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Key Issues and "Push/Pull" Messaging on South East Asian Education Agency Websites

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Abstract: *As more students from South Asia seek to study at overseas universities, they increasingly contract the services of local education agencies to facilitate their choice of institutions and their application process. This study seeks to better understand the nature of the relationship between South Asian education agencies and students who wish to study abroad. By using qualitative content analysis of education agency websites from five South Asian countries, this study identifies key issues of potentially unethical practices committed by these agencies. It also identifies the most prevalent "push/pull" factors that South Asian agencies use to encourage students to study overseas as well as the most common services that agencies use to support students. The findings indicate that there are widespread ethical issues amongst education agencies and that students are most motivated to study abroad for quality education that may lead to emigration. The implications of this study are then discussed.*

Keywords: *agent, push/pull, services, issues, South Asia*

Introduction

Many students seeking to study abroad decide to contract with third-party education agencies to assist in their selection of, and applications to, institutions around the world. Education agencies operate as specialized advisors to students and parents who are unfamiliar with the many options available for international study (Feng & Horta, 2021). It is common for students and their families to first identify a country they prefer to study in, with the agent advising them about the most appropriate options within that country. Agencies then can provide additional services, including assisting with application and admission processes, immigration compliance, language test preparation, and travel assistance (Thieme, 2017).

South Asia is of particular interest in terms of use of third-party agents because nearly 80% of growth in the international student market is likely to come from Asia by 2025 (The PIE News, 2022). This trend is of particular interest to the "big four" countries who receive the largest market share of international students: the USA, United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada (IFF Research, 2021). India represents either the first or second largest population of international students in each of the "big four" (Institute of International Education, 2022b), and is likely to continue in that position for the foreseeable future. However, the entire South Asia region is a growth market for outbound international students. India, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Pakistan are all represented in the top 25 sending countries to the USA (Institute of International Education, 2022a). Nepal is expected to continue significant outbound student increases by 2025 and may become one of the three highest sending countries to Australia (The PIE News, 2022). Pakistan is increasingly sending students to the USA, with numbers reaching levels not seen since the early 2000s (Institute of International Education, 2022a). International student mobility from Bangladesh is increasing, with the USA being the top

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receiving country for their students (The Business Post, 2022). In Sri Lanka, students are increasingly pressured to study abroad due to the economic crisis in the country (ICEF Monitor, 2022).

As the number of outbound students from South Asia increases, it is most likely that the use of education agencies by students increases as well. While Indian students have reported high levels of satisfaction with their experiences with education agencies (Kamble & Bobade, 2020), multiple issues regarding agent ethics and professionalism have been documented (Nikula & Kivisto, 2018, 2020). This paper examines how potentially widespread these issues are within education agencies that operate within five South Asian countries: India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. Furthermore, this paper contributes to the literature by examining potential ethical issues and the nature of the relationship between education agents and students. Most research into education agent relationships has been from the perspective of institutions of higher education hiring agents (Huang et al., 2016; Nikula & Kivisto, 2018, 2020; O'Connell, 2012) and the research on the relationship between agents and students is limited to the Chinese market (Hagedorn & Zhang, 2011). The study provides an important perspective on both the South Asian education agent market as well as the nature of the relationship between agents and student customers.

Literature Review

As the number of students and institutions contracting education agents has increased, so has the scrutiny of unethical practices by agencies. Agency theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976) has been utilized to understand relationships between agents and higher education institutions that contract with them (Nikula & Kivisto, 2018, 2020). Agency theory studies the relationship between two parties where one party (the principal) contracts another party (in this case the agent or agency) for a service. In international higher education, the principal may be a student looking to study abroad or a university looking to recruit internationally through an agent. Students may engage education agents to provide one or more of a variety of services to study overseas. Services may include assistance in choosing a country to study in, advice on choosing institutions to apply to within a given country, and assistance with preparing university application materials (Ying & Wright, 2021). Because the agent's goals may not align with those of the principal, there is difficulty in the principal controlling the agent's behavior. Since the agent has more information than the principal, this leads to situations of information asymmetry (Eisenhardt, 1989), which has been used by agents in India to provide mislead students and commit fraud (Marom, 2023).

Nikula and Kivisto (2020) identified multiple issues that should be monitored in the relationship between students and education agents: misinformation, disinformation, financial fraud or misconduct, limited transparency, or other types of unprofessional service. Misinformation is defined as a situation where an agent accidentally provides incorrect or incomplete information to a student, which may be due to lack of effort, incomplete training, or misunderstanding (Huang et al., 2016). Disinformation is intentionally misleading students (Huang et al., 2016). Financial fraud or misconduct may refer to collecting payments from students and institutions without consent, stealing money, etc. (Nikula & Kivisto, 2020). Limited transparency may refer to agents not disclosing their relationship with overseas institutions or disclosing their roles and responsibilities (Roy, 2017). Other types of unprofessional services may refer to unfriendliness, lack of confidentiality, poor speed of communication, or other issues (Huang et al., 2016; Roy, 2017; Nikula & Kivisto, 2020). Another key issue identified by Nikula and Kivisto (2020) is manipulating the application process. Manipulation may include writing students' university applications and/or letters for them, managing students' online university accounts, or fabrication of students' qualities or involvement (Ying & Wright, 2021). While researchers in higher education are aware of these issues, it is unclear if student principals and their families are aware of these potential issues before engaging the services of an education agent.

Students' decisions to study overseas are likely influenced by various "push and pull" factors. "Push factors operate within the source country and initiate a student's decision to undertake international study. Pull factors operate within a host country to make that country relatively attractive

to international students" (Mazzarol & Soutar 2002, p. 82). "Push" factors that may encourage a student to study overseas include the perception of education opportunities abroad as better than local ones, the difficulty of accessing higher education opportunities locally, and the expected benefits of studying overseas. Intention to migrate has been noted as a key push factor for Indian students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). More recently, one study reported over 30% of Indian students expressed that intention to migrate and settle abroad motivated their choice (Wadhwa, 2016).

Once students decide to pursue education abroad, they then identify which country or countries to prioritize before selecting which institutions they will apply for (Van Alebeek & Wilson, 2019). Various pull factors affect students' country preference: cost, language, visa application process, quality and reputation, environment, and potential prospects and opportunities in the host country (Van Alebeek & Wilson, 2019). This choice is also affected by the opinions of family members and other advisors, such as education agents. Each of the "big four" countries have their own unique pull factors that influence students' choices. The abundance and popularity of US media assists with its popularity among international students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), as does the presence of many highly ranked universities. The large number of students who have studied in the USA also helps to contribute to its continued popularity. Students who consider studying abroad may be influenced by family or friends who studied in the USA and recommend it (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Students who seek to migrate may also be interested in the USA due to the presence of Optional Practical Training (OPT) opportunities. Primary pull factors that draw students to universities in the United Kingdom are the perceived strength of UK qualifications, high quality learning environments, and an easier visa application process than other countries (Maringe & Carter, 2007; Hailat et al., 2021). Additional pull factors to the UK include learning English from native speakers, opportunities for work or additional education after graduation, and perceived religious tolerance in the country (Hailat et al., 2021). Due to its proximity to the United States, much of Canada's pull factors are based on a comparison to its southern neighbor. Canada is seen as a country that is easier to emigrate to than the USA, and also has a healthier political climate (Zhang et al., 2021). Canada is also seen as a safer alternative to the USA while having the same perceived opportunities and options to learn English as the USA (Chen, 2017). Pull factors influencing students' choice of Australia include academic requirements and attainment, host country environment, future career prospects, and social connections (Zhai et al., 2019).

Methodology and Research Questions

This study investigates the websites of prominent education agencies in five countries in South Asia to understand the extent of key issues that are found in literature on education agencies and discover how agencies encourage students to study abroad. Asia was chosen as the research area because more students have sought agent services, leading to an increase in commercial brokers (Lindquist & Xiang, 2018). Furthermore, over 20% of South Asian student respondents in a survey indicated that they used an agent, higher than any other region except for East Asia (Roy, 2017). Countries included in this study are India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. The research questions that guide this study are as follows:

1. What key issues are identified from education agency websites that may be unethical practices?
2. What push factors and pull factors do agents highlight on their websites to encourage student principals to study overseas?
3. What services are most often offered by education agencies in the South Asia region?

