2022) asserts that English serves as a lingua franca at the global level as well as a source of opportunities. Likewise, Khamkaew and Trussat (2023) state that students consider tutoring to be a significant way of preparing international tests like IELTS and TOFEL among Thai students. In Nepal, where the desire to study or work in a foreign country is rampant, it consequently means that shadow education is recognized and interpreted by students and their parents as an investment in the international future. The factors that motivate students to engage in shadow education in Nepal are numerous and are influenced by the family, personal desire, as well as the education system in general. This tuition has been taken as a solution to the inadequacies of mainstream schools as well as a strategy to ensure success in life. This kind of motivation is based not only on individual choice but also on the social pressure and cultural values that put education in the center of success in Nepal.

Benefits of Shadow Education

The second notable theme is an allusion to the benefits that students had acquired through shadow education. The results depict that students appreciated tuition as a way to enhance academic performance, accumulate confidence and motivation, develop communicative competency, and receive more individual attention. These perceived benefits go a long way in explaining why shadow education has come to be part and parcel of lives of so many students even at the expense of the budget. The short-term gain reported by all participants was improved performance in examinations. The initial subject reported the fact that tuition had enhanced his academic outcome:

“I had previously scored very low in English before taking the tuition. I feared the English examination. Six months into tuition, I began to score higher gradually and most particularly in grammar and writing. It is the same thing told and retold to us by the teacher in the tuition class until we get. Additional practice questions are also provided by him. At school, as soon as something has been taught by the teacher, it is

over and one has no time to review it. Due to tuition, I believe that my scores in English were better, and it brought me more confidence.”

It indicates the extent to which shadow education and curriculum of the school are directly correlated in achieving quantifiable changes in the exam performance. Many parents believe that tuition is more effective than schooling, and Bhandari (2022) reports that most Nepali students credited their success primarily to private tutoring rather than to school. The results of such reinforce the supremacy of exam-based learning in Nepal where grades continue to be the most important benchmarks of success and development. Other than good grades, almost all respondents mentioned tuition as a factor that gives them confidence and more motivation in learning English. The second interviewee told about confidence and motivation:

"In school, I was afraid to use English due to fear of saying something wrong and having a wrong pronunciation. I considered that my classmates were going to laugh at me. But in tuition the teacher did not use the same approach where everyone spoke. Initially, I was very hesitant but I began speaking bit by bit. Even in my normal classes I have no fear to answer in English. I had a confidence that tuition gave me I never had at school."

This description illustrates the way in which shadow education can be used to generate more welcoming learning settings, and, therefore, evoke student engagement. This is indicative of the fact that, as Adhikari (2022) noticed, in Nepal, student-friendly and more interactive than classroom learning, shadow educations are in many cases. On the same note, Regmi (2023) discovered that tuition has an increasing effect on the sense of agency among the learners, making them have a better sense of control in their learning processes. Through this, the psychological aspect of tutoring-confidence building and fear of failure reduction has become one of the main benefits of complimentary value towards academic enhancement. Tuition is also valued as students develop communication skills which they felt was not paid much attention in mainstream classes. The third respondent was interviewed about the benefits of tuition on his listening and speaking:

"Most of the time we read and write, in school. However, in tuition, the teacher plays audio files, and we are expected to provide answers to them. Even we sometimes watch short videos in English and then discuss. This puts me in the position of being taught real English and not exam English. During my viewing English movies, I am now able to understand a lot more than I used to. It feels really good."

His practice indicated that there was a significant contrast between exam-based school pedagogy and more communicative practice provided in tuition. Despite the criticism of Subedi (2018) that most Nepali tuition centers only follow the exam-centered teaching approach, the respondents of this research believed that there are tutors who attempt to balance between the exams and the development of real-life skills. In this finding, the researcher can say that it is similar to the observation done by Khamkaew and Trussat (2023) that in Thailand, test preparation and practical skill-building have a balancing effect in terms of private tutoring. It is this flexibility of shadow education, in this regard, that further helps it in filling in the missing gap created by formal schooling. Personalized attention and

feedback were considered by the participants to be of particular importance as a benefit. Fourth participants told about the importance of personalized attention and feedback:

"In tuition classes, my homework is checked by the teacher daily. In case I come wrong, he corrects me on the spot and tells me in detail. At school, we hardly ever have our homework checked by the teacher, as there are too many students. I believe that the individual care of tuition makes me progress better. I would notice the change in my creative writing and grammar."

