
Education as a Site for Reproducing Social Inequality: A Case Study of Shadow Education System in Pakistan

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Abstract:

The research looks at the shadow education system in Pakistan in a holistic mixed-method study including its structural underpinnings, socio-economic impacts, and lived-in experiences of students, parents, and teachers. The research discusses how the tuition mafia system works, why it keeps growing and what the emergence of the tuition mafia tells us about the long- running structural ineffectiveness (and possible futility) of education in Pakistan.

Keywords: Pakistan, Shadow Education, Schooling, Tuition, Social Inequality

1. Introduction

In Pakistan, the inception and the swift growth of the shadow education system (that includes the private schools, coaching academies, home tutors, and special preparation centres) has essentially changed the way learning takes place and the way success is attained. This parallel system of operation, which has been gaining momentum at the expense of the formal system of schooling, has been motivated by the long-term failures of the formal schooling system such as insufficient resources, patchy teaching standards, crowded classes and the prevailing view that government schools are incapable of delivering world-standard academic results. Consequently,

parents, students, and even teachers have all led to the emergence of what is now somewhat broadly termed as the tuition mafia, a strong, profit-based ecosystem, which feeds off the fears of education, competition, and the ever-growing distrust of state institutions. Pakistan has been experiencing a structural change in the education sector over the last 30 years where education is not perceived as just a public good or a constitutional right and more as a form of investment in education. Families of all socioeconomic statuses, including the low-income, middle-income, and affluent neighborhoods of cities, have come to adhere to the notion that achievement in school, social mobility, and prospects does not depend on classes, but instead on additional training. Even the private schools are sold as luxurious environments with superior discipline, English language lessons, and advanced facilities but this too must undergo intensive external coaching to bring about high academic outcomes. Therefore, shadow education is so normalized that tuition is not even seen as an optional assistant, but as an essential course to be taken on the way to a very competitive and exam-centered system. Such a change has severe consequences on equity, access, and educational fairness. The shadow education system strengthens the preexisting socio-economic differences by offering unequal benefits to those students who can afford academies of high standards, specialized tutors and high-intensity testing programs. In the meantime, students with lower-income backgrounds find it difficult to catch up and may need to use low-cost or low-quality tutoring services- or not at all because of their economic situation. What emerges is an environment of stratified education where privilege, rather than merit, is becoming an increasingly dominant force in determining the results of students. In addition, the dependency on personal tutoring weakens the validity and meaning of formal schooling. Where teachers directly operate parallel coaching businesses, intentionally perform poorly during school use and refer students to classes that they charge fees on, the distinction between necessity, coercion and manipulation is lost.

Another effect of the emergence of shadow education is the change in the application of classroom pedagogy where learning no longer focuses on criticality, creativity and holistic growth but instead on memorization, test preparation and results of small measures. Students with long academic time and a constant urge to perform better than others experience increased stress, burnout, and mental pressure. Parents are also facing increased financial strain and, in most cases, must do away with basic needs in a family to afford tutoring services. The larger education system is under a threat of losing integrity, accountability and the purpose of education as this tuition-based culture is institutionalized more.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Education as a Site for Reproducing Social Inequality

The primary means through which social inequalities are reproduced and reasserted. Studies in the field of education have demonstrated the common belief among low-income parents in Pakistan that access to private education is the most secure and pragmatic means of ensuring upward social mobility. In short, low-income parents often invest whatever limited resources

They have to provide their child with what they believe is the best available opportunity, even though that opportunity may marginally improve the likelihood of the same socio-economic disadvantage being visited upon their children but not eliminated.

2.2 Cultural Capital and Bourdieu's Framework in Pakistan

Bourdieu theorizes that one's intersectional position within social structures affords them varying types and degrees of cultural capital. In the case of low-income Pakistani families and their children attending private schools, there is an argument to be made that developing familiarity with cultural capital in school and home environments may promote upward social mobility compared to students educated within a government school framework. This supports an idea previously presented

by schools that privileged English-speaking populations, albeit oppressive; that possessing English language proficiency grants an individual some social mobility. However, this argument is heavily flawed because possessing cultural capital is not analogous to upward social mobility. Infantilizing parents and families who choose shadow education and the choices of their children ignores the complexities involved in increasingly differentiated and socially stratified landscapes, such as education systems, and ultimately re-inscribes disabling and oppressive constructions of poverty. Final and perhaps sadly, it constructs expectations of future children, in terms of similar stratification of resources and norms of educational attainment. Unfortunately, constructing expectations around "if this child is unsuccessful, they will never be a burden upon their parents" misses the cultural implications of growing up poor with the inequities of education, resources, and social mobility too often already - and irrevocably - established upon their first birth.

2.3 Public Sector Decline and the Expansion of Private Education

The expansion of private education in Pakistan is essentially driven by the deterioration of the quality and legitimacy of public-school education. Pakistan spends less than 2% of its GDP on education, which is among the lowest of any country. The constant underinvestment has led to cramped classrooms, poorly maintained facilities, and teachers who do not show up for work. These factors have all contributed to declining public faith, leading parents to seek options that would provide better outcomes and teach English. Another significant factor of interest is the obsession with English as a medium of instruction, which suggests social status and economic progress. English is portrayed as the key to opportunities in the rest of the world and has allowed private schools to market themselves as 'English medium. As a result, English, as a result, has equated to linguistic capital that strengthens class hierarchies between Pakistani Urdu medium public schools and English medium private schools.

