

Curriculum Dysfunction and The Crisis of School Legitimacy in Indonesia

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Abstract: This study looks closely at how curriculum problems, more shadow education, and less trust in formal education are related in Indonesia. The study looks at academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, and pertinent empirical studies on curriculum implementation, shadow education, and educational transformation using a qualitative literature review approach. Systematic review, comparative analysis, and critical interpretation based on critical pedagogical viewpoints helped to examine data. The results show that the quick development of tutoring businesses and educational technology platforms points to a systemic breakdown of official institutions' ability to offer significant, pertinent, and fair learning opportunities. Curriculum dysfunction defined by too much content loads, administrative pressures, and little interactive learning has helped to damage public trust in institutions and motivate kids to look for other learning environments. Moreover, the growth of shadow education has worsened educational disparities by favoring pupils with more financial means and strengthened the commodification of knowledge. By offering a critical awareness of how issues connected to the curriculum affect current learning techniques, compromise the societal purpose of schools, and raise more general questions about educational equity, legitimacy, and social transformation in the Indonesian setting, this paper helps to advance the field of education.

Keywords: Critical pedagogy; Curriculum dysfunction; Educational equity; Knowledge commodification; Shadow education

INTRODUCTION

Education has long been regarded as a key instrument for cultivating high-quality human resources; however, it has never been entirely free from ongoing tensions and challenges. To this day, most people continue to associate education primarily with schools. Schools function not only as formal learning environments but also as spaces that foster reasoning, character development, and fundamental human skills. In recent years, however, the role of schools has increasingly been called into question not only in terms of their effectiveness, but also their meaning, essence, and functional relevance within society (Moreira et al., 2023). A particularly prominent phenomenon in this era of rapid advancement is the rise of shadow education, encompassing private tutoring, supplementary learning centers, and education technology (edutech) platforms, all of which have expanded across nearly all segments of society (Bray, 2021). This development is no longer merely indicative of more diverse learning options; rather, it signals a growing perception that formal schooling alone is no longer sufficient to support academic success or to produce high-quality individuals. This indicates low parental trust in formal education.

In Indonesia, the growth of shadow education is not merely a passing trend; rather, it reflects both an emotional and rational response to the uncertainties surrounding formal education. Many parents find themselves in situations marked by doubt, particularly when schools are perceived as providing insufficient space for deep and meaningful understanding of learning materials. This concern often evolves into genuine anxiety about their children's future, leading parents to seek alternative forms of support beyond the formal school system. In many cases, society has begun to believe that academic success is more strongly determined by the intensity of participation in supplementary tutoring, in its various forms, than by the quality of instruction provided in schools. The growing perception that schools are no longer adequate to meet contemporary learning needs has become part of public discourse, both within and beyond the classroom (McGuire & Lay, 2020). This condition points to a perceived failure of schools to create open and comprehensive learning environments, as they are increasingly viewed as institutions that merely produce grades and certificates lacking substantive meaning.

This condition indicates a growing crisis of legitimacy faced by schools. School legitimacy is not solely determined by its existence as a formal institution, but also by social trust in its ability to provide meaningful and relevant learning experiences (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). When a significant

proportion of students acquire cognitive or conceptual understanding from tutoring centers or edutech platforms rather than from schools, schools begin to lose part of their function as the primary source of knowledge. This issue is highly complex, and one critical aspect that warrants reevaluation is the curriculum. As a guiding framework for instructional practices, the curriculum is expected to align with educational goals and societal expectations. In many regions, however, the core function of schooling is increasingly difficult to realize. Teachers face similar constraints, including dense and difficult-to-understand curricula, unclear dissemination, limited instructional time, funding challenges, and administrative demands. These conditions weaken schools' capacity to foster reflective and dialogical learning environments. A recurring phenomenon observed in practice is the lack of alignment between curriculum design at the policy level and its implementation in the classroom. Rusman (2019) emphasizes that a gap persists between curriculum planning and everyday teaching practices, resulting in educational objectives that are often not achieved optimally. Moreover, the Indonesian curriculum is frequently misaligned with the capacities of schools, leading to superficial classroom implementation that prioritizes task completion and target achievement rather than deep understanding. Beyond cognitive aspects, the diminished functioning of schools also affects their role as spaces for cultivating values and character. In this regard, shadow education similarly falls short as an appropriate setting for character development (Juppenny et al., 2025). More concerning, however, is the gradual erosion of the school's role as a space not only for knowledge acquisition but also for the formation of values and character. If such school cultures persist, the fundamental purpose of schooling risks being progressively undermined.

