

Identifying the missing link between shadow education and academic success: Features of private supplementary tutoring in South Korea

Young Chun Kim, Michael McVey, and Jung-Hoon Jung

<https://doi.org/10.18296/cm.0048>

Abstract

Shadow education or private supplementary tutoring has become an international phenomenon as increasing numbers of students seek help beyond traditional schooling for academic achievement. The positive relationship between students' academic achievement and participation in shadow education has been previously reported. However, the manner in which shadow education practices can help students to gain and maintain higher academic achievement remains understudied. In response, this study explored the features of shadow education practices that may benefit the academic achievement of students, particularly those in South Korea but with relevance beyond the South Korean context. Using qualitative research methods, this study revealed that preview learning from/with private supplementary tutors, academic mastery learning of subject knowledge and skills, training skills for school exams, and solving students' individual learning difficulties through intensive coaching are contributing factors to improving academic achievement.

Introduction

Shadow education (SE), or private supplementary tutoring, has become increasingly popular in many countries around the world. It has traditionally been prevalent in Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, China, Hong Kong, and South Korea, and it is rapidly growing in the US, Canada, Germany, Sweden, and other European and Nordic nations (Baker, 2020; Byun & Kim, 2010; Entrich, 2017; Hallsén & Karlsson, 2019; Mori & Baker, 2010; OECD, 2012; Ozaki, 2015; Wiseman, 2013). Scholars have made efforts to explain its role, value, and contribution to academic success through quantitative

studies (Bray, 2011; Bray & Kwo, 2014; Byun & Park, 2012) and some qualitative studies (Ho & Wang, 2016; Kim, 2016; Lee & Zhou, 2015). Existing literature on the contribution of SE to students' academic success has found a positive relationship between the two (Byun & Park, 2012; Ho & Wang, 2016; Lee & Zhou, 2015; Ozaki, 2015); however, there is a dearth of research explaining how SE helps students' learning and their success in schooling. This qualitative study identifies pedagogical characteristics and practices of SE that support students' learning in relation to academic achievement, maintenance of higher school grades, and eventually student success in obtaining college admissions using South Korean cases.

It has been increasingly reported that SE is a contributing factor in the academic achievement of students. In Japan, Ozaki found that students valued attending *juku*, or after-school tutoring, to improve their academic performance and argued that "if education is all about academic achievement and results, *juku* can be a sole contributor" (2015, p. 245). Ozaki makes this extreme statement based on reviews of studies on the roles of *juku* for Japanese students and a new government-led collaboration permitting the use of public assistance for the use of *juku* for student academic achievement. In Germany, students engaging in private tutoring had better performance and motivational-affective variables compared to a non-tutored group (Entrich, 2014). In Australia, where the SE market is not as big as those in East Asian countries, governments use a voucher system to intervene in SE markets for students who are low achieving and/or living in poverty (Doherty & Dooley, 2018). In New Zealand, SE is prominent among students of Chinese communities (Ho & Wang, 2016). Tracing the history of Chinese community schools in Auckland from the 1960s, Ho and Wang (2016) conceive of SE as a "new wave" of education in New Zealand. In South Korea, where SE has been the most prominent, SE is considered as an indispensable component for students' academic achievement (Byun & Kim 2010; Lee, 2007; Kim & Jung, 2019a, 2019b; Kim et al., 2020). In the same vein, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report acknowledged the role of SE as a contributing factor for student achievement in some countries (OECD, 2012, p. 70). In this respect, David Baker (2020, p. 311), one of the trailblazers of the field of SE research, laments how "sociologically naïve" he was when he thought SE was a "cultural oddity" of East Asian countries. In the recent article, he argues that SE is "*inevitable*,

universal, and will likely continue to intensify into the foreseeable future” (2020, p. 311, emphasis in original).

Despite recognition of the importance of SE, how the specific practices of SE can be defined and characterised remain neglected, understudied, and under-recognised research areas (Kim, 2016; Wiseman, 2013). Bridging this research gap will broaden our understanding about the practical characteristics of SE. If it is the case that SE provides an effective supplementary and alternative learning space for students (Aurini & Davies, 2004) and it affects students’ achievement, then it should be the duty of educational researchers to explore the characteristics and practices of SE.

The intent of this qualitative study is to investigate the features of SE practices that may differ from practices used in traditional schooling and how these characteristics can help ensure students’ academic achievement in South Korea. The behaviourist foundations of instruction and the focus of SE institutions on academic achievement are acknowledged. The intention is not to argue whether SE or particular forms of SE are good or bad, nor to argue the relative merits or balance between academic and social functions in education. Rather, the aim is to better understand the features of SE that support students’ academic achievement. The research questions include: What characteristics of SE practices make it effective for student learning in public schooling? How are SE practices similar to or different from those of schooling? What do Korean students experience when learning in SE space? What meanings do Korean students give to their learning in SE? This study contributes to understanding the essential features of SE and its effectiveness by clarifying characteristics of SE practices that may not have been considered in existing research regarding achievement. Overall, the findings will expand current discourse about SE and may reveal why it is rapidly expanding worldwide (Baker, 2020).

The landscape of shadow education in South Korea: Its history, culture, controversies, and intensity

South Korea has had a long tradition of SE (Kim, 2016). In its modernised form, called *hakwon*, it appeared in the late Joseon Dynasty (late 1800s). The first hakwons were “Youth Schools, institutions like schools, Youth

Academies, and various part-time hakwons in Jongro 1, Seoul, which were founded by the Hwang-Sang Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), established in 1903" (Kim, 2016, p. 15). After the Korean War, hakwon education quickly became popular in the country as student numbers increased due to the implementation of compulsory education in 1954. It continued to grow, in part, due to the prosperity of households in the 1960s.

