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The hidden reasons of the Vietnamese parents for paying private tuition fees for public school teachers



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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the Vietnamese parents' hidden reasons for paying private tutoring fees for public school teachers. The authors conducted qualitative research on seventy-two parents of grade 1 to 12 tutees in three urban and three rural areas in Vietnam. The findings show that: First, the participants are willing to pay private tuition fees for public school teachers because they strongly trust in public school teaching quality, teacher reputations, school locations, and the importance of tutoring subjects for their children. Next, parents believe that private tutoring taught by public school teachers would be advantageous for their children's future exams because these teachers could be able to deliver the examinable knowledge in advance for their children and consider private tutoring fees as safety net fees for their children. Finally, parents perceive the inflation of private tuition fee rates of public school teachers as the fees are the main source of public school teachers' incomes because these are always higher than public school fees many times; therefore public school teachers have strong motivations to continue providing private tutoring services for charging high fee rates and ignoring its regulations. Three important issues of the hidden reasons are critically discussed, including (i) strong parental trusts for the public schooling system; (ii) private tutoring fees are easily switched to hidden bribes in education; and (iii) undeniable parental evidence of private tutoring fees as the main source of incomes of public school teachers. The research limitation in the study is also mentioned.

1. Introduction

The competition cultures in many countries in the globalization make parents think that their children will have to compete with not only similar children in the same cities or provinces, but also with millions of other teenagers globally in the near future (Bray, 2020; Bray, 2021; Bray et al., 2020). Hence, parents, regardless of poor, middle-income or rich ones, consider private tutoring as an effective way to help their children in the educational competition (Choi & Choi, 2016; Liu & Bray, 2017; Mahmud & Bray, 2017; Pallegedara, 2018; Pallegedara & Mottaleb, 2018). Additionally, the current economic depressions due to the Covid-19 pandemic in worldwide generally might cause the decrease in the teachers' salaries (World Health Organization, 2020). Teachers, therefore, have to find other earning opportunities for their families' living expenses. Unsurprisingly, teachers often use their professional teaching skills to undertake private tutoring classes for students and charge fees for their parents (Bray et al., 2016). Hence, the private

tutoring phenomenon has been deeply sympathized, understood and accepted widely by parents and students (Elamin et al., 2019; Hallsén & Karlsson, 2018).

For parents who invest in private tutoring, they have paid at present for their children, but will save their incomes in the future, particularly, if their children have gained academic successes. In contrast, parents who have not intended to invest in private tutoring at present may save their incomes immediately; however they might have to pay more income in the future if their children do not achieve significant successes in school learning performances (Bray et al., 2018; Ille & Peacey, 2019). Alternatively, parents understand clearly that if they do not pay for their children's current private tutoring classes, they would have to pay more in various ways in their future; particularly in case of their children have to repeat the failed subjects in the next academic years (Pallegedara, 2018; Pallegedara & Mottaleb, 2018). Therefore, most parents have chosen private tutoring services as the necessary quality compensation for the normal education services in public schools, regardless of paying more

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fees (Elamin et al., 2019). An overview of cultural, social, economic contexts of private tutoring and parents' private tutoring fee payments in both international and Vietnamese contexts are demonstrated in the literature review section below.

2. Literature review

2.1. Cultural, social, economic contexts of private tutoring

2.1.1. Cultural contexts

The cultural contexts of private tutoring in the world may vary in different geographical regions (Bray, 2020; Bray, 2021; Bray et al., 2020; Zhang & Bray, 2019; Zhang & Bray, 2020). Parents in Europe and North America are likely to be persuaded by the individual ability of their children who receive private tutoring, while families in Oceania are more likely to be affected by competitions in the education systems which encourage private tutoring of their children (Bray, 2020). Although private tutoring in Africa has received little concentrations as researchers and academics have been paying more attentions to their research priority in bringing all African children into school at their first time as the Fourth of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG4) suggested, African parents have still increased their children's enrolment rates in such after-school tutoring classes (Bray, 2021). Parents in East Asian and Southeast Asian countries such as China and Vietnam are affected significantly by the Confucian philosophy in many generations. Confucianism demonstrated that through hundreds of years within the Feudatory periods, the Kings often elected officials based on their examination results to ensure that all candidates were competent through their educational achievements (Feng, 2019). Thus, parents should be able to use private tutoring for educating their children to ensure that they have study passions in their lifetime and desire to compete for good leadership and management employment positions after graduating from universities (Bray et al., 2020).

2.1.2. Social contexts

As demonstrated above, the social contexts of private tutoring in East and Southeast Asian countries have been also influenced by the Confucian philosophy. In the Feudatory periods of these nations, the role of teachers was very important as they specialized in educating and training prospective candidates for the Kings (Feng, 2019). Therefore, although many European, Oceanian, Latin-American and African parents have currently followed private tutoring services for their own educational philosophy in the modern societies under the present Industrial Revolution 4.0 (Bray, 2021; Zhang & Bray, 2020), there still has been an unofficial and traditional study passion philosophy among the generations in Japan, South Korea, China, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam, etc., in which grandparents and parents always remind and recommend their nieces/nephews/children to study hard to achieve a better life and future (Zhang, 2019; Zhang & Bray, 2019, 2020). Moreover, the traditions of private tutoring have also passed down from grandparents, parents, and children in South Asia, e.g. Sri Lanka (Zhang & Bray, 2019, 2020). As a consequence, to adapt this valuable study passion tradition in the current social contexts, parents often invest a lot of their incomes in their children's studies, including private tutoring lessons (Bray et al., 2020).

