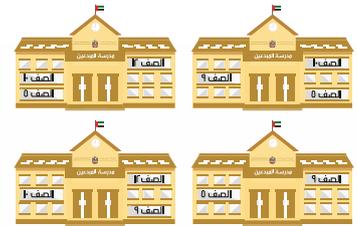


POLICY BRIEF

Private Tutoring in the United Arab Emirates: Is there a need for regulation?



Partners in Making Educational Decisions

Valeria Rocha/Ed.D. Sheren Hamed/Ph.D.



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Summary

Private tutoring has been a common feature of the educational landscape in many Western and non-western countries for a long time. Despite the rise in private tutoring in the UAE and elsewhere in the last ten years, that practice has not been without controversy. Supporters of private tutoring argue that it generates additional income for tutors and functions as a remedial intervention to aid low-achieving students while boosting high achievers' performance. Critics believe that private tutoring exacerbates social and economic inequalities, puts a financial strain on low-income families, and disturbs the overall teaching and learning environment in schools.

To understand the pros and cons of private tutoring, it is important to ascertain the prevalence and complexities of private tutoring in different contexts, while exploring the reasons for the growing demand for private tutoring and the overall state of education in each country. By knowing the local context, private tutoring can be regulated to support students learning and minimize the educational gap between high and low performers. Further, decision makers may use private tutoring as a tool to improve the overall education system.

The current policy brief presents the results of the study "Parents' Perspective on Paid Private Tutoring" conducted by the Regional Center for Educational Planning in the United Arab Emirates. The study targeted parents whose children were enrolled in grades 10 ,9 ,5 and 12 during the 2018/2017 academic year. The purpose of the study was to provide the MOE information that can guide them in making sound decisions about paid private tutoring in the country.

Introduction and Methodolog

To fulfill the UAE Vision 2021, the UAE works strategically and intensively to ensure excellence in human resources development and promote Emirati's well-being. The country provides high quality education at all levels, including continuing non-formal education to guarantee lifelong learning and to sustain a productive Emirati knowledge society.

The UAE government has adopted measures, launched initiatives and programs and allocated resources to enable the education system to be integrated, innovative, and provide multiple opportunities for learners. The country has modernized management procedures, governance and education system structures, such as merging the general education and higher education in one ministry to unify system level planning from kindergarten to higher education. Notable achievements related to education quality include developing curriculum and educational materials, integration of ICT in education, innovations in smart learning and STEM, and reading improvement among youth.

As part of its comprehensive initiatives, the Ministry of Education in the United Arab Emirates has sought to understand the status of paid private tutoring in the country by exploring its incidence, causes, cost, and providers' characteristics (grade, gender, nationality) by school type and curriculum during the 2018/2017 academic year. Although there are many types of private tutoring, the study commissioned by the Ministry only addressed paid private tutoring in school subjects after regular school hours.

The Regional Center for Educational Planning (RCEP), an institution with the mandate to produce and disseminate educational knowledge, was encumbered with the task to design and conduct a policy-oriented research to enable the MOE to use evidence to formulate policies and regulate aspects of private tutoring, such as tutors' qualifications, costs, quality of instruction, and students' safety. To obtain reliable information, RCEP designed and utilized a questionnaire for parents. The tool was validated by national and international experts and standard policy-research methodologies.

This policy brief presents findings and recommendations of the study titled "Parents' Perspectives on Paid Private Tutoring in the United Arab Emirates." The study targeted students in grades 5 (end of cycle 9),(1 (end of cycle 10),(2, and 12 (secondary level) in MOE and private schools that followed the MOE, IB, IG, or SAT curricula in those grades. Strata considered in the sample selection included: 1) emirates (Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Sharjah, Fujairah, Ras Al Khaimah, and Umm Al Quwain); 2) sex of school (male, female, co-ed); 3) school type (public or private); and 4) curriculum type (MOE, IB, IG, or SAT). The response rate was %85 and the total number of completed questionnaires was 3,929.

Results

General Result

Overall, %73 of respondents, across targeted grades, indicated their children did not take paid private tutoring during the 2018-2017 academic year.

