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“SUPPLEMENTARY TUTORING AT A PRIVATE PRIMARY SCHOOL IN ST.
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LEARNINGS FROM A “LESSONS CULTURE”

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ABSTRACT

The practice of extra-lessons or private tutoring as it is better known, is one that many have participated in for several years throughout the world. Despite its popularity, the extent to which it benefits a student academically in comparison to a country's mainstream education system remains unclear as it has both positive and negative implications. This thesis, aims to fill the gap in the discourse surrounding the extra-lessons phenomenon in the Caribbean particularly in Trinidad and Tobago. This is because literature on the issue is extremely limited despite its popularity on the islands. Thus, a case study, which focuses on the perspectives of students and teachers on the implications of extra-lessons in a Standard Four class, at a private primary school in the St. George East District, Trinidad and Tobago was carried out. A mixed method approach was applied where data was collected via a questionnaire and focus group conducted with students as well as through an individual interview.

The findings showed that despite the fact that the majority of the students who attend extra-lessons viewed it as a useful academic tool which provides remedial help, allows more individual attention and extra subject reinforcement, they as well as their found there were many negative implications for students, teachers, as well as the formal education system. However, within the mixed view there was a greater preference for the mainstream education system as opposed to private tutoring.

Keywords: Trinidad, extra-lessons, implications, primary education, shadow education, private tutoring

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INTRODUCTION

“Just as the shadow cast by a sundial can tell the observer about the passage of time, so the shadow of an education system can tell the observer about change in societies” (Bray 13). Extra-lessons (lessons) also known as ‘shadow education’, a term coined by researcher Mark Bray, has been ingrained in Trinbagonian culture for decades (Barrow and Lochan 411). Over the years, this once subtle practice of seeking external guidance and assistance from a tutor has evolved into a “multimillion-dollar industry” (Johnston) as it has become commonplace for many primary and secondary education students. However, it is important to note that this ‘lessons’ culture is not indigenous to the shores of Trinidad and Tobago, but is rather global in scope. It has been widely linked to East and South Asian (Bray 11) countries initially, namely Japan, China and South Korea. The phenomenon then gained momentum and today can be found in several parts of the world including, Africa, the Middle East, and the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, each country has a different approach to shadow education, resulting in a different impact on their education system (Barrow and Lochan 408).

A country’s demand for extra-lessons fluctuates as its education system evolves. Trinidad and Tobago’s demand for it principally links back to its colonial past whereby the tripartite system of education¹ inherited under British rule has in return created an “exam-driven school system” (Barrow and Lochan 45) which is a breeding ground for shadow education. One must also note that, within that period, there were limited school placements as well as job opportunities which is why student’s performance was prioritised. However, since then the government has opened several schools and their numerous options outside of education. Despite this fact, the colonial impact remains whereby one’s life outcome is

¹ The tripartite system of education was the British government’s attempt at an education system for all. On writing the Common Entrance examination students were selected to go to a modern or a technical school which focused on equipping students with skills to prepare them for the labour market. While a traditional grammar school was where the top academically performing students were assigned. (Cunnigham 16)

determined by academic performance. Thus, it is based on this belief that “Students and parents are careful to explore all possible alternatives [when it comes to education and gaining high grades on examinations]” (Brunton 3) and for many this alternative is supplementary classes.

Extra-lessons can no longer be regarded as an additional expense but have become a regular cost for parents and guardians as long as they have a ward enrolled at the primary and secondary level in Trinidad and Tobago. Years before extra-lessons got to the point of becoming a ‘rite of passage’ for most Trinbagonian students, the process was condemned by parents and those in the education field who tried to understand the need for children to attend these supplementary classes as they feel it is a “costly and time-consuming process” (Barrow and Lochan 55) which inevitably places extra pressure on students as these classes are historically known to be attended by students who are going to write the Secondary Entrance Examinations (SEA) or the Caribbean Secondary Education (CSEC) exams. Although there is active participation in these supplementary classes, it is still criticised by many privately and by those in authority whereby former education minister Anthony Garcia stated that he is “not in favour of the "extra-lessons" that parents and teachers feel schoolchildren need and that there should not be a need once a curriculum is taught adequately (Mckenzie). If there is indeed no need for the lessons as he mentioned, why does it persist? This is the question that fuels this research paper.

Barrow and Lochan noted that “many factors shape the supply and demand of a country’s shadow education system” (408). Yet despite the popularity of the phenomenon in TT, there is still much research to be done on it, perhaps this is due to its “informal and varying nature” (Brunton 2) highlights. Thus, until now, there have only been three concrete studies done specifically on extra-lessons in Trinidad and Tobago. One by Ronald Brunton and which explores the demand for extra-lessons in secondary schools across the country, the other two done by Dorian Barrow and Samuel Lochan examine extra-lessons again at the secondary while

the other is the only one of its kind that directly addresses the factors that influence the demand for supplementary tutoring in Trinidad and Tobago at the primary school level. Since then, however, the need for extra-lessons would have developed based on factors such as curriculum changes and world events namely Covid-19.

Hence, this research paper aims to enrich existing documentation/literature based on extra-lessons in Trinidad at the primary level by exploring the perspectives of students and teachers on the subject matter. Also, the researcher hopes that in some way this paper will reignite the conversation surrounding this ‘industry’ and help those in authority recognize that there is an urgent need for its regulation if the nation is to fulfil its founding father’s goal of equal education for all.

Thesis Statement

Within the Trinidadian context, it can be said that the continued demand of extra-lessons is not a reliable indicator that the formal education system is not sufficient to help students to reach their academic goals.

Parameters

This study was based entirely on the case of one Standard Four class in a private primary school in the St. George East District and their teacher in Trinidad. On that account, the researcher was able to obtain their in-depth experiences and outlook on extra-lessons at the primary level. Additionally, because these experiences are unique to the participants, generalizations cannot be made.

