

# Online Shadow Education in Hong Kong: Perspectives from Secondary School Students and Private Tutors

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**Abstract:** *Based on the educational hierarchical reproduction theory and the MMI and EMI hypotheses, this paper discusses the impact of the tracking of general and vocational education at the secondary level on higher education opportunity equity among social classes. The study finds that increasing gross enrollment rates of both general high schools and secondary vocational schools can help improve the equity in admission opportunities of colleges and universities among social strata; expanding the share of general high school places by adjusting the structure of general and vocational tracks (that is, the general-vocational ratio) can effectively reduce the class disparities in college and university admission opportunities; neither the change in the scale nor in the structure of general and vocational tracks will contribute to alleviating class inequality in top university enrollment opportunities.*

*Best Evidence in Chinese Education* 2022; 11(2):1477-1497.

Doi: 10.15354/bece.22.or063

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**How to Cite:** Cheng, C.H. (2022). *Online shadow education in Hong Kong: Perspectives from secondary school students and private tutors.* *Best Evidence in Chinese Education*, 11(2):1477-1497.

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**Keywords:** *Shadow Education, Online Education, Secondary School*

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**Conflict of Interests:** *None.*

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## Introduction

**D**URING the COVID-19 pandemic situation, there have been many transformations in different sectors of society. Education is one of these sectors, including in the modes of teaching and learning, as schools need to follow strict virus prevention guidelines. Harris and Jones (2020) described how COVID-19 has shaken the education world and has brought many chaotic moments to schools around the world. Although the pandemic has led to ‘undeniable chaos’ (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2020), it has also made educators change. For example, lessons have been reorganized (Zhao, 2020), and computer software has begun to play an even more important role. As for school leaders, many decisions have been made in response to newly required protocols and procedures (Netolicky, 2020). Furthermore, not only the mainstream schools need to follow the guidelines set by the Hong Kong Education Bureau; the private tutoring sector must also follow these rules, as they are also managed by the bureau (Eng, 2019). As a result, private tutorial centers in Hong Kong cannot open for face-to-face lessons, and some of these centers have been forced into bankruptcy. Other centers have installed software, such as Zoom and Google Classroom, which allows students to attend lessons online.

The focus of this paper is how students and private tutors felt about teaching and learning in online private tutoring. This can help us determine whether online shadow education is a viable alternative during the pandemic. This study attempts to answer several questions:

- (1) What are students’ and private tutors’ general impressions of online tutoring?
- (2) What are some of the areas that private tutors need to be aware of in online tutoring?
- (3) Can this type of method (online tutoring) become a future trend for shadow education in Hong Kong?

## *What is Shadow Education?*

Shadow education refers to education that is received outside of the mainstream school classroom, and these types of lessons are often called ‘supplementary lessons’ or ‘private tutorial lessons’ (Aslam & Atherton, 2012; Bray, 1999; Bregvadze, 2012). In a broader sense, shadow education can represent any form of teaching which works under or in parallel to the ‘light’ that is the general school curriculum (Bray & Kwo, 2014). This sort of education aims to help students improve their school knowledge (UNESCO, 2012, p.76), and scholars have noted that schools, families and friends are possible variables which affect the relationship between shadow education and student’s academic achievements (Buhagiar & Chetcuti, 2013). In modern Hong Kong society, it is common for students to attend private tutoring after their mainstream school lessons, especially for secondary school students who must take the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE) in their final stage of study. This is the norm in Hong Kong because the general public believes that exam performance can accurately portray students’ abilities (Ball, 2016), and this kind of high-stakes testing system has been long established in Asian countries (Carless, 2011). As a result, most of the par-

ents in Hong Kong insist that their children take more classes in order to get good results on the public examination.

## ***Shadow Education around the World***

The settings of shadow education differ around the world. Due to different cultures and societal backgrounds, the form of shadow education has been variously adjusted (Bray, 1999). There is a huge demand for shadow education in East Asian countries, such as South Korea, Japan and China. Those areas value education and hard work and emphasize academic achievement (Liu, 2012). For example, in China, an estimated 55% of urban families invested in supplementary classes (Xue & Ding, 2008, p. 3). Another study pointed out that among 827 grade 10 students in China's Gansu, Hunan and Jiangsu provinces, 75% attended extra classes after school (Shen, 2008, p. 3). In South Korea, the case was very extreme; they refer to shadow education as 'hakwon', and the lessons usually have 10 to 15 students (Kim, 2016). According to Kim (2016), the Amount of Educational Expenditure survey for hakwon showed that around 7 million children in Korea needed to take hakwon, and of those children, 80.9% were from elementary school, 70.6% from junior form and 50.7% from senior form. As Kim (2016) further elaborated, hakwon can help children improve their academic results and increase their chances of matriculating at a prestigious university. This is important in Korean society because of the emphasis on academic achievements, as indicated by the country's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results: South Korea ranked in the top four countries for its students' math, reading and science abilities in 2000, 2003, 2006, 2009 and 2012 (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013).

