In search of a school façade: Explaining the centrality of private tutoring among high-performing students in Egypt

Mohamed Alaa Abdel-Moneim [1]

Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University, Egypt

A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

This article contributes to the debates about the priorities of education reform in Egypt and approaches to reducing the students' reliance on private tutoring. It presents the results of five focus group discussions with first year students in the Faculty of Economics and Political Science (FEPS), Cairo University, to understand their experiences with private tutoring during the high stakes final year of high school. The article concludes that private tutoring represents a façade of the pedagogical, social, and emotional support functions that schools should perform. This contributes to our understanding of why private tutoring in Egypt has come to supplant, rather than supplement, formal schooling.

1. Introduction

For decades, out-of-school tutoring in Egypt has been both visible and illegal. Over the years, it has strengthened its *de facto* presence not just as a supplement to official schooling, but increasingly as a substitute to it. Especially since the publication of Bray's (2009) study on "shadow education," comparative education literature has noted that private tutoring has developed to supplant, rather than supplement, formal schooling in several countries. Examples include countries as diverse as France, India, Trinidad and Tobago (Bhorkar and Bray, 2018; Bray, 2009), Hong Kong (Koh, 2014), and Egypt (Hartmann, 2013). This shadow system had originally started as a remedy to the formal system. Over time, it came to replace formal schooling, influenced by several factors including social norms, peer pressure, the stress of high-stakes centralized exams, and poor education quality (Bhorkar and Bray, 2018).

A number of studies considered whether private tutoring could improve student learning, especially for low performing students (Dang and Rogers, 2008; Mischo and Haag, 2002). Others, however, noted the negative, even devastating, effects of private tutoring. Primarily, private tutoring renders free education meaningless, as parents have to pay a significant percentage of their incomes to out-of-school tutoring (Assaad and Krafft, 2015; Bray and Kwo, 2013; Hartmann, 2013). Furthermore, since richer families are in a better position to pay for private tutoring, it therefore reduces equity as well as class mobility (Assaad and Krafft, 2015). Other shortcomings include shirking by teachers and students

(Bray and Kwo, 2013; Sieverding et al., 2019), intimidating students by their teachers to force them to enroll in private classes (Ille and Peacey, 2019; Sobhy, 2012), and encouraging rote learning, and teaching to the test (Abdel-Moneim, 2015).

As in many other countries, the percentage of students engaged in private tutoring in Egypt increases with grade levels. Estimates of the spread of private tutoring among secondary school students put the percentage somewhere between 42 % (Krafft, 2015) and 60 % (Elbadawy et al., 2007). In its "Supporting Egypt Education Reform" Project Document, the World Bank estimates that 75 % of students in the final year of secondary education in Egypt takes private tutoring (The World Bank., 2017).

On the other hand, the quality of education in Egypt has become particularly alarming. Quality is a complicated concept with both quantitative and qualitative dimensions, and Egypt has generally scored low especially on measures reflecting quality. There have been some quantitative improvements such as increasing access to basic education, achieving gender equality, and relatively favorable student-teacher ratios (Abdel-Moneim, 2015; Krafft, 2015; The World Bank., 2005). These improvements, however, mask significant inequalities and inefficiencies.

Although Egypt has achieved close to universal access to primary education (99 % net enrollment in 2016), and has achieved gender parity at primary and secondary levels, disparities persist particularly along geographic and income lines. For example, there is still low (31 %) and inequitable access to quality early childhood education. Children in

Lower Egypt (north) have roughly 60 % access rate to pre-school services, compared to only 27 % in frontier governorates. Similarly, access to pre-primary education is 50 % among the highest wealth quintile, and almost 34 % among the lowest wealth quintile (The World Bank., 2017). Spending on private tutoring is a substantial and rising share of budgets of Egyptian households, which further disadvantages poorer students (Assaad and Krafft, 2015; The World Bank., 2017).

In terms of spending, the 2014 Constitution stipulates that the state be committed to allocating no less than 4% of GDP to education spending, which should gradually increase to reach "global rates."[2] The government, however, is still behind in terms of achieving this goal, as the 2018/19 budget allocated approximately 2.5 % only for the pre-university education budget (Abdel-Wahab, 2018). Signs of inefficiency are also paramount. These include grade repetition (5.8 % at the primary level, and 11.2 % for secondary students) (Assaad and Krafft, 2015; The World Bank., 2017).

Furthermore, breaking down the education budget shows that the majority of spending (approximately 84 % on average during the period between FY2008/2009 and 2013/2014) was allocated to wages (Husseiny and Amin, 2018), which leaves less opportunity to investing in hardware, teacher training, etc. The World Bank. (2017) estimates the percentage of pre-tertiary educational allocations to employees compensation at 94 % over the six year period (2011/12–2017/18), followed by purchases of other goods and services that constitute approximately 5% of allocations.

The education system also suffers from clear signs of quality deficiencies. One in five students in grade 3 is functionally illiterate (cannot read a single word). As a result, only half of Egypt's youth who have attained five years of schooling can read or write, and just under two thirds can do basic mathematics. It is therefore not surprising that the scores of Egyptian students on international standardized exams are below international averages. In TIMMS 2015, only 47 % of grade 8 students reached the low international benchmark in mathematics, compared to an international average of 84 %; and only 42 % reached the low international benchmark in science, compared to an international average of 84 % (The World Bank., 2017). Furthermore, the 2017/2018 Global Competitiveness Report ranked Egypt 130 out of 137 countries on the quality of the education system, which actually represents a slight improvement over earlier rankings (World Economic Forum., 2014, 2017)

In an attempt to reform the K-12 education system, the MoE championed an Education Reform Strategy in 2017. The key elements of the strategy are the expansion of quality pre-school services, teacher training, assessment reform, and the active use of ICT (The World Bank., 2017, 2018).

Of special importance, the MoE relies on "game changers," which are priority initiatives that the Ministry perceives as critical in the implementation and success of its strategy. One key game changer is the expanded reliance on ICT for learning, teaching, assessment, and data collection (The World Bank., 2017, 2018). The MoE distributed tablets (Tawfeek, 2017) and created an online knowledge bank (https://www.ekb.eg/) to allow students to choose their own curricula and preferred learning mode (El Zayat, 2020).

The closure of all centers providing group tutoring as part of the precautionary measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic starting in Spring 2020 (Al-Youm Al-Sabe'., 2020a) presented an opportunity for the MoE to highlight the importance of its ICT-focused reforms (Al-Youm Al-Sabe'., 2020b).[3] However, private tutoring also responded

to the closures through moving to online teaching.[4] It is therefore too early to estimate the impact of the ICT-based MoE reforms.

Critics of the MoE strategy cited the nominal attention to teacher preparedness and training, reliance on international companies such as Pearson with mixed success records globally, inefficient spending on ICT equipment without clear goals, and the lack of much-needed attention to investing in school facilities and improving access. These critics echo criticisms to neoclassical economic reforms in Egypt that led to state withdrawal from social sectors, such as health and education. They also echo the perception that using ICT in education should support creative pedagogy, and that it cannot be a substitute for schools and teachers (OECD, 2016). The fact that many of these criticisms were directed by education experts suggests that the strategy lacked the necessary societal debates for such a huge undertaking, despite the MoE's insistence that it had consulted various social groups in the preparation of its strategy initiative (See for example: AlMasry AlYoum., 2017; Sobhy, 2018a, 2018b; 2018c, 2019).

This article aims to contribute to these ongoing debates. It focuses on a narrow niche of high performing students in the Faculty of Economics and Political Science (FEPS), Cairo University, one of the most prestigious tertiary institutions in Egypt. It attempts to unpack the out-of-school tutoring market for this group to understand its mechanisms and explain its ability to manage the large number of students who find it as a substitute to formal schooling. In this regard, the study is replicating previous comparative literature in Egypt and internationally regarding the drivers and organization of private tutoring, as well as the social interactions taking place in this market. Therefore, the question of this research is not only why students take private tutoring, but also what distinguishes and supports the institution of private tutoring?

The high school exit exam, or *Thanaweyya 'amma*, which literally translates into "general secondary," is a key determinant of the motivations and orientations of students and teachers toward the education system. Scores on this high stakes centralized exam are the key determinant of the students' ability to join tertiary education, which is key to finding "good jobs" in the formal sector and, for young men, better chances in the "marriage market" (Singerman, 2007). As part of its reform strategy, the MoE announced the replacement of this exam with a grade point average over the three years of high school. This score would be used in conjunction with university admissions tests that the Ministry of Higher Education would develop and administer. The goal is to align the interests and orientations of students and teachers towards a focus on skills rather than rote learning (The World Bank., 2017).

---

[2] Egypt Constitution of 2014, Article 19. Available through: https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt_2014.pdf.

[3] The Minister of Education recorded a video, posted on the MoE website, to explain how to utilize the Edmodo platform to connect students, parents, and teachers virtually. This video is available through: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=my14ngo5r3M.

[4] A number of tutors and tutoring centers have also reacted to the pandemic through shifting to online teaching. For example, an online website called *Mozakrety* (my studying) (https://mozakrety.com/Home/Index) allows a platform for registered tutors to teach online. The website generates a code for each student so that he/she can pay through Fawry – an e-payment platform (https://fawry.com/aboutus). *Mozakrety* also provides free services such as exam questions and answers. Some tutors created their own Youtube channels (see for example: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8v6mNNIajKQ7m MXge0ov9Q?fbclid=IwAR1YmEcS0IC5tsyGbresk065fF9SiixvYXpL71_EQh RNZPor3Y1vkCESb_Y), or facebook pages (see for example: https://www.yout ube.com/channel/UCOMmmR5J0ndQaIPm2uG72TQ?fbclid=IwAR3Ut91SgS a7yBGbJVLBQL4pV39omcp-6_iXu20YCwxSAKKEIgKFfe5_9vU) where they posted their sessions. Others simply shared videos on Youtube without having a specific channel or facebook page (see for example: https://www.youtube.com /watch?v=zVK51Waw2eA&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR2qpv-SQrVesPlBt 6l_A250mV8IomxsOAh673RqHjbYNBhjOMtI9Ym2KeE). Those who posted free Youtube videos received their fees through increasing the prices of handouts and other study material that they made available in designated bookstores (based on personal observations). Some tutors increased their income through Youtube commercials (for example, almost all videos posted on the Youtube channel below by an Arabic-language tutor include a number of commercials, which suggests that paid commercials could be a source of income for this tutor. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7fHSfm6zxGJYC-P7RMzX7w/videos).