The dysfunction of schools gives rise to increasingly complex consequences, placing the curriculum at the center of scrutiny in relation to current educational challenges. The curriculum is often regarded as a root cause of these issues. An overloaded curriculum, framed by a narrow and monotonous assessment logic, tends to push schools to prioritize score attainment rather than the deepening of understanding. Sahlberg (2011) argues that such a model traps schools in administrative routines and standardization pressures, thereby limiting opportunities for pedagogical practices that foster critical thinking. A curriculum that offers little flexibility to teachers ultimately creates a gap between what is prescribed in policy documents and what actually occurs in classroom practice. This gap is then exploited by shadow education, which offers learning formats that are more concise, structured, and focused on learning strategies and test preparation. As a result, formal schooling which should serve as the primary pillar of education gradually loses its central role. Its inability to meet learning expectations has contributed to the rise of shadow education as an alternative support system for a society that is increasingly reluctant to rely solely on schools, particularly due to the lack of assurance regarding the quality of learning they provide.

Shadow education, often perceived as an alternative or solution, ultimately remains partial and imperfect. Rather than addressing the root causes of educational problems, it tends to reinforce a market-driven education system. A critical pedagogical perspective offers a sharper lens through which to examine this phenomenon. Freire (2019) reminds us that education always operates within relations of power and non-neutral social structures. When the education system becomes subordinated to market logic and competition, learning processes are reduced to technical activities aimed merely at achieving scores and obtaining certificates devoid of substantive meaning. Giroux (2011) further argues that education under market pressures loses its emancipatory value, as knowledge is transformed into a commodified entity. In this context, shadow education can be seen as a manifestation of the capitalization of education, where knowledge is no longer understood as a process of meaning-making, but rather as a product packaged and marketed in the form of modules, intensive programs, or premium classes.

The rapid expansion of shadow education also indicates the presence of structural relationships among the curriculum, unequal access, and the shifting role of schools. Individuals who are able to invest in supplementary educational services gain a competitive advantage over those from lower-income backgrounds, thereby exacerbating academic inequality (Tansel & Bircan, 2006). At the same time, schools struggle to keep pace with increasingly complex learning demands. The growing dominance of tutoring institutions and edutech platforms clearly illustrates that schools, as formal educational institutions, are facing serious challenges in sustaining their role as public institutions that facilitate processes of humanization and the empowerment of knowledge.

Based on the discussion above, the phenomenon of shadow education should not be

understood merely as a supplementary support for achieving educational goals or as an additional component in fostering a healthy educational ecosystem. On the contrary, it serves as a strong signal of unresolved structural tensions within the Indonesian education system. Accordingly, this study aims to critically examine how curriculum dysfunction contributes to the growth of shadow education, as well as to analyze the tangible impacts of the weakening legitimacy of schools within contemporary educational practices.

While previous studies have explored the expansion of shadow education and its socioeconomic implications, limited attention has been given to its relationship with curriculum dysfunction and the declining legitimacy of formal schooling, particularly in the Indonesian context. This study addresses this gap by adopting a critical pedagogical perspective to examine the structural tensions underlying these phenomena. Specifically, this study aims to critically analyze how curriculum dysfunction contributes to the growth of shadow education and to investigate its implications for the weakening legitimacy of schools in contemporary educational practices. The findings of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically by offering a deeper understanding of the structural challenges within the education system, as well as providing insights for policymakers and educators in re-evaluating the role of schools in delivering meaningful and equitable learning experiences.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a literature review to critically examine the relationship between curriculum dysfunction, the rise of shadow education, and the declining legitimacy of schools in Indonesia. The literature review is conducted by analyzing theoretical frameworks, empirical findings, and prior studies that are relevant to the issues of shadow education, curriculum practices, and educational transformation. This approach enables the study to explore the phenomenon not only descriptively but also critically, particularly in understanding the structural tensions within the education system (Sugiyono, 2015).

