

Thematic Article

Learning English through Shadow Education: Exploring Participants' Motives and Experiences

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Recommended citation:

Hegedűs, G. (2021). Learning English through Shadow Education: Exploring Participants' Motives and Experiences. *Central European Journal of Educational Research*, 3(2), 66–77. <https://doi.org/10.37441/cejerr/2021/3/2/9342>

Abstract

Parallel to the institutionalised school system, in which no change in pedagogical attitudes has taken place (Einhorn 2015), there is a growing demand for learning languages in non-formal contexts, including out-of-school courses that not only complement students' studies in formal education but also seem to make the process of learning languages as well as giving academic support to students more effective. The present study aims to explore the international and Hungarian literature on shadow education, which is widespread in Hungary but has little literature (Varga 2015), by presenting the characteristics of the phenomenon and highlighting its shortcomings. A qualitative study is also presented in order to examine the expectations and experiences of the students (and their families) participating in private tutoring. Data gleaned from interviews with students and their parents are analysed to identify their motives, expectations, the development of students' additional skills and competencies, their career aspirations and the families' financial background. The results of the study shed light on some characteristics of shadow education that have not been visible yet. Some factors that can potentially enhance the effectiveness of language teaching in the state school system will also be highlighted. Although the study is based on a rather limited sample, the results help us gain important insights into the hidden aspects of shadow education.

Keywords: shadow education; non-formal education; private tuition; differentiation; personalised education

Introduction

The phenomenon of private education is not unknown, as it has been used as a form of education since ancient times. Although its existence goes back to earlier times than that of formal education (Gordon Győri, 2020), it has been considered a popular form of education in Hungary in recent decades and the term shadow education has become more transparent as well. There appears to be little Hungarian literature available, and research mainly approaches shadow education in a descriptive way (Varga, 2015). These studies primarily show the kinds of correlations that can be observed when comparing shadow education and formal education. Besides, they give account of the background of educational policy behind shadow education as well as draw attention to the assumption that shadow education exacerbates social inequalities. Varga (2015) finds that few studies give account of the types of benefits that shadow education offers to students through its opportunities, or discuss to what extent students benefit from these opportunities and also how they can take advantage of them in the long run.

Theoretical background

The concept of shadow education is related to Stevenson and Baker (1992), yet several interpretations can be associated with it. Pásku and Münnich (2000) consider it as an umbrella term, including all forms of non-formal education that refer to a free supplementary academic extracurricular activity. Gordon Győri (2020) interprets shadow education as courses offered in academic subjects, which follow the characteristics of formal

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education. The term shadow education can refer to both extracurricular activities and private education, which - as Bíró (2020) points out in her study in terms of flexibility of the tutor-, can take place in the tutor's home, in a café or at a language school. One of the most important types of private education is home education, which has enabled students wishing to be educated since the beginning of antiquity. Private education has become more common today, and the role of the home tutor has been replaced by the private tutor. Bray (1999) thinks that three conditions must be met for shadow education to take place: 1. it must focus on school subjects, 2. it must be complementary to school education, 3. it must be paid private education. At the same time, the previously mentioned non-formal, out-of-school, tuition-free extracurricular (Kim & Jung, 2019) educational activity, similarly to all non-formal forms of education, also aims to complement the formal public curriculum (Gordon Győri, 2020).