SE continued to gain popularity as parents enthusiastically pursued improved grades, admission to upper-level schools and universities, and, ultimately, social success for their children. Obtaining a diploma from prestigious universities has been arguably one of the more important drivers for SE which is called *hakbeoilism*, a cultural mindset of credentialism (Jung, 2016). Many Korean parents prioritised their children's education in the hope that their children would lead better lives than they had amidst war and poverty (Park & Paik, 2020). Parents who promoted SE simply desired that their children bolster their own human capital, achieve academic goals, and raise their children as well as they can (Hong & Park, 2019).

From the perspective of South Korean governmental policy, SE has not always been held in high esteem. At times, SE has been described as a "social evil" (Kim, 2016, p. vii) needing to be tightly controlled or abolished. The Jung Hee Park government of the 1970s legislated a prohibition of SE (Kim, 2016). Additional policies to reduce familial expenditure on SE were inaugurated thereafter which reduced educational inequality (Park & Paik, 2020). However, despite governmental attempts to control it, SE survived by becoming hidden and expensive. In 2000, the Constitutional Court judged that the prohibition of SE was unconstitutional. Since then, SE began to proliferate in earnest (Kim, 2016). Worldwide, South Korea has the highest participation rate in SE. In 2016, more than 70% of Korean students participated in SE, with families estimated to have spent 18.1 trillion won (USD\$16.6 billion) (Statistics Korea, 2018).

Some scholars have attributed the high rates of SE in South Korea to Korean Confucian values (Lee, 2003; Kim, 2016), where educational achievement and qualifications are a major route to personal and family advancement (Jung, 2016). Educational competition among Korean students is intense and has been described using terms such as "education fever" (Seth, 2002) and "examination hell" (Kim, 2016). However, some scholars have criticised

this simple association between learning and Confucian culture. Sorensen observed that children “are motivated to work for educational success in South Korea by prospects for concrete success in the workaday world” (1994, p. 34). Additionally, within such a competitive educational culture and system, many Korean students engage in SE because they believe that learning in traditional schools is insufficient to achieve their academic goals (Kim & Jung, 2019b; Kim et al., 2020).

In addition, many Korean students favour SE and its educators over public education. The student perception of SE is that it provides better learning opportunities for individuals through a variety of different approaches such as intensive review of course material, preparation for upcoming exams, patient and encouraging instruction, and individual feedback, which are not always available in public schooling (Je, 2002; Kim, 2003). The results of the surveys indicate that many Korean students think they can learn better at hakwons while being cared for by the instructors through intimate academic relationships with them. This statement should not imply that school teachers are worse than hakwon instructors but that there are also many teaching figures who genuinely care for the education of students in South Korea. A study by the Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI), with the goal of supporting national public education enterprises, found that high school students evaluated SE as providing a better quality education than public schools in every area: demonstrating subject expertise; understanding students’ intellectual needs; and providing satisfying classes (Choi, 2009). Students’ responses were made based on their level of understanding of subject content knowledge and quality of feedback they got from hakwon instructors. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, Yang and Kim (2010) also found that many Korean students considered public schooling as secondary to their SE experiences, noting that there is a “phenomenon of inverted roles between public education and shadow education” (Yang & Kim, 2010, p. 117). This inversion of roles meant that the student participants in the study did their learning in hakwons and used their time at school for resting, doing hakwon homework, and cementing relationships with friends.

All identified forms of SE are available in South Korea (Kim & Jung, 2019a, 2019b): private tutoring institutes; home-visit private tutoring; internet-based private tutoring; subscribed learning programmes; and after-school

programmes. In 2017, South Korea had more than 80,000 *hakwons*, school-like private tutoring institutes (Statistics Korea, 2018). Internet-based private tutoring is the newest form of SE and growing the most rapidly because it allows students and tutoring companies to overcome geographical and temporal barriers. Internet-based private tutoring companies may provide students with learning materials in conjunction with pre-recorded lectures on school subjects, extracurricular activities, and exam preparation documents; they may also provide one-to-one counselling and guidance via telephone and SMS. Overall, South Korean students and their parents can choose to purchase SE in a variety of different forms.

Many South Korean parents are desperate to ensure the absolute best learning opportunities for their children and actively contribute to their children's learning and academic success (Lee et al., 2014; Park et al., 2015). Prioritising children's education over other matters of families is deeply rooted in Korean culture, especially in a mother's devotion to the education of her children. As an example, one of the most famous iconic figures in Korean culture is that of Mencius' mother, Zhang. As a single mother, she raised Mencius, later a famous disciple of Confucius, and moved three times until she found the most suitable learning environment for her son. Her devotion is embodied in one of the most famous traditional Chinese four-character idioms, 孟母三遷 (*mèngmǔ-sānqiān*) or "mother who moved three times". In the Korean culture, the most valuable inheritance parents can pass down to their children is good educational opportunities. In addition to having a fervent desire for children's academic success, such mothers will gather information and share it with others who take managing children's lives as students as a serious full-time job. Such active engagement has developed into a social meme known as the "Gangnam mom" which refers to an overly solicitous mother who micro-manages her child's daily life by engaging in "dynamic and vigorous pursuit of education-related information that will help their child excel in academics" (Park et al., 2015, p. 1). Recently, a new term has emerged in Korea, "mother pig", which refers to such a leading mother who "has information about good *hakwons*, strategies to enter certain schools, and skilled tutors" (Kim, 2016, p. 178). Lee and his colleagues explored the effects of parenting behaviours on children's academic achievement in South Korea and concluded that parental involvement has "a significant positive effect on academic achievement ... especially for low-income groups" (2014, p. 165).

Many scholars reported that SE has a positive impact on student achievement (Hwang & Won, 2017; Kim, 2016). Kim (2016) conducted a longitudinal ethnographic study in Korea on the effects of SE on mathematics and English achievement and found that SE had positive effects in both subjects. Based on his participant observation on SE practices and interviews with students, Kim concluded that most of the middle school and high school student participants in the study replied that they saw their grades increase with the help of SE as well as preparation for the Korean Scholastic Ability Test (KSAT) and university admissions. Kim (2016) also found that hakwons meet students' individual academic needs and demands by providing various learning options in terms of what, where, and how to learn (also see Park et al., 2015). Still, research focusing on educational policy tends to treat SE as being on the periphery of legitimate learning and education, and as something that undermines the value of public education (Byun & Kim, 2010). Given the high participation rates and reliance on SE and its perceived effectiveness, a comprehensive understanding of education in South Korea today requires incorporating learning within SE spaces.