2.1.3. Economic contexts

(Bray, 2021) and Zhang and Bray (2020) present the appearance of supply and demand in private tutoring services as it generally applied for various economic contexts not only nationally, but also internationally. In this global shadow education phenomenon, teachers provide the supply of private tutoring for gaining extra incomes, whilst parents and their children have the demand for private tutoring and are willing to pay fees for these services. More critically, Bray et al. (2016) propose a series of elements impacting the demand and supply of private tutoring in the shadow education market. For instance, students have their own

demands for the utilization of private tutoring services of their school teachers because they feel that the school curriculum is overloaded for their knowledge acquisitions, while their teachers do not have sufficient instructional time to deliver adequate knowledge to each student in mainstream schools because the classes are too large. On the other hand, when joining teachers' private tutoring classes in the out-of-school time, students easily understand their teachers' emphasis on practical exercises and perceive their teachers' pedagogy methods better in tutoring. Parents also observe the better relationships between teachers and students occurring and arising in tutoring sessions. The private tutoring supply of teachers, therefore, brings various opportunities to improve their incomes when applying their own tricks in the shadow education market (Bray et al., 2016). For example, the increase in demand and supply of private tutoring in urban areas might lead to the rise in private tutoring enrolments of urban students, also affecting the rise in private tutoring fee rates that teachers charge students or their parents (Bray, 2020; Bray, 2021).

2.2. Factors underpinning private tutoring fees

It is an undeniable fact that more wealthy parents are willing to purchase larger amount of higher quality private tutoring services for their children than low-income parents. In practice, private tutoring fees are often financial burdens to most of parents and their families in the developing countries, and even in some developed countries (Bray, 2021; Bray et al., 2016; Choi & Choi, 2016; Ille & Peacey, 2019; Liu, 2018; Pallegedara & Mottaleb, 2018; Salovaara, 2017). These financial burdens of parents are reflected on the following factors:

2.2.1. The hidden fee-paying privatization of public schooling behind the free or low fee-paying public schooling image

Bray et al. (2016) argued that the free or low fee-paying public schooling system in some developing countries has been privatized with the fee-paying classes such as private tutoring. For example, Cambodian teachers deliver tutoring lessons to their mainstream students or their colleagues' students in public school's classrooms and charge fees as required from the school leaders (Bray et al., 2016). In China, public school teachers, regardless from the same or another school, may work for various tutoring centres as part time staff or be self-employed with their own subject tutoring class (Zhang, 2019). Similarly, despite private tutoring services are prohibited in many public schools, many public school teachers in Myanmar offer these educational services from their part time employment as they wish to earn extra incomes for covering their living expenses (Liu & Bray, 2020).

2.2.2. Teachers' knowledge production for sales inside and outside public schooling

School teachers produce their own private knowledge and sell it to students for financial incentives in the form of collecting private tuition fees (Bray et al., 2016). Chinese teachers, particularly retired and in-service teachers, or who wish to be professional tutors, spend a majority of time in preparing and producing professional curriculum of their own tutoring subjects for covering examinable parts of school syllabuses and sell these important sets of knowledge to students in tutoring classes of both inside and outside public schooling (Zhang, 2019). Some professional tutoring companies in Sweden even present parental reviews on their websites to tell stories about how tutors of the companies helped their children to solve learning difficulties. The purpose of storytelling is to advertise the image of vigilant tutors when they prepare and deliver well-produced contents of tutoring lessons to students as well as guarantee their current and prospective students' schooling successes (Hallsén & Karlsson, 2018).

2.2.3. The government's underfunding in the education system

Bray et al. (2016) complained that practically the governments of some developing countries have provided insufficient funding for their

education system. Hence, teachers must charge private tutoring fees from students or students' parents to gain additional incomes for covering their inadequate salaries. This action is supported by schools as school leaders also want to have more funds to cover their operation costs of classrooms, laboratories, etc. and retain their competent teachers. Thus, although some negative issues might arise from private tuition fees such as teacher's discriminations between school students who can and cannot afford fees, teacher's blackmailing of private tutoring lessons for students and parents, teacher's intentional corruptions in private tutoring activities, etc., it is considered as an appropriate solution of the privatization and marketization in the education system and generally tolerated by parents and the society (Bray et al., 2016).

2.3. The international context

In the international context, the development of private tutoring is not only rising incomes for tutors and tutoring centres, but also increasing the affordability of parents' payments for private tutoring fees. More importantly, it is majorly convinced that private tutoring fees are indeed unavoidable costs for parents if they are afforded (Statista, 2019a, 2019b) as presented in Fig. 1 below.

As estimated by Statista (2019a), a worldwide survey from March to April 2015 with the sample of 5550 parents as participants showed that

only parents of 5 countries (France, Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, United States) had the percentages of *have paid for additional tutoring* lower than both the percentages of *have not paid, but would consider paying* and *have not paid, would not consider paying*. Meanwhile, Mexican parents had the percentage of *have paid for additional tutoring* (26%) lower than the percentage of *have not paid, but would consider paying* (49%), but higher than the percentage of *have not paid, would not consider paying* (25%). In contrast, parents of 10 countries (Brazil, United Arab Emirates, Hong Kong, Turkey, Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, China) had the percentages of *have paid for additional tutoring* higher than both the percentages of *have not paid, but would consider paying* and *have not paid, would not consider paying*, in which the top 3 highest countries were belong to China (74%), Indonesia (71%), and India (71%). Therefore, although there was an increase in the size of a global market size of the after-school tutoring from 286 million USD in 2014 to 339 million USD in 2017, it is still predicted that a global market size of the after-school tutoring in 2022 would be 425 million USD (Statista, 2019b).

