

Shadow Education in China: Policies, Problems and Suggestions

Hujing Hu^{1, a, *} Fengqiao Liu^{2, b}

¹ Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China

² Independent Scholar, Beijing, China

^a simasi@163.com, ^b 570573960@qq.com

*corresponding author

Keywords: Shadow Education; Extra-curricular Private Training; Policies; Suggestions

Abstract: Extra-curricular private tutoring is also known as shadow education academically. This paper reviews policies of shadow education in China since the launch of its reform and opening-up policy, which has undergone the evolution from rise to development, then from over-marketization to standardized regulation, and analyses the current development status and existing problems of shadow education in China. Future suggestions in the long-term are proposed to shadow education development problems.

1. The Evolution of Shadow Education Policies in China

Shadow education, first proposed by Stevenson and Becker, usually refers to social activities aimed at paid tutoring in school subjects. In China, shadow education is often referred to as after-class remediation or tutoring, which mainly refers to private cultural courses or special skills and hobbies tutoring conducted by private tutoring schools. China's shadow education covers more extensive content compared with foreign content. Shadow education training content only refers to the school courses or similar subjects in most foreign countries, while in China shadow education also includes special hobbies, such as art, piano, dancing, swimming, sports, programming, language training, etc. Shadow education in this paper refers to extra-curricular tutoring involved in the textbook outline, as well as non-discipline interest training to develop comprehensive qualities. By sorting out the policies on shadow education issued at various stages in China, it is found that since China's reform and opening-up policy, the shadow education policy has undergone the evolution from rise to development, and then from over-marketization to standardized governance.

1.1. Rising Stage: From the Launch of the Reform and Opening-up Policy to Late 1990s

After the restoration of China's college entrance examination system in 1977, some tutoring classes appeared in public schools with the increasing demand on education. Most of the tutored students were children from public schools. At this stage, the number of tutoring agencies was small, with individual or casual forms. In 1987, the Interim Provisions on Running Schools by Social Forces were promulgated to encourage various educational undertakings by social forces. As a result, the number of private educational remediation agencies has also increased and they are moving towards formalization. During this period, extracurricular training agencies mostly provided with adult education, similar to vocational training and self-examination training. In 1997, the Regulations on Running Schools by Social Forces was promulgated, which pointed out that "the state encourages social forces to set up educational agencies for the implementation of compulsory education as a supplement to the compulsory education", which has strongly supported private education, and begun to attach importance to the guidance and management of private education. Shadow education system has taken shape in China with small workshops such as family tutors, faculty tutors and tutorial classes.

1.2. Developing Stage: From Late 1990s to Early 2000s

In 1997, various forms of tutoring classes, interest-oriented classes, training agencies also

emerged with the rise of quality-oriented education and the promulgation of related policies on quality-oriented education. Meanwhile, with the introduction of key school system and school-selection policy, the demand for improving academic performance to key schools has further increased the market supply of after-school tutoring service. In 2003, Non-governmental Education Promotion Law and its enforcement regulations were promulgated, dividing China's non-government funded education into three categories: the first kind is non-profit schools that donate funds for education and charges fees, but not for profit-purpose; the second one is public welfare schools funded by the state or individual enterprises, operate for a fee, and obtain certain benefits in return; the third one is a profit-oriented private educational training institution registered and supervised by government administration. Since privately-run training agencies are not under the management scope of this Law, privately-run training agencies at that time were with no regulation. The introduction of quality-oriented education with related policies, key school system, and private schools run by famous schools, to some extent, not only have promoted the development of the tutoring market, but also aggravated the inequality of educational resources distribution. During this period, providers of extracurricular training were mainly college students, in-service teachers and after-school tutoring agencies, and these agencies were not large-scale market-oriented commercial tutoring organizations.

1.3. Market-oriented Stage: From the Year of 2005 to 2015

In 2000, China's Ministry of Education issued Urgent Notice on Reducing Excessive Burden in Primary Schools, requiring that schools shall not take up holidays, weekends, winter and summer vacations to make up classes, let alone charging fees for attending classes. Subsequently, local burden reduction policies were successively introduced. In 2015, the Ministry of Education issued Regulations on the Prohibition of Paid Lessons for Primary and Secondary School Teachers and On-the-job Teachers. However, since these policies only applied to public schools, there were no restrictive effect on out-of-school tutoring agencies in primary and secondary schools. Meanwhile, competitive school selection system has not changed. Strong social demand for extracurricular lessons provided huge business opportunities for out-of-school tutoring agencies. During this period, the after-school tutoring agencies gradually developed into large-scale market-oriented organizations. In addition to these tutoring agencies, college students and in-service teachers were also one of the main providers of after-class tutoring. Shadow education business came into being, entered into the market, and began to develop rapidly. A large amount of social capital also invested in this field to conduct market operation. In addition, as the society and families paid more and more attention to the education of children, training featuring hobbies or special skills also sprang up. As can be seen from the table below, except for fluctuations in the year of 2016, the number of private training schools, faculties and students in China is basically on the rise.