Objectives

1. To investigate teachers' perceptions of extra-lessons and their impact on students
2. To explore students' reasons for taking extra-lessons

Chapter Outline

This study consists of three chapters. Chapter One sets the background to the study as it examines existing literature on the phenomenon. The chapter is divided into two sections analysing selected pieces of literature as well as identifying some gaps within these pieces which the researcher will attempt to fill throughout the study. The second chapter is a visual breakdown of the data collected throughout the case study which will be displayed using graphs, charts and other forms of visual representation. The final and third chapter will include a detailed discussion based on the main findings of the perceptions of extra-lessons based on student and teacher perspectives.

Methodology

This study follows a case study approach, which can be defined as, “an empirical inquiry which investigates a phenomenon in its real-life context” (Yin 18). This approach was the most appropriate for the research given the fact that it allows for “the exploration of the best possible sources of data, methods of collection (of data) and data analysis most suitable for the interpretive nature of the concept being investigated” (Maharajh 41). Consequently, to get the best results of the topic being researched, the researcher chose a mixed-method approach to collect primary data. This will not only allow the researcher to get an extensive look at the subject being considered but given that the nature of the study is qualitative, the addition of the quantitative methodology is essential to the research being done since it allows for more, credible results (Dawadi et al 27).

Quantitative data was obtained through the form of a questionnaire containing 13 questions related to the factors which encourage students to attend private supplementary classes. The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms through the Primary School’s administration to approximately 18 students in a Standard Four class using purposive sampling. Whereby the students from this particular year were selected because based on

previous literature they would more than likely have experience in extra-lessons which is convenient to the researcher. Due to time constraints as well as the ages of the participants, a questionnaire was a quick yet efficient way to collect a sufficient amount of data (Holmes 1). The questionnaire consisted of closed questions so that the students could easily understand the questions without much assistance, to thereby allow for unbiased results. It also included a few open-ended questions to allow students to freely express opinions about extra-lessons.

Qualitative data was derived through an interview using semi-structured research questions with the teacher of the Standard 4 class as it related to her opinions on the prevalence of the extra-lessons phenomena in Trinidad. This method allowed the teacher to articulate her opinions without feeling obligated to give perfect or pre-planned responses. Furthermore, a focus group was held to triangulate the data obtained in the questionnaire. It was formed using four students who voluntarily responded to the questionnaire by leaving their contact numbers at the end of the questionnaire. However, there were some limitations to this type of research method. For example, for some questions asked the students were partially influenced by the responses of their peers.

CHAPTER ONE

Review of Literature

Extra-lessons despite its many names have undoubtedly taken the world by storm and as such many have become increasingly interested in the phenomenon. Researchers principally focus on areas such as the benefits of this occurrence and whether it should be regularly integrated into educational systems. Despite the interest and the frequency at which students participate in extra-lessons in the Caribbean, especially Trinidad and Tobago, the documentation is limited. Nonetheless, they are worth examining as it is vital to understand one's past to progress in the future. This chapter was divided into two main sections entitled, "Education for All" and The Efficiency Problem". The works of four locals were analysed. They include, two studies conducted by Samuel Lochan and Dorian Barrow 2015 and 2012 which deal with the factors influencing extra-lessons in TT at the primary level and a comparative study at the secondary level based on the effect of extra-lessons. The final two pieces of literature used are Victoria Cunningham's 2021 study which focused on the 'Impact of High-Stakes Testing in Trinidad and Tobago and Ronald Brunton's 2000 study which examined the factors influencing extra-lessons and its social implications at the secondary level. Moreover, the review was informed by a few other pieces of literature however, they were not explored in depth.

Education for All

In his Independence Day speech, former prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Eric Williams once said that, "Democracy means equality of opportunity for all in education, in the public service and in private employment"(Williams). Education has always been a high priority for the government of Trinidad and Tobago, more specifically an education

system for all to benefit from regardless of race, gender and one's socio-economic background. However, despite this goal, there have been undeniable setbacks to achieving it. One such setback is that of the Secondary Entrance Assessment Exam (SEA). Already elitist in nature as the test is a reformation of the British College Exhibition and Common Entrance examinations, two competitively rigorous examinations. These exams divided students into elite grammar schools, those schools built before the 1970's (Barrow and Lochan 47) or technical schools. "The major aim of primary education was the production of a few exceptionally trained children who can sit for the Exhibition Examination and secure admission to a 'classical' secondary school" (Smith et al. 224). In other words, the system was built for a selected few to succeed. Despite changes to the name and format De Lisle states that, "the exam's role and function as a selection tool for placing students into secondary schools [remains]" (qtd. in Cunningham 18). In addition to this, the categorization of high schools or secondary schools into 'prestigious' and 'non-prestigious' schools have also trickled into our society where there is the belief that 'prestigious' schools which are those usually run by a religious board are of higher academic educational standing whereas 'non-prestigious' schools are not.

In their 2012 study, Dorian Barrow and Samuel Lochan used a sequential mixed-method approach to determine whether or not participation in the shadow education system increased subsequently as exam pressures increased in secondary schools. They also sought to find out how participating in supplementary tutoring reflects patterns of educational and social stratification in Trinidad and Tobago. One of their major findings was that as early as Standard One, the national participation rate is 5.7 per cent and notes that participation increases throughout the levels, reaching 88.2 percent in Standard Five. The reason for this is none other than the SEA examinations. They note that 83% of the students who participated in the study attended private extra-lessons to ensure that they passed for their first choice school. Many of the participants shared the same sentiments in Victoria Cunningham's 2021 study the 'Impact