2.4. The Vietnamese context and education system

2.4.1. The Vietnamese context

Lam (2019) confirmed that the private tutoring enrolments of

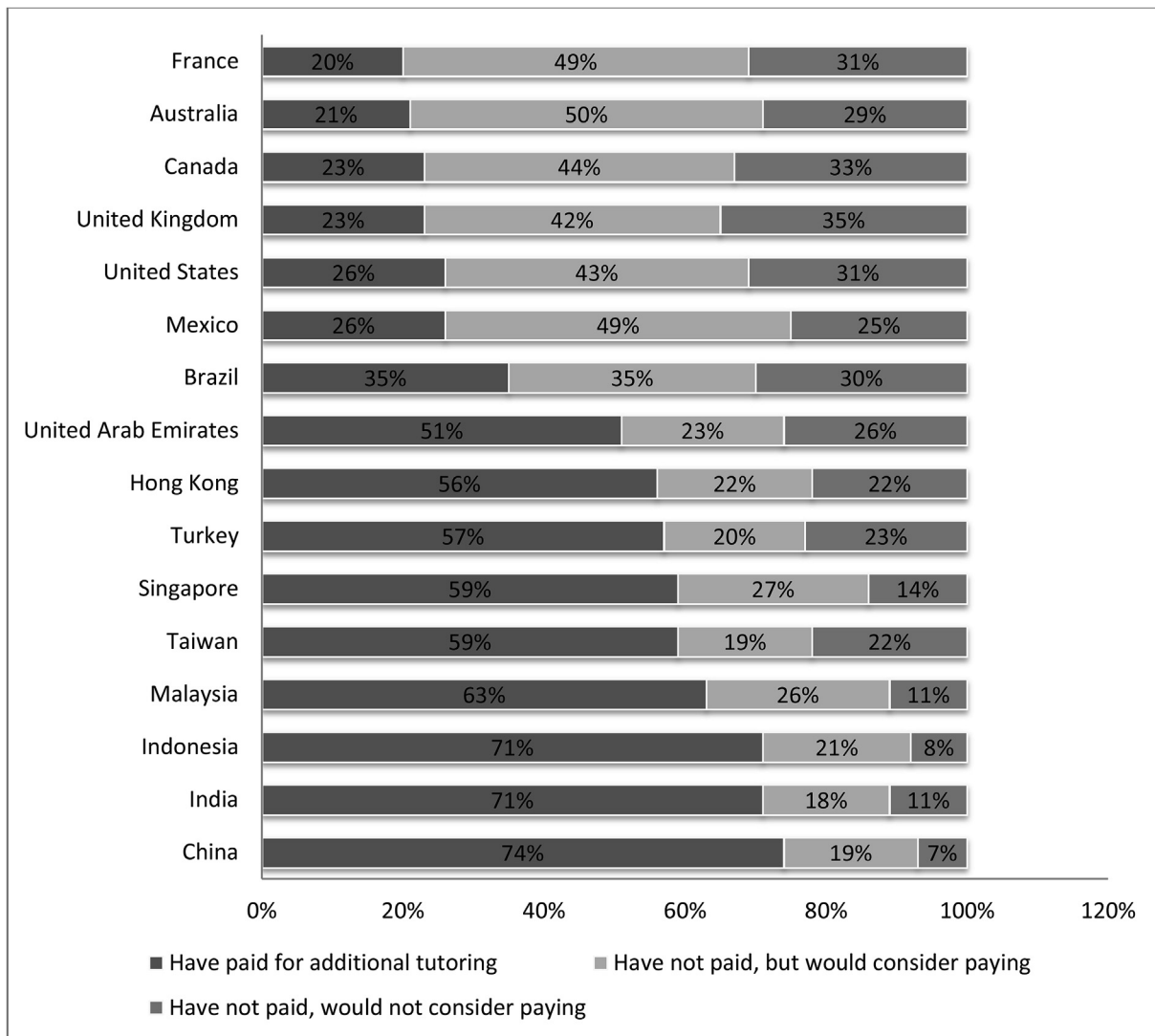


Fig. 1. Share of parents who have paid or would pay for tutoring for their child in selected countries in 2015 (Source: Statista, 2019a).

Vietnamese students are quite huge and appear from the education demands of students and their parents. At present, the private tutoring phenomenon in Vietnam has occurred in both inside and outside urban mainstream schooling and mostly in inside rural mainstream schooling. Private tutoring activities inside formal schooling mainly consist of the final test and exam preparations for school students at the end of each education level with the permission of local departments of education. Formal schools usually charge parents tuition fees based on the agreement between the boards of school administration and parents. Therefore, mainstream schooling normally manages and controls its private tutoring activities adequately. In contrast, private tutoring activities outside formal schooling are various, such as home private tutoring of school teachers, local private tutoring centres, foreign private tutoring centres, tutoring in groups, one-on-one tutoring, etc. Private tutoring fees outside formal schooling, thus, are also various for parents. As a consequence, although local authorities give permissions for private tutoring outside formal schooling, they have difficulties in managing and controlling these types of private tutoring activities (Lam, 2019).

2.4.2. The Vietnamese education system

As shown in Fig. 2, the Academic System of Vietnam's Education System Structure consists of six stages, starting from the Pre-Primary Education level and finishing at the Post Graduate Education level (The National Assembly, 2019). According to the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam (2020), the largest estimated student enrolment number of the Vietnamese education system in the school year 2019–2020 was 17,055,000 in the general education sector (in which the primary education was 8,760,000; the lower-secondary education was 5,650,000 and the upper-secondary education was 2,645,000). Meanwhile, the pre-primary education was 5,352,600 students, consisting of the nursery education (787,600 students) and kindergarten education (4,565,000 students); and the full time higher education sector was only 1,518,986 student enrolments. Hence, Tran and Pasquier-Doumer (2019) confirmed that the private tutoring services in Vietnam have been increasing mainly in these three educational levels: primary, lower-secondary, and upper-secondary. Thus, parents usually pay private tuition fees for public school teachers who currently teach their children in these three educational levels and tutor mainstream students in private tutoring classes. For instance, according to a 2014 survey undertaken by the Thanh Nien newspaper and analyzed by the Institute for Educational Research of Ho Chi Minh City University of Education with over 800 Vietnamese participants as students' parents in over 140 primary schools in 6 cities and provinces (Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, Quangnam, Danang, Cantho, and Binhdin), Ho (2014) pointed out that although 37.5% of parents agreed that private tutoring fees have put financial burdens on

their shoulders and 55.8% of them admitted that primary school students should not need to undertake private tutoring as this educational service provided almost no development in necessary skills for their children such as teamwork, creative self-study, and decision-making and solving, 74.6% of these parents still sent their children to private tuition regardless of knowing clearly that private tutoring services have been currently banned in the Vietnamese primary schooling system.