Result 1: Which group of students receives more private tutoring?

Parents' responses indicated that private tutoring practices differed by students' nationality and gender. Thirty-two percent of Emiratis were taking private lessons compared to %21 of non-Emiratis. This difference was significant. There were also differences in the extent of private tutoring by students' sex, although that difference was only significant for Emiratis (figure 1).

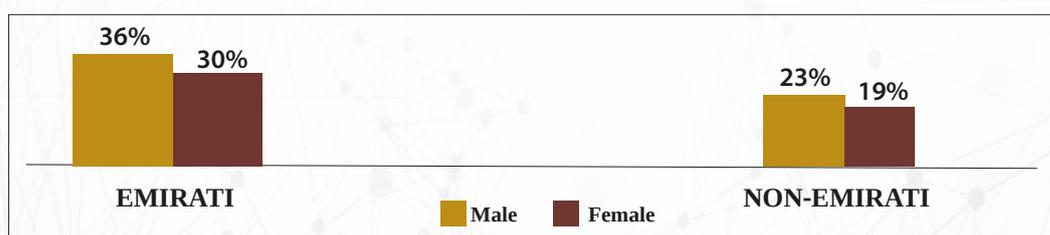


Figure 1: Percentage of Males and Females Taking Private Tutoring by Nationality

Analysis by school type (public, private) revealed that %56 of students in public schools took paid private tutoring in comparison to %44 of students in private schools. Those differences were significant (figure 2). Analysis of Emirati students demonstrate that %35 of Emiratis studying in private schools took private tutoring whereas %31 of Emiratis studying in public schools hired that service.

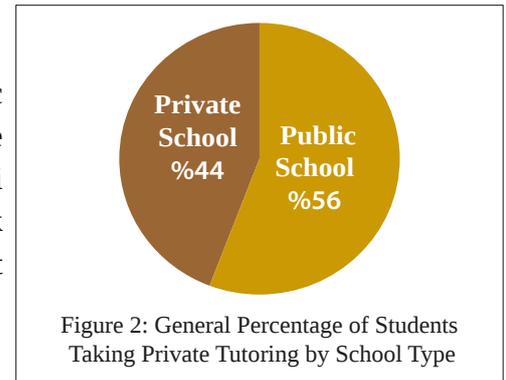


Figure 2: General Percentage of Students Taking Private Tutoring by School Type

Result 2: Private tutoring by grade

Emiratis took private classes more often than non-Emiratis in all grades (Figure 3). For Emiratis, the demand for private tutoring was similar across grades, but with a significant decrease in Grade 9. For non-Emiratis, the demand for private tutoring was higher in 5th grade than in Grades 9 and 10, but not significantly different. However, in 12th grade, the demand grew significantly in comparison to early grades. As the bar chart demonstrates, the difference between Emiratis and non-Emiratis with regards to demand for private tutoring becomes very small in grade 12. The high demand for private tutoring in grade 12 might stem from the fact that students are pressured to earn high grades to be admitted to good universities.

