

# PRIVATE TUITION IN CAMBODIA: EVIDENCE FROM URBAN AND RURAL UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Vutheavy Chim<sup>a</sup>

Sopha Soeung

National Institute of Education (NIE), Cambodia

**Abstract:** *This study compares private tuition (PT) patterns and perceptions regarding teaching and learning in public schools versus PT classes in urban and rural Cambodia. Using quantitative data from 108 tutors and 165 12th graders, followed by 21 interviews that included principals, we find that urban students are the main drivers of PT; they trust the quality of tutors they are familiar with, while their rural peers view PT as more effective when provided by their teachers. Nonetheless, examination reform may have prompted more students to seek PT with tutors who could provide adequate knowledge and skills, as opposed to their teachers. Furthermore, hurried teaching was perceived as a common response to dealing with inadequate instructional time and the pressures of trying to implement a learner-based approach. This investigation provides new insights into issues relating to teacher professionalism and students' choice of PT in Cambodia.*

**Keywords:** *Cambodia; exam reform; private tutoring; shadow education; fee-paid tuition*

## Introduction

Private tuition (PT) is recognized globally as a part of education. It comprises outside-school learning activities that support students' inside-school learning (Stevenson & Baker, 1992). In some contexts (e.g., Turkey, Sri Lanka, Greece, and Egypt), PT has become a common part of students' and parents' lives (Bray, 2013). However, it has also become problematic, especially in contexts where schoolteachers tutor their own students for supplementary income, given their low salaries. Heyneman (2009) and Bray (2003) stated that by offering PT to their students, teachers commit professional misconduct or abuse their authority for personal gain. For example, teachers may withhold curriculum content, slow down their teaching, and pressure students to take PT to earn supplementary income (Dawson, 2009). However, teachers may also view PT hours as compensation to students for insufficient instructional time during official teaching hours (Hallsén & Karlsson, 2019). Brehm and Silova (2014) considered PT as an extension of public schooling within the Cambodian context. Moreover, well-off students engage in different forms of PT to secure academic success (Bray, 2009).

Additionally, both household socio-economic conditions and urban/rural locations affect students' and parents' decisions regarding whether to access tutoring and in what form(s) (Mahmud & Kenayathulla, 2018). Although PT has some benefits, its disadvantages have been emphasized. For instance, PT has been claimed to foster inequality in education through schoolteachers' malpractices, such as inappropriately generating supplementary income and expanding their PT market by demanding that their students pay for PT classes, adjusting grades to allow students to move to subsequent grades, and purchasing test papers and answers. These malpractices have been reported in various contexts (e.g., Brehm & Silova, 2014; Dawson, 2009, 2010; Heyneman, 2009). The evidence from these studies indicates that schoolteachers tend to control the PT market in relation to their own students using differing practices, including malpractices, to market themselves more effectively.

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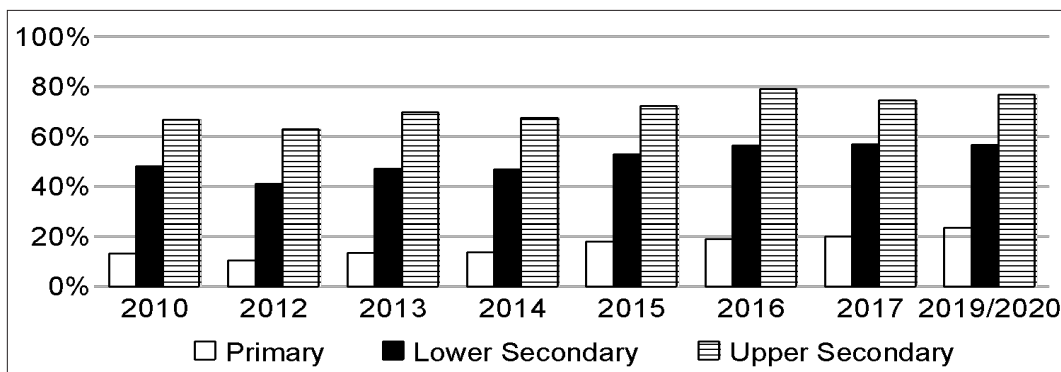
<sup>a</sup> Correspondence can be directed to: [chimvutheavy@gmail.com](mailto:chimvutheavy@gmail.com)

Policymakers worldwide, including those in Cambodia, have largely ignored the rapid growth in PT (e.g., Dawson, 2010; Mori & Baker, 2010). Although PT expansion has alerted educators and policymakers to the need to improve the quality and equality of education, empirical studies on PT expansion in Cambodia are scarce. Previous studies have explored patterns and perceptions of PT since its introduction. However, the present study investigates the current situation of PT expansion by involving relevant stakeholders. We explore and compare PT patterns between urban and rural Cambodia, and the perceptions of teaching and learning in public schools versus PT classes by attempting to answer the following two questions:

- (1) What are the current patterns of PT in urban and rural Cambodia?
- (2) What are the teachers' and students' perceptions regarding teaching and learning during public and PT classes in urban and rural Cambodia?

## Research Background

Cambodia's constitution and educational laws guarantee free education for every citizen (Royal Government of Cambodia [RGC], 2004, 2007). However, parents and students pay for PT to improve student education quality and academic achievement (Edwards et al., 2020). Figure 1 indicates that, from 2010 to 2020, the number of students at lower secondary levels demanding PT had increased by approximately 9% and 10% at both primary and upper secondary levels, respectively (National Institute of Statistics, 2012, 2020). Additionally, insufficient instructional time has been identified as a key factor in PT supply and demand (Bray et al., 2016; Dawson, 2009, 2010). Cambodian students only have a half-day schedule, while teachers must manage double shifts and multiple-grade responsibilities (Brehm & Silova, 2014).



