Exploring the Complexity of English Language Teacher-tutor Identities in Rural Kazakhstan: A Qualitative Inquiry

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Abstract

Shadow education refers to fee-based supplementary tutoring that operates alongside mainstream schooling and has become increasingly prevalent across global and local education systems (Bray, 2022; Hajar & Karakus, 2023). While urban tutoring markets in Kazakhstan have been widely studied (Hajar et al., 2021; Silova, 2009), rural schoolteachers' perspectives on EPT remain underexplored, especially regarding how they navigate their dual professional roles. This study, guided by Darvin and Norton's (2015) model of investment and identity in language teaching, explores how six rural English teachers in rural Kazakhstan. It investigates their motivations for engaging in EPT, the challenges of managing dual roles as schoolteachers and tutors, and the coping strategies they adopt. Data were collected using two qualitative methods: narrative writing and individual semi-structured interviews with participants from the Almaty, Karaganda, and Zhetisu regions. Findings indicate that financial motives were the main driver for offering EPT. However, participants also mentioned professional growth, student success, and a desire to contribute to national development. Teachers constructed multiple identities, including those of income providers, community supporters, and professionals facing ethical concerns. Some felt uneasy tutoring their students or recommending fee-based services, often due to the lack of effective regulation in Kazakhstan's private tutoring sector. Most participants responded agentively, using strategies such as positive self-reflection and support from trusted individuals. Yet, some considered leaving the profession due to emotional strain. The study highlights the need for clearer regulation and greater institutional recognition of the complex identities and well-being of teachers engaged in private tutoring.

Keywords: English private tutoring; language teacher-tutor identities; private tutoring regulation; qualitative inquiry; rural Kazakhstan; shadow education.