The data used in this study consist of secondary sources, including academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, and credible online publications. These sources are purposively selected based on their relevance to key issues such as curriculum implementation, the expansion of shadow education, and the shifting legitimacy of schools in Indonesia. Particular attention is given to recent studies that discuss educational inequality, marketization of education, and the role of supplementary learning systems in shaping contemporary learning practices. By drawing on these sources, the study seeks to capture a comprehensive and critical understanding of how curriculum-related challenges contribute to broader structural changes in the education system (Bowen, 2009).

Data analysis is conducted through a series of systematic and interpretative steps. Initially, selected literature is carefully reviewed and summarized to identify central concepts and arguments related to curriculum dysfunction, shadow education, and school legitimacy. Subsequently, the findings are synthesized to construct a coherent analytical narrative that connects these interrelated issues. A comparative analysis is then employed to examine patterns, similarities, and differences across studies, particularly in understanding how formal schooling and shadow education interact within different contexts. Furthermore, a critical analysis is undertaken to explore underlying assumptions, tensions, and contradictions in previous research, especially those related to the dominance of market-oriented learning practices. Finally, the study develops an interpretative framework to explain how curriculum dysfunction not only contributes to the rise of shadow education but also accelerates the weakening of school legitimacy in contemporary educational practices (Creswell, 2016).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Shadow education in Indonesia continues to show a significant upward trend, not only through conventional tutoring, both formal and informal, but also through edutech platforms that are increasingly taking on a major role in students' learning processes. Globally, the edutech sector experienced remarkable acceleration during the pandemic, with a World Bank report indicating an increase in active users of up to 200% in March 2020. In Indonesia, a survey by DailySocial.id (2022)

highlights a growing public awareness of educational startups from 2021 to the first quarter of 2022, with this category ranking fifth among all analyzed digital sectors at 51%. These findings suggest that society is increasingly relying on alternative learning spaces rather than formal schooling.

The growth of the edutech ecosystem in Indonesia did not emerge suddenly. A report by Badan Pusat Statistik (2018) found that 52.6% of students across all levels of education regularly access the internet, with 65% of them using it to complete school assignments. This finding is consistent with a global survey conducted by the University of Cambridge (2018), which reported that 42% of students use smartphones and 48% use computers for learning activities. Since 2007, Indonesia has experienced rapid growth in the number of edutech platform users and has even become the largest market in ASEAN (DigitalTransformation.co.id., 2023)

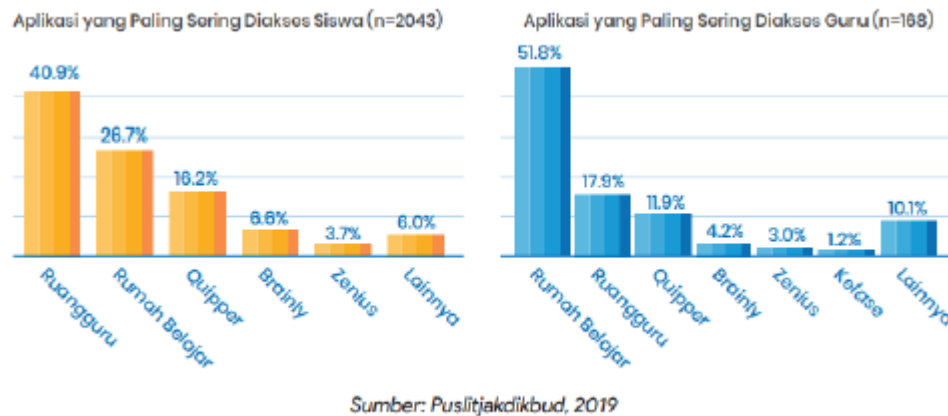


Figure 1. Graph of applications used by teachers and students

The data further confirm the growing dominance of edutech platforms within the shadow education ecosystem in Indonesia. As illustrated in Figure 1, Ruangguru emerges as the most frequently accessed platform by students, accounting for 40.9%, followed by Rumah Belajar (26.7%) and Quipper (16.2%). Meanwhile, among teachers, Rumah Belajar ranks first with 51.8%, followed by Ruangguru at 17.9%.

