

**Doctoral (PhD) theses**

**Focus on Shadow Education**

**The Controversial Role of English Language  
Shadow Education: Insights from a Study  
Conducted in Northeastern Hungary**

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## **The aim and scope of the thesis**

After the 1989 regime change in Hungary, there was an increased demand for high-level proficiency in Western languages, including English. This necessitated curriculum reforms in language teaching. Hungary's accession to the European Union further required reforms in foreign language education, as multilingualism became an important EU principle. The Common European Framework provided a great framework for acquiring language skills based on competencies, offering opportunities in language classes for students to express opinions and share thoughts through solving various communication situations, thereby developing their social skills.

To develop necessary skills and competencies, the role of teachers in the 21st-century classroom shifted from content-centred to learner-centred teaching. This approach is significant in educational sciences, where teachers step back as authoritative figures, allowing students to become autonomous learners (Kálmán, 2019). The National Core Curriculum (NAT) also emphasises self-regulated, autonomous language learning (Csizér & Öveges, 2020), crucial not only in educational but also in sociological terms, as students' socialisation largely occurs in the secondary socialisation setting, that is, in schools.

Despite curriculum reforms post-1989, practical implementation often lagged, echoing Einhorn's view (2015) that there has not been a significant pedagogical shift in terms of language teaching methods. This might explain why, despite NAT guidelines, Hungary still lags behind in foreign language education compared to European standards, as highlighted by Eurobarometer data (2012, 2018). Addressing these issues is critical, especially considering the added value of language certificates in Hungarian education and the preparation for advanced language examinations, which have a positive impact on students' academic paths.

The increasing demand for foreign language proficiency and the growing requirements have led to a rise in supplementary private language education. However, as Öveges and Csizér, (2018; Csizér & Öveges, 2021) point out, as long as exam-oriented teaching practices dominate in formal education, shadow education in foreign languages will continue its competitive nature. Effective solutions to enhance formal language education within the school system are still awaited.

The theoretical background of shadow education has been widely researched, with significant contributions from the following areas: conceptual interpretations of shadow education (Bray, 1999; Stevenson & Baker, 1992; Pásku & Münnich, 2000; Gordon Győri, 2008; Ceglédi & Szabó, 2014; Gordon Győri, 2020; Imre, 2020; Zhang, 2020), talent

development in shadow education (Gordon Győri, 2020), interpretations of formal and informal learning activities (Setényi, 2020), exploration of characteristics of shadow education (Stevenson & Baker, 1992; Bray, 2014; Baker & Le Tendre, 2005; Olaru, 2015; Baker et al., 2001; Schilperoord & Weelden, 2018; Hegedűs, 2021), reasons for participation in shadow education (Réti, 2009; Hegedűs, 2022), social equality/inequality (Gordon Győri, 2020; Entrich, 2018), private language schools (Matheidesz et al., 2006; Medgyes, 2011), qualifications of private language tutors (Bíró, 2020), economic approach to shadow education (Polónyi, 2020), and the relationship between national competency assessments and shadow education (Szemerszki, 2020).

The debates concerning shadow education revolve around two main issues: the conceptual interpretation of shadow education and the question of social inequality. The divergence in the interpretation of shadow education stems from differing perspectives. Bray (1999) argues that three conditions must be met for an activity to qualify as shadow education: (1) it focuses on main subjects that are part of the formal school curriculum; (2) it is supplement to the formal school curriculum regular schooling; and (3) it takes the form of paid private tutoring.

However, Kim and Jung (2019) state that even tuition-free extracurricular educational activities can be categorised as shadow education. Gordon Győri (2020) describes shadow education as forms of out-of-school and extracurricular education that aim to supplement the formal state curriculum. At the same time, the author later (2024) emphasises that shadow education must take place in an institutionalized form. Furthermore, he believes that shadow education is designed to enhance the academic knowledge of gifted students who aim to continue their higher education at top-tier universities. In this regard, shadow education is seen as a form of academic preparation and talent development (Matsumura, 2016).

Beyond its conceptual interpretation, the legitimacy of shadow education as a phenomenon is also a subject of debate, particularly in light of its potential impact on social opportunity and equality. While Bourdieu's (1998) theory of capital suggests that shadow education contributes to the widening of social gaps and exacerbates educational inequalities, Entrich (2018) offers a different perspective. He argues that shadow education does not necessarily lead to greater inequality, as it may provide students with the tools to overcome disadvantages and access more educational opportunities.