Given this centrality of the *Thanaweyya 'amma* exam, this article focuses on examining the institution of private tutoring and students' attitudes toward it at the final year of high school (*Thanaweyya 'amma*). Although the literature on out-of-school tutoring in Egypt addressed the perceptions of students, teachers, and other stakeholders (for example: Hartmann, 2008a; Herrera and Torres, 2006; Sobhy, 2012), the MoE approach to designing and implementing its strategy arguably did not pay as much attention to surveying the opinion of students. This is evidenced by the op-eds cited earlier and the absence of official reports documenting such surveys.

This research sheds light on these unheard voices; i.e., students' voices. Egypt is a unique case in terms of household spending on education, where the wealthiest households spend a larger share of their incomes on education compared to those at the lower income quintile (Rizk and Abou-Ali, 2016). Since education spending is positively correlated with success in high school and enrollment in tertiary education (Assaad, 2013), this population of students who were able to join FEPS could be considered a socioeconomic elite group, despite socioeconomic variations within this group which the research in this article recognizes and attempts to control for. Therefore, the results of this article apply mainly to those who "have made it through" the high school system in Egypt, and do not necessarily apply to the TVET students or others who did not reach university education.

I utilize a theoretical framework derived from neoinstitutionalism to explain the values, interests, and power bases embedded in the institutional setting of private tutoring. In the following section, I discuss private tutoring in Egypt, then move to discussing the theoretical framework and research methodology based on focus group discussions. I then discuss the results of these discussions and conclude with lessons learned and reflection on education reform needs in Egypt.

2. Private tutoring in the Egyptian educational system

Private tutoring in Egypt is illegal.[5] Official attempts to implement the law against private tutoring have failed to achieve meaningful results. One interesting example is that of the Governor of Al-Sharkeyya Governorate, who attempted to implement the law by shutting down all Private Tutoring Centers (thereafter PTCs) and fining their owners. He also took other steps to support in-school tutoring. In response,

demonstrations by students and parents ensued.[6] The confrontation ended up with the Governor's resignation less than a month after confrontations started (Fayed, 2017). This example shows that the sources of power of the institution of private tutoring do not stem only from the strength of the business interests who stand to gain from it, but also from popular support.

Tutoring in Egypt takes place as either private tutoring, mainly a result of direct interaction/transactions between the student(s) and the tutor, or in the form of support group tutoring provided by schoolteachers after school hours in order to provide extra assistance to students who feel they need it (Elbadawy et al., 2007; Krafft, 2015). The later form, however, is perceived as less efficient (Assaad and Krafft, 2015) and, contrary to the former type of tutoring, has remained relatively constant over the past few decades in terms of student enrollment (Krafft, 2015).

PTCs are main avenues for providing tutoring in Egypt. The focus group discussions conducted for this article as well as previous empirical literature show that they appear in multiple forms based on geographic location and socioeconomic status. Hartmann (2008b) defines PTCs as private for-profit entities created to provide space for group tutoring for multiple tutors in multiple classes. Since PTCs are officially illegal, they are either not registered as an education institution in the first place, or registered as an educational center providing training courses in languages and computer literacy (Fayed, 2017). The fieldwork conducted for this article shows that the financial arrangement between center owners and tutors varies mainly based on the status of the tutor. In some cases, the center receives a percentage of the cost of each session. In others, especially with more established tutors, students pay the price of each session to the tutor while paying a separate price, usually per semester, to the center.

While Hartmann (2008) finds group tutoring in centers to be a cheaper option for students in lower and middle-income urban areas who cannot afford private tutoring, the focus group discussions conducted for this article show that PTCs are a main avenue of schooling for elite students who are able, both academically and financially, to succeed in the system. Larger PTCs in affluent urban areas, where famous tutors teach, are the most expensive.

3. Theoretical framework

The widespread practice of private tutoring among high performing students in Egypt reflects cultural values, beliefs, and perceptions, as well as institutionalized practices supported by powerful groups. The cultural part includes how parents and students define the value and purpose of education, and the approach to schooling that corresponds to this definition. The power aspect reflects the importance of the status of the providers of private tutoring, as well as state-society relations, and individual and collective agency that determine the acceptance and rejection of certain institutional forms and their survival potential (Astiz, 2006; Wiseman et al., 2014). Therefore, any attempt to address the phenomenon of private tutoring in Egypt should understand the institutional setting of private tutoring through unpacking its organizational structures as well as its supporting values, norms, and interests, and the perceived social status of private tutors.

---

[5] The Minister of Education Decree 592/1998 banned all employees in the administrative and teaching force in all K-12 schools and educational governorates, including those working in private educational institutions, from providing private tutoring to any student or group of students. The only exception is formal group tutoring provided in schools during designated after-school hours. Ministerial Decree 592/1998 is available (in Arabic) through: http s://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbWFppb nxuYXNyZWxudWJhdGVhY2hlcnNuYW1lc3xneDozNTYzMWM4OTIwMGFkkY TE0. Access date: March 22, 2020. Furthermore, the Prime Minister's Decree 428/2013 stipulates that the Minister of Education and the respective Governor (the top administrator of any of the 27 governorates in Egypt, and is appointed by the President) have the right to send any of the employees in the education sector to administrative investigation for practicing private tutoring inside or outside the school, or in any other building whether public or private. The Prime Minister Decree 428/2013 is available (in Arabic) through: http://www. laweg.net/Default.aspx?action=ViewActivePages&ItemID=84082&Type=6. Access date: March 22, 2020.

[6] For newspaper reports on the confrontation between the Governor of Al-Sharkeyya and PTCs, see the following reports (in Arabic): AlYoum AlSabe'. https://www.youm7.com/story/2016/5/20/%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84% D9%81%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%88-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84% D8%B5%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A7-%D8%B9%D8%A8% D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%85% D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1% D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%A8% D9%82-%D9%8A%D9%83%D8%B4%D9%81-%D9%81%D9%89/2725475. AlWatan. https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/830320.

Institutional analysis provides a helpful framework for understanding the factors leading to the survival or change in institutional settings. From one perspective, a significant percentage of social science research is institutional, as the majority of social scientists attempt to explain human behavior within the boundaries of existing institutions, defined as the rules and norms governing human behavior (Ingram and Clay, 2000; North, 1990, 1991).

In organization theory, the resurgence of interest in institutional analysis is often attributed to the mid-twentieth century work of Selznick (1949, 1996) and associates such as Gouldner (1954) and Dalton (1959). Starting the 1970s, the neoinstitutional approach presented in the work of Meyer and colleagues had important influences on comparative education research (Meyer, 1971; Meyer and Hannan, 1979; Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Meyer et al., 1980; Ramirez, 2006).

In this article, I combine elements from the neoinstitutional analysis of the 1940s and the later neoinstitutional scholarship of the 1970s and 1980s. The 1940s neoinstitutional analysis, sometimes called the "older" neoinstitutionalism, focuses on the effects of interests, power, and negotiated institutional arrangements (Selznick, 1996). The 1970s and 1980s neoinstitutionalism focuses on the role of norms and values in creating and maintaining institutional structures not necessarily through power dynamics but rather through ideological appeal (Abdel-Moneim, 2020; Meyer and Rowan, 1978). The starting point is the argument that, in order for institutions to survive, they do not only need to serve the interests of powerful elites, but they also need to fit within the core values of their societies (Abdel-Moneim, 2020; Bidwell, 2006).

I therefore frame my analysis, and the focus group discussions, in a way that allows for achieving three key purposes. The first is to provide an analysis of the organizational setting of private tutoring in order to understand the values and constructed realities embedded in these organizational structures; as well as the negotiated settlement among parents, students, teachers, and, implicitly, the government, which had accepted these practices for decades. Second, an analysis of the social values, beliefs, and norms directing the orientations of high performing students and their parents toward the education system, hence strengthening and legitimizing this institutional setting. Finally, the study aims to understand what private tutoring provides that schools fail to provide, as perceived by this group of high performing students. The paper therefore asks three key questions:

(1) From the supply side perspective: How do tutors manage the teaching process in the out-of-school tutoring market?

This question helps understand the organization, sources of power, and values embedded in the institution of private tutoring among high performing students, including how they perceive education and its purpose, and how they define "good schooling"

(2) From the demand side perspective: What are the main beliefs/perceptions that students, and parents, hold regarding the education sector?

This question helps understand the societal norms that legitimize the institution of private tutoring.

(3) What does the out-of-school tutoring market provide to students that official schooling does not?

This question sheds light on the societal interests and real needs for the institution of private tutoring despite its many shortcomings.

4. Methodology

I conducted five focus group discussions with first year students from FEPS, Cairo University. The value of focus group discussions lies in the ability to observe group interactions to produce data and insights on topics specifically selected by the researcher (Morgan and Spanish, 1984; Summers et al., 1990). According to Morgan (1996), focus groups is an approach that can provide voice to marginalized groups and allow participants to feel empowered, hence encouraging a more enthusiastic participation in research. Private tutoring is a fresh memory for first year students, and they are arguably better able to judge this experience now than during the time when they were in high school because they can see the experience in hindsight.

The choice of FEPS in particular stems from a number of considerations. FEPS is the top school in Egypt (in terms of the High School grades required for admission) for students in the Literature section of secondary education. That is, this school requires the highest threshold score in *Thanaweyya 'amma* for students to be able to join. Students from the Mathematics and Science tracks in *Thanaweyya 'amma* are also able to join, although the threshold scores are relatively lower than those required to join the top schools in the Mathematics and Science tracks, mainly the Schools of Engineering, Medicine, and Pharmacy. Therefore, students in the first year in FEPS are likely graduates of all three tracks of the general secondary school system in Egypt.

Design issues in focus groups research include sampling, generating and analyzing data, and checking the credibility of the analysis. Regarding sampling, I used purposeful sampling based on socioeconomic status and gender. Empirical evidence suggests that socioeconomic background plays an important role in determining students' educational experience (Broer et al., 2019; Coleman, 1966). FEPS has three sections: Arabic, English, and French. These sections differ mainly in the language used to conduct the majority of instruction, as well as tuition fees. Tuition fees for the Arabic section are nominal, and it usually includes students from Arabic public schools. The English section is more expensive, and requires a certain level of English language proficiency. It therefore attracts students who graduated from private language or international schools,[7] or public schools' graduates who can afford to pay the extra tuition and have at least a fair level of English language proficiency. French section students are mostly graduates of French Language schools, which are relatively expensive and limited in number. Table A1 in the Appendix shows the numbers of first year students in AY 2018/19 in each section and tuition fees.

