

School factors underlying demand for private supplementary tutoring in English: Urban and rural variations in Bangladesh

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Abstract: Private supplementary tutoring has long existed in Bangladesh, as elsewhere in the world, but in recent decades has become much more visible. Much tutoring ‘shadows’ or reproduces formal schooling as fee-based academic teaching outside school hours. This paper focuses on school factors that shape demand for private supplementary tutoring in English at the secondary level, drawing on data gained from both quantitative and qualitative methods. The paper is especially concerned with urban and rural variations, noting that rates of tutoring are greater in urban areas but that many factors converge to create similarities. Private tutoring in English is highly demanded because English is a compulsory course; and in addition to being a subject in its own right, it assists in the learning of other subjects. While private tutoring may support the academic learning of some pupils, it also has problematic dimensions. As such, the spread of tutoring across urban and rural areas is not necessarily to be welcomed.

Key words: Bangladesh; private supplementary tutoring; shadow education; tutoring in English; urban/rural variations.

Introduction

Across the world, geographic disparities are a major consideration for policy-makers concerned with equitable access to education and other dimensions of development (see e.g. Asian Development Bank, 2014, p.5; Grubb et al., 2015, pp.35-36; UNESCO, 2010, pp.139-147; World Bank, 2013, pp.85-126). Significant disparities of course exist within cities; but they are widely evident across regions and, of particular relevance to this paper, between urban and rural areas. Rural families commonly have to travel further to reach schools and have less supportive out-of-school environments (Harber, 2014, p.62). Further, the quality of teachers is often lower in rural than urban

areas, in part because better-qualified personnel prefer to live in cities. Forces in private supplementary tutoring, which are the theme of this paper, exacerbate disparities already evident in public schooling.

The paper focuses on Bangladesh, where urban/rural disparities are particularly severe. Ferdousi and Wang (2014, p.3) noted that Bangladesh had achieved considerable reductions in poverty since the early 1990s, but that poverty rates remained much greater in rural than urban areas. Education is widely viewed as a major vehicle for poverty reduction (see e.g. UNESCO, 2016; World Bank, 2013), but may also maintain and exacerbate inequalities if families in specific geographic areas and/or social classes receive smaller amounts and inferior qualities of education (Harber, 2014, p.46).

The paper is concerned with supplementary instruction beyond official school hours. This instruction may be on a one-to-one basis, in small groups, or in full classes. The focus is only on academic subjects, and chiefly the teaching of English language, provided on a fee-charging basis. In line with widespread international usage the paper describes this provision as private supplementary tutoring, though common alternative terms in Bangladesh are private tuition and coaching. Such provision is also widely called shadow education because much of its content parallels regular schooling: as the curriculum changes in the schools, so it changes in the shadow (Bray, 2009; Bray & Lykins, 2012).

The paper provides empirical evidence from questionnaires and interviews in Dhaka, the capital city, and from a rural area in the southern part of the country. English language is not only a major component of the curriculum in its own right but also underpins many other subjects insofar as students with strengths in English can also make good use of books, websites, etc. containing content for other domains. The paper identifies patterns in Grades 8 and 10. These grades were chosen because they are watersheds in the education system, with public examinations that determine students' progression to the next stages of education. Research has shown that demand for private tutoring is usually high at such watersheds because students are anxious to secure good examination scores (Bray & Lykins, 2012, pp.23-25).

Private Supplementary Tutoring: Demand and Supply

Around the globe, private supplementary tutoring has expanded significantly in recent years. Driving factors have included increased acceptability within a neoliberal ideology that education can be a privately-purchased service, coupled with intensified social and economic competition resulting from globalization and other forces (Aurini et al., 2013; Bray, 2009; Jokić, 2013). Countries with rising

incomes such as China have seen particularly dramatic expansion of shadow education (Zhang & Bray, 2016); but the phenomenon has also long existed in some low-income countries of Asia such as India and Sri Lanka (Majumdar, 2014; Manzon & Areepattamannil, 2014; Pallegedara, 2014), and is growing in other low-income countries in Africa and elsewhere (Maithya & Mutua, 2015; Napporn & Baba-Moussa, 2013).