Shadow education also plays an important role in Western societies. According to Paiva et al. (1997), 50% of students in Rio de Janeiro public schools received supplementary lessons after school. This is also very similar to the situation in Northern European countries. According to Bray (2011), the Scandinavian countries provide extra lessons for students who cannot keep up with mainstream school lessons. However, Bray also noted that shadow education has likely become more popular because of increased competitiveness in European societies. One of the priorities of shadow education is to help students recap their knowledge and enhance their abilities.

As for Hong Kong, families are fully aware that their children's public examination results will shape their future. Education is one of the main keys to success, and many believe that those who perform well in public examinations will have a better opportunity to enroll in a prestigious university (Bray, 2013). Further, after they graduate, they may have a higher chance of finding an ideal job. Bray's (2013) study on secondary students' time use in shadow education indicated that students in Hong Kong need to take extra classes to fulfil the 'no loser' principle. According to Bray (2013), form six (Grade 12) students in Hong Kong spent an average of 4.76 hours per week in the tutorial center during the examination season. Furthermore, 71.8% of the 1,624 student participants expressed that they had attended tutorial classes during the previous 12 months (Bray, 2013). These results imply that the demand for private tutoring is a result of the highly competitive nature of Hong Kong society. The education and social sys-

tem will create the winners and losers, and students try not to be the losers in this game (Bray, 2013). As a result, they invest heavily in shadow education.

## ***The Public Impression of Shadow Education***

One of the general impressions of shadow education is that it increases social inequality. In previous literature from Bray (1999), private tutoring has been shown to create problems, such as education inequality and economic burdens for families. As has been further highlighted by Amartya Sen, who won the Nobel Prize in 1998, private tutoring has increased pressure on these families (2009, p.13). However, many parents still insist that their children go to the tutorial center. They do not want to risk their children being left behind, so they work hard and save carefully in order to send their children to private schools. The study also pointed out that 54% of the parents could not afford the tuition fee of the tutorial center, so they had to forfeit the opportunity (Sen, 2009). Bray and his colleagues (2018) provide further proof of shadow education leading to social inequality; their paper indicates that the quality of education in Cambodia is dependent upon money. That is, students who cannot afford to go to the learning center may not receive a quality education. This social inequality problem is the biggest public impression made by shadow education on the general public.

Another impression, this one student-centric, is that there might be a backwash against learning in mainstream school after taking private tutorial classes. Shadow education may lead students to think that private tutoring lessons are better than mainstream school lessons (Yung and Bray, 2016). Private tutorial lessons focus more on exam skills and techniques, while mainstream schools primarily focus on developing an abilities and character. As a result, students tend to work harder in tutorial centers (Zhan et al., 2013).

However, there are also some positive aspects to shadow education. First, it has helped students to achieve good scores on their public exams, as can be seen in South Korea's PISA performance. Korean children ranked in the top four countries for math, reading and science abilities in 2000, 2003, 2006, 2009 and 2012 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013). Loyalka and Zakharov (2016) elaborated on which group can benefit the most from shadow education; they indicated that those who have higher academic abilities tend to perform better after taking extra lessons, and they further concluded that shadow education can give an additional advantage to those high achievers. Yung and Bray (2016) argued that shadow education does not only help high achievers but also slow learners, as it provides an opportunity to revise and practice mainstream school lessons. Furthermore, the setting of a private tutoring lesson is better than that of a mainstream school, as the teacher does not need to cater to a group of 30 or more students (Bray, 2013). As a result, students may have more opportunities to ask questions and quicken their learning progress. Yung (2015) also mentioned that students are more willing to speak up during private tutorial lessons. During the pandemic, this advantage became more obvious. Students can use online software, such as Zoom, to attend tutorial classes, and they can choose whether they want to show their faces (Yung, 2020). This has encouraged students to speak during tutorial classes, which can help them learn more effectively (Yung, 2020).

## ***The Use of Technology in Shadow Education***

Various online methods have been introduced to improve the COVID-19 situation, and Zoom has become an integral part of connecting people in their daily lives. Students have been able to continue their education through online lessons and have commented that those lessons are convenient, flexible and efficient (Horrell et al., 2015). Zoom has also provided a platform for other occasions, such as visiting relatives or attending chapel. According to The Guardian (2020), 200 million people use Zoom every day to socialize, to work and for other kinds of activities. Although those who usually do things in person may find this situation frustrating, other groups have actually gained sizable benefits through their use of Zoom. Elderly persons, for example, have become more sociable because they can use Zoom to contact anyone they like (The Guardian, 2020).

Research has shown that technology can provide new ways to conduct private tutoring classes. Further, some studies have shown that technology helps students to learn better during their private tutoring classes, since they are more willing to express themselves (Yung, 2020). More evidence can be found in the United States of America, where students are more willing to complete online homework than paper-form assignments, and around 73% of middle school students completed their school assignments through use of the Internet (DeBell & Chapman, 2006). However, these studies do not fully explain why students are more willing to perform in online classes, and other stakeholders' points of view have not been included. There is still a need for research related to technology and shadow education in order to show any significant relationship; thus, this research focuses on online shadow education in Hong Kong.

