

**EXTRA-LESSONS: A COMPARISON BETWEEN  
“DIFFERENT SIDES OF THE TRACK”  
IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

*Samuel Lochan and Dorian Barrow<sup>1</sup>*

This paper attempts to compare the participation in extra-lessons by the students of a senior comprehensive school and a traditional seven-year girls' school in Trinidad and Tobago. Survey data were gathered from 25 students at each level from Forms 4, 5, and 6 in each school. Data are presented on the socio-economic status of different students, participation rates by students of the two schools, subjects chosen by students for extra-lessons, costs per subject, reasons for seeking extra-lessons, and the effects of extra-lessons. This study therefore presents some data on private lessons not previously available. It also draws some comparisons between the two schools that are critical for understanding school performance in Trinidad and Tobago.

**Introduction**

The extra-lessons industry in Trinidad and Tobago has a long heritage. Both at the primary and secondary level, there has always been the practice of students seeking the assistance of private tutors outside of the school's normal timetable. This practice has no doubt been driven on both the demand and supply side. Our colonial heritage of an examinations-driven school system, both at the primary and the secondary level, feeds the demand for extra-lessons. In the past, comparatively low salary levels of teachers fed the supply side.

Periodically, there are protests, in the form of letters to the Editors of the daily newspapers from irate parents who have problems with the practice of extra-lessons. Ministry of Education officials, from time to time, also make pronouncements indicating disapproval of extra-lessons. This

---

<sup>1</sup> The authors wish to acknowledge the help of Ms. Eathra Stephen in preparing this report.

practice, however, has become a permanent part of the informal schooling process in Trinidad and Tobago.

No doubt, this practice exists all over the world. Countries like the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (US), China, Japan, and Singapore, as well as Vietnam and Mauritius, all have this practice embedded in their education system (Bray 2006). However, the form it takes and the effect it has on the education system varies from country to country.

To date, only one researcher had conducted empirical research on the extra-lessons industry in Trinidad and Tobago (Brunton, 2000, 2002). Brunton's research notwithstanding, there has been no systematic study of this phenomenon by schools, levels of the school system, and levels within the school system. That breach is now being filled by a baseline study, which is being done in two phases. The first phase involves the secondary school level, while the second phase will involve the primary level. In the first phase, a survey of 30 secondary schools is being undertaken (from a total of 134 secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago).

This paper is an attempt to capture some of the emerging patterns as this study progresses at the secondary level. It sets out to compare the extra-lessons phenomenon in two secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago from which data have been collected. One school is representative of the old sector secondary schools that were built before Independence and which are run mainly by religious boards. This school is a 7-year, traditional, single sex, girls' school. The other is a new sector, comprehensive, 7-year, co-educational school built after Independence and run by the State.

### **Definition of Extra-Lessons**

We use the term *extra-lessons* to refer to all teaching/learning activities outside of the normal school timetable that attempt to cover the formal school curriculum at a cost to the student or parent. Sometimes, it is also referred to as *private lessons*. In the literature, it is referred to as *private tutoring*. Free assistance given by the school to children is not considered extra-lessons, nor is payment for extra-curricular activities such as music

and dance when they are located outside of the school's timetable. This is the definition adhered to in the international study of private tutoring done by Bray (2006).

### **The Secondary School Context**

The historical evolution of the secondary school system in Trinidad and Tobago has produced an unhealthy division into "prestige" and "non-prestige schools." The simplest basis for division seems to be historical time—those secondary schools built before 1970 are considered more prestigious than those built after 1970. Given the way selection and placement of students are done at the end of primary schooling, the end result is that the prestigious stream absorbs the children of the affluent in the society and the non-prestigious stream absorbs the children of the poor.

The Jules report (1994) found a clear, positive relationship between students' socio-economic background and distribution across school types. The study confirmed that students attending prestige schools were mainly from families where parents had overall higher occupational levels and greater educational qualifications. Students attending junior secondary and senior comprehensive schools, on the other hand, came from families where parents were employed in manual jobs and possessed lower levels of education.

The two schools selected, therefore, are representative of the two streams in a system stratified into a dominant sector and a weaker sector—the dominant sector producing the national scholarship winners and the future professionals of the society, and the weaker sector associated with generally low academic standards.

### **Background to the Study**

Trinidad and Tobago has been implementing a new wave of education reform since the early 1990s. First, there was "Quality in Basic Education," which was based on improving education at the primary level. This involved school expansion as well as curriculum change.

Then there is the still ongoing Secondary Education Modernization Project (SEMP), which involves curriculum reform, administrative reform at all levels of the system, and the building of additional secondary schools.

In addition to these measures aimed at making universal primary and secondary education a reality, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has also instituted a range of supporting measures aimed at making it possible for the poor in the society to access these educational opportunities. This is all part of the Government's commitment to the universal goal of "education for all." These measures include a programme of school feeding, free school transport for the needy, and a textbook rental programme. In other words, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has expended significant resources to expand educational opportunity and to make such opportunities more accessible to the poor.