Sociology of education in English began to address the phenomenon of shadow education in the 1990s and the term shadow education has been present for decades (Bray, 1999, Marimuthu et al., 1991, Stevenson & Baker, 1992). Entrich (2018) examined the role and nature of this type of education as well as its impact on students' social status in Japan. The Japanese model proves that the phenomenon of shadow education is a segment of the educational industry that has been able to get institutionalised since the advent of mass education systems. Moreover, it did so in a way which could influence the national formal education system, the values and behaviour of teachers teaching in formal education (Zhang et al., 2019) without having its specific philosophy (Gordon Győri, 2020). However, since shadow education is a cross-section of the formal and non-formal education systems, as they complement each other (Bray, 1999), we can get information about the characteristics of shadow education by comparing it with the specifics of the formal education system (Szemerszki, 2020). The idea that shadow schools also perform tasks apart from teaching, such as care and counselling, is also thought-provoking. Bray (2020) states that because shadow education is a system that runs parallel with the formal education system, it has proven its effectiveness and legitimacy in terms of academic support and filling in school gaps. However, there are those who oppose shadow education and argue that it has a negative impact on formal, institutionalised education. An increase in educational inequalities and an increase in social incomes can also be used as an argument against shadow education (Bourdieu, 1998). Thus, the question arises as to how shadow education impacts on social opportunities and equality. It is important to examine the institution of shadow education on the basis of the principle of formal and proportional equality, and the debate of increasing vs. reducing opportunities. Gordon Győri (2020) believes that shadow education is intended to develop the academic knowledge of talented students who want to pursue academic studies at high-quality universities. Thus, the task of shadow education is to perform this kind of academic preparation (Matsumura, 2016), and, in this respect it has a talent-nurturing role.

At the same time, Gordon Győri (2020) emphasises the fact that in societies where egalitarian ideologies are at the forefront, it is important to introduce knowledge-elite pedagogy into formal education, even though this carries with it the potential to upset social balances. According to him, this will prevent individual countries from lagging behind in international competitions, as they can promote the emergence of internationally competitive social and economic groups.

Another important issue is the use of teaching methods in formal education. Einhorn (2015) believes that despite the availability of teaching methodologies, teacher-centered classroom techniques have not been replaced by student-centered teaching. According to Nikolov et al. (2009), language teachers in Hungary often display a limited use of teaching methodologies and therefore can pay less attention to the needs of individual students. Einhorn believes that, as a result, the learning process is often perceived by students as a failure, resulting in a decrease in their motivation and self-esteem. She emphasises the need for change in pedagogical attitudes, so that differentiation can become an essential part of the pedagogical norm. Einhorn (2015) also points out that it is an important factor for today's generations to be equipped - when they leave school-, with the competencies such as creativity and collaborative skills that play a role in creating an innovative society.

Varga (2015) claims that few studies are available about suggestions for shadow education and its usefulness and effectiveness for students. Ceglédi (2014) suggests examining the relationship between the effectiveness of shadow education, higher education and career choice, while Gordon Győri (2020) calls attention to the lack of a detailed analysis of the teaching methods used in shadow education.

Research design and Methods

The purpose of the research

In the present qualitative study, the interpretation of the concept of shadow education is examined from the perspective of courses offered in private education. The lessons are paid for, they are provided by native/non-native private language teachers, and they complement the formal school lessons. The aim of our small-scale qualitative study is to find answers to the questions that have been formulated as a gap in the literature review with regard to the motives, reasons, efficiency and impacts of participation in shadow education with respect to foreign language learning. The research questions have been grouped around five main areas, and the results will be highlighted and summarised accordingly.

- What are students' reasons and motives for using private language education according to their mothers?
- What are families' expectations towards the private tutor?
- What competencies and 21st - century skills do students acquire according to their mothers in addition to learning the language through private education?
- What impact does private language education have on students' future plans and achievements according to their parents?
- What is the financial burden families face when using private language education?

Research method

In this study, data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with the parents of ten students aged 15-18 participating in private language education. Five of the students live in the capital city (Budapest) and five in large towns in the country. All of them attend grammar school and most of the students (8 students) have passed a B2-level language examination. Some of the students started learning English at a very young age (aged 3), while others at secondary school. Two students have learning difficulties, which do not affect language learning. The students can be characterised with a well-balanced family background. The interviews were carried out in the form of a telephone conversation, which were 30-60 minutes long, and were recorded between October 2020 and February 2021. The interviews were transcribed verbatim into text corpora sized between 2500-6500 words. After the semantic description of the text, the most frequent words and phrases in the answers were collected, labelled and coded (Szokolszky, 2006) on three different levels. Afterwards, the final categories were formed along which the focus points were created. The motives and goals of the students and the families were examined, as well as the impacts and results of private supplementary tutoring on students' competencies and career choice aspirations as perceived by their parents. It is important to point out that the families interviewed do not provide a representative sample as the results obtained cannot be generalised due to the low number of informants in the research. Nevertheless, during the interviews, we had the opportunity to examine in depth the motives and learning process of the students taking part in shadow education.