While cultural, social and economic factors are part of the contexts within which families make educational decisions, other factors that shape demand for shadow education have institutional origins. Some schools place much stress on internal competition through test scores, and research has shown that urban schools may have more competitive atmospheres than rural ones (see e.g. Zhang, 2014, p.443). Families invest in tutoring to handle such competition.

At the same time, urban areas tend to have greater supply of tutoring because they have sufficient density of population to justify operation of businesses (Kim & Park, 2013; Kwok, 2010). However, much of the tutoring covered in the present paper was provided by regular teachers who of course exist in both urban and rural locations. In some countries teachers are forbidden to provide tutoring, especially to their existing students (Bray & Kwo, 2014, pp.44-49). The Bangladesh government has periodically announced such prohibition (Nath, 2011; Karim, 2012), but the policies have not been enforced. Teachers in Bangladesh, as elsewhere (see e.g. Bray et al., 2016, p.292; Kobakhidze, 2014, p.458), justify their supplementary tutorial work by asserting that their official salaries are low and that extra incomes are needed to support their families (Nath, 2008, p.66; Hamid et al. 2009, p.285). Since the costs of living are higher in urban than rural areas, the pressures on urban teachers may be greater – and the teachers in turn exert pressures on their students.

A further factor may concern class size. When regular classes are large, families commonly feel that their children lack individual attention and therefore turn to the tutorial sector for supplementation (Bray & Lykins, pp.27-28). Again because of population density, urban classes are generally larger than rural ones. In turn, this may imply that pressures to secure tutoring are greater in urban areas.

Nevertheless, some literature has shown convergence of patterns in rural and urban areas. For example, Pallegedara (2014, p.381) presented Sri Lankan 1995/96 data indicating that 40.5% of urban households spent money on private tutoring compared with 19.2% of rural households. Eleven years later, the urban proportion had grown to 62.9% but the rural proportion was even higher at 64.4%. Comparable data over time are not available for Bangladesh, but some of the similarities between urban and rural areas reported in the present paper may also reflect convergence.

Context

With a population of over 160 million, Bangladesh is the eighth largest country in the world. As an independent entity, Bangladesh has existed since 1971 when Pakistan, which had comprised two wings named West Pakistan and East Pakistan, split into two countries. Pakistan had itself been formed in 1947 when it separated from India at the close of the British colonial era. During that period, English was the primary medium of administration, judicial work, media communication and parliamentary affairs (Imam, 2005, p.473). In contemporary times the sole official language is Bengali, also known as Bangla; but English has considerable value in many sectors, and as an international language has been strengthened by the forces of globalization. The urban labour market is more likely to value English than the rural one, which again shapes demand for supplementary tutoring for English in contrast to mathematics or other subjects. Nevertheless, even rural students need adequate skills in English. In the words of one interviewee for the present study:

English is urgent for two reasons. Firstly, English is not a mother language [for Bangladeshi students] and so students find it complex. Secondly, students need to acquire good knowledge of English for future career.

English is a core subject that must be passed to proceed to subsequent levels of education, and also provides access to curriculum materials written in English for other subjects.

Yet despite the importance of the subject, many schools lack good teachers of English. Teachers commonly focus only on students' reading and memorization, and neglect listening and speaking skills. This pattern creates a need for supplementation through tutoring. Hamid et al. (2009, p.304) stated that pedagogically, the learning of English has a complex relationship with tutoring in English because of unsuccessful performance of school system on the one hand, and the virtual absence of appropriate self-study resources on the other. Thus some tutors compensate for low-skilled teachers of English in the schools.

Parts of the data presented in this paper were gathered in Dhaka, which is the world's 11th most populous city with 12 million people. The significance of Dhaka as a centre of education has grown in recent times. Family socio-economic background has a strong impact on student's learning, and the population has expanded rapidly because of economic opportunities. Contrasting with Dhaka is Patuakhali District in the south of the country. Patuakhali has eight upazillas or sub-districts. Sagorgram, a pseudonym, is one of the upazillas and was the location from which data for this paper were collected. Agriculture provides 57.2% of the income of families in this area (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2001). Few parents have economic capacities to send their children to post-secondary education, and many students leave school early in order to engage in agricultural work.

