

Private Tutoring during Crisis: Lessons Learned from a Private Tutoring Provider in Indonesia

Fikri Yanda^{1*}, Lutfi Ismail², Anita Anita³, Lidya Pawestri Ayuningtyas⁴

¹Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia

²Monash University, Australia

³Universitas Islam Negeri Fatmawati, Indonesia

⁴Politeknik Negeri Jakarta, Indonesia

*Email: fikriyanda@upi.edu

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Abstract. While educational institutions worldwide have been widely affected by the crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, private tutoring (PT) providers have also profoundly impacted. The only way for survival is to shift to online services, although they have to compete with formal educational institutions that also provide online learning and teaching to the students –customers to the PT providers. The purpose of the study is to explore the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic to an English PT provider in Indonesia; how they negotiate and adapt to such a critical circumstance; and what strategies they have to take to sustain their place within the PT sector. The methodology uses in the current study is the qualitative interview and focus group discussion. The study reveals that the pandemic has the following effects on PT: 1) a decrease in the number of students; 2) financial loss; 3) employment reduction; and 4) a shift to online private tutoring. The study has several implications and recommendations for a sustainable private tutoring during crisis circumstances: 1) new tutoring approaches to meet the shifting demographics and employer demands; 2) the need for tutor professional development, particularly for conducting online private tutoring; and 3) the need to collaborate and build partnerships, not only among themselves, but also with other external parties.

Key words: COVID-19; private tutoring; tutors; shadow education

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INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has affected all dimensions of people's social life, including education. Educational institutions, including private tutoring providers, were closed in March 2020 in almost all parts of the world. Private tutoring providers, which become the focus of this study, have to deal with a number of challenges in light of their positions within the education sector as the 'shadows' (Bray 2009; Yung and Bray 2017; Yung 2020) during this time of crisis. Some of these supplementary education institutions were shifting their services from in-person tutoring to online and private tutoring (Johns and Mills 2020). For some tutoring institutions which have established online tutoring before the pandemic, this situation is more beneficial that they have already had the experience (Yarrow and Bhardwaj 2020).

Private tutoring is known as shadow education which gives extra academic learning for students after school hours (Bray 2009; Yung and Bray 2017). In several years, the studies regarding private tutoring have been emerging with the highlight on the inequality in the social structure. (e.g., Buchmann, Condron, and Roscigno 2010; Dawson 2010) also the effectiveness of academic learning for students (e.g., Kwo

and Bray 2014; Yung 2015). In Hong Kong, tutoring is the way for students to beat the inequalities in the educational system and in the communities (Yung 2019). Family socioeconomic and geographic conditions have affiliation to tutoring access. Private tutoring operates informally outside official schooling but obviously has consequences for the patterns and roles of public provision (Mahmud and Kenayathulla 2017). Private tutoring is available too in America, Australia and Western Europe, but not widely used in society (Bray 2009) even though the socioeconomic conditions of those countries are more advanced than other countries. However, there is a paucity of studies on private tutoring, particularly that within the contexts of the COVID-19 pandemic and Indonesia. The current study, therefore, attempts to fill the gap by exploring the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on a private tutoring provider in Indonesia.

Private tutoring in Indonesia

Indonesia is home to 10,320 private tutoring providers (PTPs), or officially called Lembaga Kursus dan Pelatihan (LKP) (MoECa 2021). That number increases from time to time to 10,808 PTPs nationally (MoEC 2022). That number may be the highest compared to other countries who experience private tutor-

ing, such as Hong Kong, Macau, India, and Bangladesh. The majority of PTPs are those that provide foreign language courses, dominated by English language, for various purposes, such as studying and working abroad, and hospitality services. Other PTPs provide courses, such as music, driving, computer, and cooking. While there is a huge number of PTPs, the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) find it difficult to categorize private tutoring since it cannot be included in formal education. As a result, it has been supervised under different departments. It was initially under the supervision of the Directorate of Early Childhood and Non-Formal Education, but now, it was managed by the Directorate of Vocational Education along with other out-of-school educational institutions called *Pusat Kegiatan Belajar Masyarakat* (PKBM), *Sanggar Kegiatan Belajar* (SKB), and *Pesantren* (i.e., Indonesian Islamic boarding school) (MoEC 2021b).