Membership in these three sections in FEPS is therefore a good proxy for socioeconomic status. Membership in the Arabic section could be a proxy for low/lower middle socioeconomic class. On the other hand, although they represent a combination of students from public, private, and international schools, students in the English section could be a proxy for the middle/upper middle classes. French section students represent an elite social category.

Since the Arabic section is the largest in terms of numbers (approximately 64 % of students in this cohort), I conducted three focus groups with students in this section: two for female students and one for male students. This division is a result of the fact that the majority of students in FEPS are female. Given their significantly smaller number, I conducted only two focus group discussions with English section students; one for females and the other for males. There were only 36 students in the French section (less than 5% of the students in this cohort), and it was therefore difficult to find enough students to join the focus group discussions. I therefore did not conduct interviews with this group given

---

[7] International schools offer international school leaving diplomas, such as the American high school diploma, the British International General Certificate of Secondary Education diploma (IGCSE), etc. Two students in the study group obtained an IGCSE diploma.

their significantly smaller number and the fact that they only represent a small proportion of schools in the Egyptian educational landscape.

The total number of participants is 34. Table A2 in the Appendix shows the number of students in each group. As expected, all students in the English section, with only two exceptions, graduated from either experimental,[8] private, or international schools. The exceptions are two male students; one of them graduated from a public school while the other graduated from one of the Nile Schools.[9] On the other hand, all 19 Arabic section participants graduated from public schools, and three of them came from governorates outside Cairo, namely Qena in the South, and AlSharkeyya and AlMenoufeyya in the North, all in the females' groups. Two other students from the Arabic section, one male and the other female, came from mainly rural areas in Giza governorate, which is part of the Greater Cairo region.

Two female senior students, in their early 20s, volunteered for the roles of moderator and observer. Given Egypt's rather conservative culture, female moderators could comfortably moderate both female and male focus groups, whereas male moderators could not moderate female groups. This was confirmed during the first focus group with male students from the English section since they were equally able to share their experiences about some sensitive issues, such as gender-based misconduct in PTCs, as the female students' groups.

The two volunteers rotated the roles of moderator and observer throughout the five focus group discussions. I encouraged them to dress casual, as they would normally do on an average day in college, to facilitate establishing rapport with the participating students. In order to allow comparability across the five focus groups (Morgan, 1996), I developed an interview protocol composed of a set of questions designed in a way so as to allow "funneling" into the three key questions guiding the research (Morgan, 1996). I pretested the interview questions with a sample of students from FEPS.

To avoid restricting the discussions, I encouraged the moderator to take an active role in probing questions and encouraging participation (Ansay et al., 2004). I therefore made sure that both the moderator and observer share the research goals and understand the topics that need probing. I listened to a sample of the recorded discussions to verify that the moderator has performed this role.

All discussions were conducted in Arabic, audio recorded, and transcribed by the moderator and the observer, each transcribing two discussions. A third assistant transcribed the fifth focus group discussion in order to speed up the transcription process. The moderators were instructed to call the name of each participant before he/she speaks to allow distinguishing speakers, hence facilitating the transcription and, later, the analysis.

In analyzing the transcribed discussions, the guiding principle was that the goal of focus groups as a research method is to interpret the meaning that participants construct from their personal and shared experiences, and to make sure that these interpretations are based on the constructed realities of the participants, not those of the researcher

(Brotherson and Goldstein, 1992). As a start, I read the transcribed discussions, and placed the answers under three categories based on the three key questions guiding this analysis. I then created analytic categories through coding specific statements or meanings across the focus groups. The categories that showed a level of internal consistency within and among groups served as the key analytic categories for interpreting the meaning participants attribute to their experiences.

I utilized two key approaches for checking the credibility of my interpretations; i.e. that my portrayal of the constructed realities of participants are not directly influenced by the constructed reality of the researcher (Brotherson and Goldstein, 1992). The first are meetings with the research assistants after each focus group to discuss the main issues raised during the discussion and their interpretations; and to take notes. The second is member checks – contacting selected focus groups' participants to present them with the analytic categories that emerged through the discussions and get their feedback about them (Brotherson and Goldstein, 1992).

The focus group discussions took place between March and May 2019. The average time for the discussion was 75 minutes. In order to maintain anonymity, I am using pseudonyms whenever referring to any quote by a specific student. I omitted all tutors' names that students mentioned during the discussions.

5. Managing out-of-school tutoring (the supply side perspective)

5.1. Education provision

Education provision in *Thanaweyya 'amma* for this group of high performing students took place in the out-of-school tutoring market; formal schooling is almost totally absent. Almost all participants took private tutoring in almost all subjects, except for the subjects that did not count toward the final grade, such as Religion and Statistics. Some students even mentioned that it is not uncommon to take more than one tutoring class per subject. The few exceptions to the tutoring-in-all-subjects rule were students in the British International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) system and the one student in the Nile School. For these students, the school was available to provide teaching, and the students trusted that the evaluation system requires more analytical skills than memorization. Only one student in the Arabic Section said that she had private tutoring in only three classes.

Other than the IGCSE and Nile School students, almost all other participants noted that they went to school approximately 2–3 times throughout the *Thanaweyya 'amma* school year. All General track students had to make a visit to their school in order to fill in the form required by the MoE to sit in the final exam; the purposes of the other visits were mainly to pay the fees, meet friends, and get the textbooks. In very few cases in the Arabic section interviews, some students said that they found teachers in their schools who were willing to teach during class time. Soha, from the English section, said she did not even know the names of her schoolteachers. Amal, in the Arabic section, said that she only went to school the first two weeks to avoid dismissal, but there were no classes to attend. When she was dismissed from school because of attendance, she and her friends ended up paying a nominal financial penalty and they were re-enrolled.[10]

Teachers went to school and provided classes only for Grades 10 and 11. The same teachers, however, did not perform their teaching assignments for Grade 12 students, possibly a result of conviction that teaching at this stage was not something the school was supposed to provide. Abdallah, a student in the English section, reflected the total absence of a role for the school for this group of students in the following note,

---

[8] Experimental schools are public schools that use English as the language of the majority of instruction, in addition to teaching a second foreign language at the preparatory level, usually either French or German. Their fees are higher than Arabic public schools, although much lower than private and international schools.

[9] According to the webpage of the Nile Schools on the MoE website, the purpose of these schools is to serve middle class families who aspire for high quality education for their children, but cannot afford to send them to international schools. The tuition fees are lower than those in international schools are. The curricula and teaching methods are developed in cooperation between the Government of Egypt and Cambridge University. The majority of teaching is conducted in English, and French is introduced in Grade 2. Nile Schools offer the Certificate of Nile International Preparatory Education (CNIPE) at the end of the preparatory level, and the Certificate of Nile International Secondary Education (CNISE) at the end of Grade 12. For more details, see: http://nes.moe.edu.eg/Docs/About_NES.pdf. Access date: April 4, 2020.

[10] *Thanaweyya 'amma* students have to be enrolled in a school in order to sit in the final exam.

"I was forced to take private tutoring. It's not about whether I like it or not. I was a public school student, and there was not even a classroom for *Thanaweyya 'amma* students."

This observation that schools did not provide education for Grade 12 students was not unique to graduates of public schools. In three of the five interviews (one of the Arabic female groups, the Arabic male and English female groups), students mentioned a common experience that they all shared with only minor differences. The shared experience revolves around going to school either to meet friends, get the school-books, try to attend classes, etc. then a teacher sees them and say, "Why are you here? Don't waste your time!" Salma, in the English section, summarized this experience by saying;

"The perception of anyone going to school is that he or she is a loser and wants to waste time… In other words, if you go to school to attend a specific class, teachers would criticize you, especially if they know you are a good student. They would tell you that it is better for you to stay at home and study."

This common experience among students in the Arabic and English sections, who attend public and private schools, reflect a general agreement among educators, parents, and students that schools are not, and should not, be responsible for education for those who want to succeed in the system.

5.1.1. The physical environment: PTCs versus small group tutoring

With few exceptions, all tutoring took place in PTCs. This observation runs counter to survey evidence using a broader representative sample, which concludes that private tutoring is more widespread, compared to group tutoring (Krafft, 2015). This suggests that PTCs represent an elite institution that replaces schools for this segment of high-performing students.

The average number of students per PTC session for the English section focus groups range from a little below 300 to 500 students per session for those having classes with one of the famous tutors. For IGCSE students, the average number of students in a PTC session is 50 students. However, the numbers of IGCSE students with famous tutors could reach 200 students per session.

The majority of students described PTCs as packed and lacking in terms of providing a safe environment conducive to learning, including proper seating and ventilation. This encouraged a number of students to enroll with tutors who were not famous in order to take their sessions with a fewer number of students.

Some other PTCs had a smaller number of students, ranging from 60 to 100 students per session, although the numbers increase significantly in revision sessions, which refer to the final sessions in which the tutor provides an overview of the course and discusses possible exam questions. The number of students in these sessions can reach up to 200. These centers usually did not have "famous" teachers.

Given the large numbers of students, especially in cases of famous tutors where the numbers are in the hundreds, usually a percentage of students never see the teacher in person during the session. The teacher is on a stage with a microphone in his or her hand. Some students would sit in front of the tutor. Others sit in different rooms watching the tutor through a screen.

One interesting observation which reflects social class differences is that at-home tutoring, as opposed to PTCs, is more widespread among students in the Arabic section. In both cases, the majority of students still go to PTCs. This observation could be attributed to the fact that Arabic section students did not put as much weight on taking classes with the "famous" or "star" teachers. Second, students from rural areas did not have the system of PTCs that was more prevalent in urban areas.

Smaller numbers in tutoring sessions were more prevalent among students from rural areas as well as lower class urban areas; the numbers in rural areas were the smallest. In the latter case, students did not go to PTCs. Instead, each teacher would designate a special place for tutoring,

such as a first floor in a building that he or she owns or rents, and can dedicate to tutoring. This is different from PTCs, which are private entities that rents space for multiple tutors in multiple subjects. Others made arrangements with the school where they teach to give classes after school hours. Based on the laws highlighted earlier, this practice is officially illegal. In these classes, the numbers of students are significantly fewer, usually in the range of 15 students, and the prices were significantly lower. The idea of "star teachers" was alien.