Methodology

The research underpinning this paper sought to identify the ways in which school factors shaped the demand for private supplementary tutoring in English using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2012, p.541). Four secondary schools were chosen from each location through purposive sampling. All schools were Bengali-medium, with some institutional variations in the city and greater homogeneity in the rural area. Bangladesh, as a mainly Islamic society pays much attention to gender in secondary schooling and beyond, especially in cities. Among the four Dhaka schools, one was girls-only, another was boys-only, and the other two had both genders but operating in separate sections. The rural schools were smaller; and because they could not afford full classes for separate genders, all four had mixed classes.

Since the urban schools were large, they all had more than one class of each grade operating in parallel. In each school, one Grade 8 and one Grade 10 class was selected randomly. The rural schools had only single classes of Grades 8 and 10, so each of those classes was selected. Within the classes, all students were requested to complete questionnaires and to ask their parents also to complete questionnaires. The student questionnaires were adapted from ones used in Hong Kong and elsewhere (see Liu, 2015), while the parent questionnaires were devised for this specific purpose. Both questionnaires, which were written in Bengali, were piloted before finalization. This quantitative component generated responses from 401 students and 401 parents in a balance of 44.1% urban and 55.9% rural.

To secure these data, folders were prepared for each student in the sampled classes. Each folder contained two survey questionnaires and two consent forms. Students were asked to take the questionnaires back to their homes and hand the parental questionnaires to either their fathers or mothers. Students then brought back the completed questionnaires to their schools. Other researchers (e.g. Jokić, 2015) have surveyed students and parents separately, and have not been able to match the data. The method for the present research permitted verification by comparison of students' and parents' responses. It also provided more complete information on some dimensions. For example, the parents were better able than the students to report on the extent to which private tutoring was a financial burden.

The qualitative component comprised interviews of 16 students, 16 parents, and 16 teachers. Again, all interviews were conducted in Bengali and were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. In each school, two students were selected through random sampling of individuals who had indicated willingness to be interviewed at the time of distribution of the questionnaires. One of

the selected students was currently receiving private supplementary tutoring, and the other student was not currently receiving it. The interviews were conducted in quiet locations on the school premises. Parents were more difficult to access than the students, since they were not readily available in the schools. Access was gained through introduction by the school authorities and/or by students, and the interviews were conducted as per the parents' choice in the schools or in their homes.

The teachers were all interviewed on their school premises. By design, half of the teachers were specialists in English while the others taught other subjects. This arrangement provided insights on tutoring in different subjects, for comparison.

In addition to piloting, several steps were undertaken to increase reliability in the research. The first step was to gain not just permission from the school authorities but also sufficient trust to allow the investigation to proceed without major impediment. Other researchers on shadow education (e.g. Maheshwari, 2015) have noted that because of the sensitivity of the subject, teachers might wish to 'guide' students and parents in their questionnaire and interview responses. To handle this challenge, first all participants were assured of anonymity; second, efforts were made to establish trust through interpersonal dialogue with teachers and others; and third, the investigator explained goals and procedures to the students in the classrooms before distribution of the questionnaires. The investigator also distributed name cards with his identity and mobile telephone number in case of queries. Approximately 25 telephone calls were received for clarification when the students or parents were completing the questionnaires, suggesting that at least these respondents took the task seriously. Further, two sets of questionnaire responses were randomly selected and the students asked to complete the surveys again as part of a process of double-checking. The repeat surveys were consistent with the originals, indicating again that at least these students and parents took the task seriously. The authors of this paper recognize that the sample of schools was purposive rather than random, and cannot claim that all findings are fully accurate. Nevertheless, they have confidence that they are sufficiently reliable to expose patterns with adequate clarity.

Findings

Quantitative findings

Table 1 shows variations in the proportions of sampled students who had received private supplementary tutoring in English within the previous 12 months. In Dhaka the proportion was 84.7%, while in Sagorgram it was 60.7%. Gender issues are beyond the scope of this paper, but it is worth mentioning that in Dhaka considerably more females (90.9%) in the sample received tutoring

compared with males (78.7%), while in Sagorgram greater proportions of males received tutoring (62.5% compared with 59.2%). This matter would merit further investigation. Concerning total numbers, the figures reflected both supply and demand. Specialist tutors outside the schools were more readily available in Dhaka, and families had stronger financial resources to pay for them. As noted, urban parents were also more likely to consider tutoring in English to be a worthwhile investment. In Dhaka, individual tutoring was the most popular type (44.7% of respondents), while in Sagorgram only 20.6% of respondents received individual tutoring. These proportions reflected not only the availability of individual tutors but also their higher costs – i.e. families in Dhaka could more easily afford individual tutoring than could their counterparts in Sagorgram.