Research methods

This study takes qualitative and interpretive approaches (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) to research design and analysis. This study was conducted from March 2018 to February 2019 in South Korea. We framed students, SE instructors, and parents as agents who actively engage with the social construction of their culture as we explored their experiences within the educational context (Elder, 1974). We used snowball sampling to recruit participants and research sites; this approach was useful because unwillingness to participate in studies about SE has been one of the biggest challenges in conducting SE research (Dawson, 2010).

We employed participant observation, semistructured interviews, and document analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Participant observation (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) helped clarify how participants communicated with one another and yielded rich descriptions of events, behaviours of participants, and artefacts within SE settings. For this mode of observation, we video-recorded 50 hour-long classes at 10 private tutoring institutes, 20 hours of *gwaoe* (private tutoring) lessons, and 20 hours of internet-based private tutoring. Semistructured interviews included open-ended questions

with all participants. For this mode of observation, we adapted Patton's (2002) method of sequencing questions by asking questions intended to provide direct answers to the research questions along with follow-up questions to obtain richer data. We conducted these interviews with 18 students from grades 7 through 12, 15 private tutoring instructors, 10 principals of private tutoring institutes, and five parents. We also used document analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Document analysis included reviews of statistics about SE provided by the Korea Association of Hakwon (KAH), postings by students and parents on the websites of SE institutions, curricula of private tutoring institutes, various teaching and learning materials used in SE practices, and students' portfolios and learning diaries.

We used thematic analysis for data analysis (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017). We first transcribed all the interviews and made field notes out of the recorded videos and participant observations. The generated data includes 353 pages of interview transcriptions, 157 pages of field notes out of participant observations, and many printed and online documents. Two of the authors first read and reread the interview transcripts, field notes, and various documents for familiarisation with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Then, we coded to generate initial codes indicating students' experience and characteristics of SE practices, especially regarding how it helps students' learning. Next, we looked over the created codes to identify patterns and themes among them. Reviewing the themes, we triangulated the data and the codes using investigator triangulation and data source triangulation. Triangulating the data, we attempted to ensure "a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility" (Eisner, 2017, p. 110) and prevent bias due to use of a single method or a single investigator (Patton, 2002). Data analysis was ongoing and recursive and was informed by the existing literature about data collection and emerging interpretations. Over the process of data analysis, the focus is on finding the strategies, characteristics, and mechanisms of SE practices that help students with obtaining higher achievement.

Four characteristics of South Korean students' learning in SE

Our thematic analysis revealed four themes that characterise SE practices for Korean students' learning and academic success in South Korea. They include: 1) preview learning from/with private tutors; 2) academic mastery learning of subject knowledge and skills; 3) training skills for

school exams; and 4) resolving students' learning problems and difficulties through intensive coaching. In presenting the findings, we use quotes from participants to illustrate key points in the interpretation of the qualitative data in the thematic analysis. All the names of research participants in this section are pseudonyms, for ethical reasons. The qualitative data we present in this article best represent the characteristics of SE practices with regard to the research questions. We acknowledge that there are multiple aspects and voices that cannot be easily subsumed into the four aspects. However, in the discussion, we tried to incorporate multiple aspects of the SE practices.

Preview learning from/with private supplementary tutors

Preview learning is called *sunhanghaksup* in Korean (*sunhang* means to precede and *haksup* means learning). To engage preview learning, Korean students learn subject matter from SE instructors prior to learning it from school teachers. Preview learning is provided by different forms of SE such as hakwon, gwaoe, and internet-based private tutoring. Preview learning is a relatively new feature of SE in South Korea as the earlier forms of SE were called *bosup-hakwon*, an abbreviation for *bo-chung-hak-sup* or "learning for remediation". Today, the purpose of SE is moving away from remediation toward acceleration, an important change in the use of SE. Despite it being a relatively new feature, preview learning is a distinctive and common feature of SE. In fact, Lee and Lee (2015) found that 90% of high school students in their study population engaged in SE preview learning. This kind of learning does not include voluntary and self-directed preview learning in preparation for school learning. The purpose of preview learning is primarily to prepare students for what they will learn in upcoming school semesters. Preview learning is provided during vacations. During a period of about 4 weeks, students learn the basics of what they are going to learn in upcoming school semesters. They learn the basic concepts and ideas that will make it easier for them to learn in school. As Minji, a 9th grader, said, "Because I have learned it already from my instructor, I can understand better the teachers' instruction." Minji's response is not exceptional.

English-language hakwons employ level-based classes, which allows for more effective instruction (Lee et al., 2014). Each level-based class uses learning materials specifically designed for the students' academic level,

often developed by hakwon instructors. The instructors mostly have teacher certificates and some of them have a Master's or PhD in Education or specific subject areas. Instructors teach the fundamental knowledge of reading, writing, grammar, and speaking; some of which are difficult to learn in traditional schooling due to time limitations (Lee et al., 2014). Importantly, SE instructors engaging in preview learning try to balance these elements, because most students have weakness and strengths. At the beginning of every class, SE instructors provide each student with a brief 5-minute test to evaluate whether students understand what they had learnt in the previous lesson. Students mark their own tests and resolve incorrect items with their peers. If they do not understand something, they ask the instructor. Then, the instructor provides them with additional explanation, another test, and often arranges a learning counselling session or self-directed learning session where individual learning coaching is provided by assigned SE instructors.