Historically, private tutoring in Indonesia has been recognized since 1976 within the name *Program Luar Sekolah yang diselenggarakan Masyarakat* [Community-Organized Out-of-School Education Programs] or shortened as PLSM (DoPTT 2022). It was under the supervision of the Directorate General of Out-of-School and Sports Education, a department within MoEC. A year later, it was then made official by the regulation of the Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 0151/U/1977 on the Principles of the Implementation of Community Organized out of School Education Program Development. As stated within the decree, the directorate has the responsibility over PLSM by: (1) Planning various types of education, their goals and functions; (2) Regulate institutional standardization which includes the content and quality of lessons as well as teaching and learning tools; (3) Planning to improve the quality of the tutors/tutors and their teachers; (4) Regulate the standardization and procedures for administering examinations, assessments and diplomas; and (5) Regulating and supervising institutional licensing and following its development.

In 1981, three ministerial decrees were regulated to organize PLSM. The first decree regulates that PLSM can only be established by a person, a group of people, and a legal private institution. The PLSM course program is grouped into ten educational clusters, namely domestic affairs, health, sports, agriculture, arts, crafts and industry, engineering and encroachment, services, language, and specialties). Each cluster includes various types of education, and each type of skills education is developed within a levelling system from basic, skilled, and proficient. The curriculum, as long as there is no national curric-

ulum, can be locally designed. The exam consists of a local course exam and a national exam.

In 1990, the regulation on private tutoring was renewed since it was mandated to another department, Directorate of Out-of-School Education, Youth, and Sports. The name for private tutoring providers then changed to *Organisasi Mitra Pendidikan Masyarakat* (Partner Organizations for Community Education). It was marked by the release of the Decree of Director General of Out-of-School Education, Youth, and Sports No. KEP-105/E/L/1990 on the Basic Operational Procedure for the Coaching and Development of Community Education Partners. The decree regulates that private tutoring can only be established by related professional communities, such as the Organization of English Private Tutoring Providers, the Organization of Mathematics Private Tutoring Providers, and the Organization of Cooking Private Tutoring Providers. The decree also orders the establishment of coaching consortiums for each organization. The consortiums are responsible to examine and formulate a development program that is in accordance with the community needs. The members of the consortiums include education stakeholders, users of the program graduates, experts, and related government officials.

In further developments, private tutoring establishment is adjusted to new regulations, but without ignoring previous laws that are still relevant to be used and have not been revoked. New regulations on private tutoring refer to Law No. 20 2003 on the National Education System that controls the whole education system, both formal and non-formal, including private tutoring. Since then, the name for private tutoring providers is *Lembaga Kursus dan Pelatihan* (LKP). Within the law, along with formal education, private tutoring is expected to follow the developments of science, technology, arts, and culture. It should also be based on the community needs for education and sustainable purposes, such as eradicating poverty and reducing unemployment. It is clearly stated that “private tutoring and training institutions as non-formal education units are held for people who need knowledge; skills, life skills, and attitudes to develop oneself, develop a profession, work, independent business, and/or continue education to a higher level” (Law No. 20 Article 26 Verse 4-5 2003). These private tutoring institutions are developed and monitored by national and international certifications.

Despite the fact that it has a huge number of PTPs, it is surprising that there has not been a single study covering private tutoring practices within the context of Indonesia. Bray and Lykins (2012) may have mentioned Indonesia as one of the Asian countries that they study. They mention one of the franchise models

of tutoring that has taken hold in many countries, including Indonesia, Kumon. As described by the franchise itself, it is “the world’s largest after-school math and reading enrichment program” (Kumon 2012, as in Bray and Lykins 2012). Their report on the Indonesian case mainly refers to the work by Suryadarma et al. (2006) that focuses on the correlation of primary student performance in mathematics and dictation tests, not on private tutoring practices in Indonesia. With this in mind, the current study attempts to fill this gap by exploring private tutoring practices during the COVID-19 pandemic in an Indonesian PTP.