of High-Stakes Testing in Trinidad and Tobago.’ While Cunningham presented several vignettes of the students expressing their feelings toward their upcoming SEA exam, two stood out from students both age 11 as they strongly reflect the responses of their peers. Participant 12 stated “...I feel I will never get my first choice which is Prestige High but my third choice, non-prestige...” (104) while participant 15 notes that, “I am a child who cries fast and worries about things, like when Miss ...Said... that I would pass for a Life Centre” (107). These statistics and statements confirm Lochan and Barrow’s belief that there is a correlation between extra-lessons participation, education and social stratification in Trinidad and Tobago. Although there is no in-depth research that demonstrates a difference in the quality of education between, ‘prestigious’ and ‘non-prestigious’ schools, categories which are no longer applicable in the country’s contemporary education system, the colonial mindset remains those who are not academically inclined will go to a ‘non-prestigious’ school and thus will have a difficult future since, “educational qualifications have become the new benchmark of the modern world; the new measure of a person’s value...” (Brunton 4) and “the key to success is still perceived to be through [the] narrow gates [of a few secondary schools]” (Barrow and Lochan 419).

Another finding that stood out in both Lochan and Barrow’s 2015 and 2012 studies is that lessons are not available to all. A study done on regulating shadow education globally by Wei Zhang highlights that, “if left to the market forces, private supplementary tutoring is likely to be exclusive and inequitable.” This might be the case in Trinidad and Tobago. Despite the prevalence of extra-lessons in the twin-island republic, there have been minimal attempts to create legislation to regulate the service, not even in the recent “Draft Education Policy Paper (2017-2022)”, published by the Ministry of Education. Thus, prices for tutoring services are determined by the tutor. In their 2012 study, Lochan and Barrow conducted on primary school students they found that parents pay as low as TT\$20 per week, “a nominal fee” (413) which is the case for those in rural or poorer communities, whereas on a case by case basis depending

on what a parent could afford, TT\$75 - \$610 per month and in one extreme case where one student attended lessons 6 days a week, the parent paid TT\$3000 per term. In their 2015 comparative study done on a traditional (prestigious) high school and a comprehensive ('non-prestigious') high school, they found that regardless of the school, parents spent an average of TT\$500 per month on an average of three subjects. However, it is important to note that only 52.7% of the sample who attended a comprehensive school opposed to 89% of the sample of the traditional school was able to go to extra-lessons. According to Jules, this can be attributed to the point that, "students from comprehensive schools are generally materially less well off than students from traditional school" (qtd. in Lochan and Barrow 66). On the other hand, Brunton notes that the only limitation to one's participation in extra-lessons is their socio-economic background and variables including, "residence, family type and size and main provider" had limited influence on participation (14). But based on the period this study was conducted these factors are possibly worth considering. Nonetheless, Lochan and Barrow affirm that because the education system and extra-lessons are linked, "education in Trinidad and Tobago is not free and those who can afford are at an advantage in the system" (67).

The Efficiency Problem

In Lochan and Barrow's 2015 study, 97% of the students from the two schools highlighted that by attending extra-lessons they were able to see improvements in their individual subject areas for some of the following reasons:

1. **" because the lessons teachers knew their work well."**
2. **"they got the type of individual attention they needed"**
3. **"...repeating the school work in the subject" from the perspective of another teacher at these lessons sessions also "...helped."**

Interestingly enough in their 2012 study, they note that “[extra-lessons] concentrates only on the requirement for passing the final examination. Tutors focused only on the aspects of the syllabus that are tested in the final examination.” (418). That being said, most tutors teachers use the rote-learning ‘drill and kill’ system.² Thus, while some parents and students may criticise teachers, comparing them to their tutors it is often because they are not aware of several factors. When a student goes to a tutor there is a high possibility that said student would have already interacted with the content being taught at school, by their mainstream teacher, the only difference is that the child will now be able to interact with the content on a deeper level because of time. The tutor can take his/her time to explain concepts and allow the child to practice further without time constraints. In fact, the consensus given by teachers interviewed was that there is not enough time to thoroughly cover the syllabus within school hours to ensure that students are successful in examinations. Furthermore, in comparison to mainstream class teachers, these tutors have complete control over the number of students they choose to take in which is why several students in the literature reported that they received "individual" attention. Nonetheless, in his research, Brunton raises a pertinent point, “The rapid expansion of extra-lessons in TT may be seen as one of the most significant developments in education in the 1990s and represents a disturbing paradox. This paradox is manifested in the concurrent deterioration of the formal school system” (2). The Ministry of Education determines a school’s academic value based on the performance of the students on their standardised examinations, namely SEA and CSEC. As such, many teachers and schools receive praise for students’ success when in reality it is difficult to determine how much they have really contributed especially if that student attended extra-lessons. There have been several reports on social

² Based on the learning scenario proposed by Richard E. Myer, *A Tale of Three Learning Outcomes*, Rote-learning can be defined as memorizing information by repeating it. However, because no active learning is taking place one can only recall the specific information learnt and cannot apply the principles learnt and apply to new situations outside of the context it was learnt in. (Mayer 227)

media platforms where parents and guardians have complained that teachers purposely withhold content from students and technically “blackmail” (Barrow and Lochan 409) them and their parents covertly under the guise of a lack of time. As a consequence of our society being plunged into a ‘pass the exam’ craze, these parents are obligated to pay their child’s teacher extra money for lessons.

After reviewing the studies several points stood out. It appeared that a significant number of students both in primary and secondary school attend extra-lessons. The majority of them attend because they want to achieve success at the SEA and CSEC examinations, a symptom of colonialism, and because there is an overall lack of efficiency in the mainstream classroom including improper legislation, poor time management and even blackmail. However, despite the cost it appears that parents and guardians are willing to sacrifice because based on their perspectives they can get more benefits from the tutor than the class teacher.