To select the education agency websites, web searches were used with the term "(country) education consultant" over a one-month period during the autumn of 2022 for each of the five selected countries. Consultant was used in lieu of agent as a search term because consultant is more commonly used by the agencies to describe themselves; agency/agent is a more common term in academic literature. For each search, the top five results that were links to an individual agency were

selected for study. The top five results should approximate the most popular and representative education agencies in each country, with the limitation of the search and websites being in English. Validity for the study was ensured through using the top five search results for each country (removing selection bias) and using established qualitative analysis procedures.

Each website was reviewed using qualitative content analysis over all webpages that are available to the public without requiring a log-in or subscription. Content analysis is a group of analytic approaches varying from systematic to interpretive methods (Rosengren, 1981). Within those approaches, qualitative content analysis is used to study text data, which may exist in verbal, print or electronic form (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002). Qualitative content analysis is defined as "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon 2005, p. 1278). More specifically, a directed content analysis was used. This method is used to "validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory" (Hseih & Shannon 2005, p. 1281). This study used a deductive method of analysis, in which prior theory or study is used to develop the coding scheme (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). Prior study helps to develop the initial coding scheme through predicting relationships amongst variables, which is known as deductive category application (Mayring, 2000). In this case, initial categories and codes were identified in advance of viewing the websites of education agents, and using reducing procedures (Mayring, 2014) to interpret the data through summary.

Three initial categories were identified prior to coding: key issues, "push/pull" factors, and services offered. These three categories remained the only categories after studying and coding the agent websites. Under key issues, initial codes were identified based on the work of Nikula and Kivisto (2020): misinformation, disinformation, financial fraud/misconduct, limited transparency, and manipulating the application process. Based on identified "push" factors by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), the following "push/pull" factor codes were initially used: quality of overseas education compared to local options, difficulty of accessing higher education locally, availability of a course of study that is not available locally, better understanding of the West, and intention to migrate. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) was used as the basis since "push/pull" studies since that time have focused on individual countries or student populations (Cao et al., 2016; Hailat et al., 2021; Van Alebeek & Wilson, 2019; Zhai et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2021). No initial codes were created for the services category; all codes were identified through a deductive process while examining agent websites.

Results

Twenty-five education agency websites were studied, representing five different countries in South Asia. The first category of study was key issues that may be observed on the agency websites. Five initial codes based on the work of Nikula and Kivisto (2020) were studied: misinformation, disinformation, financial fraud/misconduct, limited transparency, and manipulating the application process. During the study, a sixth key issue code was identified as no pricing listed. This code represents a lack of transparency to potential student principals about the cost of services rendered. Key issues were found in every category except for financial fraud/misconduct (Table 1). The most common key issue is limited transparency, with over half of the agencies in every country except for Sri Lanka having this issue. Limited transparency in this study was usually related to a lack of obvious disclosure about the nature of the relationship between the education agencies and different universities listed on their websites. Multiple agency websites have long lists of foreign universities on a webpage, with no statement about their relationship. It is not clear if the agencies have formal agreements with the universities, if the agencies have assisted students to apply and enroll at these universities before, or if there is no relationship between them at all. One Nepalese agency stated that they had over 700 institutional partners. The nature of this partnership is not disclosed. Another agency in Pakistan stated that they "represent" more than 600 universities and

schools in Australia, the UK, the USA, Canada, and New Zealand. Again, there is no explanation for what it means for the agency to represent these institutions. The majority of agency websites studied (Table 1) had some type of limited transparency regarding their connection (assumed or otherwise) to institutions abroad.

The next most common key issue was a lack of stated pricing for services. While the limited transparency key issue relates to an unclear relationship between agencies and institutions, this key issue represents a lack of transparency in the agent's cost of services to student principals. Fifteen out of 25 agent websites lacked price information, including every Indian agent website studied (Table 1). It was a common practice for agencies to require potential customers to create accounts and provide personal information to access more information about costs and services.

Misinformation was the next most common key issue (Table 1). Out of the five instances of misinformation identified, four were regarding scholarships or financing and the other was for internships. In all cases, the agent website made it seem that financial assistance was easily available for international students. This contrasts with the tendency for institutions to view international students as a means to create additional revenue (Choudaha, 2017). An example of this type of misinformation is one agency stating that students with strong application profiles get offered assistantships at universities. While this may be true, the nature of what constitutes a "strong" profile is unclear and there is no guarantee that student applicants will receive an assistantship. But to a student this type of language sounds more certain and secure. The same type of wording is used by other agencies regarding the opportunity to apply for scholarships. Multiple agencies stated that there were many scholarships available at overseas institutions, conveniently not discussing how competitive the scholarships are and whether international students are eligible to receive them.

Disinformation was identified on two out of the 25 websites; both instances of disinformation were from agencies in Nepal (Table 1). The first instance of disinformation was through an agency's search tool that allows users to search for "all universities" in different countries through the website. When tested, the search did not return "all universities" but a number selected by the agency. The second case of disinformation was an agency stating that students who use their services "have access to choose from over hundreds of universities and thousands of courses offered in different destinations." Students, of course, have this opportunity without engaging the services of an agent, and there was no stated relationship between the agency and any overseas institution on the website. Both cases of disinformation centered on agencies overstating their level of influence or access to encourage prospective clients to engage their services.

There were two identified instances of manipulating the application process (Table 1). The first was an advertised service by an education agency in India to edit students' application documents for them before submitting them to universities. The agency website states that they provide feedback to students on the applications, but specifically that they help with essays, statements of purpose, grammar, tone, structure, and content. This level of feedback makes it unclear how much of the finished application is a student's own work compared to that of the agent. The second instance of manipulating the application process is even more straightforward. One agency in Nepal offers a "bank" of statement of purpose letters that have been previously used by students who were accepted to institutions overseas. The samples are categorized by different fields of study, and some even include sections where students can fill in their names and personal information to make the letter their own. The same agency also provides other sample documents, such as work experience letters.

This study found no examples of financial fraud or misconduct through the agency websites. This is not surprising, as it is unlikely that this key issue would feature on websites. Overall, India had the most examples of key issues with 12 issues identified over five agency websites (Table 1). All Indian education agent websites studied lacked pricing information and all but one had issues of limited transparency. Sri Lanka had the fewest identified key issues, with four over the span of five agencies. Out of all 25 education agency websites included in the study, only three did not have a single key issue that was coded. Two of those agencies are in Sri Lanka, and the other is in Bangladesh.

Table 1. Occurrence of Key Issues on Education Agency Websites by Country

	Limited Transparency	No Pricing	Misinformation	Disinformation	Manipulating the Application Process	Financial Fraud/ Misconduct
India	4	5	2	0	1	0
Nepal	4	3	1	2	1	0
Pakistan	3	4	0	0	0	0
Bangladesh	4	2	0	0	0	0
Sri Lanka	1	1	2	0	0	0
Total	16	15	5	2	2	0

Eighteen different "push" and "pull" factors were identified throughout the agency websites (Table 2). Three of Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) original factors were not identified on any agency websites: difficulty of accessing local higher education, availability of course of study, and a better understanding of the West. The most common "push/pull" factor was the quality of overseas education. It is common for agencies to highlight that top ranked universities are in countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. The second most common factor was value/career preparation. The concept of value was always connected to career prospects from studying overseas on the agency websites. The third most common factor was the intention to migrate, which was found on most agency websites from India, Nepal, and Bangladesh. The next three most common factors all relate to the social aspect of the overseas experience: diversity of the host culture, variety in the culture, and leisure or lifestyle opportunities for students outside of the classroom. Opportunities for work and research are the next most often cited factors. Research opportunities is the first "push/pull" factor that is only mentioned in three or fewer countries. The remaining "push/pull" factors that were identified were listed on five or fewer agency websites. Those are technology (that is available in classrooms or laboratories), opportunity to develop English language skills, on-campus support for students, opportunities for personal development, safety, healthcare, a healthy economy, and increasing one's status through studying abroad.

