



PARALLEL PRIVATE LESSONS

Scale, Nature and Implications for Policy and School Management



Copyright © by This Life Cambodia, July 2016

Reproduction for non-commercial purposes is authorized provided the source is acknowledged. For copying in any other circumstances, for reuse in other publications, or for translation or adaptation, This Life Cambodia must be consulted.

This report draws on information, opinions and advice provided by a range of individuals and organizations. TLC accepts no responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of any material contained in this report. Additionally, TLC disclaims all liability to any person in respect of any information presented in this publication.

No. 313, Group 9, Sala Kanseng Village, Sangkat Svay Dangkum, Siem Reap province, Kingdom of Cambodia. www.thislifecambodia.org

About This Research

The Comparative Education Research Centre (CERC) at the **University of Hong Kong** hosts an international group of researchers on shadow education led by Professor Mark Bray. In addition to Cambodia, members of the team have especially focused on shadow education in Bangladesh, China, Georgia, Hong Kong and India. Publications available from CERC (<http://cerc.edu.hku.hk>) include:

- Bray, Mark & Lykins, Chad (2012): *Shadow Education: Private Tutoring and its Implications for Policy Makers in Asia*. Manila: Asian Development Bank, and Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, The University of Hong Kong, 98 pp.
- Bray, Mark & Kwo, Ora (2014): *Regulating Private Tutoring for Public Good: Policy Options for Supplementary Education in Asia*. Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, The University of Hong Kong, and Bangkok: UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, 93 pp.
- Bray, Mark; Kwo, Ora & Jokić, Boris (eds.) (2015): *Researching Private Supplementary Tutoring: Methodological Lessons from Diverse Cultures*. Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, The University of Hong Kong, and Dordrecht: Springer, 292 pp.

The Community Research and Consultancy Program (CRCP) is a project of **This Life Cambodia (TLC)**. TLC is a not-for-profit, non-government community development organisation based in Siem Reap. CRCP is financed by philanthropic foundations, private donations, aid organisations and through research and evaluation consultancies. The work of CRCP provides a mechanism for the voices of marginalized communities to be heard. In line with TLC's mission to listen to, engage with and advocate alongside communities, CRCP translates voices into new knowledge, which can then be used as a tool to advocate for positive change.

Suggested citation:

Bray, Mark (2016): *Parallel Private Lessons: Scale, Nature and Implications for Policy and School Management*. Siem Reap: This Life Cambodia, and Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, The University of Hong Kong.

For further information, contact:

- This Life Cambodia (TLC), contact@thislifecambodia.org and/or
- Prof. Mark Bray, University of Hong Kong, mbray@hku.hk

Parallel Private Lessons: Scale, Nature and Implications for Policy and School Management

The University of Hong Kong (HKU) has conducted a research project with This Life Cambodia (TLC) into the scale and nature of parallel private lessons received by secondary school students. It focuses on private lessons that are delivered in parallel to lessons in government classes, commonly by the same teachers to the same students and on the same school premises. The research focused on a sample of schools in Siem Reap Province. This report presents key findings and their implications for policy makers and school managers. Although the findings refer only to Siem Reap Province, they also have relevance to other parts of the country.

The report commences by explaining the reasons for the research focus and the issues that arise concerning parallel private lessons. It then explains the sample of schools, students and teachers and the methods through which data were collected. Subsequent sections present quantitative and qualitative findings; and the final section presents recommendations for policy makers and school managers.

1. The Issues

Parallel private lessons have been a feature of Cambodian education since at least the early 1990s. Everybody knows that they are there; but they are commonly ignored in discussions about the quality and management of government schooling. This report argues that parallel lessons need much more attention than they have previously received.

Some previous studies of parallel private lessons in Cambodia have focused on the scale and implications of household costs (e.g. Bray 1999; Bray & Bunly 2005; NGO Education Partnership 2007; UNDP 2014). Others have considered complementarities with government schooling, implications for the work of teachers, and various other dimensions (e.g. Dawson 2000; Brehm, Silova & Tuot 2012).