Preview learning builds confidence about school learning and many students feel that it reduces their burden of school learning. When we asked if students lose interest in their school lessons, for example, a student's response was, "Do I lose my interest? No, I feel more motivated because I know it a bit and I can participate in class activities with confidence" (Hyujung, a 10th grader). Such responses are in stark opposition to the common perception that SE increases student workload (Bray, 2011; Yamamoto & Brinton, 2010). Some researchers have argued that SE preview learning hampers teaching and learning in school classrooms because students become bored and lose interest (Song, 2012). As a result, the Korean government treated preview learning as a problem. In 2014, it implemented a Prohibition of Preview Teaching policy, which forbids preview learning within schools and out of school. Still, SE providers continue to offer preview learning and students continue to access it because they believe it helps them to learn better. Minsu, an 11th grader, told us that "the policy is ridiculous. How dare can they think of controlling me what to learn when to learn. I want to learn in advance. In that way, I do better at school classes and school exams." Minsu is not an exception. In fact, many student participants felt that preview learning helped them learn better and perform better during school exams.

Preview learning helps activate students' "advanced organizers" (Ausubel et al., 1968). The purpose of preview learning is not to "master" all targeted content but instead to prepare students better for learning in upcoming semesters by focusing on making an effective linkage between what students learnt in the past semesters and what they are going to learn in upcoming semesters. SE instructors purposefully teach students in ways that help them connect new concepts and ideas with those they already know. School teachers do that, too, yet student participants told us that SE instructors do this more intensely; for example and as explained by one student, "while schoolteachers do that too briefly, my hakwon teachers do it very thoroughly, carefully checking my level of understanding every time" (Sunin, a 10th grader). Robert Marzano (2007) discussed the significance of previewing in detail in his book, *The Art and Science of Teaching*. He argued that previewing can be particularly useful because it links updated content with previously taught content. When a student is unable to make this link, SE instructors, as far as we have observed, help identify what is missing and teach the student how to make the connection.

Students may not be able to master the content by relying only on school teachers (Kim, 2016). The intense competition for admission into prestigious schools and universities is another driver for SE preview learning. Many Korean students and their parents aggressively seek the best instructors, tutors, and hakwons for preview learning and, in some cases, students preview material that they may not cover in school for one or more years. By learning the material earlier than they would in school, Korean students seem to become more confident and less stressed about learning at school as Ryu (2014) argued and as our participants testified. Korean students and parents consider SE preview learning to be a normal and effective part of education.

Academic mastery learning of subject knowledge and skills

Another characteristic of SE practice is to master subject knowledge and skills through traditional and behaviourist approaches to teaching and learning such as repetition and practice. The SE practice for mastery learning is rooted in the Korean educational culture (Lau, 1996). Traditionally, when Koreans learn something, they read and reread the text to interpret the meaning. They will often read the text aloud and verbalise what they learn and understand.

The idea is to persist until the text is mastered and until the student can clearly verbalise his or her understanding. This kind of Confucian educational culture is also observed in other Asian countries such as China (Lau, 1996), Hong Kong (Tang, 1991), and Japan (Hess & Azuma, 1991).

As Bloom (1956) theorised, mastery learning is one of the keys for academic achievement by increasing time spent on learning. Mastery learning in SE involves the systematic reinforcement of subject knowledge via repetition and practice, based on the idea that “learning involves encoding and retrieval of information and requires practice and repetition” (Williams & Harkness, 2018, p. 87). Repetition is a vital part of the learning process and Bruner (2000, p. 1) argued that “repetition is the first principle of all learning”. Repetitive learning is a recursive process of reading and rereading textbooks, reviewing what has been learnt before, solving test questions, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and improving test-taking skills. Throughout the entire process, SE instructors thoroughly and firmly instruct and guide students using various teaching–learning materials. Repetitive learning is thought to improve retention through repeated exposure to knowledge (Ebbinghaus, 1913; Marzano, 2007). It does not simply involve memorisation, which is avoided or considered secondary or obsolete, within the progressive competency-based curriculum (Bellanca & Brandt, 2010). However, from the behaviourist view, it is “a route to understanding” (Hess & Azuma, 1991, p. 6). The repetitive learning in Korean SE appears to activate what Tang (1991) conceptualised as “deep memorizing”. It can be characterised as a reciprocal activation between memorisation and understanding; understand, then memorise, then understand, then memorise.

Deep memorisation is made possible by the systemic approach of SE providers. SE instructors thoroughly and systematically make the main ideas and topics accessible to students. Again, it does not mean that school teachers do not also do this as well. What we can say, though, is that memorisation practice has been de-emphasised in South Korean schools as it has recently been conceived as an obsolete practice or forceful teaching against students’ will or their enjoyment, from a progressive education perspective (Kim, 2016). While memorisation practice is avoided in public schooling, it is aggressively applied in SE as far as we learnt in this study.

All hakwons work for mastery learning, usually using the phases of preview learning (discussed above), review learning, and core-arrangement learning. Review learning starts at the beginning of school semesters and helps students master the content of the school curriculum. For example, math hakwons review what they have taught in the preview learning phase and assess each student's knowledge. Based on this assessment, instructors may provide remedial or accelerated sessions, extra coaching sessions, and/or extra homework. Together with students, instructors will identify reasons for gaps in knowledge, such as deficits in prior learning, misconceptions about core concepts, or lack of effort. Students who have grasped the material are provided with more advanced content.

Core-arrangement learning is strongly focused on exam preparation. It maximises learning efficiency to increase students' grades within a brief period of time—a couple of weeks or a month. Core-arrangement learning has two goals: 1) to consolidate what students have learnt in preview and review learning; and 2) to improve students' test-taking abilities. For the first goal, SE instructors provide students with a condensed summary of the core contents of each subject. Students are encouraged to take these summaries everywhere they go and review them whenever possible. For the second goal, SE instructors keep records of the exams from each student's school. They are fully aware of the history, trends, and styles of exams given in specific schools, even by specific teachers, and know what material is central and what is peripheral. They focus their core-concentrated instruction on what is most needed for school exams. For example, as school exams approach, students at a math hakwon solve problems as many times as necessary until they master the content and improve their test-taking strategies. SE instructors analyse and provide feedback on these mock tests so that students know their own weaknesses and strengths. SE providers have a database of questions either developed by themselves or provided by the franchise headquarters. This repetitive test-taking continues until the day before school exams. Internet-based private tutoring also involves review learning, but this is more self-directed. Students can access online courses as many times as they want. If they do not understand the material, they identify what they are missing and review previous lectures to address this gap. Online test-taking practice sessions provide an instant analysis of a student's test results and make suggestions about what the student should review.