Final revision sessions have a special status. They are usually more expensive and include more students. In many cases, tutors and PTC owners choose to bring together students from different PTCs in the same PTC or in a more spacious building during final revisions. Arwa, from the Arabic section, said that she had final revisions in History and Geography in a large building, which seems like a movie theatre to accommodate students from six or seven PTCs at a time. Average numbers were 300–500 for famous tutors, and 30–100 for "regular" tutors. In other cases, especially when the teacher is not famous, the number could even be smaller than in regular sessions.

5.1.2. Recruiting students for out-of-school tutoring

Tutors compete for students in a relatively open market. In line with the absent role of formal schooling for this segment of high performing students, schools are no more the key avenue for recruiting students for out-of-school tutoring, although a few students in the discussions, especially from the Arabic section, mentioned that they chose to take their tutoring with teachers from their schools. Private tutors gain their reputation in the out-of-school tutoring market where students exchange information about the quality of teachers through word-of-mouth and social networking websites.

This observation runs counter to studies that used a more diversified sample, and noted that schools were avenues for recruitment when students take tutoring with their schoolteacher who might, intentionally, lower the quality of in-class teaching. Alternatively, the teacher could intimidate his or her students through verbal or even physical means, or through threatening to deprive the student from the coursework grade (Abdel-Moneim, 2015; Sobhy, 2012). Again, this deviation suggests that high performing students relied on a different paradigm of private tutoring that allowed them more freedom of choice.

One factor that facilitates this freedom of choice is the fact that in *Thanaweyya 'amma* the whole grade is based on scores in the final exam, the potential for intimidating students is therefore much lower. All participants who attended PTCs said that they pay the cost of each session right before attending, which translates into freedom of exit in case they find that the tutor is below standards. This explains the phenomenon, noted through the discussions, of tutors who are fully dedicated to out-of-school tutoring. Some of these tutors have never worked as schoolteachers. Others have resigned from their schools to focus solely on out-of-school tutoring.

This should also direct attention to the fact that out-of-school tutoring is much more rewarding for teachers. Samira, from the English section, said that some schoolteachers "would take an open leave from their school to dedicate all their time to tutoring." Amal, from the Arabic section, noted that one of her tutors used to go to school only to sign attendance, or ask someone to sign for him, and then go back to the PTC. This later example suggests the absence of accountability mechanisms by the school administration and the MoE. Soha, from the English section, recalled that she had a creative Geography schoolteacher in Grade 8 who used songs to help students with classes. She noted that this teacher did not remain in the school for long as she decided to resign from school and move to teaching *Thanaweyya 'amma* students in PTCs. The participants in the English female group agreed that tutors who feel they are "above the level of teaching in a school" would simply move to focusing on PTC tutoring instead.

This observation provides yet another example of how formal schooling and out-of-school tutoring for this group of high performing students are two competing, rather than complementary, markets. One

market, the private tutoring market, is superior in terms of attracting the individuals who have the best qualifications for teaching, whether trained or not; hence depriving formal schools from one of their key assets.

5.1.3. Star teachers

Competition is key for understanding teaching practices within the out-of-school tutoring market, and the reasons why students perceive its benefits to outweigh the costs, including even the overblown financial costs. Mary, from the English section, noted that "the tutor is keen to have you score the highest possible grades since you are part of his or her reputation." She summarized this situation by saying; "for the tutor, whether teaching in a PTC or at home, it's a business. And the tutor wants to be the top in his business."

This competition has worked in favor of the students, at least in terms of providing support, both academic and psychological. Mary noted that she had her English tutoring in a class of 15 students in her apartment. The tutor was ready to give her a free extra class by herself in case she needed to review any part of the material.

Competition among teachers for students, reputation, and status creates a phenomenon that comparative education literature has noted in a number of countries as "famous" or "star" teachers (Hartmann, 2013; Koh, 2014; Yung and Yuan, 2020). These are the main figures in teaching a specific subject in terms of teaching skills, knowledge, and reputation. All students in the focus groups agreed that a small number of teachers raise their reputation to the level of stardom.

Similar to the situation in other tutoring markets around the world, media, advertisements, and marketing, among others, are common in Egypt as tools for creating a special status for a select group of tutors who rise to achieve special fame or "stardom" (Koh, 2014; Yung and Yuan, 2020). Hartman (2013) described characteristics of tutoring with these "famous" tutors in Egypt, which include having to reserve space in their packed classes a few months before the academic year begins. All student participants in the focus groups who experienced with PTCs noted that they had to start registering with tutors no later than April in order to start tutoring classes in August. Some students had to start registering as early as January.

The focus group discussions validate these arguments. "Star Teachers" is mainly an urban phenomenon that all public and private school participants discussed to varying extents. A star teacher is a tutor who has gained reputation for his or her teaching style, selectivity regarding which students can enroll and remain in class, the performance of their students on the final exams, and their ability to predict final exam questions. These tutors only teach in PTCs since they can never teach small groups in apartments or even small PTCs. This later characteristic is an indicator not only of high demand to enroll in their classes, but also of social prestige. A few names of "star teachers" were repeatedly mentioned in all five focus groups.

Interestingly, the phenomenon of "star teachers" was also present among IGCSE students. This gives support to the claim that tutoring results from competition among students as well as social norms. Although the IGCSE is a British degree, IGCSE students in the focus group discussions noted that the degree has been "Egyptianized" – a reference to the role of culture and social norms. Hala, an IGCSE graduate from the English section, described the "star teacher" phenomenon in the IGCSE system as follows;

> "A tutor would rise to 'monopolize' a particular subject – as if he is the 'big boss' of the subject. There could be other tutors around teaching the same subject, but they are not as famous as this one person is. The thing is; in the IGCSE system, people are always threatening you that your exam 'is flying to you on an airplane, and going back for grading on an airplane.' So you have to have a tutor who understands the system in order to succeed."

This quote suggests the important role of social norms in promoting

the centrality and resilience of this system. Nadia, from a public school in AlMonoufeyya governorate, echoed the same idea when she said; "we do not have much choice. You have a couple of tutors for each subject that you have to choose from."

The fear factor, which stems from the need to compete for limited space in public universities amid the absence of government supervision of education, creates a need among students for predictability. Out-of-school tutoring, especially with "star teachers," satisfies this need. Yasmin, also an IGCSE graduate from the English section, reflects this need for predictability by saying;

> "A famous teacher is very well experienced in the system. He usually has gone to conferences in Cambridge dedicated to preparing 'the doctors' to understand the system. Therefore, parents always put pressures on students to take their tutoring classes with these famous tutors."

This quote reflects the role of social beliefs and parental pressures, in addition to competition among students, in promoting out-of-school tutoring, as well as creating a special status for tutors and the whole tutoring institution. Yasmin's reference to "conferences in Cambridge" to prepare a select few tutors, who she calls "doctors," reflects widespread belief that tutors who rise to stardom have mastered the system. This perception is widespread among students in the IGCSE system as well as general track students, both public and private school graduates. This explains why Yasmin, as well as other students in the focus group discussions, used the term "doctors" in reference to these tutors, although the students knew they did not have a PhD degree.

For many students, their "star teachers" have special contacts with high-level officials in the MoE or special experience that allows them to predict the final exam questions. This is another manifestation of the perceptions about the education system and "star teachers." It is possible to infer from the discussions that the teachers themselves have played a role in promoting these perceptions which, after all, contributes to their status and financial gains.

These perceptions also buttress the social status of star teachers. Stories about wealth and connections were paramount. Amal, from the Arabic section, mentioned a story about a star teacher who owns a number of PTCs. Suzan spoke about a tutor who used to rent a Wedding arena or movie theatre for his final revisions to accommodate the large numbers. She noted that this tutor appeared on a famous TV program to speak about his large numbers of students and teaching experience. Recalling a story about one of her star tutors, Suzan noted;

> "When the Prime Minister or some high level official in the Ministry of Education criticized the large number of students in his sessions, he responded by saying that 'all I owe you is EGP30,000 in taxes, so come take your damn money (*khod folousak 'ala elgazma*).' He is actually very well connected. I only heard this story, but did not witness it."

Regardless of their accuracy, such stories about the arrogance and wealth that star teachers enjoy further buttress their reputation. A number of characteristics of "star teachers" deserve special attention. I discuss them below under the following headlines: selectivity, innovation, the ability to predict final exam questions, and social prestige.

5.1.3.1. Selectivity.
Since students' performance on the final exam is an important determinant of the tutor's reputation and ability to reach the level of stardom, with all the affiliated prestige and wealth, tutors who had some level of fame established standards for entry and continuing in their sessions. Assignments, exams, and attendance were key monitoring tools. Sometimes star tutors used admissions exams for students who want to enroll after the sessions start.

Amal, from the Arabic section, mentioned a tutor who would start his sessions in August, and then, a month later, administer a test. Anyone who scores below a certain threshold is not allowed to continue

attending class. Low performers on the test are transferred to a group called "the weak group." The purpose of joining this group is to allow low performers one month to catch up with the rest of the students. This same tutor would only allow a student to join his class in the second half of the semester after passing an entry exam. His average class size, according to Amal, was 300 students per session.

5.1.3.2. Innovative teaching practices. The discussions revealed some innovative teaching practices that distinguished star teachers. As expected, these techniques do not necessarily have to do with improving skills or critical thinking. They were mainly marketing tools to increase the visibility of the tutor. One example is a History tutor who came to the session dressed up in the costumes of the historical figures he used to discuss during each session. This tutor was particularly famous for explaining history in the form of storytelling using a theatrical approach that students preferred to the rather uninteresting approach of the school textbook.

On the other hand, almost all students agreed that schoolteachers lacked the motivation to perform and develop their teaching skills. The majority cited low pay as the main disincentive.

5.1.3.3. Ability to predict final exam questions. In a system where the final exam is the only determinant of the ability of students to find space in tertiary education, the final exam becomes the main factor deciding the tutor's perceived quality. Abdallah, from the English section, said that "the role of the tutor is to tell you how the questions will appear on the final exam… what we care about is getting the full grade." Some students even noted that taking classes with a tutor who is not famous creates the risk of studying unnecessary material and failing to focus on the parts of the syllabus that matter the most for the final exam.

Some discussions noted that there is a high level of perceived corruption in the system. Three students from the English section spoke with a high level of certainty about how some tutors, especially star teachers, coalesced with high-level officials in the MoE, so that the later can give them the final exam questions before exam time. They argued that tutors sell books written by MoE subject supervisors to their students, hence generating huge profits for subject supervisors. In return, these subject supervisors, who participate in writing the final exam questions, would allow star teachers access to at least some of the final exam questions. Another participant noted that, although star teachers never teach in a student's apartment, he knew of some tutors who did so for a student who was the son of a high-level official in the MoE. Whether these stories are real or imagined, they reflect perceived regulatory capture of the MoE by star teachers, which further demeans the perceived ability of official schooling to provide real opportunities for students.