### ***Significance of this Study***

In Hong Kong shadow education study, it has only a limited research related to online shadow education. Yung (2020) has mentioned that when students switched to online classroom during the pandemic period, they seemed to have both positive and negative impact in learning. For example, some of the "quiet" students may become active in online setting, whereas some of the students may not even response to teacher's question. However, there is not enough study focusing on the impact of online shadow education in Hong Kong, and there should be a voice from private tutors about the impact of online shadow education. As a result, the above literature has mentioned a lot about shadow education from mainstream school teacher's and student's perspective, and this research would like to put the emphasis on students and private tutors in Hong Kong.

### **Methodology**

This study focused on students' and private tutors' perspectives about online private tutoring in Hong Kong, so the data collection methods prioritized expressions and elaboration; individual interview, group discussion and lesson observation were the main methods. All the data were codified and followed all relevant ethical procedures. The students in this research were from different bandings' secondary schools (Band 1 through Band 3), which allowed students at different academic levels to express their

opinions about online private tutoring (Chan & Bray, 2014). All private tutors included in this study had at least 10 years of private tutoring experience.

## *Participants and Settings*

The students in this research had been taking online private tutoring lessons since the beginning of COVID-19. They were all form 6 students, as these may have more private tutoring experience than students in other forms (Bray, 2014). Moreover, form 6 students need to attend the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (DSE) in order to continue their studies. Due to worries related to competitive performance on this exam, they have more reason to apply for extra classes (Yung, 2020).

The tutors included in this research had at least 10 years of private tutoring or teaching experience in the local area. They taught different subjects in their tutorial center, allowing a broader picture of the impact of online teaching and learning in the private tutorial sector during the pandemic. All tutors had some experience dealing with online classes, as they have used them for teaching purposes during the pandemic.

Twelve students and six private tutors participated in this study. The ethical procedures, which are discussed further in the coming section, were carefully implemented. The participants' backgrounds were also considered because their academic performance may have affected the results of this study. In similar educational studies, researchers often justified their reasons for choosing a specific group of participants (Bui & Kong, 2019); for this research, the participants were from schools in three different bandings, which ensures that all variants within the data can be addressed and that the data can capture a broader picture of the Hong Kong secondary school context. Below is the background of the students (**Table 1**).

Three of the private tutors were from locally famous private tutoring centers, while the other three were from local learning centers. Below is the background of the private tutors included in this research. Some of the 'big name' learning centers in Hong Kong, such as Modern Education, can provide extensive resources to students, while local learning centers are more limited. Since most of the local learning centers aim to provide basic education support, such as exercise worksheets, to students, they do not provide support comparable to that of some of the big brands in the Hong Kong private tutoring sector (**Table 2**).

All the participants were from Hong Kong, and their first language was Cantonese. As a result, all the interviews and group discussions were conducted in Cantonese. This allowed the participants to express their ideas freely, and they were more motivated to speak during the data collection process (Longhurst, 2003). The research was mainly conducted in a college meeting room, since the setting is suitable for both individual interviews and group discussions. Prior notice was given to the college about using the facility for research purposes, and they agreed to lend their meeting room for this study (**Table 3**).

## *Data Collection Procedure*

The study was conducted from October 2021 to December 2021, and all participants were able to attend all sessions. There were no dropouts, but the interview schedule was modified because of the participants' school exams and busy itineraries (**Figure 1**).

**Table 1. Participants' Backgrounds.**

Band 1	Band 2	Band 3
4	4	4

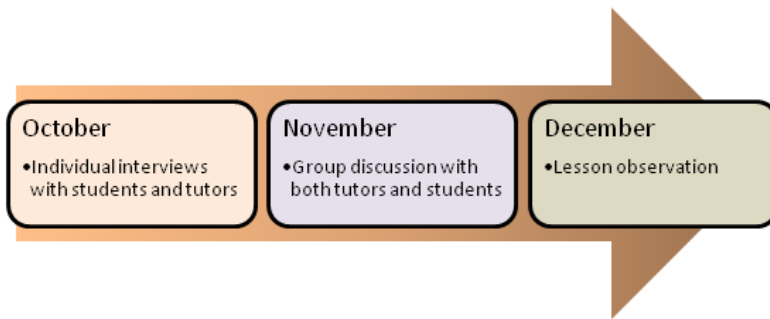
**Table 2. Tutors' Backgrounds.**

Local tutors from famous learning centers	Local tutors in local learning centers
3	3