2.4 Problematic Parental Choices and Narratives of Poverty

Finally, parental expectations also contribute to the growth of private education. In their study, Ahmed & Shahzad (2016) noted that even the lower-middle class made cuts to their expenditures towards other items, such as food, to pay for private schooling or tuition because they perceived that paying for education would allow their children to achieve mobility. Kamran, Afzal, and Rafiq (2023) indicate that this practice is caused not just by the discontent with the government education, but also by coercion by other individuals.

Moreover, a more subtle appreciation of the history of shadow education in recent decades in Pakistan, would show that it is not the simple result of the state failure but a subset of a more general reshaping of the concept of society regarding schooling, success and mobility. The change in the concept of education, where it has become an investment on individual levels in the past 3 decades rather than a fundamental right has compelled families at both ends of the income ladder to learn privately. This privatization of education has catapulted the branding of privately-owned schools as competitive enterprises that sell their quality, or their English-medium instruction, or their modern facilities, even though these selling attributes are more of a pipe dream than a demonstrated reality. Pakistan has seen education become more of a consumer-based option and not a civic obligation.

2.5 Double Schooling and Pedagogical Gaps Normalization

It is worth noting that an empirical study emphasized the normalization of grades in Pakistan in double schools-regular and tutoring academies. Students attending reputed private schools are far more predisposed in the context of shadow tutoring suggesting a stronger pedagogical divide: schools are geared towards syllabi fulfilment as opposed to conceptual growth. This puts families in a cycle of reliance in which they outsource learning and tell themselves that they need external recommendations to be successful. This is detrimental to the natural impetus to

learning and excessively focuses on education based on exams. The ramifications are even worse in the social equity perspective. The most privileged on their part, and the poorest households, in their turn, receive the gates to opportunity when accessing private education and private tutoring, respectively. In agonizing redundancy, children in the poorest income bracket are ever targets of the least funded schools and ladders to social ascendancy.

This way, the shadow education in Pakistan is not just bridging a gap in formal education but actively contributing towards shaping who will hold economic and social power in the future.

If the public sector is not made more robust and private sector is not synced to public education system; shadow schooling will continue doing nothing but replicate the very inequalities its meant to mitigate.

3. Methodology

The paper uses a mixed-method research design, in which it analyzes the organization, practices, and perceived power of the shadow schooling system also known as the so-called tuition mafia in the urban education environment in Pakistan. They were methodically a mixture of quantitative survey data and qualitative knowledge about recording how students, parents, and teachers experience tuition dependence and the dependency is a manifestation of systemic problems at the mainstream schooling.

3.1 Research Design

The adoption of a mixed-method approach (qualitative + quantitative) was informed by the fact that the tuition economy is both at behavioural, emotional, and structural levels. Quantitative data will assist in demonstrating the prevalence of tuition dependence, and qualitative answers allow stating why tuition dependence is a reality and how it is maintained. Surveys were chosen as the main form of data collection because of the following reasons:

Accessibility and reach: Tuition dependence cuts across a wide range of socioeconomic populations over big cities in Pakistan and an online survey was not limited to any particular population.

Sensitivity of topic: A lot of respondents are afraid of the repercussions of talking about a teacher or school system; anonymous surveys will minimize the fear of doing so, and hence the respondent will be more candid. To get the representation of the groups that have the most direct influence on the tuition ecosystem, three distinct questionnaires were created:

Student questionnaire Parent questionnaire Teacher questionnaire

All forms consisted of closed-ended questions (Likert scale, multiple choice, yes/no) and open-ended questions. The closed ended questions enabled quantifiable tendencies whereas the qualitative questions were crucial to the comprehension of lived experiences, pressures, and power relations, which are key in determining the framework of shadow schooling. The methodological design was a deliberate agreement with the aim of revealing whether the existence of the private academies is seen as a subsidiary institution or as a system that responds to each other as a monopolistic and coercive organization.

3.2 Data Collection Procedures

Google Forms were used to collect data, as it is an easy method, anonymous, and efficient in collecting the responses of people of various geographical locations. The survey was open-ended and lasted 48 hours and the respondents willingly participated after reading a concise explanation of the aims of the study. The finished data contained student, parent, and teacher data all of which was exported to Excel as a way of laying out and analysis. Cleaning involved the elimination of duplicate columns, verification of missing entries, standardization of categorical responses, and coding preparation of qualitative text. Online surveys were especially useful since the questions that were asked about the tuition, e.g. teacher coercion, fear of

ineffective school teaching and economic burden, are sensitive. Digital participation was anonymous, allowing the respondents to be more open in their concerns, which enhanced the quality of authenticity and validity of collected data.

3.3 Sampling

The sampling plan was a mix of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. To select the participants, their role in the education ecosystem and the probability of interaction or being affected by tuition systems were considered. Though not random per se, the sample was sufficient to meet the aim of the study which was to record perceptual, behavioral and experiential data. The sample included:

Students in different types of schools (elite private, mid-tier private, low-cost private and public). Parents who represent various socio-economic groups and make or affect decisions on tuition.

The teachers are the powering mechanism of the school and in many cases, may be the frontline contact with tuition networks. The sample was also spread out geographically as there were respondents in Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Peshawar, and smaller urban centres. This variety was useful in ascertaining how the tuition economy lacks localization but is broadly spread in diverse boards and education experiences, such as Agha Khan Board, Cambridge (O/A Levels), Federal Board, and IB. Although the sample size is moderate, it has a composition that covers various layers of the tuition ecosystem, making it possible to triangulate and analyze the tuition system through a multi- perspective.

3.3 Instruments and Variables

The survey instruments were designed with reference to four large constructs that were frequently used in KAP (Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices) studies:

Knowledge:

Knowledge of tuition systems, knowledge of school-tuition interactions, knowledge of two-fold role of teachers.