The occurrence of "push/pull" factors on agency websites varied significantly by country. The five Nepalese agencies combined for 34 mentions of 15 different "push/pull" factors, most often referencing the quality of overseas education and the opportunity to migrate. In contrast, the five Bangladeshi agency websites studied only referenced nine "push/pull" factors a total of 12 times (Table 2).

Table 2. Occurrene of "Push/Pull" Factors on Education Agency Website by Country

Total	Sri Lanka	Bangladesh	Pakistan	Nepal	India	
16	2	2	4	5	3	Quality of Overseas Education
12	2	1	4	3	2	Value/Career Preparation
11	0	3	1	4	3	Intention to Migrate
10	1	1	2	3	3	Diversity
9	2	1	3	1	2	Variety
9	1	1	4	3	0	Leisure/Lifestyle
8	1	1	3	1	2	Flexibility
8	1	1	1	3	2	Work Opportunities

Table 2. Occurrene of "Push/Pull" Factors on Education Agency Website by Country (continued)

Total	Sri Lanka	Bangladesh	Pakistan	Nepal	India	
7	2	0	2	3	0	Research Opportunities
5	0	0	1	2	2	Technology
5	1	0	1	2	1	Funding
4	1	1	2	0	0	Language
3	0	0	2	1	0	Support
2	1	0	1	0	0	Personal Development
1	0	0	0	1	0	Safety
1	0	0	0	1	0	Healthcare
1	0	0	0	1	0	Economy
1	0	0	0	0	1	Status

The agency websites collectively advertised eleven different services to students interested in studying overseas (Table 3). The most common listed service was counselling or offering advice about where to study abroad. Websites would often describe the counselling process as helping students and families identify which country was their priority to apply for, then helping them choose institutions to apply to based on the student's academic qualifications and the programs offered at different universities. The next two most common services were preparation for language tests and assistance with applying for a student visa. Language test preparation often involved classes that were offered by agencies, as well as practice tests. This type of assistance was commonly offered in every country except for Bangladesh. Visa assistance was offered by most agencies in each country; this assistance involved guidance for how to apply for a student visa as well as how to prepare for the visa interview. Pre-departure assistance was the next most offered service. This service often included assistance with finding a place to live in the new country, finding flights and making travel plans, as well as how to open a bank account in a new country. University application assistance was the next most common service offered. This assistance varied from providing advice on how to apply to different institutions and understand what documents are required, to helping students write applications. The next most common service offered was assistance with writing a statement of purpose document for university applications. While this may seem similar to application assistance, nine agencies specifically stated their offer to help with these statements separately from the application process. Of the remaining five services offered, three are financial in nature: assistance finding scholarships, financial advice, and help preparing loan documents. The remaining services were assistance with getting quality letters of reference, and academic test preparation for tests such as the GRE. Education agency websites in Nepal were most likely to offer a variety of services, while those in Bangladesh were most likely to offer the least (Table 3).

Table 3. Occurrence of Services Offered on Education Agency Websites by Country

	Counselling	Language Test Preparation	Visa Assistance	Pre-departure Assistance	Application Assistance	Statement of Purpose Assistance	Assistance Finding Scholarships	Letter of Reference Assistance	Financial Advice	Academic Test Preparation	Help Preparing Loan Documents
India	4	5	3	3	3	3	1	3	3	2	1
Nepal	5	4	4	4	4	3	2	2	1	2	1
Pakistan	5	4	3	3	1	2	1	2	0	0	0
Bangladesh	4	1	3	3	3	0	1	0	0	0	0
Sri Lanka	5	4	5	4	4	1	3	1	1	0	0
Total	23	18	18	17	15	9	8	8	5	4	2

Conclusion

The "push/pull" factors that were identified on the agency websites were more numerous and varied greatly compared to those originally posited by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002). Three of Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) "push/pull" factors were not identified on any agency website: difficulty of accessing local higher education, availability of course of study, and a better understanding of the West. The lack of mention of these factors may mean that some drivers of student mobility have changed in the past 20 years. For example, students may be less interested in learning about Western culture than they are in finding education and employment overseas in healthy economies. By contrast, some factors may not be mentioned on agency websites because they are matters of deficit and not opportunity. Instead of addressing the difficulty of accessing local higher education in South Asia, agencies instead advertise the many available options overseas. The prevalence of different "push/pull" factors on the agency websites helps show what the primary drivers of student mobility in South Asia are. The most represented factors were quality of overseas education, value/career preparation, and the intention to migrate. This indicates that students from South Asia are most interested in studying abroad for a quality education that can prepare them for a career in the country they study in. The interest in migration mirrors the findings of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) for Indian students and the emphasis on quality of education is similar to intentions of students in other areas of Asia (Zhai et al., 2019). Little research has been completed on the intentions and preferences of students from South Asia; this is an area for further study. Universities that seek to enroll more students from South Asia may want to identify how they are currently preparing their students for their careers and may also want to identify how they can market this career development to potential student applicants.

Once students decide that they are interested in studying overseas, they are then assisted by a South Asian agency sector that provides an expanding and comprehensive variety of services. Agents no longer simply provide information about potential destinations and universities, but can fully facilitate students' preparation, application, financial planning, and travel logistics. Counselling is still the backbone of the agency practice, but 18 out of 25 agencies included in the study also prepare students for language tests. From online training to in-person classes, education agencies are finding an additional revenue source through test preparation for language and to a lesser extent for academic tests as well. Agencies are also providing thorough guidance on how to successfully apply to universities overseas. Many are offering assistance with completing applications, writing statements of purpose, and receiving well-written letters of recommendation. The increased assistance in this area is also cause for concern that there may be increased occurrence of ethical issues in the application process.

In terms of key issues of ethics, the obvious issues of manipulating the application process that were found in this study are most concerning as they may be indicative of the type of practices that more agencies are engaging in but are not overtly listing on their websites. While one agency listed a "bank" of statement of purpose letters for students to choose from, another stated that they assisted students with writing their application materials. It is possible that other education agencies offer the same services, unbeknownst to university admissions staff members who review applications. As institutions potentially deepen their ties with education agencies and also seek to increase enrollment of international students from South Asia, they should also give scrutiny to application materials of students from this region to ensure that they are not fraudulent.

Other key issues that were identified in this study affect the students themselves. Misinformation and disinformation from education agencies can take advantage of students and their families through information asymmetry (Marom, 2023). This asymmetry is further exacerbated by the lack of clear pricing that was found on most education agency websites in this study. Students and families who contact an agency may lack understanding of the options: countries, universities, degree programs, etc. They also may not understand the value of the advice of the education agency nor the scope of influence the agency has. The information asymmetry between students and education agencies is continued through the lack of transparency found in 16 out of 25 agency websites included in the study. The lack of transparency continues the asymmetric relationship between agent and principal (in this case students and families) and benefits the agents. A lack of transparency was found as an issue in the majority of agency websites for every country but Sri Lanka and seems to be an issue across South Asia. Greater transparency would benefit students who have educational aspirations abroad, but this will not likely come from agencies themselves. If South Asian governments developed a regulation structure for agencies, this may in turn benefit students to better understand their options and avoid fraudulent practices.

There are several limitations to the study. First, since the education agency websites were chosen by web search, the most notable agencies were likely selected. It is unclear how representative these agency websites may be of the overall education consultant industry within each country. Less notable agencies may have more or fewer ethical issues on their websites, for example. However, the variety of agencies covered in the study makes it representative of the South Asia region. Second, since the search was conducted in English only education agent websites that were in English were identified for this study. Including education agent websites in other languages such as Hindi, Tamil, Sinhala, Bengali, Nepali, and Urdu would add to this area of study and may be an area for further research. Finally, the study only indicates a variety of factors that are found on websites; more factors may be identified through in-person visits to and interviews with education agents, such as the mystery shopping method suggested by Nikula and Kivisto (2020).