**Table 3. Below is the demographic background of the subject in this study.**

Name (pseudonym)	Gender	Studied/taught subject
Alan (student)	Male	English and Liberal studies
Betty (student)	Female	English
Jasmine (student)	Female	English
Ray (student)	Male	English
Chris (student)	Male	English, Math and Liberal Studies
Anna (student)	Female	Chinese and English
Sally (student)	Female	English
John (student)	Male	English
Chan(student)	Male	English and Math
Charlotte(student)	Female	English
Lucy (student)	Female	English
So (student)	Male	English
Monica (tutor) franchise learning center	Female	English (Zoom)
Kevin (tutor) Local learning center	Male	English and Math (Zoom)
Lee (tutor) franchise learning center	Male	Chinese and Math (Zoom)
Francis (tutor) Local learning center	Male	English (Zoom)
Wong (tutor) franchise learning center	Female	English (Zoom)
Emily (tutor) Local learning center	Female	English (Zoom)

Purposive sampling was used in this research, since there were some criteria for the participants (Etikan et al., 2016). For example, students and tutors were required to have experience with online tutoring. The first student's individual interview took place on 8 October 2021. The interviews were semi-structured in order to allow participants to interact and express related ideas (Longhurst, 2003). The student interview process lasted around two weeks, and each interview took around 30-45 minutes to complete, depending upon interaction with the participant. As for the individual tutor interviews, the first was conducted on 25 October 2021, and it was also semi-structured. Since the number of tutors was smaller than that of students, all the tutors' interviews



**Figure 1. A Brief Research Process and Data Collection Timeline.**

were completed within one week. The interview protocol (see sample questions in **Appendix A**) was provided before the interview, which allowed the participants to prepare. All participants gave permission for their interviews to be recorded.

After finishing the first stage of the individual interview, participants were invited to attend the group discussion sessions in November. Since the group discussion date overlapped with some of the students' exam dates, the discussion sessions were changed to near the end of November (27 November 2021). The students were separated into two groups with six people in each group, and each group included at least one representative from each banding. During the discussion, they exchanged ideas related to online private tutoring, such as the strengths and weaknesses of that tutoring. The discussion lasted 45 minutes. As for the tutors, all six met early in November and discussed their impressions about online shadow education. During the discussion process, a recorder was again used, and permission was granted by all participants.

The third stage of the study was lesson observation, which was used to triangulate the data and find out more about the impact of private online tutorial lessons. Three students and their private tutors agreed to be observed by the author during their 45-minute online class. However, recording was prohibited during their lessons; only field notes were used to document any details related to the research topic. The observations were conducted through Zoom, which is popular online conferencing software in Hong Kong, and both student and teacher behaviors were marked down for further analysis. During this stage of research, the students and teachers both activated their cameras, allowing for observation of any gestures or expressions.

## ***Data Analysis***

Interview responses and group discussion ideas were transcribed and further analyzed. This analysis was guided by the research questions in this paper. Responses that were related to either students' or tutors' impressions of online shadow education and teaching and learning strategies were carefully sorted. After determining the key ideas, they were compared and contrasted among the groups, allowing for the identification and validation of the societal situation and any trends. By analyzing and comparing key



points, societal theories and trends can be clarified (Gibbs, 2018), and this research identifies both new trends and novel ideas.

As for the lesson observation, field notes, the main instrument in this data collection method, allowed the researcher to mark down responses from the participants and make note of any significant observations related to the study (Tenzek, 2018). During the lesson observation, students' and tutors' behaviors, as well as the lesson setting, were noted, as this kind of information was considered to be objective information from the participants (Tenzek, 2018). In addition to descriptive data, reflective field notes (ideas from my point of view about the reasons students and tutors behaved or reacted in given ways) were also included. The reflective notes allowed me to reconsider the situation and re-evaluate the data.

In data analysis stage, for both individual interview and group discussion, thematic analysis was applied in this study. In order to conduct thematic analysis, 6 steps were used in analysis. Those 6 steps are familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. According to Terry et al. (2017), thematic analysis allows qualitative researchers to effectively present the results to readers. Below is a brief explanation of each step.

- (1) Familiarization: familiarize the data first, and try to come up with general questions, ideas or themes from the interview data.
- (2) Coding: identify and mark down ideas that appear in all the data. By doing this, it can help researcher to see whether there are any common patterns among the interview transcripts.
- (3) Generating themes: based on the coding results, researcher can construct several related themes. When constructing those themes, research questions can also put in use to help researcher to build those themes.
- (4) Reviewing themes: the part can check whether the themes and data match with each other, and also it can see whether the data can answer the research questions.
- (5) Defining and naming themes: identify the definition of some of the concepts inside, and see whether any parts of the themes are too thin.
- (6) Producing the report: writing the report, and focus back on the general picture of this topic.