Major themes evident in this existing literature and also emerging from the present research include the following:

- *Social inequalities*. When fees are charged for supplementary classes, children who cannot afford those fees are excluded. This situation maintains and exacerbates social

inequalities, and is especially problematic when the extra classes are necessary for full coverage of the curriculum.

- *Teachers' incomes.* Most private classes are provided by regular teachers who complain that their salaries are low. Income from the private classes supplements the teachers' salaries and may help to retain the teachers in the profession.
- *Backwash on government classes.* When some students receive extra lessons but others do not, disparities increase within government classes. Also, teachers who provide private lessons in addition to their government ones may reduce effort in government classes in order to focus energies on the private lessons. And teachers who want to maximize their incomes may press for the higher grades (especially the classes sitting national examinations), contributing to neglect of the lower grades.

Cambodia is not alone in having to confront these issues, which have been highlighted by the HKU team and others in a range of countries (e.g. Bray & Lykins 2012; Jokić 2013; Bray & Kwo 2014). Cambodia has the opportunity both to contribute to and to learn from analysis in other countries.

2. Sample and Methodology

The data in this report were collected from six schools in Siem Reap Province. The schools were chosen to display variations, and restriction to six institutions assisted in securing depth of understanding while identifying variations within the province. Among the six schools, three were lower secondary schools serving Grades 7-9, and three were high schools serving Grades 7-12. Three schools were urban or semi-urban, and three were rural or remote. TLC and the HKU team together selected an initial sample of schools, following which TLC sought approval from the provincial government and from the schools themselves.

Within the schools, the research focused on students in Grades 9 (all six schools) and 12 (the three high schools) on the grounds that these are transition points in the education system and thus of particular importance. Grade 9 has a national examination that marks the end of lower secondary schooling, following which students either proceed to Grade 10 or leave the system. Grade 12 is the terminal year of schooling, again marked by a national examination, following which students either proceed to post-secondary studies or join the labour force.

The research had both quantitative and qualitative components. In an initial visit to each school the team explained to teachers and students in the selected grades the purpose of the research.

The team then gave the students a summary for them to take to their parents and obtain parental consent. Subsequently the team returned to each school and obtained from the students and teachers their own consent to participate. At the time of distribution of questionnaires to students and teachers, a further invitation was issued to participate in interviews if selected. This report draws on questionnaire responses from 1,274 students (662 in Grade 9 and 612 in Grade 12), and 72 teachers. It also draws on interviews of 48 students and 24 teachers (Bray et al. 2015).

For the student interviews, the research design envisaged a balanced sample in each grade comprising:

- male students with tutoring,
- male students without tutoring,
- female students with tutoring, and
- female students without tutoring.

However, some students who had initially agreed to join the interviews subsequently declined and had to be replaced. Also, in some schools relatively few students were not receiving tutoring and it was not always easy to find willing interviewees. The final balance, partly reflecting the greater proportions of girls in the classes and also the greater willingness of girls to be interviewed – perhaps because they tended to be higher performers – had 31 females but only 17 males. It also had 39 students receiving tutoring compared with only nine who were not. Nevertheless, these balances did to some extent match the broad picture shown by the quantitative data.

The teacher interviews, by contrast, secured gender equality: among the 24 interviewees, 12 (50.0%) were female and 12 (50.0%) were male. This compared with the average of 46.6% females among secondary school teachers in the province as a whole. Among the teachers interviewed, 11 (55.0%) were providing tutoring and nine (45.0%) were not.

3. The Scale and Reasons for Seeking Supplementary Lessons

Among the students responding to the questionnaire, 81.9% stated that they received private tutoring, with rates in Grade 12 higher than Grade 9 (Table 1). Differences between genders were small, though with a slightly higher rate among females.