Attitudes:

Perceptions of fairness, beliefs regarding the need of tuition, trust in school teaching, and beliefs regarding quality of education.

Practices:

The number of hours attended, tuition enrollment habits, monthly spending, dependency on tutors to prepare for exams.

External Pressures:

Social comparison, academic fear, perceived competition and coercive factors affecting tuition decisions. Items included in each form were mapped to each of the dimensions, and they helped to determine whether academic need, systemic failure, teacher manipulation, or more overall socio-economic pressures are driving tuition dependency. Certain variables were:

- Grade level and school type
- Subjects of tuition taken.
- Cost of tuition
- Price frequency and length of tuition. Perceived school teaching quality.
- Reasons for joining tuition
- Personal emotional and psychological influence.
- Recommendations by teachers and conflict of interest

These variables were consistent with the purpose of the study that was to establish whether patterns of dependence were a systemic economic system that operated in the same manner as a mafia.

3.4 `Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in two steps quantitative and qualitative: Quantitative Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used in analyzing quantitative data. The frequency counts and pattern of distribution were used to ascertain:

- The percentage of students on tuition
- The percentage of students goes to tuition.

- The level of dependency on tutors to perform in the exams. Allocation of costs burden among income levels.
- Level of school teaching dissatisfaction.
- Existence of teacher-managed tuitions or academies

These statistical patterns assisted in setting the degree of prevalence and habitualization of tuition dependence, which is one of the reasons that tuition is not merely an addition, but a part of the education system.

Qualitative Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to process open-ended responses and involved three coding processes:

- Open coding: to find the common expressions (e.g., “teacher pressure,” “school is not enough,” “everyone takes tuition”)
- Coding: These phrases relate them to broader conceptual groupings (e.g., coercion, fear of academic failure, economic exploitation).
- Selective coding: to narrow down on major themes that correspond to the functioning of a tuition mafia.

Qualitative analysis played a critical role in exposing the invisible processes, such as psychological pressure, competitive pressurization or perceived deliberate incompetence of school teaching, which cannot be quantified using the quantitative method only.

3.5 Triangulation and Validity

The methodology is strong because it is triangulated in nature the combination of the views of students, parents, and teachers. Though the groups did not engage in the tuition ecosystem in the same way, the trends revealed were very similar:

Students are dependent and pressurized. Parents indicate monetary strain.

The teachers are aware of structural inefficacies that draw students to tuition.

This consistency in independent groups of respondents increases validity and supports the argument that the tuition system is a consistent parallel educational system.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The whole research was conducted according to ethical guidelines. The study was voluntary, and no personal data was gathered, and the respondents were aware of the academic nature of the study. Since criticizing teachers, schools or boards is a sensitive issue, anonymity was vital to promote honest reporting.

3.7 Methodological Importance to the Concept of being a Tuition Mafia.

Although methodological sections generally avoid interpretative assertion, it should be mentioned that the design of the present study with its KAP organization, triangulation, and multi-stakeholder sampling was carefully selected to explore whether tuition dependence can be seen as the system of influence, or not. The methodology enabled us to record patterns and even capture mechanisms such as pressure, dependency, financial extraction, and dual teacher roles which all indicate characteristics of a mafia-like organization. Therefore, the methodology was intentionally developed to expose not only the presence of shadow schooling but the logic behind it.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 Data Analysis

The growing popularity of private tutoring, which is often called tuition mafia in Pakistan, is an important driving force in the development of Pakistan's education system. Tuition mafia not only simply means private tutoring, rather it means that private tutoring is a well-developed, profit- driven education business that is not regulated by the state and, in many cases, unregulated. This is not only the tutoring facilities and the coaching academies but also the private tutors and schoolteachers who intentionally decrease the quality of teaching in classrooms as a way of creating the necessity to pay for tuition fees at the end of the day.

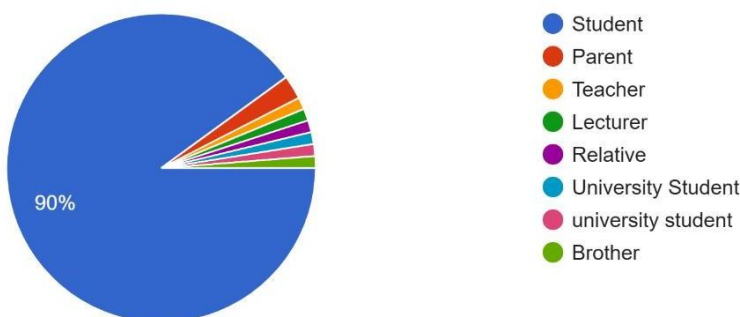
The information from the survey conducted in this research paper goes a long way

towards demonstrating that the tuition mafia is real, has organization, and has become so relevant to the lives of students throughout Pakistan. The responses have shown that most students in both the private and the public schools are frequent attendees of academies. Furthermore, the majority voicing complains about the formal schooling experience, the manner schoolteachers teach concepts, and a compulsive reliance after-school tuition. This clearly shows that tuition is no longer a choice; it is, rather, nearly compulsory to academic success, especially in urban areas like Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Quetta.

This dialogue elaborates how the tuition mafia operates, why it has become so powerful, and its impact on learning and teacher behavior, classroom routines, and students' well-being. There were 80 individuals in total who each responded to a survey, 90 percent of whom were students and the other 10% were a mixed sample that consisted of both teachers and parents. These students were distributed across public/private schools representative of low/mid/high tier schools which illustrate how students of all academic backgrounds, i.e, Cambridge and various nationally recognized board - universities - attend second-tier coaching centers.

