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Tutorial Schools in Thailand: Perceptions and Motivations of Thai High School Students

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Abstract

The article explores the motivation of Thai secondary school students who chose to enroll in private tutorial institutes. The research draws on primary qualitative data compiled from structured interviews utilizing a comparative perspective to provide insight into perceptions of tutorial versus formal secondary education. The evidence presented here suggests that Thai secondary students have two clear motivations for consuming and engaging in private tutorial education: (1) the belief that tutorial classes will provide them with better educational performance as measured by their grade point average and performance on standardized tests, and (2) a service-driven motivation where tutorial educators provide student-centered learning and personalized education.

TUTORIAL SCHOOLS IN THAILAND: PERCEPTIONS AND MOTIVATIONS OF THAI HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Introduction

Private tutorial education services have seen a global marked increase in the preceding three decades which continues at present (Baker et. al. 2001; Bray, 1999; Bray, 2007; Bray, 2011). Bray (1999) observes that private tutorial education has three essential features, namely, supplementation, privateness and consisting of various academic subjects. This definition conceptualizes the ecosphere of tutorial schools as a place where students engage in academic studies for largely demand generated reasons. This is important in two respects; when a formal education is deficient and when the formal state education system has a supply side deficiency meaning that even if the instructors are proficient, if the class size is too large to accommodate for student centered learning then this generates further demand for shadow education systems.

However, simply stating that these are the two primary push factors potentially undermines any number of other motivational determinants which include, but are not limited to socio-cultural pressure, familial pressure, labor market competition and examination stress. It is important to gain insight into grounded first hand motivations of secondary school students as to why they choose to consume private tutorial services. There are a number of useful purposes for data derived in this manner be it policy area provision, substantive structural education deficiencies, human resource capacity building or material resource based deficiencies. That said, it stands to reason that research directed at student motivations will assist in filling the current gap in contemporary research surrounding private tutorial educational systems.

Theoretical Backgrounds

This article will draw on mixed theoretical approaches which seek to ground a pilot study firmly within a critical social/power theory which draws on the work of Foucault and is

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framed in regard to national cultural considerations. This approach will base the study within the narrow paradigm of power relations which seek to discipline students within the structure of the education system while explaining the perceptions of students within the local context of power asymmetries and hierarchies. Secondly, neoliberalism will be used as the larger meta framework to explain why the growth in tutorial schools has been so pervasive and how neoliberalism impacts student perceptions and motivations towards enrollment in private tutorial education.

Foucault argues that with the invention of technologies in the 17th-18th centuries, constitutions of power were fundamentally changed and reorganized by the state which transformed the relationships of power between individuals, groups and the state in essential ways. In particular was the shift to incorporate and gain access to "individuals and bodies to their acts, attitudes, and modes of everyday behavior. Hence the significance of methods like school discipline, which succeeded in making children's bodies the object of highly complex systems of manipulation and conditioning" (Foucault, 1980, p. 125). Furthermore, Foucault identifies the binary relationship between knowledge and power and institutional structures such as education and the university as being intersectional spaces where the objectified human being is subject to power and must conform to institutional imperatives in order to access other systems of power. He elucidates this by examining the complex relationship between economic power and the exercise of power where he states "the exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power" (Foucault, 1980, p. 52). The power of the schooling is important enough to quote at length:

> "the school brings together tens, hundreds and sometimes thousands of school children, students and it is as such a question of exercising over them a power that is precisely much less onerous than the power of the private tutor, one which could only exist between the pupil and the master. There we have a master for dozens of disciples; it is therefore necessary, despite this multiplicity of pupils, that there is an individualization of power, a permanent control, an overseeing of every moment" (Foucault, 2007, p. 160).

This can be understood in the "vulnerability to criticism of things, institutions, practices, discourses" (Foucault, 1980, p. 80). This is demonstrated in the Thai classroom by the omnipresent hierarchy of power between teacher and pupil as well as the inclusion or exclusion of pupils to the teacher's good graces, attention and scorn depending on the students' adoption of Thai values and cultural expectations. The binary relationship of power within formal institutions leads to unequal outcomes which forces students to engage in private tutorial education for a number reasons that will impact their future lives in any number of sphere's including economic, social, and marital among others. This access to knowledge; specific disciplinary knowledge, is located in power domains of the structure of the education institute as well as the classroom. As a consequence of power asymmetries students are either included within the formal structure or excluded and must seek knowledge elsewhere.

Neoliberalism finds its intellectual roots in the Austrian school of economists most notably represented by Ludwig von Mises and Frederick Hayek and its American counterpart the Chicago school best represented by Milton Friedman. While arguably an intellectually incomplete ideology, neoliberalism is generally considered to be a radical market based set of ideas that find expression in state policy as being antagonistic towards state intervention; instead arguing for radical market liberalism with minimal state functions and self-regulated markets (Bresser-Pereira 2009; Harms, 2007; Springer, 2010). Glassman (1999) has asserted

that when considering neoliberalism one must take into account the local variation in which it forms itself outside of the monolithic characterization of global neoliberalism, thus allowing for variation in its implantation in different policy areas. In this context the Thai state has essentially allowed for the privatization of failing state education services by stipulating a state based tutorial curriculum regulatory environment without pursuing deep reforms needed for student success in the externally driven neoliberal environment which includes a generally open and globally influenced economy. While this approach exacerbates socioeconomic disparities, it reflects the general laissez faire approach to social and economic organization of the Thai state.