## ***Ethical Considerations***

Ethics in educational and social science research is very important, since there may be many opportunities to work with human subjects. Participants may sometimes be misguided or unaware of the ways in which a study will use their information; for this reason, educational and social science researchers must pay special attention to ethics (Robson, 2011). In this study, the participants were informed about the research background and purposes. All participants signed consent forms before any research procedures began. The consent forms were from Andrews University, which is affiliated with the researcher's current institution. Furthermore, all ethical procedures went through the Institution Review Board, and prior notices were delivered to all the related school principals or school authorities. All the participants could withdraw from the study at any point if they felt uncomfortable with the questions or research procedures. After all

the interviews, the transcribed data were sent to the related participants so that they could check the accuracy of their responses. The researcher was the only person who could assess the data, but some concepts and ideas were discussed with another colleague. The names of the participants were codified, and only their first names were used when necessary.

## Findings

Based on the research questions of this paper, the data can be categorized into three aspects: general impressions of online private tutoring classes, areas that need more attention when conducting online classes in shadow education and future trends in shadow education.

### *General Impressions of Online Private Tutoring Classes*

Generally speaking, students tended to express positive opinions about online classes, as they appreciated being able to attend from home. However, most tutors believed that it would be more productive to interact face-to-face. All students expressed that online tutorial lessons were a secondary but still important aspect of their education.

- Under the strict social distancing guidelines in Hong Kong, online tutorial lessons were the only way for me to practice DSE.
- Online classes are fun, since we do not need to go to school in person.

However, some students were puzzled by the follow-up question about the usefulness of an online tutorial class. They expressed that online classes were usually care-free and that teachers had obvious difficulty managing the disciplines and technical issues. Some participants' responses are shown below.

- My private tutor used 15 minutes to deal with technical issues, but my lesson only lasted for 1 hour. It seemed a bit of a waste of time.
- I do not know whether this is true, as I have never taken any online tutorial class before. I would think online class is like talking to a machine/ computer, and it doesn't motivate me to learn. I would check my phone or even be distracted if I was doing online class at home.

As for the tutors, they expressed that online tutorial lessons were essential for them, but like the students, some had doubts about the utility for students. Some tutors' responses are shown below.

- Online classes have saved my job. I was able to get paid because of this. Of course, we all wanted to go back and do our stuff in the old way. However, because of COVID-19, we have used some alternative methods.

If you ask me about whether this is useful, I can only say it really depends on students. If they are lazy, then online learning won't work for them. They can get distracted, and if they close the camera, we won't know what they are up to. So, it really depends on students. For me, I will just do my part, such as changing my materials into an online version for my students, and that's it.

- For me, in this situation, Zoom has changed the world of education. Students can listen to our lectures whenever they want. It breaks the barrier of locations, races and languages. My impression of online private tutoring is inno-

vative, and I believe in the coming future it will be more innovative in our education field.

However, if you ask me whether this is useful for students, I will say it provides them with a choice. They can choose the most suitable method for themselves, but, as you may know, they may choose wrong. They may work better in face-to-face mode.

The above results are somewhat similar to those of Yung's 2020 study, which indicated that students expressed positive reactions toward online lessons. As students could stay at home for their lessons, they felt more comfortable. However, in this research, some tutors and students expressed uncertainty regarding whether online private lessons were useful in terms of improving students' academic performance or increasing their knowledge.

As for academic performance, only a few students mentioned that online classes helped them increase their examination marks, such as 'my grades were better than last year because online private lessons helped me to revise the concepts before my exam'. The tutors indicated that online classes allowed them to revisit concepts with the students, and they believed this would make a difference between those who attended online private tutorial lessons and those who did not.

### ***Areas that Need More Attention during the Online Private Tutoring Class***

Online shadow education is an alternative because of the pandemic, but students and tutors generally expressed positive impressions of this type of education. However, this study also focuses on those aspects of online teaching to which tutors need to pay more attention. According to the individual interviews and group discussion with the tutors, these opportunities for improvement in online private tutorial classes included ensuring that students were paying attention, privacy problems and issues with online teaching materials.

Tutors expressed that it was a challenge to make sure their students were in class. Some participants' responses are shown below.

- You never know whether they are online or offline, and that is why you need them to open their camera. By doing this, you can ensure that student's attendance.
- I will randomly ask them questions throughout the lesson. If they missed any of them, they would have to copy the answers several times. This can make them pay attention during the online class.
- I agree that asking questions is a good way, and I will do the same as well. I usually ask them to turn on the camera only. At least I can make sure they are here.

As shown, the most common ways to determine whether the students were still in class were asking random questions and asking them to turn on the camera. However, some tutors reported the use of interesting teaching strategies to increase interaction. Some participants' responses are shown below.

- I try to include some trivia questions during the lesson, and I will use Kahoot to play a small game with my student. My student pays more attention in class

because they think that the information in that lesson may help them to win the Kahoot game.

- I will try to think of some games, such as hangman, for my students to learn new words.

As for the privacy problem, all the tutors mentioned that they usually used a virtual background during the lesson. This made them feel more comfortable since they did not want students to know about their background or be distracted by things in their homes. Therefore, they suggested that future tutors who would like to use Zoom as the main medium do the same thing. They additionally agreed that students should also make use of the virtual background during lessons.