Results

During the interviews, the following results were gained:

1. What are students' reasons and motives for using private language education according to their mothers?

In analyzing the answers to this question the difference must be pointed out between the cause of the families' (child's) participation in private language learning and what they assumed or intended for their children to gain from private tuition. Therefore, the cause of their choice is referred to as reason in the study, while the families' assumptions and intentions that motivate them is referred to as motive. Table 1 shows that the primary consideration for parents choosing shadow education was the critical approach towards formal language education. Eight of the parents emphasised the lack of speaking practice, but also the greatest criticism fell on the Prussian type school system, the grammar-translation centred methodology, as well as teachers not taking students' individual needs into consideration. Parents also found that language teaching in state schools was not motivating, it did not seem to work, as no or not much development could be detected in the student's

knowledge (4-4 students). To a lesser extent, parents (1-2 respondents) claimed that despite the fact that students learnt English in small groups, the learning process was inefficient as the groups were heterogeneous. The number of language lessons at school was low, the teacher-student relationship was unfavourable, and due to the lack of language knowledge of the parents, they were unable to help the child in the language learning process. As parents put it:

“My child found it hard to learn English from his language teacher at school, because she did not take his learning difficulties into consideration.”

“Her teachers found it hard to teach my child, because of her learning difficulties.”

“My child’s language teacher allows my child to deal with the material needed for her own pace while the rest of the class is working on another material, but the teacher does not make this material available for her.”

Table 1. Students’ reasons for taking part in shadow education (Source: the Author)

Reason	Number of respondents
Lack of speaking practice	8
Grammar translation method	7
Ignoring individual needs	6
School education does not work	4
No development in English	4
Lessons not motivating	4
Large group numbers	3
Different levels of students	2
Low number of students	2
Teacher-student relationship	2
Parent unable to help	2
Fear of asking questions	1

Table 2 shows that the largest proportion of families (5 families) used private language education to prepare for language examinations. In addition, an equal proportion (4-4 families) were motivated by international higher education, having remedial lessons, preparation for graduation as well as the development of speaking skills. Parents, whose children studied English with a native teacher, considered the role of the native teacher important in order to maintain the student’s pronunciation.

Table 2. Students’ motives to take part in shadow education (Source: the Author)

Students’ motives	Number of respondents
Language examination	5
International higher education	4
Higher education	4
Remedy	4
Developing speaking skills	4
Motivation	4
Pronunciation	3
Socialising	2
Native teacher	2
Supplementation	1

In addition to their critical approach to formal language teaching, another reason parents gave as an important factor in participating in private language teaching was motivation, as 5 out of 10 students aimed to take a language examination.

According to two parents:

“The pace and level of teaching English at school is not motivating enough for my child.”

“My child doesn’t get the motivation to learn English at school.”

“Her own school teacher didn’t believe in my child.”

2. What are families’ expectations towards the private tutor?

The three most important expectations that families had towards the language tutor were: accommodations in response to the child’s needs, the development of speaking skills and the location of private lessons. Half of the parents considered it important for the teacher to go to the student’s home or live nearby. However, it is interesting to see that only 2 parents had expectations towards the qualifications of the private teacher, and it was only 3 families for whom their experience was a requirement.

Based on the responses, we can see that although parents did not have high expectations regarding the qualifications of the teacher, they considered it important for them to have some experience in teaching. Besides, all the parents reported that they expected the tutor to take into account the age-specific characteristics of the student and the child-centered and friendly attitude.

“I considered the personality of the teacher very important – that they should be very kind and friendly. I had no expectations about their qualifications because I take my child’s motivation as the benchmark. If I find that he enjoys learning, he will develop eventually.”

“Already after the first lesson, there was an increase in motivation, thanks to the language teacher’s praise, which focussed on my child’s strengths, not his weaknesses.”

Table 3. Families’ expectations towards the language teacher (Source: the Author)

Expectations	Number of answers
Adapting to child’s needs	5
Developing speaking skills	5
Location	5
Native teacher	3
Experience	3
Qualification	2
Flexibility	2

3. What competencies and 21st-century skills do students acquire in addition to learning the language through private language education according to their mothers?