Training skills for school exams

Training skills for school exams is another feature of SE practice in South Korea. SE instructors equip students with knowledge and test-taking skills for school exams and the Korean Scholastic Ability Test (KSAT). SE instructors provide intensive preparation for school exams from 2 or 3 weeks before the upcoming school exams until the day before the exam. Achieving higher grades on exams is one of the major reasons that students engage in SE in South Korea (Kim & Jung, 2019a, 2019b). In South Korea, school grades are a vital part of university and high school selection systems. High school *naesin*, grades on school exams, are crucial as the most decisive criterion for university admissions. Under recent university selection policies and selection systems, 70% to 80% of university students are selected primarily based on their *naesin*. Additionally, prestigious high schools select students based on their middle school *naesin*.

The desire to obtain good test results is deeply embedded in Korean history and culture. Meritocracy is the idea that people should be selected based on their ability and the *gwageo*, a state examination used to recruit high-ranking officials, was first implemented in 958 AD (Lee, 2003). This recruiting system ended in 1894, but despite the official abolition of the *gwageo*, Korean culture continues to value good test results. Within this context, and the competitive educational system, Korean students are eager to obtain SE to prepare for school exams. As discussed above, *hakwons* collect exams from each student's school and use these to decide what material is central and peripheral for each student. SE instructors also often check students' notebooks and textbooks to identify what school teachers emphasise. By learning what material is central and peripheral, students can approach exam preparation strategically to ensure higher grades. This approach can be called school-oriented exam preparation.

The biggest difference between traditional schools and SE institutes in terms of exam preparation is the many practice tests given in SE. School teachers focus more on teaching content, while SE instructors are more focused on helping students find the correct answers to exam questions. This emphasis is because if *hakwons* fail to raise grades, students may quit and move to another *hakwon*. They provide students with practice questions to familiarise them with all types of questions. SE institutes have what they call a "question

bank” which is a large database of exam questions. As a result of their large numbers, franchised SE providers are stronger in relation to gathering and developing question databases, but even individual tutors have their own question banks. Table 1 shows the types of workbooks that are used in SE and how these workbooks focus on examination-type questions and skills for answering questions.

Table 1. Types and characteristics of workbooks to be used in hakwons

Types of workbook	Subjects	Purposes/Characteristics
Basic Concept Workbook	Korean, Social Studies, Science	To provide detailed explanations of core/basic concepts To be called “book of basics” To provide fundamental question-solving skills To be used for students who are left behind
Question Bank Workbook	Mathematics, English Grammar	To include thousands of exam questions To provide various types of questions To be used for students who obtained basic concepts
Sample Questions Book	All subjects	To provide analysis of sample questions of each subjects To provide questions in the order of frequency To master targeted contents and basic level of question-solving skills
Advanced Question Workbook	Korean, English, Mathematics	To be used by academically advanced and gifted students To provide various alternative question-solving approaches that are often not introduced by official textbooks of schooling

Following the logic of practice makes perfect, most Korean students solve as many questions as possible over the course of exam preparation. Instructors analyse the results of practice tests to find each student’s strengths and weaknesses. For example, if a student lacks basic understanding of core concepts, he or she will be guided to study the basic workbook again. If a student masters all the basics, he or she would be guided toward advanced levels. Nowadays, they may also use smartphone applications to identify areas of strength and weakness for each student. Each page of the workbooks has a QR code linked to the hakwon’s database. Once students or instructors

submit a picture of the code and students' answers, the system instantly shows the analysis of the students' learning. Such analytic data is shared by instructors who teach the students, students themselves, and their parents.

Another important aspect of learning for test-taking is developing test-taking skills. Some school teachers often avoid this type of instruction because they believe that teaching test-taking skills is not desirable or may confound a school's ability to distinguish between high and low achievers on exams (Park & Kim, 2012). For this reason, school teachers may choose to focus on teaching content rather than test-taking skills. This aspect of school instruction is what student participants complained about the most. Suhee, an 11th grader, told us that:

school teachers do not teach us how to strategically take the exams. They only give us exams and tests. Yet, my tutors specifically teach me how to approach school exams and how to solve certain types of questions. Following their instruction not only saves me a lot of time in exams but raises my test scores.

However, SE instructors are aware that getting higher grades on exams requires more than subject knowledge. Hee-jung, a math hakwon instructor, said that:

many students, especially low achievers, often lack strategic thinking skills in terms of how to approach solving mathematical questions. Thus, I spend much time teaching them how to decide what kinds of problem-solving strategies to be used for given questions.

Hee-jung's hakwon has developed a systemic five-step question-solving procedural strategy: 1) identify what needs to be found; 2) identify provided conditions; 3) find answers; 4) check what should be considered; and 5) find alternative approaches. Overall, by exposing students to many questions with various types of content and levels of difficulty, SE helps students reach a state such that as soon as they see an exam question, they almost intuitively know how to solve it. In the KSAT, students are expected to solve questions within one minute. Being equipped with such strategies saves time for students during exams, allowing them to spend more time on questions that are difficult or unfamiliar.

Solving students' learning problems and difficulties through intensive coaching

This feature of SE is to provide students with individualised strategies to solve individual difficulties and problems regarding their learning. This approach is based on understanding that various factors such as learning motivation, self-concept, confidence, as well as peer and parent relationships function interrelatedly over the course of students' learning. Thus, SE instructors use intensive coaching to understand individual students' characteristics and circumstances such as their aptitude, relationship problems, self-concepts, and so on. Based on this understanding, SE instructors tightly guide students to solve or overcome the possible barriers that might dampen their learning. This approach is not simply to provide a specific method related to obtaining knowledge, but one that is more related to helping students deal with their emotional and psychological stability by promoting active learning, increasing self-concept, and maintaining motivation. The three components are related in terms of their functionalities as the latter two are essential for the first.