Lastly, tutors need to be aware of the availability of online learning materials. All tutors agreed that they needed to prepare a set of materials for students to access online, since they cannot provide them with the hardcopy. Tutors must also take more time to prepare for the lesson so that it seems ‘tailor-made’ for the course or student. The online private tutorial class required tutors to devote more time to lesson preparation. This was a topic of conversation during the tutors’ group discussion.

Regarding teaching strategies, the students also provided some ideas about how to motivate them in class. Below is an excerpt of one of their conversations.

*Anna: Sometimes teachers just teach and ask us to do exercises, so it is easy for us to lose focus.*

*Chris: My teacher actually will prepare some MC questions on Zoom and ask us to vote. I think it is very interesting.*

*Charlotte: So good that you have those activities; my teacher is just like Anna’s.*

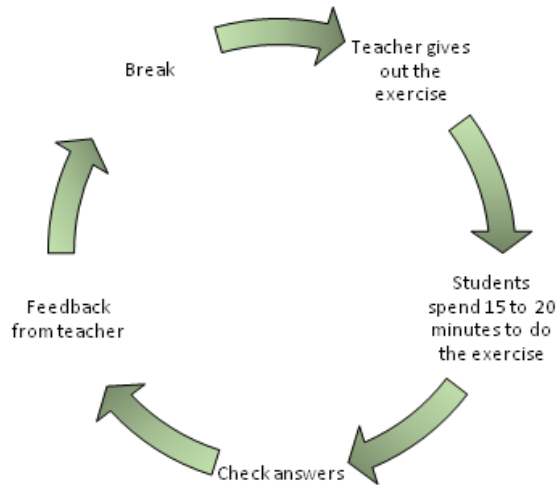
*Chris: I actually think if they have more activities, the lesson will be more interesting.*

*Anna: True. For me, I just keep doing exercises. I can do those by myself, why do I need to attend the lesson?*

The findings from the above showed students suggested more online activities during virtual instruction, which shadow educators can take as a recommendation to improve their lesson quality. This conversation also makes clear that students’ motivation in online private tutorial classes was correlated with the in-class activities. Some may feel interested in participating more fully in a class with these activities, while others may question the necessity of their attendance. **Figure 2** depicts the lesson process, according to Anna’s description.

As a result, students may become bored and begin to lose interest. They may even begin to think that they can check the answers by themselves; after all, they are form 6 students and therefore old enough to do so.

A follow-up question from the interview protocol about motivation in an online private tutorial class showed that half of the students were motivated. Anna and Charlotte were among those who said they were not motivated because of the boring lesson design. The other half, including Chris, mentioned that they were motivated because teachers would use different activities to attract their attention. Some of the students



**Figure 2. Lesson Process Following Anna’s Description.**

even explained that their tutors would provide rewards to encourage them to pay more attention in class. Some participants’ responses are shown below.

- I was thrilled about getting the coupons from my tutor. She said if I improve my grade on the exam, she will give me \$50 Starbucks coupons. I did it, and I received my rewards. Looking back, I was concentrating during the lesson.
- I got a small gift for answering questions during class, and I felt great. After that, I was involved in class.

However, when students clarified whether their grades had significantly improved, most said they were more or less the same as before they took the online class, with the exception of some subjects, such as liberal studies. One student expressed that his English and Chinese grades had dropped after a recent exam, and he mentioned that languages were difficult to learn through online classes, especially English. He could not use it with his peers in class, and he believed this was the reason that his English grade had deteriorated. Therefore, online learning may not be useful for students who would like more interaction.

### ***Future Trends in Shadow Education***

Responses from tutors on this topic were almost the same. They all believed that in the near future, shadow education will follow mainstream schools to the use of online software. They further provided several reasons for online shadow education. First, the COVID-19 situation will remain for quite a while, and no one can predict the day that we will be free from the pandemic. Second, shadow education works under mainstream schools (Bray, 1999), and that is why shadow education may need to be synchronized with those schools. Lastly, online shadow education can help break barriers. Students from different countries can attend lessons at the same time, and this can be an oppor-

tunity for some learning centers to expand their business. From the tutors' perspective, this method of teaching will remain even after COVID-19 is no longer a serious issue.

As for the students, they also agree that this will be a future trend in education. Although some still questioned the effectiveness and efficiency of the practice, there is no doubt that online classrooms have made education more convenient. This parallels the tutors' statements about the convenience of online education. Students could attend the lesson whenever and wherever they wanted, and this allowed them to make good use of their time. However, they also pointed out that in order to make this happen, teaching quality, technical issues and privacy issues should receive further attention. However, generally speaking, online learning will be the future of shadow education.

## **Discussion: General Impressions from Tutors and Students**

This paper primarily focuses on general impressions of online shadow education, and both private tutors and students expressed positive feedback regarding this method of instruction.