Table 1. Private training market in China

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Private Training Schools (thousand)	20.155	20.104	20.001	20.089	19.501	21.234	25.064
Employees of Private Training Schools (thousand)	246.3	229.5	234.9	230.5	227	294.7	298.3
Faculties of Private Training Schools (thousand)	141.5	129.6	135.4	139.7	132.4	161.5	173.4
Students of Private Training Schools (thousand)	8606.4	9435.6	8679.4	8986.6	8468	9014.4	9101

1.4. Normative Stage: From the Year of 2016 to Now

Shadow education should be a beneficial supplement to school education. In recent years, however, some after-school training agencies have seriously damaged the normal order and ecology of learning and teaching by tutoring exam-oriented content and lessons outside the syllabus, causing

great concern in the society. Since 2016, the Ministry of Education has begun to track after-school training agencies by conducting in-depth investigations among schools and the public. In November 2016, the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Promotion of Private Education was amended, clarifying school attributes of legal person and property under classified management, and promoting safe and healthy development of non-profit and for-profit private schools. In 2018, after-school training irregularities began to be inspected. On February 13, four government bodies, the Ministry of Education (MOE), the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA), the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MHRSS), and the State Administration for Industry and Commerce (SAIC), jointly issued a document entitled Notice Issued by the General Offices of Four Ministries including Ministry of Education on a Special Campaign to Rectify Out-of-School Training Institutions in Order to Reduce Extracurricular Study Burden on Primary and Secondary Students. It is prohibited to link the training results of after-school training agencies with the enrollment of primary and secondary school students, and it is prohibited not giving lessons in class but giving lessons after-class instead. On March 28, the Ministry of Education issued the Notice on Accelerating the Special Governance Work of After-school Training Agencies, requiring local administrative departments of education in all provinces to work out the special governance work plan before April 20 that year. In May, the Ministry of Education dispatched seven teams to carry out special inspection on after-school training agencies. On August 10, the Regulations of the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Promotion of Private Education (revised draft) was released, highlighting substantial classification of non-profit and for-profit social tutoring schools. On August 22, the State Council issued the Opinions on Regulating the Development of After-school Training Agencies, aiming at the existing problems of after-school training agencies, such as hidden safety risks, incomplete certificates, and training exceeding syllabus. It can be seen that in this stage, China not only encouraged the proper development of private education including after-school training, but also strictly strengthened the standardized management.

2. Current Situation of Shadow Education Development and Existing Problems

2.1. Current Situation of Shadow Education Market

There are about 200,000 non-profit private education agencies registered with civil affairs departments up to now, including 20,000 private training agencies. According to the Private Education Blue Book: Report on the Development of China's Private Education Industry (2019), the size of China's education market reached 2.68 trillion Yuan in 2018, among which the top three market segments accounting for the largest proportion were individual training and education market, K12 and STEAM education market, and private kindergarten education market. The report predicted that the overall scale of private education would reach 3.36 trillion Yuan in 2020 and close to 5 trillion Yuan in 2025, with a compound annual growth rate of 10.8 percent. With the development of Internet and artificial intelligence technology, China's private education market has taken on some new characteristics. First, the development is stable, but the competition has intensified and the market concentration has continued to increase. Second, the boundary between market segments and regional markets is gradually diluted. Third, new industry unicorns are likely to emerge in the next few years.

2.2. Training Contents

Various kinds of after-school training market for primary and middle school students are in high demand in recent years. Advanced class, top class, elite class, the very-best class, training class, the outstanding class, and so on emerge in endlessly, and the tutoring subjects such as mathematics, English, art, vocal music, physical education and Chinese studies are rich and diverse. The survey classified the after-school training into two categories: subject tutoring and interest extension. The survey, released by the China Institute of Education and Financial Sciences at Peking University, shows that the overall participation rate of primary and secondary school students in after-school training was 48.3%. Data from IRESEARCH Company shows that English, hobbies and

mathematics are the most common categories for children to participate in after-school tutoring. In 2017, the penetration rate of key education and training categories among pre-school users was: hobbies (64.0%), knowledge enlightenment (52.5%), English (46.5%), study tour (13.5%), mathematics (8.0%). There are two kinds of after-school tutoring per pre-school user on average. The penetration rate of existing K12 users is: English (81.4%), hobbies (52.8%), mathematics (46.9%), Chinese (22.0%), study tour (20.1%). There are 2.6 kinds of after-school tutoring per K12 user on average. According to the 2017 data released by Jiazhangbang Community (an online BBS), among the selected quality education courses, arts courses (music, fine arts) take up the largest proportion, followed by sports courses. In addition, robot course, science courses, children's programming and other science and innovation education products have also received close attention.

