



Use of Shadow Education for Success at School and College Admission

Despite the universal pervasiveness of shadow education, as discussed in Chapter 2, and its implications for curriculum studies, as discussed in Chapter 1, few academic efforts have focused on how shadow education contributes to academic success. Moreover, shadow education has often been framed as an antagonist of public education (Burch, 2009; de Silva et al., 1991; Marimuthu et al., 1991; Park, Lim, & Choi, 2015) and even as a ‘societal evil’ (Park, Buchmann, Choi, & Merry, 2016; Park et al., 2015). From this perspective, public education is seen as ‘normal’ and shadow education as ‘abnormal.’ We suspect that the lack of academic effort exploring how shadow education contributes to academic success is related to these issues of power. Here, we are not promoting shadow education as superior or inferior to public education: We simply want to explore the phenomenon with regard to students’ academic success.

Our qualitative analysis of data from our fieldwork and recent research on shadow education revealed that there is a positive relation between student achievement and shadow education (Byun & Park, 2012; Cameron, 2017; Gordon, Bridglall, & Meroe, 2005; Mori, 2015). Byun and Park (2012) found that shadow education was related to the high SAT scores among East Asian American students in the USA. Gordon et al. (2005) also found that students perform better after accessing shadow education. In this respect, Heinrich, Meyer, and Whitten (2010)

noted that researchers need to get ‘inside the black box’ to understand the phenomenon better. Therefore, this chapter explores how shadow education helps students, beginning with a case study.

HANUL’S STORY

Hanul is in the 12th grade and is one of the top students in her class in terms of academic achievement. During the elementary school years, she attended taekwondo hakwons and took piano lessons. She did not much care about her grades during that time, and her grades were mediocre. However, after taking enrolling in hakwon lessons, her grades shot up. Hanul now attends Math and Korean language hakwons after school and on weekends: three Korean lessons and four Math lessons per week. She also has English home-visit tutoring several hours per week. Like many other Korean students, her hakwon learning was initiated by her parents. She said:

My parents suggested me to take hakwons. You know as elementary school kids we do what our parents told us to do (smile). Also there weren’t many friends to play with because most of them took hakwon classes. It was rather natural I think for me to attend hakwon classes. Now, as a high school student who prepare for college admission, I go to hakwons to increase my grades and test scores. I think the hakwons I attend critically affect my grades. My grades change over time depending on what kinds of hakwons I attend. (Individual interview with Hanul, December 20, 2017)

Now, she takes the initiative in attending hakwons, instead of relaxing or being with friends after school. She understands that this is required to ensure her academic success. We asked her why attending hakwons is important. She replied:

Attending hakwons is kind of taking a shortcut for higher grades and test scores. Hakwon teachers do not care about my hairstyle or dress code while school teachers take it seriously. Hakwon teachers are solely concerned about my learning and increasing grades. They say nothing to me when I wear adult-like clothes with which school teachers may have been mad at me (laugh), but they scold me when I did not finish homework they gave. I think it is the biggest difference between school and hakwon. Hakwon teachers are in a condition where they solely focus on my learning. Did my grades increase because of hakwon learning? Definitely it did but not much of my affection toward learning. (Individual interview with Hanul, December 20, 2017)

Hanul believes that hakwon teachers are different from those of school teachers. Specifically, she evaluates hakwon instructions and learning atmospheres as qualitatively better, and she is more motivated in ability-grouping classes of hakwons. She feels that school classes are simply not enough to obtain good grades on exams. She noted that when she was not attending hakwons, she went through a lot of distress in preparing for school exams:

The nights before the exams, I tried to memorize everything in my text books. Of course, it was not very effective, ha ha. I lacked learning strategies on my own. I tried hard, I mean it. But my grades remained the same. I was frustrated. When I was taking classes at hakwons, change began. They taught me effective ways to prepare exams. I made them mine. (Individual interview with Hanul, October 17, 2017)

Learning the strategies not only increased her grades, they made her more confident. Hanul said, ‘I have no difficulties with my exams now.’ She said that hakwons are much superior to schools in terms of preparing for exams, but noted school teachers care more about her life, dreams, and personal issues, whereas hakwon teachers are more interested in her grades. She commented, ‘I don’t think it is right to judge one over the other. They both have strengths that I get benefit from.’

The following discussion deserves serious attention from teachers and scholars. It focuses on four main themes: (1) improving grades in school subjects, (2) preparing for upper school entrance exams, (3) accelerated learning for advanced students, and (4) personalized learning. We identified these themes during our fieldwork in South Korea; the following discussion is informed by research conducted in various countries.