In the Hungarian context, the literature on shadow education is limited, and the existing studies tend to address the phenomenon in a broader sense. Notably, there are no studies that

specifically investigate supplementary private tutoring, that is, shadow education in English as a foreign language.

In Table 1 below the concepts, dimensions, and measurement possibilities most frequently used in our research are summarised. The central concept of the present research focus is *shadow education*; the relationship between foreign language learning and shadow education is examined based on the following two main concepts: *the settings of education*, which include formal school education and English language shadow education, and *the actors in language learning* – the language learner and the language teacher – as the key participants in the language learning process.

Within the framework of educational settings, our analysis of formal education is conducted along the following dimensions: (1) the level of the institution, i.e., secondary school vs. university, (2) the type of institution based on its maintainer, i.e., state-maintained vs. church-maintained secondary schools, (3) the composition of the school, referring to the type of settlement where the institution is located, and (4) social support, examining the role of the community in determining the kind of assistance students can expect in their language-learning process. Within the framework of language-learning actors, the present research focuses on the following dimensions concerning the language learner: (1) participation rate in shadow education, (2) language learners' goal orientation, (3) language learners' effectiveness, (4) the effects of the learning environment, and (5) learner's self-efficacy. Regarding the language teacher, the following two aspects are examined: (1) whether the learner receives support from their school language teacher and (2) whether the teacher accommodates the learner's individual learning pace.

**Table 1: Concepts, dimensions, and indicators to be examined in the research**

			Dimensions	Indicators
EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS	Formal school education	Institution	institution level: secondary school-university maintainer of institution  settlement of institution	<i>Are you a university-, or a secondary school student?</i>  <i>Do you attend a state-, or church-maintained secondary school?</i> <i>What type of settlement is your school located in?</i>
		Social capital	social support	<i>Do you receive help with language learning from your classmates or language teacher?</i>
	Shadow education in a broader sense	Tuition-free education	type/form of shadow education	<i>What type of tuition-free class do you attend?</i>
		Fee-paying education	- form of, - efficiency of, - impact on self-efficacy of shadow education	<i>What type of private lessons do you attend?</i> <i>Do you have a language certificate?</i> <i>Self-efficacy scale: Student questionnaire Likert scale 1-5</i>
	ACTORS OF LANGUAGE LEARNING	Language learner	Cultural capital	mother's qualification type of settlement of residence
Financial capital			financial capital index	<i>Objective material assets</i>
Individual variables			learner's gender goal orientation	<i>What is your gender?</i> <i>Why are you learning English?</i>
Language teacher		Applied methods	individual learning pace	Language teaching method dimension (items 17, 18); and The motivational impact of the language teacher dimension (item 54), student questionnaire Likert scale 1-5
		Support	assistance in language learning	<i>Do you receive help with language learning from your school language teacher?</i>

## **Research methodology**

The problem area of this dissertation is examined in the context of the characteristics of language learners participating in English language shadow education. Our research is both innovative and addresses a research gap in the literature, as to our knowledge, no prior studies have been conducted in Hungary in relation to private English language instruction outside of formal education. In our empirical research, the concept of shadow education is interpreted from the perspective of courses offered in private language education. The term 'shadow education' is defined in the sense specified by Bray (1999), who states that for learning activities to be considered shadow education, three conditions must be met: (1) privately conducted educational activities (i.e., supplementary education outside of the classroom, which can occur individually, in small groups, or at the class level, in classrooms and large lecture halls); (2) learning activities that supplement the curriculum of the formal school system; and (3) learning activities that are conducted for a fee.

The aim of our research is to shed light on the socio-economic characteristics of 11th–12th grade students and first-year university students participating in foreign language shadow education. Our research is primarily relevant to public education, as secondary school students typically participate in shadow education. However, in addition to the secondary school age group, it was considered important to include first-year university students in the study because Silova et al. (2006) pointed out that this age group can still relatively easily recall their studies at secondary school

Our study seeks to answer the question of what correlations can be identified between the socio-economic background of language learners' families and the characteristics of the learners' participation in shadow education. We focus on factors such as the gender of the language learner, their family's cultural and financial capital, and the characteristics of the learner's participation in shadow education. Furthermore, we aim to determine the goal and effectiveness of English shadow education for the language learners in our sample. Additionally, it is examined whether there is a correlation between the students' goals related to English shadow education, their language learning success, their family's socio-economic status and the educational setting. By educational setting, we refer to both the different levels of education – i.e., secondary school and university – and the maintainer of the institution – i.e., church-maintained or state-maintained secondary schools. It is also analysed whether and what kind of compensatory mechanisms exist in secondary schools with different compositions to

promote more effective language learning. Finally, we seek to answer how self-efficacy correlates with the effectiveness of participation in English shadow education and the socio-economic background of language learners.