The existence of a private lessons industry raises doubts about the efficiency and equity goals of this reform agenda. To the extent that a large extra-lessons industry still exists despite the reform initiatives, it may mean that the formal school system does not adequately prepare children to attain the goals of schooling, or that the poor are still at a disadvantage in the system since only those who can afford can participate. Additionally, it raises questions about the basis for the well-entrenched and accepted division of schools into prestige and non-prestige, which is part of the educational landscape of Trinidad and Tobago.

### **Efficiency Issues**

To the extent that there is a significant market for extra-lessons, it raises questions about the adequacy of the delivery system for preparing students in the schools. If there is insufficient time, resources, or competent teaching to complete the programme of work set for schools and the demand for extra-lessons is an attempt to fill this gap, then this could be viewed as an indictment on the ability of the State to provide schooling. Therefore, the motives for accessing extra-lessons are important.

### **Equity Issues**

Since the access to extra-lessons involves a significant expense, it means that despite the interventions of the State, education is still not as free as is generally assumed. The provision of free meals, books, or transport, therefore, does not equalize educational opportunity since only those who can afford to pay can access extra-lessons. Knowing the extent and costs of extra-lessons, therefore, will help us to better understand the true private costs of schooling in Trinidad and Tobago.

### **Accountability Issues**

In addition, the existence of an extra-lessons industry makes it difficult to evaluate and compare school performance. Given ready access and commitment to extra-lessons on the part of students and parents, the achievements of a school, if measured by success in examinations, is not a reliable indicator of either the instructional capability of the school or the intellectual ability of the students. In schools where parents seek out extra-lessons for their children, the schools' efforts are complemented by efforts external to the school. High pass rates in examinations, therefore, may not be reliable indicators of sound instructional practices.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This paper seeks to explore the extra-lessons phenomenon in two schools in Trinidad and Tobago. These two schools are significant in terms of their standing within the educational system of Trinidad and Tobago—one representative of the older, traditional, more successful schools and the other representative of the new sector schools, built more recently and perceived as less successful in achieving high levels of success in final examinations.

### **Research Questions**

1. When the participation in extra-lessons by students of both schools is compared, can it be said that education is efficient and equitable?
2. Are measures of comparison based on performance in examinations reliable for comparing the performance of both schools?

Specific sub-questions include the following:

1. What is the extent of participation in extra-lessons by secondary school students?
2. What is the cost of extra-lessons?
3. What are the forms that extra-lessons may take?
4. What are the motivations for seeking extra-lessons by students?
5. Who are the decision makers in the process?
6. What are the proposed benefits of extra-lessons?

### **Literature Review**

Some significant pieces of literature have been encountered on the issue of extra-lessons. These include the very recent publication in February 2008 by Dang and Rogers; Hallak and Poisson (2007); Mark Bray (2006); Silova, Budiene, and Bray (2006); Heyneman (2004); Brunton (2000, 2002); Buchmann (1999); and Stevenson and Baker (1992). The publication by Hallak and Poisson is an international comparative study with a series of articles on all aspects of corruption in education. The article by Heyneman is a survey of the same sets of issues covered by Hallak and Poisson. Stevenson and Baker concentrate on the private lessons experience in Japan, while Mark Bray does a world survey of “supplemental private tutoring.” The articles by Brunton on the extra-lessons phenomena in Trinidad and Tobago are the only local articles on the extra-lessons industry in Trinidad and Tobago. Buchmann describes the situation in Kenya, a post-colonial society, which closely resembles the situation in Trinidad and Tobago.

The overarching conceptual framework for the entire publication by Hallak and Poisson is the concern with corruption in educational provision in its widest sense, and its effect on the efficiency of resources in educational planning and provisioning at all levels of the education system. The authors see the elimination of corruption at all levels as a necessary precondition for the achievement of the goals of “education for all” set in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 and re-affirmed in the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000.

Hallak and Poisson (2007) summarize the findings from an international project that was carried out with the participation and support of many

### *Extra-Lessons in Trinidad and Tobago*

institutions and individuals from about 25 countries worldwide. The partners included ministries of education, universities, researchers, and members of civil society organizations. The guiding idea behind this research effort is that there exists corruption in education systems across the world and such corruption affects all levels of operation of education systems: teacher management and behaviour, school construction improvement and repairs, textbooks and teaching materials, school feeding and nutrition programmes, exams accreditation and credentials, and private tutoring.

In the examination of the private tutoring phenomenon, data are provided from countries all over the world, giving evidence of the universality and frequency of this practice. The main conclusion of the writers is that private tutoring is not bad in itself; it can be a healthy practice but this depends on the conditions and circumstances under which it takes place. It can complement the mainstream system but it can also corrupt it.

The impact of private tutoring could mean that teachers do not cover all topics during normal class time. This would result in children seeing the classroom work as unnecessary, and could possibly lead to a narrowing of the goals of teaching and learning. In such a case, the effects on the mainstream is bad. However, to the extent that it assists students with special needs or complements the work of the schools, then it is positive.

Heyneman (2004) is but a precursor of the study by Hallak and Poisson, and does no detailed investigation of the extra-lessons phenomenon except to classify it as a form of corruption under the rubric of professional misconduct.