**Figure 1. Students at Lower Secondary Levels Demanding Private Tutoring**

Source: Compiled by the authors from National Institute of Statistics (2010-2020)

To avoid unpleasant situations (e.g., being ignored when approaching for academic support and asking questions, being blamed or mocked) during official teaching hours and to acquire the prescribed knowledge and skills more effectively and comprehensively, students tend to take PT. Generally, schoolteachers have been reported to focus more on theory, with limited practice (Brehm & Silova, 2014), or to apply “uncaring pedagogies” during official hours, but use effective and caring pedagogies and administer practice exercises during PT classes (Bray et al., 2016, 2018; Brehm & Silova, 2014). Further, schoolteachers have been reported to favor their tutees during public school learning activities and examinations, give their tutees more care and better grades, and emphasize curriculum content or specific test items during PT (Bray et al., 2016, 2018).

Cambodia lacks a specific policy to regulate PT. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS) has implemented various strategies to minimize teacher malpractice, such as increasing teachers' salaries; abolishing school registration fees and all types of informal payment,

including PT; and implementing a Priority Action Program (PAP) (Bray & Bunly, 2005). For instance, the basic salaries of newly recruited teachers at upper secondary schools increased from 586,500 Cambodian riels (KHR) (approximately 147 US dollars) in 2016 to 862,500 KHR (approximately 216 US dollars) in 2020 (Soeung, 2021). Empirical studies and news reports (e.g., Dawson, 2009; Khy, 2019) have claimed that this increase could not adequately help teachers to meet their daily family needs due to a simultaneous increase in living costs. Although the PAP has boosted enrollment rates and empowered schools, the quality of education remains low (Keng, 2009). Therefore, parents continue to perceive PT as necessary (Bray & Kwo, 2014), while schoolteachers still appear to control the PT market for their own benefit.

### *National Examination (NE) Reforms and their Effects*

Cambodia's NE reforms seem to increase the likelihood of teacher malpractice in relation to PT. Its NE went through two reforms in 1994 and 2014 by aiming to reduce corruption, ensure that only qualified students pass, and reinvigorate society's trust in public education because public schoolteachers were criticized for being corrupt and for malpractices for their supplementary income in the PT literature. However, such reforms have substantially influenced the overall passing rates. Following the 1994 NE reform, only 4.05% of 17,000 candidates passed the upper secondary school (Baccalaureate) certificate, while only 13% of 50,000 succeeded at the lower secondary equivalent (Francis, 1994). Similarly, the passing rates dropped sharply from 83% in 2013 to 26% in the 2014 NE reform (Koyanagi, 2017).

Since the 2014 NE reform, students only take seven examination subjects according to their learning tracks –science and social science, aimed at giving them enough time for preparation, whereas they took 10 subjects before this reform regardless of their tracks (Barron, 2014). Notably, students' annual results, obtained from school-based examinations that were administered by schoolteachers, were adjusted and included in the NE results prior to this 2014 reform (see MoEYS, 2013). Therefore, teachers could expand the PT market for supplementary income by teaching some test items during PT hours (Brehm et al., 2012). However, this strategy became ineffective following the 2014 reform (MoEYS, 2019) because the NE results of 12th graders depend on how well the students perform in NE (Soeung, 2021). Therefore, the reform indirectly reduced teachers' influence by not allowing the use of school-based achievement in NE results. We hypothesized that this reform prevents students from targeting higher grades in school-based examinations by relying on their own subject teachers, and, instead, they gain adequate knowledge and skills to succeed in NE. Studies have scarcely focused on this reform and how it may have shaped the PT market. It is worth noting that the 2014 reform aims to ensure fairness and transparency for students in their examinations and eliminating the influences from the school-based annual results. Therefore, in this study, we aimed to address this gap.

### *Tuition Demand in Urban and Rural Areas*

Generally, because of their higher average incomes, greater competitiveness, greater population density, and higher availability of tutorial schools, urban students demand more PT compared to their peers in rural areas (Bray, 2009; Bray & Bunly, 2005; Brehm et al., 2012). Socio-economic status and place of origin have also been found to affect PT demand (e.g., Dang, 2014; Kwok, 2010). However, semi-urban and rural areas in Cambodia seem to have fewer differences. Bray et al. (2018) showed that the rates of students taking PT differed by only 2.6% between semi-urban and rural areas in Siem Reap province. Similarly, Marshall and Fukao (2019) reported that PT was likely to expand in rural Cambodian areas.

## Methodology

This study employed both survey and interview approaches to gain insight into the patterns and perceptions of PT in urban and rural upper secondary schools after the NE reform and to examine changing trends in the PT market in Cambodia. Ethical approval was obtained from the MoEYS and it was sent to all selected Provincial Office of Education (POE) and schools. Before proceeding to the data collection stage, a brief presentation on the study's objectives and data collection process was done to both POEs and schools to reconfirm their approval. Additionally, the participants gave written informed consent.

### *Research Setting and Participants*

The study was conducted in two provinces, P1 and P2, with median poverty rates of 17.7% among 24 provinces in Cambodia, excluding the Capital city, using data from Cambodia's Ministry of Planning that identifies poor households, as cited in Sok and Chhinh (2018).

