
A book review of teachers as tutors: shadow education market dynamics in Georgia

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Private tutoring, also referred to as shadow education, has become prevalent worldwide (Zhang & Bray, 2021), and Nutsa Kobakhidze's monograph *Teachers as tutors: Shadow education market dynamics in Georgia* offers a unique contribution by exploring the intricate dynamics of teachers' identity and social interactions within shadow and mainstream education. Due to its Georgian context, Kobakhidze's work is set apart from other publications on the topic of private tutoring, and thus makes an essential contribution to comparative studies of shadow education. The book is based on her Ph.D. dissertation, which received the prestigious Comparative and International Education Society Gail P. Kelly Outstanding Dissertation Award. In addition to its unique research context, the book's robust theoretical framework, rigorous methodology and insightful findings are particularly noteworthy.

Kobakhidze offers a comprehensive introduction to the specific research context and identifies a gap in the study of shadow education. Although previous literature has explored various aspects of shadow education in diverse societies, few studies have focused on the context of post-Soviet Georgia. Private tutoring has been conducted in Georgia since the Soviet era but has received little attention from the government. As in other post-Socialist countries, this form of education contradicts the fundamental ideology of communism inherited from Soviet times. As Kobakhidze elaborates, acknowledging the existence of private tutoring implies a recognition of the underlying incentives that drive teachers and students to engage in it. These include the poor quality of mainstream education, low teacher salaries, widespread corruption in the education admissions process and the problems resulting from the exam-oriented selection system. As the government cannot ideologically accept these issues, it turns a blind eye towards the phenomenon of private tutoring, which has thus developed without extensive government regulation. The book's focus on the dual roles of teachers who are involved in private tutoring while also working in mainstream schools is thus necessary and valuable. In addition, the findings from the novel research context of Georgia can have significant implications for other post-Soviet countries.

Another highlight of the book is its integration of various theories from economic sociology, which has never before been applied to the field of shadow education. The study



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combines the three elements of market operation formulated by Beckert (2002), the concept of social embeddedness proposed by Granovetter (1985), the notion of equilibrating relationships outlined by Plattner (1989) and the concept of moral economy, as defined by Mauritz (2014). While classical market theories can be applied to explain the typical characteristics of teacher behavior in the shadow education market, Kobakhidze argues that these concepts, borrowed from economic sociology, can help to explain why their behavior deviates from that predicted by classical theories. For instance, although these dual-role teachers are found to behave according to economic motivations, such as engaging in competitive pricing for their private tutoring services, they also exhibit moral considerations in their economic activities, such as providing free tutoring or discounted prices to underprivileged students. By drawing on economic sociology theories, the book enriches our understanding of the complexities and nuances of teachers' sentiment and behaviors in the private tutoring market in Georgia.

The rigor of the book's research methodology is also remarkable. Kobakhidze discusses the philosophical assumptions underlying the complex issues she investigates and justifies her qualitative research approach. She also tackles some of the thorny issues regarding qualitative approaches in general, such as investigator subjectivity, the degree of representativeness and the limitations of generalization. For example, while acknowledging that her position as an insider brings her own biases and pre-established understandings to the study, Kobakhidze contends that this position also enables her to fully address Georgia's contextual nuances, distinct culture and local languages. She also provides fascinating insights into her research methods and discusses her fieldwork experiences along with the relevant ethical issues. For example, she describes how she negotiated with a school principal to gain entry to a school, and also her discomfort when asking a 75-year-old teacher about her salary and untaxed income from private tutoring, given her concerns about respecting the teacher's privacy. Descriptions such as these appear throughout the book, enabling readers to grasp how the author as the primary instrument in the research managed her fieldwork, which also increases the trustworthiness of the entire study.

Finally, the book provides notable conclusions regarding teachers' identities, the free market of shadow education and the economic-sociological perspective on teachers' behaviors in the market, as presented in Chapters Five to Seven, respectively. These support previous findings (e.g. Bray & Hajar, 2023; Bray, Kobakhidze, & Kwo, 2020) that reveal tutors' business-like traits in other contexts. The book also provides an in-depth and comprehensive assessment of why teachers are inclined to engage in private tutoring and how they manage such engagement in the Georgian context. Kobakhidze offers a deeper understanding of what motivates teachers to work in the shadow education market, by revealing "the existence of culturally influenced patterns of teachers' identities" (p. 5) as market actors. Throughout the research, the book offers a humanistic understanding instead of indifferent objectivity and presents a holistic view rather than fragmented episodes. These attributes ensure that the analysis is robust. Kobakhidze demonstrates throughout that a good qualitative researcher not only adheres closely to the specific research approach but also exhibits a contextual and anthropocentric understanding of the issue being constructed.

However, although the book offers a comprehensive introduction in Chapter One, its discussions of the "researcher positionality" may be more appropriate in Chapter Four. The overall conclusions in the final chapter could also have been strengthened through further elaboration of the policy implications, thus providing readers with a more informed understanding of the practical significance of the research findings.

Teachers as tutors is an exceptional work on shadow education. It offers a distinctive and contextual perspective, along with an innovative theoretical framework, a rigorous methodological approach and intriguing findings about teachers' identities as private tutors. I wholeheartedly recommend it to those who are interested in shadow education,

particularly in terms of comparative perspectives, qualitative research methodology and the education system in post-Soviet countries.

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