The study by Stevenson and Baker (1992) is relevant to the Trinidad and Tobago situation. The researchers establish three preconditions for the existence of the shadow education system that exists in Japan: 1) the allocation of school places by formal examinations, 2) the use of centralized systems for doing so, and 3) the clear connection between future occupational and social status and access to certain schools. In Japan, the competitive pressure exists most strongly in the transition from high school to university. Selection to a prestigious university almost guarantees students access to the good life. The extra-lessons industry is an institutional response to this social arrangement. This is a

vast industry and the participation rate by students is extremely high at the secondary level and immediately after secondary school when students may enrol in special schools for preparation to sit university entrance examinations.

The cultural/institutional context of Japan very much resembles the situation of Trinidad and Tobago, except that in our case the quest for extra-lessons begins at the primary level since the connection to occupational and social status begins with the secondary school that students can access through competitive examinations at the end of primary schooling.

Bray (2006) provides data to show the universality of the extra-lessons phenomenon throughout both the developed and developing countries of the world. Bray's position is that it is a shadow system which requires understanding by policy makers. It is referred to as a shadow since it owes its existence to the mainstream and responds to needs of the mainstream. Bray explores the levels of participation, forms of supply, motives for participation, and effects of private tutoring. Bray's findings are inconclusive on the instructional benefits of private tutoring, but he concludes that this medium is a form of social reproduction as wealthier families are able to afford the opportunities that this facility makes available.

The report by Silova and Bray (2006) was the result of a study of the nature, causes, and consequences of the private tutoring market in some former socialist countries of Eastern Europe, including, Azerbaijan, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Lithuania, Mongolia, Poland, Slovakia, and Ukraine. As these former socialist countries attempt to transform themselves into market economies, the growth of the private tutoring market has been significant. This is a likely challenge to the development of free and open societies and, therefore, it is a phenomenon requiring in-depth study. This study was a first attempt to document systematically the general characteristics of private tutoring: its scale, cost, geographic spread, and subject matter, as well as the factors underlying the demand for private tutoring and its educational and social impact.

### *Extra-Lessons in Trinidad and Tobago*

In the countries surveyed, it was found that private tutoring had a number of negative consequences. It exacerbated social inequities, distorted curricula and teacher performance, fostered corruption, skewed the university admissions process, and deprived the state of revenues. On the positive side, it helped students to compete in the education market place, facilitated private investment in human capital, and provided additional options for out-of-school youth.

A survey of first-year university students done in all these countries revealed a high participation rate in private tutoring in late secondary school. The participation rates ranged from a low of 56% for Croatia to a high of 93% for Azerbaijan. Students complained that they were sometimes pressured to take private tutoring. University professors in charge of entrance examinations abused their positions by setting up private tutoring services. By far the strongest driver of the private tutoring business was the need to perform well in qualifying examinations for university. This report recommended actions to policy makers for the control of private tutoring, which included: raising public awareness, regulation of private tutoring, development of a code of ethics, and the licensing of private tutors.

The recent study by Dang and Rogers (2008) confirms the universal and growing nature of the phenomenon of private tutoring. Firstly, while the greatest incidence of private tutoring exists in the East Asian countries, it is now an important phenomenon in many countries of different sizes, levels of development, political institutions, and geographical locations. Secondly, it exists at all levels of the education system, from primary to upper secondary. Thirdly, both in absolute terms and relative to the formal education system the private tutoring industry seems to be growing rapidly.

From a survey of 23 countries, which included Bangladesh, Cambodia, Cyprus, Kenya, Egypt, Japan, the US and UK, it was determined that there was a common core of factors which were the drivers of the private tutoring industry at the level of households. These were: household income, level of education of parents, and urban location. Other factors may affect the demand by households as a result of cultural differences between countries, but the common core holds across all countries.

At a macro level, the key drivers of the private tutoring industry were found to be: firstly, the transition to a market economy in countries where it did not exist earlier; secondly, the existence of tight linkages between schooling and work; thirdly, the existence of a deficient public education system; and fourthly, cultural values, such as in the case of East Asia.

Reviewing several econometric studies that use grades to ascertain whether students benefit from private tutoring, the authors found the results inconclusive. But they did find remedial-type support programmes that yielded positive returns. At the end of the study, the authors made some very qualified conclusions. They felt that under certain conditions, private tutoring can complement the formal school system. In addition, private tutoring increases the welfare of households and society overall, but only if a free market prevails. The private tutoring industry may, however, put poor households at some disadvantage.

In terms of state policy, the authors advocate a policy of market cleansing rather than attempts to impose a complete ban. This would mean making the market competitive and free by ensuring that there is freedom of information, freedom to choose, and a public awareness of standards.

In 1997, using a quantitative approach, Brunton sampled, by questionnaire, 500 secondary school students throughout Trinidad. The sample was derived from eight secondary schools representing urban/rural, semi-urban, north/south/central, and traditional and non-traditional type schools. The findings proved his two hypotheses that: (a) participation in extra-lessons in Trinidad increases as secondary school students face greater examination pressure, and (b) participation in extra-lessons reflects patterns of educational and social stratification in Trinidad and Tobago. The findings also showed that students in the 15–18 age group were three times more likely to be enrolled in private lessons than students below 15. So the search for private lessons was strongest at Forms 5 and 6.