As mentioned in Yung (2020), students felt comfortable with online learning because they neither needed to attend school in person nor reveal their identities. This provided both positive and negative impacts. Students were more outgoing in online classes, but the teachers were unable to fully control whether their students were listening during the lesson (Yung, 2020). In this research, the students indicated that they felt safe and comfortable with having their lessons at home. Some did feel that online tutoring was more 'distant' than 'intimate', but they mentioned that because their mainstream schools had provided prior online instruction, they had no problem with learning through Zoom. The factor that negatively affected their impressions was their tutor's teaching strategies. It is worthwhile to dig deeply into teaching methods for online shadow education, as it is likely that the most effective will be different from those utilized in face-to-face learning. In the U.S.A., schools and learning centers have developed a set of new curricula and teaching methods, such as collaborative blackboard, in response to the COVID-19 situation (Netolicky, 2020). Teaching strategies should be reflected upon and evaluated every semester, and new methods, such as games, competitions and rewards, can be implemented to attract students.

As for the tutors' perspectives, they provided both positive and negative impressions of online shadow education. As mentioned in the findings, the tutors stated that success in an online tutorial class is dependent upon the student's attitude. For example, if students decide not to respond to questions or fake their presence, they may not gain any benefit from online private tutoring. However, those who demonstrated commitment and stayed involved by, for example, answering questions, were more likely to have learnt something from their tutors. As a result, tutors were not fully sold on the online methods of teaching, and they still believed that traditional face-to-face lessons would be more effective. These concerns can be somewhat related to previous research results from Bray (2011), Yung (2020) and Cheng (2021), all of which are related to helping students benefit from private tutoring. As Yung (2020) concluded, it can be somewhat difficult to maintain discipline and ensure that students are paying attention in class when one is utilizing online teaching methods.

However, tutors also expressed positive impressions of online tutorial classes. Some used economic terms, such as stating that they were able to gain income by conducting online classes throughout the pandemic. Due to the strict social distancing policy in Hong Kong, schools were forced to stop face-to-face classes for almost six months. Some private learning centers went out of business because of the pandemic (South China Morning Post, 2020). The emergence of online tutorial classes allowed many tutors to keep their jobs, which is why, from an economic point of view, they support online shadow education. Some of the tutors in this research explicitly expressed that online shadow education can help break barriers and that it has completely changed the world of education. It is noteworthy to hear this belief expressed by tutors, who are major stakeholders in this industry. They generally agreed that online classes in the private tutoring sector can help students learn and revise knowledge at any place or time. Students may participate in the class on live stream or view a recorded session at a later time, depending upon the students' needs, or they may do both. This is a huge benefit and convenience for students, as retention depended almost solely on jotting down notes in the past. As a result, the tutors also expressed positive impressions of online shadow education.

Although there are some benefits in using online platform as a way to conduct shadow education, a more considerate guidelines or government supports are needed in Hong Kong. Currently hagwons (private lessons) in Korea have also switched to online platforms, and scholars indicated that government should provide more supports, such as laws and regulations for private tutors to follow when conducting their classes online (Piao & Hwang, 2021). In Hong Kong, online teaching has not received a lot of supports from government, but using Zoom as one of the main methods in teaching has become a trend because of COVID-19. More can be done in terms of supporting online shadow education in Hong Kong.

### ***Areas that Require Further Attention***

During online tutoring, most of the participants (both tutors and students) agreed that teaching strategies, privacy issues and creating online teaching materials were some of the areas to which tutors need to pay more attention.

This research shows that teaching strategies were critical, especially because the relationship between tutors and students was distant. Using online software to conduct lessons may result in students being distracted by the surrounding environment or playing with their phones while attending lessons. These distractions were observed in each of the three lesson observations in this study. All students, at some point in the observation, bowed their heads and appeared to stop paying attention to the lecture. During the group discussions, some students also pointed out that interesting teaching methods and rewards can attract their attention and motivate better performance in future lessons. As a result, the methods utilized in online teaching are the first aspect that tutors need to priorities. Some of the suggested methods, such as using Kahoot or the Zoom polling system, can help make the lesson more unorthodox and interesting. Also, the tutors suggested trivia questions and question-and-answer interactions to keep students involved in the online classes.

Privacy issues were addressed by both tutors and students in this study. Tutors mentioned that they used a virtual background to hide where they were and to help them feel more secure. Students, on the other hand, tended to shut off their cameras unless their tutor requested that they switch it on. The students' behavior in this study was similar to that of the participants in Yung's (2020) research. They would feel more comfortable in an online class, and they would be more expressive because of the camera. Going forward, tutors who would like to choose online software as their primary mode of teaching should understand the associated privacy risks. A virtual background or strategically switching the camera on and off should be carefully considered for integration into the lessons, as various kinds of background information may risk a leak of the tutor's or student's information, including age, gender or full name (Kagan et al., 2020). Another issue that can happen in online teaching is the sudden or accidental appearance of strangers who crash the meeting. Although this was not addressed by participants in this research, these surprising appearances are related to online teaching's privacy issues. Recent research conducted by Kagan et al. (2020) mentioned the risks associated with leaks of personal information or video conference links to the public. If the latter occurs, strangers can suddenly appear in the session and expose disturbing materials to the users. This is another issue to which tutors who plan to use online education should pay attention.