Although families did not have expectations regarding the acquisition of competencies and skills other than language skills, parents reported a number of positive developments (Table 4). Shadow education had an effect primarily on students’ self-confidence (6 students), but in addition, four parents reported that students’ communication skills and discussion skills also developed significantly.

An equal number of parents (5-5) mentioned that they experienced the development of social skills and increased social sensitivity in their child. Two parents thought that their child’s critical thinking had developed, while one parent thought that private education had had a positive effect on their child’s tolerance, intercultural skills and leisure time.

Table 4. Development of students' perceived skills and competencies in private tuition (Source: the Author)

Skills and competencies	Title 2
Self-confidence	6
Social skills	5
Social sensitivity	5
Communication skills	4
Critical thinking	2
Tolerance	1
Intercultural skills	1
Positive impact on free time activities	1

4. What impact does private language education have concerning students' future plans and achievements according to their parents?

Regarding future plans, it is clear that private language learning had a significant impact on students' career orientation and further learning. Eight parents reported that without taking a private lesson, they had not seen a chance for their child to be able to achieve their desired career goal. Four parents claimed that private lessons also contributed to their child's successful participation in international higher education, either because otherwise it would not have been possible to pass academic language examinations within the state school framework, or because the students also received extra career guidance from a private teacher. One parent reported that while her child was working with a private tutor for remediation, the idea of learning another language came to mind due to the child's increased motivation and sense of success.

5. What is the financial burden families face when using private language education?

With regard to financial issues, again, it is important to note that representative results cannot be formulated, only the patterns can be emphasized that have become visible in our research. When examining the financial factor, the following answers were received:

"It wasn't burdensome, although it was expensive at times, we were looking for cheaper options then."

"The language school was expensive, but it was worth it."

"It wasn't financially burdensome, it was offered at a realistic price."

"It's not a problem for the family, even though there were financial lows, job losses."

In the case of all the families interviewed, there was one factor on which they agreed: despite the significant financial burden, they were willing to make this kind of financial commitment.

"Education is worth everything, I owe this attitude to my parents, their goal has always been to give us a good education."

Discussion

Reasons and motives for using private language education

The responses of the participants were grouped around three focus points that provided the reasons and motives that drove the families. On the one hand, the responses illustrate parents' strong critical attitude towards language teaching in state schools. All the parents interviewed reported the experience that school language teaching did not seem to work, which can be supported along several lines of argument. The most common reason was the methods used in language teaching. Although there have been efforts to reform language teaching in state school education, since the change of regime, the Humboldtian grammar translation method still dominates language teaching, and a much needed change in pedagogical attitudes (Einhorn, 2015) has not taken place yet.

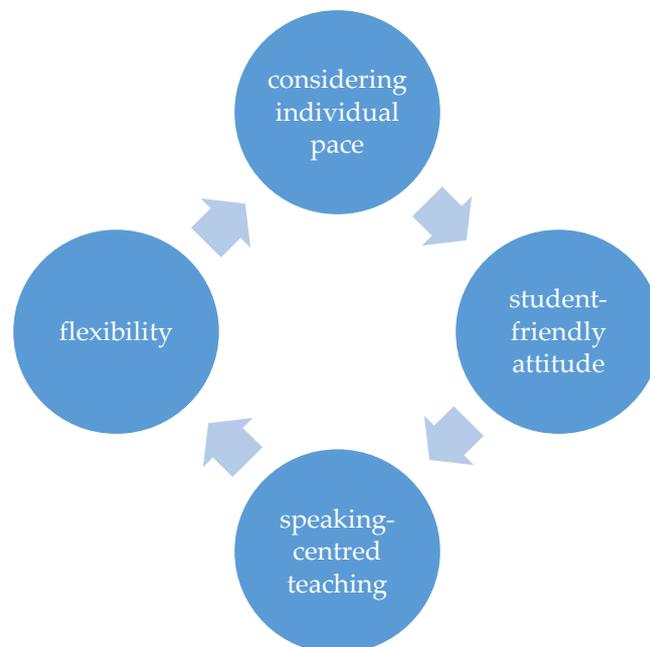
Parents considered it important that one-to-one tuition might also better suit the learner's personality. Based on the results, it can be concluded that learning with a private teacher was more effective for less confident and introverted students, as they were less reluctant to speak than in a traditional frontal-based

classroom, since learning with a private teacher took place in the context of a fully personalised form of education.