Private tutoring during the COVID-19 pandemic

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic that people need to make adjustments, private tutoring has become one of the things that some families and parents have chosen to abandon. In Australia, for instance, parents choose not to send their children to after-school tutoring due the uncertainty around their own work and income (Gbogbo 2021). Also, parents prefer the children to focus mainly on lockdown learning, rather than added with tutoring. As recorded by Gbogbo, the COVID-19 pandemic also leads to the resignations of tutors in Australia, particularly because they are unfamiliar with online learning. Although these tutors have been assisted with a number of webinars to understand effective online tutoring and how to use various software tools, they still chose to give up because they could not cope with it. There were only a few skilled tutors who were capable of delivering tutoring online. As admitted by Mohan Dhall, a chief executive officer and co-founder of the Australian Tutoring Association (ATA) and co-founder of the Global Tutoring Association (GTA), private tutoring had undergone a 30 per cent downturn since the start of the pandemic (Gbogbo 2021).

The pandemic has also led to the shift in the tutor role. Tutoring clients –children, who could afford it, were independent kids with good technology and relatively good in online learning, but having a bad experience of uncertainty. This condition has led to changes in the role of the tutors that they need to become more focused on keeping children buoyant,

helping them to keep focused, and reassuring them, in and among addressing the actual learning issues (Gbogbo 2021). The children who could afford private tutoring during the pandemic were mostly of the ‘have’ families. For these families, tutoring is viewed as a necessity –instead of a discretionary spend, for the children. Private tutoring is considered able to help shy children, who hesitate to ask questions in normal classes, to freely be active during tutoring sessions. For these families, the cost was never an issue.

The study

Drawing on a single case study approach, this article aims to explore the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic to a franchise English PTP in Indonesia. Previously, the authors sent invitations via email to a number of English PTPs for participation in the study. Although some of them responded, only one PTP positively agreed to participate. We then arrange the time to have a virtual collective interview via Zoom. Semi-structured interviews were carried out on 22 February 2021 during *Pemberlakuan Pembatasan Kegiatan Masyarakat* [Community Activities Restrictions Enforcement] (PPKM) via Zoom with a director/owner of an English PTP and its two tutors. The interviews were carried out in Bahasa Indonesia, sometimes mixed with English, by the authors, and divided into two sessions. The first session was an interview with Rida (female), the director, who was interviewed by the first author. The second session was a collective interview between the second, the third, and the fourth authors with Mena (female) and Han (male), the tutors. The interviews were carried carefully since the data to be collected was sensitive information, as also experienced by previous researchers (see Bray 2010; Gupta 2021). There were many times the participants interrupted and refused to answer several questions, such as the detailed income of the PTP, the wages of the tutors, and the financial loss during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, translated and then thematically analysed.

Table 1. Participant Demography

Pseudonym	Status	Age	Gender	Qualification	In-Office (Year)	Nationality
Rida	Director	60	F	Bachelor in Education	30	Indonesian
Mena	Tutor/Employee	38	F	Bachelor in Mass Communication	16	Indonesian
Han	Tutor/Employee	38	M	Bachelor in English Language Education	7	Indonesian

Impacts of Covid-19 to private tutoring

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic to private tutoring practices are basically snowballing. The first and essential impact of the crisis is the decrease in the number of students enrolled in the PTP. Due to the closures and lockdowns, students –as the customers to the PTP and where the revenue mainly comes from, could not come to study. It also could not recruit new students. Like other private education institutions, it relies heavily on student fees. When there is no student, there is no money. It, therefore, experienced a huge financial loss. Consequently, it implemented cost-cutting measures as well as cutting the number of employees and tutors. “The greatest impact is that there is a significant reduction in the number of students” (Rida, director). Before the pandemic, it had a huge number of students ranging around 3,400 to 3,500. But now, it has decreased to only around 1,400 students. To survive, the PTP shifted its services to online private tutoring.