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Test Anxiety: Prevalence and Factors Associated with Test Anxiety Among form Four School Students in Malaysia

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Abstract: *Students who suffer from test anxiety go through a stressful and unpleasant experience that could harm their physical and mental health long term. This study examines the prevalence of test anxiety in Malaysia and investigates the association of test anxiety with socio-demographic factors. A cross-sectional survey comprising demographic data and the FRIEDBEN Test Anxiety Scale (FTAS) questionnaires were used. Of the 371 students who responded, 46% of the students reported a low level of test anxiety, almost 20% a high level of test anxiety, and 34% a medium level of test anxiety. Further analyses suggest that test anxiety is significantly predicted by factors such as gender and ethnicity. These findings can help the education system including the Ministry of Education, schools, teachers, and parents to better understand the scope of the problem and the groups of students who are most affected. Potential policy implications as well as possible interventions to help students are discussed.*

Keywords*: Test anxiety; secondary school students, socio-demographic, prevalence*

Introduction

In Malaysia, examinations are seen as a critical component of the education system, as they play a significant role in determining a student's academic progress and future life pathways (Samuel et al., 2017). Exams are not just used for assessing student learning but also used as a key instrument for admissions to post-secondary education, as well as for accountability at the teacher, school, and ministry levels. Decades of emphasis on examinations have shaped a highly exam-oriented, competitive and exam-results-driven culture (Aziz, 2017; Rajaendram et al, 2022).

The upper secondary school level in Malaysia is a crucial milestone for students as they need to be mentally resilient when preparing for the high-stakes public examinations, *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM)* or Malaysian Certificate of Education, at the end of their Form Five secondary education. The focus of teaching and learning is very much trained on preparing for the SPM throughout the two years in upper secondary. The students are often plagued with worries and anxiety as their performance in the examinations is said to determine their future life pathways.

The students often feel stressed about performing in these high-stake examinations, mainly because the results are used as a determining factor in obtaining scholarships, continuing higher studies, and securing promising careers. With such pressure to meet high expectations from both family and society, high-stake examinations can bring about test anxiety that can have a debilitative effect on students' composure and capability during examinations, and this can go on to affect their exam performance and overall well-being (Huntley et al., 2019).

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Yet, recent data about the prevalence of exam or test anxiety in Malaysia is limited, especially with regard to upper secondary students who are preparing to face SPM. Understanding the prevalence of test anxiety can help the educational system in establishing a shared responsibility between schools, parents, and students in creating a healthier learning environment in the classroom and at home.

Literature Review

Education has an integral role across all countries, including Malaysia, where academic achievement is evaluated and determined based on student examination scores. The academic achievement of the students is crucial in creating the finest students who will serve as leaders and the workforce for the nation, making significant contributions to the economic and social growth of the nation. In Malaysia, upper secondary school students will sit for the SPM examination which serves as an entrance exam for secondary education institutions, both public and private. Also, the SPM results are used to determine scholarship allocations. Hence, the upper secondary years of Form Four and Form Five are considered to be crucial examination preparation years for school students.

Wuthrich et al. (2020) conducted a recent systematic review examining the causes and consequences of student distress in the last two years of secondary school. The findings showed that this period causes academic stress across many nations, with many students reporting very high levels of discomfort. According to this review, individual differences in anxiety inclination, gender, the absence of negative thoughts, and attachments to family, friends, and school are all associated with academic distress (Wuthrich et al., 2020). One factor affecting students' performance in the last two years of schooling is their concern about high-stakes exams that lead to test anxiety (Kültür & Özcan,2022).

Test anxiety, also known as examination anxiety, exam stress, and test stress, is distinguished from other anxiety manifestations by its focus on the evaluative context (Zeidner, 1998). In addition, Howard (2020), on test anxiety, stated that test anxiety refers to unfavourable physiological, emotional, and cognitive reactions to an examination or assessment, with symptoms including rapid heart rate and breathing and worry about performing poorly which usually occur before, during, or after an assessed performance.

According to Jerrim (2022), moderate levels of test anxiety may be appropriate since they are just substantial enough to drive students to perform and inspire them without compromising their cognitive function or distracting them away from their current activity. Based on two meta-analyses studies, test anxiety negatively affects one's academic performance and general well-being (Huntley et al., 2019; Von Der Embse et al., 2018).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) administers the Programme for International Student Evaluation (PISA), a comprehensive international assessment every three years of 15-year-old students to evaluate their proficiency in mathematics, science, and reading. For the first time in 2015, a survey was conducted on students to provide in-depth evaluations of their life experiences in terms of self-belonging, subjective well-being, bullying, life satisfaction, supportive relationships with their classmates, instructors, and parents, as well as anxiety connected to academics. According to this survey on test anxiety, 66% of students were anxious about receiving poor results, and 59% of students frequently worried about how difficult the exams would be. Moreover, despite being well-prepared for their exams, 55% of the respondents felt that they could not help but feel worried (OECD, 2017).

Despite the fact that test anxiety for middle and high school students seems to be a worldwide problem, there hasn't been much research on test anxiety among upper secondary students in Malaysia, with the exception of studies on anxiety connected to specific disciplines (e.g., Mathematics, Chemistry, English language, and writing anxiety) and for undergraduate students (Kamaruddin et al., 2019; Kee & Seok, 2019; Mohamed & Tarmizi, 2010). One study, for instance, used the English Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (ELCAS) to examine the types of anxiety among Form Four

students in Selangor (Elas et al., 2020). The findings showed that students had high anxiety levels, with communication apprehension and test anxiety being the most significant categories. In a study conducted by Kamaruddin et al. (2019), Chemistry was the focus of another study on subject-related anxiety. They assessed test anxiety among 258 science stream upper secondary schools across urban and rural areas in Johor, Malaysia.

The results indicated that test anxiety varied significantly, with learning Chemistry emerging as a key contributor to Chemistry anxiety. According to the study, students in Johor experienced test anxiety while studying Chemistry. Also, students in urban schools had higher levels of test anxiety than students in rural schools when it came to managing test anxiety in Chemistry. As a result, anxiety affects school students, and intervention is necessary to stop test anxiety from affecting their tertiary education (Kamaruddin et al., 2019). Even though both studies indicated anxiety in both English and Chemistry, there was no data on the magnitude or prevalence of this specific subject-related anxiety.

One earlier study on test anxiety in Johor was conducted using the Children's Test Anxiety Scale (CTAS), which has three dimensions: thoughts, off-task behaviours, and autonomic reaction (Alia &Talibb, 2015). This study assessed the test anxiety levels of 160 students in Standard Six (aged 12) taking the UPSR (Primary School Achievement Test). The results showed that 28.1% of them had high test anxiety, 56.9% had medium anxiety, 15% had moderate anxiety, and none had low test anxiety (Alia & Talibb, 2015).

Also, test anxiety is higher in female students than in male students, and there was a significant disparity among the genders in the mean of the test anxiety thoughts, off-task behaviour, and autonomic reaction dimensions. According to the researchers, it could be difficult to spot students who are particularly test-anxious at an early stage because these symptoms might not surface until high-stakes exams. They suggested that teachers play a crucial role in supporting and advising students in a variety of areas, including altering learning styles, boosting motivation, offering learning direction, encouraging a positive attitude toward learning, and encouraging self-evaluation (Alia & Talibb, 2015). Hence, test anxiety is also common in Malaysia, and most Malaysian students worry about failing exams because they view exams as a measure of their academic progress (Khaidzir, 2015, as cited in Elas et al., 2020).

Research on test anxiety in school students discovered that girls experienced more significant test anxiety than male students (Brandmo et al., 2019; Putwain & Daly, 2014). In addition, other demographic variables, including ethnicity, and socioeconomic position, are also significant because they have been linked to a higher risk of test anxiety, according to previous studies (Segool et al., 2014; von der Embse et al., 2018). Panda and Sharawat (2021) stated that in the Indian education system, the stress of taking high-stakes exams would significantly impact the student's future career, parents, and teachers. As a result, such students will experience more significant test anxiety due to the pressure to achieve high marks and the fact that outside examiners will examine the papers. Additionally, most students believe their test anxiety increases nearer the exam date. Hence, the time left before the final exam significantly predicts test anxiety (Panda & Sharawat, 2021).

Regarding the prevalence of test anxiety, Howard (2020) stated that between 12% and 18% of studies were considered to have high prevalence rates of test anxiety. This suggests that, on average, five students out of a class of 30 are likely to have severe test anxiety. In addition, previous studies revealed that 10% to 40% of students suffer from test anxiety (Thomas et al., 2018a). Study skill training, and cognitive, behavioural, and combination techniques were frequently employed in test anxiety interventions to change participants' ideas, feelings, and behaviour (Ergene, 2003; Hembree, 1988; Huntley et al., 2019).