2.3. Training Expenditure

According to a report released by the China Institute of Education and Financial Sciences at Peking University, the average expenditure of students participating in after-school training was 5,616 Yuan, and the average expenditure of all students was 2,697 Yuan. A survey report released by the Shanghai Municipal Government shows that the average expenditure on children's education and training outside school is about 16,000 Yuan (excluding academic education for attaining degrees), accounting for 9.4% of the family's total income, which is already higher than tourism and close to the family's expenditure on food and beverage. According to a survey report on after-class training for primary and secondary school students released by Sina Company, more than half of the primary and secondary school students spend 2,000 to 10,000 Yuan on after-class tutoring each year, and 13.7% of the families spend more than 20,000 Yuan on education and training each year. Some educational training agencies are booming and their fees are getting more and more expensive, even with fees rising by around 10% a day. According to the 2017 Report on the Consumption of Quality Education for Chinese Families released by the Jiazhangbang BBS, 60 percent of families spend more than 10,000 Yuan on their children's quality education every year.

2.4. Demand Distribution

The Report on the Development of New Forms of Education in China (2017) - Basic Education shows in primary and secondary schools, there are huge differences between different regions and urban and rural areas in the per-student expenditure and participation rate of after-school training. The per-student expenditure of after-school training in northeast China is over twice that of central and western China. The out-of-school training expenditure of urban students is nearly 9 times that of rural students. It is worth mentioning in particular that the participation rate of subject tutoring in northeast China is particularly high. Even for primary school students, the participation rate of subject tutoring is as high as 57.1%, over 20 percentage points higher than that of the eastern and central regions. On the whole, China has developed after-school training in the form of supplementary education from early education, preschool education to K12 education, university education and adult vocational education. Among them, the overall participation rate of after-school training for students in primary and secondary schools is 48.3%.

3. Main Problems in the Development of Shadow Education

3.1. A Micro Perspective: Low Entry Threshold, Uneven Quality of Training Agencies, and Irregular Charges

In a micro perspective, firstly, the barrier to enter shadow education industry is low. Because of the easy access to the market for after-school training, a small education company can be established with a few people, and small and medium-sized educational agencies account for most of the market. In the whole industry, small and medium-sized after-school training agencies account for nearly 95% of the market share, while large training agencies account for no more than 5%, which makes supervision difficult. Secondly, the quality of agencies are uneven, with vague and

chaotic operating standards. Due to the asymmetry of information, agencies have low cost of violation of laws and regulations such as no guarantee of teaching quality, disordered pricing mechanism, unqualified teachers, high faculty turnover rate, and other chaotic situations. It is estimated that the incomplete qualification of extracurricular counselling organization accounted for 65%, with less than 20% of complete qualification of private training agencies. Many training agencies have no fixed teaching place or officially published teaching materials, they will hide in private homes when regulation is strict and flourish again when regulation lightens up. Thirdly, the overall quality of teachers in training agencies is worrying and price increases and unreasonable charges are serious. Due to the lack of effective supervision on the qualifications of teachers in training agencies, many consumers have doubts about the overall expertise. Moreover, the large mobility of teachers in tutoring agencies makes it difficult to maintain the so-called personalized education.

3.2. A Macro Perspective: Equity of Access to Education and Difficulties in Regulation

In a macro perspective, firstly, after-school training may aggravate the unfair access to educational resources. Rich families can often obtain high-quality education resources through various channels, such as buying houses to select schools and have after-class tutoring to enter public schools. However, disadvantaged families usually cannot afford after-school training. If policy makers try to develop effective intervention policies to address the possible educational inequities brought about by after-school training, they need to fully consider the motivations of after-school students and the actual effects of the training. Secondly, there are still many difficulties in overseeing after-school training market. Prior to the implementation of the newly revised Law on the Promotion of Private Education, private training agencies have to some extent been divorced from the management of education administrative departments. A large number of them are companies registered in the industry and commerce department. Only a few of them have been pre-approved by the administrative department of education, with lax supervision. Even training agencies registered in the industry and commerce department do not have a clear regulating mechanism. There are also many training agencies that carry out teaching activities in the name of education consulting companies or science and technology consulting companies without registration in the education department. These management classifications are not standardized and unified.

4. Future Suggestions for Shadow Education Development

Since 2018, China has introduced a number of policies and measures to regulate and supervise the legitimate development of shadow education market. In the future, relevant government departments should guide after-school training into rational development to reduce its negative impact on students and education system and let it play a positive role in education. It is also necessary to further clarify the causes of the chaotic development of after-school training, establish a long-term mechanism, and effectively guide the healthy and orderly development of shadow education.