In addition, parents believed that learning in a heterogeneous group for an average of 3-5 hours per week was not enough to ensure proper progress, despite the fact that children learnt in smaller groups in language classes. Language lessons were mostly tailored to the pace of slower learners, so those at higher levels got bored of the lessons and felt that they were just wasting their time. Unlike the previous pattern, it seems that some students turned to a private tutor for remedial purposes, as the language lessons at school were designed to follow the pace of high ability learners.

During the interviews, parents' expectations shown in Figure 1 were outlined as follows: consideration of the learner's individual pace, student-friendly and accepting attitude of the teacher, speaking-centred lessons and flexibility in teaching. It can be seen that these factors are in line with the characteristics that, according to Bíró (2020), private teachers consider to be of paramount importance: many years of experience, the quality of the training, the personalized program, and the uniqueness of the method used.

Figure 1. Parental expectations towards a language teacher (Source: the Author)



Based on these results, it seems that there is a need for individualised, student-centered education in formal education in Hungary. However, the interviews with parents also revealed that although the curriculum emphasizes the development of individual competencies, the language teachers in the respective state schools do not seem to be ready for this, as they cannot / do not want to take into account individual learner differences, be it differences in language skills or different learning styles.

Added Value

In addition to the critical approach to school language teaching, another important focus is the concept of added value, which in the present small-scaled study can be related to the effectiveness of learning: the goals achieved, and the expectations placed on the teacher as well as the connections between the two.

Apart from the teacher's experience, their personality was the most important expectation for most families, and only two families found the tutor's qualification also important. In one case, the family found that although the language teacher taught English in a friendly atmosphere, the student's language skills did not improve, and therefore they decided to find a new teacher:

"The first private tutor was nice and kind, but we didn't see any improvement."

It can be concluded from parents' responses, that although the personality of the private teacher had a positive effect on the student at the beginning of the joint learning process, since it created a motivating

environment (Dörnyei 2007), the teacher's personality alone did not always maintain the student's motivation in the long run. In light of this, hiring a private language teacher was not necessarily an effective or more efficient solution than learning English in formal education.

During the interviews, it became clear that the most important reason for using shadow education was exam coaching (Réti 2009), in order to obtain a language examination certificate. In Hungary, language skills are currently assessed on the basis of two standardised external examinations: foreign language school-leaving examinations and state-accredited language examinations. The latter are also emphasised by Fekete and Csépes (2018) as they are important milestones in Hungarian public education as proofs of language proficiency. Csépes (2021) also points out that a certificate of foreign language proficiency at B2 level plays a key role in higher education: it gives applicants an advantage in the form of extra points for admission to higher education, and it is a prerequisite for obtaining a degree.

Regarding the type of examination, this study shows that students, who aimed to pass the B2 language examination, were typically planning to continue their studies at a Hungarian university. For those, whose goal was to take remedial action rather than to take a language exam, improvement could be experienced in all aspects, such as individual pace of progress, an increase in confidence and catching up with school work.

For students preparing for international higher education, the exam goal was to obtain an international academic language exam. They used two forms of private education. They either enrolled in a language school to prepare them for an academic language exam, or turned to out-of-school education programs that provided support in a complex way for higher education abroad.

The role of the native teacher as an added value in language learning also arises when it comes to students using these forms of private education. According to Medgyes (1992), native and non-native speakers have the same chance of becoming good teachers because their strengths and weaknesses balance each other out. Parents' responses revealed that they did not dispute the question of native/non-native teacher from a professional point of view. Parents insisting on their children learning with a native language teacher did so for two reasons: on the one hand, the children had been learning this way since kindergarten and it was important to maintain the acquired pronunciation. On the other hand, the native teacher (English, Canadian) taught in a different way, which was more direct, treating the learner as an equal partner, thus creating a friendly, more accepting atmosphere in the lesson. Such a learning environment was likely to have a more positive effect on students' motivation than the authoritative approach that the learners often experienced at school.