To answer our research questions, a sequential exploratory mixed-methods model (Creswell, 2012) was applied, which allows the researcher to use qualitative and quantitative data in a mixed manner over two or more phases. Our small-sample qualitative study aims to provide the foundation for developing the theoretical background of our quantitative research instrument, the questionnaire.

Our research questions were structured around three main areas:

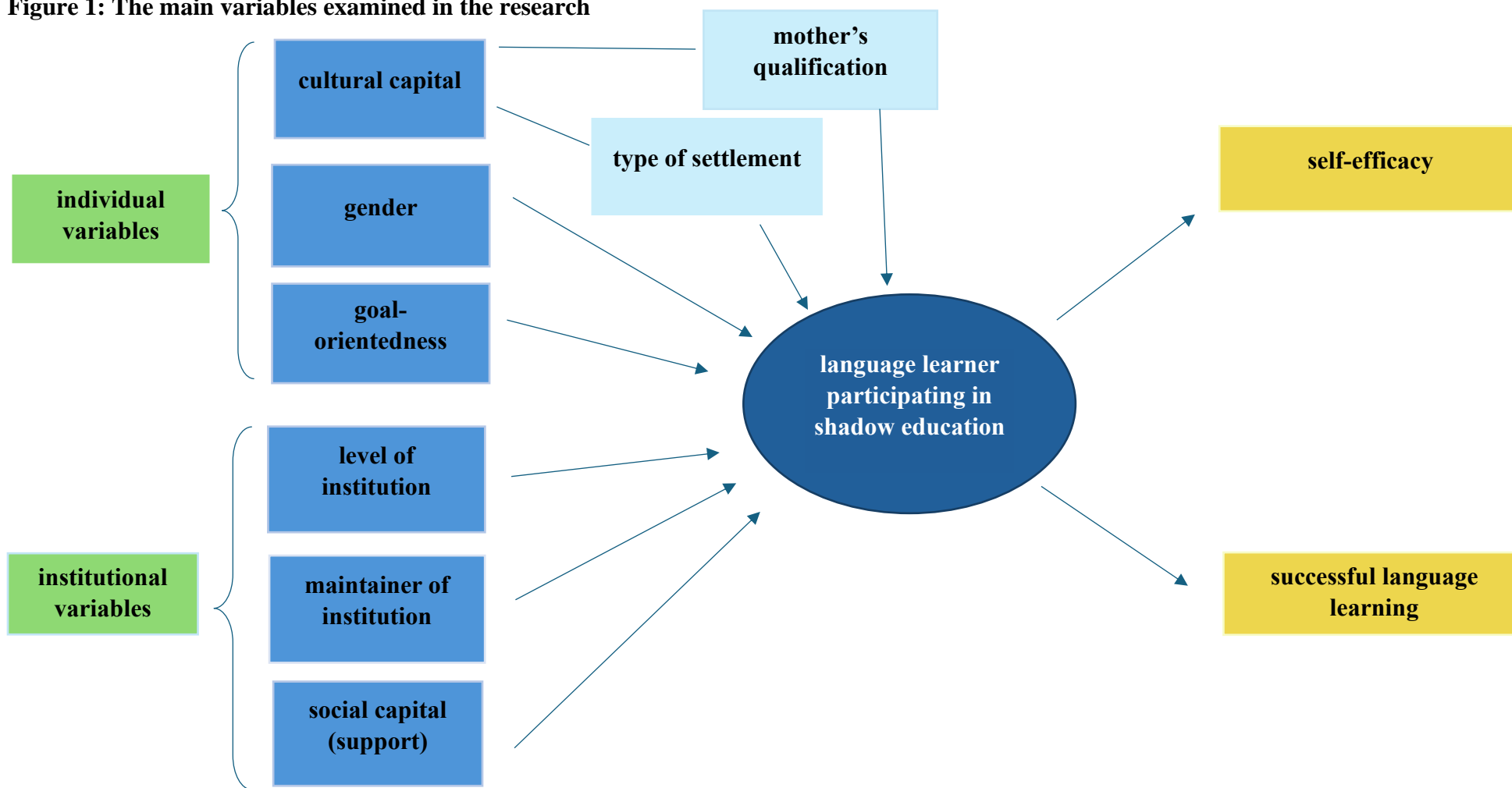
- 1) What are the reasons and motivations for students to seek private tutoring?
- 2) What expectations do students and their parents have regarding private tutors?
- 3) What effects does private tutoring have on students' future plans and academic success?