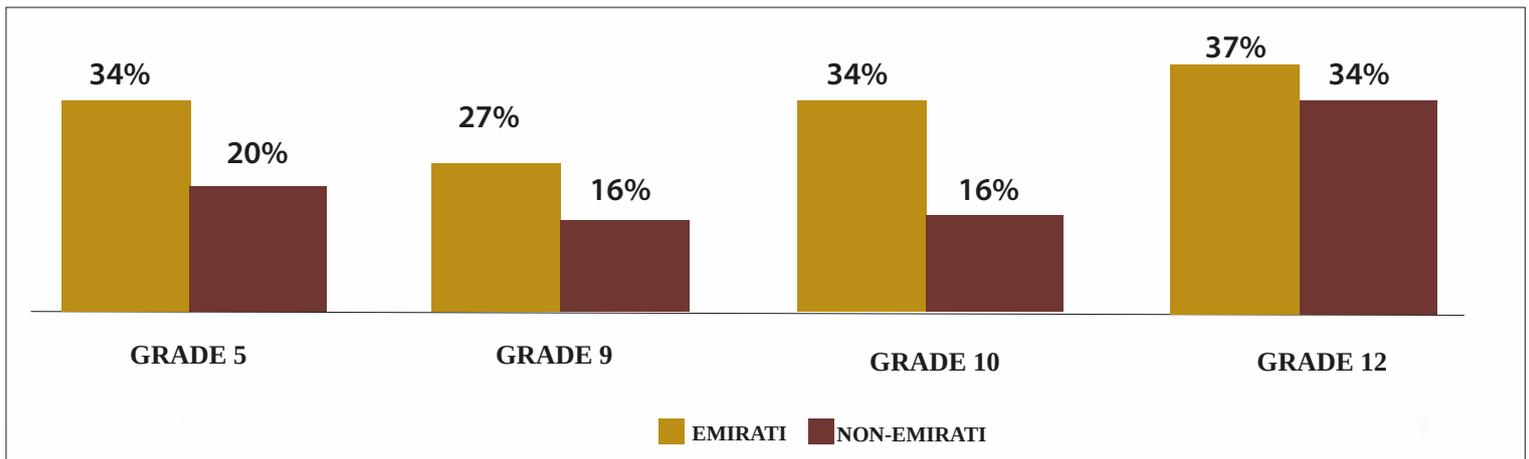


Figure 3: Percentage of Students Taking Private Classes by Nationality and Grade

Result 3: Private tutoring by subject

Parents were asked about private tutoring in four subjects: math, science, Arabic and English. Mathematics was the subject in which most students took out of-school lessons (%83), followed by science (%58), English (%50), and Arabic (%44). On average, students took private lessons in two subjects, for two hours a week per subject. However, a substantial percentage of students (%27) took private tutoring in all four subjects.

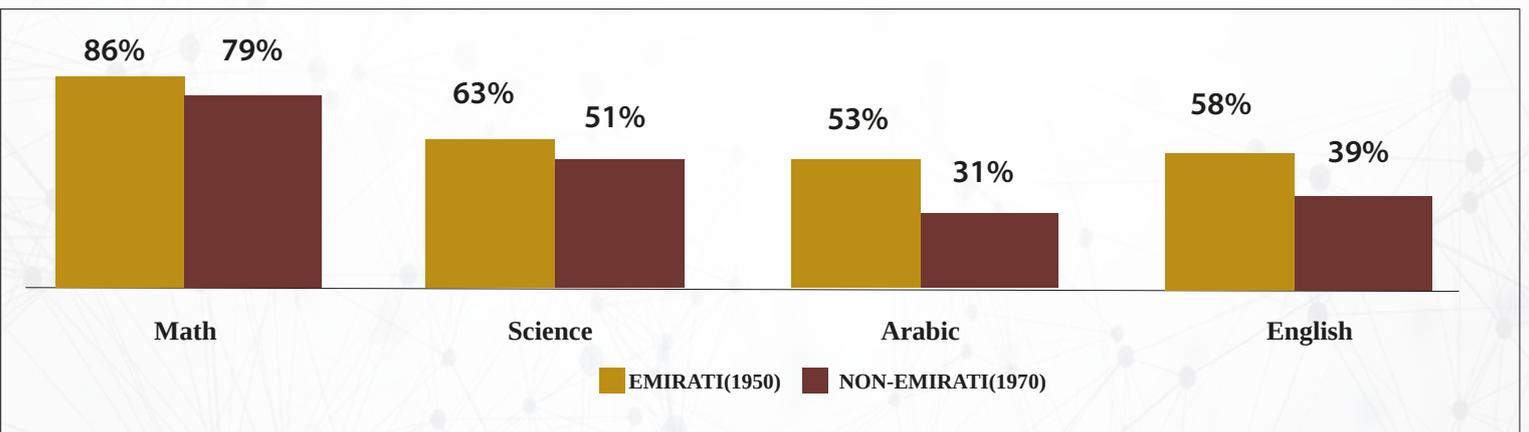


Figure 4: Percentage of Students Taking Private Tutoring by Subject and Nationality

Result 4: Reasons for not taking private tutoring

Parents who asserted their children had not taken private lessons, were provided a list of potential reasons for not doing so. As seen in figure 5, the most common reasons chosen among Emiratis and Non-Emiratis were “my child is doing well in school and does not need private tutoring” (%61), followed by “we help and support our child with homework” (%42), “I can’t afford it” (%22), and “I cannot find a good private tutor” (%10).