As estimated by Lam (2019), incomes from private tutoring services of Vietnamese public school teachers, particularly who have from 10 to 15-year experiences in teaching major subjects (such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, English, Vietnamese), have been from high to quite high. For example, the average income from private tutoring of public school teachers in Ho Chi Minh City might be from approximately 5 million to 20 million Vietnamese Dongs (VND), depends on the number of subjects and tutoring locations which they can teach. One of the reasons for these facts was because private tutoring fees for secondary and upper-secondary school students are usually more expensive than ones for primary school students. As a result, upper-secondary public school teachers usually have higher private tutoring incomes than secondary and primary public school teachers (Lam, 2019).

3. Research gaps and research questions

Practically, parents may over-invest in private tutoring due to the lack of useful information in this educational service. The reasons are not only because the evaluation of private tutoring services is difficult, but also very little persuasive and reliable data are available for parents to evaluate (Bray et al., 2016). Therefore, some following research gaps involving the Vietnamese parents and private tutoring fees have rarely been understood so far: (i) Although knowing that there is almost nothing new in the private tutoring content as it is the repetition of mainstream schooling content, parents are still willing to pay private tuition fees to public school teachers as their children's tutors; (ii) Parent believe that private tutoring taught by public school teachers would be advantageous for their children's future exams; and (iii) Private tuition fees of public school teachers still inflate when parents are willing to invest their income for those teachers (Ho, 2014; Lam, 2019; Tran & Pasquier-Doumer, 2019). These research gaps could be considered as the hidden reasons of the Vietnamese parents for paying private tuition fees for public school teachers and lead to the three following research questions:

1. Why are parents willing to pay private tuition fees for public school teachers as their children's tutors?
2. Why do parents believe that private tutoring taught by public school teachers would be advantageous for their children's future exams?

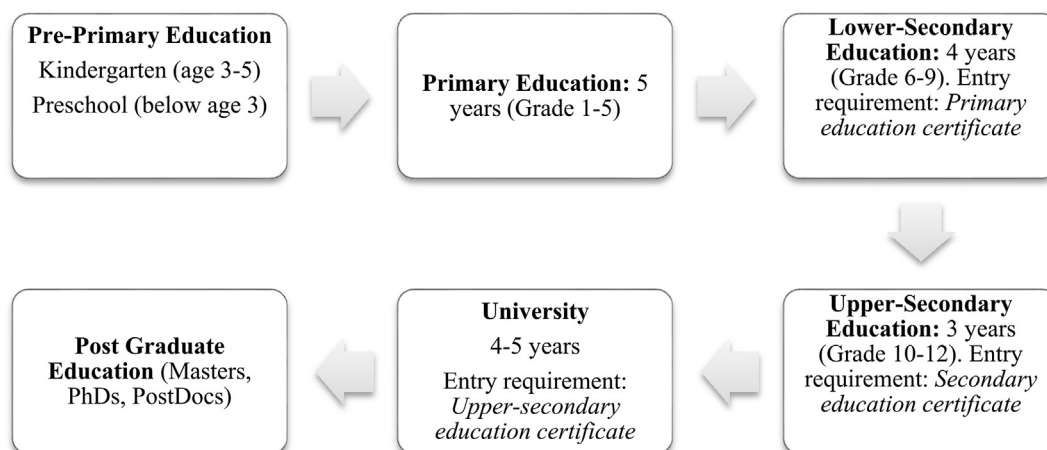


Fig. 2. The academic system of Vietnam's education system Structure (Source: Adapted from The National Assembly, 2019).

3. Why do private tuition fees of public school teachers still inflate even though parents are willing to invest their incomes for public school teachers?

4. Research design

In order to diagnose the research problem, screen available alternatives and discuss possible detected ideas and opinions of the participants, exploratory research is the appropriate approach to undertake this research project in Vietnam. As a case study, appropriate qualitative research methods were used to explore how private tutoring fees influence the Vietnamese parents' perceptions of private tutoring through three research questions above, consisting of brainstorming sessions, focus group discussions and in-depth individual interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Neuman, 2014).

5. Data collection

The corresponding author used the *snowball sampling technique* to ask his local friends who have currently lived in the researched areas for introducing his research and delivering the offer letters of research interview in Vietnamese to their local parents (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Neuman, 2014). These friends notified him that the local parents told others about the content and purpose of the research. After receiving a huge agreement responses from the interested parents, he chose seventy-two parents as the research population with twelve parents for each group in three urban cities (Hanoi, Danang and Ho Chi Minh City) and three rural provinces (Caobang, Quangbinh and Camau) within North, Central and South Vietnam. The children of each parental group were students who have been attending from grade 1 to grade 12 respectively at both public and private regular schools and also enrolling in private tutoring classes.

Firstly, six groups of twelve respondents per group in the three urban and three rural areas were invited to participate in six brainstorming sessions, as the researcher wished the participant groups to express their initial ideas, viewpoints and opinions about private tuition fees in a short given time (Neuman, 2014). He initiated each brainstorming session by introducing himself and asked each respondent to introduce himself/herself to the group to help each participant to know new people. Next, he talked to the participants about their children's studies in schools before transferring to the private tutoring topic. This transition made the informants felt free and comfortable to talk about private tutoring fees later. The author also planned the mind mapping techniques himself to support, generate and combine the ideas from the participants. He always encouraged the respondents to contribute their own ideas about private tutoring fees to make the brainstorming sessions fun and relaxed.