Table 1: Scale and types of tutoring by residential status

<i>Scale of tutoring</i>	<i>Urban</i>		<i>Rural</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Receipt of tutoring in English	150	84.7	136	60.7	286	71.3
Non-receipt of tutoring in English	27	15.3	88	39.3	115	28.7
<i>Types of tutoring</i>						
Individual (one-to-one)	67	44.7	28	20.6	95	33.2
Small group (2-7 students)	54	36.0	60	44.1	114	39.9
Large group/class style (8 or more students)	60	40.0	76	55.9	136	47.6

Note: The percentages for types of tutoring are only for students receiving tutoring (i.e. not all students). Some students received more than one type.

Table 2 displays expenditure variations between English and other subjects. The questionnaire asked only for expenditures on all other subjects as a total, not individually, so it is not possible to compare English with mathematics, science, history and other subjects. Nevertheless, the table shows that mean expenditures for English were 1,290 Taka (US\$16.77) compared with 1,895 Taka for all other subjects. Reflecting the lower incomes and prices of rural areas, over half of the expenditures of Sagorgram families (58.1%) were 500 Taka or less while only 1.3% of Dhaka families were in this category. At the other end of the scale, 50.7% of the Dhaka families had expenditures above 1,200 Taka compared with only 8.1% of the Sagorgram families.

Table 2: Monthly average expenditures on tutoring per student

	<i>Urban</i>		<i>Rural</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Monthly expenditures on tutoring in English (Taka)</i>						
up to 500	2	1.3	79	58.1	81	28.3
501-1,200	72	48.0	46	33.8	118	41.3
1,201-1,800	18	12.0	2	1.5	20	7.0
1,801-2,500	33	22.0	5	3.7	38	13.3
2,501-5,000	24	16.0	4	2.9	28	9.8

>5,000	1	0.7	0	0.0	1	0.3
<i>Monthly average expenditures on tutoring in all other subjects except English (Taka)</i>						
up to 500	1	0.7	57	39.3	58	20.3
501-1,200	20	14.2	70	48.3	90	31.5
1,201-1,800	11	7.8	9	6.2	20	7.0
1,801-2,500	38	27.0	6	4.1	44	15.4
2,501-5,000	59	41.8	3	2.1	62	21.7
>5,000	12	8.5	0	0.0	12	4.2
<i>Monthly mean, lowest and highest expenditures (Taka)</i>						
	<i>Mean</i>		<i>Lowest</i>		<i>Highest</i>	
English: Urban	1,885		500		6,000	
Rural	695		200		2,000	
Total	1,290		200		6,000	
All subjects except English: Urban	2,996		500		8,000	
Rural	794		100		3,500	
Total	1,895		100		8,000	

Note: The top segment of the table refers to the 286 students (150 urban and 136 rural) who were receiving tutoring in English. Within the sample, 141 urban and 145 rural students received tutoring in other subjects except English and comprise the majority of students in the middle segment of the table. In addition, nine rural students received tutoring in other subjects but not in English, and are the remaining students covered in the middle segment of the table. On official exchange rates, one Taka was worth approximately US\$0.013.

The next question concerns the providers of tutoring. Table 3 shows that in both locations the largest proportions of students received private tutoring from their own teachers of English – reaching 70.6% in Sagorgram and 43.3% in Dhaka. Also striking in the rural area was that 22.8% received tutoring from other teachers in the same school, compared with just 4% in the urban area. As might be expected, senior or university students were not readily available in the rural area, and self-employed tutors were also more common in the urban area. It seems likely that many of these self-employed tutors were tutoring as a stop-gap measure pending success in finding other occupations.

