

## **Public Education Versus Private Tutoring in Sri Lanka: Who is Contributing More?**

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### **Introduction**

Private tutoring, also known as ‘shadow education’ is a globally expanding phenomenon (Byun et. al. 2018). In Sri Lanka, supplementary private tutoring has long been a pervasive part of many students’ everyday experiences (Bray 2003). Even though the Sri Lankan government spends a huge amount of money per student (Rs. 11,804 in 2015 and Rs.11, 357 in 2016) for public education, many Sri Lankan children start attending private tuition beginning from the Grade Five scholarship examination to the G.C.E A/L examination (Cole 2017). Among Sri Lankan students, private tutoring demand is very high. In 1990, it was estimated that 75 percent of G.C.E (A/L) students were attending private tuition classes. The proportion was 62 percent among G.C.E (A.L) arts students, 67 percent for G.C.E (A.L) commerce students and 92 percent among G.C.E (A.L) science students in 1990 (De Silva 1994). Empirical literature on private tutoring is growing; however whether shadow education indeed matters for academic achievement is still unclear and needs further analysis (Byun 2014: 54; Cole 2017). In Sri Lanka, the government always provides education at public cost while people also always clamor for free education. In such a situation, private tutoring is escalating. As a result, household expenditure for private tutoring is also increasing. It seems that parents enroll their students in public schools while sending them to learn in informal fee-paid out-of-school classes. As a result, parents have to spend much money on private tutoring. However, there is a lack of knowledge regarding this area. Therefore this study is an attempt to assess the contribution of public schools and private tutoring classes on students’ academic performance and to estimate household expenditure for both public school education and private tutoring.

## Objectives

The study assesses some selected aspects of public school education versus private tutoring for school level education. The objectives of the study are: to determine the individual contribution of both public schools and private tutoring classes to students' academic performance; to estimate per student expenditure borne by households for private tutoring; and to ascertain reasons for the demand for private tutoring.

## Methodology

To achieve the objectives of the study, data was collected regarding public schools, private tutoring classes, student performance and households. In addition, information on attendance of students and the extent of teaching (the coverage of subject matter) in public schools and private tuition classes, and household expenditure for private tutoring were also collected. In this regard, a sample of 100 students who sat for the G.C.E (O.L) examination in December 2017 and 300 students who completed their G.C.E. (A.L) examination in August 2017 were randomly selected. The G.C.E (A.L) students selected represent four subject streams; i.e. Arts, Science, Technology and Commerce. All these samples were selected from among those who enrolled in public schools in Colombo District which represents the highest student population (23.3%) according to the School Census 2016. In addition, selected public sector officials of the Department of Education, principals of selected schools, Officials of private tuition classes and well-known teachers who conduct private tuition classes were interviewed in order to collect relevant data. In the case of input and output data, student performance is not separately available for public schools and private tutoring. It is available as an added variable for both sectors, and student participation can be estimated separately for both sectors. Considering this situation, the following simple linear model was adopted to determine the contribution of both public schools and private tutoring to student performance.

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{1i} + \beta_2 X_{2i} + U_i$$

$Y_i$  is the  $i^{\text{th}}$  student's academic performance,  $X_{1i}$  is the time period the  $i^{\text{th}}$  student spent in studying in his or her public school,  $X_{2i}$  is the time of the  $i^{\text{th}}$  student spent in studying in his or her tutoring class/classes,  $\beta_i$  are the parameters to be estimated and  $U_i$  is the residual term. Based on the above proposed model explained above, linear, log linear and reciprocal regression

models were estimated respectively taking total marks obtained by each student for his/her G.C.E (O.L) subjects studied in his private tuition class and Z-score each student obtained for his/her G.C.E.(A.L) examination as dependent variables. In addition to these models, descriptive statistics were used in estimating household expenditure for education.

## **Results and Discussion**

Out of all G.C.E (O.L) subjects studied in private tuition classes by students, tuition fee is very high for French, Western Music, English Literature, Art, Dancing and IT. However, when compulsory subjects for the G.C.E (O.L) are considered, tuition fee is the highest for mathematics, followed by science. Monthly tuition fee at G.C.E (O.L) for both mathematics and science are respectively greater than monthly per student expenditure borne by government for students in public schools. According to estimated values for quantity demanded from students in private tuition classes for each subject at G.C.E (O.L) it was found that both mathematics and sciences subjects are ranked highest. As such, higher class fee and higher demand for mathematics and science are consistent. In the case of G.C.E (A.L) monthly tuition fee of all the subjects of all streams is greater than Rs. 1000 which is equal to the monthly per-student expenditure borne by the government at present for public school education.

Inquiries were made of sampled public school students at both G.C.E (O/L) and (A.L) of eleven reasons regarding their learning in private tuition classes. Out of these reasons three were found as most influencing ones. According to the descending order of preference of students those reasons can be stated as “in the private tuition classes there is repetition of the subject matter taught in public schools and therefore tuition classes support them to understand academic matters easily; distribution of handouts and notes in the private tuition classes; and adoption of better teaching methods in fee-paid out-of-school classes”. Total number of hours spent studying all the subjects in both private tuition class/es and public schools were separately included as independent variables. Parameters of tuition time in private classes are highly significant with the positive sign and private tuition classes could be identified as a significant contributor in determination of student performance at both G.C.E (O.L) and (A.L).

## Conclusion

The paper concludes that private tuition classes contributes to the knowledge of students in public schools in Sri Lanka, and parents of school children spend extensively on fee-paid out-of-school classes. Even though free education is still provided in Sri Lanka, parents paid much more money on educating their children. In the case of policy recommendations, in order to produce productive results through market forces, the rapidly escalating private tutoring industry emphasizes the requirement of monitoring of the same by the government. Students attending private tuition classes understand that teaching quality is better in these classes than that in public schools. This proposes public schools to look for more attractive teaching methods. Finally, higher demand for informal fee-paid out-of-school education puts a big question mark in presence of free school education.

## References

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