Secondly, these six groups of twelve respondents were continued to be invited to join six focus group discussions. According to Neuman (2014), focus group techniques gather experiences of each participant in the group and create understandings of related concepts. Therefore, findings from focus group discussions could be used to develop possible theoretical frameworks and conceptual issues of private tutoring fees, such as how the participants understood payable tuition fees, how the respondents experienced the fee payments in the Vietnamese education context, and informants' opinions about benefits and challenges of joining the focus group discussions, etc. Thus, the researcher tried to stimulate conversations relating to private tutoring fees among participants naturally to explore new findings where possible.

Further, the author selected six voluntary small groups of three participants each (including a parent in primary school level, another parent in secondary school level and a final parent in upper-secondary school level per each small group) with the sum of eighteen participants from the total seventy-two participants for taking part in eighteen in-depth individual interviews. He selected unstructured interviews as the main technique to performing their qualitative research, as this technique explores the informant's thoughts and interests in depth and gathers rich

qualitative data (Neuman, 2014). Hence, the researcher tried to make the narrators feel comfortable by respecting their silences in hesitating scenarios and interpreted the interviewees' attitudes rather than force them to speak up the sensitive information. He also conduct some informal style interviews within the process (such as speaking slang, imitating both the Vietnamese urban and rural accents when interacting with the local Vietnamese parents, etc.) to create close relationships with the narrators as well as explore more opportunities to discover and deepen the research issues.

The data collection was undertaken for approximately 2 months, from February to March 2019. The researcher came back to Vietnam and visited three main urban cities (Hanoi, Danang and Ho Chi Minh City) and three rural provinces (Caobang, Quangbinh and Camau) to organize meetings with appropriate participants in these cities and provinces, undertook the brainstorming sessions, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews and collected the primary data. He incurred some expenses like the return airfare to Vietnam, the train/coach tickets to three main cities and three provinces as the research sites within Vietnam; and some small expenses to do interviews (such as offering some drinks and refreshments for focus groups in participants' houses where the interviews were conducted; buying some souvenirs/gifts as presents for respondents who joined the in-depth individual interviews, the rent of a motorbike and a helmet to travel to interview sites, etc.). All collected data in Vietnamese were audio-recorded and taken notes and secured in a safe place.

6. Data analysis

Firstly, the researcher transcribed the gathered raw data, including audio transcripts and notes in Vietnamese to the written Vietnamese data files, and translated the important Vietnamese data files only into English raw data files. He also sorted all the collected English verbal data into three categories, including the brainstorming session category, the focus group discussion category and the in-depth individual interview category of six folders of participants in three urban cities and three rural provinces.

Secondly, the writer applied each coding category for the appropriate data sources (including specific techniques such as created subthemes, sub-issues, illustrations, direct quotations from participants to interrelate themes and descriptions) to conduct the coding process (Neuman, 2014) as follows: (i) Parents of students from grade 1 to 12, regardless in any researched urban or rural area, were coded as from P1 to P12. The difference of them would be recognized depending on the coding categories of brainstorming sessions, focus group discussions and in-depth individual interviews; (ii) The brainstorming session folders in three urban cities (Hanoi, Danang and Ho Chi Minh City) and in three rural provinces (Caobang, Quangbinh and Camau) were respectively labelled as BSS1, BSS2, BSS3, BSS4, BSS5 and BSS6; (iii) The focus group discussion folders were respectively labelled as FGD1, FGD2, FGD3, FGD4, FGD5 and FGD6; and (iv) The in-depth individual interview folders were respectively labelled as III1, III2, III3, III4, III5 and III6.

Next, the author compared and contrasted the responses of each of participants for each of the interview questions. Thus, he reflected what they found out from the answers of respondents in appropriate logical interpretation procedures. Furthermore, he asked each informant questions where possible to explore the new issues, if possible (Neuman, 2014).

Finally, the writer also triangulated various data from participants in both the urban cities and rural provinces in North, Central and South Vietnam to seek similar and different evidences from these primary sources of information to argue, discuss, justify and clarify responses for building the main themes and core issues. As explained by Neuman (2014), the contradictory evidences made the research findings realistically and validly.

7. Findings

7.1. Reasons for parents are willing to pay private tuition fees for public school teachers as their children's tutors

The participants provided various opinions as reasons for supporting their willingness to pay private tuition fees for public school teachers, such as:

7.1.1. Public school teaching quality

All participants strongly believed in the teaching quality of the public schooling system in Vietnam and agreed that public schools should be able to charge suitable rates to cover their operation schooling expenses sufficiently. For example, parent P1 (in Folders: BSS3 and FGD3) supported that:

I think whether the tutoring fees are expensive or not depend on the school teaching quality. The good school might invest more money in its teaching quality and educational equipment, so they have to charge higher tutoring fee rates. That's fair enough!

7.1.2. Public school teacher reputations

In general, the participants also trusted in the professional reputations of public school teachers. As demonstrated by parent P8 (in Folders: BSS1 and FGD1):

The teacher reputations are important in private tutoring classes. Other parents of my son's classmates usually use "words-of-mouth" to notify each other about the famous and high reputational tutors in schools and private tutoring centres. They also agreed and believed that the various fee rates which tutors charge partly demonstrate their advantages and reputations about their own tutoring subjects. The higher reputational tutors will charge higher fee rates, and vice versa.

7.1.3. The importance of tutoring subjects

All participants agreed that mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, Vietnamese and English were considered as important tutoring subjects. For instance, parent P11 (in Folders: BSS6, FGD6 and III6) explained that:

I think there has been an 'unwritten law' that the tutoring fees of important subjects like mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, Vietnamese literatures, English are a little bit higher than tutoring fees of other subjects. Teachers explained to us that because these subjects are usually examinable subjects in final semester exams, final year exams and final school level exams; and they have to spend more physical energies to carefully deliver knowledge of examinable subjects to tutees.

