

China's crackdown on tutoring leaves parents with new problems

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. What do you know about higher education? Choose the best answer to complete each statement.

1. The oldest university in the world is in **Germany / Italy**.
2. The oldest university in the UK is **Cambridge / Oxford**.
3. With 3.5 million students, the biggest university in the world is in **China / India**.
4. With over 4,000 universities, **India / the USA** has the most universities in the world.
5. The most remote university in the world is in **Norway / Russia**.

b. Discuss these questions with a partner.

- Where did you go / would you like to go to university?
- Do you think the prestige of a university matters?
- Which are the best universities in your country?

2 Key words

a. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

accumulate blindside cater comply crackdown
death knell exacerbate eye-watering fees looming
outfit plunging poll prestigious stave off

1. _____ are money that you pay to a professional person or institution for their work.
2. If the cost of something is _____, it is extremely high.
3. A / An _____ is an event or situation that is a sign of the end of something.
4. A / An _____ is an informal term for an organization, especially a small firm.
5. If an institution is described as _____, it is admired and respected by people.
6. If you _____ to people, you provide them with what they want or need.
7. To _____ means to get more and more of something over a period of time.

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8. A / An _____ is a strong action that people in authority take to stop something.
9. If you _____ someone, you give them an unpleasant surprise by doing something they were not expecting.
10. If you _____ with a rule or a law, you obey it.
11. To _____ means to stop something from happening.
12. A / An _____ crisis is one that seems likely to happen soon.
13. A / An _____ birth rate is one that is falling rapidly.
14. A / An _____ is an occasion when a lot of people are asked what they feel about something to get statistical data.
15. If you _____ a problem, you make it worse.

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Public largely sceptical about effectiveness of move aimed at reducing pressure in hyper-competitive education field

Helen Davidson

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- 1 In 2018, Ms Hu spent a third of her annual income sending her child to summer school in Shanghai. In the following year, the cost went up. Still, she and her partner paid the fees, such is the competitiveness in Chinese children's education. "My son started to learn English at age five. I feared he would be left behind if we didn't do so," she said.
- 2 Hu and her husband are among the vast majority of parents who pay for extracurricular private tutoring – survey estimates range from 65% of families with school-aged children in 2016, up to 92% in 2021. The classes often come at eye-watering costs that contribute to an industry worth more than \$150bn. In July, 2021, however, China's government announced what appeared to be the death knell for the sector.
- 3 On 23 July, China's state council released new rules banning for-profit companies from tutoring in core curriculum subjects, and foreign investment in such companies. No new licences would be issued and all existing outfits must register as non-profits, it said. The move was announced in part as a measure to reduce pressure on parents and students in China's hyper-competitive education field. "Parents want their children to have a happy childhood, but they are afraid they will lose at the starting line in a competition over scores," said China's leader, Xi Jinping, in March.
- 4 The quality and resource of education varies greatly between urban and rural areas, from province to province, and between top- and lower-tier cities. There are few university places relative to the number of students, and even fewer at prestigious universities, which are concentrated on the east coast and in major cities. It is in these areas where private tutoring has exploded in the past decade.
- 5 "Education and health are the two main concerns of Chinese people," said Dr Ye Liu, of King's College London. "Private education catered to the demand from urban families," Liu said. "Because of the one-child policy, urban families used education as an investment channel, to reproduce the privileges of cultural capital – good universities, studying abroad. They need the private tutoring because it's so competitive."
- 6 As the private education industry grew, it accumulated massive wealth and power, and observers, including Liu, believe that the second primary aim of the policy is to crack down on the industry in the same way authorities have to big tech. In the past year, Chinese authorities have targeted mega-corporations, including Tencent, Didi and Alibaba, with investigations, financial orders and sanctions.
- 7 While there had been signs from China's leaders that a crackdown was coming, the July announcement blindsided the industry. It triggered falls of as much as 60% in the share price of some tutoring companies listed on the New York and Hong Kong exchanges. Knowing that there is little ability to resist a Chinese government order, some of the biggest companies released statements saying the new policy was not good news for them but that they would comply with the instructions.
- 8 There is some discussion that the reforms also seek to boost China's efforts to stave off a looming demographic crisis by reducing the cost of raising children. The plunging birth rate is driven by the high cost of living, low wages, long hours and little upward mobility. Much of the feedback to the reforms – including from Hu – said they don't go far enough to change anyone's mind about having any, or any more, children.
- 9 In one poll, almost 70% of the 2,400 respondents said they didn't think the policy reform would reduce pressure on parents. Just 18% thought it would partly or entirely ease pressure.
- 10 In Shanghai, Hu said the policy's intention was good and that she would now spend more time with her child doing outdoor activities. However, she is among many who fear that other parents will instead spend their money on private individual tutors – a difficult-to-regulate sector not yet targeted by the reforms – which would maintain or even exacerbate the education gap.

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- 11 "It is financially and mentally challenging for parents to send their children to extracurricular schools. There are piles of cash behind a child's excellence," said one parent. "At the same time, I am concerned that parents will have to shoulder all the burden for educating their kids. Those with good grades succeed and the rest will be left far behind."
- 12 Liu says the government needs to diversify and promote education pathways, encouraging and funding more students – particularly those from lower socio-economic regions – to enrol in vocational education, apprenticeships and other skills training. "The key is for the government to use their propaganda skills to associate these jobs with high social status and high returns."

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. What percentage of her annual income did Ms Hu spend on sending her child to summer school?
2. What percentage of families pay for private tutoring?
3. How much is the private tutoring industry in China worth?
4. What was banned by China's state council in July, 2021?
5. What will all existing tutoring companies have to do?
6. What, according to Dr Liu, are the two main concerns of Chinese people?
7. What happened to the share price of some tutoring companies when the announcement was made?
8. What factors have led to the falling birth rate in China?
9. What percentage of respondents in the poll didn't think the new policy would reduce pressure on parents?
10. What might parents spend their money on as a result of the new policy?

4 Key language

a. Match the verbs in the left-hand column with the nouns or noun phrases in the right-hand column to create verb-noun collocations.

- | | |
|---------------|-------------------|
| 1. reduce | a. someone's mind |
| 2. accumulate | b. a demand |
| 3. release | c. an activity |
| 4. change | d. a burden |
| 5. shoulder | e. pressure |
| 6. cater to | f. a licence |
| 7. do | g. wealth |
| 8. issue | h. a statement |

b. Choose three phrases and use them to make sentences about the article.

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "Private education is better than state education."
- "Parents should always do what is best for their children."
- "Studying abroad is the best education."

6 In your own words

a. Hold a debate. In your team, read your role card below and prepare arguments to defend your position.

Role Card A

You believe that education should be privatized in general because the open market economy is the best natural regulator. You think that parents should be able to invest in their children's future and that their hard work and the investment should be rewarded. If it is all public, parents don't have as much incentive to work hard to generate more opportunities for their kids. Think of more arguments to support private education. Remember you will debate the opposite side, so analyse what arguments they might bring forth and how to counter them.

Role Card B

You believe education should be state-funded across all levels. You think education is a public good and basing access to education on parents' income will exclude many disadvantaged children, which is also bad for the economy because it loses talent. Think of more arguments to support public free education. Remember you will debate the opposite side, so analyse what arguments they might bring forth and how to counter them.