Six upper secondary schools (urban: 3; rural: 3) were purposively selected as targeted sites. In each area, three schools were in P1 and the other three schools were in P2. These schools had at least two teachers teaching the same subject in the 12th grade, especially core examination subjects: mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, and Khmer composition. PT is associated with high-stakes examinations (Bray, 2009); hence, the study scope was limited to the 12th grade, as it is the only grade that involves a nationwide examination. The research population comprised 298 teachers and 20 12th-grade classes with 765 students. As one selected rural school had only two 12th-grade classes, two classes in each target school were selected to ensure an equal number of classes in each site. Thus, 12 classes with 471 students were selected. As no information on tutors was available, the surveys were sent to all teachers teaching examination subjects.

### *Data Collection*

#### Quantitative Data

The first data collection phase involved an online survey conducted between March and April 2020 because of unexpected school closures following the COVID-19 pandemic. Surveys were sent to students and teachers through *Telegram*, a social media platform. Respondents were informed about the survey's purpose and requested to confirm participation before answering the survey questions. Consequently, we obtained responses from 108 tutors (urban: 53; rural: 55) and 165 tutees (urban: 78; rural: 87).

To understand PT patterns in urban and rural Cambodia, quantitative data were obtained from tutors and tutees. Respondents were asked to select whether teachers or students proposed PT in their areas. Tutors were asked about the identity of their tutees, while tutees were requested to identify the type of tutor for each subject tutored (0 = own teacher, 1 = teacher from the same school, 2 = teacher from another school, 3 = tutorial center).

To understand teachers' and students' perceptions of teaching and learning in public school and tutoring classes, tutors and tutees were asked to rate 31 statements ( $\alpha=.735$ ) on a 5-point scale (1 = absolutely disagree, 2 = disagree, 0 = no idea, 3 = agree, 4 = absolutely agree). For the analysis, the 'absolutely agree' and 'agree' were combined and reported. Prior to the data collection, pilot surveys were conducted with 48 tutors and 65 tutees. Consequently, the internal consistency value ( $= .801$ ) was good.

#### Qualitative Data

The informants who indicated their willingness to participate in the survey interviews were randomly selected from both urban and rural areas. We subsequently conducted 27 semi-structured online

interviews in June 2020 with teachers (urban: 6; rural: 6), students (urban: 4; rural: 5) and school administrators (urban: 3; rural: 3). The administrator was invited to comment on teachers' behavior regarding PT. The interviews were conducted in the local language, Khmer, and lasted approximately 30 minutes (Appendix A). Online interviews provided informants with a more confidential environment to express their viewpoints, compared to face-to-face interviews conducted in a classroom or on a school campus (Soeung & Chim, 2022).

Twenty-seven transcripts were sent to the informants for verification, to ensure complete and accurate data, before content analysis was conducted. Both researchers manually coded concepts through conceptual content analysis, based on words and phrases frequently appearing in the scripts. The concepts were explicitly coded; however, we contacted relevant informants for clarification of issues pertaining to dialect interpretation or any unclear information. To ensure validity and reliability, coding agreement for content analysis was employed, and then both codings were compared to see similarities and differences (Anney, 2014). When the coefficient agreement is above 70%, it is considered sufficient agreement or reliable (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The qualitative results were used to explain the main identified phenomena. With this purpose, we explicitly focused on six concepts (Appendix B), which were commonly found in the previous literature such as PT actors, type of tutors, teaching techniques, teacher malpractice, reactions from administrators, and differences of science and social science tracks (Bray et al., 2015; 2016; 2018; Brehm et al., 2012; Brehm & Silova, 2014; Dawson, 2009; Soeung, 2021). Although science and social science track was included in the previous studies (e.g., Bray et al., 2018), they only reported rates of students taking PT by subjects, not their preferred tutors. Therefore, this study aimed to bridge this gap.

## Results

### *Current Patterns of Private Tuition*

#### Tutoring Actors

The results illustrated students approached teachers for PT in urban areas while teachers did this in rural ones. As seen in Table 1, data from teachers showed that 67.9% of teachers in urban areas reported that they were approached by the students for PT. However, the rural teachers (61.8%) collaborated with their colleagues to market their PT during official hours by publicizing PT and its benefits. Similarly, data obtained from students revealed the same trend, 66.7% of students approached teachers for tutoring in urban areas, whereas 87.4% of their counterparts in rural areas reported that their teachers proposed PT to the students. Urban students tended to have a clear picture of their preferred tutors as they had experienced particular teachers in PT during school holidays. All urban student-informants reported that they had started discussions with relevant subject teachers at the start of the 12th-grade program to ensure they could take PT classes again with the teachers they preferred. One student (UTS1) explicitly expressed that:

*My friends and I contacted teachers or requested them after [public school] class to offer us PT, or they may not have time slot for us. ... I got to know them [prefer their teaching style] when taking PT during school holiday (UTS1: urban tutee)*

**Table 1. Tutoring Actors**

Who created PT?	Types of respondents			
	Teachers (n = 108)		Students (n = 165)	
	Urban (n = 53)	Rural (n = 55)	Urban (n = 78)	Rural (n = 87)
Students create PT	36 (67.9%)	21 (38.2%)	52 (66.7%)	11 (12.6%)
Teachers create PT	17 (32.1%)	34 (61.8%)	26 (33.3%)	76 (87.4%)

Types of Tutees and Tutors

This study found differences in the types of tutees and tutors in both areas. Urban teachers did not seem to propose PT to their students, whereas rural teachers did. Similarly, urban students tended to take PT for most subjects from teachers in the same or different schools, unlike their rural counterparts.