Different theories of test anxiety have developed throughout time and have a multifaceted construct (Friedman & Bendas-Jacob, 1997; Roos et al., 2021; von Der Embse et al., 2018; Zeidner, 1998). In summary, historical, and current research demonstrate that students' physiological and cognitive aspects of test anxiety are experienced mainly by evaluative situations (Thomas et al.,2018b; Roos et al., 2021). Similarly, in the meta-analysis review, Huntley et al. (2019) identified two dimensions: a cognitive component commonly referred to as "Worry," which consists of persistent

thinking about the implications of failure and test-irrelevant thinking, and an emotional dimension, "Emotionality," which is defined as bodily arousal (such as muscle tension, sweating, and heart rate accelerations) which is triggered by test circumstances.

Additionally, Lowe et al. (2008) described the Biopsychosocial model of test anxiety, according to which test anxiety also has a social component related to a person's worries about how their academic performance would be perceived and evaluated by parents, teachers, and peers. Hence, the theoretical assumptions in this study were based on the integration of test anxiety constructs involving physiological, cognitive, and social factors, as shown in Figure 1.

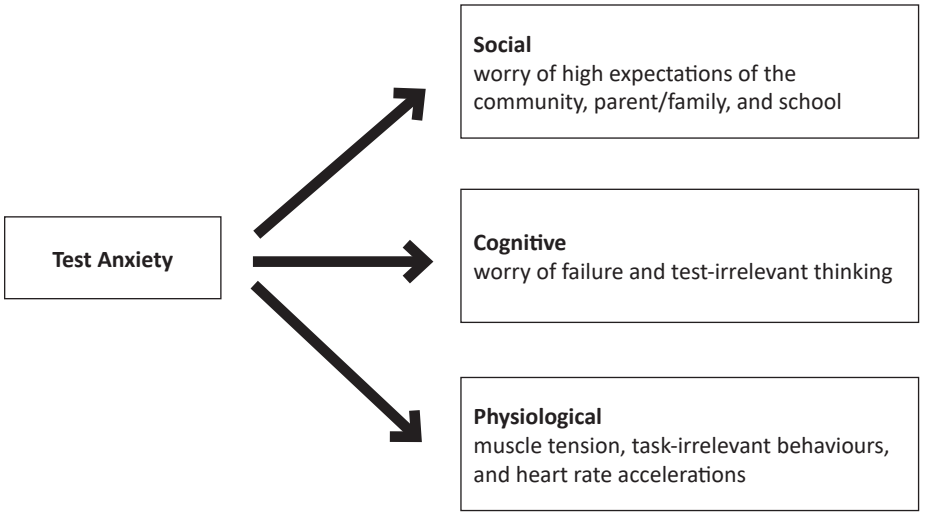

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework for Test Anxiety

As mentioned earlier, research on test anxiety in schools in Malaysia is limited and focused more on specific subject anxiety and university students. Thus, in seeking to fill the gap, this present study aimed to investigate the general prevalence of test anxiety at the upper secondary level and to examine its associations with socio-demographic variables. The research objectives outlined for this study are as follows:

1. To examine test anxiety among Form Four students.
2. To identify the levels of social, cognitive, and tenseness components of the test anxiety among Form Four students.
3. To determine the association between test anxiety and socio-demographic factors.

Methods

This study was conducted in a public secondary school with more than 3000 students and located in the district of Klang, Malaysia. This school is also one of the best-performing schools in the district. The research methodology employed in this study was a quantitative approach involving a cross-sectional survey. The FRIEDBEN test anxiety questionnaire (FTAS) and socio-demographic variables were given to Form Four students aged 16. The FRIEDBEN test Anxiety Scale (Friedman & Bendas-Jacob, 1997) is a free test that can be used to screen large or specific groups of students for test anxiety.

The FTAS is comprised of three subscales, namely social derogation (Items 1-8), cognitive obstruction (Items 9-17), and tenseness or physiological elements (Items 18-23). The 23 items in FTAS measured three theoretically-related scales for test anxiety. The students responded to each item on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD). The scoring for the FTAS four-point Likert questionnaire was as follows: SA = 3, A = 2, D = 1, and SD = 0. Items with an asterisk are reverse scored, as follows: SA = 0, A = 1, D = 2, and SD = 3. By using the scoring method, the score for each item was identified. Next, the scores for all 23 items were summed. A high total score indicated low test anxiety, while a low total score signified high test anxiety.

The socio-demographic survey was distributed to collect information on the students' gender, ethnicity, and household income which was categorised into three different income groups: Top 20% (T20), Middle 40% (M40), and Bottom 40% (B40). B40 household monthly income group earns less than 5,000.00 Malaysian Ringgit (RM), M40 earns less than RM 11,000.00, and the T20 household income is more than RM 11,001.00.

A pilot study was carried out to test the survey instruments on a small group of students from a different school. The Malay version of the FTAS questionnaire was forward and backward translated from English to Malay. The questionnaires were also checked by school counsellors in order to check the suitability of words used in the FTQS items. Based on the pilot study, the reliability analysis for the FRIEDBEN Test anxiety scale was Cronbach Alpha .869.

The cross-sectional survey based on past study prevalence of test anxiety required a minimum of 421 Form Four students. The researcher increased it to 500 due to concerns about higher drop-out rate during the coronavirus outbreak (COVID-19). The survey questionnaires were given to all Form Four students who attended school during the data collection period. Four hundred seventeen students volunteered to take the surveys and provided their responses.

Before the study, the researcher obtained approval from the Ministry of Education, the Selangor Education Department, and the University of Malaya Research Ethics Committee (UMREC). The reference number for the ethical approval was UM. TNC2/UMREC 1455.

Results and Data Analysis

Data were analysed using the 28.0 version of the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM, SPSS, 28: Ill Chicago). The descriptive analysis was used to compute the percentage, mean, standard deviation, and chi-square analysis was used to investigate the association between test anxiety and socio-demographic factors.

A total of 417 students responded to the surveys and during the data analysis, 46 cases were excluded as outliers. The term "outlier" refers to observations that differ from what is regarded as "normal" in some specific ways, and inferential statistics must be checked for outliers since they can lead to incorrect interpretation of the statistical findings (Hair et al., 2019; Pallant et al., 2016). As a result, the boxplot was utilised to identify the outliers in the current study. Hence, the sample size that remains for the main study was 371 students after removing the outliers. The demographic information for 371 Form Four students are shown in Table 1. Based on the table below, more than half of all respondents consist of female respondents, 55.8% (n =207). Furthermore, most of the participants are Chinese, 43.2% (n=160), followed by Malay, 41.2% (n=153), Indian, 13.7% (n=51), and others, 1.9% (n=7). Regarding socio-economic status (SES), students from B40 families are 39.9% (n=148), while those from M40 families are 38.3% (n=142), and T20 families are 21.8% (n=81).

Table 1. Demographic Profile of 371 students

Demographic	Categorical	Frequencies n	Percentage %
Gender	Malay	164	44.2
	Female	207	55.8
Ethnicity	Malay	153	41.2
	Chinese	160	43.2
	Indian	51	13.7
	Others	7	1.9
Social-economic status (SES)	B40	148	39.9
	M40	142	38.3
	T20	81	21.8

Note: B40: Less than RM 5000.00
M40: Less than RM 11000.00
T20: More than RM 12000.00

Regarding the test anxiety instrument, Putwain and Daly (2014), stated that test anxiety levels could be classified as low, medium, and high based on students' experiences and not on how well they performed in comparison to other students (Putwain & Daly, 2014). Thus, the 33.3 and 66.6% terciles of the scale anchors were chosen as a priori bounds for low, medium, and high-test anxiety since there were no standardised scores given by the FTAS developer (Putwain & Daly, 2014).

Hence, this step was also followed in this study, and Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage of the level of test anxiety, and the results indicate that most of the students rate themselves with a low level of test anxiety, 45.8 % (n=170). However, close to 20% (n=73) have a high level of test anxiety, while the 34.5% (n=128) rate themselves as experiencing a medium level test anxiety.