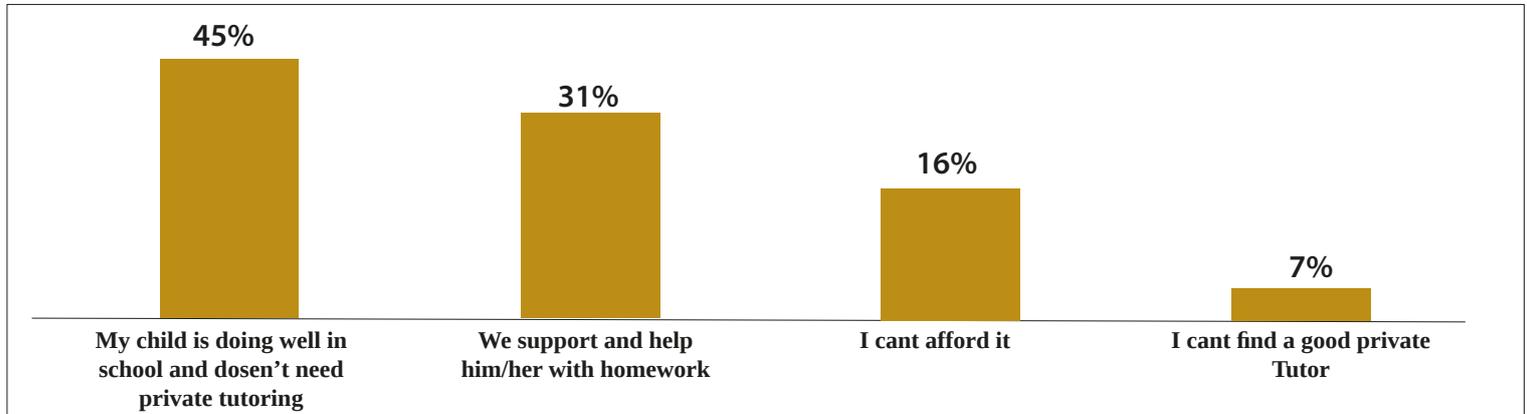


Figure 5: Reasons for Not Taking Private Tutoring (n=2868)

Result 5: Reasons for taking private tutoring

Parents were asked to clarify reasons for hiring private tutors for their children. Factor analysis identified three factors as parents’ main reasons for hiring private lessons:

- Factor 1: high academic demands (curriculum difficulty, too many exams, and homework) was the main reason for taking private lessons.
- Factor 2: concern over education quality (school and teacher quality).
- Factor 3: compliance with external influences (pressure from other parents, teacher, and/or principals).

Approximately %74 of Emirati and non-Emirati parents agreed that they would stop paying for private tutoring if their child’s school provided free additional lessons after school hours free of charge.

Result 6: Who are the private tutors?

Figure 6 reveals that most Emirati and non-Emirati children were taught by professional teachers, independently of the subjects. Most of those teachers (%49-46) did not work in their students’ schools. However, a small percentage of students was taught by their own teacher (%13-11) or a teacher who works in the same school (%13-10). A more modest percentage of students took private lessons with someone who is not a teacher.

Forty-five percent of parents did not know the educational level of the last tutor they had hired. Among those who were aware of the tutors’ academic background, %36 hired tutors with at least a bachelor’s degree. About %15 had a master’s degree and %3 had a doctorate.