The worth of individualized care is reflected in the global studies. According to Sain et al. (2024), Chinese students described the individualized teaching of coaching classes as especially important to them, with the provision of active engagement, which they do not receive in schools. Due to this individualized attention, learning appeared to be more timely, receptive and efficient to the participants. Participants agreed that private tuition was one of the areas where they gained not only physical academic enhancement but psychological one; this twofold enhancement is what produces not only improved grades but also increased confidence, motivation and communication skills despite its economic prices. This, in the long run, becomes a normal part of the supplementary education that cannot be ignored since it not only provides quantifiable results but also qualitative personal experiences.

Challenges of Shadow Education

The study revealed some pertinent challenges in applying shadow education. These included: financial strains in the families, student disparities, and excessive reliance on tuition and workload stress. The most common difficulty was financial burden. Every respondent agreed that tuition fees were a heavy burden to the family. The financial burden was explained by the first participant as follows:

"My both father and mother work in village and I live in the rented house in the city. My father even applies to borrowing money among the family members now and then to take tuition. I am extremely guilty because it is quite costly, yet I also sense that I would not be able to achieve a good grade in the exam without tuition. In a way, I wish the tuition is free so that it can be like the poor students like us."

The given account reveals how households are able to prioritize tuition despite financial struggles. It represents the results of Mahmud & Kenayathulla (2018) regarding the excessive burden on household budget due to shadow education. In this case, most of the families in Nepal continue to rely on foreign employment remittance; the extra burden of tuitions renders their survival imperative unreachable. The other issues reported by the students are disparities brought about by tuition. One of the participants described it as follows:

"Everyone does not attend tuition classes in my school. There are students who are simply unable to afford it and they usually perform worse in the exams. Teacher is also aware who attends tuition and at times treats them better. I believe that it is not fair since even education is equal, but tuition make a difference between wealthy and poor children."

The account above demonstrates that shadow education brings about inequality as it favors the affluent. Kshetree (2020) discovered that student beneficiaries of tuition enjoy unequal opportunities whereas pupils who are unable to access tuition are not only disadvantaged in academics but also socially. Shadow education, as it is argued by Bray & Silova (2006), facilitates the widening of social stratification, so that educational opportunities are associated with the economic resources. The other issue that the students have posed was overreliance on tuition. Most of the interviewees acknowledged that they rely on tuition classroom and teachers more than mainstream classroom and teachers. One of the participants frankly talked about experience:

"Now I do not listen much in school, as I am sure the tuition teacher will tell me all in details and give an example. In some cases, I even avoid school homework as I do my job in tuition. This does not seem to me to be good, but it is occurring. I rely on tuition rather than school nowadays."

This study gives a great concern over the undermining of formal education. Bray (2007) cautioned, shadow schooling may undermine the status and position of the school teachers. The same trend has been noted in Romania where researchers, Popa & Acedo (2006), established that other teachers resorted to the use of private tuition as a source of financial stability and consequently lessened their commitment to classroom teaching. Reliance on tuition in the case of Nepal is a methodological issue whereby the private education establishments are meant to replace but not complement the formal system. Besides, there was also a serious challenge of stress and workload. The students indicated that both school and tuition attendance caused fatigue and lack of time. The fourth respondent explained it in the following manner:

"My day routine is quite exhausting. I attend two three hours of tuition after school. Next, I get home and I must do school homework. At times, I would enjoy spending the time with friends and playing with them, however, my parents insist on doing education first and thus I continue doing it, yet I am finding myself becoming weary and strained."

It demonstrates how tuition brings time, physical, and mental stress. Similar experience was reported by Mallahi (2022), who discovered that shadow education in Iran was supportive and exhausting to students. Learning can be boosted by tuition, yet time to rest, play, and other personal development that is essential to the young can be lost. The situation of juggling between many academic commitments might even result into burnout and defeating the very essence of tuition. Overall, the issues surrounding shadow education, whether it is the financial cost, inequality, overdependence, or stress and workload, demonstrate the ambivalence of the shadow education: it has good aspects and bad aspects, which create complications in the lives of students and further promote inequalities.