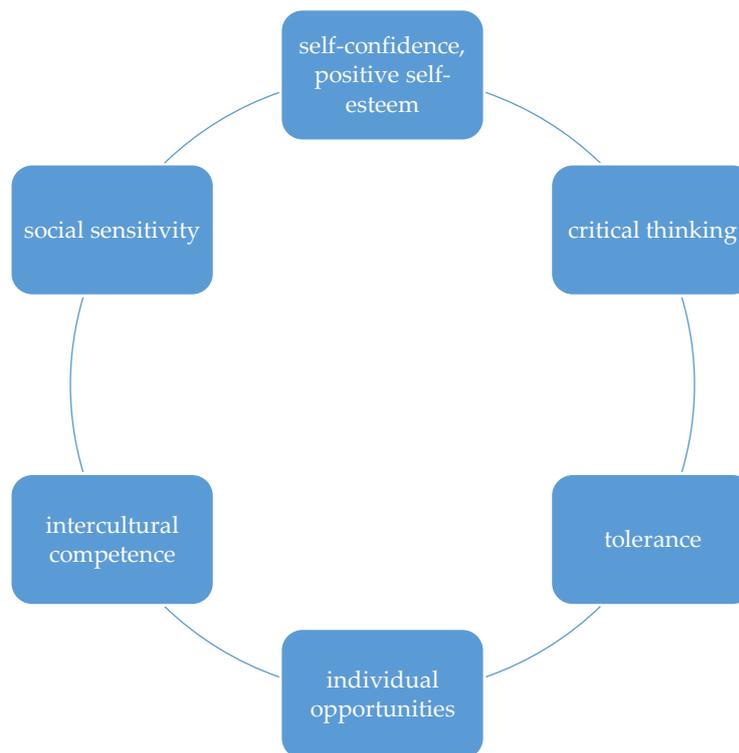
Social mobility

The third focus point of our research can be formulated in terms of social variables. An effect of private education on social mobility (Fényes, 2006) could be observed for all families. Students got access to opportunities in private language learning that would otherwise not be available to them. For instance, the student with learning difficulties, lacking self-confidence and experiencing anxiety in social situations set herself the goal of obtaining a school-leaving certificate initially, but eventually two further opportunities opened up for her during private education. One of these was that her chances of choosing a better career had increased. The other one was that English also served as a basis for learning another language more easily. In terms of a future career choice, a positive outcome of current private education was expected, but its extent and the nature of the effects can vary a lot.

Our study shed light on the fact that although parents did not have any prior expectations, apart from the positive impact on learning outcomes, they gave accounts of their child's development in a number of competency and skill areas. For example, a learner with low language level struggled with a lack of self-confidence and was characterized by anxiety in social situations. In her case, an increase in self-confidence could be detected.

As Figure 2 shows, students and parents experienced an increase in confidence and positive self-esteem, individual opportunities, social sensitivity and belief in the success of career choices, and finally the development of critical thinking, tolerance, and intercultural competence among the effects of participation in private education. According to a parent:

"I believe that education is the best investment, which is worth all the sacrifices, as it builds self-confidence and motivation through the learning process and provides opportunities which you would otherwise not experience in formal education."

Figure 2. Perceived impacts of private tuition on the individual (Source: the Author)

Having passed the B2-level language exam, one student had been specifically taking online courses run by a native speaker teacher to improve competencies such as social skills. She also enrolled in international online courses (book club, drama club) that suited her individual interests, which she would like to use in her future international studies. In her case, her parents also saw progress in critical thinking, tolerance and intercultural competence. As a result of learning English at a higher level, despite her young age, she was able to take part in an international project.

Our study shows that besides studying with a private teacher, there is another important extracurricular, private institutional form of education in shadow education. These are education programs that support out-of-school learning in English and provide career guidance to teenagers. They also offer courses on how to develop 21st century skills such as social responsibility, creative thinking and teamwork. These institutionalised forms of private education are very costly and appear to be affordable only to certain social groups.