The coaching begins with increasing the self-concept of students in setting goals based on understanding their intellectual abilities, emotional states, academic records, and relationship problems. SE instructors help students identify situations that might dampen students' learning. SE instructors gather as much information as they can about individual students, through various tests such as intelligence tests, cognitive ability tests, psychological tests, and aptitude tests as well as counselling sessions in which they identify students' goals, learning difficulties, and issues with families and friends. A portfolio containing accumulated information for each student is used not only for the instructors, but also for the students' own activation of meta-cognitive abilities. Promotion of self-concept is purposefully pursued through counselling sessions. For example, hakwons regularly provide counselling to check students' progress and identify challenges. Counselling sessions may focus on many issues: learning skills, test-taking skills, and peer relationship at hakwons and schools. Hakwon instructors will help students deal with any issues that may affect learning.

Such coaching usually involves four aspects. First, motivational coaching is used to increase and sustain learning motivation. SE instructors help students shape specific short- and long-term goals. Student abilities are

thoroughly assessed using tests, survey results, and data from interviews. Second, coaching exposes students to alternative learning approaches. SE instructors review the work of each student and then make suggestions about alternate approaches. This individual feedback is highly effective as Kim (2016) argued. It helps students rethink their approach to learning and expand their problem-solving capacity. Suhee, a 10th grader, told us:

The coaching I had helped me with understanding why my learning was not effective and how I got the wrong answers of certain types of questions. Once I changed my learning habit and ways of notetaking, I got my grades up. Importantly, the coaching helped me find my own ways of learning. That is the most important I think.

Thirdly, psychological coaching is used to improve emotional and psychological stability. SE instructors try to reduce any barriers for students. For example, swearing-in ceremonies and parties help students feel that they belong to a community and can reduce the psychological burden involved while learning. In the ceremony, as we observed, many students shared their goals, challenges, and fatigues. Such a self-disclosing event provoked much empathy and emotional support among the students. In that way, they appear to develop a sense of belonging although each has different goals. Finally, self-evaluation coaching is used to develop meta-cognitive abilities of students. They are asked to assess their own learning preferences and strategies and provide suggestions to instructors regarding how to improve their own productivity and achievement. For example, students are asked to identify knowledge gaps, learning difficulties, and how to resolve the challenges.

Such coaching leaves “a positive impact on students’ social-emotional adjustment, self-efficacy and confidence, and conflict resolution skills” (Bae et al., 2010, p. 351). The holistic coaching is the element that students in the study do not appear to get from schooling. This finding should not be interpreted to mean that school teachers do not provide emotional supports and coaching for students. Yet, it seems that students do not get the same intensity of coaching in schools, as many student participants testified. For example, Minu says, “the time and intimacy of coaching I get at hakwons ... I had never got it in schooling. I know school teachers care for me, but they are always busy.” Through the intensive coaching practices, SE instructors closely help and guide students with achieving their academic goals.

Conclusion

This study explored the under-recognised relation between SE and Korean students' academic success. It revealed four main elements of SE practices. All these elements are related to improving scores on their school exams with good grades in school being crucial for academic success in South Korea. The findings also shed light on the learning culture in which SE is rooted, which has, as schooling does, ramifications for the broader society and individuals.

This article should not be interpreted as uncritical praise for SE, but as an opportunity to rethink schooling. SE has been criticised for increasing educational inequality, but the findings of this study highlight the need for scholars and teachers to consider the viewpoints of students and their parents regarding learning, achievement, and academic success. Understanding the characteristics of SE practices may provide alternatives for instructional and curriculum reform of schools. This study has provided an alternative to the body of quantitative research on SE as most previous research on SE has focused on identifying the causal relation between SE and students' academic success. This prior research has neglected to consider the curricular characteristics of SE practices, which can provide a richer and fuller understanding about what and how students learn through their engagement with SE. For instance, the four features of SE practices can be used as variables for quantitative research on the effectiveness of SE for students' academic achievement.

Given the situation as Entrich (2017, p. ix) has argued, that SE has "the potential to become indispensable for a national system of education", we suggest further analysis of unexpected outcomes of such learning culture; for example, the experiences of students and how these influence academic success and development. Additionally, this study primarily focused on the Korean context and we await more research on the characteristics of student learning in the SE sector of other countries around the world. The findings are specific to South Korea, but the focus on the role of SE and efficacy of instructional practices that support examination preparation and academic achievement have wider relevance because SE is an international phenomenon.

References

- Alvesson, M., & Sköldbberg, K. (2017). *Reflexive methodology: New vistas for qualitative research*. Sage.
- Aurini, J., & Davies, S. (2004). The transformation of private tutoring: Education in a franchise form. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 29(3), 419–438. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cjs.2004.0031>
- Ausubel, D. P., Novak, J. D., & Hanesian, H. (1968). *Educational psychology: A cognitive view*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Bae, S., Oh, H., Kim, H., Lee, C., & Oh, B. (2010). The impact of after-school programs on educational equality and private tutoring expenses. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 11(3), 349–361. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-010-9088-y>
- Baker, D. P. (2020). An inevitable phenomenon: Reflections on the origins and future of worldwide shadow education. *European Journal of Education*, 55(3), 311–315. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12410>
- Bellanca, J., & Brandt, R. (Eds.). (2010). *21st century skills: Rethinking how students learn*. Solution Tree Press.
- Bloom, B. S. (1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives: Cognitive domain*. New York, NY: David McKay.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Bray, M. (2011). *The challenge of shadow education: Private tutoring and its implications for policy makers in the European Union*. European Commission.
- Bray, M., & Kwo, O. (2014). *Regulating private tutoring for public good: Policy options for supplementary education in Asia*. UNESCO.
- Bray, M., & Lykins, C. (2012). *Shadow education private supplementary tutoring and its implications for policy makers in Asia*. Asian Development Bank.
- Bruner, R. (2000). *Repetition is the first principle of all learning*. University of Virginia Darden School Foundation.
- Byun, S. Y., & Kim, K. K. (2010). The effects of afterschool participation on shadow education demand at the lower secondary level in Korea. *Korean Journal of Educational Sociology*, 20(3), 51–81. <https://doi.org/10.32465/ksocio.2010.20.3.003>
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed.). Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452230153>
- Dawson, W. (2010). Private tutoring and mass schooling in East Asia: Reflections of inequality in Japan, South Korea, and Cambodia. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 11(1), 14–24. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-009-9058-4>
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. Sage.
- Doherty, C., & Dooley, K. (2018). Responsibilising parents: The nudge towards shadow tutoring. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 39(4), 551–566. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2017.1377600>