IMPROVING GRADES IN SCHOOL SUBJECTS

Shadow education helps students maintain or increase their grades in school subjects: This is one of the main reasons why students engage in shadow education (de Silva, 1994; Kim, 2016; Nanayakkara & Ranaweera, 1994; Stevenson & Baker, 1992). As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, research has consistently reported a positive relationship between students’ school grades and use of shadow education (Stevenson & Baker, 1992). However, few scholars have engaged in deep analysis of how shadow education helps students learn school subjects and achieve

better grades. This section explores five ways in which shadow education helps students maintain or improve their higher school grades.

First, shadow education exposes students to the content of school subjects in addition to their learning at school. This provides multiple opportunities for being taught, rather than studying alone. Getting additional help benefits good students and those who are falling behind. For example, one-on-one private tutoring, which is a common form of a prevailing form of shadow education in North America and Europe, plays a crucial role in meeting the needs of remedial students (Mori, 2015). Research has shown that among students who cannot master the content taught in school classrooms, shadow education provides a more student-centered atmosphere where students feel more free to ask questions about content they do not understand (Brian, 2004; Kim, M., 2003; Kim, Y. C., 2016; Yang & Kim, 2010). For example, hakwons usually provide preview lessons, in which students learn school subject content before it is taught at school, as well as review lessons, in which students learn the content after it is presented at school (Kim, 2016).

Second, shadow education increases learning time in general (Enrich, 2014; Heyneman, 2013; Patall, Cooper, & Allen, 2010). Many students need more learning time to master school content and memorize large quantities of text for school exams; they feel that repetitive learning is essential for exams and cannot be achieved within the relatively short school hours (Cameron, 2017). Sawada and Kobayashi (1986) analyzed the effect of juku attendance on mathematics performance among upper and lower secondary students. They found that more time spent in jukus provided more opportunities to learn, resulting in higher scores in arithmetic and algebra. Heyneman (2013) analyzed the relationship between mathematical literacy and total time studying in South Korea and the USA and found that the high international test scores among South Korean students were related to time spent in shadow education.

Third, shadow education teaches test-taking strategies for school exams. Students learn various techniques, including understanding text questions, recalling the relevant information quickly, and deciding which knowledge or skills to apply when solving problems. Instructors point out incorrect strategies used by students and correct them; they repeat this until the students learn the strategies to solve certain types of questions (Kim, 2016). Many shadow education instructors also keep records of school exams and are aware of the history, trends, and styles of the

exams given in specific schools by specific school teachers. They help students prepare for these exams by sorting out what is central and what is peripheral for specific school exams (Kim, 2016).

Finally, shadow education improves students' attitudes about learning at school. Many scholars have observed this phenomenon and how it leads to improved learning outcomes (Cayubıt et al., 2014; de Silva, 1994; Mori, 2015; Russell, 1997). Students with relatively low achievement and low self-esteem are particularly likely to benefit in this way: Cayubıt et al. (2014) found that shadow education affects the general attitudes of participants toward their studies and learning, their perceptions about themselves, and their ability to perform school-related tasks. In the USA, Mori (2015) found that students who engaged in tutoring were more motivated and interested in learning science and spent more time studying alone. In South Korea, Min (2016) found that shadow education helps students develop fundamental learning skills such as time management, note-taking, and mnemonics. Finally, a study by the Japanese Ministry of Education revealed that the most popular reason for enrolling children in *juku* is to increase their motivation to study (Russell, 1997). Shadow education encourages basic learning skills, self-directed studying habits, and positive attitudes about learning at school, so students are more likely to become active participants in schooling, often leading to high scores on school exams.

EFFECTIVE PREPARATION FOR UPPER SCHOOL ENTRANCE EXAMS

Many scholars have found that one main reason that students seek shadow education is to help them prepare for university entrance examinations (Byun & Park, 2012; Falzon & Busuttıl, 1988; Gunawardena et al., 1994). Technical functionalists and human capitalists assume there is a direct link between educational credentials and job assignment (El-Khawas, DePietro-Jurand, & Holm-Nielsen, 1998). Based on this belief, many students worldwide want to enter prestigious universities: In South Korea, this is referred to as *hakbeolism* (Jung, 2016). Some have argued that the growth of shadow education is a result of parents and their children's dissatisfaction with public education (Lee & Jang, 2010) especially with regard to preparing for university entrance examinations (Mori & Baker, 2010).