In our quantitative research, a self-developed questionnaire was used as a measurement tool, which consists of two parts. The first part includes questions aimed at exploring socioeconomic background variables and general questions related to language learning. The second part was constructed based on Dörnyei and Ottó's (1998) process model of language learning motivation and Kuhl's (1984) self-regulation theory, incorporating ten dimensions related to language learning. The dimensions of *teaching methods*, *individual learner differences (differentiation)*, *the teacher's motivational influence*, and *the impact of the learning environment* were developed based on the first focus of our qualitative research, which centred on motivations and reasons. The dimensions related to *language examination goals*, *self-efficacy*, *language learning experiences* and *language learning beliefs* were constructed based on the added-value focus of the qualitative research. The dimensions of *intercultural relations* and *international goals* in the quantitative study were derived from the third focus of the qualitative research, which addressed social mobility.

The self-efficacy dimension includes adapted items (SE1-SE6) from Piniel and Csizér's (2013, p. 25) study, while the teacher's motivational influence dimension was adapted from Kálmán's (2016) quantitative research instrument. The questionnaire items were tested and refined using the 'think aloud' technique (described by Ericsson & Simon, 1993) and through three pilot studies. The questionnaire was developed under the guidance and supervision of an expert researcher, and three pilot tests were conducted to refine its design.

Based on Figure 1, a two-way analysis was conducted to achieve our research goal in shadow education, focusing on *the language learners participating in shadow education*. On one hand, *individual* and *institutional* variables influencing shadow education were analysed. On the other hand, we were interested in understanding how shadow education affects language learners' *effectiveness* and *self-efficacy*. Individual variables included language learners' *cultural capital*, *gender* and *goal-orientedness*. *Cultural capital* was defined by the *mother's education level* and the *type of settlement* where the learner resides. Institutional variables, as the educational context, comprised three indicators: (1) *educational levels* (secondary school vs. university), (2) *the maintainer of the institution* (church-maintained vs. state-maintained secondary school), and (3) *social capital* of language learners. Social capital was operationalised through the construct of social support: learners were asked about sources of assistance available within their environment. This was important to explore compensatory mechanisms and their types in schools with varying compositions of social capital. Lastly, we sought to understand how shadow education impacts language learners' self-efficacy and effectiveness. Self-efficacy was assessed using the items corresponding to the self-efficacy dimension of the quantitative measurement tool, whereas effectiveness was evaluated based on the attainment rate of language proficiency certificates.

**Figure 1: The main variables examined in the research**



Quantitative research questions (RQ):

RQ1: Who participates in supplementary private tuition in English (English language shadow education) and free language learning activities?

H1.1: Language learners participate in paid educational activities (shadow education) at a higher rate than in free language learning activities.

H1.2: Shadow education is primarily attended by female language learners residing in county seats, particularly those whose mothers possess higher education qualifications

RQ2: What goals and effectiveness characterise language learners who participate in shadow education?

H.2.1.: It is assumed that language learners primarily engage in English language shadow education to prepare for language examinations (Réti, 2009).

H.2.2.: Language learners involved in English language shadow education demonstrate a higher degree of goal orientation relative to non-participating peers.

H.2.3.: In all settlement contexts, learners whose mothers hold higher education degrees demonstrate greater effectiveness and exhibit higher rates of language examination attainment (Imre, 2015).

RQ3: What differences can be observed among students participating in shadow education across various educational levels (secondary school vs. university) and institutional sectors (state vs. church-maintained institutions)?

H.3.1: It is assumed that, irrespective of educational level and institutional sector, language learners predominantly engaged in language education via private tutors.

H.3.2: It is assumed that, in both sectors, language learners participated in shadow education primarily to obtain language certificates.

H.3.3: Language learners in state-maintained secondary schools exhibit greater language learning outcomes than those in church-maintained institutions.

RQ4: How does social support influence participation rates in shadow education and the effectiveness of language learning?

H4: It is assumed that learners in church-maintained secondary schools possess higher social capital, which may contribute to lower participation rates in shadow education and positively influence learning outcomes.

RQ5: What is the nature of the relationship between language learners' self-efficacy and participation in shadow education?

H5: It is assumed that language learners engaged in shadow education have higher self-efficacy than their peers.