Brunton's study confirmed his social reproduction hypothesis. From his sample, 56% of students in prestige schools sought extra-lessons while

## *Extra-Lessons in Trinidad and Tobago*

the figure for comprehensive schools was 44%. There was a high correlation as well between father's occupation and participation in extra-lessons. The higher the status of the father's occupation the greater was participation in extra-lessons. The connection between school type, income levels, and participation in extra-lessons was clearly established by the Brunton study. From his national sample, 65% of those with fathers in the professional category of work participated in extra-lessons while 29% of those with fathers in the unskilled area participated in extra-lessons.

While Brunton's study used a national sample, this paper seeks to examine the phenomenon of extra-lessons more comprehensively at the level of two specific schools. While the social reproduction issue is of great significance for this research paper, more details about the time spent, the subjects chosen, and the motivations for and the effects of extra-lessons are also needed to explore the phenomenon from an educational perspective.

Buchmann (1999) attributes the existence of a large extra-lessons industry in Kenya to three factors. Firstly, after Independence, schooling became a cultural criterion for being modern for most Kenyans and this led to an insatiable demand for schooling overall. Secondly, the existence of a two-tier secondary system—one perceived as better than the other—meant that there was competition for the few schools perceived as good. Competitive examinations became the device for selection for school placement. Buchmann describes an extra-lessons culture that is costly to parents, time consuming for children, and incapable of control by the State.

## **Methodology**

### **The Two Schools**

The two schools chosen for this comparison are significant because they typify two separate categories of secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. One school, a traditional, single-sex, girls', 7-year, denominational secondary school, in existence for a relatively long period of time—established 12<sup>th</sup> January, 1951; the other, a co-educational, new sector, government secondary school, a senior

comprehensive school, was one of the secondary schools built during the school expansion programme undertaken during the 1968–1983 plan period.

In the educational landscape of Trinidad and Tobago, the former would be referred to as a prestige school while the latter would not be so designated. Senior comprehensive schools, unlike prestige schools, are usually portrayed in the media as schools with greater student indiscipline and poor student performance in examinations. Generally, the Form 1 intake into a traditional prestige school, as the one in this sample, would have to attain marks in the range above the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile in the selection examinations at the end of primary schooling. The Form 1 intake into senior comprehensive schools, however, falls within a much lower range of examination scores in the selection examinations at the end of primary school, and may even include students who scored below the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile in the selections examinations.

Given a system of secondary school placement based on parental choice and examination scores, the historical fact has been that parents prefer the placement of their children at the older traditional schools. It would not be untrue to say that in the public mind there exists a hierarchy of schools and the new sector schools are at the bottom of the heap.

### **Target Group**

In each of these two schools, students from Forms 4, 5, and 6 were surveyed. These levels were chosen because these are the upper levels of the secondary school system when the concern for success in examinations is great and the participation in extra-lessons is highest. Twenty five students were surveyed from each level. In each school, therefore, 75 students were targeted. Figure 1 shows the actual response rate of the survey in both schools by Form level.

*Extra-Lessons in Trinidad and Tobago*

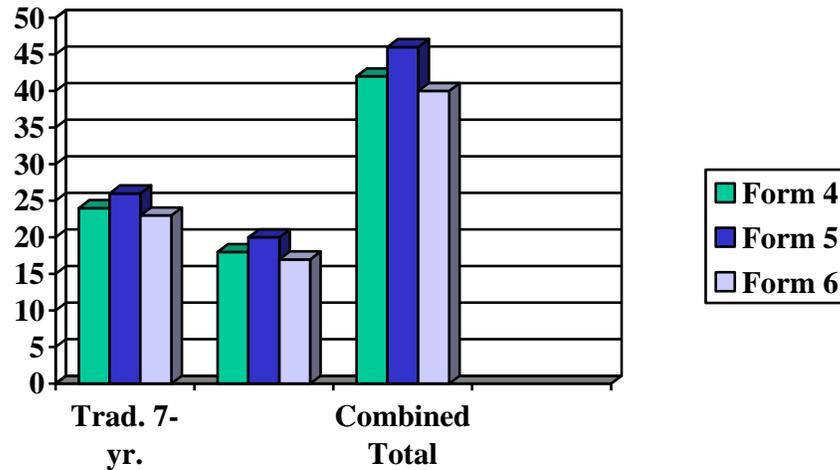


Figure 1. Sample size 1: Number of responses by school/form level.

**Instrument for Data Collection**

A questionnaire was designed with 21 questions covering the different research objectives of the study. In addition, socio-biographical data were collected through the survey instrument, which contained questions on the subjects that students sought extra-lessons in, the costs of extra-lessons, the motivations for taking extra-lessons, and the benefits of extra-lessons. The rate of return of questionnaire by school was 100%, whereas the rate of response to questionnaire by student was 85.3%.

**Administration of the Instrument**

The approach to data collection was based on winning the support of the principals. The two researchers visited the schools, and after explaining the purpose of the study to the principals left the questionnaires with them to be administered at the school's convenience. The researchers were overwhelmed by the positive response and level of interest by the administrators in this study. In these two schools, the support of the administrators was very positive.

