

# A Study on the Relationship between Shadow Education and Academic Achievement in the Subject of Primary School English

## —Taking Haidian District, Beijing as an Example

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**Abstract:** Shadow education has been a hot topic in educational filed recently. Hence, it is critical to find the connection between shadow education and students' academic achievement to support learners to improve their English. However, most studies have focused on math subjects or secondary school students, little is known about primary school students, especially in the subject of English in China. The research will tend to analyse the relationship between shadow education and academic achievement, which could potentially provide recommendations for students, as well as implications for relevant educational policies. Also, it will provide information of current situation of shadow education in China by taking Haidian District, Beijing as an example. Moreover, this research also explores the psychological and cultural factors of students and their parents choosing shadow education by investigating their views.

**Key words:** shadow education; academic performance; primary school

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### 1. Introduction

Shadow education, also widely known as private supplementary tutoring, is becoming a global phenomenon and an object of international academic research. In the context of globalization, shadow education has become a global trend. Many families around the world participate in a system of "shadow education" that supplements regular schooling, where private tutors are hired to tutor the pupils academically. In China, pupils are given high expectations to achieve academic excellence by their parents. Moreover, under the influence of China's competitive examination and selection system, coupled with the continuous socio-economic development in recent years, students and their parents are attracted to shadow education.

According to the official data of *Beijing Statistical Yearbook 2020*, there are 16 districts in the city as of 2019. Among them, the primary education in Haidian District is not prominent in the number of schools, but the number of students accounts for the first in the region. Therefore, it shows that the educational resources in Haidian District of Beijing are relatively abundant. This study regards Haidian District as a microcosm of Beijing education, which may reflect its value and representativeness.

As a compulsory subject, students' English studies extend from school classrooms to shadow education, reflecting the increased demand for quality English education resources. Academic performance is a direct reflection of a student's

mastery of knowledge. It is also a question to explore whether participating in shadow education can improve their academic performance.

## **2. Literature Review**

As for shadow education, many scholars have studied this concept from different perspectives and have different views. The first proponents of the concept were Stevenson and Baker. They defined shadow education as occurring outside of mainstream schooling and that its educational purpose was to improve students' academic performance. Bray further elaborates this concept after entering an in-depth study of shadow education. In his study, it illustrates the significant growth of shadow education in most regions and details the prevalence of shadow education with specific data. Moreover, he states that shadow education "covers various forms of private supplementary tutoring". According to the in-depth research by Bray, shadow education occurs more frequently in East Asia compared to that in other regions.

Moreover, scholars have different opinions about the effects of shadow education on students' academic performance. Some argue that higher participation in shadow education is beneficial for both advancement opportunities and academic achievement. Shadow education is more helpful for students who learn well, while it is not that effective for those with poor academic performance. However, some believe that participation in shadow education does not help academic performance. Educational expectation plays an important role in students' acceptance of shadow education. The impact of shadow education participation time on students' academic performance shows an upward trend first and then a downward trend.

This study intends to examine this topic by answering the following questions.

(1) What is the impact of shadow education on academic achievement for primary school students in Haidian District of Beijing?

(2) Is the improved performance in English subjects related to participation in shadow education?

## **3. Research Methods**

Compared with a single method, mixed methods research allows for a more complete description of the phenomenon under study and overcomes the weaknesses and biases of the single method. Therefore, this study will use mixed method to achieve better reliability.

### **3.1 Participants**

Two primary schools will be randomly selected from Haidian District of Beijing, and one class will be randomly selected from each of the six grades in each primary school, for a total of 300 primary school students. Therefore, these two primary schools and about 600 children will participate in this study. In the focus group section, five children will be randomly selected from each grade categories in the same schools that participate in the sample, i.e., Grades 1-2, 3-4, and 5-6. Thus, these two primary schools, approximately 30 children, will participate in focus group discussions, grouped by grade level, with students in the same grade level in one group, divided into 3 groups of 10 children each.