### Research results

In the **first hypothesis** of our dissertation, we examined the relationship between language learners' cultural and financial capital, their gender distribution, as well as their participation rates in shadow education and free after-school activities. *It was hypothesized that language learners would participate in paid educational activities (shadow education) at a higher rate than in free activities (H.1.1). It was also assumed that shadow education primarily involved female language learners residing in county seats, particularly those whose mothers possess higher education qualifications (H.1.2).*

Our findings indicated that learners of mothers with lower educational attainment were underrepresented in both free activities and paid English language shadow education. Furthermore, participation in paid activities was mainly influenced by the mother's highest level of education as a form of cultural capital, while financial capital was a less significant determinant. In line with our assumptions, the majority of students participating in shadow education were female learners. Overall, boys participated in non-formal learning activities at a lower rate. A key finding of our study, however, is that all students participating in English language shadow education had mothers with significantly higher levels of education attainment. An additional focus of the analysis was to explore the association between gender distribution and maternal educational attainment. Our results show that higher maternal educational attainment positively influenced gender distribution: when the language learner's mother held a higher education degree, the gender distribution among students in English language shadow education was relatively balanced. Additionally, our findings confirmed that students whose mothers possessed higher educational qualifications were more likely to participate in shadow education, especially those residing in county seats and attending secondary schools within these areas. This suggests that shadow education primarily enhanced the opportunities of language learners from higher socioeconomic backgrounds.

## Thesis 1:

It can be concluded that among demographic background factors, the maternal educational attainment – as a form of cultural capital – was the most decisive factor. Students whose mothers possessed lower educational qualifications were underrepresented in both free and paid supplementary English language learning activities. Furthermore, participation in paid activities was primarily influenced by maternal educational attainment, while the family's financial capital played a comparatively minor role. It is further concluded that English language shadow education was predominantly attended by female students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, male and female students with highly educated mothers participated at similar rates. Additionally, the study establishes that English language shadow education is significantly more prevalent among students whose mothers hold higher education degrees and who attend secondary schools in county seats. Our first hypothesis has been fully confirmed.

In our **second hypothesis**, we focused on the relationship between the goals of students participating in English language shadow education and their language learning success. *It was hypothesized that language learners primarily enroll in English shadow education to prepare for language examinations (Réti, 2009) (H.2.1). Additionally, it was assumed that students participating in English language shadow education demonstrate a higher degree of goal orientation relative to non-participating peers (H.2.2). Furthermore, it was predicted that, across all types of settlements, learners whose mothers hold higher education degrees demonstrate greater effectiveness and exhibit higher rates of language certificates (Imre, 2015) (H.2.3).*

Using descriptive statistical tests, it was confirmed that the majority of language learners indeed sought English language shadow education primarily to prepare for a language examination. Additionally, they placed significant importance on raising their educational aspirations and on the need for personalized instruction (Hegedűs, 2021). Our findings indicate that students who participated in English language shadow education formed a significantly more goal-oriented language learning group than those who did not. Through factor analysis, the underlying patterns of students' language learning goals were examined, resulting in the identification of three principal factors: international orientation, career choice orientation, and language examination orientation. A non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test revealed that students engaged in shadow education exhibited higher goal orientation in two cases, compared to their

peers who did not participate in English shadow education: in the language examination orientation and career choice orientation factor groups.

It was assumed that a student's cultural capital played a decisive role in the learner's success in shadow education. To examine the influence of background variables – such as maternal educational attainment and the type of settlement of residence – on success in shadow education, a cross-tabulation analysis was conducted. Following the assessment of data normality, the results were analysed using a binomial logistic regression model. Both the bivariate analysis and logistic regression confirmed our hypothesis: the mother's level of education proved to be the most significant factor influencing students' success in obtaining a language certificate. Despite the continued presence of settlement-related disadvantages, students residing in county seats whose mothers held higher education degrees attained language certificates at a significantly higher rate than their peers from smaller settlements. However, across all types of settlements, students whose mothers held higher education degrees were more successful language learners and had a higher proportion of language certificates.

## Thesis 2

The study establishes that students primarily utilized supplementary private language education for language examination preparation. Students participating in English language shadow education were more goal-oriented than their peers who did not engage in such programs. Our results confirm that, across all types of settlements, the mother's level of education was a key determinant of language learning success. It is concluded that while students residing in county seats achieved language certification at significantly higher rates than those from smaller settlements, students across all settlement types whose mothers possessed higher education degrees and who participated in English language shadow education demonstrated greater language learning success and higher rates of language certificate attainment. Our second hypothesis has been confirmed.