## Findings

### 1. Socio-Economic Comparisons

Figure 2 shows a summary of the distribution of parent occupations by categories: professionals (i.e., parents who are doctors, lawyers, accountants, upper level managers, etc.); skilled professionals (programmers, technicians, supervisors, middle-level managers, etc.); manual workers (labourers, farm workers, store-clerks, domestic workers, etc.); and housewives. Figure 2 shows the summary of the occupations of the parents of students attending both schools. Note the skewing to the left towards the professional occupations end for the parents of students attending the traditional all girls' school, suggesting that these students largely come from more materially affluent households than the students attending the senior comprehensive school.

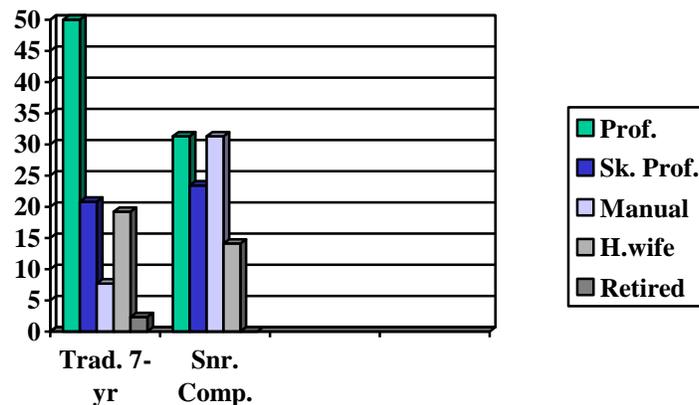


Figure 2. Parents' occupation.

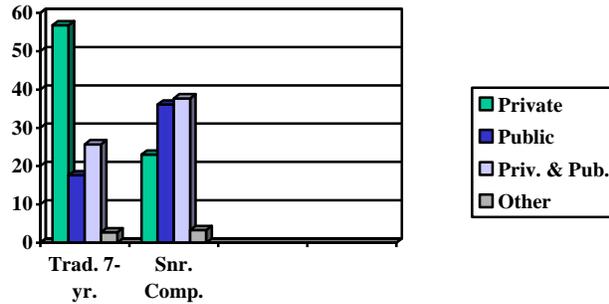


Figure 3. Students' travel habits.

Figure 3 depicts the travel-to-school habits of the student population of the two schools. Note that the majority of students attending the traditional school (56.8%) are driven to school via a privately owned vehicle, whereas of the students attending the senior comprehensive school, only 23% travel to school in this way. This suggests that the home resources available to these two sets of students are different, with the students attending the traditional girls' school having access to greater material resources.

## 2. Comparison in Participation Rates in Extra-Lessons

Overall, 73.4% of the students sampled from these two schools take extra-lessons in one or more subjects. When the level of participation in extra-lessons is compared by school, the data suggest that, overall, 89% of the students in the traditional 7-year school take extra-lessons in one or more subjects, whereas only 52.7% of students attending the senior comprehensive school attend extra-lessons, a mean difference ( $\Delta M+$ ) of 36.3% of the traditional 7-year school students over the students attending the senior comprehensive school.

Figure 4 illustrates the difference in participation rates by both schools according to form level. It shows that 100% of the students of the traditional 7-year school in Forms 4 and 5 attended extra-lessons classes in one or more subjects, with this level of participation decreasing to 65.2% among the students in Form 6. This pattern of participation is

reversed among students attending the senior comprehensive school, where in Form 4, the level of participation in extra-lessons is 33.3%; in Form 5, it increases to 45%, and at Form 6, the level increases to 82.4%.

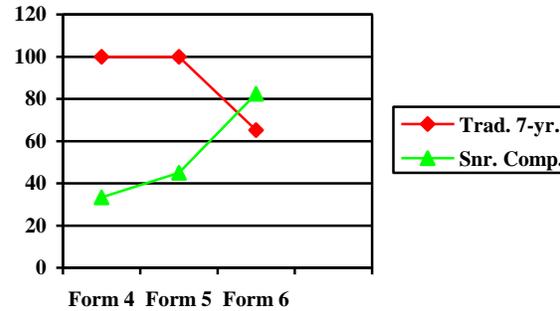


Figure 4. Students taking one or more subjects in extra-lessons by school/form level.

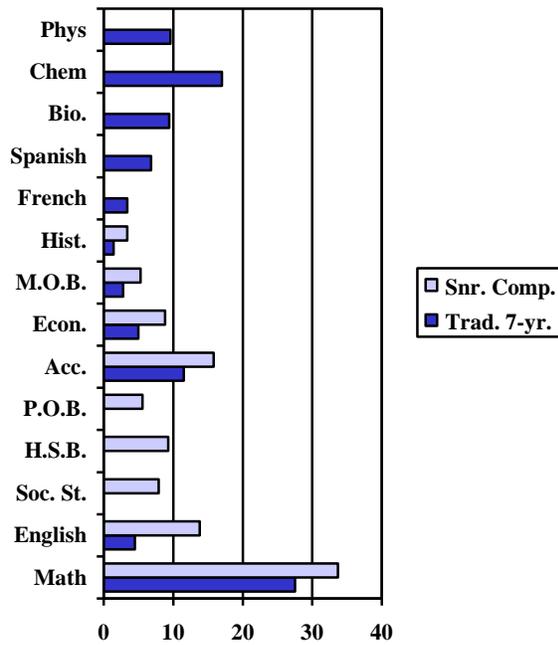


Figure 5. Participation rates by schools/by subjects.