It is important here to note that, among public school graduates in the Arabic section, the belief in the ability of the tutor to predict final exam questions was not well developed. Some students mentioned that they did not even care about going to the final revisions in the days and weeks leading to the final exam, preferring instead to stay at home to study. This was a function of their conviction that the tutor cannot add much in these final revisions, and that his or her ability to predict the final exam was limited.

5.1.3.4. Social prestige. A number of students in the focus groups said they calculated the average income of star teachers through multiplying the session fee per student by the number of students present. The average income from one tutoring session in a PTC, assuming roughly 300 students present and an average cost of EGP75, translates into over EGP 20,000 per a two-hour session – this is close to half the average GDP per capita (current LCU) in 2018 of EGP45,084.7 according to the World Bank's World Development Indicators.

This wealth, coupled with the perceived capture of the system by the tutors, translates into a special social status for star teachers. Students

mentioned stories about how star teachers reacted with arrogance in cases when authorities attempted to close PTCs because of legal issues. In these cases, the centers closed for only a few days before reopening and resuming normal business, their star teachers assured students that the formal authorities simply cannot close PTCs.

Using the title "Dr." in reference to star tutors by students in both the Arabic and English sections is another reflection of the high social status of star tutors and their perceived dedication to continuous development in order to master the high school system. Students in the IGCSE system and private schools mentioned stories about tutors who "got their masters' degree from Cambridge or another international University." This observation applies to tutors who are fully dedicated to PTCs, as well as those who teach in PTCs while (nominally) being schoolteachers.

Another popular perception among a segment of the high performing students represented in this sample is that star teachers are the only way to excel in the system. It could be inferred from the focus group discussions, especially in the English section groups, that parents and students are convinced that the education system is dysfunctional, and that the only way to "play by the rules" of this dysfunctional system is to "do what everyone else does."

5.1.4. Managing large numbers

The ability to manage classroom teaching amid the presence of hundreds of students in PTCs requires special attention. The number of students in PTCs, especially in cases where star teachers conduct their sessions, could seem unmanageable. However, the PTC system has developed a number of tools to deal with this situation. The discussions revolved around innovative approaches by tutors to enforce discipline in class, and the role played by Assistants.

5.1.4.1. The tutor's tools to maintaining discipline and encouraging commitment. A number of discussions noted that the personality of the tutor plays a central role in his or her ability to control the class. According to Hana in one of the Arabic female groups;

> "One of my tutors had a large number of students in his sessions, but they never exceeded 200 students. However, even if they did, I never had a problem. It all boils down to the character of the tutor. Some students used to go to class to have fun. Whenever this happened, he would dismiss them right away, and give them their money back."

This quote reflects the fact that, given financial independence and high demand for tutoring, coupled with the absence of government regulations, tutors had freedom to treat their students as they see fit in order to maintain order in overcrowded tutoring sessions and defend their status in the out-of-school tutoring market. This created pressures on students that sometimes led to emotional breakdowns toward the end of the school year. Interestingly, some students noted that, had these pressures been absent, they would have never been able to achieve the high scores necessary to join FEPS.

Some of the pressures that tutors practiced aimed at guaranteeing discipline throughout the year. Arwa, from the Arabic section, said that her tutor for the "Philosophy and Psychology" course had each of his students carry a card with his/her name, the name of the PTC where he/she takes their sessions (since he teaches in multiple PTCs), and his/her phone number. Students had to swipe their cards before entering; a green light means that the student had attended the previous session, while a red light means he/she did not attend. Those who fail to attend a specific number of sessions with no excuse were dismissed.

Some tutors used to take such practices to an extreme level, which explains the emotional and physiological stresses that students experience due to out-of-school tutoring. Samira, from the English section, said

that she started her tutoring a month after the beginning of the sessions[11] as she had a scholarship in a foreign country. She mentioned how each one of her tutors cared only about his or her subject, and refused to allow her flexibility to catch up with the other classes. For example, she asked her Physics tutor to postpone four late assignments in order to allow her time to study for a 4-hour mathematics exam. Both tutors warned that failing to submit the assignments and pass the exam, respectively, would mean that she would be dismissed. This was a serious threat as relying on the school was not an option, and she perceived that taking classes with star teachers was indispensable for her success.

Negative pressures were not the only way to maintain discipline. Students mentioned examples of tutors who give a card for each student who answers the tutor's question in the session (this was usually in small PTCs with smaller numbers of students). After collecting a specific number of cards, the student takes free sessions in return. Similar stories about tutors who would pay for trips or give financial rewards for their students who excel on exams or answer questions during class were mentioned in all five focus groups. Some students even mentioned that their tutors paid in "hard currency" (i.e. dollars[12]) for excellent students. Others noted that their tutors used to give out tea and snacks if the session goes on for longer than usual. The fact that sessions could go for longer than planned is another example of the dedication of tutors to defend their reputation.

5.1.4.2. Assistants. A teacher assistant has not been a common position in the Egyptian educational system. However, assistants are a key pillar for managing the large number of students in PTCs. Assistants are absent in small group tutoring (up to 30 students) and in rural areas.

Assistants come in a number of categories. The first main category of assistants are the teaching assistants, who were either former students of the tutor who had scored the full grade on the final *Thanaweyya 'amma* exam in the subject and are currently in their first or second year in college, or fresh graduates. Soha, an English section student, and Sherine, an Arabic section student, who participated in the focus group discussions, were both working as assistants for former tutors. Sometimes assistants were older people with some knowledge of the subject and a need for the job.

Teaching assistants were responsible for assisting students and grading assignments. However, the discussions leaned toward an agreement that most assistants were not qualified to perform these roles, usually because some of them were first year university students who had no teaching experience. A number of students felt this role was demeaning for the young people who had to accept such a job, especially if they were fresh graduates (as opposed to first year university students). Abdallah, from the English section, said;

"I used to feel bad for these assistants. They were university graduates but had to accept this job because they needed money. Their job had nothing to do with teaching; they only had to make sure that students were quiet. They even made mistakes in grading assignments."

A second category of assistants focus on maintaining discipline during the session, collecting money from students, selling class notes, and monitoring attendance so the tutor can decide if someone should be dismissed from class. Amir, from the English section, explained that the PTC was divided into "blocks of seats," and each block had an assistant responsible for monitoring students to make sure they were quiet and attentive. He even described them as "bodyguards," not teaching assistants.

A number of students noted that their tutors intentionally assigned assistants to intimidate students. Abdallah noted that one tutor had a former police officer work as an assistant for maintaining order. Arwa, from the Arabic section, recalled that one of her tutors used to do regular comprehensive exams covering the class material that were discussed up until a certain point within the course. During these exams, this tutor used to bring special assistants "who look like bodyguards to intimidate us so as not to cheat during the exam."

Regarding the relationship between the students and Assistants, a number of students in both the Arabic and English section focus groups, male and female, noted that assistants were their friends, and a number of students said they used to hang out together. Some students are even still friends with the assistants they had met during *Thanaweyya 'amma*.

Others, however, noted contentious relations with their assistants. This was usually a result of the controlling function that the assistant had to exercise in order to maintain order. Students felt that someone their age should not have any authority over them. A number of students mentioned that assistants, who were usually male, favored their friends among the students, and were nicer to girls. Sometimes assistants were rude, and instances of unfriendly exchanges between students and assistants were mentioned in several discussions. The situation was particularly tense in the female groups' discussions, as some young women recalled instances of intimidation by assistants to enforce discipline, as well as flirtation.

Students in the focus group discussions commented on how some tutors disrespected their assistants in front of students. Abdallah remembered a tutor who used to humiliate his assistants "if he hears noise from the other room (where students are sitting to watch the tutor through a screen)." Mahmoud, from the English section, recalls having an Engineering School graduate as a Teaching Assistant, noting that he used to perform tasks much below his abilities, such as grading assignments.

5.2. The costs of tutoring

In PTCs, the price of each session is distributed between the teacher and the Center. Usually the center retains no more than 10 % of the price, while the tutor retains the rest. In some cases, students paid a "cover fee" (*ardeyya*) to the Center per semester for each course, which usually range from EGP250−550.

According to data from the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), the average annual household income in Egypt in 2017/2018 was EGP58,854.9 (June 2018).[13] The cost of private tutoring varies significantly based on a number of factors. The clearest variations were those between IGCSE and general track students, whether tutoring takes place at home in small groups (usually not exceeding 30 students) or in a PTC, geographic variations between urban and rural students, and whether the class is in the Science or Literature tracks. It is important here to note that the statistics presented in this section aim at providing general trends regarding the costs of tutoring in different situations. Given the small sample size, they do not aim at presenting specific estimates about the costs of tutoring.

5.2.1. IGCSE students

IGCSE students only had to take classes when the schoolteacher was perceived not to be of high standards. In some cases, students might choose a subject for which there is no schoolteacher, usually because the number of enrolled students is very low that the school does not hire a teacher to teach it. In these cases, students had to take this subject in a PTC that provides tutoring for IGCSE students. In other cases, IGCSE students might choose to take tutoring in the "easier" classes since there is a better chance that tutoring, especially if there are good tutors in the

---

[11] Out-of-school tutoring usually starts a month before the official school year starts.

[12] Foreign currency, especially the US dollar, is highly appreciated in Egypt given the recent fluctuations in the value of the Egyptian pound.

market, would allow students to get the full mark, hence raising their competitiveness in university admission.

The cost for IGCSE students varied based on whether the subject is A level or O level. Unlike general track students, IGCSE students had to pay the total cost of all tutoring sessions in any specific subject upfront, usually on two installments at the beginning of each semester. The cost of an A level subject ranges from EGP10,000 to EGP16,000. The cost of an O level subject ranges from EGP6,000 to EGP10,000. These prices do not include the cost of books, which could roughly add EGP1,500. The exact cost depends on the "stardom" of the teacher and demand for the subject.

5.2.2. Small group home tutoring (usually not exceeding 30 students) or in a PTC

The cost of small group home tutoring is generally cheaper than tutoring in PTCs, especially if the PTC tutor qualifies as "famous." If the tutor is not famous and teaches a subject in the Literature track, the cost could be as low as EGP50 per month for home tutoring. The price even drops more significantly in rural areas. Other students reported EGP35−100 per session in a PTC in the Science track.