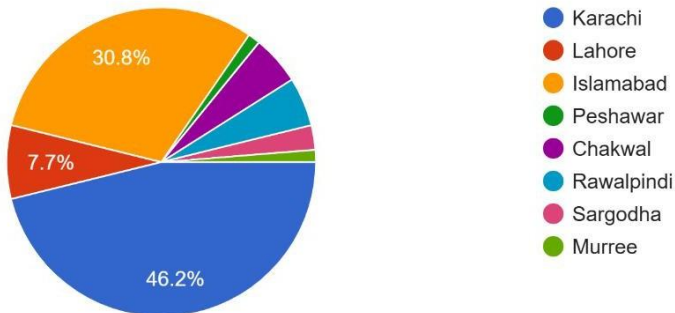
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80 responses



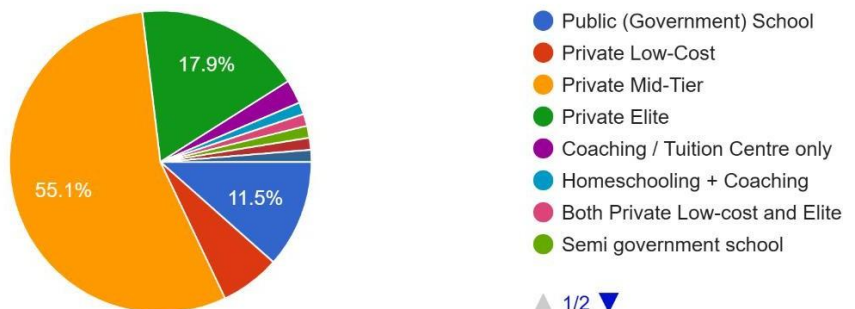
City

78 responses



Type of school you attend

78 responses



▲ 1/2 ▼

4.2 Patterns Observed

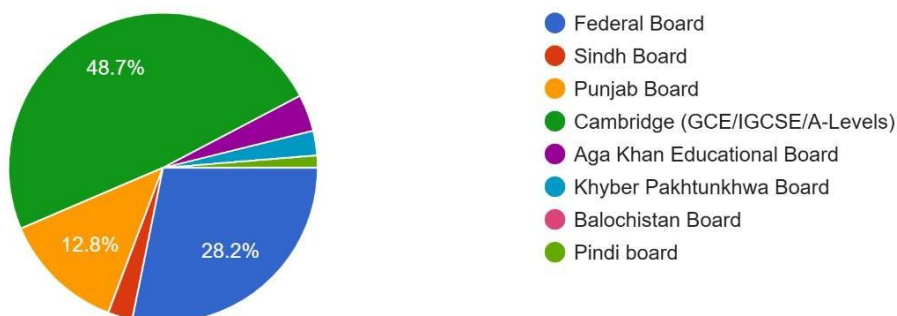
4.2.1 Extremely High Reliance on Academies

The survey revealed that students heavily relied on private or home tutoring, no matter which schools they attended. Cambridge students attend academies for the science subjects and mathematics, while Matric and FSc students heavily rely on

coaching centers for exam preparations. Students reported that private school teaching is insufficient with academics.

The high number of students attending academies is not random; it demonstrates the normalization of tuition culture. When parallel systems become the main system, students depend upon it, as in this case. These coaching centers have moved beyond service provision to structural dominance.

Education Board
78 responses

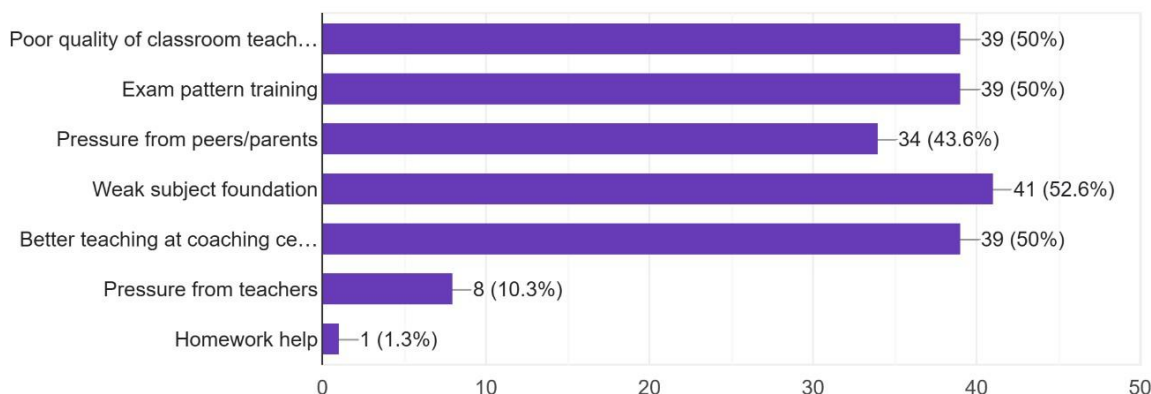


4.2.2 Tuition as a Substitute for Coaching

Many students have made clear that they receive a better education in academies than schools, with schools focused on making notes and attendance and academies focused on passing the exams. This is one of the main signifiers of a tuition mafia environment, where the academy is positioned over the school and the schools lose their value. Students continue to chant, 'The syllabus is not clearly explained by the schoolteachers.' 'We go to school for attendance.' 'Academies are better at teaching.' This is a substitution effect, whereby tuition providers marketed themselves as better and results-driven, designed to establish academic dependency, on purpose.