State of Art: Tutorial Schools in Asia
        Regarding Asia generally, there exists a body of work that largely focuses on Northeast Asia regionally, and the factors driving tutorial education, state policies (Lee et al., 2010). The work of Choi and Cho (2016) in South Korea, Zhang (2013 & 2016) in China outlined the demand and effectiveness of tutorial academies. Dawson (2010) in a comparative study of Japan, South Korea and Cambodia finds that there are some commonalities that drive tutorial demand in these countries which are structural in nature. Structural inequality in social demographics and income distribution tend to disadvantage those on the lower end of the socioeconomic hierarchy thereby necessitating tutorials as a general supplement to public education. He also finds changing demands of the labor force driving students to acquire more highly skilled and specialized knowledge which can be a stepping stone to tertiary education.
        Hong Kong stands as a focal point of prior research and offers insights into the drivers for the large-scale consumption of private tutorial education. Bray and Kwok (2003) find that university entrance examination pressure and the larger collective anxiety concerning educational achievement is a primary driver of private tutorial education. They also find that secondary schools often do not provide students with a comprehensive understanding of in-class pedagogical materials along with the attractiveness of personalized learning in an environment of smaller class size and tutorial assistance with homework to be supplementary determinants for private education consumption. These findings are similar to previous research by Kwok (2001, 2004a, 2004b) who investigated tutorial drivers from a student perspective and found that key drivers for tutorial school services arose from an increased awareness of the need for examination preparation, internalized stress by individuals from social factors, a meritocratic social focus and credential inflation.
        Yung (2015) undertook an investigation of English tutoring of Chinese learners in Hong Kong. The author found that students enjoyed both mass and small class tutoring but responded most to being 'spoon fed' in preparatory fashion for exams. Furthermore, Yung found that students were motivated by positive reinforcement of the peers by tutors, a positive atmosphere and the techniques of the tutors. Functionality of tutoring was largely driven by examination driven teaching and upon reflection afterwards did not provide useful English skills. Other studies such as Liu (2012) in Taiwan outlined the positive aspects of tutorial academies in terms of Math performance.
        Tan (2017), in a study of Singaporean parental motivations for influencing children's decisions towards private tutoring, argues that the Singaporean state and private institutions help subsidize private tutoring which makes access to these education supplements largely egalitarian. However, the author also finds that income based demographics do alter outcomes, as those from higher economic backgrounds can enter at younger ages, thus influencing disparate outcomes. Lastly, the author finds that education reforms in Singapore regarding

curriculum and structure have influenced parents greatly in terms of enrolling their children into tutorial schools.

Regarding Thailand, there is a distinct lack of scholarly literature addressing the mass phenomenon of private tutorial schools. There is a body of general literature which focuses on national public education and its shortcomings. Varavarn (2006) provides a general overview of secondary public education and its deficiencies in Thailand noting that while access has expanded to a majority of the citizenry there needs to be shift to a diversified and relevant curriculum, strengthening of human and ICT resources and a management overhaul. Two studies available consider possible motivations for tutorial engagement and offer interesting insights. Pisanpanumas and Pratchayapong (2016) use a micro study of the effects of tutorial schools on science pupils after the fact which concluded that there are four primary motivations for students after partaking in tutorials to gauge their satisfaction and return.

Learning experience is a primary factor in that tutorials are tailored towards students' needs thereby making the learning experience engaging and personalized. The use of basic technology and techniques of presentation are innovative and engaging to students. Teacher adaptation is seen from the perspective of a non-static learning environment where pedagogy and teacher are consistently adapting to student needs, weaknesses and strengths thus enhancing the personalized service experience. Lastly, the psychological effect of positive reinforcement by teachers and staff towards students tends to allow a greater degree of personalization between student and teacher as well as cross engagement with parents.

Chaidaecha (2015) finds that there are two primary factors leading to undergraduates taking supplementary tutorial classes of English. They find that product elements, promotion, productivity and quality, place, process, physical environment and price were primary factors influencing college age students to engage in tutorial schooling. Their study is largely marketing and economic factor driven and sectioned off to a tertiary level student base. That said there is a distinct lack of information available regarding the circumstances which influence individual students to pay for private tutoring and determine if the market is responding or being created and why.

Lao (2014) argues that Thai state policy has engaged with the private tutorial education sector at a policy level due to structural and ideological reasons. Structurally the supply of state tertiary education cannot meet the demand of students who sit for the formal state entrance examinations. This has cultural underpinnings which help drive the above mentioned in that Thai students and parents have an established bias for sending their children to four prestigious universities: Chulalongkorn, Kasetsart, Thammasat and Mahidol Universities. These four universities are located in the capital, Bangkok, which lends additional geographic bias and push factors for students to attend private tutorial schools. Secondly, neoliberal ideology plays a strong role in state policy by the recognition that formal education is deficient in many regards as illustrated when the government announced it had asked the privately owned tutorial schools to produce and distribute teaching materials to state run schools (Bangkok Post, January 14, 2017).