Decrease in the number of students

Due to physical interaction and travel restrictions, the PTP should suffer from the reduction in the number of students. Since private tutoring is generally recognized as supplement to formal schooling, the parents of these students gained no loss not to send their children to the PTP. In fact, they could save from these “unnecessary” expenses of private tutoring during the economic crisis caused by the pandemic.

“...I think the economic condition has a very big influence, right? Because one pays priority things first, like daily needs and for their children's education, which is the formal one, not private tutoring... private tutoring is just additional needs... if you have more money, you send your children to private tutoring centres, if you don't, you don't... especially during this crisis...” (Rida)

The PTP should also compete with the formal schools in providing online teaching and learning. Although some parents preferred their children to have online classes only from the schools, other parents were still assured if the children would learn English through private tutoring virtually.

“There were many [parents] who ask [for] offline [classes], but we don't dare [to do so] because the risk is too big. So, we are still [providing] online [classes only]. We are glad that more parents are convinced that they can still learn languages online.” (Rida)

Financial loss

Rida may not mention the impact of the pandemic to her institution's finances –since it is sensitive information. But we can assume that she and her institution experienced a huge financial loss. It is a result

of the decrease in the number of students, from whom the PTP relies on the most. Like other private education institutions that are highly dependent on their students, the PTP suffered from financial loss that, along with the fall in student enrolment, its revenue also fell down. For comparison, private higher education –that is also dependent on their students, in Malaysia has experienced a huge loss of revenue for an approximate 84.1% or RM6.9 billion (equal to US\$1.6 billion) due to the decrease in student enrolment. This financial loss of the PTP consequently leads to a number of cost-cutting measures, such as cutting the number of employees and tutors.

Employment reduction

The economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has led to short-term adjustments to employment and working conditions, including in the private tutoring sector. It is evident from the data we get from the PTP in this study that it has to cut some of its employees and tutors. Since the number of students decreased, the number of classes decreased as well. Therefore, it did not need too many tutors. Before the pandemic, the total of tutors and administration staff was around 48 personnel.

“...but now, because our classes are also reduced, so many tutors are not active and there are around 30 active ones... hey all teach from home, we provide [internet] quotas for teachers, because we also don't want them to come here... the government has also limited us to operate our businesses offline...” (Rida)

We can also assume that the wages received by these tutors were also adjusted with the limited revenue it gained from the students' fees.

“We choose to survive as private tutoring tutors because it is difficult to find another job during the COVID-19 pandemic. I have kids. What else can I do to feed them if I don't tutor?” (Han)

Online private tutoring

In order to survive, the PTP has to shift its services to online private tutoring. In fact, dealing with technology is not something new to the tutors. The tutors have also already had the experience with technology and digital tools. They gave an example that they could operate projectors in the classrooms and gave presentations using Microsoft Power Points.

“Before the pandemic, we had implemented online private tutoring as well. To complement offline classes, we sometimes conduct online classes to them [students]” (Mena)

“We have actually performed online private tutoring. Before the pandemic, before the offline class, we usually send materials through Google Classroom for the students to read at home. So, they know what we

will be doing in the class. During class, we will discuss what they have read and their opinions about it.” (Han)

Despite these experiences, they reflect that there are differences between offline tutoring before the pandemic and online tutoring during the pandemic. Before the pandemic, interactions between tutors and students or students and students happened easier that they meet face-to-face. During offline classes, tutors could also use physical-based learning games to increase the interactions and students’ engagement in learning.

“...because we met in class, so the interaction was easier and it's easier to give assignments and activities in class... for example, children can have games in class so they don't get bored... for junior high school students it's a bit more serious, but still with games, although they talk more with their friends,

they can have more conversations with their friends...” (Han)

Designing materials for offline classes was also easier. In contrast, tutors found a number of challenges in performing online private tutoring during the pandemic. They need to creatively perform interactive online classrooms. In exchange to physical-based learning games, to increase students’ engagement, the tutors adopt online-based learning games, such as Kahoot and Quiziz. In terms of online materials designing, the tutors find it more difficult and tiring. For a single online class session (90 minutes), it is divided into three sub-sessions (30 minutes each), namely pre-Zoom activities, whilst-Zoom activities, and post-Zoom activities. To improve their knowledge and skills for online private tutoring, these tutors were also arranged to participate in a series of professional learning workshops and training.