In our **third hypothesis**, we focused on the institutional setting – specifically the institutional level (secondary school vs. university) and the type of institution (state vs. church-maintained secondary school) – and formulated three sub-hypotheses. *In sub-hypothesis H.3.1, it was assumed that irrespective of educational level and institutional sector, language learners predominantly engaged in language education via private tutors. In sub-hypothesis H.3.2, it was hypothesized that in both sectors students participated in shadow education primarily to*

*obtain a language certificate. Furthermore, in sub-hypothesis H.3.3, it was assumed that students attending state-maintained secondary schools exhibit greater language learning outcomes than those in church-maintained institutions.*

Our analysis focused on the educational setting, examining which types of shadow education were utilized by secondary school students and first-year university students. We also aimed to determine whether there were differences in language learning characteristics between the two groups based on their learning goals and achievements. To test our hypothesis, descriptive statistical analyses, Pearson's chi-square tests, factor analysis, and normality tests, followed by binomial regression analyses were conducted. Descriptive statistical analysis revealed no substantial variation across levels or educational types in terms of the proportion of students engaged in English language shadow education or their stated reasons for participation. This indicates that students with higher cultural capital primarily engaged in shadow education to obtain a language certificate. Our findings show that learning with a private tutor was primarily driven by motivations related to language exam preparation and further education. In every aspect analysed, the identified factors were found to be significantly more salient among secondary school students than for their university-level counterparts. The non-parametric Mann-Whitney test confirmed these results, demonstrating that secondary school students – especially those engaged in English language shadow education – exhibited higher levels of career orientation and language exam motivation. The observed trend was evident not only among participants in shadow education but within the overall sample. Finally, a binomial regression analysis was conducted to examine the effects of background variables on language learning success within the full secondary school sample, incorporating factors such as the student's settlement type, the mother's highest level of education, and the type of school maintainer (state vs. church-maintained). All variables had a significant effect on students' success in obtaining a language certificate. Secondary school students residing in county seats, attending state-maintained secondary schools, and whose mother held a higher education degree were significantly more likely to achieve a B2-level language certificate compared to students attending church-maintained secondary schools. Our results underscore that while the disadvantages associated with settlement type diminished with respect to participation in English language shadow education, settlement type did not show a statistically significant relationship with language learning success. However, the mother's higher educational attainment remained a critical factor, amplifying the probability of language learning success for secondary school students with preexisting advantages in cultural capital. All three sub-hypotheses within our third research question have been fully supported.

### Thesis 3

It can be concluded that most secondary school students (irrespective of school maintainer) as well as university students engaged in English language shadow education, predominantly opted for private tutoring as their preferred form of supplementary instruction. University students obtained language certificates at a higher rate than secondary school students. In both groups, students who participated in English language shadow education demonstrated greater language learning success, with the mother's higher educational attainment emerging as the primary positive predictor of achievement. Our third hypothesis has been confirmed.

In our **fourth hypothesis**, *it was assumed that students in church-maintained secondary schools possess higher social capital, which may contribute to lower participation rates in English language shadow education and positively influence language learning outcomes.* The study aimed to examine the extent to which secondary schools with a lower socioeconomic student composition may support the reduction of educational inequalities, that is, what compensatory power they possess (Engler, 2020). To explore this issue, the study focused on social capital as a source of support available in the language learner's environment, particularly in the form of assistance provided to the student. Cross-tabulation analysis of the entire secondary school sample revealed that, across both state- and church-maintained educational sectors, language learners primarily relied on their school language teachers for support, supplemented by assistance from their families, friends, and classmates. However, students in church-maintained secondary schools received significantly more assistance from their families compared to those in public secondary schools. Overall, it can be said that students in church-maintained secondary schools had greater social support from their classmates as well. In addition to social support, the study also examined the forms of assistance provided by language teachers within the context of formal language instruction. The analysis concentrated on secondary school students participating in supplementary private language education, with particular attention to the degree to which individualized learning paces were realised. Our findings indicate that students enrolled in state-maintained secondary schools reported lower levels of satisfaction with the pace of school instruction compared to their peers in church-maintained secondary schools, which may have influenced their decision to pursue supplementary private language education.

#### Thesis 4

It is concluded that, despite serving a student population with lower-status parental backgrounds, church-maintained secondary schools demonstrated higher levels of social capital. While community support contributed to a more personalized educational process, it did not exert a positive influence on either participation rates in shadow education or language learning outcomes. Our sub-hypotheses related to our fourth research question were only partially confirmed.