Hence the state is supporting financially or by liberalizing policy the prominence of tutorial schools. With this in mind there is a need for academic attention and research which takes into consideration the motivational factors on secondary school students who consume private tutorial services. This will help fill the gap between macro studies of state policy and market oriented studies which focus on end user satisfaction after service provision while providing needed insight into personalized choices and the dynamics driving decision making. Importantly, Lao (2014) posits that a free market approach prevails in relation to the establishment and expansion of the private tutorial sector. This is demonstrated by the lack of

regulation and taxation of tutorial schools and the attitude taken towards incentives and drivers of tutorial school services. Most glaring is the policy position towards public education competency "students should be able to get access to quality education outside the school system…if the school does not have the competencies to teach certain subjects, the students should have the 'choice' to study elsewhere and receive accreditations" (Lao, 2014, p. 10). This clearly demonstrates the bureaucratic understanding that state public education is insufficient in many substantive areas which is a reflection of structural inequalities within Thailand's socio-economic demographics. As such, unofficial state policy derogates responsibility stemming from deficient public education to the private sector. Within this context private tutoring can be considered not 'shadow' education but a parallel private system of education which mirrors public education and is in fact an integral part of that system at the primary and secondary education levels.

At present there are no studies regarding Thai student perceptions regarding *why* they engage in private tutorial education. There are only studies that investigate the market push-pull factors of private tutorial schools in city specific markets or meta-structural studies of Thai state education policy vis-à-vis tutorial schools. This pilot study attempts to fill a much needed gap in education scholarship. In doing so, the authors are modestly attempting to provide insights into both the dysfunctional nature of public education as well as the driving factors towards private consumption of tutorial education.

Development and Context of Private Tutorial Education in Thailand

According to the Thai Ministry of Education there were, as of 2014, 2,379 registered tutorial schools (Ministry of Education n.d.).[2] The growth of the private tutorial sector is strikingly high with Kasikorn research unit estimating private tutorial education sector growth at 6.8% per annum in 2015 with total current student enrollment estimated at over 535,000 (Akaraphanth, 2015, Kasikorn Research, 2015).

Private tutorial schools are regulated within the Ministry of Educations' Office of Private Education which has a subdivision designated as the 'Non-formal Education Unit' that formally organizes and oversees private tutorial schools (Lao, 2014). The Private School Act defines 'Non-formal education as tutorial education, religious education, vocational education & training, arts, music and sport and enrichment for life skills' (Ministry of Education, 2011). The context of private tutorial education in Thailand can be understood through the lens of a bureaucratic attitude favorable towards marketization of educational services. Private tutorial schools must follow the MoE curriculum and are in general quite loosely regulated with regard to location, pricing and profit margins yet they are allowed a great degree of liberty in terms of pedagogical techniques.

Research Questions

Based on the survey of literature pertaining to tutorial school education within the larger Asian region, the researcher's hypothesize that the larger motivational factors based on securing a competitive advantage for student consumption of tutorial education will be rationally based on observational cost benefit analysis. The cost benefit analysis would cut along two major points of concern. Firstly, students would choose tutorial education for benefits related to entrance into the limited number of Thai public universities. Secondly, there

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[2] It should be noted that official Ministry of Education statistics put the number of teachers at 465,330 and student enrollment at 11,458. We interpret this as a data input error where the reverse would be correct with data of 465,300 students and 11,458 teachers. Given the fluidity and short term nature of tutorial courses exact numbers at any given time are quite arbitrary.

should be motivational factors which stem from structural considerations within Thai high schools for competition for scarce resources such as student-teacher ratio and GPA performance as factors driving students to seek the opportunity cost advantage of consuming private tutorial education.

Essentially, the inadequacies of the public secondary education system have led to student motivation for supplementary education and have thus created a lucrative market for tutorial education. Therefore, the formulation of the research questions is based on the logic first, of structural educational motivations based on observational cost benefit analysis The second question attempts to identify the specific motivational factors for student choice and if there are intervening factors which cut across GPA categories. The research questions are stated more directly below:

RQ1: What are the advantages of enrolling in tutorial courses as perceived by the tutees?
RQ2: What are the student's specific motivations to attend tutorial courses?

Method

This exploratory qualitative study was conducted by interviewing fifteen twelfth grade science students at a prestigious secondary school in central Bangkok. This school was chosen as it was consistently ranked in the top three secondary programs in Thailand between 2010-2015 as determined by the achievements of students' admission results, academic awards, and scholarships. Simple purposeful and snowball sampling were conducted with the addition of informant suggestion of possible further informants. A qualitative interview design was chosen to reveal the details of the participant's perceptions of tutorial schools as compared to their secondary school. The interview questions were framed in an open-ended format with the goal of establishing rapport and allowing the participants to expand on their remarks without interruption. As participants shared opinions of particular interest to the aims and scope of this study, follow-up questions were introduced to provide a richer detailed context necessary for academic inquiry.