7.1.4. Public school locations

Many participants admitted that tutoring fees of rural public school teachers are reasonable and definitely cheaper than in urban public school teachers' tutoring fees. As parent P3 (in Folders: BSS4 and FGD4) represented:

Because our province is a rural area, so the tutoring fees for school children here are very reasonable and definitely cheaper than in urban areas like Hanoi. Of course, because the living standards here are lower than the living standards in Hanoi.

7.2. Reasons for parents to believe that private tutoring taught by public school teachers would be advantageous for their children's future exams

7.2.1. Parents are willing to pay high private tutoring fees as bribes where possible for public school teachers when necessary to purchase advantages for their children's future exams

Five urban and nine rural parents attempted to take advantages for

their children in the future exams by using their own relationships to search for individual information of public educational officers who are authorised to produce the content of the mid-semester and final semester test and exam papers of their children's public schools. As soon as knowing the authorised teachers' private residential addresses, these parents promptly approached and asked the teachers for enrolling their children in their private tutoring classes, as one of these participants (ID Number: P10; in Folders: BSS3, FGD3 and III3) revealed below:

As soon as being announced by my friends that Mr X will be the Chief Examiner of Mathematics subject in my child's school this year, I met other parents who are willing to enroll their children in his private tutoring class to discuss about our children's enrolments. We then came to his house and asked him for enrolling our children in his math tutoring class. Unfortunately, teacher X denied our children's enrolment demand because "You parents are too late. My math class is now too crowded, about one hundred and fifty something students". We quickly discussed and decided orally together that each of us would pay the private tutoring fees in double to guarantee a place for our child in his math tutoring class. After listening to one of us suggested the more financial incentives for him, Mr X could not refuse our desire any more. He smiled at us: "You parents are very enthusiastic and ... smart".

7.2.2. Parents are willing to pay private tutoring fees for public school teachers as safety net fees for their children

Three urban parents and a rural one complained that after participating in private tutoring classes of public school teachers for several months, their children looked thinner and weaker than before. The main reason was that their nutrition was affected because of having untimely meals in the short time break between full day schooling and night private tutoring. Hence, they decided to stop sending their children to private tutoring classes of formal school teachers, while still maintained paying full private tutoring fees for them. They then revealed that although knowing clearly that their children were absent in their private tutoring classes, formal school teachers had no comments about that as they still received the full tutoring fees from the four parents. These parents considered these tutoring fees as safety net fees for their children as they could avoid facing private tutoring troubles for their children from teachers. In return, they had a valuable time to take care of their children in having meals and rests in weekdays and even weekends to support children's growth as one of participants (ID Number: P6; in Folders: BSS2, FGD2 and III2) accepted as follows:

Last year, I didn't know how to take care of my son: He had to go to full day schooling every weekday. At the weekend, he also had to undertake some private tutoring classes in his teacher's house. He had not had enough time to eat and sleep each day. So, he did not increase in any kilos of his weight; just increased by nearly 2 cm in his height. This year, a friend advised me to do a trick: I still kept enrolling my son in private tutoring classes and pay the tutoring fees for teachers as normal, but I only take him to each tutoring class once per week, or even once per fortnight. Luckily, no one queried me about my son. I think they only checked the student list and satisfied with the full tutoring fee payments monthly of my son. So, he has time to take rests and have meals with us at home. Now his health looks better.

7.3. Reasons for private tuition fee rates of public school teachers still inflate even though parents are willing to invest their income for public school teachers

7.3.1. Private tutoring fees are the main source of public school teachers' income

Interestingly, parents debated critically about whether private tutoring fees are the main source of public school teachers' income.

Twenty-eight urban parents replied that from their viewpoints, teachers who teach important subjects in public schools for graduation examinations and entrance university assessments, “especially urban teachers and teachers in the upper-secondary level” as considered by an urban parent (ID Number: P11; in Folders: BSS3 and FGD3) below. These participants’ opinions considered private tutoring fees as the main source of incomes of public school teachers, as there have been a lot of students enrolling in these examinable subjects each semester.

Everyone knows that many teachers have good living standards, as beside monthly salaries in their public schools, they can earn huge amounts of monthly incomes from their private tutoring activities, especially urban teachers and teachers in the upper-secondary level. They tutor all examinable subjects, from mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology to literature, history, geography and foreign languages.

The reason for these urban parents’ conclusion is that they self-compared the current net salary rankings system of public regular school teachers (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2019) as specified in Table 1 below, and self-contrasted such rankings with their own estimations of the tutoring fees they have paid for their children.

Indeed, this legal document in education clearly shows that after deducting 10.5% of superannuation rate payable by all public school teachers, the net salaries of public kindergarten and primary school teachers from ranking 1 to 11 are from 3,450,393VND to 7,531,503VND. From ranking 1 to 10, the net salaries of public secondary school teachers are from 3,739,155VND to 8,706,889.5VND. The net salaries of public upper-secondary school teachers from ranking 1 to 9 are from 4,166,487VND to 9,238,149VND. Meanwhile, these 28 urban parents argued that depending on tutoring subjects and number of tutees undertaken, a public school teacher may earn on average approximately from 15,000,000VND to 25,000,000VND per calendar month or even more in urban areas and on average approximately from 10,000,000VND

to 15,000,000VND per calendar month in rural areas.

Moreover, fourteen rural parents demonstrated that urban public school teachers are more likely consider private tutoring fees as their main source of incomes as long as the urban tutoring fee rates are stably expensive and “usually higher than the tutoring fees in provinces” as presented by a participant (ID Number: P4; in Folders: BSS5 and FGD5):

But, only teachers in big cities might have opportunities to earn more private tutoring incomes, because the tutoring fees in big cities are usually higher than the tutoring fees in provinces.

On the other hand, five rural parents wondered that teachers who teach artistic or sport subjects in public regular schools may hardly consider private tutoring fees as their main sources of incomes, because less students and parents hired those teachers to tutor such subjects.