Table 1: The Scale of Private Tutoring

		Proportions receiving private tutoring (%)
All students		81.9
Grade	Grade 9	74.7
	Grade 12	89.8
Gender	Male	80.9
	Female	82.8
Location	Urban	83.5
	Semi-urban, rural and remote	80.9

Table 1 also shows that greater proportions of urban students received tutoring compared with counterparts in other locations. This was in line with patterns in other countries (see e.g. Bray & Lykins 2012, p.12), but the gap was modest. One reason for the modesty of this gap was that most tutoring was provided by teachers rather than by companies which tend to congregate in urban areas to secure density of population. The question about identities of the tutors, following adjustment of the questionnaire, was only asked in three of the six schools (one semi-urban, one rural and one remote); but among the responding students in those schools receiving tutoring, 57.7% indicated that they did so from their own teachers and 40.9% from other teachers in their schools. Only 1.2% indicated that they received tutoring from a teacher in a different school, 0.6% from a university student or other self-employed person, and none from a company.

Interviews with both students and teachers indicated that most tutoring was provided in the schools already attended by those students and teachers. Occasionally it was held in teachers' houses or other locations such as in the offices of NGOs. In parts of Cambodia where much tutoring is provided by companies (especially Phnom Penh), that tutoring generally takes place in premises managed by the companies. However, the fact that most of the tutoring in the six schools covered by this survey took place in the schools themselves meant that the private classes could indeed be seen to have a close relationship with the government classes. Most students who received tutoring did so in several subjects (Table 2). Nearly half received tutoring in three to five subjects, and 1.7% of students received it in over six subjects. Not only did more Grade 12 students receive tutoring, they also did so in more subjects: 45.3% of them reported that they received tutoring in over five subjects while that proportion for Grade 9 students was only 8.1%. Mathematics, Chemistry, Khmer (language and literature), Physics, Biology, and English were the most popular subjects for tutoring.

Table 2: Subjects of Private Tutoring

Number of subjects	No.	%	Subjects	No.	%*
Zero (no tutoring)	230	18.1	Mathematics	825	79.0
One	171	13.4	Chemistry	718	68.8
Two	129	10.1	Khmer	627	60.1
Three	215	16.9	Physics	623	59.7
Four	197	15.5	Biology	461	44.2
Five	218	17.1	English	296	28.4
Six	91	7.1	Earth and Environmental Studies	47	4.5
More than six	22	1.7	Geography	35	3.4
Missing	1	0.1	History	28	2.7
Sampled students	1,274	100.0	Morality/Philosophy	15	1.4
			Other	2	0.2

* Expressed as % of students receiving tutoring, i.e. excluding ones that did not.

Table 3: Students' Declared Reasons for Receiving Private Tutoring

Reasons	Grade 9		Grade 12	
	Percentage*	Importance†	Percentage*	Importance†
To prepare for the national examination	89.5	1	97.3	1
To get exposure to different pedagogical methods	87.6	2	92.0	2
To increase the amount of instructional time I get	82.9	3	87.1	4
To prepare for university	77.9	4	87.4	3
To experience class sizes smaller than government ones	68.6	6	75.9	5
To satisfy demands from my parents	72.7	5	63.5	6
To satisfy demands from my teacher	31.8	7	24.5	8
To supplement my teacher's income	29.8	8	24.9	7

* The % of students who agreed or strongly agreed with this reason among students who responded to this question.

† Ranking of importance, with 1 meaning most important, and 8 least important.

Concerning the students' reasons for seeking tutoring, Table 3 indicates the importance of the national examination, especially for Grade 12 students. A second reason was to gain exposure to different pedagogical methods, meaning that the teachers taught differently in private classes. The next highest reason was to increase the amount of instructional time.

4. What do the Students Gain in the Private Classes?

The government school curriculum is widely recognised to be very full for the available time. The school day is short by comparison with other countries, the system has multiple public and school holidays, and days are commonly lost because of teacher absences and other factors. Teachers are expected to complete the curriculum during the year, but this requires them to rush. The private classes provide more time for the students, allow them to review what they have learned, and in particular provide exercises for consolidation. As explained by one student:

I feel that for biology, we don't study the exercises in government [regular] school. We have fewer exercises, so if we don't attend private tutoring we will not understand at all. I won't know how to solve the problem when I am doing the exam.