Following each interview the recorded data were reviewed and transcribed verbatim. The transcribed data was then analysed for emerging themes which were categorized on the right margin and specific phrases which elucidated the emotional reactions of the tutorial experince on the left margin. This inductive approach of natural inquiry and analysis allowed for the emergent themes to be indentified and labelled. Specfic attention was then given to the intersection and repetition of these themes. Each of the transcripts was read multiple times by both of the authors and comparative analysis of notes assisted in the thematic mapping and unitization analysis. This approach of thematic data analysis assisted in the identifaction of freqeuncy, speficicity and the emotionality of the participants reactions to the interviews quesitons (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

Prior to the interviews, all participants received a verbal explanation of the purpose of the research. Participants were also informed of their ability to withdraw from the study or to refuse to answer any questions for any reason. All participation was voluntary and participation required verbal informed consent prior to the onset of the interviews. All participants were given an alias on the recorded transcripts of the interviews to further protect their identity thus ensuring confidentiality and anonymity which is an integral aspect of this research. All students had been engaged in tutorial education for at least one school year and most had upwards of three plus years of tutorial education. Normal class size for these students could be categorized as small, numbering between 5-25 students per class. There were no mass classes or one-on-one but taken generally with known peers and classmates. Generally, class

sizes in Thai tutorial schools vary depending on the subject and student demand. For example, English classes can be one-on-one if the student is willing to pay more or chooses private tutoring whereas mathematics is usually taught to classes of 10 or more students.

Research Design

One on one semi-structured interviews using the Thai language were conducted with each of the participants. The interviews were conducted in Thai to promote participant fluency and openness with the interviewer. The interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed in Thai and then translated to English. Following the English translation, the researchers conducted reverse translation sessions to ensure accuracy of documentation. Each interview lasted approximately 15-20 minutes.

Participants

- The fifteen interviewees are categorized equally into one three tracks, according to their grade point average (GPA). GPA is the standardized measurement of secondary and university student academic success which is used in Thailand to apply for college entry as well as by employers when inquiring as to the academic success of job candidates. To calculate a students' GPA the numerical value for each letter grade is multiplied by the number of credits the course is worth and then divided by the total number of credits.

Grade A	4 points –Excellent
Grade B+	3.5 points –Very Good
Grade B	3 points— Good
Grade C+	2.5 points—Fairly Good
Grade C	2 points—Fair
Grade D+	1.5 points—Poor
Grade D	1 point—Very Poor
Grade F	0 points—Failure

The three groups of participants in this study were categorized by their cumulative GPA. The cumulative GPA is calculated by their GPA for all courses taken during the high school program. Given that most colleges and universities in Thailand require a GPA of above 3.0 as well as a high score of the PISA or other standardized test, GPAs have become the standard measurement or marker of academic success by students, parents, employers and college entrance committees.

Group A- GPA is between 0.00 - 1.99.
- Students in this group have the lowest possibility to compete with other students if they choose the faculties that require three major subjects of English, Mathematics and Physics.

Group B- GPA is between 2.00 - 2.99.

Group C- GPA is between 3.00 - 4.00.
- Students in this group have the greatest possibilities to achieve their educational goals.

All interviews were conducted with twelfth grade students enrolled at a prominent secondary school in Bangkok and currently enrolled in at least one tutorial course related to a course the student is also enrolled in the period between June and November 2016. For instance, to be selected for participation in this study a student must be enrolled in a calculus

course at both the secondary school and a tutorial academy. This was intended to lend to more detailed observations regarding the similarities and differences in course materials, teaching style and environment. The fifteen interviewees included eight females and seven males all aged between 17-18 years old. There are three female and two male interviewees in the first group (low GPA), three females and two male in the second (middle GPA), and two female and three male within the last group (high GPA). Prior to each interview the researcher asked all the interviewees about their background information, name, age, and confirmed the participants GPA to ensure correct classification for further analysis. Each participant agreed that all responses and identifying information would be removed from the text to further ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Results

RQ1: What are the advantages of enrolling in tutorial courses as perceived by the tutees? The advantages of enrolling in tutorial schools were primarily based on the improvement in performance at the participant's secondary schools.