Table 2. Differences of private tutoring before and during the COVID-19 pandemic

Before the pandemic	During the pandemic
It was easier for tutors-students or students-students to interact with each other	It is more challenging to have interactive online classrooms
Interactive games were used during class	In exchange with games involving physical activities, tutors adopt online learning games
Tutors find it easier to design offline materials	Tutors find it more difficult and more tiring to design online materials

In conducting online private tutoring, the tutors utilized several smartphone apps and PC softwares, such as Whatsapp, Google Classroom, Zoom, and Microsoft Power Points. These three apps and softwares were the main tools for establishing online private tutoring. Whatsapp was mainly used for communication among tutors and students to arrange virtual classes and other tutoring matters. Google classroom was used for task and assignment instructions and submissions. Zoom was used for classroom sessions. Microsoft Power Points was utilized for delivering materials from the tutors. Additional apps

and softwares were also employed in support of the online tutoring. For games, the tutors usually used websites such as Kahoot, Quiziz, Quizalize, Quizlet, Mentimeter, and Brandquiz. Additional learning resources were taken from Youtube. For writing exercises, the tutors use Padlet. The tutors also used Instagram for project-based tasks.

“Sometimes we have projects, they have to make... a project one day and later they need to post it on their Instagram feed... once posted, the others commented and gave likes...” (Han)

Table 3. Smartphone apps and websites used for online private tutoring

App/Web	Type	Gadget	Status	Use
Whatsapp	App	Smartphone	Main	Communication
Google Classroom	App/Web	Smartphone/ Laptop/PC	Main	Tasks and assignments
Zoom	App	Laptop/PC	Main	Virtual classes
Microsoft Power Point	App	Laptop/PC	Main	Materials delivery
Kahoot.com	Web	Smartphone/ Laptop/PC	Supplementary	Games/Ice-breaking activities
Quiziz.com	Web	Smartphone/ Laptop/PC	Supplementary	Games/Ice-breaking activities
Quizalize	Web	Smartphone/ Laptop/PC	Supplementary	Games/Ice-breaking activities
Quizlet.com	Web	Smartphone/ Laptop/PC	Supplementary	Games/Ice-breaking activities
Mentimeter.com	Web	Smartphone/ Laptop/PC	Supplementary	Games/Ice-breaking activities
Brandquiz.com	Web	Smartphone/ Laptop/PC	Supplementary	Games/Ice-breaking activities
Youtube	App/Web	Smartphone/ Laptop/PC	Supplementary	Additional materials
Padlet	Web	Laptop/PC	Supplementary	Writing exercises
Instagram	App	Smartphone	Supplementary	Learning projects

Online private tutoring is not without challenges. The tutors in this PTP have experienced a series of challenges, which are mostly technical. These challenges are quite similar to problems in online teaching and learning by formal schools (see, for example, Wang et al., 2021). First, not all students have gadgets (smartphones or laptops). “They may have them, but some of those gadgets were not supportive for online private tutoring” (Rida). Second, the internet connection was so low and unstable that it often disrupted online class sessions.

“...not everyone has a good internet connection... Sometimes it was stable, sometimes it was not... that's how the internet works here in the country... the worst is when it suddenly disappears or even blackouts!” (Rida)

Third, parents should spend more money on internet quotas. While the tutors were provided with a budget for the internet, parents should provide extra expenses for the internet. Fourth, student engagement for online private tutoring was low. The tutors should attempt more in creating an effective, interactive, and fun online tutoring session.