### **3.2 Research tools**

Putting quantitative and qualitative data together can be difficult, but they complement each other, giving a complete picture of the phenomenon in question. Therefore, a combination of the two research tools, questionnaire and focus group, is employed for this study, allowing for a more comprehensive and complete study of the topic.

#### **3.2.1 Questionnaire**

Respondents will be purposefully sampled in the classroom. The questionnaires will be distributed in the classrooms of two primary schools in Haidian of Beijing. In addition, an attempt will be made to contact the sampled schools to seek their consent. It will take all participants approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. When respondents have questions,

the researcher can give some verbal explanatory help, but cannot interfere with the respondent answering the questions. This paper will use closed questions. They are quicker to code and analyse than text-based data, and they are usually directly to the point, more focused than open-ended questions, and easier for respondents to answer. In addition, the questionnaire will be labelled with pinyin to help students understand the content, given that the survey is targeted at primary school students whose literacy level may be lower.

### 3.2.2 Focus group

The focus groups in this study consist of three groups of 10 people, a group composed of 10 primary school students of the same grade. Prior to the focus group sessions, the main content, purpose, and other considerations of the study will be told by the researcher. While the survey is in progress, researchers will be assisted in organizing students and explaining some of the questions raised by students. Pupils may feel uncomfortable or fearful of making mistakes. Therefore, the researcher should encourage pupils to feel comfortable answering any questions. Students will be asked to interact in groups and have discussions or conversations with each other. Informed consent forms will be sent to participants at the beginning of the focus group discussion. The content of the group interviews will be recorded by audio and video tapes and all content will be kept confidential.

## 4. Approach to Analysis

The questionnaires will be analyzed by SPSS to analyse the data collected. The dependent variable is the participants' English final exam results in the previous semester. The independent variable is the duration of shadow education, measured primarily through the number of hours per week spent on shadow education.

After the interviews, the researcher takes notes from the discussions and compiles a written survey report on the focus group. This includes the content of the survey, the process of recruiting respondents, basic information about the respondents, findings and takeaways from the survey, and the main recommendations made.

## 5. Ethical Considerations and Research Integrity

When interviewed, all participants are assured that their rights and privacy will not be infringed before any research activities begin. In this study, several questions will be considered in line with the principles of research ethics.

Firstly, all research activities in this study follow the principle of voluntary participation. Participants are asked to complete the questionnaire independently and participate focus group discussions without any interference from teachers and parents. A teacher or parent may persuade or even force a pupil to participate in a survey, which is a clear violation of the pupil's rights. Therefore, all respondents and their parents will be informed of the principle of voluntary participation before the start of the research. The sampled schools and classes can decide whether to participate in the study or not. Pupils in the sampled class could also refuse to participate and withdraw from the study at any time. Pupils and parents will be given age-appropriate leaflets informing them what the research is, how it will be disseminated and how the data will be stored. In addition, all personal identifiers will be removed, and all data will be kept and stored confidentially.

Ethical considerations for pupils are complex and one potential problem is that involving the exam results may harm the confidence and self-esteem of students with less desirable grades. To avoid this, the exam results will be provided by the teachers rather than the students.

## 6. Limitations

Due to the limited capacity of the researcher, there are certain limitations in this research. One limitation is that the research has not been specifically implemented. At the time of writing, the world was in the grip of the global COVID-19 pandemic. As a proposal, they can only provide an implementation plan. The second limitation is sample size. As the sampling strategy is probability sampling, the number of respondents in this study is not large enough and there is some

incompleteness regarding the sample size of this study and the accuracy of the findings.

## **7. Conclusion**

This research will examine the relationship between shadow education and primary school students' English performance from the pupils' perspective. It will also explore how much time students spend each week on shadow English subjects will maximize their academic performance. Hence, students and parents can rationalize the amount of time they spend on shadowing. In addition, this study will provide insights for educational policies. Schools and the government will be aware of the current state of shadow education in Haidian District of Beijing and will have some influence on policy decisions. For example, if participation in shadow education presents some positive impact on student academic achievement, then policies may appropriately encourage the development of shadow education.

## **Conflicts of Interest**

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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