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Beyond the Classroom: Private Tutoring as a Complementary Learning Pathway for University Entrance Preparation in Thailand

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Abstract

Private tutoring has become a prominent form of supplementary education in Thailand, particularly among upper-secondary students preparing for university admission. This conceptual paper examines how private tutoring may complement, rather than replace, formal schooling in a high-stakes admission environment. The analysis draws on documentary review of official Thai admission and curriculum documents, Thai and international research on private supplementary tutoring, and evidence syntheses on one-to-one and small-group tuition. The paper compares formal schooling and private tutoring across five dimensions: 1.educational purpose, 2.content targeting, 3.time and pacing, 4.instructional interaction, and 5.learner choice. The synthesis suggests that tutoring can provide targeted explanation, additional practice, immediate feedback, and flexible pacing when it is explicitly connected to identified learning needs. However, these potential advantages should not be interpreted as evidence that tutoring is inherently more effective than classroom teaching. Evidence on tutoring is context-dependent, and positive effects are more likely when provision is additional to regular instruction, focused on specific needs, delivered by appropriately prepared tutors, and monitored for progress. The paper also identifies important concerns regarding unequal access, commercial pressure, variable tutor quality, and the risk of examination-oriented shortcuts replacing conceptual understanding. A complementary model is therefore proposed in which schools provide the common educational foundation, while tutoring functions as an optional, targeted layer of support. The paper concludes that the educational value of tutoring depends less on the label or format of provision than on the alignment among learner needs, instructional quality, assessment demands, and ethical practice.

Keywords: Private Tutoring, Supplementary Education, Shadow Education, University Entrance, Learner Choice Thailand