Broader Social and Cultural Dimensions of Shadow Education

The final theme explores the broader social and cultural dimensions of shadow education in Nepal. Participants' accounts identified tuition as having now shaped the educational culture, forming part of both identities and norms and raising ethical issues. One of the most explicit patterns in participants' accounts was the normalization of tuition. All the

participants highlighted that going to tuition was the norm rather than the expectation. As one participant explained:

“In my class, almost everyone goes to tuition. If I don't take any tuition class, I feel like I am missing something important. I feel I am learning more from tuition. So it has become like a compulsory thing, especially board exams like SEE and SLCE, not optional anymore.”

This is in line with Bray & Silova's 2006 argument that shadow education becomes institutionalized in societies where competition is rife and non-attendance is perceived as risky. Due to perceptions about the inadequacy of both public and private schools, shadow education has evolved into an alternative education system of learning that most students cannot afford not to join. Certain participants stated that tuition is also critical in the process of identity shaping and empowerment. One participant stated:

“I was very quiet in the English class before attending tuition. I also thought I was very weak in English. But then, after some months of tuition, I started answering and even helping my friends. Now I feel proud that I can speak and write better in English. Tuition has changed how I think of myself as a student.”

This demonstrates that shadow education offers not only academic support but also transfers how students see themselves. Regmi (2023) identifies a comparable pattern in Nepal where tuition can build empowerment by creating spaces where one feels able and validated. Therefore, tuition is affecting not just grades, but a students' perception of agency. Of course, students voiced ethical questions in regard to tuition. As two participants described:

“Some tuition teacher gives us clues or hints about what question might come in the exams. They even solved model questions that later asked in real exam. Students at tuition receive these advantages, however, others are left out while I think this is not fair to claim.”

This participant's account aligns with findings from Kshetree (2020) which illustrates unethical practices in Nepali tuition centers that recursively privilege pre-existing inequities. These practices raise serious concern about the integrity of the education system, and how those engaged in shadow education are undermining basic value assessments of fairness and meritocracy.

Some limitations of the present study exist. The small sample size of four participants yields rich and thick information but restricts the extent of generalizability of the findings. The participants were drawn from one district, Rupandehi, and therefore may not represent the experiences and voices of students from other geographical or cultural locations in Nepal. Finally, akin to all phenomenological research, these findings have been interpreted through the lens of this researcher. Although every attempt has been made to minimize this through

peer debriefing, we cannot escape some interpretive bias.

Conclusion and Implications

This paper analyzes the prospects and issues of shadow education in Nepal with reference to experience of secondary school students regarding the experience of private tuition in learning English. Hearing the phenomenological stories of the experiences and perceptions of the students concerning tuition in the public school setting. The qualitative data indicate that shadow education makes a great contribution to the learning of students. All four participants were motivated to take tuition courses by exam pressure, dissatisfaction with overcrowded mainstream classrooms, perceived inadequacies in public-school teaching, parental pressure, and aspiration for overseas study, perceiving shadowing education as a necessary ‘third space’ for academic improvement. Students have said that tuition has increased their grades in examination, confidence to communicate and they also enjoyed the personalized learning approach that the typical school program did not offer.

Tuition has not proven to be a better solution, as it adds additional financial burden on families, foster dependency, creates inequalities between rich and poor students, and increase the workload for students as well. Other than sharing their experiences, shadow education has also evolved to become a socially and culturally-accepted activity in Nepal, with a significant number of students reporting the feeling of almost compulsory/obligation to attend tuition, therefore, molding themselves as learners, and thus, some questionable ethical gains. The information addresses both opportunity and the necessity. The school education should be strengthened by the policymakers so that learners are not encouraged to take tutoring. The strategies to be used will focus on smaller class size, good preparation of teachers, and more interactive and student-centered pedagogy. Rather, the academic school curriculum needs to revolve around communication, critical thinking and substantive learning rather than characterize learning as being about what students are purportedly motivated to, they call it rote learning in order to get tutoring.

However, it is not feasible to do away with tuition, since this has already been embedded in Nepal education system as per the recommendation, the government should enable and control tuition centers, which is a component of transparent system education, and consequently education charges can be justified; hence education proceeds professionally. As a result, the schools and tuition facilities would have to work together in the interest of their common client and consumer, the learner. This will require the teachers to work more and assist, which enhances the pedagogical divide between tuition and education.