Private education programs raise the issue that shadow education might have a negative impact on social equality. However, parents reported that these institutions offer students scholarships based on their social status, making this type of education available to more students. Our research shows that parents considered social responsibility important, which, to some extent, is also present in the formal education system. However, a significant difference from school education is that social responsibility in these private education programs requires a regular presence that lasts for several years. As a result, students seem to have a real opportunity to change their attitudes. As one parent puts it:

“I think this is the future of private education; this elite helps the ones with potential. This elite bends down and embraces the one in need.”

These responses draw our attention to the phenomenon that although shadow education is not available to everyone, there are initiatives that consider it important for lower status students to be able to participate in it as well.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to map the characteristics of shadow education in order to fill in some gaps in the relevant literature. It has been revealed that there is little empirical data on the characteristics and impacts of L2 learning in shadow education. Therefore, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with the

parents of ten students participating in private education. The motives and goals of the students were examined, as well as the impacts and results of private supplementary tutoring on students' competencies and career choice aspirations as perceived by their parents.

Based on the parents' answers, the research results were grouped around three main areas of supplementary private tuition. The first focus point reflected a critical approach towards formal education, including lack of developing speaking skills in language teaching, the use of grammar - based teaching methods, lack of differentiation, and language teachers' inability to motivate their students (Dörnyei & Csizér 1998).

As a second focus, the importance of added value was examined and whether it referred to real or conditional value in private language teaching. Students who turned to a private tutor for remediation really seemed to get added value. With regard to the native/non-native teacher dilemma, preserving correct pronunciation acquired in childhood, learning in a student-centered environment, and enriching as well as maintaining intercultural knowledge seemed to be of primary importance. Regarding the relationship between the goal and success rate of language examinations, further analyses are needed in order to get a more refined picture of the effectiveness of shadow education. The results of the third focus of the research were interpreted in terms of social mobility. In all of our cases, it could be seen that the learners' participation in shadow education expanded their opportunities in terms of career choices. One reason for this was that the motivating environment had strengthened their confidence, which, at the same time, allowed them to set themselves a higher goal than previously imagined. Another reason was that personalised education had allowed students to perform and develop in accordance with their own abilities.

This research also drew attention to a phenomenon that students took advantage of, primarily for the purpose of further study abroad: the role of private educational programs outside school. It seems that this segment of shadow education not only improved students' academic English and prepared them for international higher education but also encouraged social responsibility in the students. While it is true that there is an element of community work in formal education, it would be worth considering integrating it into the curriculum as a subject so that students could have the opportunity to experience its formative power through regular, weekly social responsibility.

This qualitative study had major limitations. Nevertheless, it fills an important gap as it shed light on several characteristics of shadow education that can provide a basis for further in-depth research in the field of shadow education. Based on the findings, the implementation of a teaching approach that is grounded in learner differentiation is called for, and the importance of pre- and in-service teacher training that can promote differentiation is emphasised. The need for speaking-centered teaching in formal education is reaffirmed and attention is drawn to the inclusion of social sensitization in the curriculum. Future research on the effectiveness of shadow education is hoped to be conducted in the form of a quantitative study to contribute to the further exploration of this hidden phenomenon.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Appendix

Interview questions:

1. General information (gender, age, qualification, etc.)
2. Reasons and motives for participating in shadow education
 - Why did you decide to choose private education for your child?
 - Why did you turn to a private tutor rather than other forms of private education?
 - What expectations did you have regarding the tutor and learning with the tutor?
 - How do you feel about the atmosphere of the lessons?
3. Teacher's qualifications and methods
 - What qualifications does your child's private tutor have?
 - How important is the private teacher's qualification to you?

- Can you tell me about the method chosen by the teacher? What do you think about it?
4. Competencies and other skills
 - Do you experience that in addition to language development, your child acquires some competencies, skills while learning with a private tutor? If so, which one?
 - What other competencies / skills would you consider important for your child's development through language learning?
 5. Impacts and future plans
 - What are the effects and results of your child's language learning with a private tutor?
 - How effective do you think private tuition is in your child's case?
 - What effect do you experience learning with a private tutor on your child's academic achievement?
 6. Financial situation
 - Can you tell me about how the cost of private tuition affected your family's financial situation?



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