Finally, a new set of online materials that are suited to the current pandemic situation needs to be created. An example used in a previous section is that some schools and learning centers in the United States have recently developed a set of online learning materials for students to use during the pandemic (Netolicky, 2020). In this research, the students were given some online materials, such as online worksheets or textbooks, to enhance their learning. Since the COVID-19 situation remains uncertain, online teaching may need to be widely used for some time. For tutors, it is necessary to develop a set of new Internet-based learning and teaching materials for online shadow education. This will ensure the teaching quality of the lesson and reduce pressure on the tutor. Additionally, online shadow education materials should be synchronized with those of mainstream schools. This synchronization also fulfils a primary function of shadow education: to work in integration with mainstream schools (Bray, 1999). Therefore, updated online materials are needed for tutors to stay competitive, maintain teaching quality and successfully assist their students' learning.

## ***Future of Online Shadow Education in Hong Kong***

Online education in both mainstream and private tutorial schools is now quite popular in Hong Kong, but only a few studies have discussed the effectiveness of online private tutoring. This research showed that the general impressions of students and tutors regarding online shadow education were uncertain. Although some think this is the future of education and its convenience can help students learn, others challenge whether students can really learn at all through a screen. However, researchers and educators should assume that online shadow education will become even more popular in the future. It is quite difficult to turn back to traditional methods, as convenience and breaking barriers are very attractive to students and some tutors. Therefore, online shadow education is a method that is worth further investigation and discussion in the future



(Eng, 2019). Some of the participants in this study indicated that the future trend in the private tutoring field will be a combination of online and face-to-face work, which can be called a 'hybrid' mode of teaching and learning. Teachers can use Zoom and face-to-face teaching at the same time, while students can attend face-to-face lectures or live stream from home. This combination is the future for the Hong Kong private tutoring sector and is likely a trend for shadow education around the globe.

Moreover, tutors in this research mentioned that online shadow education can break barriers. Online classes have already begun to provide opportunities for tutors since learning centers can now accept students from around the world. Economically speaking, this can bring a large amount of income to tutors and learning centers. As a result, when talking about the future of online shadow education in Hong Kong, some of the tutors in this study expressed optimism about the future of their profession.

## **Conclusion and Limitation**

In conclusion, this research has highlighted that online shadow education will very likely be the future for the private tutoring industry in Hong Kong, as most of the participants in this research expressed a positive impression of the convenience of using online private tutoring. For tutors, this type of teaching can help them maintain their jobs and is a more suitable approach to teaching during a pandemic. Although there were a few worries about the effectiveness of online shadow education, these can be solved through teaching strategies and the development of updated online materials and curricula. Some of the findings were related to Yung's (2020) study; for example, the students felt more comfortable and expressive while participating in Zoom learning. They were more willing to express themselves because they did not need to reveal their faces and identities. However, this study does not reflect only students' impressions of online shadow education. As a result, the data and implications of this study illustrate some of the trends in shadow education in Hong Kong.

Further research is needed on online shadow education, as too few scholars have focused on this area. In this research, students and tutors only expressed their general impression of online shadow education; however, the results of online shadow education, such as whether students have significantly improved after completing a session, have not been adequately examined. This research was limited to the perspectives of students and private tutors, which may not be a wide enough sample to show the whole picture of online shadow education in Hong Kong. More stakeholders should be involved in this type of research in the future, such as government representatives, parents, school teachers, policymakers and any others who take part in online shadow education, as more ideas from these stakeholders can help to paint a more complete picture (Bray, 2014). Therefore, future researchers should consider online shadow education to be one of the branches of shadow education study, and they should investigate various topics within this field in order to help educators in Hong Kong and around the world.

Furthermore, this research may only reveal some of the potential issues happened in Hong Kong shadow education, as online education can still have a lot of areas that can be discussed, such as potential governmental supports in Hong Kong shadow education and the reasons that students felt more comfortable in staying behind the

camera. Those are some of the factors that can be included in future studies, and it is a limitation of this paper as well.

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**APPENDIX A: SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

***Questions for the pre-interview***

1. *Have you ever attended online lessons?*

***Questions for the interview***

1. *What are your impressions of online private tutoring? Do you think it is useful? Why?*
2. *What teaching strategies did you use during online teaching? Why? (Tutor)*
3. *What are some of the difficulties that you faced during online private tutoring? Please explain in detail.*
4. *Are you motivated in an online private tutorial class? Why?*
5. *Did you feel you had significantly improved your/your student's academic results after the online classes? Why?*
6. *Do you think online private tutoring is useful? Can this become a trend?*

*Received: 22 June 2022*

*Revised: 05 July 2022*

*Accepted: 11 July 2022*