In your opinion, why do students typically join coaching centres? (Select all that apply)

78 responses

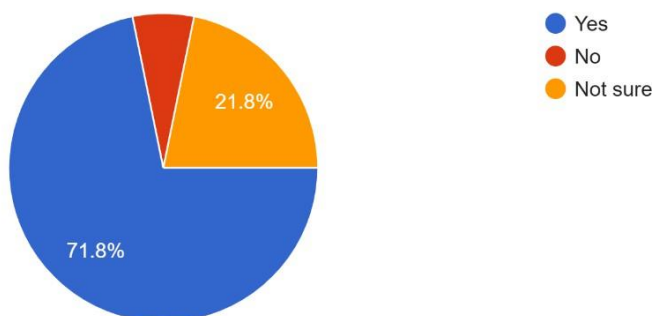


4.2.3 Uniform Business-like Structure

Students described academies as crowded, expensive, strictly commercial, exam-focused, and profit-oriented. This reflects a highly organized, corporate-like structure, where tuition centers act as businesses rather than educational spaces. Teachers are hired on commission and sometimes exploited to attract students. This suggests that these centers are not informal or accidental; they are strategic, systematic, and financially driven.

Do teachers from your school also teach at private academies?

78 responses

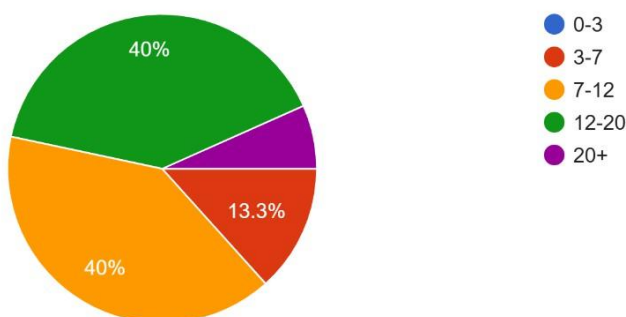


4.2.4 Economic Burden and Exploitation

Many survey respondents mentioned that tuition burdens their families financially. This is especially true for middle-income families with multiple school-going children, low-income families sending children to low-cost private schools, and students preparing for medical or engineering entrance tests. Tuition costs are rising faster than school fees in many cities. The tuition mafia capitalizes on parental fear that their child may fall behind.

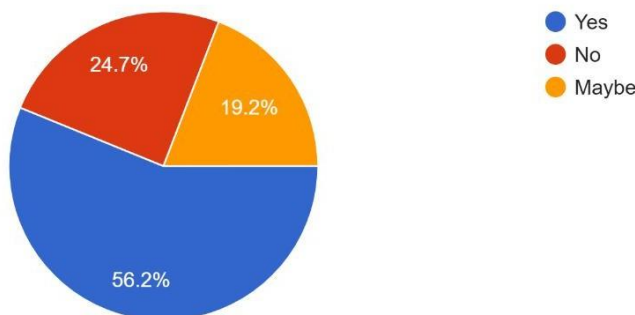
How much do you spend monthly on tuitions? (PKR)

15 responses



Does tuition cost burden your family?

73 responses



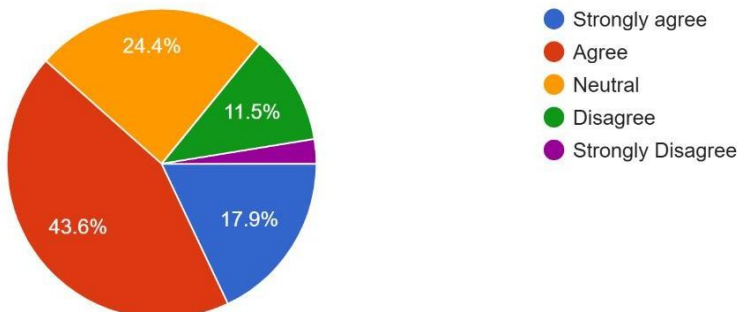
4.2.5 Social Inequality among Students

There is now a separation of students attending the same school due to the intervention of

coaching centers. The students who can afford to go to an academy do not attend school and are able to score well, while those students attending school alone fall behind. This fencing creates a social distinction between students and a clear division between privileged and underprivileged students. This also justifies the longstanding injustice in our society perpetuated by the tuition mafia and so-called educational system.

Coaching creates educational/ social inequality among students Rate your agreement

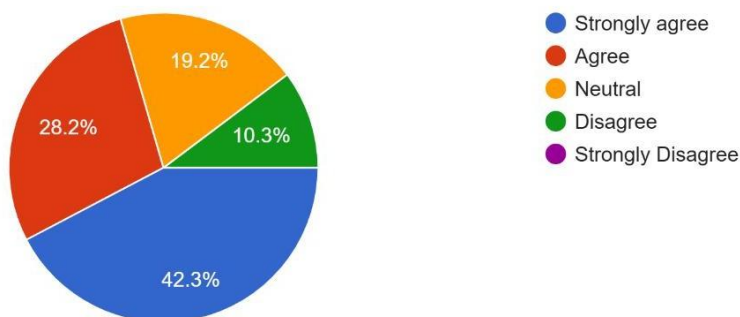
78 responses



4.2.6 No Regulation or Transparency

Tuition businesses set their own fees, increase prices without notice, provide no receipts or accountability, and operate without any oversight. This regulatory gap has allowed the tuition mafia to expand unchecked.