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage for the Level of Test Anxiety

Level of Test anxiety	Frequency n	Percentage %
High < mean=1.48	73	19.7
Medium (mean=1.48-1.83)	128	34.5
Low (mean>1.83)	170	45.8

Note: A high mean score indicates low test anxiety

In relation to social, cognitive, and tenseness components of test anxiety, based on Table 3, most students have a high level of tenseness with 32.9% (n=122), followed by a social deviation of 31.3% (n=116). In contrast, cognitive obstruction is considered to be the lowest level of test anxiety construct with a value of 51.5% (n=191) compared to social deviation and tenseness 44.4% (n=165), and 28.8% (n=107), respectively.

Table 3. Frequency and Percentage of Social, Cognitive, and Tenseness Components of Test Anxiety

Test Anxiety Constructs	High		Medium		Low	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Social Deviation	116	31.3	90	24.3	165	44.4
Cognitive Obstruction	51	13.7	129	34.8	191	51.5
Tenseness	122	32.9	142	38.3	107	28.8

Note: A high mean score indicates low level, m=mean
social deviation (high m <1.38, medium m= (1.38- 1.88), low m > 1.88)
cognitive obstruction (high m <1.56, medium m= (1.56-2), low m > 2)
tenseness (high m<1.29, medium m= (1.29 -1.67), low m > 1.67)

The Association between Test Anxiety and Socio-Demographic Factors

Chi-square tests were carried out to examine the association between test anxiety levels and the various socio-demographic information. Table 4 shows the chi-square statistics of students' test anxiety levels and socio-demographic factors. The Pearson chi-square values reveal that test anxiety levels amongst students are significantly associated with student's gender identity ($\chi 2 = 8.178$, df = 1, N = 371, p <.05). Female students are more likely to have a high test anxiety level than male students (24.1%, and 13.4%, respectively).

Table 4. Chi-Square Analysis of Levels of Test Anxiety and Socio-Demographic Factors

Variables	N	Level of Test Anxiety	χ2	P	Phi
Gender		High Medium Low	8.178	.017	.15
Male	164	22(13.4%) 57(34.8%) 85(51.8%)			
Female	207	51(24.6%) 71(34.3%) 85 (41.1%)			
Ethnicity			31.741	.<.001	.29
Malay	153	41(26.8%) 63(41.2%) 49 (32.0%)			
Chinese	160	20(12.5%) 56(35.0%) 84 (52.5%)			
Indian	51	12(23.5%) 6(11.8%) 33 (64.7%)			
Household Income			.888		.867
B40	148	29(19.6%) 51(34.5%) 68 (45.9%)			
M40	142	31(21.8%) 49(34.5%) 62(43.7%)			
T20	81	14(17.3%) 27(33.3%) 40 (49.4%)			

As for ethnicity, the results indicate that students' test anxiety level was significantly associated with students' ethnicity ($\chi 2 = 31.741$, df = 2, N = 364, p <.001). Malay students experience a higher level of test anxiety than Chinese and Indian students. Finally, for household income, as shown in Table 4, there is no association found between the household income group and the student's level of test anxiety ($\chi 2 = .888$, df = 2, N = 371, p >.05).

Discussion

The present study examined test anxiety and investigated the association of test anxiety with socio-demographic factors. The findings from this present research showed that about 54% of Form Four students have moderate to high test anxiety, and 19.7% have high test anxiety. Similarly, in another recent study, 2158 school children in India completed the test anxiety inventory (TAI), and the findings showed that about 66% of the children (age: 9 to 18 years old) have moderate to high test anxiety and about 18% have high test anxiety (Lohiya et al., 2021). In fact, Howard (2020) found that the estimated value for high test anxiety among children and adolescents (aged 7 to 21) was in the range of 12%–18%. This review focused on the UK as well as outside the UK education system. The results of this study demonstrated that test anxiety is prevalent among Form Four students in Malaysia and is consistent with findings from previous research. Hence, we can infer that test anxiety is a typical educational problem that seems to affect all students in many countries.

In terms of the construct of test anxiety, results showed that tenseness and social construct contributed more to test anxiety among the Form Four students than cognitive obstructions. Past research also showed students' physiological arousal comprised of increased heart rate and shallow or rapid breathing, and in a social construct, the students may experience worry thoughts as they fear being negatively judged by teachers, parents, and friends (Lowe et al., 2008).

A previous study on school students' test anxiety by Putwain and Daly (2014) showed that tension score was the highest, followed by worry and social was the lowest. Although the tension score was highest in this study, the other two constructs had opposite results. The students in this study comprised 2435 secondary school students, and they experienced examination as anxiety provoking and worried about failing, and the tension and worry were also due to the negative judgements from others (Putwain & Daly, 2014). By comparison, students in the current study were more worried about their results and more concerned about the negative judgement of others. This finding signalled the need for a meaningful solution for schools and education departments. For example, for the social construct of test anxiety, school counsellors can conduct programmes involving parents to reduce parental pressure on students.

Gender also seems to be a significant factor in test anxiety that has been extensively studied. This study found that female students were more likely than male students to experience substantial exam anxiety. Generally, most studies reported the same findings as in this study (Aydin, 2019; Brandmo et al., 2019; Dinc & Oguz Duran, 2021; Perez et al., 2019; Putwain and Daly, 2014; Rehman et al., 2021; Sarı et al., 2018). This could be explained by gender disparities in students' coping mechanisms, socialisation styles, and awareness of the test anxiety issue (Zeidner 1998, p281). Additionally, Brandmo et al. (2019) suggested that women, as opposed to men, are more vulnerable to test anxiety because of their sensitivity to evaluative settings.

According to studies, female students are more worried about exams and experience a higher level of stress, as well as the social component of test anxiety, which involves worrying about how others will perceive them (Howard, 2020). Also, in accordance with cultural and social expectations, male students prefer to underreport their test anxiety because doing so can be seen as a challenge to their manhood, whereas women are more likely to express their test nervousness (Lohiya et al., 2021; Núñez-Peña et al, 2016). Moreover, female students are more afraid of failing in a test situation. Nevertheless, some studies have found that this does not appear to impact their academic performance (Núñez-Peña et al, 2016).

However, this result contrasts with other research that revealed no differences in test anxiety levels between male and female students (Bodas et al., 2008; Msayar et al., 2016; Nweze, 2014). According to Bodas et al. (2008), the shift in gender roles and societal expectations towards women's education, especially in urban areas like Mumbai, as well as the rise in female literacy in India, could be the cause (Bodas et al., 2008).

As for ethnicity, previous meta-analyses on test anxiety revealed that minority students are more likely to report higher test anxiety levels than other demographic groups (Von Der Embsee et

al., 2018). Surprisingly, compared to Chinese and Indian students, Malay students reported having more test anxiety, although Malay ethnicity is the majority group in Malaysia. A possible reason could be that most of the participants in the current study were from more competitive classrooms, and there were more Chinese students than Malay students. Most Malay students normally apply to join MRSM or Mara Junior Science College, a boarding school generally for higher-performing Malay students. Therefore, only a few Malay students were left in these competitive classrooms. Hence, they were probably more apprehensive about tests that may help to explain the findings. Furthermore, the expectations of parents, teachers, and peers may add to the strain already placed on the Malay pupils, increasing their stress levels.

The other socio-demographic predictor investigated was the students' household income which was categorized into three different income groups: Top 20% (T20), Middle 40% (M40), and Bottom 40% (B40). B40 household income group earns less than RM 5,000.00, M40 earns less than RM 11,000.00, and T20 household income earns more than RM 12,000.00. The results showed no association between the household income group and the student's level of test anxiety. Therefore, it can be assumed that in this study, the family household income did not influence test anxiety. This finding was in line with research which examined test anxiety among Turkish elementary and high school students and found no association between test anxiety and income (Aydin, 2013).