In other cases, the cost of home tutoring can be as expensive as the cost of PTCs, especially for Science track subjects in urban areas. One student mentioned that after taking Physics classes for almost the entire academic year in a PTC with a famous tutor, paying EGP95 per class, he switched to home tutoring with a small group of students to get a better chance to understand. The price of this class was EGP100 per session.

5.2.3. Literature versus science tracks

Whether in a PTC or at home, the costs of tutoring for students in the Literature track was cheaper than that for the science track. For private school students, the tutoring prices for literature track subjects range from EGP40 to EGP60 per session in a PTC with an average tutor. The cost of classes in the Science track, such as Physics and Chemistry, range between EGP70 and EGP95 per session. The prices of revision sessions are higher, ranging from EGP100 to EGP150 per session, which could rise to EGP300 with famous tutors. Revision classes with famous tutors can reach EGP1000 in the Science track.

In both cases, the price of the session does not include the prices of class and assignment handouts, which can add EGP100 to EGP2000 per month (some students chose not to buy all sheets offered, such as model answer sheets). In order to make sure that all students had to buy the handouts, some tutors put a watermark to make it difficult to photocopy. Most students noted that tutors manipulated the study sheets to increase their gains through creating different varieties of them such as assignment sheets, quiz model answers, revisions, summaries, etc.

5.2.4. Rural versus urban

The prices in rural areas, or poorer urban areas, were much cheaper than in other parts of Cairo. Mostly, students from rural areas did not have to pay per session as students in Cairo did. Instead, they used to pay per month, and the price per month was almost equal to the average price of one session in a PTC in Cairo. In rural areas and areas outside the big cities, the cost per month would range from EGP70 to EGP150 for Literature trackclasses, and roughly EGP20 higher for Science track-classes. The prices of study sheets were also much cheaper. Sandy, a student in the Arabic section from AlSharkeyya governorate, said;

> "Our system was nothing like that in Cairo. First, we did not pay the price per session; we paid per month. One-month price was equal to the price of one session in Cairo – EGP80 or 90. This included three sessions per week. We did not have to buy the tutor's handout. We were only asked to buy an outside book at the beginning of the school year. If the tutor asked us to buy a handout, its price was only equal to the cost of photocopying it."

Arabic section students also reported lower average costs for their

tutoring sessions in PTCs, usually ranging from EGP40 to EGP100 in PTCs, and less in small group sessions. This could be a function of the absence of star teachers in these areas.

Amal, from the Arabic section, noted that the session price was influenced by the neighborhood where the PTC was located in Cairo and whether it included students from language (aka private and international) schools. She noted that; "PTCs located in affluent neighborhoods such as October cost around EGP80 per session, while sessions in PTCs located in AlHaram used to cost EGP50 per session."

One other observation, for which the students had no clear explanation, is that of social class-based segregation. This observation appeared mainly in one of the Arabic female student groups. Amal noted that the same tutor used to have separate seating areas for boys and girls in a PTC in AlHaram neighborhood, but mixed seating in his sessions in a PTC in October. In fact, both female groups in the Arabic section, all public school graduates, agreed that boys and girls had separate seating areas in PTCs in less affluent neighborhoods.

Furthermore, Asmaa also noted that one of her tutors advised public school students not to attend in PTCs where private and international school students attend. PTCs where private and international schools' students attend, usually in more affluent neighborhoods, were generally more expensive than PTCs where public school students are concentrated. If a student had missed a class in one PTC in a less affluent neighborhood, the tutor usually made sure that she does not attend the makeup session in a PTC with private school students, even if she is willing to pay the extra cost. The discussions did not clarify the reasons behind this behavior. One possible explanation is that this tutor feared that students from public schools might not get along well with students from private and international schools.

6. Public beliefs and values about schooling and the education sector (the demand side perspective)

A number of popular beliefs and perceptions buttress the status of the out-of-school tutoring market. Concerning tutors, these beliefs and perceptions include the belief that some tutors have "captured" the formal system, either through developing a complete understanding of the system or through corrupt ties with officials from the MoE and other government agencies. The resilience of out-of-school tutoring despite being officially illegal further strengthens these beliefs. Furthermore, families believe that joining prestigious schools, such as FEPS, should be a main goal for high school students, and "good" tutoring is key to achieving this goal.

Concerning the other market for schooling; i.e. formal schooling, a number of beliefs also seem prevalent. The focus group discussions included questions to discuss the students' beliefs about the potential success of the MoE's education reform strategy discussed earlier. The majority of students in both the Arabic and English sections had doubts about the potential success of these reforms. A small percentage of participants expressed their belief in the appropriateness of these propositions, even describing the Minster as "brilliant." The main concern is that these reform plans are too ambitious given available resources. If the government were serious about reform, the argument goes, then it should invest in preparing better and more dedicated teachers, reform Faculties of Education to produce better teachers, allocate more resources to schools, and apply the system only to the new

entrants into the system (KG-1 students) not students in High School.

Students in the Arabic section seemed more aware about infrastructural limitations. This is likely a function of the lower quality of infrastructure in public schools compared to private and international schools. For example, Perry, from the Arabic section, noted that the Minister's ideas could work well in the Japanese Schools,[14] where the infrastructure is much better than the case in her public school. In her school, there is no way to apply the knowledge that students learn in Chemistry and Physics classes, for example, since there are no labs available. When labs are available, students are not allowed to use them. Suzan, also from the Arabic section, noted that any reforms would not be enough as long as the physical infrastructure is not suitable; for example, "there is not enough chairs for all students, and teachers' salaries are extremely low."

There is also widespread agreement that a dedicated teacher and better school is more important than reforming curricula or evaluation methods. Generally speaking, the arguments point out that students care about teacher abilities, school governance, and accountability more than curricular reform or the use of ICT. A number of students argued that the teacher should have an incentive to teach and be held accountable for his or her performance in school. Other students argued that school administrators should be held accountable as well for the performance of their schools. Samira, from the English section, noted that private tutors were very successful, and "the MoE should benefit from learning about how this system functions." Hoda, from the Arabic section, criticized the distribution of tablets to students and reliance on ICT for providing educational resources since some students in parts of Egypt do not have internet access. Samira, from the English section, said that her father took her brother's tablet since he was afraid it could break and then he would be liable to pay back to the Ministry.

Another agreement among the five focus groups concerns the need to change social norms in order for any reform to succeed. The discussants agreed that parents and students should get over the idea that tutoring is indispensable and that joining one of the "top schools" should be the goal of education.

Finally, a few students mentioned the fear to take risk. According to these students, returning to schools and giving up private tutoring means they will be risking their future. Since they had low trust in the government, they were not willing to take this risk.

In short, students were generally not comfortable about the potential success of the proposed reforms. Their views reflect that their understanding of educational problems diverge in significant ways from the official view. For the participating students, the main problem lies in unqualified (and possibly corrupt) teachers and poor school infrastructure, in addition to the absence of a system of governance for the education sector. For the MoE, the problem lies in centralization, evaluation systems, and outdated curricula. While there is no necessary contradiction between both positions, this is an issue of prioritizing the problems and interventions, and the timeline for intervening. The students feel their opinion has been left out, hence losing faith in the potential for reform.

7. What does the out-of-school tutoring market provide to students that official schooling does not?

The results of the focus group discussions portrays the out-of-school

tutoring market as an integrated system of education provision that, despite its ills, is the only alternative available for this group of high performing students to achieve their aspirations.

This could explain why the government has failed to close PTCs despite being officially illegal, or to invoke the law against private tutors. Parents and students stood side by side with the institution that drains their resources and lead to the *de facto* privatization of education (Sobhy, 2012). While this behavior seems irrational, the results of the focus group discussions show that parents and students were actually defending their right to education. Although this education is not free and the system creates inequalities and financial as well as emotional stresses, it is the only educational alternative available for success in the system as the government has retreated from education provision and, increasingly, education management.

When asked about the negative sides of tutoring, all discussions revolved around financial burdens and wasting time, in commute and waiting for the tutors who were sometimes late. Other discussions referred to poor relations with assistants, emotional stress, poor physical environment, and lack of regulations, especially price regulations. The later point refers mainly to regulations concerning pricing, extra sessions for fee, and ethical standards for treating students, particularly female students who sometimes had to deal with unwelcome advances especially by assistants. Another negative aspect of tutoring that was repeatedly mentioned, especially by students who went to PTCs, is the absence of direct contact with the tutor.

Despite these problems, almost all students in all focus groups agreed about a number of positive sides that, overall, outweigh the problems. These sides, in order of importance, are:

1 *Continuous follow-up*: with no exception, the issue of follow-up came up in all five focus groups as the primary reason for preferring out-of-school tutoring. This was equally important for those who had crowded sessions in PTCs and those who went for smaller tutoring sessions, whether the students were graduates of public, private, or international schools. Follow-up includes assignments, periodic quizzes and comprehensive exams.

The majority of students agreed that they would not have been able to get the high scores necessary to join FEPS had it not been for out-of-school tutoring. The exception was a number of students who graduated from the Literature track in High School. These students agreed that their subject matters, such as Social Sciences, did not require much explanation and they could have studied them on their own. The other exceptions were students from the Nile School and the IGCSE diploma.

2 *More attention from teachers*: Students in all five focus groups agreed that the quality of teaching in out-of-school tutoring is far better than the quality of school teaching. This observation is in line with what previous research has noted regarding the low quality of teaching in public schools (Hartmann, 2008a; Sobhy, 2012). However, this observation applies equally to students from public as well as private schools, and even students who had an IGCSE diploma. Suzan, from the Arabic section, summarized this position by saying; "teachers were one thing in the school, and another in the PTC. They were much better in the center, and I was very saddened by this lack of integrity."

Students who had their tutoring in small groups had an even better opportunity to interact with their tutors. Hoda, from the Arabic section, said that students were able to call their tutors after the session if they had any problems. This was a small class of no more than 45 students per session. Heba, from the Arabic section, who comes from a rural area on the outskirts of Cairo, said that one of her tutors kept explaining things for her on the phone until 3am in the holy month of Ramadan.

---

[14] The "Japanese Schools," or Egypt-Japan Schools (EJS), is an outcome of the Egypt-Japan Education Partnership "EJEP" announced in 2016. These schools apply the Tokkatsu system. According to the MoE, website, there are 35 Japanese schools in 21 Egyptian governorates in AY2018/2019. Annual tuition fees are EGP10,000 – approximately one fifth of the average annual household income. For more information see: https://www.modrsbook.com/2017/09/2017-ejsregemisgoveg.html, and https://www.jica.go.jp/egypt/english/activities/activity12.html.