All things considered though they aptly addressed issues surrounding extra-lessons, there are several gaps the researcher can fill based on this analysis. The studies examined with the expectation of Victoria Cunningham’s research paper all range between 8-21 years since being published as such there has more than likely been a change in the factors influencing extra-lessons as well as the perceptions of it. Furthermore, Lochan and Barrow’s 2012 study stands out as the only one that focuses completely on this topic as well as primary school thus, there is a need for further documentation. The researcher will address these findings within the context of her own research objectives in the upcoming chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

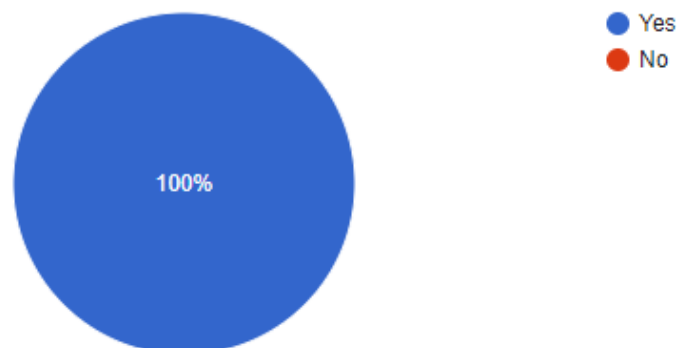
Data Presentation and Analysis

The following chapter seeks to present and analyse the data collected from a questionnaire, a focus group discussion and an interview. In alignment with the research questions, the presentation will be arranged according to student perspectives where the qualitative data obtained via the student focus group will be used as a cross-referencing tool to validate and/or oppose the quantitative data from the questionnaire. The teacher's interview will be presented separately. The questionnaire was distributed to a Standard 4 class of 18 students. Of the eighteen students, ten questionnaires were returned. Furthermore, four out of the ten respondents also formed the focus group. Thus, the following is a representation of their perspectives as well as their teacher.

Fig. 1. Quantity of Students Enrolled in Extra-Lessons in a Standard 4 class

1) Do you attend extra lessons

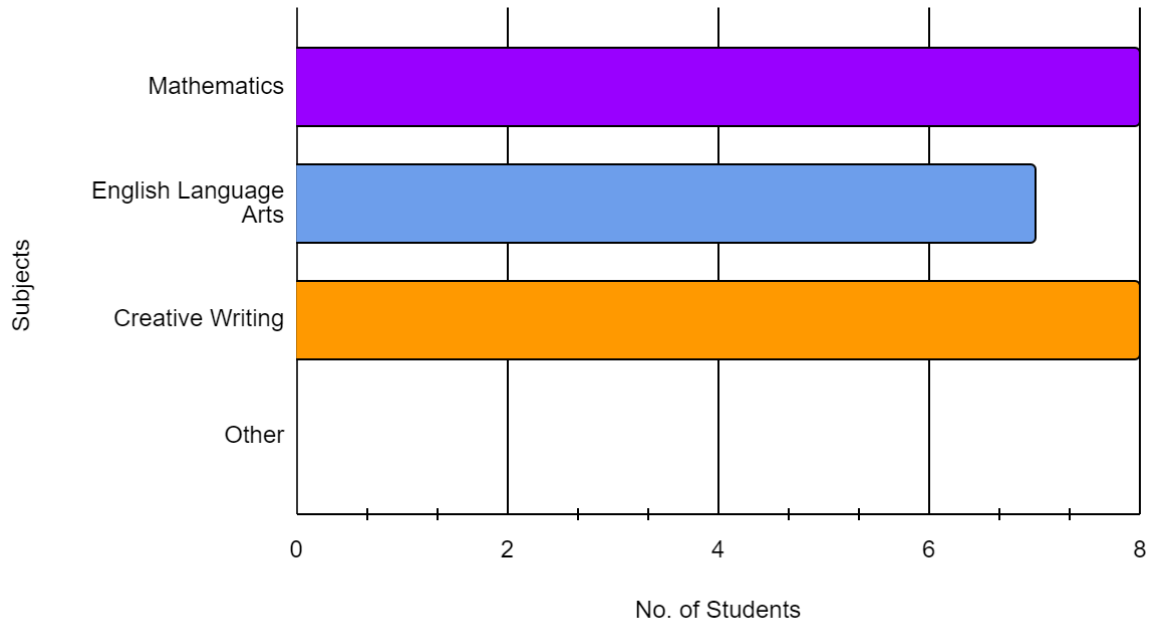
10 responses



The diagram above demonstrates that 100% per cent of the participants attend paid lessons with an external tutor. Through this response, extra-lessons appear to be prevalent among the Standard 4 class as just over half of the students attend.

Fig. 2. The Main Subject Areas for which Students Attend Extra-Lessons.

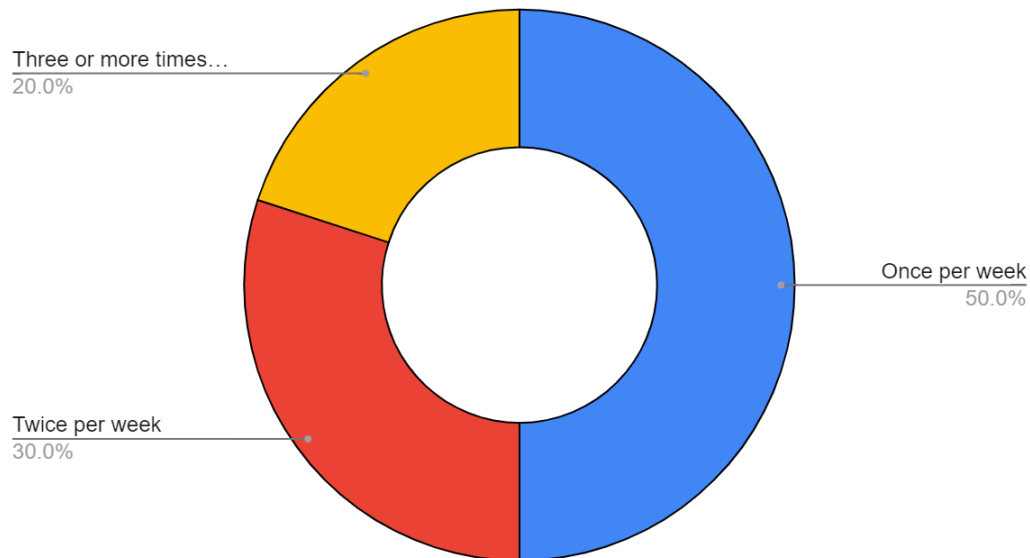
2) Which subject areas do you attend lessons for ?