This finding, however, conflicted with most of the earlier research, which claimed that students from lower SES backgrounds experienced more significant levels of test anxiety than those from higher SES backgrounds (OECD, 2017). This seemingly contradictory result may be attributable to the fact that some students have more effective coping techniques for managing their exam anxiety. For instance, the students may be satisfied with their material needs and not feel inferior compared to individuals from higher economic brackets. It might also be the parenting style of the parents that prioritise their child's education and are able to accommodate the pupils' requirements. These factors explain why there is not always a negative correlation between pupils' test anxiety and their family's socioeconomic status (Xu et al., 2021). Furthermore, according to Bodas et al. (2008), students in India who faced stressful situations exhibited better-coping behaviours because they had access to services and support systems in their culture that could assist them in developing coping mechanisms. Examples include after-school tutoring programmes and helplines for students during exams. Furthermore, these high-stakes examinations are typically predictable and timed. Thus, children, parents, and educators can plan and prepare for them. Thus, these adaptive coping abilities provide individuals with some control over the evaluative circumstances (Bodas et al., 2008).

Limitations and Implications of the Study

The COVID-19 pandemic was the main barrier to this study's implementation, as it caused delays and made it difficult to obtain approval in time. Additionally, students were under stress navigating the pandemic and taking turns attending classes. As a result, the findings shown here may have been impacted by the effects of continuing lockdowns. Another limitation is the percentile classification used to divide students into low, medium, and high-test anxiety groups. This technique has some drawbacks whereby it is not comparable to other studies and may not be very suitable for equating individual scores of subtests with the different number of response categories (Satyendra Nath, 2020; Wang & Chen, 2012).

Based on these findings, educational institutions might try to lessen student academic stress, particularly test anxiety, with the assistance of counselling departments by providing programmes that have been shown to lessen test anxiety and coaching students on how to deal with and manage test anxiety. Teachers also play a vital part and should empower students to learn meaningfully and inspire them during exam time. In addition, teachers can help students develop their self-confidence and self-esteem by offering support, assurance, encouragement, and teaching simple skills like breathing and relaxation. Above all, the Ministry of Education (MOE) should concentrate on developing sensible educational policies and avoid revising them frequently due to political influence.

Final Discussion and Conclusion

Like most of its Asian contemporaries, Malaysia's education system is sometimes criticised for being overly exam-focused (Heng et al., 2015; Huan et al., 2019). The Primary School Achievement Test (UPSR), Lower Secondary Evaluation (PMR), and SPM are high-stakes exams conducted in Malaysian public schools. The elimination of the UPSR and PMR exams in 2021 was done so that school-based assessments (SBA) could be introduced successfully to support meaningful and holistic learning. The SBA concept was introduced in parts to lessen the detrimental washback effects of high-stakes exams, particularly the UPSR and PMR (Ong, 2010 as cited in Huan et al., 2019), but the impact so far has been somewhat limited (Ayamany, 2022). The MOE has introduced non-academic SBA components like PAJSK (physical activities, sports, and co-curriculum assessment) and psychometric evaluation, which are run by teachers at the school level, to lessen the washback effect of the high-stakes standardised exams (Huan et al., 2019). These are significant steps, but there is still much to be done as teachers and students learn to adjust to the new system.

However, the SPM examination still plays a crucial role and has a significant impact on upper secondary students as it serves as a school exit examination and determines their future studies and getting scholarships. Moreover, according to Alia and Talibb (2015), it might be challenging to identify students who are extremely test-worried at an early stage because these symptoms may not appear until the students sit for high-stakes exams. Hence, although the number of high-stakes examinations has been reduced in Malaysia, upper secondary students will still have to face the high-stakes SPM and the stress and anxiety students undergo still need to be monitored.

The prevalence of test anxiety among Form Four students is quite similar to that reported in earlier studies, demonstrating that test anxiety is a widespread issue that requires early management. The findings of this study suggest that almost 20% of upper secondary school students have high test anxiety; females have higher test anxiety than male students. In addition, in this study, Malay students have higher test anxiety compared to Chinese and Indian ethnicity. Hence, understanding the prevalence of test anxiety and its constructs can help the education system including the MOE, schools, teachers, and parents to identify the scope of the problem and the groups of students who are most affected. Prevalence data can eventually help in the development of better policy as well as targeted interventions to help students manage their test anxiety.

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Private Tuition in Cambodia: Evidence from Urban and Rural Upper Secondary Schools

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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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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).

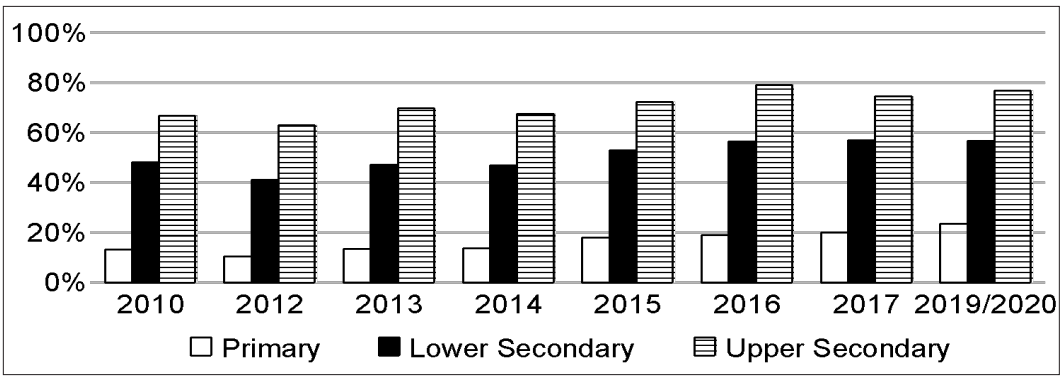

Figure 1. Students at Lower Secondary Levels Demanding Private Tutoring

Source: Complied 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 (α=.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. (RTS5: 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 12th 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, 12th 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.

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Appenndix 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?

Appenndix 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	• 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.
	Teachers as PT creators	1	4	1	5	• 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. • 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.
Typeof tutor	Own teachers/ students	1	4	1	3	• I prefer to study [opt for PT] with my own teacher(s) becuase they know us [my class] better than any teachers who are not teaching us [my class]. • 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) • Teaching my own students is much easier. I know them very well. … I can help them learn better.
	Recomen-ded teacher	3	1	-	-	• 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. • 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.

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	• […] We are required to use a learner-based approach [mainly in the public school]. It takes lots of our time. Also, you know?*(an interactive phrase expressed by the interviewee)* '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.
	[cause]: Less instructional time	2	3	5	6	• 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] • 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] • 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]
	[cause]: Learner-based approach	-	-	4	6	• […] [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] • Students can learn better with more practice exercises during PT. We *[interviewee tended to generalize to every tutored teacher]* 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] • […] [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]

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	• Teachers **always** *(emphasized by the interviewee)* gives us homework. […] Without going to tutoring classes, we cannot complete that homework on time. [quote from rural student] • 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] • Sure! I would say almost all teachers assigned homework *[from a probing question: it is about what we learned and not very challenged, I think]* 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] • I almost always assign homework. I know that students do not have emough time to practice during the public school hours; so, they can practice that [homework] at home. … Sure, some homewor 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]
Social science vs. Science	Social Science	3	2	-	-	• I prefer to study with my own [subject] teacher because s/he undersand about what we need and what we are not really good. [quoted from rural student] • 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]
	Science	1	3			• 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]

Themes and Codes		Frequency				Extracted Quotes
		students		teachers		
		Urban. n=4	Rural. n=5	Urban. n=6	Rural n=6	
Reactions of administrators		*School administrator*				
		Ur. (n=3)		*Ru. (n=3)*		
	Lack of Instructional time	3		3		• 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.
	Pressure the students for PT	1		2		• I feel headahes 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 embarrase them, do not answer to the questions. • 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.'

BOOK REVIEW

Shadow Education in the Middle East: Private Supplementary Tutoring and its Policy Implications. By Mark Bray and Anas Hajar (2022), 122 pages. ISBN: 978-1-0323-2980-2. London: Routledge.

This insightful book is the first study of private supplementary tutoring in the Middle East. It uses the common metaphor of 'shadow education' because such tutoring mimics daytime schooling: as the cultural or curriculum changes in the schools, it changes in the shadow accordingly. Previous research in the region only scrutinized single countries, or parts of those countries. The book presents a comprehensive picture of the demand and supply of private tutoring in the 12 Arabic-speaking countries of the Middle East. It also provides detailed updated information on the geographical span and socio-economic intensity of demand for private tutoring with intra-country and inter-country variations. Special attention has been paid to online and public media advertisements of various types of tutoring, and to various forms of internet tutoring that expanded with the impact of COVID-19.