> *"I think they help me quite a lot, because I don't like many of the teachers in my school mostly because they are always so strict. For this reason, I rely mostly on tutorial schools and my GPA may be worse than this if I was not taking any tutorial classes."* (Interviewee No.1 of 1st Group, 0.00 - 1.99 of GPA, 2016)

> *"They help me a lot. Although I expect myself to do better than this (overall GPA) now, it's quite satisfying for me because I know that before I was not a good student, but after taking some tutorial classes, my GPA improved. I gained some confidence from that."* (Interviewee No.1 of 2nd Group, 2.00 - 2.99 of GPA, 2016)

The students' tendency to focus on GPA as the main indicator of academic success proved to be a positive reinforcement for the tutorial academies and increased the students' perceptions of the academies as well as their willingness to continue studying at the tutorials. While many students discussed the gradual increase in GPA at their secondary schools, there was also a critical social factor involved in tutorial enrollment. Another student remarked:

> *"They can actually help me bring up my GPA, but I never aimed to enter public university because I don't want to get too stressed. I go to the tutorial schools because of my friends. I just want to hang out with them, and meet some new faces"* (Interviewee No.2 of the 2nd Group, 2.00 -2.99 of GPA, 2016)

The lower performing group of students shared similar sentiments of a general recognition of their academic abilities vis-à-vis other peer groups. Tutorial schools offered a stopgap in academic performance which allowed them to maintain their academic standing whilst not digressing any further. Psychological and social aspects also were present in that students saw an improvement in performance or at least were able to maintain their current standing which reinforced their self-confidence and reliance on tutoring.

The psychological factors involved in enrolling in tutorial programs became apparent as many of the participants commented on an improved sense of self efficacy and a shift towards more expectations of success. The shift from failure avoidance to mastery orientation increased self-worth and created greater expectations of academic success. One participant summarized this phenomenon when he remarked:

"I have to compete with students all across the country. I can't just sit at home, studying by myself, while others go to the tutorial schools. I cannot tell you exactly how the classes help me; but at least, they help me to gain a lot of confidence. It's too risky not to go to tutorial school" (Interviewee No.3 of the 3rd Group, 3.00 - 4.00 of GPA, 2016)

The increase in self confidence is difficult to quantify but has a tremendous long term impact on the individuals' sense of self and allows for a shift to an internal locus of control in terms of academic pursuits. This comment was echoed by another participant who said:

"I've had a really hard time learning things since I first entered high school. I've doubted myself, asking why I was so stupid. Most of the time I have to revise things that my teachers taught in classes so that I can catch up with my friends. After taking a couple of tutorial classes that some of my friends suggested, things got better and the doubt has finally faded. I'll say that the tutorial classes help me, at least they wipe away my self-doubt. It's all that matters, my self-confidence." (Interviewee No.4 of the 2nd Group, 2.00 - 2.99 of GPA, 2016)

The gradual decrease in self-doubt can produce as cascade affect and lead to greater initiative, autonomy and self-esteem for the students who had previously struggled in the public system. The transition mentioned above is a clear advantage provided by tutorial academies. Given the popularity of social media, claims made by this student can become great motivators for other students as well.

*"No. I heard that the university admissions are so hard and I **only** [emphasis of interviewee] have one chance. I don't want to risk relying on self-study. The tutors there help me with the techniques that the teachers didn't teach me. I have to go there."* (Interviewee No.2 of the 3rd Group, 3.00 – 4.00, 2016)

The second group of middle to high performing students had similar views as the lower performing group relating to self-confidence. However, the motivational outcome is quite different in that academic stress was accentuated and expressed in a risk averse manner related to national university entrance examinations and the fact that these students had been in tutorial schools since a very young age. The peer group pressure profile was strong with this group in that they related academically to peers of similar academic performance. Tutorial program services were categorized in two ways; non-assurance as to the positive effects of classes and tutor techniques of assisting students to learn easier and faster.

The first aspect is important with respect to student self-confidence and assurance in their preparation for national university entrance examinations. The limited number of available seats and competition for public universities is a common theme among this cross section of students. This accentuates a supply demand market analysis as a critical perceptional factor. The second aspect is also an important motivating factor in that private education providers hold specific domain knowledge which teachers are not providing in the classroom. Techniques of analytical thinking, shortcuts to understanding and methods of effective learning are provided in a concrete manner which students can then use in their studies. The profit service provider's tutorial schools are responding to the demands of students to gain specific knowledge which is not provided by their teachers thus demonstrating a structural deficiency in Thai public education. This deficiency is twofold, human resources are not qualitatively

sufficient for student demands and quantitatively Thai public schools simply cannot provide student based learning assistance to a degree which is sufficient to market demand. Perceptions of these students are reflective of prior studies of high school student perceptions in Hong Kong undertaken by Bray which found that high school students reported "improved confidence in examinations, revision skills and learning strategies" (Bray 2015, p. 6).

RQ2: What are the student's specific motivations to attend tutorial courses? The responses to the second research question were classified into three central themes which participants discussed in regard to motivations to attend the tutorial courses, namely comparative teaching styles, high school teachers need to maintain their high power distance and competition among their classmates to gain access to higher education. Each of these motivators is discussed below with selected quotes from participants.