Table 3: Types of tutoring providers by residential status

	<i>Urban</i>		<i>Rural</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Own English teacher from school	65	43.3	96	70.6	161	56.3
Other teacher from same school	6	4.0	31	22.8	37	12.9
Teacher from another school	32	21.3	32	23.5	64	22.4
Coaching centre employee	38	25.3	31	22.8	69	24.1
Senior or university student	47	31.3	12	8.8	59	20.6
Self-employed tutor not involved in any school	32	21.3	13	9.5	45	15.7
Others	0	0.0	1	0.7	1	0.3

Note: Tables 3-5 refer only to students who were receiving tutoring in English (150 urban and 136 rural; 286 total). Students were permitted to select multiple responses. The percentages refer to the proportions of students in each category who received tutoring from that designated supplier.

Table 4 turns to the students' stated reasons for receiving tutoring. The strongest reason, in

equal proportions for urban and rural students (72.0%) was that they received tutoring because they experienced strong academic competition in school. In view of previous literature (e.g. Zhang, 2014, p.443), the finding that the proportions were equal in both locations was unexpected. More in line with expectations, nearly half (49.3%) of urban students reported that their classes were large and they could not follow lessons, whereas only 32.3% of rural students identified that reason. Just over a quarter (26.7%) of urban students indicated that their teachers could not finish the syllabus, while only 11.0% of rural students did so. Failure to finish the syllabus may have reflected not only lack of professional commitment but also political disruption of schooling which was a problem in Dhaka (see also Cameron, 2012, p.32). However, only 12.7% of urban students said that their school teachers recommended them to seek private tutoring while 23.5% of rural students did so. Over a third (36.7%) of urban students stated that their schools did not provide enough help with English learning, while only 19.1% of rural students did so.

Table 4: School factors identified by students for receipt of tutoring in English

	<i>Urban</i>		<i>Rural</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
My school does not provide enough help with English learning.	55	36.7	26	19.1	81	28.3
My school teachers recommended it.	19	12.7	32	23.5	51	17.8
My school teacher could not finish the syllabus.	40	26.7	15	11.0	55	19.2
My class is large and I cannot follow lessons in school.	74	49.3	44	32.3	118	41.2
I experience strong academic competition in school.	108	72.0	98	72.0	206	72.0

Note: Students were permitted to select multiple responses.

Table 5 reports parental perspectives. Broadly matching the students' responses, 79.3% of urban parents and 75.0% of rural parents indicated that they demanded tutoring because their children faced strong academic competition in school. Again with similarity to the students' responses, 55.3% of urban parents and 27.2% of rural ones indicated that they demanded tutoring because school classes were large. Over one third (37.4%) of parents indicated that they sent their children to tutoring because school lessons did not provide enough help for learning English. A large variation was found between urban (49.3%) and rural (24.2%) participants on this point. A disparity was also found regarding school teachers' recommendations for private tutoring outside school hours. Only 10.0% of urban parents said that school teachers recommended their children to receive tutoring, whereas the proportion of rural parents was over three times this figure (34.6%). Another variation was evident on the issue of school syllabus completion. Nearly a third (30.7%) of urban parents reported that school teachers could not finish the syllabus, while only 17.6% of rural parents did so.

Table 5: School factors reported by parents for children's receipt of tutoring in English

	<i>Urban</i>		<i>Rural</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
The school does not provide enough help with English learning.	74	49.3	33	24.2	107	37.4
The school teachers recommended it.	15	10.0	47	34.6	62	21.7
The school teacher could not finish the syllabus.	46	30.7	24	17.6	70	24.4
The class is large and my child cannot follow lessons in school.	83	55.3	37	27.2	120	42.0
My child experiences strong academic competition in school.	119	79.3	102	75.0	221	77.3

Note: Parents were permitted to select multiple responses.

The corollary question, of course, is why other students did not receive tutoring. The main school-related reasons provided by students, and broadly echoed by their parents, are shown in Table 6. In both urban and rural areas, over half of the students felt that they were doing well enough in school, that their teachers were knowledgeable enough, and/or that none of the available tutoring seemed to suit their needs. Much lower proportions indicated that their teachers said that tutoring was not useful.