Table 2 shows that urban tutors (79.2%) reported recruiting more tutees who were not their students, whereas the majority of rural tutors (65.5%) mostly recruited their students for PT. Students' answers in both areas confirmed the teachers' responses, except for Khmer (Table 3). About 56% of urban students choose their teachers, rather than other teachers, for Khmer composition PT. However, Table 3 exhibited that no less than 75% of rural students opted for PT of core exam subjects (mathematics: 79.3%, physics: 83.1%, chemistry: 75.4%, and Khmer composition: 78%) with their teacher. To ensure better quality, urban students tended to take PT from teachers with whom they or their relatives were familiar. 75% of urban informants admitted, during the interview, that they went to PT class with teachers whom parents/relatives recommended. In addition to teaching quality, parents viewed trust in teachers as a key asset in the PT market, particularly for the special PT at their home (e.g., one-to-one/small-group PT) in urban areas. Parents were more inclined to hire teachers with whom they were well acquainted, as a security measure for their children:

*My parents wanted me to study with him [teacher of mathematics]. They said they would not worry about my safety and family security because they know him and his family well. So, they trust him when inviting him to tutor me at home. (UTS1: urban tutee)*

**Table 2. Types of Tutored Students by Area**

Type of tutored students		Area (n = 108)	
		Urban (n = 53)	Rural (n = 55)
Most of my tutees are:	own students	11 (20.8%)	36 (65.5%)
	students from the same school	19 (35.8%)	11 (20%)
	students from another school	23 (43.4%)	8 (14.5%)

Note: Data were obtained from teachers

**Table 3. Types of Teacher-Tutors by Subject and Area**

Types of tutors	Mathematics (n = 155)		Physics (n = 134)		Chemistry (n = 134)		Khmer (n = 107)	
	Urban (n = 73)	Rural (n = 82)	Urban (n = 63)	Rural (n = 71)	Urban (n = 65)	Rural (n = 69)	Urban (n = 57)	Rural (n = 50)
Own teacher	35 (47.9%)	65 (79.3%)	30 (47.6%)	59 (83.1%)	16 (24.6%)	52 (75.4%)	32 (56.1%)	39 (78%)
Teacher from same school	22 (30.1%)	12 (14.6%)	14 (22.2%)	5 (7%)	19 (29.2%)	9 (13%)	25 (43.9%)	11 (22%)
Teacher from another school	16 (21.9%)	5 (6.1%)	19 (30.2%)	7 (9.9%)	30 (46.2%)	8 (11.6%)	-	-

Note: Data were obtained from students

Additionally, the interview results showed that three out of four urban informants took PT in the same subject twice, that is, with their own teacher and another tutor simultaneously, to ensure good relations with their teachers and avoid unpleasant situations, such as receiving less attention



or being scared to approach or ask questions during public school hours. They acknowledged that this was financially burdensome and time-consuming. One informant emphasized:

*I studied with my schoolteachers one hour per day. Then, I have another tutoring class with another teacher recommended by my brother. Without taking PT with my teachers, I do not feel good during public school hours. I fear that not doing so might spoil our relationship in class. (UTS2: urban tutee)*

Regarding teacher malpractice, on being asked, “have you ever received any complaints from students/parents on teachers’ misbehavior during official hours in relation to their PT?”, one administrator (USP1) accepted that some teachers still pressure students. However, he seemed to feel optimistic because of the 2014 NE reform:

*USP1: It is not easy to stop teachers from coercing students to opt for PT with them. It is still happening at my school. I think this will no longer exist because the MoEYS stopped using the school’s annual results with the national examination results.*

*Moderator: Can you elaborate on the effects of this policy?*

*USP1: When implementing this [policy], obtaining better scores with those teachers cannot benefit their [national] exam unlike before 2013/2014.*

As expected, the rural students preferred their teachers for PT because of the limited number of teachers in their areas, unlike the situation with their urban counterparts. Despite this, the rural students believed that their teachers knew more about their needs than other teachers did, which helped their learning be more effective and efficient. However, two out of five rural informants expressed that some of their peers who could afford to commute to the downtown for tutoring classes with other teachers did so:

*... Studying with the same teachers is better because they know us well and know our areas to be improved. I used to take [PT] with another teacher. Sometimes, I felt confused in the way s/he explained. (RTS6: rural tutee)*

### Perceptions of Public Schools

The study revealed a difference in the teachers’ perceptions of teaching between urban and rural schools. As seen in Table 4, compared to rural teachers, urban teachers were more associated with issues in teaching in the public school in terms of focusing on theory a lot (62.26%), implementing hurried teaching (92.45%), having fewer teaching hours for exam subjects (86.79%), providing less time for students to practice new skills (86.79%), having larger class sizes (96.22%), and having issues with their government salaries (79.24%). Oppositely, rural teachers had more association with assigning homework (69.09%), lacking proper students understanding (67.27%), and using a learner-based approach (89.09%), compared to their urban counterparts.