The book focuses on the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, namely Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and contrasts their contextual diversities with the other six Arabic-speaking countries of the region, namely Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and Yemen. It portrays the multi-level impacts of shadow education on primary and secondary students' academic achievement, social and educational inequalities, and ethical and social values. The book captures a massive volume of qualitative and quantitative data, which is neatly presented in boxes, charts, figures, and tables in plain English, easily accessible to general readers without academic jargon. It also benefits from questionnaire data distributed by the UNESCO Regional Center for Educational Planning (RCEP), based in the UAE, and from a 2021 Policy Forum hosted by that body.

Among the treasurable components of each chapter is the lengthy reference list of English-language and Arabic-language research literature. The titles of the latter items are translated into English, and the supplementary notes in most chapters ease the understanding for general readers. The references will help shadow education researchers have a comprehensive overview of relevant and updated literature for further research in the Middle East and other world regions.

The book contains seven chapters after a clear definition of private supplementary tutoring (p. xiii) in the executive summary. Chapter one initiates the main objectives and rationale for the study. Chapter two describes related global and cross-regional, and cross-national perspectives on private tutoring, the span and intensity of demand for and supply of tutoring, and geographic and cultural variations. Most importantly, it outlines the merits and demerits of tutoring. Chapter three summarizes some educational and cultural commonalities and depicts some socio-economic and political diversities. Chapter four then outlines student enrolment rates, modes of operations, and durations of demand for tutoring in the 12 countries. Socio-economic, sociocultural, and political drivers of demand and supply are highlighted, including teaching deficiencies, and low teacher salaries. Chapter five highlights the educational and social impact of shadow education, including possible learning gains after tutoring, skeptical views towards its quality, its backwash effects on daytime schooling, the effects of corruption caused by tutoring, student over-reliance on tutoring, and some critical harassment cases of female tutees.

Chapter six draws some significant policy implications toward shadow education and daytime schooling. In particular, fruitful comparative lessons are identified from a list of various regulations concerning the provision of tutoring services by serving teachers in 10 Middle East countries (Lebanon and Yemen are omitted because they are laissez-faire on the matter) and regulations on tutorial

centres in four countries (Iraq, Lebanon, Qatar, and Syria). The practicality of such regulations is evaluated by the authors regarding lessons in other countries and regions.

Chapter seven concludes. It draws some conceptual discussion first by pinpointing the commonalities in the role of the Arabic language and cultural traits across the region. It then highlights cross-national differences in economic growth and other sub-regional variations. Among major themes are possibilities for partnership between state and non-state actors. Educational reformers need to know the whole picture concerning commonalities and diversities and multiple roles of the state and the market.

Alongside this book is a spin-off article (Bray & Hajar, 2022) on complexities and units for comparative analysis in the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members, using the three-dimensional Bray and Thomas (1995) cube. Both illuminate the phenomenon, showing the deep roots of shadow education in parts of the region. This long history has not previously been presented in English-language literature.

Bray and Hajar fully understand the social and educational issues concerning shadow education. You should not miss reading the book not only for its analysis of patterns in the Middle East but also for a wider understanding of the phenomenon.

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BOOK REVIEW

Designing World Language Curriculum for Intercultural Communicative Competence. By Jennifer Eddy (2022), 376 pages. ISBN: 978-1-3501-8066-6. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

"Learning is creativity by design" is the thesis of this resource by Jennifer Eddy on language teaching (p. xiv). In this book, the author establishes the central idea of teachers as "designers of creative, novel performance tasks along a spiral, articulated curriculum for transfer and language learner autonomy"(p. xiv). Given the unpredictable nature of language settings and contexts, teachers must be creative with strategies that facilitate the learners' ability to adapt and respond to different cultural language situations. Eddy argues that the fundamental aim of modern language teaching is Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) where learning a language requires an understanding and responsiveness to the culture and context where the language is used. The language curriculum thus, requires an understanding of the products, practices and perspectives of cultures that can unfold through cultural stories, images, and works of art. All these have the potential to evoke learners' cultural language experiences and interpretations.

The book departs from the traditional banking model followed in language teaching where learners are passive and where grammar rules and scripted learning take precedence. Instead, the author asserts the need for "exploration, participation, creation, and reflection, via varied and novel interactions of intercultural experience" (p. 7). Language learners are to be encouraged to ask questions, evaluate, and use authentic text evidence in communication and consensus-building. Throughout the book, the theory and evidence-based research on the value of re-creating and re-designing the spiral and bespoke language curricula are reiterated. More so, Eddy's work is a valuable resource for language teachers who may be in search of a learner-centered, culturally-appropriate, and practice-based teaching framework.

At the outset, the author proposes the Intercultural Curriculum Aligns Novel Assessment Design Articulated Performance and Transfer (ICANADAPT) framework. The alternative and articulated curriculum highlights an inquiry-based and learner-centered approach. Teachers and learners act as co-investigators to discover more about themselves and other cultures within interdisciplinary units. The ICANADAPT is grounded on the work of Wiggins and McTighe (2004, 2005, 2006, 2011) on curriculum development referred to as Understanding by Design (UBD). Therefore, to better grasp Eddy's framework and its jargon, it is suggested that the reader revisit the principles of UBD as well.

The ICANADAPT also follows a specific instructional template similar to UBD that requires language teachers to develop classroom assessments that allow for transfer of concepts within varied contexts and for varied audiences. In these assessment tasks, language learners are expected to solve problems and create products that are culturally-meaningful. Aesthetic education and drama pedagogy are central instructional strategies to the ICANADAPT model.

Throughout the chapters, the author methodically scaffolds language teachers through the instructional design process made up of three stages. Stage 1 begins with planning for Essential Understandings (EUs) and Essential Questions (EQs) and transferable goals relevant to a chosen intercultural concept and consider intercultural transfer goals and tasks. Stage 2 focuses on the Articulated Assessment Transfer Task (AATT) or Integrated Performance Assessments (IPAs). Through performance tasks that call for problem-solving and creating products of novelty over time, language learners then attain levels of proficiency and performances for transfer. Practice in deliberate, classroom-based, authentic, culturally-relevant transfer tasks is requisite for learners to adapt to varied language contexts. Meanwhile, Stage 3 emphasises formative assessments for transfer.

The performance assessments involve learners working with authentic texts and demonstrating learning via three productive modalities, specifically, the interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational modes. Citing the work of Vygotsky (1986), the learner must first organize and construct meaning via intrapersonal or inner dialogue with and from the authentic text as a means of social interaction or mediation. Later on, in the Interpersonal mode, learners engage in unrehearsed, communicative situations that involve interaction and negotiation of meaning. Finally, the Presentational mode involves learners performing productive, creative, rehearsed or refined oral or written pieces for a target cultural community.

Parallel to the adoption of UBD as an instructional framework, the book's organization follows the UBD sequence as well. Each chapter is introduced by EUs and EQs to guide the reader. Reflections and formative assessment activities are likewise provided across all chapters. Each chapter also features a research-to-practice summary chart of relevant studies in support of the different components of the curriculum. This feature proves to be a useful tool for readers who may choose to extend classroom practice to action research. Lesson exemplars throughout the book are then provided to illustrate the different stages of the ICANADAPT template. From teaching the Japanese concept of *uchi* (inside) vs. *soto* (outside) space distinction to the Portuguese art form and symbol of resistance called *Capoeira,* each lesson exemplar is laudable in its illustration of how a cultural concept becomes a unifying idea for classroom-based language activities. By the end of each chapter, readers are then guided to reflect on issues, check for learning, and even develop performance assessments of their own.

Overall, the book is a creative and recommended resource for facilitating teacher training, professional learning communities, and higher-level courses on language teaching. Nonetheless, as the text tends to be theoretical with very detailed and lengthy discussions, some novice teachers or students may find the concepts quite conceptual and perplexing. Perhaps in the future, to expand the reach of this work, a corresponding simplified teaching resource for K-12 classrooms may be considered.

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