Coaching centres have become a “mafia.” Rate your agreement
78 responses

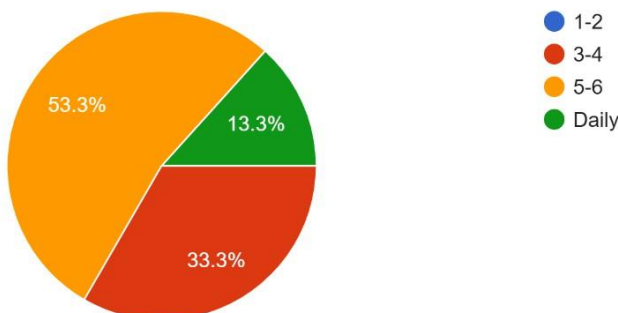


4.2.7 Psychological and Academic Pressure

Students attending 6–12 hours of tuition weekly report burnout, exhaustion, loss of leisure time, stress, and anxiety. This constant pressure demonstrates that tuition is no longer supportive; it is an oppressive system that pushes students beyond healthy limits.

How many days per week do you attend coaching?

15 responses

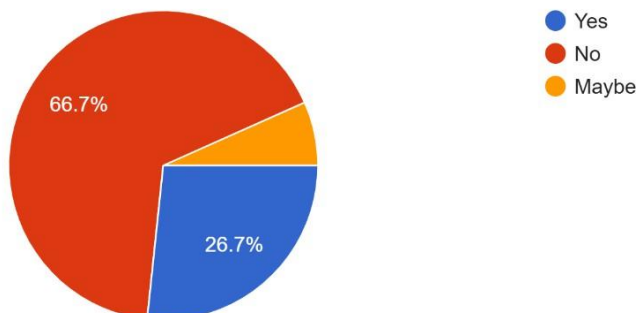


4.2.8 Fear-Based Marketing

Academies create a fear that school alone will not prepare students for exams that are too difficult without external help, and students who do not attend tuition will fall behind. This fear keeps students and parents tied to tuition, even when they don't need it or they cannot afford it. This pressure is at times also created by teachers, who urge students to join academies where they teach.

Do you feel pressured by teachers to join tuition?

15 responses

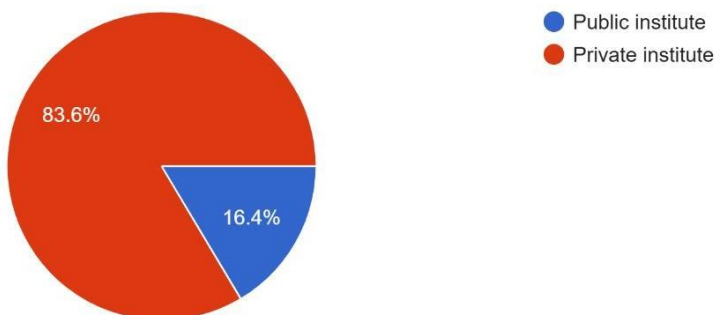


4.2.9 Quality of Teaching

Many believe that the quality of education in the private sector is higher than in the public sector. Engagement of the students and the overall discipline are also better in private educational centers. Students join private institutes for better exam preparation, as teacher support and attention are better.

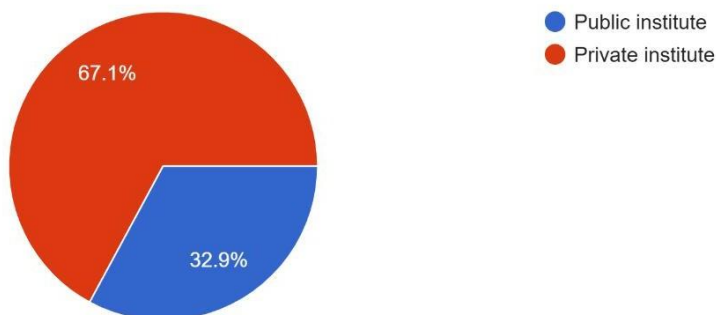
Quality of teaching

73 responses



Discipline

73 responses



5. Interviews

As a result of interviews conducted in the university among students who were

availing academies in their school and college, one student said:

I have never joined any academy during both A levels and olevels. However I went for a home tuition for chemistry in olevels and maths in AS for only a few months. All I can say from my experience is that what makes a true difference is the students' individual effort. The amount of resources available on social media etc for studying purposes now is enough for a student who works hard to achieve a grade and tuition isn't much necessary. From my own personal experience, I've learned more from YouTube channels in alevels than I ever did in both tuition and college.

Another said:

I had to hire a home tutor..who runs his own evening coaching center as well..just because my college instructors couldn't care less about whether any of thier students actually get what they were teaching.Their negligence made me hire a private tutor for my science subjects in college

One student, while talking about the workload, said:

The exhaustion from attending both school and tuition was typically negative for my scoring

5.1 Patterns Observed in Private vs Public Schools

It is observed that the rates of shadow education among private schools are higher than among public schools in Pakistan. For example, one study indicates that 34% of private schools had students in tuition compared to 17% of public-school students in Punjab state. Moreover, tuition outside of school has the potential to have a greater impact on learning for public school students using it than for private school students using it. There exists demand for both private and public schools based on the demand for individualized education, preparation for exams, and concerns about teacher absences in public schooling. Demand also in part exists because of higher rates of tuition in private schools, which contributes to the learning gap between private and public schools, especially in the area of English. Many of the people who teach in private tuition are also the teachers of the students in formal schools. This leads to consequences such as providing private tutors with content knowledge and credibility among the parents. Private tuition teachers may also be less inclined to teach rigorously during the school hours, especially when it is anticipated that

students are paying for the private sessions. Presence of private tuition can lead to monitoring and accountability relationships that can weaken the relationship between the school and family.

Most private schools are English medium; they tend to offer students private tuition at a higher rate, which effectively closes the achievement gap in English, while the divide in public (Urdu medium) schools is more obvious in Maths and Urdu. This creates a sort of duality in the system, where being proficient in English comes with a higher fee and Urdu-medium comes with state- funded, cheaper schooling. In general, English medium schools are private schools that charge fees and cater to wealthier families, while Urdu medium (public) schools are free and tend to cater to lower- and middle-income families. All in all, English medium schools are generally more prestigious and offer better job opportunities due to English proficiency.