Another student indicated that “in the private tutoring class [the teacher] explains each point clearly and we can ask if we are unclear”. This contrasted with patterns in government classes in which time is tight and the hidden curriculum discourages students from asking questions.

While most teachers responding to the questionnaires and in interviews indicated that they could and did complete the curriculum in government classes, albeit at speed, the research team heard from students and even from a few teachers about cases in which teachers deliberately “saved” material from the government classes and made it available only in the private classes. One student indicated that “the teachers say that if you want to be clear, you can go to my private tutoring class”. Another student indicated that the teacher “did not allow” students to do exercises in government class even though time was available. Instead when the teachers had completed the content they simply closed the lesson:

Some teachers don't give us exercises even though they have already finished the [government] lesson.... They allowed the students to leave school instead. I think they should give the students small appropriate exercises.

A further element concerned coverage of the syllabus in private lessons ahead of the government classes. As explained by one student, the teacher:

usually teaches the lesson at private tutoring before the government class. Then when the teacher covers that lesson in the government class, the teacher calls on students from private tutoring to solve the problems because the students who do not attend private tutoring do not know how to solve them. As a result, we couldn't understand and the teacher didn't explain it well.... [The teachers engage in] kinds of trick in order to encourage the students to study in the private tutoring with them.

Granting higher marks to tutored students was interpreted as another marketing trick. Another student explained that:

students who study in the extra lessons will get higher scores than the students who don't study in the extra lessons. Teachers will add more scores to the students who study in the extra lessons.

Teachers also recognised this practice. As recounted by one:

Usually the students who attend private tutoring are given high scores even if their [real] scores are not good. But the students who don't study in the private tutoring don't get the scores.

In these cases, teachers were using their power to set and grade internal tests, even though the signals sent by those tests might not be consistent with the scores eventually received by the students on the national examinations. The above quotations about extra scores refer to students who are receiving lessons from their own teachers. The dynamics in the case of lessons from other teachers may be different; but still the parallel lessons inevitably have a backwash on government classes.

A further component of what students gained in the private lessons was a more client-oriented approach. During private lessons, teachers tended to be more informal and flexible, and were more willing to help individuals. They recognised that they were in a marketplace, and that the students had a choice of not joining the private classes or perhaps of joining the classes offered by a different teacher.

5. Implications for Policy Makers

The existence of parallel private lessons is very problematic. Cambodia should aim for a system in which government schooling is enough and in which students do not feel the need for extra classes.

In order to achieve this, policy makers need to consider:

- *The number of hours in the school day, and the number of days in the school year.* Schools and teachers need enough time to complete the curriculum with the necessary exercises. The authorities should extend both the school day and the number of days in the school year.
- *Teachers' salaries.* Teachers commonly push their students to receive private classes in order to earn extra incomes. They have done this, with some justification, on the

grounds that their salaries have been low and that periodic salary raises have been inadequate and rapidly eroded by inflation. In April 2016 the government did make a new significant increase. This could perhaps be used as a form of 'social contract' to persuade teachers to take their regular duties more seriously. The government budget is of course constrained, and cannot easily be raised to the level at which teachers would feel satisfied without any supplementary incomes. Nevertheless, a strong case remains for raising teachers' salaries (in real terms, i.e. not just through inflation) so that teachers have less need and justification for pushing students into private classes.

- *Teachers tutoring their own students.* The practice of teachers giving extra lessons to their own students is very problematic. It creates too close a link between government and private classes, and contributes to corruption in which teachers deliberately withhold content from government classes and deliberately inflate the grades of students who receive private lessons. It is not possible at the present time to prohibit government teachers from providing tutoring, but they can at least be prohibited from tutoring their own students.

6. Implications for School Managers

Policies at the provincial and national levels have an important place, but even more important may be the policies and practices of school managers. The research asked students and teachers what their school principals and other managers felt about private classes. Most respondents indicated that the school managers at least tolerated the practice, and that some actively encouraged it because (a) it promoted the learning of (some) students, and (b) it provided supplementary incomes for teachers who were generally considered to be inadequately remunerated by the government.