Table 6: School factors identified by students for non-receipt of tutoring in English

	<i>Urban</i>		<i>Rural</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I have been doing well enough in school.	15	55.5	55	62.5	70	60.9
None of the available private tutoring seems to suit my needs.	14	51.9	42	47.7	56	48.7
My school teachers are knowledgeable enough.	16	59.3	64	72.7	80	69.6
My teachers said it is not useful.	5	18.5	5	5.7	10	8.7

Note: The percentages in this table refer to the 27 urban and 88 rural students (115 total) who were not receiving tutoring in English. Students were permitted to select multiple responses.

Qualitative findings

The qualitative data echoed and elaborated on the quantitative findings, identifying both similarities and differences between urban and rural areas. For example, homework was an important issue in both locations, but particularly in urban areas. In the words of one student:

My school teachers provide me homework. If I do not perform these home tasks, teachers scold me. But I do not understand everything. I show school homework tasks to my private tutor. He helps me to work it out.

The main alternative sources of assistance, particularly for urban students, were parents and elder siblings. Rural students received less support from these sources because their family members had lower educational levels.

Some parents, both rural and urban, felt that the teachers lacked adequate training. The urban

parents were more sophisticated, in one case remarking particularly on the importance of pedagogy for communicative English. Yet even when teachers did have the necessary competence, they were not always dedicated. In both rural and urban areas, teachers were reported to neglect school classes in order to devote effort to tutorial centres or private work in their own homes. One student said:

I find a difference between my school teacher and private tutor. My school teacher tries to finish the curriculum quickly, whereas my private tutor delivers lessons elaborately and provides suggestions and notes for the final examination.

However, patterns were not uniform. Two students felt that their school teachers taught well and delivered lessons not only grammar but also on other components of the curriculum. The majority of interviewed urban students and parents indicated that teachers encouraged them either directly or indirectly to take extra lessons. In the words of one student:

Coaching organized by school teachers is compulsory for me. I pay 900 Taka each month. Coaching has run for five to ten months in a year.

Some teachers stated that students would not be allowed to sit for the final examination if they had not participated in extra coaching organized by these teachers on the school premises.

In Dhaka, most private tutoring was conducted in tutorial centres or at teachers' homes, but many rural teachers provided tutoring on the school premises. Some rural parents reported that private tutoring was a financial pressure but that they were "bound to receive it". One urban parent argued that supplementary coaching inside school would not have been necessary if teachers had provided careful lessons during regular lessons. Another urban parent stated:

I think coaching inside school is not rational. Not all parents are rich. Some low-income families feel pressure but they have to pay for it. School teachers are paid by the school but they create another source of income through supplying extra coaching.

By contrast, one rural parent felt that school-based coaching had the merit of helping students at a low cost. Similarly, one urban parent considered school-based tutoring potentially cost-effective:

Students need 2,000 or 3,000 (Taka) to receive tutoring outside school campus. In this case, they can take coaching inside school with payment of 400 Taka only.

Nevertheless, other parents felt that coaching inside school was worthless. They found no differences between school lessons and compulsory extra coaching, reporting that the shadow education was indeed a repetition of the same content by the same persons.

Echoing the quantitative data, interviewees also stressed the challenges of class size. Even though their classes were smaller, the majority of rural students said that class size obstructed

interaction with teachers. The challenges were even greater for urban students, one of whom said:

There are 65 students enrolled in my class though not all of them come regularly. Several times I have not been able to secure attention from my class teacher. I have discussed this matter with my father. He has recommended me to take extra lessons for English learning.

Allied to this matter were relationships with teachers. Several students mentioned that those who received tutoring from school teachers gained extra benefits, including tips for the examinations which would be set by those teachers.

Interviewees in each location also elaborated on the students' choices of tutors. Only one rural student indicated that he received tutoring from a self-employed person, and all the other rural students received tutoring from school teachers. In contrast, half of the urban students received tutoring from tutors who were not full-time school teachers. Two factors explained this pattern. First, coaching centres were more readily available in the city; and second, many urban teachers chose not to offer tutoring because they engaged in other kinds of business.

Finally, teachers in both locations complained that their salaries were low. One rural teacher said:

I have worked all the year round as a tutor in addition to my work as a school teacher. I have received 10,000 Taka from school salary and 5,000 Taka from private tutoring. I have three children. Two of them study in universities. I am not able to maintain their costs without extra income from tutoring.