Teaching Style. The teaching styles of secondary and tutorial instructors was the most common motivating factor as cited by the participants. In the first group of interviews, all of the students shared the same opinion that tutorial classes are more enjoyable. All of the participants expressed a similar perception of the tutors as less strict than the teachers in their secondary school. This was further explained by their observations that most tutors choose to motivate by implementing methods designed to attract student's attention rather than punishment. While the secondary teachers were more likely to motivate through rule enforcement and power cues, tutorial teachers chose forms of edutainment and consistently provided positive feedback to create an atmosphere of cooperative learning and openness. Moreover, participants revealed that some of the secondary teachers share important techniques only for those who have extra class with the teachers, so that these teachers can earn more money, in addition to their normal salary. The participants claimed that secondary teachers are offering an informal tutorial service to those students with the means to afford these critical techniques. This unfortunate situation was summarized by one student who said:

> *"They're totally different. The normal class seems to be more stressful and really boring. The teachers have less motivation compared to the tutors. Moreover, some teachers spare some techniques that are very crucial when doing exams. They just keep the techniques for those who hire them for special classes outside of the school so they can make more money."* (Interviewee No.3 of the 1st Group, 0.00 – 1.99 of GPA, 2016)

Students in the second group shared a similar perception that learning with tutors is more fun compared to the teacher in their secondary school. Most Thai students are not encouraged to ask questions, engage in discussion or debate (Nguyen, n.d.). This does not seem to apply to tutorial academies. The second group stated that, in tutorial classes, the tutors are more open to the questions from the students, but the teachers in high school classes seem to be more antagonistic towards answering questions in class, and some of them consider it as disrespectful. It was reported that some teachers consider students in-class questions as a challenge to their authority or role as a knowledge expert. One of the students commented that:

> *"Tutorial classes are more fun. The tutors know how to get the attention of students. On the other hand, most teachers in my normal classes seem not to care as much as the tutors. The relationship between me and some tutors is closer if compared to the teachers. The teachers are so obsessed with the idea that the students must respect them that I almost get nothing from my normal classes because of this kind of attitude that they are hanging on to. Sometimes I didn't mean to disrespect them. I just asked questions or said something,*

but they thought that I challenged their knowledge and position.” (Interviewee No.2 of the 2nd Group, 2.00 - 2.99, 2016)

Another student remarked

"Tutorial classes are more entertaining and less strict. I mostly learn with joy while I'm in tutorial classes. I can ask any questions free of worry that the question may be considered as disrespectful to the tutor. They are friendlier than the teachers in my school. And this is the reason why I depend mostly on cram schools.” (Interviewee No.2 of the 1st Group, 0.00 - 1.99 of GPA, 2016)

These comments reflect a meaningful change in student's behaviors and perceptions of their learning environments. The public secondary schools continue to focus on obedience, respect and rote learning whereas the tutorial academies provide open mediated learning environments which promote feelings of competence, higher self-esteem and an openness of communication between students and teachers.

A similar comment was shared by a student in the third group:

"I think some tutors are more entertaining. For them, teaching is a business and students are their customers, so they have to please their customers. Compared to the high school teacher, it's like a reversal. Students must please them because they are the ones who hold our future in their hands, by giving out grades.” (Interviewee No.1 of the 3rd Group, 3.00 - 4.00 of GPA, 2016)

If the secondary schools are based on passive learning where the student must absorb facts and act as the "empty vessel to be filled" (Hooper-Greenhill, 1999, p.68), the tutorials are promoting an active learning environment which gives the students an opportunity to comment, interact with their teachers and most importantly to engage their minds (Hein, 1998). This leads to the second major motivation for attending tutorial courses which is to escape this attitude among some of the secondary teachers that the teacher is infallible.

Maintaining Power Distance. Students in all three groups commented on the use of power distance by their teachers in secondary schools. Many of the respondents discussed how the behavior of tutors provided a stark contrast and gave them hope and motivation regarding continuing their studies at the tertiary level. It was also acknowledged that the secondary teachers had a versatile tool to control students; grade allocation. To illustrate, one male student in group 2 said:

"Some teachers act like they are gods whom students must pay respect to. If we don't, things will become nasty. What should I do, then? I don't want to please them because of their attitudes. To compare, the tutors act more like they are my brothers, or friends. I can ask everything I want, free of worry about respect. It's funny that as they treat me that way, I pay more respect to them. This also makes me keep going back to the tutors.” (Interviewee No.2 of the 2nd Group, 2.00 - 2.99 of GPA, 2016)

Such bold criticism of teachers is not accepted in Thai society and the respondents acknowledged that this was unlikely to change. Thai culture has long valued the principle of teachers as respected figures in society and often as people who we must be grateful for. Within the second group of participants there is another interesting observation from a student who claimed that many students have common problems in their normal classes, yet they are

ignored by their teachers. Meanwhile, the tutors do not ignore their students. For this reason, many students turn their hope towards tutorial schools. She commented:

> *"It's clear that my school only cares about a certain group of students-- just a small group of highly intelligent students. If you're not in that group then you don't get anything from them. Yet, the cram schools are not like that. They care about all of the students who want to learn."* (Interviewee No.2 of the 3rd Group, 3.00 - 4.00 of GPA, 2016)

This focus on demanding students respect through obsequious classroom behavior expectations creates a docile learning environment which is not conducive to this generation of learners. While it has been said that Thai students do not engage in classroom discussions out of fear of disagreement or debate (Eldridge & Cranston, 2009), participants in this study more commonly discussed the futility of asking too much of their secondary teachers.