Hurried teaching was the core reason behind PT in both areas. Ten out of twelve interviewed teachers explained that this approach allowed them to complete the prescribed curriculum within the given teaching hours. Teachers from both areas agreed on two reasons for hurried teaching. First, because they had *less instructional time*, they had to focus only on theory, with limited practice provided during public school time. Second, implementing *a learner-based approach* took much of their instructional time, owing to large class sizes. Similarly, reflecting on their experiences as classroom teachers, five of the six administrators considered these factors as the primary causes of hurried teaching. However, they stated that their position obliged them to follow the MoEYS guidelines. Hence, teachers had less interaction with students individually, paying more attention

**Table 4. Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Public Schools**

Item	Teachers (n = 108)		Students (n = 165)	
	Urban(%) n = 53	Rural(%) n = 55	Urban(%) n = 78	Rural(%) n = 87
1. Focus on theory a lot.	33 (62.26)	30 (54.54)	67 (85.89)	66 (75.86)
2. Hurried teaching is implemented.	49 (92.45)	46 (83.63)	74 (98.87)	70 (80.45)
3. There are fewer teaching/learning hours for exam subjects.	46 (86.79)	37 (67.27)	54 (69.23)	43 (49.52)
4. There is less time to practice new skills.	46 (86.79)	39 (70.9))	58 (74.35)	48 (55.17)
5. Class size is too large.	51 (96.22)	49 (89.09)	57 (73.07)	54 (62.06)
6. Homework is assigned for students to practice at home.	36 (67.92)	38 (69.09)	65 (83.33)	75 (86.20)
7. Students cannot understand the lesson well.	20 (37.73)	37 (67.27)	-	-
8. Learner-based approaches take up a lot of instructional time.	34 (64.15)	49 (89.09)	-	-
9. A government salary cannot meet my family's needs.	42 (79.24)	35 (63.63)	-	-

Note: Data were obtained from both teachers and students.

to group work where possible than to supporting each student's needs. For example, one teacher explained:

*We [teachers] are required to use a learner-based approach. It takes a lot of time. Also, 'group work' is not effective because the class is too big [40–50 students]. Therefore, we introduced formulas and explained them briefly and set some exercises to practice. (UT3: urban teacher)*

The results from the students echoed the teachers' responses. The results indicated that urban students had higher percentage for most of the observed items (Table 4). Regarding assigning homework, the results exhibited few percentages differences between rural and urban areas in both groups of samples. Teachers and students in rural areas had more association with the homework assignments.

The interview results also showed that rural students viewed homework assignments as a new type of teacher coercion for PT. However, urban students did not share this view and noted that their teachers never checked their homework. All rural student informants reported that homework extended beyond what they had learned in class, leading to delays in handing it in or being unable to complete homework exercises in front of their classmates unless they used PT.

*Teachers **always** (emphasized by the interviewee) give us homework. [...] Without going to tutoring classes, we cannot complete that homework on time. (RTSS: rural tutee)*

Contrastingly, the rural teachers did not view numerous homework assignments as adding pressure, but rather as a technique to improve students' learning. Although these teachers acknowledged that homework was challenging, they frequently assigned homework and called on students randomly to answer questions set for homework on the blackboard. For instance, one teacher emphasized:



*I almost always assign homework. I know that students do not have enough time to practice during public school hours; so, they can practice those at home. Sure, some homework is challenging because it is a kind of exercise for examinations. I always check otherwise they do not do it. (RT4: rural teacher)*

Two rural administrators (RSP4, RSP6) and one urban administrator (USP2) acknowledged the reality of such a situation (i.e., teachers pressure students for PT) in their schools, which they attributed to various types of pressures facing teachers. After receiving complaints, the concerned teachers had suitable excuses, which was called a ‘*professional excuse*’ by RSP4, when invited to discuss this issue. Teachers always gave a good excuse by commenting that what they did aimed at assisting students to learn better outside school hours.

### Perceptions of Tuition Classes

Table 5 shows some differences in teachers’ perceptions of PT classes between teachers in urban and rural areas. Urban teachers viewed that PT could provide their students with more practice (84.9%), obtain a better grade in the national exam (79.24%), gain more confidence to ask questions (83.01%) and learn the entire syllabus (83.01%). Adding to these, the results exhibit that rural teachers viewed PT offers them more time to explain the contents (92.73%), and helps students to understand the lesson better (98.18%). On the one hand, teachers in both areas had similar viewpoints in terms of PT helping students gain more skills/techniques for the exams. Additionally, around 78% of rural teachers believed that the quality of public schools relies on PT compared to their counterparts (58.49%).

**Table 5. Teachers’ and Students’ Perceptions of Private Tuition**

Item	Teacher (n = 108)		Students (n = 165)	
	Urban(%) n = 53	Rural(%) n = 55	Urban(%) n = 78	Rural(%) n = 87
1. Have more time to precisely explain lessons, so lessons at PT are easy to understand.	47 (88.67)	51 (92.73)	59 (75.64)	66 (75.86)
2. Practice exercises from various sources.	45 (84.91)	44 (80)	72 (92.30)	67 (77.01)
3. Students obtain better grades in the national exam.	42 (79.24)	33 (60)	53 (67.94)	38 (43.67)
4. Students are confident enough to ask questions during PT.	44 (83.01)	39 (73.58)	48 (61.53)	69 (79.31)
5. Students can learn the entire syllabus.	44 (83.01)	39 (70.90)	61 (78.20)	50 (57.47)
6. Students understand the lesson better.	46 (86.79)	54 (98.18)	68 (87.17)	84 (96.55)
7. Offer/obtain more techniques and skills for the exam.	38 (71.69)	40 (72.72)	66 (84.61)	59 (67.81)
8. PT supports the quality of the public school.	31 (58.49)	43 (78.18)	-	-
9. There are more individual interaction in PT classes.	-	-	66 (84.61)	72 (82.75)

Note: Data in this table from both teachers and students.