The study suggests that the families be aware of the financial and emotional cost of a tuition culture and realize that there is also a more varied and fairer conceptualization of the educational success. Shadow education has been a disabling and enabling factor in Nepal; as much as students are given the chance to acquire skills, shadow education comes out as the judgmental factor to the failure of conventional education. Without the transforming policy, supervision and involving an educational culture that is characterized through equity, sustainability and purpose at the applied level of English language by all learners, issues of shadow education in Nepal will not change.

References

- Adhikari, D.P. (2022). Perception of teachers and students towards shadow education. *The EFFORTS, Journal of Education and Research*, 4(1), 11-23.
- Bhandari, B. L. (2022). Teachers' and students' attitudes toward shadow education in teaching and learning English. *Butwal Campus Journal*, 5(1), 78-89. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/bcj.v5i1.50187>
- Bray, M (1999). *The shadow education system: Private tutoring and its implications for planners*. UNESCO.
- Bray, M. (2007). *The shadow education system: Private tutoring and its implication for planners* (2nd ed.). IIEP-UNESCO.
- Bray M. (2022) Shadow Education in Asia and the Pacific: Features and Implications of Private Supplementary Tutoring. In W.O. Lee, P. Brown, A. L. Goodwin, & A. Green (Eds.) *International Handbook on Education Development in Asia-Pacific*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-2327-110_1
- Bray, M., & Silova, I. (2006). The private tutoring phenomenon: International patterns and perspectives. In I. Silova, V. Budiene, & M. Bray (Eds.), *Education in a hidden marketplace: monitoring of private tutoring* (pp. 27-40). New York: Open Society Institute.
- Colaizzi, P. F. (1978). Psychological research as the phenomenologist views it. In R. S. Valle & M. King (Eds.), *Existential-phenomenological alternatives for psychology* (pp. 48-71). Oxford University Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- DeJonckheere, M., & Vaughn, L. M. (2019). Semi-structured interviewing in primary care research: A balance of relationship and rigour. *Family Medicine and Community Health*, 7(2), e000057. <https://doi.org/10.1136/fmch-2018-000057>
- Khan, S. (2014). Qualitative Research Method – Phenomenology. *Asian Social Science*, 10(21), 298. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v10n21p298>
- Kim, Y. C., Gough, N., & Jung, J. H. (2018). Shadow education as an emerging focus in worldwide curriculum studies. *Curriculum Studies*, 14(1), 9-20.
- Kshetree, A. K. (2020). Students' views on shadowing in English language learning. *Journal of NELTA Gandaki*, 3(1-2), 25-35. <https://doi.org/10.3126/jong.v3i1-2.33142>
- Kshetree, A. K., & Bhusal, T. (2024). Shadow education and students' academic achievement. *Oikos Nomos: Jurnal Kajian Ekonomi dan Bisnis*, 17(1), 35–43.**
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.
- Mahmud, R., & Kenayathulla, H. B. (2018). Shadow education: Patterns and scale of private supplementary tutoring in English in secondary education at urban Dhaka in Bangladesh. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 48(5), 702-716. DOI: 10.1080/03057925.2017.1340827

- Mallahi, O. (2022). Exploring the status and effects of shadow education in teaching English in Iran: A hermeneutic phenomenological approach. *The international Journal of Humanities*, 29(4), 75-108.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Popa, S., & Acedo, C. (2006). Re-defining professionalism: Romanian secondary education teachers and the private tutoring system. *International Journal of Education Development*, 26(1), 98-110.
- Rahmanu, I. W. E., & Molnár, G. (2024). *Multimodal immersion in English language learning in higher education: A systematic review*. *Heliyon*, 10(19), e38357. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e38357>
- Regmi, C. R. (2023). Unveiling the benefits and challenges of shadow education in English Language Education: A Phenomenological Exploration. *Journal of Bhuwanishankar*, 2(1), 1-16
- Sain, Z. H., Geng, H., & Song, Y. (2024). The Impact of English language coaching classes in Pakistan: Opening opportunities for education and socioeconomic inequities. *Language, Technology and Social Media*, 2(2), 116-127.
- Subedi, K. R. (2018). Shadow education: A role of private tutoring in learning. *Online submission*, 1(2), 29-42.
- UNESCO. (2017). *Accountability and education: Meeting our commitments*. Global Education Monitoring Report 2017/18 Author.
- Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. State University of New York Press.
- Yu, J., & Zhang, R. (2022). A review of shadow education. *Science Insights Education Frontiers*, 11(2):1579-1593.