5.2 Impact on Learning Outcomes

In terms of academic performance between different types of schools, some studies suggested that private schools have better results on average, while other studies reported that public school students were performing better than private school students in math and Urdu, potentially due to factors such as class size, teacher qualifications, and urban and rural differences. Students in public schools experienced larger class sizes, with an average of 41 compared to 19 in private schools, and this may have impacted the learning environment. In addition, although public school teachers had higher qualifications, they tended not to be present in classrooms and stay in their staff-rooms instead. Even if teachers were in front of the students, they did not seem to put in their best effort toward teaching the material. Public schools had the benefits of studying at school but did not maintain a consistent level, while private schools had good studying at the school, and the students mostly elect to have tuitions for better understanding of the concepts. Obtaining a higher grade is one of the most noticeable motivators provided for by literature. Interestingly, only private

school students were extremely driven by such motivation in contrast to public school students. Public school students were influenced by wanting to get better grades either from attending private tuition or from some intrinsic motivation, which compelled them to do so. Whereas, private school students opted for private tuition, based on goals driven as the better rewards will be and also for intrinsic motivation. Parents of the students attending private schools stated that private schools are extremely competitive and can offer quality education among their children. Education systems tend to lack confidence-based creative and moral education. Furthermore, the system prioritizes the achievement of 'marks' and more emphasis on the memorization for the purpose of exams, therefore taking away valuable time and resources from extra-curricular and non-academic development. The increasing reliance on private tuition or private tutoring particularly around shared subjects such as math and science demonstrates some degree of concern with creative playful abilities being neglected and not developed in the same way as academic abilities. The weaknesses in creative learning and moral education have not developed alternative frameworks and opportunities for learning to care 'for' and or 'about' the moral or creativity within the formal system itself, which borders a precarious positioning, but it remains under the social expectation of private tuition or private contractors, where the onus is placed on shadow education.

5.3 Socio-Economic Stratification

In urban areas, high and upper-middle class families regularly and routinely employ private tutoring. In peri-urban and rural areas, utilization is more varied depending on the availability of coaching centers and private tutors, but use is still widespread regardless of socioeconomic background. Access is highly inequitable: Wealthier families can afford frequent, high quality, sequential private tutors, coaches which carry the costs of test preparation, while poorer families cannot access or cannot afford cheaper lower quality coaching centers, or simply cannot afford to access

coaching at all. Thus, a regime is established such that those with higher income can secure additional coaching. Consequently, this sustains existing inequalities, as already wealthier students can secure advantages through tutoring and support that poorer students are excluded from. The demand for shadow education is induced by distrust in the formal system and desire for better educational outcomes, but supply of shadow education is confined by its cost. The rate of private tuition is considerably more pronounced for urban children than rural children, at 54% to just 11% of students, reflecting the density of wealth and demand in urban areas. The shadow education system enables and supports mechanisms that have a tendency to favor families that are already financially secure, which affirms and arguably widens the gap between the rich and the poor. Regular tutorial lessons are a major ongoing cost for many families. Even middle- income households are funding their children's tutorials as an investment into an opportunity for better mobility at a cost to the needs of the household. In addition to paying for school, it is a heavy burden to pay for tutoring to support their children for a better future. Parents feel compelled to invest in private tuition to ensure their children are not left behind academically as compared to other students in their class. Parents lack trust in the quality of education their children receive at public schools and that leads to parents investing in additional coaching. The unrelenting pressure on grades or test scores forces parents to invest in more tutoring and lessons, creating an unending cycle of competition between their peers.

5.4 Cultural and Parental Expectations

It is motivated by a mix of parental expectations to achieve academic success, the cultural focus on education and the competitive environment. Other factors such as individual attention, which in turn can be extended to the pressure on marriage and family reputation, also can lead to higher parental investment in private tuition. Parents tend to see education as a route to success and financial stability and therefore

have high expectations of their children in academic performance. Social pressure, in other words, where the dominance of shadow education among the group of peers may result in a feeling of need among parents to send their children to private tuition to remain competitive. It is also the environment that has caused the mind to be guided towards it and compelled to believe that unless the children take the tuition, he/she will fail to get good grades. Moreover, it assists in enhancing learning, and in among students of public schools, thus signaling where disparity in education system lies. In addition to the academic achievements, participation in English-medium shadow education might frequently be related to the achievement of certain social competencies, self-confidence, and a connection to a modern, if westernized, identity, especially among the elite. The Pakistani educational system is highly connected to the urge to learn English language that is regarded as a key to a prosperous life and corresponds to some westernized desires. The attitude that has been adopted by parents and society is such that unless a child pays tuition, he or she will not achieve good grades otherwise he or she cannot compete. Shadow education magnifies this rivalry and compulsion to memorize and score good grades on the children, which results in attention to passing the examinations instead of in-depth understanding.