In our **fifth hypothesis**, *it is assumed that language learners engaged in shadow education possess higher self-efficacy than their peers*. The Mann-Whitney test was applied to examine the relationships between the background variables forming the foundation of our research – namely, the type of school maintainer, institutional level, the mother’s highest educational attainment, type of settlement where the language learner resides, location of the educational institution, and the language learner’s self-efficacy. Our results revealed that participation in English language shadow education was associated with a modest increase in self-efficacy compared to that of language learners who did not participate in shadow education. The educational environment, alongside the socioeconomic background of the language learner’s family, was found to influence learners’ self-efficacy, which in turn affected their overall language learning success. By incorporating variables such as the language learner’s gender, maternal educational attainment, the type of settlement in which the student resides, the location of the educational institution, and the institutional maintainer, our findings revealed that, among students who did not participate in English language shadow education, all background variables – except for the type of school maintainer – had a statistically significant effect. Specifically, boys residing in county seats, attending secondary schools situated in the same type of settlement, and whose mothers possessed higher education qualifications demonstrated significantly higher self-efficacy. English language shadow education exhibited a compensatory effect in two specific domains: gender and the settlement type of the educational institution. That is, female students residing outside county seats who participated in shadow education were able to reach self-efficacy levels similar to those observed among male peers residing in county seats. However, a key finding of our study is that the compensatory effect of English language shadow education on self-efficacy was observed exclusively among students whose mothers held higher education degrees. Self-efficacy emerged as a significant determinant of language learning success, as evidenced by the Mann-Whitney test, which

demonstrated that both participants and non-participants in shadow education with higher levels of self-efficacy achieved superior performance outcomes. A noteworthy finding of our study is that – contrary to our initial hypothesis – English language shadow education did not significantly correlate with any specific language learning skill, indicating no measurable enhancement in learners’ self-efficacy concerning their perceived language competencies

## Thesis 5

It is concluded that boys residing in county seats, with mothers holding higher education degrees, exhibited elevated levels of self-efficacy, irrespective of their participation in English language shadow education. Higher self-efficacy was found to be a significant positive predictor of language examination achievement among both participants and non-participants in English language shadow education. Although, contrary to our initial hypothesis, participation in shadow education did not result in a general increase in self-efficacy, it had a notable positive effect on the self-efficacy of female students from non-urban areas whose mothers had possessed higher education qualifications. It is concluded that shadow education had no statistically significant effect on language learners’ linguistic skills. Our fifth hypothesis was not confirmed.

### **The Relevance and Implications of the Research**

The educational relevance of our research can be supported by several factors. One of the most significant contributions of our dissertation lies in the fact that, to our knowledge, no prior research has been conducted in Hungary, specifically targeting language learners engaged in English language shadow education and their families. Although the international literature is abundant in studies on the phenomenon of shadow education, and research on English language shadow education has gained increasing prominence in recent years, Hungarian studies on shadow education have not explored the characteristics of supplementary English language shadow education. As a result, owing to the scarcity of evidence-based insights, scholarly discourse remains constrained in this niche area.

The relevance of our research is further enhanced by its examination of the phenomenon of shadow education from the perspectives of multiple actors. On the demand side, our quantitative research primarily targets language learners, while our qualitative study provides insights into the perceptions of parents whose children participate in English language shadow education. These parents play a crucial role in driving the phenomenon of shadow education.

Additionally, through the responses of language learners, we can draw valuable conclusions about language teachers as well.

The study's principal innovation is its exploration of English language shadow education both through cross-sectoral analysis and comparisons across multiple levels of educational institutions. In doing so, our study fills an important research gap by shedding light on the demographic characteristics of language learners participating in English language shadow education in a disadvantaged region of Hungary, as well as the cultural and financial capital of their families. Our research also addresses unexplored areas in the study of English language shadow education, such as the socio-economic background of language learners, their goals regarding language learning, the effectiveness of shadow education, and the role of social support in language learning.

The methodological significance of our research lies in its application of a sequential exploratory design, which, through the development of customised measurement instruments, yields empirical data on the characteristics of both families and language learners involved in English language shadow education. The pedagogical relevance of our research is reflected in its formulation of targeted intervention strategies for language educators, designed to enhance the effectiveness of language teaching and learning processes.

Our findings indicate that language learners primarily rely on the support of their language teachers during their English studies. Consequently, it is crucial to provide further methodological training for language teachers, as their teaching methods play a key role in boosting students' motivation and goal orientation, thereby strengthening their sense of self-efficacy. Student-centred language instruction – such as pair work and small-group activities – encourages active participation in the learning process. Simultaneously, ensuring a balanced development of the four main language skills, particularly with an emphasis on the development of speaking, promotes more intensive language use, thereby enhancing learners' confidence and communicative competence.