Several factors affect admission to prestigious schools, including school grades (GPA), entrance exam scores, letters of recommendation, extracurricular activities, and volunteering experience, but standardized entrance exams are arguably the most influential. In the USA, there has been increasing emphasis on official university entrance examination scores (Dowrkin, 2001; Grodsky, Warren, & Felts, 2008), and this competitive pressure has led to the rapid expansion of shadow education (Russell, 2002). In the USA, these tests include the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and American College Testing (ACT). Elsewhere, they include Gaokao in China, *Suneung* in South Korea, Daigaku Nyuushi Sentaa Shike in Japan, Baccalauréat in France, Abitur in Germany, and General Certificate of Education Advanced Level in the UK. The pressure is even stronger for international students who must score highly on English proficiency tests, such as TOEFL, IELTS, GRE, or GMAT.

Specialized shadow education institutes help students prepare for university entrance exams. In North America, some students attend so-called cramming centers; research has shown there is a positive relationship between participation in a cramming center and improved SAT test scores, especially among Asian American students (Byun & Park, 2012). Other examples include hakwons or boarding hakwons in South Korea, juku in Japan, and buxiban in Taiwan/China. Shadow education helps students prepare for university entrance examinations in four main ways.

First, shadow education institutes track trends and patterns in university entrance examinations. Students can use these to decide how to solve problems, which can be called a meta-cognitive approach. For example, the recently revised SAT in the USA includes evidence-based reading and writing, a reading test, writing and language tests, math, and an essay. To help students with the reading test part, shadow education institutes may provide students with the most frequently appearing words, passage organization patterns, common errors (exaggeration, diminution, addition), and effective approaches to specific types of questions. Many grade 12 students we interviewed made comments like Hyunsu, who said, ‘at hakwon, they teach me specific strategies to solve the questions. Importantly, they help me with analyzing why I got some questions wrong, and how to improve my test-taking skills.’ Learning about patterns in tests and effective approaches to deal them is critical in preparing students for entrance exams (Kim, 2016; Kim & Kim, 2015).

Second, shadow education institutes provide opportunities for students to repeatedly practice on previous entrance examinations. Exercises such as drilling allow students to practice their test-taking skills and learn how to manage time for certain questions. Exams require effective time management, because it is difficult for most students to solve all problems. For example, the SAT requires students to solve 153 questions in 3 hours: 65 minutes for 52 critical reading questions, 80 minutes for 57 mathematics questions, and 35 minutes for 44 writing questions, with an additional 50 minutes for an optional essay. Pattern drilling can reduce the time spent on each question, and students also develop their time management skills in terms of how much time to spend on certain questions. Moreover, because SAT questions are selected from a test question bank, students who have been drilled using previous tests have an advantage. Shadow education institutes also lead mock tests to help students get used to the actual test environment.

Third, shadow education institutes provide educational counseling and school entrance information. Generally, school teachers or counselors are expected to provide this information to students and parents. However, the school counseling system may have limitations such as lack of specialized expertise among counselors, frequent changes to school curriculum and university admission policy (Kim & Kim, 2015), and especially insufficient numbers of counselors (Kim, Yoo, & Hong, 2015). Private admission counseling services usually offer more specialized, focused, and especially individualized approaches to university admission in three phases: (1) pre-testing: evaluation of a student's background in academic/personal/extracurricular areas, customized guidance in studying, course planning, extracurricular choices, vacation plans; (2) testing: year-by-year strategy for standardized testing; and (3) post-testing: application strategy, crafting a final college list for early and regular admission based on estimated test scores, and assistance with admission essays, activity sheets, lists of awards and background information, and preparing for interviews.

Finally, Internet-based shadow education institutes have become popular among students preparing for entrance exams (Kim, 2016; Ventura & Jang, 2010). They allow students to participate in supplementary classes with less time and energy. High school students preparing for college admission are busy, and easy access to Internet lectures allows them to participate in classes anywhere and anytime via smartphones or laptops. This eliminates commuting time and provides all students with

access to classes by so-called star lecturers, who were previously only available for students living in wealthy areas. Lecturers deliver the content knowledge in interesting ways. When needed, they or their assistants address questions from students on Web site posts or sent by text.

In the USA, students can access several online resources to help them find the right schools, including College Navigator, College Insight, College Board's Big Future, Cappex, etc. These services provide students with the reliable data about any college in the country and have filters to compare schools considering the location, academic interests, cost and financial aid, admissions, programs offered, graduation rates, athletics, college reviews, and other general statistics. In South Korea, students can access companies such as Jinhak.com (jinhak means 'to enter schools') that provide services for college applicants: introductory information about each school and their admission requirements. They can even estimate the possibility of a student being admitted into a particular school and department: Students can upload their suneung (scores on the Korean College Scholastic Ability Test) on the Web site, and admission specialists can recommend schools and estimate the probability of being accepted.