*Extra-Lessons in Trinidad and Tobago*

The students in this sample attended extra-lessons in 14 separate subjects, which can be grouped into four broad categories, namely, mathematics, science, business, and “others,” which includes English, social studies, French, Spanish, and history. As Figure 5 shows, mathematics is the most popular option (30.6%), followed by business subjects (27.5%), and science (22.7%). The other subjects make up the remaining 19.2%, of which English is taken up by 9.2% of the students.

The students attending this traditional 7-year secondary school not only participated in extra-lessons at a greater rate than those students attending the 7-year senior comprehensive school, but they also enrolled in a much wider range of subjects. Students from the traditional 7-year school took lessons in 1–7 subjects, with the majority doing lessons in three 3 subjects. Whereas, students attending the senior comprehensive school took lessons in 1–3 subjects, with the majority (55.6%) doing lessons in three subjects.

### 3. Comparative Expenditures on Extra-Lessons

**Table 1. Cost Per Subject Per Month by School**

<b>Subjects</b>	<b>Senior Comprehensive</b>	<b>Traditional 7-Year</b>
Accounts	\$155.00	\$159.00
Economics	\$160.00	\$136.67
H.S. B. /Biology	\$204.00	\$130.11
Mathematics	\$172.00	\$125.00
History	\$275.00	\$125.00
M.O.B.	\$200.00	\$125.00
English	\$196.67	\$121.67
Actual mean = \$194.67 vs. \$131.79; Overall mean = \$163.23		
Overall actual range: \$275 (history); \$121.67 (English)/month/subject		

The price paid for extra-lessons by students reveals a range from a high of \$275 for history to a low of \$121.67 for English per month. The average overall cost per subject per month is \$163.23. The students attending the senior comprehensive school in the sample took lessons in a narrower range of subjects than students from the traditional school. Students from the senior comprehensive school participated in a range of

9 different subjects, whereas the students from the traditional 7-year school in the sample took extra-lessons from a range of 11 subjects.

There were seven subject fields—accounts, economics, biology (human and social biology), mathematics, history, management of business, and English—common to both sets of students. The cost to access extra-lessons in these common subject fields was different for the two sets of students, with the students from the senior comprehensive school paying a higher average cost (\$194.67 per subject per month) than the students attending the traditional 7-year school, whose average cost was \$131.79 per subject per month.

In summary, the overall unit cost per subject that these students pay for extra-lessons ranges from \$275 per subject per month to \$122 per subject per month. The average cost is about \$163 per subject per month. Since students take, on average, lessons in three subjects, they spend, on average, about \$500 per month on extra-lessons services.

#### **4. Purpose for Extra-lessons: Enrichment and Remediation**

The following are the five reasons given by students from both schools for taking extra-lessons, ranked in order of priority:

1. Enhancement and remediation
2. Mitigating against the teaching/learning deficit
3. Examination drills
4. Extending the school week
5. Lessons as a quality assurance policy

*Enrichment and remediation.* A detailed analysis of the students' (N = 128) responses to this issue revealed that students from these two schools do lessons in the subjects they are doing well in, as well as those that they are having difficulty with. This suggests that extra-lessons is an avenue that students use for both academic enrichment and for remediation. When students purchase extra-lessons services in the subject areas in which they are doing well in school, it is to secure for themselves the advantage that they, seek especially in getting good

grades when competing in external examinations. When they purchase extra-lessons services for remediation purposes, it is largely an attempt to make up for the deficit in the teaching/learning experiences they are having with the subject in school.

*Mitigating against the teaching/learning deficit.* These students appear to experience this teaching/learning deficit in a variety of subjects and for a variety of reasons, including poor teaching; the student's personal history and expectations; and the school context, including its culture and ethos. At the core of the "poor teaching" factor is the perception that students have of some subject area teachers as being unable to explain their subject properly. This was the most frequent reason cited by the students for difficulties they experienced in a subject area.

Consequently, one of the major reasons why these students went to extra-lessons classes was to work with another teacher, whom they perceived as being able "...to provide a better explanation of the subject matter"; one who would be better able to "...relate the subject matter better to the student"; and a teacher who would "...push and encourage students ...who would answer questions when asked ...would correct home work ...[and] ...who would be sensitive and not make you feel stupid." This teacher would also "...cover the whole syllabus" but not at such "a fast pace" where a deep understanding of the subject matter was sacrificed.

*Examination drills.* One of the ways these students seemed to evaluate the effectiveness of their teachers was by the extent to which the teacher provided them with opportunities to do past examination questions. Teachers who provided them with lots of opportunities to attempt past examination questions were considered favourably. Those teachers who didn't, became suspect.