3 *Predictability and stress reduction*: According to a significant number of students, private tutoring reduces stress. This could sound counterintuitive given what has been discussed earlier regarding the emotional and psychological stress resulting from the excessive demands by tutors on their students to attend, maintain academic status, pass quizzes and comprehensive exams, etc. However, the *Thanaweyya 'amma* diploma creates its own stresses that appear to surpass the pressures of tutoring.

Victoria, from the English section, noted that despite the stress resulting from the need to move between PTCs, she had felt that her schedule was well organized and was therefore less stressed during this critical year. Amir, from the English section, said that assistants sometimes intentionally made noise during the quiz time to simulate potential problems that could take place during the actual final exam. These stresses, therefore, allowed for reducing the stress resulting from betting the student's future on one final *Thanaweyya 'amma* exam. Arwa, from the Arabic section, said that by the end of the academic year, she had mastered the curricular content and memorized the answers to the main exam questions. Therefore, the discipline practiced in PTCs, while a source of stress is also a source of comfort for students who feel it makes them better prepared.

4 *Institutionalization*: for a number of students, the tutor is not just an individual who provides tutoring. The tutor, especially in the case of star tutors, represents an institution with its own norms, expectations, and administrative structures. Norms include belief in the tutor as a "public figure" and a source of authority with access to classified information about the final exam. Expectations include commitment from the students in return for thorough explanation by the tutor. Finally, the tutor is only the figurehead and CEO of an organizational structure that includes assistants, IT, finance, etc. This sense of institutionalization provides assurance in the face of the high stakes system of *Thanaweyya 'amma*.

A number of students mentioned "institutions" that their star tutors created, such as "Physics Academy" and "Physics world." These academies post content on the internet, which can be accessed through a username and password provided to the students enrolled with the tutor, and have trained staff to help students with academic issues. Describing the "Physics World," Soha, from the English section, said;

"'Physics World' was an institution with an official headquarters and staff. Assistants in this institution are ready to help you if you have a question or need an extra session. It is like a small college."

5 *A sense of community*: for a number of students, the PTC provided a sense of community. It was therefore an alternative to school in terms of allowing students a chance to socialize and meet new people. A number of students from public and private schools noted that they went to PTCs with their friends from school and social clubs, and neighbors. They also got a chance to make new friends. Reflecting on this aspect, Amal, from the Arab section, said that she used to like the PTC because "there was a food and crepe place just next to it, and we used to eat there."

Therefore, private tutoring provided some of the emotional and psychological support functions that should be among the traditional school functions. During the highly stressful *Thanaweyya 'amma* year, schools were almost totally absent from providing any kind of support to these students, let alone teaching. On the other hand, the institution of private tutoring filled this gap. Students spoke about emotional and psychological support provided by tutors and assistants in times when students felt that they were nearing a breakdown resulting from stress.

In case a student missed a number of sessions in a row, the tutor, PTC, or assistants would call to check. Nadia, from the Arabic section, mentioned a tutor who used to dedicate a session every few weeks to discuss academic or even social problems with his students.

8. Concluding remarks

This article aims to unpack the institution of private tutoring in Egypt in order to uncover its mechanisms and the nature of the market in which it functions. The purpose is to understand its centrality for high performing students. From this perspective, the article contributes to the societal debates about the priorities of education reform given the education reform strategy announced by the MoE in 2017, which aims at overhauling the education system through curricular, pedagogical, and assessment reform with a central role for ICT.

The focus groups' discussions validate many of conclusions that the literature on Egypt as well as international and comparative literature have found. First, as the comparative literature has noted since at least 2009 (Bhorkar and Bray, 2018; Bray, 2009), private tutoring in Egypt has come to supplant rather than supplement formal schooling for this group of high performing students.

Furthermore, this study validates some of the key findings of the literature regarding the drivers of private tutoring. Specifically, this article validates that private tutoring prevails due to the poor quality of formal schooling, including the lack of accountability mechanisms and outdated curricula (Elbadawy, 2014), high stakes exams and competition among students (Abdel-Moneim, 2020; Hartmann, 2008a; Sieverding et al., 2019), as well as social norms, beliefs, and perceptions about private and formal schooling (Galal, 2002). Similarly, standardization and assessment methods play key roles in explaining the spread of private tutoring (Abdel-Moneim, 2015).

Social and cultural norms and values play important roles in explaining the resilience of private tutoring. It is possible to argue that "myth" creation (Meyer and Rowan, 1977), including beliefs and values related to the special status and connections of teachers and their ability to capture the formal system, are supported by the tutors themselves as part of their competition for fame and "stardom."

In line with comparative literature on the topic, this research validates the importance of market mechanisms in creating the accountability structures that govern the institution of private tutoring. Marketing and media tools play central roles in the competition among teachers for students (Hartmann, 2013; Koh, 2014; Yung and Yuan, 2020).

This article draws attention to the centrality of schools in the lives of high performing students. Private tutoring is a distorted system that generates serious problems, including financial and emotional stresses. Especially in PTCs, it suffers from low resources and opens channels for harassment and intimidation. However, it still plays an important role for those who want to succeed in the system. When compared to the absent, and sometimes chaotic, organization of formal schooling, students who aspire to excel and join prestigious tertiary institutions find that the benefits of out-of-school tutoring surpass the market's many downsides.

Furthermore, this study sheds light on the elitism of Egyptian education. While previous research points out to the inequality of educational opportunities (Assaad and Krafft, 2015), this research draws attention to systemic elitism that directs the decisions of students and parents regarding private tutoring. The elitism of the Egyptian educational system is embedded in the institution of PTCs and elite/star tutors. More affluent students, who live in urban areas and are enrolled in private or international schools, are more likely to favor large PTCs with elite/star tutors. Those in rural areas and less affluent neighborhoods are more likely to have their tutoring in small groups at home or smaller PTCs, and they do not put as much weight on elite/star tutors. Furthermore, social stratification and elitism is entrenched in the organization of PTCs, where tutors attempt to segregate students based on social class and the school where they are officially enrolled.

Despite its many shortcomings and distortions, high performing students find in private tutoring a façade of the social, psychological, and pedagogical functions that schools should provide. The centrality of the school and the importance of gaining and maintaining students' trust in their schools and teachers is clear when noting that high performing students in more privileged public schools, which gained more attention from the MoE as well as foreign donors, such as the Nile Schools and Japanese schools, had less incentive to engage in private tutoring, even compared to students in private and international schools.

One important takeaway from this article is that students need schools. Curricular and assessment reforms, as well as cultural change that addresses the "diploma disease," (Dore, 1976; Hargreaves, 1997) are critical for education reform. However, there is no alternative for a school system that is capable in terms of both the physical and governance structures. Using e-resources and distant learning, approaches that gained much attention after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, will not satisfy the students' needs for the social, emotional, and pedagogical functions that schools perform.

Therefore, any attempt at reforming education and bringing students back to formal schooling requires a dedication by the state to take back its control over the schooling market through investments that cover the physical environment, preparing better teachers, and holding teachers and administrators accountable, in addition to reforming curricula and evaluation methods. Future research should examine the potential and actual resilience of private tutoring, especially with the University entrance examinations that the MoE proposed as part of the *Thanaweyya 'amma* reforms.

Authorship Statement

Mohamed Alaa Abdel-Moneim: Conceptualization; Data curation; Formal analysis; Funding acquisition; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Resources; Supervision; Validation; Visualization; Roles/Writing - original draft; Writing - review & editing.

Funding acknowledgment

Appendix A

Table A1
Number of students and tuition fees for the three sections in FEPS (first year AY2018/19).

	Arabic	English	French
Number of students	476	231	36
Tuition fees	EGP 289	EGP 23,400	EGP 23,400

Source: Office of the Vice Dean for Education and Student Affairs, FEPS, Cairo University

Table A2
Numbers of students in each focus group.

Group	Number
English Female	9
English Male	6
Arabic Female 1	9
Arabic Female 2	5
Arabic Male	5
Total	34

References

Abdel-Moneim, M.A., 2015. A Political Economy of Arab Education: Policies and Comparative Perspectives. London and New York Routledge.

Abdel-Moneim, M.A., 2020. Between global and national prescriptions for education administration: the rocky road of neoliberal education reform in Qatar. Int. J. Educ. Dev. 74, 102160 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2020.102160.

Abdel-Wahab, A., 2018. Alinfak' ala Keta' Alta'leem: Bain Mataleb Alshare' Almasry Wal Tatbeek (Spending on the Education Sector: Between Popular Demands and Implementation). The Egyptian Center for Public Policy Studies., Cairo.

AlMasry AlYoum, 2017. *Tasa'olat Hawl Nizam Alta'leem Algadeed* (Questions About the New Education System). August 3 Retrieved from. AlMasry AlYoum. https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1171792.

Al-Youm Al-Sabe', 2020a. *Aldawla Toghlek Marakez Aldorous Alkhosouseyya Bel Mohafazat* (The Government Shuts Down Private Tutoring Centers in All Governorates). Al-Youm Al-Sabe'. December 30 Retrieved from https://www.youm7.com/story/2020/12/30/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%BA%D9%84%D9%82-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%84%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%B4%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%B9-278/5135155.

Al-Youm Al-Sabe', 2020b. *Wazeer Al Ta'leem: Nasta'ed Lesenariohat Corona* (The Minsiter of Education: We Are Ready for the Coronavirus Scenarios). Al-Youm Al-Sabe'. October 17 Retrieved from https://www.youm7.com/story/2020/10/17/%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85-%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%83%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%A9/5025384.

Ansay, S.J., Perkins, D.F., Nelson, J., 2004. Interpreting outcomes: using focus groups in evaluation research. Fam. Relat. 53 (3), 310–316.

Assaad, R., 2013. Equality for All: Egypt's Free Higher Education Policy Breeds Inequality of Opportunity. Eonomic Research Forum, Giza.

Assaad, R., Krafft, C., 2015. Is free basic education in Egypt a reality or a myth? Int. J. Educ. Dev. 45 (C), 16–30.

Astiz, M.F., 2006. Policy enactment and adaptation of Community participation in education: the case of Argentina. In: Baker, D.P., Wiseman, A.W. (Eds.), The Impact of Comparative Education Research on Institutional Theory. Elsevier Science, Oxford, pp. 305–334.