Firstly, while normalizing the business behaviour of after-school training agencies from the supply side, we should also give full play to the role of school education as the main channel and comprehensively deepen the reform of school teaching and education mechanism. The overflow of after-school training should be monitored so as to form a dynamic virtuous circle of formal fundamental education and its admission mechanism, avoiding vicious competition of after-school training. Primary and secondary schools shall open all courses in accordance with the curriculum plans, curriculum standards and school teaching plans issued by the state. It should be punished for behaviour such as teaching beyond syllabus, giving lessons after class but not in class, and linking performance of after-school training with the enrolment of primary and secondary schools. At the same time, it requires all provinces to establish a flexible school leaving system and constantly improve the after-school service in order to improve the teaching quality of schools, strict enrolment discipline, and do a good job in after-school public service. After-school service

mechanism should ensure the creation of favourable conditions for schools to carry out after-school services.

Secondly, it is necessary to guide families to have a correct understanding of after-school training, and pay attention to both physical and mental health development of children. The common demand for after-school training in Chinese families mainly stems from the parents' desire to improve their children's competitiveness of entering higher schools. The latest policy also stresses the need to improve educating ability of primary and secondary schools, improve the quality of teaching, enforce enrolment discipline, and do a good job in after-school services, which can fundamentally solve the problem of training craze. We should encourage every school to promote individualized education, fulfil the school's due responsibilities to reduce the demand for out-of-school training, and alleviate the burden on children and families.

Thirdly, daily supervision mechanism of after-school training agencies should be improved to speed up a long-term educational monitoring mechanism. We should make clear the responsibilities of all departments in charge of education, market supervision, human resources and social security. The whole-process supervision of after-school training agencies can be strengthened by means of annual inspection and annual report system, black-and-white list system, random inspection and credit supervision. For private after-school training agencies, in addition to setting the pre-approval and registration in management authorities, there should also be standard daily monitoring. At present, the governance focuses on the threshold but ignores daily supervision. In the future, parents, students, news media and other social forces should all effectively participate in the monitoring process.

References

- [1] Lou Shizhou. (2013) The Dilemma of "Shadow Education" and the Choice of Basic Education Policy. *Research on Educational Development*, 18, 76-78
- [2] Xiao Ling. (2015) Policy Research on Shadow Education Governance of Compulsory Education in China - Based on the Perspective of Game Theory. *Zhejiang Normal University*, 17-19
- [3] Li Na. (2015) The Development Trend of Shadow Education in China. *Chinese Journal of Education*, 5, 54-55
- [4]. Wu Fei. (2018) Two Decades of Shadow Education - Visual Analysis Based on CNKI Journal Database from 1997 to 2016. *Educational Reference*, 3, 39-40
- [5] Li Jiali. (2016) Who Benefits from Shadow Education - Based on Choice Hypothesis and Rational Choice Theory. *Research on Educational Development*, 20, 71-72
- [6] wu Yilin. (2016) Research on Influencing Factors of Junior High School Students' After-class Tutoring - Based on the Survey Data Analysis of CEPS. *Education Science*, (32) 5, 71-72
- [7] Guan Jia, Li Qitao. (2014) Development Status, Trend and Experience of Online Education in China. *China Audio-Visual Education*, 8, 62
- [8]. Cheng Tianjun, Chen Xiaolu. (2014) Messy And Organized: Institutionalization of Tutoring Agencies and Institutionalization of School Tutoring - A Sociological Analysis of After-school Tutoring Fever. *Journal of education*, 10 (1), 112-113
- [9] liu Yongsheng. (2008) Domestic Research on Educational Remediation in Recent Ten Years: Review and Prospect. *Future and Development*, 9, 45
- [10] Wang Jianjun. (2005) Home Tutoring and School Education: An Inescapable Vicious circle. *Research on Fundamental Education*, 10, 8-9
- [11] wang Xiaolei. (2017) Inequality between Education Quality and Shadow Education Opportunity in Junior Middle School -- A Case Study of CEPS Data 2013-2014. *Beijing Social Science*, 9, 58-59

- [12] liu Hui. (2014) The Development of Shadow Education in Developed Cities: Investigation and Reflection - A Case Study of Guangzhou. *Contemporary Education Science*, 21, 46
- [13] Zhou Lin, Zhou Changwen. (2017) Evolution of Shadow Education Governance Policy in South Korea and its Enlightenment. *Foreign Education Research*, 5, 72-75
- [14] Xiao Fengxiang, Wang Rui. (2017) Shadow Education Governance in South Korea and Its Enlightenment to China. *Foreign Primary and Secondary Education*, 8, 5-6
- [15] Wang Subin, Zhu Yimin. (2015) On Comprehensive Management of After-school Training Agencies. *Basic Education*, 15 (2), 51-52