Competition for Access to Higher Education. The third motivating factor which emerged was related to inter-student competition. As previously stated, there is great competition for entry to Thai higher education. This has an impact on student relationships and the motivation to attend tutorial academies. One student mentioned:

> *"I think the techniques that I get from the tutors are quite amazing. It helps strengthen my confidence. Meanwhile, it is quite hopeless to ask for that from the teachers in my normal school. Apart from that, friends are another key factor here. My normal school classmates seem to keep the techniques from those who don't take tutorial classes. They don't share anything. So, I chose to take some tutorial classes, instead of relying on that kind of pseudo-friendship."* (Interviewee No.5 of the 3rd Group, 3.00 -4.00 of GPA, 2016)

The comments from the student above were not unique when students were asked about which factors motivated them to attend tutorial academies. Many of the students commented on the sense of pressure and related stress to get high scores on the national assessment tests. One female student who was aware that her classmates were doing better than she was asked for help and this was how she explained her classmates reacted:

> *"They gave me the notes, but, there were actually two notes they had. One was a full version which contained all the techniques essential for the exam. Another was quite similar to the first, but it was an incomplete one. The core techniques were not included. And you know what, there was some wrong information on the one they gave me! I couldn't believe this. They tried to sabotage me, their friend. I only realized this after I had a chance to talk with my tutor who also taught them. Lucky me. Otherwise, I might have failed the exam"* (Interviewee No.4 of the 3rd Group, 3.00 - 4.00 of GPA, 2016)

This comment reinforces previous remarks that certain learning strategies which are more effective are presented in the tutorial academies and not in the secondary schools. This was an important motivating factor for students to take additional tutorial classes. This further undermines the status of teachers in the secondary schools and decreases their credibility. Students commented that they felt that they had been abandoned by the teachers whose duty it is to teach and guide their students down the right path. As the teachers' attitudes and actions failed to fulfill students' expectations, the students had little choice but to turn their hopes to

the new option, tutorial academies. Moreover, the tutorial academies seem to be aware of the students' need for additional class time with teachers who are more engaged and have a positive attitude as they continue to expand their branch academies closer to the larger secondary schools in the city. This is largely due to business necessities and scale of operations as being close to schools allows for easier access to students (Akaraphanth, 2015).

Discussion

Access to the Thai higher education system is competitive and the students with the financial means to attend tutorial academies feel compelled to do so. Research has shown that the most important education related factor in regard to student outcomes is the quality of teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2000; OECD, 2005). The respondents in this study repeatedly expressed a similar opinion regarding the poor quality of instruction in their secondary programs. The 2008 revised national curriculum was expected to change traditional Thai learning environments from authoritarian teacher centered lectures with assessments based on rote learning to a new 21st century style teaching strategies which emphasize Problem Based Learning, teamwork, the use of information and communication technology, analytical thinking, creativity and encouraging students to learn outside of the classroom (OBEC, 2013). This was in line with the governments' efforts to shift from a quantity driven model of providing education to the masses to a quality driven model to help Thailand compete internationally.

The secondary teachers are instrumental in the efforts to achieve this goal and yet, from the student perspective, they have not made the shift from 20th century teaching to the demands of the 21st century. The tutorial teachers seem willing and able to relate to the students more readily, are more accepting of student inquiry and are more adept at providing learning techniques which the students value. There are many potential reasons for this. Firstly, the tutorial instructors tend to earn much greater incomes than their secondary counterparts. This income is then partially invested in their own professional development and the development of better teaching materials. There is a demonstrated correlation with improvements in student achievement and sustained professional development among teachers (OECD, 2014).

Another reason why many of the students may prefer these tutorial academies is that these programs tend to focus on subjects which the secondary programs tend to do poorly on, namely English, mathematics and science. This is reflective of the Thai education system whereby students must choose in 7th grade which educational track they will engage in, the Science track or Arts track. The more prestigious is the Science track known to produce students in hard sciences where jobs are more plentiful in fields such as technology and engineering. After choosing a Science track, students will take subjects largely in this general track with little focus on humanities, arts and social studies and vice versa for the Arts track students. While there is an oversupply of teachers in general, there is a shortage of teachers in specific subjects such as math, science and foreign languages (OECD, 2014). These are precisely the subjects which are necessary to achieve high scores for entry to the higher education system and not coincidentally, the subjects which tutorial programs focus on.

Furthermore, these are subjects which Thai students score consistently low on in relation to their peers internationally in PISA tests as well as national O-Net and A-Net exams (Fernquest, 2017; OECD, 2014). These subjects are also the three most popular subjects which students choose in tutorial schools (King Mongkut University of Technology n.d.).