This becomes even more significant when one considers some of the other fundamental difficulties students have with many subjects. Whether it is with factual knowledge, conceptual knowledge, or procedural knowledge, many of our students' time is spent on recall, that is, on remembering the bits and pieces of facts, concepts, or procedures associated with a subject. Invariably, not enough time is allocated to understanding, applying, and analysing these facts, concepts, and

principles. Hence, these students noted that one of the reasons they sought remediation through extra-lessons was partly because the lessons teacher provided much more opportunities for them to “apply what they have learned, especially to solve past examination questions.”

***Extending the school week.*** A sample of the students said that “...class size” was a factor that impacted on how they learned the content of a subject. Several students from the sample said that “...too many students in the class made it difficult for them to focus” or “...to concentrate” in class. This, of course, contributed to them “...not understanding the teacher or the subject” and so helped to propel them on to extra-lesson classes.

The teaching time allocated to subjects was also another factor that contributed to the deficit in the quality of the educational experience they had while at school. This was especially so when students thought that not enough teaching time was allocated to a subject. Therefore, students went to lessons, in part, to make up for this time deficit, so that extra-lessons also served the additional function of extending the school week for students who accessed the services.

On average, through extra-lessons, the students’ school week is extended by six hours of contact time with teachers. This is, for all intents and purposes, one full school day. These extra-lessons students, therefore, enjoy the advantage of a six-day school week. These students are willing to make this additional sacrifice, in part, because they want to do well, even in those subjects that they perceive themselves to be weak in.

***‘Lessons’ as a quality assurance policy.*** Even if students were getting “excellent grades” in certain subjects in school, a solid majority of them (66.7%) would still do extra-lessons in some or all these subjects. These subjects commonly included mathematics, the natural and physical sciences, and certain core business courses such as principles of accounting. Clearly, here, these students are using extra-lessons as an assurance strategy for success in those subjects in both the internal and external examinations. “These days,” one student said, “...in order to pass exams you have to have the initiative to go the extra-mile, and to pay the extra cost, for a quality education.”

### **5. Who Decides? The Role of Parents**

Because parents are the ones who ultimately decide in some cases (in 36.7% of the cases) on whether a student will purchase lessons services, parents' ambivalence about the teacher's capacity to assist their children in meeting the contested academic goals through scheduled in-school teaching alone is one of the many forces driving the extra-lessons explosion in Trinidad and Tobago.

Extra-lesson services have to be purchased. Students are charged on average about \$163 per month per subject, and, on average, students take lessons in three subjects, at a total cost of approximately \$500 per month. It is invariably the parent who has to come up with this resource. Hence, how many subjects a student accesses is in part determined by the capacity and the willingness of the parent to pay. Once the parent has the capacity and is willing to pay, then other factors come into play in the decision process, including the students' perceived need for the service. For example, one of the observations made in comparing these two schools is that the role of the parent in the overall decision-making process regarding extra-lessons varies for the two schools. The data show that students who attend the senior comprehensive school rely less on parental inputs (by a margin of 9.2%) than those students attending the traditional 7-year secondary schools.

### **6. Does Extra-Lessons Matter?**

The correlation between the responses these two sets of students gave to this question was both high and positive ( $r = +0.89$ ). Almost all the students (97%) sampled from these two schools, regardless of school type, confirmed the claim that extra-lessons did help to improve their performance in the subject. The limited times when lessons didn't work it was because the students did not apply themselves, or were distracted by friends, or that they tried their best "... and still could not understand." Hence, the few cases when extra-lessons did not work it was primarily because the students were unable to make it work.

Students from these two schools said that lessons worked for them "...primarily because the lessons teachers knew their work well." Furthermore, lessons provided more exam practice, and the lessons

teacher "...provided good notes." Students also indicated that they got the type of individual attention they needed and that "...repeating the school work in the subject" from the perspective of another teacher at these lessons sessions also "...helped."

Finally, students had a mixed response to how attending lessons affected their social lives outside of school. In a ratio of 8:1 [88.9%], students in the sample attending the senior comprehensive school said that lessons curtailed their time from extra-curricular activities like sports, recreation, and so on. Whereas, in the traditional 7-year school, the majority of the students (62.5%) made the opposite claim, saying that doing extra-lessons did not affect "their social life" outside of school.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

While the data presented here are rich, it begs more exploration about the range of subjects, differences in the type of participation and rate of participation between both schools, the role of parents in decision making, and so on. This discussion here, however, will confine itself to the main research questions.

#### **The Equity Factor**

Findings from socio-economic data confirm Jules' (1994) claim that students from comprehensive schools are generally materially less well off than students from traditional schools (see Figures 2 and 3).

Figures for participation in extra-lessons show that 89% of the sample from the traditional school took lessons compared to 52.7% of the sample from the comprehensive school (this is much higher than 56% for the former and 44% for the latter in Brunton (2002)).

It is immediately obvious that the two schools have a significant dependence on extra-lessons, but that the reliance on it is greater in the traditional school. In the traditional school, findings show that at Forms 4 and 5, the participation rates are at 100% and dip in Form 6. In the comprehensive school, the participation rate at Form 4 is 33.3%, 45% at Form 5, and 82.4% at Form 6. It is clear, therefore, that more students from the traditional school begin accessing extra-lessons much earlier.