Bhorkar, S., Bray, M., 2018. The expansion and roles of private tutoring in India: from supplementation to supplantation. Int. J. Educ. Dev. 62, 148–156. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2018.03.003.

Bidwell, C.E., 2006. Varieties of institutional theory: traditionas and prospects for educational research. In: Meyer, H.-D., Rowan, B. (Eds.), The New Institutionalism in Education. State University of New York Press, Albany.

Bray, M., 2009. Confronting the Shadow Education System. What Government Policies for What Private Tutoring? UNESCO-HEP, Paris.

Bray, M., Kwo, O., 2013. Behind the façade of fee-free education: shadow education and its implications for social justice. Oxf. Rev. Educ. 39 (4), 480–497. https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2013.821852.

Broer, M., Bai, Y., Fonseca, F., 2019. Socioeconomic inequality and educational outcomes. In: Hegarty, S., Rutkowski, L. (Eds.), Evidence from Twenty Years of TIMSS Vol. Volume 5. IEA Research for Education.

Brotherson, M.J., Goldstein, B., 1992. Quality design of focus groups in early childhood special education research. J. Early Interv. 16 (334), 342.

Coleman, J.S., 1966. Equality of Educational Opportunity. National Center for Educational Statistics., Washington, DC.

Dalton, M., 1959. Men Who Manage. Wiley, New York.

Dang, H.-A., Rogers, F.H., 2008. The growing phenomenon of private tutoring: does it deepen human capital, widen inequalities, or waste resources? World Bank Res. Obs. 23 (2), 161–200.

Dore, R., 1976. The Diploma Disease. Education, Qualification and Development. California University of California Press.

El Zayat, N., 2020. Egypt: K-12 Egyptian Knowledge Bank Study Portal and New Form of Assessment, Education Continuity Stories Series. OECD Publishing., Paris.

Elbadawy, A., 2014. Education in Egypt: Improvements in Attainment, Problems With Quality and Inequality. Economic Research Forum., Cairo.

Elbadawy, A., Assaad, R., Ahlburg, D., Levison, D., 2007. Private and Group Tutoring in Egypt: Where Is the Gender Inequality? Economic Research Forum., Cairo.

Fayed, A.A., 2017. Corruption in the Egyptian Secondary Education. PhD dissertation, King's College London, University of London, London.

Galal, A., 2002. The Paradox of Education and Unemployment in Egypt. Egyptian Center for Economic Studies., Cairo.

Gouldner, A.W., 1954. Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy. Free Press, New York.

Hargreaves, E., 1997. The Diploma Disease in Egypt: learning, teaching and the monster of the secondary leaving certificate. Assess. Educ. Princ. Policy Pract. 4 (1), 161–176. https://doi.org/10.1080/0969594970040111.

Hartmann, S., 2008a. At school we don't pay attention anyway" – the informal market of education in Egypt and its implications. Sociologus 58 (1), 27–48.

Hartmann, S., 2008b. The Informal Market of Education in Egypt: Private Tutoring and Its Implications. Institut für Ethnologie und Afrikastudien, Mainz, Germany.

Hartmann, S., 2013. Education 'Home delivery' in Egypt. In: Bray, M., Mazawi, A.E., Sultana, R.G. (Eds.), Private Tutoring Across the Mediterranean: Power Dynamics and Implications for Learning and Equity. SensePublishers., Rotterdam, pp. 57–75.

Herrera, L., Torres, C.A. (Eds.), 2006. Cultures of Arab Schooling: Critical Ethnographies from Egypt. SUNY Press, New York.

Husseiny, I.A.E., Amin, K.Z., 2018. Pre-university education outputs in Egypt: does money matter? Int. J. Educ. Econ. Dev. 9 (3), 210–235.

Ille, S., Peacey, M.W., 2019. Forced private tutoring in Egypt: moving away from a corrupt social norm. Int. J. Educ. Dev. 66, 105–118. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2018.12.003.

Ingram, P., Clay, K., 2000. The choice-within-Constraints new institutionalism and implications for sociology. Annu. Rev. Sociol. 26 (1), 525–546. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.525.

Koh, A., 2014. The "magic" of tutorial centres in Hong Kong: an analysis of media marketing and pedagogy in a tutorial centre. Int. Rev. Educ. 60 (6), 803–819. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-014-9460-y.

Krafft, C., 2015. Educational experiences of youth in Egypt: who attends school, who succeeds, and who struggles. In: Roushdy, R., Sieverding, M. (Eds.), Panel Survey of Young People in Egypt (SYPE) 2014: Generating Evidence for Policy, Programs, and Research. Population Counci., New York and Cairo.

Meyer, J.W., 1971. Economic and political effects on national educational enrollment patterns. Comp. Educ. Rev. 15 (1), 28–43.

Meyer, J.W., Rowan, B., 1977. Institutionalized organizations: formal structure as myth and ceremony. Am. J. Sociol. 83 (2), 340–363.

Meyer, J.W., Rowan, B., 1978. The structure of educational organizations. In: Meyer, M.W. (Ed.), Environments and Organizations. Jossey Bass, San Francisco, pp. 78–109.

Meyer, J.W., Scott, W.R., Deal, T.E., 1980. Institutional and Technical Sources of Organizational Structure Explaining the Structure of Educational Organizations. Institute for Research on Educational Finance and Governance., Stanford.

Meyer, J.W., Hannan, M.T. (Eds.), 1979. National Development and the World System: Educational, Economic, and Political Change. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, pp. 1950–1970.

Mischo, C., Haag, L., 2002. Expansion and effectiveness of private tutoring. Eur. J. Psychol. Educ. 17 (3), 263–273.

Morgan, D.L., 1996. Focus groups. Annu. Rev. Sociol. 22, 129–152.

Morgan, D.L., Spanish, M.T., 1984. Focus groups: a new tool for qualitative research. Qual. Sociol. 7 (3), 253–270. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00987314.

North, D., 1990. Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

North, D., 1991. Institutions. J. Econ. Perspect. 5 (1), 97–112.

OECD, 2016. Innovating Education and Educating for Innovation: The Power of Digital Technologies and Skills. OECD Publishing., Paris.

Ramirez, F.O., 2006. Growing commonalities and persistent differences in higher education: universities between global models and national legacies. In: Meyer, H.-D., Rowan, B. (Eds.), The New Institutionalism in Education. State University of New York Press, Albany.

Rizk, R., Abou-Ali, H., 2016. Out of Pocket Education Expenditure and Household Budget: Evidence from Arab Countries. Economic Research Forum, Giza.

Selznick, P., 1949. In: Selznick, Philip (Ed.), TVA and the Grass Roots; A Study in the Sociology of Formal Organization. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles.

Selznick, P., 1996. Institutionalism "Old" and "New. Adm. Sci. Q. 41 (2), 270–277. https://doi.org/10.2307/2393719.

Sieverding, M., Krafft, C., Elbadawy, A., 2019. An exploration of the drivers of private tutoring in Egypt. Comp. Educ. Rev. 63 (4), 562–590. https://doi.org/10.1086/705383.

Singerman, D., 2007. The Economic Imperatives of Marriage: Emerging Practices and Identities Among Youth in the Middle East *Middle East Youth Initiative Working Paper No. 6*. Retrieved from https://ssrn.com/abstract=1087433 or. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1087433.

Sobhy, H., 2012. The de-facto privatization of secondary education in Egypt: a study of private tutoring in technical and general schools. Comp. A J. Comp. Educ. 42 (1), 47–67. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2011.629042.

Sobhy, H., 2018a. *Aldorous Alkhosouseyya: Hal Sayakdy 'aleiha Nizam Alta'leem Algadeed?* (Private Tutoring: Will the New Education System Put an End to It?). September 23September 23Retrieved from. *AlShorouk*. https://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=23092018&id=3bc09010-b66d-404b-957e-fb57f8ed7874.

Sobhy, H., 2018b. *Nizam Alta'leem Algadeed: 'an Alkhibrat Alagnabeyya Wal Igabeyyat Wal Damanat* (The New Education System: Foreign Experiences, Positive Aspects, and Assurances). August 7 Retrieved from. AlShorouk. https://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=07082018&id=310d65d4-ffef-44c9-8559-fdacf4efca99.

Sobhy, H., 2018c. *Nizam Alta'leem Algadeed: Alislah Bidoun mo'alemin* (The New Education System: Reform without Teachers. July 21Retrieved from. AlShorouk. https://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=21072018&id=bb3c5033-f017-444a-9265-ea2ec3b69c37.

Sobhy, H., 2019. *Ma'sat Altablet Wa Mo'delat Altatweer* (The Tragedy of the Tablet and the Reform Dilemmas). May 25 Retrieved from. *AlShorouk*. https://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=25052019&id=d8855e26-168e-45a9-b296-20f81298df4d.

Summers, J.A., Dell'Oliver, C., Turnbull, A.P., Benson, H.A., Santelli, E., Campbell, M., Siegel-Causey, E., 1990. Examining the Individualized Family Service Plan Process: What Are Family and Practitioner Preferences? Topics Early Child. Spec. Educ. 10 (1), 78–99. https://doi.org/10.1177/027112149001000107.

Tawfeek, F., 2017. One Mn Tablets to Be Distributed to High School Students: Minister of Education. December 21. Egypt Independent.

The World Bank, 2005. Making Egyptian Education Spending More Effective: Egypt Public Expenditure Review. The World Bank, Washington DC.

The World Bank, 2017. *Supporting Egypt Education Reform Project (P157809): Project Information Document/Integrated Safeguards Data Sheet (PID/ISDS)*. (PIDISDSC23072). The World Bank, Washington DC.

The World Bank, 2018. International Bank for Reconstruction and Development Project Appraisal Document on a Proposed Loan in the Amount of US$ 500 Million to the Arab Republic of Egypt for a Supporting Egypt Education Reform Project. The World Bank, Washington DC.

Wiseman, A.W., Astiz, M.F., Baker, D.P., 2014. Comparative education research framed by neo-institutional theory: a review of diverse approaches and conflicting assumptions. [Article]. Comp. A J. Comp. Educ. 44 (5), 688–709. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2013.800783.

World Economic Forum, 2014. The Global Competitiveness Report 2014–2015. The World Economic Forum, Geneva, Switzerland.

World Economic Forum, 2017. The Global Competitiveness Report 2017–2018. The World Economic Forum., Geneva, Switzerland.

Yung, K.W.H., Yuan, R., 2020. The most popular star-tutor of English': discursive construction of tutor identities in shadow education. Discourse Stud. Cult. Politics Educ. 41 (1), 153–168. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2018.1488241.