The graph above presents the common subjects for which students attend extra-lessons. Eight students go to supplementary Mathematics and Creative Writing or English Language Arts Writing classes, while only seven students attend English Language Arts (ELA) classes. It is worth noting that the subjects selected were the three main subject areas which students are tested on for the Secondary Entrance Assessment, despite being given the option to include subject areas under the “Other” section.

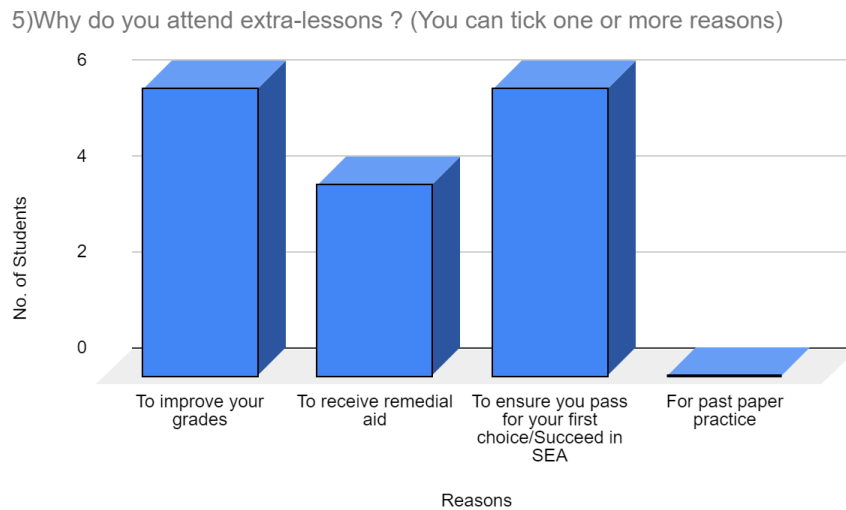
Fig. 3. Frequency With Which Students Attend Extra Lessons.

4)How often do you attend lessons ?



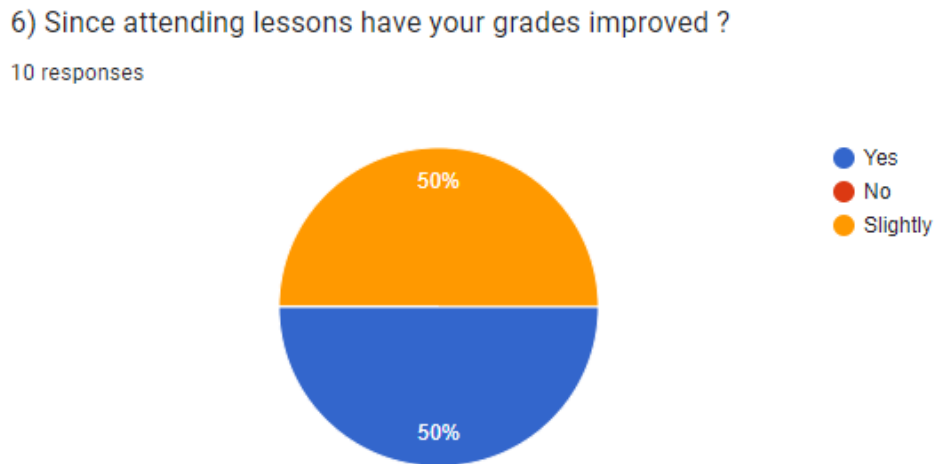
The chart above highlights how often students partake in extra-lessons classes. The majority of the respondents, approximately 50%, only attend lessons once every week. While 30% of them go twice per week and finally, 20% of the respondents attend these sessions three or more times a week. According to the focus group participants, their classes range from one to two hours,

Fig. 4. Reasons Why Students Attend Extra Lessons



The column chart highlights some possible reasons why students attend extra-lessons. An equal number of participants, 60%, claim that they attend extra-lessons to improve their grades and to succeed in the SEA exams. The remaining 40% go to receive remedial aid which includes revision with emphasis on the fundamentals of topics on the curriculum. No participants attend these classes for past paper practice. However, during the focus group, a similar question was asked and interestingly all the participants revealed that their main reason for going to supplementary tutoring was to receive remedial help, in the words of one participant, “I needed to go to lessons because I didn’t understand the work Miss was doing during class.” Only after mentioning their need for these sessions for remedial help, while the remaining two participants mentioned that SEA played a role in their parents making the decision to send them to lessons.

Fig. 5. Chart Indicating Whether or Not Students Saw Changes In Their Grades Since Starting Lessons.



The 10 respondents were asked whether or not they have seen any improvements in their overall grades since they began lessons by simply choosing between three options, 'Yes' – indicating significant changes, 'No' – indicating no improvements and 'Slightly' – indicating moderate progress. Half of the participants indicated that lessons have improved their grades while the other 50% claim that their grades have only improved slightly. In the focus group, the results were similar, whereby three of four participants agreed that extra-lessons had allowed them to improve, while the remaining student firmly stated that there had been no improvements since she began her lessons journey.