- Ebbinghaus, H. (1913). *Memory: A contribution to experimental psychology*. Teachers College, Columbia University. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10011-000>
- Eisner, E. W. (2017). *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice*. Teachers College Press.
- Elder, G. H. (1974). Time, human agency, and social change: Perspective on the life course. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 57(1), 4–15. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2786971>
- Entrich, S. R. (2014). German and Japanese education in the shadow—Do out-of-school lessons really contribute to class reproduction? *IAFOR Journal of Education*, 2(2), 17–53. <https://doi.org/10.22492/ije.2.2.01>
- Entrich, S. R. (2017). *Shadow education and social inequalities in Japan: Evolving patterns and conceptual implications*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-69119-0>
- Hallsén, S., & Karlsson, M. (2019). Teacher or friend?—consumer narratives on private supplementary tutoring in Sweden as policy enactment. *Journal of Education Policy*, 34(5), 631–646. doi:10.1080/02680939.2018.1458995
- Hess, R. D., & Azuma, M. (1991). Cultural support for schooling: Contrasts between Japan and the United States. *Educational Researcher*, 20(9), 2–8. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X020009002>
- Ho, A. H., & Wang, Y. (2016). A Chinese model of education in New Zealand. In C. P. Chou & J. Spangler (Eds.), *Chinese education models in a global age* (pp. 193–206). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-0330-1_14
- Hong, H. M., & Park, M. H. (2019). The perception of elementary and middle school parents' hagwon culture. *Journal of Education & Culture*, 25(3), 477–505. <https://doi.org/10.24159/joec.2019.25.3.477>
- Hwang, M.-Y., & Won, H.-H. (2017). The effects of learning clinic program on cognitive processing styles for learning maladjusted children. *The Korean Society Fisheries and Sciences Education*, 29(3), 909–919. <https://doi.org/10.13000/JFMSE.2017.29.3.909>
- Je, M. J. (2002). *An analysis on preference of the trend toward SE*. [Master's thesis, Hongik University].
- Jung, J.-H. (2016). *The concept of care in curriculum studies*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315676258>
- Kim, M. S. (2003). Private institute education: Competition and anxiety of the South Korean middle class. *Korean Journal of Sociology of Education*, 13(3), 67–87.
- Kim, Y. C. (2016). *Shadow education and the curriculum and culture of schooling in South Korea*. Palgrave MacMillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-51324-3>
- Kim, Y. C., & Jung, J.-H. (2019a). Conceptualizing shadow curriculum: Definition, features, and the changing landscapes of learning cultures. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 51(2), 141–161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2019.1568583>
- Kim, Y. C., & Jung, J.-H. (2019b). *Shadow education as worldwide curriculum studies*. Palgrave MacMillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-03982-0>
- Lau, S. (Ed.). (1996). *Growing up the Chinese way: Chinese child and adolescent development*. Chinese University Press.

Identifying the missing link between shadow education and academic success

- Lee, B. J., Jwa, H. S., & Lim, S. H. (2014). The effects of private tutoring and parenting behaviors on children's academic achievement in Korea: Are there differences between low- and high-income groups? *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy*, 11(2), 163–178.
- Lee, G. H., & Lee, J. R. (2015). A study on the relationship between prior learning experience and mathematics achievement, GPA of college. *Communications of Mathematical Education*, 29(3), 423–439.
- Lee, J. (2007). Two worlds of private tutoring: The prevalence and causes of after-school mathematics tutoring in Korea and the United States. *Teachers College Record*, 109(5), 1207–1234.
- Lee, J. K. (2003). *Korean credential and hakbeolism: Origin and development*. Jipmoondang.
- Lee, J., & Zhou, M. (2015). *The Asian American achievement paradox*. Russell Sage Foundation. <https://doi.org/10.7468/jksmee.2015.29.3.423>
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (1999). *Designing qualitative research*. Sage.
- Marzano, R. J. (2007). *The art and science of teaching: A comprehensive framework for effective instruction*. ASCD.
- Mori, I., & Baker, D. (2010). The origin of universal shadow education: What the supplemental education phenomenon tells us about the postmodern institution of education. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 11(1), 36–48. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-009-9057-5>
- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2012). *PISA 2009 technical report*. <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisaproducts/50036771.pdf>
- Ozaki, M. (2015). *A juku childhood: Children's experiences in Juku attendance and its relation to their well-being in Japan*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Bath].
- Park, K. M., & Kim, H. C. (2012). A study to probe the status of mathematics private education and educational policies to alleviate private education. *Journal of Curriculum Evaluation*, 15(2), 113–138. <https://doi.org/10.29221/jce.2012.15.2.113>
- Park, M. H., & Paik, I. W. (2020). *Understanding of shadow education*. Hakjisa.
- Park, S., Lim, H., & Choi, H. (2015). “Gangnam Mom”: A qualitative study on the information behaviors of Korean helicopter mothers. In *iConference 2015 proceedings*. <https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/handle/2142/73636>
- Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Seth, M. J. (2002). *Education fever: Society, politics, and the pursuit of schooling in South Korea*. University of Hawaii Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824862305>
- Song, W. S. (2012). *A survey on learning-in-advance practices for high school mathematics and its effect on school education*. [Master's thesis, Hanyang University].
- Sorensen, C. W. (1994). Success and education in South Korea. *Comparative Education Review*, 38(1), 10–35. <https://doi.org/10.1086/447223>
- Statistics Korea. (2018). *The survey of private education expenses for elementary school to high school*. National Statistics Korea.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research*. Sage.