Socially, tutorial schools offered these students the ability to network and reinforce existing social relationships they have with friends who are engaged in tutorials. Furthermore,

the student/teacher relationship is important in that formal schooling tended to push lower performing students into an adversarial or denigrating relationship with their public school teacher. Tutorial schooling offered these students a mechanism to engage studies in a positive environment where the dynamics of the student / teacher interactions are of a reinforcing and positive nature rather than adversarial. Two strains of cultural behavior underlie these student's motivations namely, social conformity and power distance hierarchy.

Thai cultural norms of communication, interaction and respect of socio-cultural capital are bound in what Hofstede et al (2010) consider to be high power distance cultures which exhibit strong collectivism, conflict avoidance and respect for hierarchy (Kamolpattana et. al. 2015). High power distance indicates the degree of acceptance of those persons with 'low' power while reinforcing social inequalities and empowering those who have a high power status. This significantly impacts the degree to which students would dare to interact publically or challenge their teachers in a public or private setting. Thai children are taught from a very young age to respect elders, seniors, teachers and others in positions of authority which limits their ability to engage in meaningful academic enrichment if they are falling behind, do not understand or simply lack the foundational abilities of their peers. This was echoed many years prior and holds validity to the present as Hawkey and Narongchai (1980) demonstrate by arguing that:

> '…disagreeing with teachers is probably the worst of all crimes [to Thai students]. This does not mean that they always agree with the teacher's view, but rather that they are disinclined to show their disagreement. Here respect for teachers seems to have a negative effect on students' performance…when asked to give opinions, they tend not to give straight criticisms, because of what may seem to be an undue concern for 'politeness'" (p. 77-78).

Lastly, the participants in this study perceived of the secondary teachers as responsible for creating an atmosphere which reinforces traditional Thai roles and social interactions. It is well established that the Thai communication style is unique (Thapatiwong, 2011). Some common elements of traditional Thai social interactions include conflict avoidance, showing respect for the elderly or those with high status (i.e. power distance), femininity and the tendency to seek social harmony (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2010; Pimpa, 2012). While it has been claimed that Thai students prefer to sit and quietly listen to teachers (Deveney, 2005), perhaps this is not a preference so much as a socially conditioned behavior pattern which, when not observed, resulted in admonishment and ostracism by teachers. The participants in this study claimed that tutorial teachers continue to rely on the basic tenets of operant conditioning and increasing positive reinforcement to enhance student understanding and motivation, whereas the secondary teachers tend to prefer punishment which is increasing students avoidance and desire to escape the traditional education system.

Limitations
This exploratory case study is based on a single secondary school in Bangkok. Application of concepts and outcomes to other institutions is limited. In addition, the overall generalizability is limited due to the sample size. Given the limited sample size, it is possible that the participants, who were already enrolled in tutorial programs, were biased in terms of their perception and attitude of their secondary school teachers. These case study is based on students of an elite demonstration school in Metropolitan Bangkok which may have embedded bias in that these students are high performers usually of a higher socioeconomic demographic.

Lastly, it is not known how many secondary schools in Thailand have a similar student classification system or the impact of such a system on student motivation.

Conclusion

The Thai secondary students in this study chose to vote with their wallets and it seems the tutorial academies are winning at the ballot box. It is well known that Thai children are taught to minimize displays of emotion and conceal all negative emotions publicly (Kulick & Wilson, 1992), yet if we are to observe the students choices when they have the opportunity to select their tutors, it becomes readily apparent that the students do indeed prefer a more interactive and student centered approach to learning which is precisely why the tutorial academies have witnessed such success. In a society which expects nearly all social interactions to be defined by one's relevant position in the social hierarchy (Klauser, 1993), it seems that the tutorial academies have achieved a minor social coup in allowing the students some voice which was not hitherto tolerated within the traditionally Thai classroom.

Previous observations of Thai students often describe how non-confrontational, accepting and tolerant they are (Deveney, 2005) yet if we are to explore the reasons for this, it seems that this set of behaviors is the byproduct of an enculturation process which emphasized power distance, conformity, collectivism, conflict avoidance, femininity and *kreng-jai* (the tendency to engage in social face saving behaviors). If a student experiences years of enculturation which emphasize social place and subordinate/superior, patron client relationships, then one would suspect deference to authority particularly within the education system. However, deference does not equate to agreement or support. The maintenance of social harmony in the classroom comes at the price of a lack of student motivation, poor assessment performance and the rapid growth of tutorial courses.

The formal education system does not respond to student needs or preferences, in fact, it resists market forces for institutional change. Whereas tutorial schools respond to market forces and stakeholder needs which are driven both by structural factors as well as intra and inter-personal factors which this study has demonstrated. The mere fact that the Thai government is distributing CDs of tutorial courses to secondary schools in the provinces, due to the fact that students cannot travel the great distances or afford the costs of education in prestigious tutorial academies in Bangkok, validates and legitimizes the students' perceptions that tutors provide better quality instruction and response to student's actual needs. This demonstrates both structural deficiencies but also a neoliberal answer to education provision and reform in Thailand. This study has in a small but substantial manner filled in a gap in educational scholarship by considering heretofore non-researched areas of personal motivation for educational consumption. Further elucidation of secondary student motivations is critical to the ongoing reformation of Thai education.

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