It is recommended that language instruction incorporate differentiated teaching methodologies, including the identification of individual learning styles and the formulation of pedagogical strategies to accommodate these differences. The implementation of personalized curricula enables language instruction to be tailored to the specific needs and abilities of individual students. It would also be beneficial to organize professional development programs for language teachers that focus on motivational teaching strategies and differentiated instructional techniques.

To sustain motivation, we consider the development of learning strategies essential. Indirect learning strategies – such as goal setting and structured learning organization – can play an instrumental role in fostering self-regulated learning among language learners. Furthermore, incorporating individual consultations into curricula and lesson plans can help students set concrete goals and monitor their progress.

In terms of assessment methods, introducing student-centred, constructive feedback would be advantageous. Alternative assessment forms, such as diagnostic tests and personalized feedback, can better address students' individual needs. This is especially critical for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who often have limited access to academic support in their home environment. In such cases, personalized attention in education can serve a compensatory function.

Our research highlights that, in addition to language teachers, classmates play a vital role in supporting each other's learning. Integrating peer support into language education fosters collaboration, develops communication skills, and creates a supportive learning environment. Pair and small-group activities encourage students to take a more active role in their educational development. Furthermore, establishing peer tutoring programs can offer several benefits. First, these programs can reach disadvantaged language learners who may not otherwise have access to learning opportunities. The individualized attention and targeted support provided by peers can help these students catch up in their studies, boosting their confidence, motivation, and social competence. Second, these programs allow peer tutors to deepen their understanding of the subject, develop valuable skills, increase their confidence, and significantly contribute to their peers' learning – thereby supporting both their academic and personal development. Recognizing peer tutors' efforts through performance certificates and official acknowledgment of volunteer hours – valuable for university applications or fulfilling community service requirements – can serve as an incentive for students to actively participate in supporting their peers.

An important finding of our research is that mothers function as primary transmitters of cultural capital, significantly influencing their children's language learning trajectories. The educational attainment of the mother is significantly correlated with both participation in shadow education and the effectiveness of language learning outcomes. Maternal engagement in language education holds considerable pedagogical significance. On the one hand, active parental involvement – especially that of mothers – can strengthen support for learning in the home environment, thereby reducing the need for additional English language shadow education. On the other hand, maternal involvement can help create a supportive learning

environment, positively influencing a child's intrinsic motivation and decreasing the necessity for external tutoring.

Based on these findings – given that highly educated mothers tend to have better cultural resources and strategies to support their children's learning – it is essential for schools and educators to reach out to mothers from lower educational backgrounds. This can be achieved through closer communication and the provision of individual consultations. Additionally, implementing language learning programs specifically designed for parents, with the involvement of student mentors, could be beneficial. Such programs might include language courses for mothers, allowing them to experience language learning firsthand and acquire basic language skills. Another effective approach could be organizing language days where parents participate in various language learning activities. Workshops and courses related to language learning could also help mothers better support their children's education.

### **Limitations of the Research**

Our research has several limitations. Firstly, we examined a narrow segment of language learners participating in shadow education, which limited our ability to draw generalizable conclusions. The reliance on a convenience sample limits the generalizability of the findings and introduces potential biases. Secondly, we were unable to conduct analyses across wider societal strata, as our research primarily reached learners from middle-class families. Accordingly, the conclusions drawn from this study cannot be generalized to the broader society. Thirdly, in the qualitative phase of our research, we collected parental insights regarding their children's experiences, motivational factors, and perceived outcomes of English language shadow education. Consequently, our findings primarily represent parental perspectives, rather than the viewpoints of the children involved. Nevertheless, it is our assessment that the research objectives were successfully met and the research questions were adequately addressed. Despite the limitations in sample size and the scope of the analyses, it is hoped that our dissertation makes a valuable contribution to expanding knowledge on English language shadow education. It highlights key aspects of shadow education that can serve as a foundation for further in-depth studies on shadow education in Hungary.

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### List of publications related to the dissertation

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In: Megküzdés, fejlődés, nevelés: az Iskola a határon III. konferencia előadásaiából. Szerk.: Podlovics Éva; Erdei Róbert; Kissné Gombos Katalin, Tokaj-Hegyalja Egyetem, Sárospatak, 97-108, 2023, (Sárospataki pedagógiai füzetek, ISSN 0230 0435 ; 32) ISBN: 9786156482143

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