### *Extra-Lessons in Trinidad and Tobago*

The comparative decline in participation at the sixth form level in the traditional school could be due to the fact that students feel more confident to manage on their own while their counterparts at the comprehensive schools do not.

While there are variations in cost for different subjects and the range of subjects for which extra-lessons are sought (see Table 1), on average, students spend about \$500 per month on extra-lessons regardless of which school is considered. Most students in both schools attempt three subjects at extra-lessons.

The participation rates and costs, as well as the number of subjects for which extra-lessons are sought, suggest a high private cost of schooling on the part of parents. Parents with children in the traditional school in this study, which has all the advantages associated with high prestige, spend more money on extra-lessons than parents of children from the comprehensive school. That the participation in extra-lessons is significant in the “poorer” school means that parents also accept the need for extra-lessons and will pay when they can afford.

The perception of the need for extra-lessons and its costs suggest that education in Trinidad and Tobago is not free and those who can afford are at an advantage in the system. Children in the stronger school in this study accessed more extra-lessons.

#### **The Efficiency Factor**

The participation rates in private lessons and the range of subjects pursued already mean that students access significant assistance over and above what is given in the school system.

The data collected on motivations for extra-lessons speak more pertinently to this issue. There are two separate forces driving the process. One is the concern for good grades as a result of competition for scholarships or for job opportunities in a narrow labour market. Therefore, even if the system was efficient at delivering instruction, this factor would still hold. This is dependent on parental anxiety and a whole lot of cultural factors. Students agree that they would still seek extra-lessons in subjects in which their performance was good in order to

ensure high exam grades. Students from both schools agreed on this issue.

But there is a second factor driving the process, which has to do with student perception that teaching is inadequate and teachers are seen as not up to the task. They cite many bad practices from their teachers. In addition, they feel that instructional time is sometimes not sufficient for completion of their courses. In both schools, therefore, there is evidence to suggest that the system is not delivering quality instruction. Hence, students from both schools agreed that extra-lessons impacted positively on their school performance.

### **Accountability**

In all education systems, success in formal examinations is the most popular yardstick by which schools are evaluated. It is an accepted fact in Trinidad and Tobago that the traditional schools achieve higher pass rates in examinations than senior comprehensive schools. And so, in the public mind, senior comprehensive schools are generally perceived as less successful than traditional schools.

The far greater reliance on extra-lessons by the traditional school compared to the comprehensive school in this study, if it is a typical pattern in the system, suggests the need to re-evaluate the way schools are assessed. Not only does the traditional school enjoy the advantages of stronger school culture, students with stronger academic skills, and more established alumni, they are also able to access greater support from the extra-lessons market. Therefore, comparisons of final examination marks cannot be relied upon to reflect the instructional capability of different schools.

It was stated at the beginning of this article that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has been expending large sums of money to improve access to education in keeping with the drive for “Education For All.” It is clear from these findings that the existence of an extra-lessons industry contradicts the goals of democratization of education—both on grounds of efficiency and equity.

Due to the strong competitive nature of the examinations system and shortcomings in the delivery of instruction, candidates and their parents spend significant amounts of money in order to achieve success in examinations. Consequently, success becomes dependent on the ability to pay.

Policy makers must, therefore, pay more attention to the extra-lessons market in considering education reform.

### References

- Bray, M. (2006). Private supplementary tutoring: Comparative perspectives on patterns and implications. *Compare*, 36(4), 515–530.
- Brunton, R. (2000). Extra-lessons in Trinidad and Tobago: Qualification inflation and equality of opportunity. *Caribbean Curriculum*, 7(2), 1–17.
- Brunton, R. (2002). The effects of extra-lessons on the qualification inflation and equality of educational opportunity in Trinidad and Tobago. In N. Mustapha & R. Brunton (Eds.), *Issues in education in Trinidad and Tobago* (pp 162–186). School of Continuing Studies, UWI, St Augustine.
- Buchmann, C. (1999). The state and schooling in Kenya: Historical developments and current challenges. *Africa Today*, 46(1), 95–117.
- Dang, H., & Rogers, F., H. (2008) *How to interpret the growing phenomenon of private tutoring: Human capital deepening, inequality, or waste of resources?* (Policy Research Working Paper; no. WPS 4530). Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Hallak, J., & Poisson, M. (2007). How to avoid the corruption of mainstream education. In *Corrupt schools, corrupt universities. What can be done?* (pp. 257–271). Paris: International Institute for Economic Planning.
- Heyneman, S. P. (2004). Education and corruption. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 24, 637–648.
- Jules, V. (1994). *A study of the secondary school population in Trinidad and Tobago: Placement patterns and practices: A research report*. St. Augustine, Trinidad: Centre for Ethnic Studies, UWI.
- Silova, I., Budiene, V., & Bray, M. (Eds.). (2006). *Education in a hidden marketplace: Monitoring of private tutoring: Overview and country reports*. New York: Open Society Institute.
- Stevenson, D. L., & Baker, D. P. (1992). Shadow education and allocation in formal schooling: Transition to University in Japan. *American Journal of Sociology*, 97(6), 1639–1657.