Fig. 6. Trends Indicating Where Students Believe They Learn Better Between School and Lessons

<u>Preference</u>	<u>Number of Students</u>	<u>Common themes among the reasons identified</u>	<u>Number of Students</u>
School	6	→ Explanations are thorough and clear	3
		→ Explanations are carried out at a reasonable pace so students can keep up	2
		→ No reason	1
extra-lessons	4	→ Receive more individual attention	2
		→ More time spent on individual subjects	1
		→ More reinforcement of topics through additional practice	1

The results above were derived when participants were asked to state where they learnt better between school and at extra-lessons. In a follow-up question, they were also asked to explain their reasons why they preferred one over the other. Six of ten participants learnt better at school. The most common trends identified based on the six reasons were that the class teacher's explanations were more thorough and were carried out at a reasonable pace so that they can follow the concepts easily. The remaining four participants preferred lessons mainly because they received individual attention, they were able to get more practice as well as more time was dedicated to the individual subject areas. Furthermore, these reasons also filtered into the trait's students hoped their class teacher could adopt from their lessons teacher, which mostly included providing students with more individual attention and more reinforcements of topics. Amidst this, an interesting perspective emerged from the focus group where two participants emphasised that their tutor needed to be more like their class teacher. One participant stated "...In lessons they don't explain really well, and I just wish my lessons teacher

was more like Miss.” While the other participant said, “I wish that my lessons teacher would be like my schoolteacher because my lessons teacher would do an easy question on one thing and then immediately go on to a hard one.”

Fig. 7. Opinions On Lessons As a Valuable Tool To Achieve One's Goals

<u>Are lessons a valuable tool?</u>	<u>Number of Students (%)</u>	<u>Reasons</u>
Yes	50%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → It helps improve students' overall level of understanding in various subjects. → It allows for extra practice and reinforcement. → It helps students cope with the SEA exam.
No	20%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Students believe if you study hard enough you will not need the additional assistance. → The difference in teaching methodologies only confuses students.
To a certain extent/Maybe	30%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → It is only necessary if you are struggling in a particular subject area. → External influences such as the student's peers believe it is necessary, but the student is not sure.

Finally, the students were asked about their opinions on extra-lessons as a valuable tool to help them succeed in the upcoming SEA exams. The vast majority, 50%, found that lessons were necessary for success in the high stakes exam principally because it increases their understanding in a particular subject as well as it is a source of extra practice. While 30% of students think it's only necessary in certain cases such as when a student may be struggling in a subject area, while other students are only attending because they feel pressured by others such as their peers. Finally, 20% of the participants thought that supplementary classes were unnecessary, primarily because. They believe that studying is sufficient but also, they believe that the difference in teaching methodologies used by their class teacher and schoolteacher

causes confusion. This was also an issue raised by a student in the focus group who found themselves confused because not only did the tutor's methodology differ but also the topic did not align with what the child was doing at school.

Interview Findings

An interview with a Standard 4 teacher at the school was conducted to explore her own professional perspectives as a teacher of 35 years on the extra-lessons culture in Trinidad and whether or not a parent should enrol their children. She highlights that she is against the practice of extra-lessons and believes that the phenomenon has several negative effects on students. For her, time spent at school is sufficient as she is not only able to complete the entire curriculum, but also adjusts her material to cater to the unique learning style of her class. According to the teacher, tutoring is only encouraged under one circumstance and that is when the child is displaying more educational gaps than she has time to fill during the day. Nonetheless, she maintained that extra-lessons are an added source of stress and fatigue for a student. Moreover, she underscores that the work done as well as the methodologies used during extra-lessons sessions sometimes clash with what is being done in the classroom. Finally, she notes that students have a dependence on their tutors. Therefore, she finds herself having to compensate for this during school hours as they are now forced to help the students unlearn harmful habits. Another issue that was highlighted in relation to her general perspective on the topic is that despite her advice against it parents have made correlation between success at the SEA exam and extra-lessons. This link is debunked when she notes as recent as the last year 2023, the top performing student in her class at the SEA exam was not enrolled in any supplementary classes for the time they spent in primary school. Finally, she touches on the problem of inequality whereby she nor any of the other teachers at the school give private lessons, she notes that in Standard 5 students are encouraged to get to school earlier where they will receive extra

practice at no cost, but this is not mandatory. However, if parents choose not to send their children to these classes they will not be disadvantaged as no new content is taught.

These perspectives put forward by the students and teacher of a Standard 4 class will be compared to the findings previously discussed in the before gaining better insight on the perceptions of extra-lessons.

CHAPTER THREE

Discussion

This chapter seeks to thoroughly evaluate the findings that were presented in the previous chapter. As demonstrated in Figure 1, 100% of the participants who responded, all attended extra-lessons. Given that the remaining eight students in the class selected did not attend supplementary classes that means 55.6% of the class partake in lessons. This is significant not only because it indicates a moderate to high demand for lessons but it is also consistent with the findings that those who are in exam classes are more likely to enrol in private lessons (Brunton 7). This statement is further supported as the participants in the focus group all indicated that they only began their tutoring journey at the beginning of Standard 4.

This result thus begs the question of what are the factors that propel students to start private lessons. Based on Figure 4, the current investigation found that the main reasons that the respondents went to lessons was to improve their overall grades as well as to ensure they went to their first choice school. These results align with the historical perspective that showed that 50% of the participants saw a definite improvement in their grades due to lessons while 50% said it improved their grades slightly. In the focus group however, two students affirmed that lessons have had no effect on their grades thus far, however this could be attributed to the fact that they began lessons less than a year ago. Given that half of the respondents saw positive changes in their grades, it is important to consider the statement made by Lochan and Barrow that “education in Trinidad and Tobago is not free and those who can afford it are at an advantage in the system” (67). This is a complex statement simply because they are making an indirect claim that lessons, a tool not available to all, plays a role in a student’s success.