Regarding the perceptions of PT, the interviews revealed that around 83% of interviewed teachers in both areas felt confident about their teaching quality to ensure students’ success in

NE by offering PT through using a teacher-centered approach. One urban tutor (UT2) of physics explicitly said:

*Students can learn better with more practice exercises during PT. We spend as many hours as possible on one thing. We follow our teaching [teacher-centered] method. No one blames us because it is our time. Almost all my tutees passed the NE, and some got better grades (at least C [i.e., Good in Cambodia's letter grade system used for 12<sup>th</sup> grade's NE]) in my subject.*

Consistently, all the administrators encouraged the teachers responsible for core examination subjects to offer PT to their students, especially in rural areas, accepting that PT plays a complementary role in public school systems.

*I realize that teaching hours at public schools are not enough to help students acquire the MoEYS' prescribed knowledge and skills. Thus, I encourage my teachers to spare some time to offer PT. (RSP5: rural administrator)*

The results from students mostly echoed teachers' perceptions of PT in both areas. As seen in Table 5, 79.31% of students in rural areas viewed PT offered them more confidence in asking questions as they could not do it during public school, whereas about 85% of their peers considered PT helps them obtain more skills/techniques for the exams. Consistently, the qualitative results emphasized that improved understanding was more likely after being taught the same things twice, with various practice exercises/examples during PT. PT helped build a concrete foundation of knowledge and skills for the next academic stage. For example, two students (RTS6, UTS2) expressed:

*Tutoring class helps me understand lessons better because I can learn one thing twice. Teachers always give us many exercises to practice during tutoring classes while we could learn only theories at public school.*

*Teachers could not teach lessons precisely because of fewer hours at public school. If we do not go to PT, [...] this may affect our learning now and later [university].*

### Different Patterns by Area

The interviews showed that, in terms of social science and science tracks, students in both areas seemed to exhibit different PT patterns when considering their reasons for their decisions to select tutors. Five out of nine interviewed students who were in social science across the areas reported that they and many of their classmates (estimated 70%) tended to choose their own teachers for PT, while some opted not to take PT. However, all four interviewed science students seemed to prefer tutors whose students from previous years had obtained better grades or had won scholarships; thus, they tended to opt for PT from tutors recommended by their relatives/friends. However, this study cannot claim this phenomenon due to the limited number of interviewed informants. To do so, further study should be conducted in a more in-depth qualitative study with more students in each learning track.

*I think I must win a scholarship either at a state or a private university. This will greatly help my parents. Thus, I must study with any teacher I know who can prepare me for this opportunity. (RTS4: rural tutee)*

## Discussion and Conclusion

This study is the first to investigate the current PT trends in Cambodia following a critical NE reform in 2014 as this reform aimed to ensure ‘only qualified students pass’ by eradicating the corruption in the examinations, by exploring the differences between patterns and perceptions of teaching and learning in public school and PT classes in urban and rural areas. This investigation contributes new insight concerning issues affecting teacher professionalism, including potential misconduct, and students’ choices for PT in Cambodia.

The PT patterns changed more in urban than in rural areas. They may switch from opting for PT with their teachers to teachers from the same or another school. Their passing results are not influenced by the school-based annual results anymore, which used to be controlled by their subject teachers before the 2014 NE reform (see MoEYS, 2019). Thus, they opt for PT with tutors who can help equip them with the intended skills and knowledge for both their examinations and university entrance. Additionally, urban students have more choices of tutors owing to a large number of teachers in urban schools, in contrast with the shortage of teachers in rural schools, which can be a challenge (MoEYS, 2017). With this challenge, rural students perceived that choosing their teachers for PT was effective and efficient because the teachers understood their needs and provided whatever knowledge they had missed during public school hours. However, some urban students engaged in PT with their teachers to avoid being neglected during public school, as teacher-tutors may focus more on their tutees as found by Bray et al. (2018). For improved learning, they engaged another teacher (s) in their PT for the same subject(s). This finding suggests that the primary functions of PT classes with the students’ teachers were building good rapport and continuing public school teaching. However, students who aimed to get university placements/scholarships tended to seek PT from the best tutors who could prepare them for NE and beyond. The best tutors’ tutoring market was promoted through word-of-mouth by former tutees and the students’ relatives, as parents had to trust the tutors’ teaching capacity.

The findings revealed that the concept that teachers may commit malpractice to market their PT classes, is likely to have greater applicability in rural rather than urban settings. However, the changing trend of PT seemed to promote having teacher-tutors who are not students’ own teachers for almost all examination subjects except in Khmer composition subjects, especially in urban areas.

This trend contrasts with the related study findings in Cambodia by Bray et al. (2015, p. 233; 2018, p. 442), who found higher rates (47.5% and 57.7%, respectively) of students choosing their teachers for PT, followed by those opting for teachers from the same school. Thus, malpractice did not seem to be the primary reason to recruit tutees, following the 2014 NE reform, which may signal that the NE reform may drive teacher-tutors to employ “caring” pedagogies in both public school and tutoring classes, instead of committing malpractices, to retain their supplementary income through PT.