In a parallel remark, an urban teacher said:

Our salary is very low. I need to maintain my family in Dhaka. My school salary is 18,000 Taka and tutoring income is around 30,000 Taka.

These quotations reflect the lower costs of living in rural areas; but since salaries and the prices of tutoring were also lower, in effect the pressures on teachers and their families were similar to those in the city. The scale of income from tutoring of course also depended on the diligence and marketing abilities of the teachers. Urban teachers had opportunities for larger tutorial classes because their school classes were larger.

Conclusions

This paper has focused on variations between urban and rural areas on the assumption that both the contexts and school-based determinants of demand for tutoring contribute to differences. Some findings showed greater similarities than had been anticipated. Among them was the extent of perceived competition within schools. Nevertheless, the research also found anticipated differences.

Over three quarters (84.7%) of urban students received tutoring in English, whereas only 60.7% of rural students did so. The roles of teachers also varied, with more teachers providing tutoring in Sagorgram than Dhaka; and rural students were more likely than urban ones to receive their tutoring on the school premises. By contrast, as expected greater proportions of urban students accessed coaching centres and informal providers such as university students.

Both urban and rural students need English learning, but geographic and socio-economic differences create variations in demand. English is a compulsory subject that also provides a key to enhanced learning in other domains. At the same time, urban families may be more likely to perceive the utility of English since they more frequently see it in advertisements, newspapers, and other materials of daily life. Rural parents who expect their children to stay in the agricultural sector may be less motivated to invest in English than their urban counterparts. Yet the fact that 60.7% of rural respondents did invest in tutoring in English demonstrates that the subject is perceived to have considerable value even in rural areas.

A starting point for this paper was the assumption by many planners and others that rural/urban disparities are problematic. Pallegedara (2014, p.381) had indicated that Sri Lanka gaps in tutoring consumption between urban and rural areas had significantly reduced and even reversed between 1995/96 and 2006/07. Comparable data over time are not available for Bangladesh, but a question may be asked whether Sri Lanka has been improved by the reduction in the gap and whether a reduction would similarly be desirable in Bangladesh. Analysts who view supplementary tutoring positively highlight the opportunities for enhanced learning and competition for higher education and jobs. However, shadow education encourages teachers to neglect their regular classes, takes the out-of-school time of students away from other activities, and exacerbates social inequalities because poor families cannot afford the quantities and qualities of tutoring consumed by middle-income and rich families. Thus, an alternative perspective might be that equalization of ratios between urban and rural areas is actually an indication of spread of something problematic.

Whatever the case, shadow education has expanded significantly across the globe, and shows no sign of abatement in either high-income or low-income societies (Aurini et al., 2013; Bray, 2009; Bray & Lykins, 2012). Planners and others who have viewed education as a public good and who have considered governments to be the bodies principally responsible for schooling increasingly recognize the role of the private sector alongside and intertwined with public provision (see e.g. Harber, 2014; Macpherson et al., 2014; Verger et al., 2016). Private tutoring mostly operates by default in an unplanned way, but clearly has major implications for the nature and role of public provision.

The patterns in Bangladesh revealed by this paper indicate that the shadow sector has a

backwash on the mainstream. A positive side is that it permits teachers to gain extra incomes, thereby helping to compensate for low salaries and retaining them in the profession; but the negative side is that teachers may neglect their regular classes in order to devote energies to their private work, and may discriminate against students in their regular classes who do not receive tutoring.

The research on which this paper is based has limitations arising from its focus on just two locations and from its purposive rather than random sample; and it would have been useful to unpack in more detail the characteristics of tutoring and underlying forces for each subject so that English can be compared individually with mathematics, science, history and other subjects. Further research might also look closely at the nature of pedagogies in regular schooling and the shadow sector, and at the extent to which higher prices do or do not deliver better qualities. Further research could also consider assessment practices and the extent to which those practices might be amenable to reform and then impact on the scale and nature of private tutoring. Nevertheless, the paper has advanced understanding of forces in a country which has to date received little research attention in the domain of private tutoring, and it has permitted comparison of patterns in that country with patterns elsewhere.

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