ACCELERATED LEARNING FOR ADVANCED STUDENTS

In contrast to remedial supplementary lessons, which are designed to help students meet the coursework requirements in schooling, enrichment-oriented shadow education lessons are designed to boost achievement among students who already perform well in school (Baker & LeTendre, 2005). Enrichment activities are more common in East Asian countries such as Japan, South Korea, China, and Taiwan (Kim & Chang, 2010; Kim & Lee, 2010), in contrast to remedial activities, which are popular worldwide (Baker, Akiba, LeTendre, & Wiseman, 2001; Baker & LeTendre, 2005). Shadow education provides learning opportunities for advanced students in ways that public education cannot (Kim, 2016).

Generally, accelerated learning enables advanced students to learn in a relatively short time, allowing them to progress more rapidly than their peers. Advanced students want advanced content; for example, research has shown that some students prefer juku to public school because juku provides materials not taught in schools (Dawson, 2010). Some research indicates that this kind of enrichment can reproduce socioeconomic

inequalities (Dawson, 2010), and the South Korean government attempted (unsuccessfully) to suppress shadow education for advanced students (Kim, 2016). Other scholars have suggested that accelerated learning is a clever market strategy: It eases anxiety in students who attend it and increases anxiety in those who do not, eventually forcing them to become customers themselves (Kim, 2003). The following discussion explores why advanced students prefer shadow education to public education.

In South Korea, special purpose high school hakwons and youngjae (gifted students) hakwons have emerged. They select advanced students from elementary schools to train them to enter special purpose high schools (SPHSs), which are the most prestigious high schools in South Korea, and finally to enter prestigious college. They offer specialized curricula that are popular with students (Kim, 2003), as illustrated by the following interview excerpts:

At school, we must study what the teacher wants me to do. Many times, I had to study what I already knew. At hakwons, I really learn new things. It is where I truly learn something. (Individual interview with Sang-wook, November 14, 2017)

I face challenging questions at hakwons, the questions that prepare me to enter the high school that I want to enter. A question took me three days once. And I did it. (Individual interview with Ji-hye, October 3, 2017)

In South Korea, the 2008 High School Diversification 300 Project law changed the traditional high school track into two different tracks (general high schools and SPHSs). This sparked ‘education fever’ as parents and students wanted to enter the prestigious high schools (e.g., science high school, foreign language high school, independent private high school, international school, and youngjae high school). Students attending these schools have an advantage when it comes to entering prestigious colleges. The entrance exams for SPHSs are highly challenging and require preparation beginning in elementary school, which is only available in the shadow education sector.

Students who want to enter gifted or science high schools must usually master math and science at the high school level before even entering high school. In general, students who attend gifted or science high schools are granted entry to the prestigious Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST) or special purpose engineering colleges

once they reach the third year of high school (Cho, 2015). Other students study at specialized English hakwons, which train students in the Test of English Foreign Language (TOEFL) and Seoul National University created Test of English Proficiency (TEPS) material. In general, the TOEFL is taken by those who wish to enter universities in the USA, and the TEPS is utilized in employment decisions after students graduate from university.

For our research project on gifted education hakwon, we observed four hakwons in the Seoul area. Our field observations and interviews with four instructors and eight students revealed three common characteristics. First, they have a rigorously admission process. Their curricula are much more advanced than those in schools, so they accept only qualified students. One instructor told us:

We must be selective and honest in making our decisions. If we accept those who are not qualified by our standards, their existence may function as a barrier for high level of instruction, and we have seen that they usually quit because they could not follow our program. (Individual interview with Cho Sang-wook head instructor at N-GEH on June 24, 2014)

The selection process usually involves three phases: review of school report cards, testing by the hakwon, and interviews with students and parents.

Second, they have highly tailored curricula tailored to specific universities. While other forms of shadow education supplement or accelerate learning at schools (Aurini, 2006; Kim, 2016; Lee, 2007), gifted education hakwons focus helping students enter desired schools and universities. They tailor their curricula, programs, instructions, textbooks, and teaching/learning materials to prepare students for admission exams, interviews, essay writings, and other qualifications that might make student applications strong and distinctive. To do this, they group students by ability and personalize learning using a ‘study navigator,’ which charts individual study progress and plan, learning portfolio, and individual guidance.