However, one must consider that in order for something to be considered an advantage it must have clear benefits to the parties involved. While this research paper's findings does support Lochan and Barrow's statement by showing that half of the students who attend lessons have seen a definite positive improvement to their grades, one still cannot be sure if it is solely extra-lessons that has prompted this improvement. Nonetheless, that aspect goes beyond the scope of this study but it is a worthwhile gap that other researchers who are interested in this topic can explore.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that the vast majority of the students agreed that lessons is a valuable tool in one's academic career not only because there is the possibility it can improve a student's grades but also because it increases a students understanding of a particular subject area which can be a direct result of them receiving more individual attention in their supplementary classes. The participants also highlighted that extra-lessons are also a source of practice and reinforcement as well as a tool to cope with the pressure for SEA examinations. Another finding that stands out is that 30% of the participants believed that extra-lessons can be considered necessary until a certain point and that is if you are struggling in a subject. This was also the case for the teacher interviewed who found that a student should only enrol in lessons when students are displaying learning gaps beyond what their class teacher can help them with during school hours.

The extra-lessons phenomenon has become something that is often viewed as a tool that "provides a competitive edge in the battle of educational qualifications" (Brunton 4). Due to its perceived benefits and because of its unregulated reign in Trinbagonian society, stakeholders rarely stop to consider its negative effects. The Standard 4 teacher outlined several negative effects of extra-lessons on students and the mainstream education system. Firstly, she notes that they cause the child to become stressed and fatigued. The focus group participants highlight that a tutoring session can last around 1 to 2 hours. These hours combined with 6

hours of school not only affects the child mentally but also negatively affects the child's in-class experience. The teacher reports that they are often too tired to do the homework and are also tired in class, which inevitably has adverse effects on how much they absorb during the day.

Another issue she notes is the confusion stemming from the malalignment of the mainstream teacher's methodologies and topics being covered and that of the tutors. Surprisingly, this was also an issue highlighted by the participants in Figure 7, and in the focus group. Participants complained that sometimes their tutor goes through the curriculum at a much faster rate in comparison to their class teacher which often leaves them confused during their regular classes. Consequently, the teacher claims that class time is wasted because she has to undo the tutor's work to ensure that the concepts are clear for students. Finally, she highlights strong dependence on the lesson's teacher. This discovery aligns with research Mark Bray's finding that, "most students rely on private tutors for everything including homework and exam tips" (30). The teacher states that often in areas such as ELA Writing instead of helping students to understand writing theory and the important elements of a story, which is way she does it, tutors stifle the students creativity and ingenuity by teaching to the test and giving them what she calls a "formula", which is only meant to help the child succeed in examinations. This upholds the claim that extra-lessons is an "examination-centred activity" (Mahmud 70). Moreover, the issue touches on a greater societal problem of the ability of Trinidad and Tobago's government to produce highly skilled workers through the education system³. By upholding a system where rote-learning is encouraged, this creates negative habits in students early-on which could follow them throughout their academic career and in turn have adverse implications for the society.

³ In their study professor Jerome De Lisle et al work to resolve whether or not the design of the current education system which was inherited from the British is sufficient to foster human capital/resource development which is not only equal but equitable.

Nonetheless, the noxious effects of private lessons was a unique finding from the data collected chiefly because from a teacher's view they usually deem extra-lessons as an advantage. Thus teacher efficiency is questioned because Lochan and Barrow's research showed that, often teachers opted for extra-lessons because they felt as though class time was not sufficient to cover the necessary topics (415). However, the findings of this study do not support the previous research as the Standard 4 teacher stated that the MOE has issued a well-structured curriculum which if approached correctly is more than capable of being completed.

Based on the results obtained through a case study on the students and teacher of a Standard 4 class, this study was able to understand the perspectives and implications of the extra-lessons phenomenon. Interestingly, in comparison to the teachers interviewed in the local studies analysed, the Standard 4 teacher does not see the true benefit of enrolling one's ward in extra-lessons unless he/she is experiencing learning issues that the teacher will not be able to address during normal school hours. To support her belief, she pointed out several negative implications on both the mainstream school system as well as on the students. On the other hand, while the participants were able to recognize the value of the supplementary classes, the majority in the focus group as well as the questionnaire acknowledged that they learnt more with their class teacher (see Figure. 6). For this, the research has unearthed the fact that while there are some cases where extra-lessons can be advantageous for a student, contrary to previous findings it is not a mandatory tool for success. This research will surely serve as an asset for those who are interested in further researching this evolving phenomenon in Trinidad.

CONCLUSION

The practice of extra-lessons regardless of the name it bears has overtime become “an almost universally pervasive species” (Bray 13), that has undoubtedly formed part of the cultural fabric of Trinidadian society for decades. For an extended period, the school of thought that has justified attending supplementary classes is that a student can only have academic success, more specifically success in the SEA and CSEC, two high-stakes examinations taken at the end of the primary and secondary levels respectively only if they attend extra-lessons. Though many have opposed the practice, extra-lessons attendance continues to be a staple for many students. Even with this fact there are only three studies that directly address extra-lessons within the Trinidadian context, however, neither have zoned into the perspectives and implications of it on students, teachers and the formal education system that it shadows. Hence, this paper sought to not only give updated information on the extra-lessons system by means of a case study conducted on the students and teacher of a Standard 4 class at a private school in the St. George East District to understand their perspectives on extra-lessons, but it also served to enhance existing literature.

In line with popular belief, the study revealed that many students viewed extra-lessons as a positive tool which helps them to prepare for the SEA exams as they receive more practice and individual attention in comparison to school, it helps them to improve their grades and is also a source for remedial learning. However, the overall perspective was that the majority still preferred the learning that took place at school. Similarly, from a teacher’s perspective, extra-lessons are not necessary since during her years she’s seen students achieve their academic goals without tutoring. She has also observed that it also has several negative effects on students

who do attend extra-lessons as well as on herself as the class teacher and the formal education system.