Limited instructional time and an inflated syllabus at public schools have encouraged schoolteachers in both areas to engage in hurried teaching during official teaching hours to complete the prescribed syllabus. To avoid criticism, teachers have sometimes presented only an overview of the content to complete the syllabus, despite knowing that their students would be unlikely to understand it in that form. This is evidenced by Bray et al.’s (2018) finding that teachers tended to use uncaring pedagogies during official hours while employing caring ones only during PT classes to promote their PT. Additionally, implementing a learner-based approach is considered to prompt the expansion of PT in both areas, as it has been criticized as a time-consuming approach (Būdienė & Zabulionis 2006, p. 213) that poses more challenges to teachers at Cambodian schools (see Song, 2015). The teachers, students, and administrators in this study claimed that a learner-based approach did not seem to work with students, particularly in 12th grade. Unlike Jones and Rhein’s (2018, p. 80) findings in Thailand, Cambodian tutors and tutees were found to prefer a teacher-centered approach, viewing PT as a way to obtain clearer explanations, become exposed to varying exercises,

and engage with examination preparation questions. These perceived advantages may continue to generate perceived educational inequality between tutees and non-tutees.

Adding to the literature, this study found that rural students viewed homework assignments as a type of pressure from teachers to increase PT demand as the assignments asked far more than what had been taught, and these were regularly checked. However, we found no clear evidence to support this latter finding because of the blurred boundary between homework and teacher pressure. More investigation is required to address this.

Additionally, the type of learning track seemed to determine the tutees' choice of tutor type and their perceptions of PT in Cambodia. It is worth noting that, after the 2014 reform, 12<sup>th</sup> graders are only tested on seven subjects: three compulsory subjects (mathematics, Khmer composition, English/French), three elective subjects for their tracks (physics, chemistry, and biology for the science; and history, geography, and moral-civics for the social science), and one randomly selected subject. Science students tended to take PT and were likely to opt for the best tutors, which was not the case with social science peers. Science students generally faced greater difficulties in obtaining passing grades than their peers in social science because science and mathematics tests are more challenging, while social science major students may require only memorization skills for their examinations (Soeung, 2021).

Teachers should be offered the freedom to select pedagogies that are suitable for their students, especially in the 12th grade. Teachers, students, and administrators viewed that a teacher-centered approach is beneficial for preparing students for NE. A learner-based approach tended to force teachers to engage in hurried teaching to complete the syllabus during public school hours. This situation was likely to prompt the need for PT in both areas.

Although our findings align with broader PT literature, they illustrate more clearly the relevant patterns and perceptions within the Cambodian context. For example, rural students perceived teachers' assignment of extra homework to improve their learning as coercion. However, this finding could signal to Cambodian educational authorities that further efforts are needed in NE reform to help promote learning quality and trust in the education system. The overall findings could encourage policymakers, other educational stakeholders, and development partners to maximize the instructional time for core examination subjects, or reduce the required content, and thus promote the effective implementation to improve examination preparedness, especially for 12th graders.

This study has three main limitations: (1) the small sample size, limiting generalizability; (2) the limited variety of tutors; and (3) the limited number of stakeholders included. Given the availability of extensive informal tutoring services, and the inclusion of more educational stakeholders, such as parents and policymakers, future studies are needed involving a greater sample size and a greater variety of tutors, including tutors from Phnom Penh and other provinces with low-poverty rates.

## Note

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## Appendix A. Interview Questions

### *For Students*

- (1) How do you know about the tuition classes (of each subject teacher)?
- (2) With whom do you take PT?
  - a. Who decided to choose tutors and tutoring subjects for you? Why?
  - b. Why did you choose to opt with your subject teachers/other teachers for PT?
  - c. How did your teachers promote their tutoring classes?
  - d. How many subjects do you opt for tuition classes?
- (3) What do you get from PT classes that you do not get from public school classes?
- (4) How often did your teachers assign homework for your classes at the public school? Did your teachers check it?
  - a. If Yes, how (often) did they check?
  - b. If No, why did they assign it?
- (5) In your opinion, why do your teachers offer the tuition classes?

### *For Teachers*

- (1) How do your students know about your tutoring classes?
- (2) What do your students get from PT classes that they do not get from public school classes?
- (3) How often do you assign homework to your students during the public-school hour? Do you check that homework in the next classes?
  - a. If Yes, how do you check it?
  - b. If No, why did you assign it?
- (4) In your opinion, why do you offer tuition classes?

### *For School Administrators*

- (1) Can you tell me about the number of instructional time, especially for the subjects for the 12th grade's examination?
  - a. Did this issue (lack of instructional time) happen after the national examination reform in 2014? Why?
  - b. Was it same to your time as the subject teacher? If so, in what way was it same?
  - c. Do you think it (lack of instructional time) is the issue? If so, what do you do when realizing that the instructional time at public school is not enough?
- (2) Have you ever received any complaints from either students or parents about teachers' behavior in the relation to their private tuition?
  - a. If you do not mind, could you tell us what was/were the complaint(s) about?
  - b. Can you give us one or two example, if you can remember?
  - c. What did you do after receiving those complaints? What was the response from the teachers?

## Appendix B. Summary of the Interview Themes and Codes

Themes and Codes		Frequency				Extracted Quotes
		students		teachers		
		Urban. n=4	Rural. n=5	Urban. n=6	Rural n=6	
PT actor	Students as PT creators	4	1	1	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My friends and I contacted teachers or requested them after [public school] class to offer us PT, or they may not have time slot for us. ... I got to know them [prefer their teaching style] when taking PT during school holiday.</li> </ul>
	Teachers as PT creators	1	4	1	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When reforming the examination, the Ministry should also increase teaching hours at public schools. Students cannot learn all lessons at school if we do not practice private tutoring.</li> <li>I talked to my colleagues and asked them to inform their students that I am going run tutoring classes of my teaching subjects [mathematics]. ... I gave them [student] some options of tutoring hours, so they can choose because they may have other classes.</li> </ul>
Type of tutor	Own teachers/ students	1	4	1	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I prefer to study [opt for PT] with my own teacher(s) because they know us [my class] better than any teachers who are not teaching us [my class].</li> <li>Studying with the same teachers is better because they know us well and know our areas to be improved. I used to take [PT] with another teacher. Sometimes, I felt confused in the way s/he explained. [quoted from rural tutee]</li> <li>Teaching my own students is much easier. I know them very well. ... I can help them learn better.</li> </ul>
	Recommended teacher	3	1	-	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My parents wanted me to study with him [teacher of mathematic]. They said they would not worry about my safety and family security because they know him and his family well. So, they trust him when inviting him to tutor me at home.</li> <li>I studied with my schoolteachers one hour per day. Then, I have another tutoring class with another teacher recommended by my brother. Without taking PT with my teachers, I do not feel good during public school hours. I fear that not doing so might spoil our relationship in class.</li> </ul>