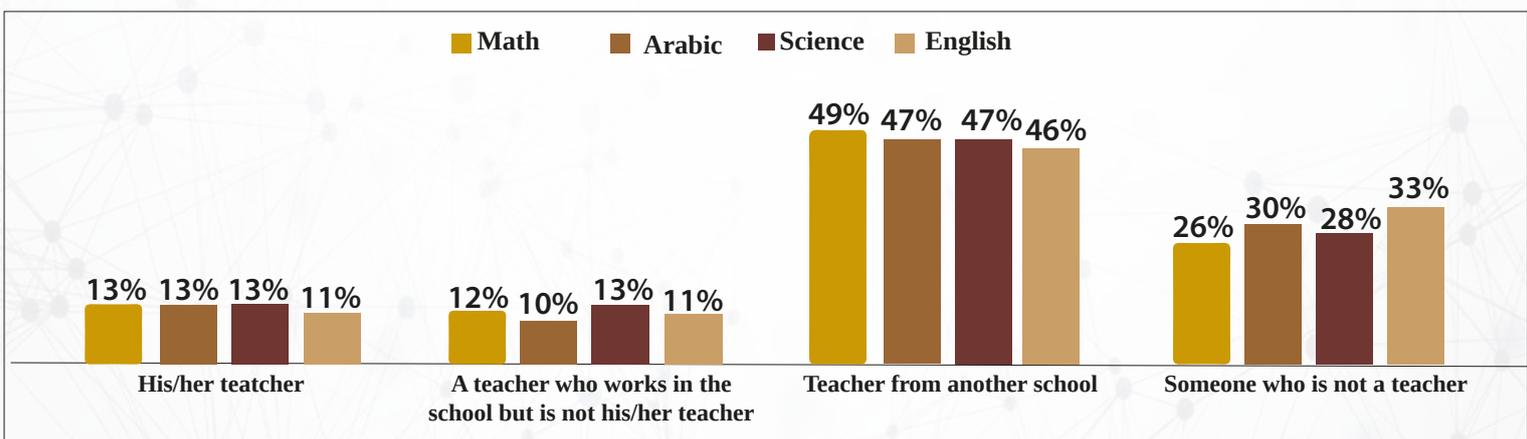


Figure 6: Private Tutoring Providers by Subject

Result 7: What is the cost of private tutoring?

The average amount paid for private tutoring was not very different from the maximum amount parents were willing to pay. Emirati parents were willing to pay 170 AED/hour, on average, while non-Emirati parents are willing to pay 150 AED/hour.

Result 8: Parental Preferences (Tutors' Characteristics)

Parents were asked about aspects they consider important when hiring a private tutor for their children (Table 1). The most important aspect for Emiratis and non-Emiratis was tutors' "skills and experience" (%86). Consistently, a large percentage of parents stated they would not hire a college undergraduate (%78), as those tutors will probably be young and have limited experience in teaching.

Although half of the parents stated the sex of the tutor was not important, a large percentage indicated a preference for having their children taught by a teacher of the same sex. Fifty-one percent of girls' parents stated they would prefer a female tutor and only %5 would prefer a male tutor. Thirty percent of boys' parents preferred a male tutor and %17 preferred to have a female tutor.

Additional tutors' characteristics mentioned by parents were "reputation as a private tutor" (%38), followed by "being able to go to a child's home" (%29), "age" (%13), and "being a child's school teacher" (%10).

Tutors' Characteristics	% of parents who believe these are important characteristics
Age	13%
Sex	52%
Skills and Experience	86%
Reputation as Private Tutor	38%
Being a Child's School Teacher	10%
Being Able to Go to a Child's Home	29%
Would NOT hire a college undergraduate*	78%

Table 1: Characteristics Parents Consider When Hiring a Tutor (n=1487)

Regulating Private Tutoring

The main goal of this paper was to provide a foundation to develop future private tutoring regulations in the UAE. The survey asked participants what aspects of private tutoring should be regulated, if any. Only %5 believed that private tutoring should not be regulated at all. The remaining participants believed that one or more aspects should be controlled by the Ministry of Education (Table 2). The most common factors to be regulated, according to parents, were "quality of private tutoring" (%64) and "hourly rate" (%60). However, half of the respondents were also in favor of regulating tutors' qualifications (%52) and child safety conditions (%51). Aspects of private tutoring (skills-focused) and venue were also common responses (%43 and %40, respectively). A substantive, but smaller percentage of parents (%29) believed that school staff should not be allowed to tutor their own students.