While conducting this research the researcher encountered several limitations. The first limitation was the limited literature on extra-lessons in Trinidad. Those that were available were published more than 7 years ago affecting its reliability and validity, and as such the researcher had to use sources of those with similar educational landscapes to Trinidad and Tobago to get as close to an accurate vision of the issue as possible.

Another limitation faced was the small participant sample used, due to the time constraint of the research project. This study reflects the perspectives of ten respondents and a teacher in one private school in Trinidad. As such, to a certain point their opinions on extra-lessons cannot be applied to every student and teacher in Trinidad and Tobago as they may include some biases, particularly those responses obtained through the focus group and interview.

These implications leave room for future researchers to carry out a more profound exploration of this topic by opening up the research to the students and teachers at more primary schools both public and private as well as secondary schools. Not only can they discover more on the perspectives of students and teachers on private tuition but chapter 3 unveiled several research gaps beyond the scope of this research paper that are worth exploring including an analysis of whether or not attending extra-lessons alone improves a student's grades "since it cannot be denied that the attitudes, interests and learning styles of different students also affect the effectiveness of additional classes attended by these students" (Selamat et al 112).

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire Sample

Extra-lessons culture in Trinidad.

B *I* U  

My name is Zahra Joseph and I am a final year modern language student at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. For my undergraduate research project I am investigating the demand for extra-lessons at the primary school level. It will be greatly appreciated if you take a few minutes to answer 10 short questions on this issue. Please note that your responses will remain completely anonymous and will be used solely for academic purposes so please be as honest and detailed as possible. Furthermore, **this questionnaire is to be done strictly by primary school students at the Standard 4 level with the guidance of their parents if needed.** Thank you for your responses in advance.

1) Do you attend extra lessons *

- Yes
- No

2) Where do you attend these classes ? *

- In school (with your class teacher)
- Outside of school (with a tutor/lessons teacher)
- Both

3) Which subject areas do you attend lessons for ? (Please tick all of the subjects you take lessons for) *

- Mathematics
- English Language
- Creative Writing
- Other...

4) How often do you attend lessons per week ? *

- Once per week
- Twice per week
- Three or more times per week

5) Why do you attend extra-lessons ? (You can tick one or more reasons) *

- To improve your grades
- To get past paper practice
- For remedial learning
- To ensure you pass for your first choice (success at the SEA examinations)

6) Since attending lessons have your grades improved ? *

- Yes
- No
- Slightly

:::

7a) Do you understand a topic better when it is taught in class or at lessons ? *

- I understand it better in class
- I understand it better at lessons

7b) Based on your answer above in 7a, why do you think you understand topics better either at school or at lessons ? *

Long-answer text

8) Is there anything done in your extra-lessons class that you wish would be done in school? (for example, more past papers, more repetition of topics etc.) *

Long-answer text

9a) Do you enjoy attending extra-lessons ? *

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

9b) Why do you like or dislike going to lessons ? *

Long-answer text

10) As a student do you believe that attending extra-lessons is necessary to prepare you for your upcoming SEA exams ? Why is necessary or why is it unnecessary? *

Long-answer text

Section 2 of 2

Focus Group Participation

Description (optional)

...

1)If you are willing to let your child participate in an online focus group with his/her peers to gain extra information on the research topic, please leave your contact number below. It will be greatly appreciated.

APPENDIX B

Focus Group Questions

Objective: To understand student perspectives and factors which influence the demand for extra-lessons.

*NB -All terms will be further broken down to the students' level to ensure that they fully understand. Furthermore, please note that these are only guiding questions and are subject to change again based on the student's understanding.

1)How long have you been attending lessons and how has your experience been so far i.e. has it been helpful, has it not been helpful, has it been tiring etc?

Can you state why?

2)Have you seen an improvement in your overall test scores, reading/understanding/writing/numeracy, and can you grasp concepts faster since starting extra lessons?

3) How often do you attend extra classes per week?

2)Why did you start extra lessons?

Did you need help to keep up with class work/ Did you find that concepts/lessons taught in class were difficult?

Was it a decision made by your parents? If so, do you understand why they sent you there? Is it just to improve your grades or to succeed in the SEA examinations?

Was it a suggestion by your class teacher?

4) Who do you do extra lessons with? — An external tutor or your class teacher?

5)In light of the SEA examinations, how do you feel about it? (are you nervous/anxious, excited, or overwhelmed ?)

What has prompted these feelings? Do you feel pressured to pass for your first choice?

Do you think that lessons will help you to achieve your academic goals? Why or why not

6)The majority of your peers who've answered thus far think that they learn more at lessons?

Do you also feel this way and why ? In what ways are lessons different from class?

Does the teacher spend more time on topics in comparison to class?

Is there fewer children/ are you able to receive more individual attention

Do you have the opportunity to do more past papers?

Does the tutor teach by repetition i.e. students do a number of the same questions until they can memorise or does he/she teach generally i.e. ensure that students understand every area of that particular topic?

7)Is there any specific technique/tool that your lesson teacher does that you wish your class teacher would use because it makes learning easier?

APPENDIX C

Broad Teacher Interview Questions

- 1) Could you please state how long you have been teaching as well as your professional qualifications.
- 2) Are you familiar with the extra lessons culture in Trinidad and Tobago? Can you elaborate on this?
- 3) Do you believe that extra lessons are vital to the success of a child? Why or why not ?
- 4) In your professional opinion, what do you believe are the main factors which cause students to enrol in extra-lessons?
- 5) Are you a tutor / lessons teacher ? If yes, what is the average cost per month/ per subject? Or are you aware of others and their price points?
- 6) What do teaching and learning look like in your classroom?
- 7) In your opinion do you believe that there are negative impacts of extra-lessons? (This can be general or specific i.e whether you can identify a child going to lessons ‘shuts down/ignores teachers during class’ or that it is an elitist system that puts students behind’)




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Declaration

1. I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

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