Third, instructors at gifted hakwons emphasize self-directed learning. One instructor, Jin-Yong Ryu, said ‘I continuously try to inspire my students to solve questions by themselves. It includes to help them be aware of their learning habits, strengths and weaknesses, problem-solving strategies.’ According to Marzano (2000), the highest level of knowing

is self-knowledge. Given the level of competition in South Korean education, self-awareness is vital to achieve one's goals. Hakwons help students understand how they learn by encouraging them to assess the appropriateness of their learning plan, study habits, and strengths and weaknesses in terms of academic subject areas and intellectual abilities. Specific strategies include learning diaries, classes encouraging discussions and presentations, and providing in-depth feedback. Self-directed learning is vital for gifted students, because students studying at gifted hakwons require a much wider breadth of knowledge and higher cognitive levels of thinking than those studying the basic school curriculum.

PERSONALIZED LEARNING

Shadow education provides students with personalized learning (Kim, 2016; Kim & Kim, 2012, 2015; Mawer, 2015; Ozaki, 2015). Ideally, personalized learning enables all students to have equal access to quality education according to their individual needs and interests. In reality, modern schooling is limited in its ability to meet students' individual needs (Kim, 2003; Ozaki, 2015). A 2008 Japanese government survey revealed that two-thirds of parents attributed the growing role of *juku* to the lack of personalized learning in public schools. Ozaki (2015) found that *juku* teachers appeal to students more than public school teachers, possibly because of their attention to individual needs. Kim (2016) found similar results in South Korea.

Schools are unable to effectively personalize education for two main reasons. First, they have larger class sizes: On average, classes in OECD countries include 21.1 students in elementary schools and 23.3 students in junior high schools (Education at Glance, OECD, 2017); classes in developing countries are much larger. Considerable research has shown that personalized learning is not effectively practiced in overly large classrooms (Kim, 2016; Yang & Kim, 2010). School teachers find it difficult to provide personalized learning due to the wide range of academic achievement, ability, aptitude, preferred learning styles, and background knowledge among students. Additionally, students may hesitate to ask questions because they fear this may interfere with the teacher's lecture or be seen as a threat to the teacher's authority; they may prefer to take questions and learning difficulties to shadow education instructors (Kim, 2003, 2016; Yang & Kim, 2010). Second, the bureaucracy of school systems prevents effective personalized learning in countries such as Japan

and South Korea, where school curricula are very structured. School teachers in these countries are legally obligated to completely cover all the content of the official curriculum (in all subject areas) within a given period of time: This is their primary duty. This institutional pressure forces them to pay more attention to the delivery of the textbook knowledge to the whole class than to make any effort to provide personalized learning (Kim, 2003).

Among the five types of shadow education, three are most likely to stress personalized learning: (1) home-visit private tutoring, (2) private tutoring institutes, and (3) Internet-based private institutes. As discussed in the previous chapter, home-visit private tutoring is the most personalized. Parents often tell the tutor what to teach based on the student's needs and the purpose for tutoring, such as preparing for entrance exams, increasing school grades, and developing positive self-efficacy and study skills. In South Korea, this kind of tutoring is most commonly used by high school students preparing for the College Scholastic Ability Test (Kim, 2016). Families often spend USD\$30,000 or more annually per student on this type of shadow education (Oh My News, 2012).

Private tutoring institutes have much smaller class sizes than schools, which helps them provide personalized learning. Classes average only 8–15 (in some cases 3–5) students—about half the size of public school classes (Kim, 2003). They also often group students by ability. For example, elementary students in the same grade are grouped into advanced, intermediate, and basic classes based on their academic level. Middle and high school students are grouped by ability regardless of their grade: Academic level is the most important criterion. For example, we often observed ninth-graders studying eleventh-grade math at private tutoring institutes. Effective ability grouping is crucial in ensuring quality instruction and student learning, so the institutes administer various kinds of diagnostic and formative assessments to measure student progress, academic level, and learning difficulties on a daily, weekly, monthly, and annual basis. Students can move the next level at any time, once their performance shows that they have mastered the current level. Private tutoring institutes also provide types of learning materials that schools do not. For example, some Korean middle school students in advanced English courses may read the *New York Times* or watch YouTube videos, as college students do. We also observed that advanced classes emphasize discussion and creative thinking more than basic-level classes, where instructions tend to be more didactic and explanation oriented.

Internet-based private institutes also incorporate personalized learning effectively. Students can choose their favored courses to prepare for school tests and the KSAT simply by clicking a mouse: They can choose from numerous courses and tutors based on their needs and purposes. Some scholars have referred to this feature as ‘supermarket education’ (Kim & Kim, 2015). Additionally, unlike in schools, students using Internet-based private institutes can start and restart classes anywhere and anytime and skip lessons they do not need. Finally, they can instantly receive answers to questions by simply sending their instructor a message.

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