Themes and Codes		Frequency				Extracted Quotes
		students		teachers		
		Urban. n=4	Rural. n=5	Urban. n=6	Rural n=6	
Teaching techniques	Hurried teaching			4	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>[...] We are required to use a learner-based approach [mainly in the public school]. It takes lots of our time. Also, you know?<i>(an interactive phrase expressed by the interviewee)</i> 'group work' is not effective because the class is too big [40-50 students]. Therefore, we introduced formulas and explained them briefly and set some exercises to practice.</li> </ul>
	[cause]: Less instructional time	2	3	5	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The given time is not enough for students to learn all the intended contents. However, it is [enough], if we briefly explain the key concepts with few practice exercises in the textbook only.[quoted form rural teacher]</li> <li>Teachers could not teach lessons precisely because of fewer hours at the public school. If we do not go to tuition classes, [...] [T]his may affect our learning now and then [university]. [quoted from urban student]</li> <li>Tuition class helps me understood lessons better because i can learn one thing twice. Teachers always give us many exercises to practice during tuition classes while we coullf learn only theories at the public school. [quoted from rural student]</li> </ul>
	[cause]: Learner-based approach	-	-	4	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>[...] [Students] cannot learn much for the examination if we follow learner-based method. They need more skills and in-depth understanding each of the skills through explanation and practices. Thus, we only can help them gain these through PT classes. [quoted from urban teacher]</li> <li>Students can learn better with more practice exercises during PT. We <i>[interviewee tended to generalize to every tutored teacher]</i> spend as many hours as possible on one things. We follow our teaching [teacher-centered] method [during PT classes]. No one blames us because it is our time. Almost all my tutees passed the national examination, and some got better grade [at least Grade C (good)] in my subject. [quoted from rural teacher]</li> <li>[...] [Learner-based] approach can help us to rush on the content easily, but students are not able to gain skills and reall knowledge for the examination because they required more practices otherwise they cannot solve problem effectively during the national examination. [quoted form rural teacher-mathematics]</li> </ul>

Themes and Codes		Frequency				Extracted Quotes
		students		teachers		
		Urban. n=4	Rural. n=5	Urban. n=6	Rural n=6	
Teachers' malpractices	Homework assignment	2	5	2	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers <b>always</b> (<i>emphasized by the interviewee</i>) gives us homework. [...] Without going to tutoring classes, we cannot complete that homework on time. [quote from rural student]</li> <li>She [teacher] always called students to the blackboard and solve that homework. As I noted, the ones who were called had not taken PT, but then they took after they could not solve those exercises. I am one of them. [...] I do not want to be mocked before the classes, to me, but I do not about the other students' thoughts. [quote from rural student]</li> <li>Sure! I would say almost all teachers assigned homework [<i>from a probing question: it is about what we learned and not very challenged, I think</i>] for us to practice. But, they hardly ever check or call us to do it in the class. No! Never, I am sure. [quote from urban student]</li> <li>I almost always assign homework. I know that students do not have enough time to practice during the public school hours; so, they can practice that [homework] at home. ... Sure, some homework is challenging because it is a kind of exercises for examinations. I always check otherwise they [students] do not do it. [quote from rural teacher]</li> </ul>
	Social Science	3	2	-	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I prefer to study with my own [subject] teacher because s/he understands about what we need and what we are not really good. [quoted from rural student]</li> <li>I guess no less than 70% of my classmates took tuition with our own teachers because we really understand each other. Thus the learning is more effective. [quoted from urban student]</li> </ul>
Social science vs. Science	Science	1	3			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I think I must win a scholarship either at a state or a private university. This will greatly help my parents. Thus, I must study with any teacher I know who can prepare me for this opportunity. [quoted from rural student]</li> </ul>

Themes and Codes		Frequency				Extracted Quotes
		students		teachers		
		Urban. n=4	Rural. n=5	Urban. n=6	Rural n=6	
Reactions of administrators	<i>School administrator</i>					
		<i>Ur. (n=3)</i>		<i>Ru. (n=3)</i>		
	Lack of Instructional time	3		3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I realized that teaching hours at the public school are not enough to help students acquire the MoEYS' prescribed knowledge and skills. Thus, I encourage my teachers to spare some time for PT.</li> </ul>
	Pressure the students for PT	1		2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I feel headaches of this [complaint]. I got some [4 or 5] complaints every year about it [teachers' coercion] to various ways like blaming them [students] before the class, asked them difficult questions to embarrass them, do not answer to the questions.</li> <li>It is not easy to eliminate this [malpractice], i think. I always invite them [concerned teachers] to discuss after receiving the complaint; however, they always have a 'professional excuse[using it to promote learning or to help students learn better.'</li> </ul>