These findings indicate that the reliance on shadow education is not limited to students but has also extended to teachers, suggesting a broader systemic shift in learning practices. The significant use of these platforms reflects how both students and educators increasingly depend on external learning resources to support, and in some cases substitute, formal classroom instruction. This phenomenon highlights a critical transformation in the role of schools, where the delivery of knowledge is no longer centered within formal institutions. From a structural perspective, this pattern can be interpreted as a consequence of curriculum-related challenges within formal education. The increasing dependence on edutech platforms suggests that schools may not be fully able to accommodate the diverse and evolving learning needs of students. As a result, shadow education functions as an alternative space that offers more flexible, accessible, and targeted learning experiences. However, this shift simultaneously raises concerns regarding the weakening legitimacy of schools as the primary site of knowledge production and learning.

In addition to edutech platforms, conventional tutoring institutions also demonstrate a strong presence within the shadow education landscape. Data from the Direktorat Pembinaan Kursus dan Pelatihan (2012) show that in 2012 there were 13,446 course institutions in Indonesia, of which 11,207 institutions, or approximately 83.35%, had obtained official operating licenses. The total number of participants reached 1,348,565 individuals, ranging from primary school students to those in higher education. Students at the senior high school level accounted for the largest proportion at 45.51%, followed by junior high school at 22.97%, primary school at 17.84%, and postgraduate levels (master's and doctoral) at 10.11%.

Furthermore, Intan, as cited in Muhammad Arif (2022) estimated that there are approximately 1,362 tutoring institutions with a total of 955,863 students, with participation projected to increase by

10% annually. The high level of student participation in shadow education is closely associated with the misalignment between the formal curriculum and the competencies required to succeed in university entrance examinations, as well as students' relatively strong trust in tutors and tutoring institutions (Latifah Isti Barokah, 2022). Additional driving factors include exam-related anxiety, a lack of confidence in formal schooling, and pressure to gain admission to higher levels of education. These findings reinforce the argument that formal schools have not yet been able to function as supportive and adequate learning environments that effectively address students' academic needs.

Based on the data presented above, the development of shadow education in Indonesia demonstrates a consistent and systematic growth pattern. The surge in edutech platform usage reaching several hundred percent during the pandemic along with increasing public awareness of educational startups, reflects a growing trust in alternative learning spaces as more responsive sources of knowledge compared to formal schooling. Furthermore, the fact that more than half of Indonesian students regularly access the internet and utilize it for academic purposes reinforces the finding that learning experiences are no longer dependent on physical classrooms. Instead, they are increasingly shifting toward more flexible and technology-based learning models.

These findings are further reinforced by the widespread presence of conventional tutoring institutions, which involve millions of students across various educational levels. The dominance of participants from junior to senior secondary levels, coupled with the increasing number of tutoring institutions each year, indicates that the formal education system continues to generate significant academic anxiety, particularly in relation to assessments, examinations, and transitions to higher levels of education. This dynamic suggests that formal schools have not yet been able to provide sufficiently supportive learning experiences, both in terms of academic guidance and the development of students' confidence, as well as the overall quality of instruction. Consequently, many learners seek alternative sources of learning outside formal institutions.

Overall, these findings indicate that shadow education has evolved into a parallel system that both complements and compensates for the limitations of formal schooling. The high level of dependence on edutech platforms and conventional tutoring, as demonstrated by the preceding data, signals a structural inefficiency in the functioning of the curriculum and instructional practices within schools. Therefore, this study confirms that the expansion of shadow education is not merely a technical phenomenon but rather a direct reflection of the weakening legitimacy of schools in ensuring the quality, reliability, and relevance of learning for students.