Aspects to be Regulated	% Parents
Hourly rate	60%
Quality of private tutoring	64%
Private tutors' qualifications	52%
Child safety conditions	51%
School staff should not be allowed to tutor their own students	29%
Venue where private tutoring should take place	40%
Areas (focus on skills rather than textbook memorization)	43%

Table 2: Aspects of Private Tutoring That Should Be Regulated by the Ministry of Education (n=1264)

Policy Options

Given the characteristics of private tutoring in the UAE and its growing demand, the Ministry of Education should lead a process to develop several measures and policies to govern private tutoring in the coming years. The measures proposed below can be implemented selectively and some will affect only Emirati students in government schools. Measures will focus primarily on ensuring the quality of private tutoring by regulating who can be a tutor and providing feasible options for parents to determine how to choose their children's tutors, where tutoring can take place, and how much they should pay. More specifically, the Ministry of Education could implement the following:

1) Provide Cost-Free Private Tutoring in Public Schools

The MoE might offer in-school tutoring programs after school hours in public schools, distributed geographically in all regions of the country and under the direct supervision of the educational zones. Public school teachers would be allowed to carry out private tutoring sessions and receive a bonus according to the number of private tutoring hours they provide each month. Teachers would also be allowed to tutor in different schools if they are accredited and hold a teacher's license from the Ministry of Education. Teachers will receive additional training on student-centered teaching methodologies to address the specific needs of students.

2) Require Tutors to Obtain a Professional License

All teachers interested in providing out-of-school private tutoring should have to obtain a license to become tutors. The licensing process would be based on basic requirements for tutoring, such as in-depth knowledge of the subject, advanced knowledge of key tutoring strategies and techniques. The tutoring license process would be managed by the Ministry of Education. An e-page created by the Ministry of Education would list all licensed teachers who provide tutoring. That information would be available to all parents.

3) Establish an Open-Communications System between the Ministry of Education and Parents to Guarantee their Rights

In addition to providing a list of licensed tutors, an e-page created by the Ministry of Education would provide information about parents' rights and responsibilities related to hiring a tutor or a tutoring center. The e-page would also include an assessment page for parents to evaluate tutors' performance. Parents' evaluations would become accessible to other parents to make informed decisions about who to hire. A hotline for complaints can be developed so parents can denounce non-compliance with MOE's regulations.

4) Regulate Costs

The Ministry of Education should standardize private tutoring fees according to tutor's credentials, type of tutoring (individual or groups), materials provided, etc. and cap the maximum amount tutors can charge based on selected criteria. Cases of non-compliance would be denounced through the e-page or the hotline.

5) Regulate Private Tutoring Centers

The Ministry of Education should require Centers to obtain a license to operate. The licensing process would consider several educational and commercial regulations, such as the number of students the establishment is allowed to provide lessons to, guidelines for child safety, hours of operation, services provided, fees (based on government stipulations), the types of private tutoring offered (one-to-one or groups), advertisement practices, and the assurance that tutors are licensed by the MOE. After Centers obtained a license they would have to report on those operational aspects periodically.

6) Implement a Tutorial Voucher System

The MOE should provide vouchers for private tutoring in licensed centers to students who fall below national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy. The voucher amount and restrictions would be based on the regulated costs of private tutoring. The government would monitor children's progress to assess parents' satisfaction and children's academic progress.

All measures proposed above will require coordination among MOE departments and other ministries and entities (Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization, Ministry of Economy, Chambers of Commerce and Industry from all emirates). A governing framework can be developed to establish regulations, mechanisms/terms to monitor and evaluate the activities of private tutors, as well as check the quality of the services provided to students.

A solid regulation strategy will strengthen the academic performance of students who are not performing well and increase their grades. It is also expected that providing after-school tutoring programs in schools and licensed centers will gradually reduce the prevalence of non-regulated private tutoring in students' homes.



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المركز الإقليمي للتخطيط التربوي

Regional Center for Educational Planning

Regional Center for Educational Planning
University City - Sharjah

P.O.Box: 68855 - Phone : +971 6 5055333 - FAX : +971 6 5455004

Email: Info@rcep-unesco.ae

Website: www.rcepunesco.ae