- Tang, C. (1991). *Effects of different assessment methods on tertiary students' approaches to studying*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Hong Kong].
- Williams, D., & Harkness, N. N. (2018). *Diverse learning opportunities through technology-based curriculum design*. IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-5519-3>
- Wiseman, A. W. (2013). Foreword. In J. Aurini, S. Davies, & J. Dierkes (Eds.), *Out of the shadows: The global intensification of supplementary education* (pp. xi–xiii). Emerald.
- Yamamoto, Y., & Brinton, M. C. (2010). Cultural capital in East Asian educational systems: The case of Japan. *Sociology of Education*, 83(1), 67–83. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040709356567>
- Yang, I., & Kim, B. C. (2010). A qualitative case study on the school life of middle school students who go to private educational institutes. *The Korea Educational Review*, 16(3), 117–153.

The authors

Kim, Young Chun (pedakim@cue.ac.kr)

Young Chun Kim is a professor of the Department of Education at the Chonju National University of Education, South Korea. He has published more than 40 books in the areas of curriculum studies, qualitative research, and postcolonial curriculum theory. He has also published many articles and books on shadow education.

McVey, Michael (mmcvvey@emich.edu), ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7290-4944>

Michael McVey began the first two decades of his career as a high school English and special education teacher in Canada, Japan, and the United States. He is a former director of learning services at the College of Education for the University of Arizona. Presently, he is a tenured professor at Eastern Michigan University in the Teacher Education Department with a specialisation in educational technology, and is a director for the International Society for Technology in Education.

Jung, Jung-Hoon (dalinwill@gmail.com) ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6311-1355> (Corresponding author)

Jung-Hoon Jung is a sessional instructor at the Department of Education in Chonnam National University, South Korea. His research interests include curriculum theory, shadow education, teacher education, and post-colonial studies.

***Curriculum Matters* submission guidelines**

Scope

The general editor of *Curriculum Matters* invites interested people to submit articles (essays, literature reviews, research reports, scholarship and critical comments) in the field of curriculum. The main audience groups for these articles are teachers, teacher educators, graduate students of education, and curriculum theorists.

Manuscript submission

Articles should be sent for consideration to General Editor Jennifer Tatebe: j.tatebe@auckland.ac.nz

There is one volume of *Curriculum Matters* per year. The deadline for submissions is 31 March.

Manuscript format

Each article must be no more than 6,000 words in length (including references), with a brief title. A short abstract of about 100 words must be provided. A reference list is to be included at the end of the article.

Authors should consult articles in this journal on general matters of style, such as conventions with headings, subheadings, paragraph breaks and use of diagrams. Articles need to be submitted as Word documents (.doc or .docx files). text should be 1.5 or 2.0 spaced.

Notes should be avoided, but if included should be used sparingly and take the form of endnotes rather than footnotes. Endnotes should be numbered consecutively through the manuscript, using superscript, and appear at the end of the article.

Diagrams, tables, or photographs should be supplied as separate .tiff, .eps or .jpg files and clearly labelled, e.g. Figure 1, Figure 2. Notes need to be inserted in the main text to specify the location of each figure, e.g. [insert Figure 1].

Referencing should be consistent and follow the American Psychological Association (APA) convention (7th ed).

Submitted articles must be anonymous and ready to be sent to blind review. To ensure anonymity, authors need to ensure that:

- in-text references to work by the author(s) are disguised, e.g. written as “Author(s), 2006”
 - items by the paper authors in the references list are removed and replaced with the words “Author(s), 2006 [removed for blind review]”
 - electronic identifiers are removed from electronic file settings
- “track changes” is turned off.

Author information should be provided in a separate title page. Authors’ names should be given as first name and family name, without titles, and including affiliations. Where there are multiple authors, the corresponding author should be identified. Where a corresponding author is not provided, correspondence will be sent to the first-named author. Short biographical notes about authors should also be provided, including email addresses.

Authorial responsibility and copyright

Authors must accept sole responsibility for the originality and factual accuracy of their articles and for obtaining and supplying written permission to quote lengthy excerpts from copyrighted sources. Permissions are required where an article may draw on work that was prepared for an institution and where copyright and intellectual property rights lie with the institution. It is the authors’ responsibility to obtain these permissions and they must be supplied when the manuscript is submitted. Where there may be questions relating to intellectual property or copyright, these need to be communicated to the editor at time of submission. Copyright in the articles is held by the journal publisher, NZCER.

Editorial policy

The editor makes an initial decision about whether a submitted article is appropriate for *Curriculum Matters*. Articles are then sent to peer review and are reviewed by two peer reviewers. From these reviews the editor decides whether to publish the article. Copies of the anonymous reviewers’ reports

will be sent to the authors. If articles are accepted, specific revisions may be requested. The editor reserves the right to make minor alterations or deletions to articles without consulting the authors, as long as these changes do not materially affect the substance of the article.

Author checklist

- The manuscript has a short title that provides a clear indication of the focus of the article.
- The manuscript is no more than 6,000 words, including references.
- An abstract is included (approximately 100 words) at the beginning of the article.
- The manuscript is presented as a Word file, with 1.5 or 2.0 spacing.
- Referencing follows APA 7th edition conventions.
- Headings, subheadings and other style features are consistent with articles published in previous editions of Curriculum Matters.
- Figures are included as separate files, with their position in the text clearly indicated.
- The manuscript is anonymous.
- Author names, affiliations, contact details and biographical information are provided in a separate file.
- Matters relating to copyright have been attended to and, where appropriate, permissions have been obtained.