Discussion

Shadow Education as an Indicator of Structural Failure in Formal Schooling

The rapid expansion of tutoring services and edutech platforms signals a concerning shift, indicating that schools are gradually losing both their capacity and their fundamental meaning as spaces for deep understanding. When students feel the need to seek a "second education" outside formal institutions, this should not be viewed merely as a matter of choice, but rather as a clear indication that the existing structure of schooling is no longer able to provide adequate learning experiences (Situmorang et al., 2025). Freire (2019) characterizes such conditions as a form of "domesticated" education, in which students are positioned as passive recipients of knowledge, without being encouraged to interpret, question, or construct meaning. This condition ultimately contributes to heightened anxiety, particularly when students are confronted with examinations and assessments.

In this context, shadow education continues to flourish outside the formal system, reflecting the erosion of schools' moral authority as spaces of emancipation and critical engagement. This phenomenon does not necessarily indicate that tutoring institutions or edutech platforms are inherently superior; rather, it highlights the extent to which schools have drifted away from their essential purpose. Consequently, this trend should be understood as a serious structural symptom that requires critical attention, as the continued weakening of schools risks reducing their role to merely procedural institutions, rather than meaningful spaces for cultivating critical thinking and improving the quality of human resources.

Curriculum Dysfunction as the Primary Source of the Legitimacy Crisis

The curriculum is ideally positioned as a bridge between knowledge and the lived realities of students. However, in practice, an overly dense curriculum, coupled with administrative-oriented

demands and limited dialogical engagement in classroom instruction, often distances students from meaningful learning experiences. Freire (2019) argues that a curriculum which positions students as passive objects leads to a form of education that is static, disengaging, and devoid of transformative potential. When the curriculum is reduced to a mere collection of content, lacking social relevance, it inevitably loses its pedagogical legitimacy. It is at this point that shadow education begins to assume a compensatory role, offering simplified materials, strategic guidance, and condensed learning modules as a response to the complexity of the formal curriculum in Indonesia.

The limitations of the formal curriculum extend beyond its content to the logic underlying its design. In many cases, the curriculum appears to be structured to fulfill reporting requirements and standardized benchmarks, rather than to cultivate critical consciousness. Consequently, students are driven to learn in order to meet external demands rather than to achieve genuine understanding. This condition indirectly encourages reliance on tutoring services and edutech platforms, which provide more structured, concise, and goal-oriented versions of learning that are often perceived as more accessible and effective. As a result, schools gradually lose public trust, and the curriculum itself loses its authority as an instrument of intellectual and social emancipation (Zamzani, 2020)

Moreover, the role of teachers as the primary agents in enacting the curriculum further complicates this issue. In practice, the curriculum is often perceived merely as an administrative requirement rather than as a meaningful pedagogical guide. Sudirman (2019) emphasizes that teachers should function as critical cultural agents who are capable of engaging with dominant cultural values, both within society and within themselves, in order to foster reflective and transformative learning. The inability to realize this role contributes to the weakening of the curriculum's function in promoting meaningful education. Consequently, these conditions collectively lead to a broader crisis of legitimacy, where the curriculum is no longer trusted as a reliable foundation for delivering relevant and empowering learning experiences.

The Commodification of Knowledge and Education as Capital

The rapid expansion of the shadow education industry signals a profound transformation in the educational ecosystem, where knowledge is no longer viewed as a public right but increasingly as a commodified resource. Knowledge, which should function as a means of liberation, is gradually transformed into a product that must be purchased to enhance academic opportunities. This shift reflects a form of dehumanization, particularly when education becomes embedded within market logic and departs from its humanistic values (Freire, 2019). Tutoring institutions and edutech platforms further reinforce this commodification by offering paid services that, in principle, should already be accessible within formal schooling. As a result, schools are increasingly perceived as ineffective and inefficient in delivering meaningful learning experiences.