5.5 Institutional and Policy Implications

The growth in shadow education may indicate systemic weaknesses in the formal education system-particularly, the perceived inability to deliver quality instruction and support for all students. This creates and deepens social inequality. The extra explicit financial and implicit time costs burden households, likely at the cost of other uses of their resources. Policy makers have to pay proper attention to improving the formal education system, increasing the funds for schools, and enhancing the performance of teachers. They should address socio-economic disparities that feed demand for private tutoring. Most of the students were highly demotivated by their learning and educational skills, respectively, and therefore became motivated to take

tuition. The overcrowded classrooms and revision/lack of preparation for board exams were also prominent themes, motivated primarily by tuition. The students in public schools were compelled to take tuition; however, private school students were intrinsically motivated to take tuition for improving and attaining better grades. Most students in public and private schools felt overwhelmed by their routines. They woke up early for school and stayed busy with activities until late at night. This often cost their time management and health. The government needs to tackle issues in the public schooling system and the larger education sector. Assessments should focus on higher-order thinking and continuous evaluation instead of relying on single high-stakes exams. Teacher pay and working conditions need improvement. Schools should closely monitor teacher attendance. Students should feel encouraged to voice their complaints. Classroom sizes should be kept between 30 and 35 students to allow teachers to give proper attention to each student. Public schools should promote routine tests, practice exams, and preparation schedules for board exams to foster competition between schools, both public and private.

6. Policy Analysis and Recommendations

6.1 Gaps in Current Policies

The education policies have not developed a pace that matches the exponential growth in private schooling and shadow education. The inconsistent quality assurance is one of the major gaps across provinces, highly accentuated after the devolution of education to the provincial governments through the 18th Amendment. Though it was meant for more responsiveness, decentralization has meant uneven standards of curriculum, teacher qualifications, and inspection across various jurisdictions Government of Pakistan 2017. This has resulted in increased disparities in learning quality across Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan. A second major issue is the inadequate regulation of monitoring fees by private schools themselves. Furthermore, there is a vast difference across the entire system in teacher

training and competencies, pedagogies applied, and overall curriculum quality. Due to the failure of the present examination system, most notably the wide-reaching coverage from the Cambridge O-Level across various private schools, to effectively keep track of these thousands of schools, vulnerable parents may be deterred, and the students may be prevented from learning as much as they can.

6.2 Proposed Recommendations

The quality improvement initiatives will thus focus on improving teacher performance and curriculum relevance in public schools. This has been proven to improve student learning since there is evidence showing that the former factor improves student achievement (Andrabi et al.,2008). In this direction, the provinces will need to develop a sound teacher assessment and support system and introduce transparent performance evaluation processes in order to cut down on private schooling. There is an urgent need to strengthen the oversight of the private sector. The provincial governments should outline the requirements for teacher competence and qualifications, financial transparency, and alignment of the curriculum in line with national learning outcomes. According to Bray(2013), private and shadow education can result in social inequalities if not well regulated. As such, the provinces should give monitoring authorities the legal powers necessary to impose penalties and sanctions. Thirdly, equal opportunity can be extended with the provision of scholarships, vouchers, or CCTs to students attending public and private schools. These incentives should be given special priority for poor households in combination with the monitoring of learning quality (Punjab Education Foundation, 2009). Such initiatives will ensure that all classes of income have equal access to quality schooling. Finally, it is vital that Pakistan brings formal/shadow learning systems under one policy framework. This requires a call to regulate tutoring centers across the country, giving minimum quality assurances. Clear policies about curriculum and teacher qualifications need to be followed as well as school environment. Regulations

of the ‘shadow education’ will bring clarity that can help the government decrease the financial burden that is caused to citizens.

6.3 Possible Reforms to Bridge the Divide

The community-driven school improvement models should be scaled up for long-term sustained improvement in quality, with a particular focus on parental involvement, teacher capacity, and student attendance. Community participation, according to the research undertaken by ASER Pakistan (2023), strengthens transparency, thus improving accountability in the schooling system. Thirdly, digital and hybrid models of learning have the potential to reduce regional inequities. Any digital interventions should focus on improving connectivity in remote and rural areas; this would enable students to reduce dependence on private schooling and thus give them equal learning opportunities.

7. Conclusion

The results of this research have shown that the education system in Pakistan is no longer determined by the formal schooling system, but rather by a broad and profound shadow education economy with the power, networks, and organization of a tuition mafia. What started as an add-on to academic assistance has turned into a strong parallel system, which now takes the center stage in the learning behaviors, academic standards, and family decision-making among socioeconomic classes. Its emergence cannot be linked to the long-standing ills of public education: bad governance, lack of teacher accountability, lack of adequate funding and haphazard curriculum implementations, all these combined to make families resort to the idea of having a private tutor as a means of necessity but not improvement.

The study proves that tuition dependency is not just a reaction to academic necessity but a larger cultural and economic change in which higher education becomes a commodity which is purchased, sold and competed over. Such a consumerist culture has compounded the process of social stratification, as more privileged families gain

an unfair advantage in getting access to high- quality coaching, preparation of exams and environments based on the English language, leaving low-income students with nothing but a lopsided and expensive system. The ensuing inequalities support privilege cycles which limit upward mobility opportunities and the gap between public and private schooling.

Further, the culture of tuition has transformed the dynamics of the classroom through creating conflicts of interest among the teachers, advancing fear-based marketing tactics and making it customary that formal schooling is not enough. Students are subjected to the increased pressure, protracted studying times, and mental stress, and parents must contend with the increased financial demands that put a strain on the household stability. All these trends are leading to a system in which grades, competition, and market results are given focus instead of actual learning, theoretical knowledge and total growth.

The tuition mafia cannot be overcome by just controlling coaching centers, it needs to restore life in the public education system by enhancing the teacher training system, creating real accountability, equal funding and curriculum reforms that encourage critical thinking as opposed to rote learning. Unless the policy sector takes another overhaul, and the general populace starts valuing education as not a purchasable merit, but as a right, Pakistan will only continue to institutionalize inequalities and destabilize the pillars of formal education sector.

In the end, the paper reaches the conclusion that to create a fair, effective, and accessible system, it is necessary to reform both formal and shadow education and be able to serve everybody, decrease the reliance on parallel systems, and increase the trust in education as a common good.

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