You know, teachers who teach artistic or sport subjects in regular schools are very difficult to recruit tutees. Artistic teachers may have some opportunities to employ some students who will take artistic exams for small private tutoring classes. Sport teachers are hardly to do so, because although sports are compulsory for all level schools, they are still not broadly examinable subjects, except for some sport universities.

(ID Number: P7; in Folders: BSS6, FGD6 and III6)

Additionally, ten rural parents agreed that rural public school teachers are less likely consider private tutoring fees as their main sources of incomes, as “the amounts of private tutoring enrolled students here are not many for teachers; and of course, the incomes that they’ve earned are less ...” (ID Number: P4; in Folders: BSS4 and FGD4).

In our province, the private tutoring activities are not broadly like in Hanoi. The amounts of private tutoring enrolled students here are not many for teachers; and of course, the incomes that they’ve earned are less than in Hanoi very much.

Table 1
The 2019 net salary rankings system of public regular school teachers.

Net salaries of public kindergarten and primary school teachers (Vietnamese Dongs or VND)											
Ranking	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Pay rate	1.86	2.06	2.46	2.66	2.86	3.06	3.26	3.46	3.66	3.86	4.06
Basic salary	2771400	3069400	3665400	3963400	4261400	4559400	4857400	5155400	5453400	5751400	6049400
Seniority allowance	0	0	0	237804	340912	455940	582888	721756	763476	920224	1088892
Preferred allowance (35%)	969990	1074290	1282890	1387190	1491490	1595790	1700090	1804390	1908690	2012990	211720
Superannuation rate (10.5%)	290997	322287	409836	451952.76	495320.7	539940.24	585811.4	621482	669230.52	718230.66	635187
Net salary	3450393	3821403	4538454	4898637.2	5257569.3	5615249.8	5971679	6338308	6692859.5	7046159.3	7531503
Net salaries of public secondary school teachers (VND)											
Ranking	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Pay rate	2.1	2.41	2.72	3.03	3.34	3.65	3.96	4.27	4.58	4.89	
Basic salary	3129000	3590900	4052800	4514700	4976600	5438500	5900400	6362300	6824200	7286100	
Seniority allowance	0	0	243168	406323	597192	815775	1062072	1336083	1637808	1967247	
Preferred allowance (30%)	938700	1077270	1215840	1354410	1492980	1631550	1770120	1908690	2047260	2185830	
Superannuation rate (10.5%)	328545	402577	468208	536748.66	608199.38	682560.06	759830.7	840011	923101.94	765040.5	
Net salary	3739155	4265593	4800432	5332361.3	5861380.6	6387489.9	6910689	7430979	7948358.1	8706889.5	
Net salaries of public upper-secondary school teachers (VND)											
Ranking	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9		
Pay rate	2.34	2.67	3	3.33	3.66	3.99	4.32	4.65	4.98		
Basic salary	3486600	3978300	4470000	4961700	5453400	5945100	6436800	6928500	7420200		
Seniority allowance	0	0	268200	446553	654408	891765	1158624	1454985	1780848		
Preferred allowance (30%)	1045980	1392405	1564500	1736595	1908690	2080785	2252880	2424975	2597070		
Superannuation rate (10.5%)	366093	445883	516238	589691.34	666242.33	745891.02	828637.4	914482	779121		
Net salary	4166487	4924823	5518262	6108603.7	6695847.7	7279994	7861043	8438993	9238149		

(Source: Ministry of Home Affairs, 2019).

7.3.2. Private tutoring fees are always higher than public school fees many times

Frankly, thirty-two urban and thirty-five rural parents confirmed that their children's tutoring fees have been always higher than the formal school fees many times, "even higher ten times" (ID Number: P6; in Folders: BSS2 and FGD2). For example, mainstream fee in a student's school is only 150,000 VND or 9.37 AUD monthly, while 1,500,000 VND or 93.71 AUD per month are his or her tutoring fees for three main tutoring subjects.

As I have experienced, the tutoring fees in public schools are always higher, even higher ten times than the mainstream school fees. My son's mainstream fee in his school is only 150,000 dong per month, but his tutoring fees for three main subjects are 1,500,000 dong per month.

(ID Number: P6; in Folders: BSS2 and FGD2)

Thus, the participants realized that the fees for private tutoring, which were simply thought as supplementary fees, have actually become the major fees of most students in the Vietnamese public schools. On the other hand, public school fees, although also necessary for any school students, have been considered as minor fees from these parents' viewpoints. Therefore, the parents also admitted that at present private tutoring fees practically have been more important than public school fees.

7.3.3. Large amounts of charged private tutoring fees motivate public school teachers to continue providing private tutoring services for earning high incomes and ignoring the regulations on private tutoring

Thirteen urban and seven rural parents confirmed that the main motivation for formal teachers to keep providing tutoring services is gaining large amounts of incomes from private tutoring fees, as the public school "salary is not enough for the teacher to cover all living expenses for himself/herself and his/her family monthly" as confirmed by an urban parent (ID Number: P3; in Folders: BSS2, FGD2 and III2). Hence, these teachers always focus on tutoring their tutees and charging fees from parents, whilst ignoring the private tutoring regulations of the Vietnamese government which may apply for them "to maintain this stable source of income" (ID Number: P3; in Folders: BSS2, FGD2 and III2).

You know, the main salary of a public primary school teacher maybe 3,500,000 dong per calendar month. This salary is not enough for the teacher to cover all living expenses for himself/herself and his/her family monthly. However, he or she can earn at least 10,000,000 dong to 20,000,000 dong per month from teaching some private tutoring classes, and this income is very stable. So, although private tutoring for primary school students are banned, he or she might ignore that and keep teaching such private tutoring classes to maintain this stable source of income.