This commodification also narrows the meaning of learning itself. Shadow education often promotes premium packages, quick strategies, modular content, and exam-oriented techniques, yet rarely provides space for deep and meaningful understanding. From a critical perspective, knowledge that has been commodified loses its emancipatory function, as education is reduced to an instrument of competition rather than a process of intellectual and social transformation. Consequently, shadow education should not be regarded as a genuine solution to the shortcomings of formal schooling; instead, it reinforces the same underlying logic, positioning education as a mechanism of selection and capital accumulation, rather than as a process of humanization and the development of high-quality individuals.

The Reproduction of Social Inequality and the Loss of Pedagogical Essence

Shadow education inherently reinforces social inequality. Individuals with greater economic resources are able to purchase additional access to knowledge, while those with limited means are left behind within the same competitive system. Freire (2019) argues that structural inequalities are often normalized as “natural consequences,” when in fact they are products of systemic design. As access to learning becomes increasingly privatized, education shifts from being a mechanism of social mobility to a means of reproducing existing class structures. This inequality not only widens academic gaps but also generates psychological and structural disparities. Students from middle- and upper-income backgrounds benefit from dual support both from formal schooling and shadow education whereas those from lower-income families rely solely on schools that are themselves experiencing functional decline. Consequently, shadow education creates a dual system: one for students who can “purchase opportunities,” and another for those who must depend on increasingly inadequate formal education.

Such a system is not only inequitable but also contradicts the fundamental principle of education as a process of humanization.

At the same time, formal schooling remains constrained by a curriculum that, in practice, reduces learning to the mere delivery of content. Teachers are often required to complete curricular targets rather than facilitate meaningful understanding. Mahur et al (2019) conceptualizes this condition as banking education, in which students are treated as passive recipients of deposited knowledge, with little room for critical dialogue. This model weakens the reflective dimension of learning, both during and beyond the classroom experience. In response, shadow education attempts to fill this gap by offering more structured and accessible learning support, often perceived as more engaging by students. In some cases, tutors within these systems demonstrate more proactive and dialogical approaches, although such practices remain limited.

However, this dynamic ultimately produces a deeper cycle of distortion. While formal schooling loses its dialogical space, shadow education simultaneously reinforces a reductionist approach by accelerating learning processes that should, in principle, allow time for critical reflection. As a result, learning is transformed into a series of mechanical strategies rather than an intellectual process that cultivates awareness and understanding. In this context, shadow education, often perceived as a support mechanism, does not resolve the underlying problems of education. Instead, it intensifies them, reflecting a broader regression in the educational paradigm, where learning is no longer oriented toward humanizing individuals but rather toward optimizing their performance within standardized measures of achievement.

The Erosion of the Public Function of Schools in Contemporary Education

Schools are fundamentally intended to serve as public spaces that provide equitable access to knowledge for all members of society. However, as shadow education increasingly assumes core instructional roles, schools gradually lose their public function. Rather than functioning as central sites of learning, schools risk being reduced to administrative spaces with limited pedagogical significance (Kawedhar et al., 2020). The erosion of this public function poses serious implications for the future of education, as it opens pathways toward the gradual privatization of learning. In such a context, the legitimacy of knowledge shifts from public institutions to private providers, thereby weakening the role of the state in ensuring equitable access to education. Over time, this transformation redefines education from a fundamental right of citizens into a commodity accessible primarily to those who can afford it.

From a critical pedagogical perspective, this condition reflects a deeper transformation in the nature of education itself. As education becomes increasingly aligned with market logic and competition, it loses its emancipatory character and instead functions as an industry oriented toward performance and selection. Consequently, the diminishing public role of schools not only signals institutional decline but also represents a broader shift away from education as a process of liberation toward education as a mechanism of stratification.

CONCLUSION

The rapid expansion of shadow education in Indonesia reflects a significant crisis in the legitimacy of formal schooling. Schools are increasingly perceived as inadequate in providing meaningful learning experiences due to curriculum dysfunction and weakened pedagogical practices. As a result, students turn to alternative learning spaces, indicating a shift in trust away from formal institutions. However, rather than resolving these issues, shadow education reinforces the commodification of knowledge and deepens social inequality. This condition highlights a broader structural problem within the education system, emphasizing the urgent need to restore the role of schools as equitable and emancipatory spaces for learning.

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