Nevertheless, school managers should consider the negative dimensions of parallel private lessons, including the impact on students who cannot afford the fees, the internal inequalities when certain teachers demand certain classes and neglect others, and the inefficiencies in use of both students' and teachers' time. With such matters in mind, school managers should consider:

- *Prohibition of teachers providing extra lessons to their own students.* Even if the provincial and/or national governments have not (yet) made a policy on the matter, schools can have their own policies. Indeed this is common in other countries. Action is taken first at the school level to avoid the corrupting influences of teachers receiving income from tutoring their own students.

- *Encouraging teachers to be sympathetic to low-income students.* In the questionnaire responses from teachers, over half (56.1%) indicated that they allowed children from low-income families to receive private classes at reduced price or even free of charge. This seems a desirable practice which shows sensitivity to the social inequalities.
- *Managing balances in deployment of teachers.* If left to market forces, aggressive teachers may demand the senior classes in order to increase the supply of students receiving tutoring, and the high-demand subjects may squeeze out the low demand ones. School managers should monitor these matters and secure appropriate balances.
- *Advising and listening to parents.* The students' families are major stakeholders, and do not always make the best decisions. For example, parents approach the teachers who are already teaching their children, asking them to provide additional private lessons. This creates a conflict of interest and inequities within the system. School managers can brief parents on the issues, and can also listen to their own perspectives and suggestions about ways forward.
- *Sharing insights with other schools.* Issues are complex, and are best discussed openly rather than hidden away. School Managers can gain a lot from sharing with peers. Although each school is to some extent different, they all have commonalities in the generic themes and in possible ways forward.

7. Conclusion

This report has presented only the summary of a rich data set and made some initial suggestions about the implications. The research has confirmed that the phenomenon of parallel private lessons needs much more attention at both school and higher levels.

References

- Bray, Mark & Bunly, Seng (2005): *Balancing the Books: Household Financing of Basic Education in Cambodia*. Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, The University of Hong Kong and Washington DC: The World Bank. [Also available in Khmer]
- Bray, Mark; Kobakhidze, Nutsa; Liu Junyan & Zhang Wei (2016): 'The Internal Dynamics of Privatised Public Education: Fee-charging Supplementary Tutoring Provided by Teachers in Cambodia'. *International Journal of Educational Development*, Vol.49 in press.
- Bray, Mark & Lykins, Chad (2012): *Shadow Education: Private Supplementary Tutoring and its Implications for Policy Makers in Asia*. Mandaluyong City: Asian Development Bank and Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, The University of Hong Kong.
- Bray, Mark; Zhang, Wei; Kobakhidze, Magda Nutsa & Liu, Junyan (2015): 'Researching Private Supplementary Tutoring in Cambodia: Contexts, Instruments and Approaches', in Bray, Mark; Kwo, Ora & Jokić, Boris (eds.), *Researching Private Supplementary Tutoring: Methodological Lessons from Diverse Cultures*. Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, The University of Hong Kong, and Dordrecht: Springer, pp.219-244.
- Brehm, William C.; Silova, Iveta & Tuot, Mono (2012): *The Public-Private Education System in Cambodia: The Impact and Implications of Complementary Tutoring*. Budapest: Education Support Program, Open Society Foundations.
- Dawson, Walter (2009): 'The Tricks of the Teacher: Shadow Education and Corruption in Cambodia', in Heyneman, Stephen P. (ed.), *Buying Your Way into Heaven: Education and Corruption in International Perspective*. Rotterdam: Sense, pp.51-74.
- Jokić, Boris (ed.) (2013): *Emerging from the Shadow: A Comparative Qualitative Exploration of Private Tutoring in Eurasia*. Zagreb: Network of Education Policy Centers.
- NGO Education Partnership (2007): *The Impact of Informal School Fees on Family Expenditure*. Phnom Penh: NGO Education Partnership.
- UNDP (2014): *Curbing Private Tutoring and Informal Fees in Cambodia's Basic Education*. Phnom Penh: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).