8. Discussion

8.1. Strong parental trusts for the public schooling system

Undeniably, a majority of Vietnamese participants were willing to pay high tutoring fees for public school teachers of their children because they expressed their strong trusts for the public schooling system. Firstly, parents believed in the teaching quality of public schooling where public school teachers work full time, because these teachers usually have prestigious higher education qualifications, pedagogical trainings and teaching experiences professionally. Secondly, parents perceived that many of public school teachers might have local and national prizes and awards of Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam in their teaching, education and training careers and have professional reputations. Thirdly, parents understood the importance of tutoring subjects for

their children not only in their current school time, but also in their life time. For example, in the school time students study mathematics to develop their logical skills, whilst Vietnamese and English help them to use language skills in both their mother tongue and foreign languages. Moreover, after graduating the higher education levels, students should be able to apply logical and language skills of these 3 tutoring subjects in any practical scenarios of their daily lives (e.g. calculating their sales and taxes, writing a Vietnamese business contract, orally discussing with foreign customers in English, etc.). On the other hand, parents invest in other important tutoring subjects like physics, chemistry, biology, geography, history where necessary. However, the main objective of this investment is definitely examination purposes, rather than applying the theoretical knowledge of such subjects into their children's daily lives. Finally, all urban and rural parents understood deeply that the tutoring fees that they have to pay for public school teachers depend on public school locations: Urban parents are likely to pay higher tutoring fee rates than rural parents as the living standards of urban areas are usually higher than in rural areas.

8.2. Private tutoring fees are easily switched to hidden briberies in education

In the Vietnamese context, when parents are notified that their children are poor performed in public school learning, they naturally discuss with the principal teachers of their children's formal school classes for finding appropriate solutions. These principal teachers often demonstrate the learning disadvantages of low performed students from their own teaching experience and strongly recommend parents to send their children to private tutoring classes of them or other public school teachers with the unofficial guarantee that their children's learning ability should be improved. Both parents and public school teachers implicitly understand that the purpose of this negotiation lead to the issue of the children may know or even acquire the examinable knowledge successfully in advance from such tutoring classes. In order to express the desire to encourage their children to study with these special tutors, parents orally committed to pay high tutoring fee rates for the public school teachers, regardless of their requirements or not. Although understanding clearly that these suggestions could be considered as briberies in education, parents perceive that public school teachers are hardly to deny these generous suggestions, because these display the parents' real enthusiasms and interests in their children's studies. In fact, there is a blurred boundary between private tutoring fees and private tutoring briberies. These briberies, if found, only appear in private tutoring classes of the Vietnamese public schooling system.

8.3. Undeniable parental evidence of private tutoring fees as the main source of incomes of public school teachers

In Vietnam, incomes of public school teachers generally come from two main sources: salaries from regular schooling and salaries from private tutoring. Unfortunately, teachers, regardless in public or private schools, for various sensitive reasons, are rarely to share their salary information for others. Hence, parents who send their children to public school teachers' private tutoring classes should be able to calculate the monthly salaries of these teachers by: (i) checking the current net salary rankings system of public school teachers to determine their net salaries as regulated by the Vietnamese Ministry of Home Affairs (Bui, 2019); (ii) identifying the average private tutoring fees paying for public school teachers per student; counting the number of students in the private tutoring classes; then multiplying them together to have the gross tutoring sales; and subtracting related expenses to find the net tutoring sales; (iii) comparing the net salaries in public schooling and the net salaries in private tutoring to estimate whether private tutoring fees are the main source of public school teachers' incomes; and (iv) combining the net salaries in regular schooling and private tutoring to estimate the total monthly salaries of public school teachers. Thus, the correct answer

depends on the numbers of tutees who are taught by these public school teachers. Alternatively, the more students enroll in private tutoring subjects, the more fees teachers may collect as their main sources of incomes after deducting related expenses, and vice versa.

9. Conclusion

The article expresses many various responses with narrative justifications of informants to answer three research questions of private tutoring fees affecting the Vietnamese parental perceptions of private tutoring. First, the participants are willing to pay private tuition fees for public school teachers because they strongly trust in (i) school teaching quality, (ii) teacher reputations, (iii) school locations and (iv) the importance of tutoring subjects for their children in the Vietnamese public schooling system. Thus, when mentioning to private tutoring in Vietnam, local parents, regardless of urban or rural parents, often think about private tutoring services offered by public school teachers rather than private or foreign tutoring centres. Second, parents believe that private tutoring taught by public school teachers would be advantageous for their children's future exams due to several reasons: (i) public school teachers could charge high tutoring fee rates in exchange for delivering the examinable knowledge in advance for their children; (ii) public school teachers should consider tutoring fees as safety net fees for their children, as parents just simply pay the fees and ignore sending their children to tutoring classes for taking care of them at home instead without incurring any problems. Therefore, Vietnamese public school teachers play an important role for students' successes in private tutoring. Third, parents clearly indicate possible reasons for the inflation of private tuition fee rates of public school teachers even though they are willing to invest their income for public school teachers: (i) private tutoring fees are undeniably the main source of public school teachers' incomes; (ii) in fact, these fees are always higher than public school fees many times; and (iii) hence, public school teachers have great motivations to continue providing private tutoring services for charging high private tutoring fee rates and ignoring the private tutoring regulations.

A current research limitation of this article is the lack of quantitative techniques to measure the influences of private tutoring fees on parental perceptions of private tutoring from the economic viewpoints. Therefore, quantitative studies about the relationships between private tutoring fees and parental perceptions of private tutoring should be undertaken in the future research.

To sum up, the hidden reasons of the Vietnamese parents for paying private tuition fees for public school teachers are varied from their different viewpoints and dimensions. However, bribes in private tutoring would never disappear as long as (i) parents still expect the advantages that public school teachers could bring to their children in private tutoring classes of the public schooling system; and (ii) these teachers should have motivations and opportunities to charge parents high private tutoring fee rates as their main source of incomes.

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The Cuong Nguyen: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Resources, Data curation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Visualization, Project administration, Funding acquisition. **Abdul Hafeez-Baig:** Supervision. **Raj Gururajan:** Supervision. **Nam C. Nguyen:** Supervision.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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