“We need to think how the students could learn and have fun at the same time, so they did not feel bored. They may have been so tired of the online classrooms by their schools the whole day. When they join our tutoring classes in the afternoon or during weekends, they need some refreshments, not other burdens and homework. Therefore, it has been challenging for us, to at least make them survive our tutoring sessions.” (Han)

Sustaining private tutoring

As we project a world of digital technology advances, uncertain demographics, cost-conscious society, and vulnerable economic environments, private tutoring providers (PTPs) need to envision innovative shifts to survive in the educational service industry. Current traditional private tutoring business models are no longer effective. New business approaches are needed to restrain disruptions from other pandemics and crises in the future. When the current COVID-19 pandemic ends, the notion of an enclosed space as an office or a classroom will be outdated. PTPs who do not accept the digital revolution or technology change will be left behind and become irrelevant. However, investment in any novice technologies should be balanced with the actual pedagogical needs of PTPs to avoid any negative impacts from those technologies.

The future needs of students and employers

In order to overcome other pandemics and crises, PTPs need to rethink their tutoring approaches to meet the shifting demographics and employer de-

mands. For this reason, these shadow education institutions should change their traditional programs or course offerings into flexible learning pathways. In instance, PTPs should offer digital-based courses which could be taken anywhere and anytime, therefore, pandemics- and crisis-proofs. They should also consider lower and affordable prices to the customers, particularly those who had difficult times during the pandemic or those whose finances were badly affected by the crisis. They may need to conduct a needs analysis to parents and students. Based on the results of this analysis, they can design better approaches in delivering private tutoring.

Although projected to “continue to intensify into the foreseeable future” (Baker 2020, p. 311), the crisis made by the COVID-19 pandemic leaves private tutoring stakeholders to think about their sustainability to remain in business. One of the aspects to revisit is the need for students to enroll in private tutoring. While it is mostly regarded only as supplementary or ‘shadow’ to formal education, and therefore, it depends so much on it, PTPs need to look at their students’ needs, particularly to support them in achieving academic success and increasing their grades at schools (Carr and Wang 2018; Hu, Fan and Ding 2016; Kim 2016; Lee 2007; Park et al. 2016). While schools may cause stresses and pressures to the students, PTPs should consider to provide enjoyment that the students do not get from schools (Yung and Chiu 2020) in addition to increasing their outcomes. However, while schools deliver courses online, it becomes more challenging to PTPs to provide different approaches in online courses too. If the delivery is just similar to that of the formal schools, students will be bored and find it unhelpful to support their academics. The worst scenario is that they choose not to continue to have the tutoring services. The data of the study shows how tutors struggled to provide innovative and fun online tutoring to their students, so they were still engaged with the tutoring process.

Tutor professional development

The data of the study implies the need for tutor professional development, particularly for conducting online private tutoring. It may be challenging that the services provided in private tutoring are just similar to those at schools: online learning. The data shows that the greatest challenge for the tutors to conduct online private tutoring is to provide innovation and fun learning that is not provided by school teachers during online teaching and learning. It implies that professional development for tutors is key to sustainable private tutoring. With this in mind, private tutoring stakeholders should provide a series of workshops or training to their tutors. These trainings are aimed to

develop their knowledge and skills in tutoring, designing materials, and technology. Professionals can be invited to train these tutors; or they are sent to trainings held by external parties.

Strategic collaborations and partnerships

PTPs need to collaborate and build partnerships, not only among themselves, but also with other external parties. PTPs usually run their businesses alone, and sometimes in competition with each other, especially to gain more students and more benefits only for themselves. For survival and sustainability purposes, PTPs need to organize and work together, not only for self-profits, but also for higher value. Along with formal education, PTPs should join the force to educate people for them to achieve successes in life and career. For instance, PTPs that offer English language learning need to collaborate into a community. Within this community, they can share ideas and innovations for better English private tutoring practices. They can also establish exchange programs among tutors and students.

CONCLUSION

The Covid-19 global pandemic definitely disrupts the private tutoring sector in many ways. However, it is a great opportunity for PTPs to reimagine their positions in the educational system. They may not be able to operate within their traditional business and tutoring models, but they could adopt innovative business and tutoring approaches that prioritize the revolution of digital following the developments of the technologies; the future needs of students also the industry; and start to build strong and strategic collaborations and partnerships among PTPs and the community. Only then would they be able to overcome obstacles and the uncertain future. Unless, they will be left behind by their customers: parents and students.

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