# THE PRIVATE TUTORING EPIDEMIC:

## When Bad Teachers Become Great Tutors

AZERBAIJAN NATIONAL REPORT

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For the majority of Azerbaijan's children, formal educational instruction neither begins nor ends with school. Approximately 57% of secondary school students report using private tutoring, with 53% of ten-graders and 61% of eleven-graders paying for supplementary private tutoring in secondary school. Many of these children attend private tutoring lessons before the beginning of the school day and proceed from their schools to some form of private tutoring at the end of the school day. Unequivocally, students use private tutoring to prepare for centralized university entrance examinations. They believe that schools are no longer able to provide them with the necessary skills and knowledge to pass university examinations and, therefore, hire private tutors to help them in the process. In this context, university entrance seems practically impossible without studying with private tutors. As this study confirms, 91.8% of university freshmen report using private tutoring in secondary schools. Thus, private tutoring becomes one of the main and most effective mechanisms for students to successfully move from school to higher education institutions.

However, private tutoring is not accessible to all students. Students from poor families and rural communities use the services of private tutors less frequently and spend less on supplementary tutoring compared to students from urban areas. For example, students who perceive their family welfare as below the national average are less likely to use the services of private tutors, compared to children who perceive their family welfare as average or above the national average. Furthermore, students in Baku spend on average 40% more money on private tutoring than students from Ganja and Lenkaran areas. Having less access to supplementary education opportunities and spending considerably less on private tutoring, students from poor families and rural areas have less access to quality education, resulting in inequitable higher education admission outcomes and limited labor market opportunities.

Private tutoring has a mixed impact on public schools. On the one hand, it provides students a chance to extend their learning and gain additional knowledge and skills outside of school. On the other hand, it has a number of negative consequences. This study reveals that private tutoring has begun to distort the public school curricula, put enormous pressure on students, exacerbate social inequities, and accelerate the spread of corruption in the education system. As such, the rapid growth of private tutoring has signalled that Azerbaijan's students and parents are beginning to lose confidence in public education.

The demand for private tutoring is driven by educational, sociocultural, and economic factors. First, educational factors stem from the public perception of the declining quality of education in public schools. The majority of surveyed students (75.9%) indicates that that low quality of teaching in schools is the main reason for their decision to take private tutoring, explaining that private tutoring offers them a more individualized, innovative approach to learning. Second, sociocultural factors reflect a growing value of education during the transformation period and increasing competitiveness among students to enter higher education institutions in order to succeed in a new market economy. Third, economic factors are related to the government's inability to pay adequate teacher salaries, which has forced many teachers to look for alternative ways to generate income.

Currently, the Azerbaijan's government takes a *laissez-faire approach* to private tutoring (i.e. deliberately ignoring the issue), which is not the most appropriate policy solution in the context of decreasing quality of public education, increasing inequities, and widespread corruption in public schools. In the current circumstances, a more active governmental response is necessary. While specific policy action should be formulated with the involvement of major stakeholders (including school teachers, education administrators, parents, government officials, and NGO representatives), the first steps to address the adverse effects of private tutoring on public schools should include such broad actions as (1) public awareness raising about the nature, scale, and implications of private tutoring on the public education system; (2) continuous monitoring of the nature, scope, and impact of private tutoring on public education system, (3) consideration of the necessity to regulate the nature, form, and quality of private tutoring, and (4) efforts to reduce the demand for private tutoring through improving the quality of public education.

This study represents the first attempt in Azerbaijan to thoroughly document the general characteristics of private tutoring (scale, cost, geographic spread, and subjects), the main factors underlying the demand for private tutoring (quality of secondary education, higher education entrance examinations, education financing, etc.), as well as the educational, social and economic impact of private tutoring on the education system. This study draws from both quantitative and qualitative data, including a survey of 913 first year university students and 1019 secondary school students from different regions of Azerbaijan.

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## I- INTRODUCTION

Private tutoring is not a new phenomenon in Azerbaijan. It existed during the Soviet period (1918-1991), survived the Nagorno Kharabagh conflict during the political transformation period (1988-1994), and blossomed during the last decade of Azerbaijan's independence. While the private tutoring phenomenon persisted throughout these turbulent changes, the social perception of private tutoring has noticeably changed. Reflecting on the changes in public perception of private tutoring during the Soviet period and after independence, a veteran literature teacher from Baku noted that "during the Soviet period private tutoring was a shameful activity, which students were hiding from others. Today, students are bragging about how many private tutors they hire." Remarkably, private tutoring moved from being associated with students' academic ineptitude during the Soviet period to symbolizing students' intellectual sophistication in the post-Soviet context.

While it is commonly perceived that private tutoring has dramatically increased since the 1990s, no studies were conducted in Soviet Azerbaijan and few attempts were made to collect statistical data on private tutoring after independence. In 2002, for example, the State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan Republic conducted a survey, which estimated that 56.3% of school students engaged in private training with school teachers or tutors. However, no attempts were made to examine the reasons for the growing demand for private tutoring, the factors influencing the demand for private tutoring, and, more importantly, its effects on quality, equity, and ethics in the education system. One of the main reasons for a lack of studies on private tutoring is difficulty in accessing reliable information. As Bray and Kwok (2003) observe, pupils may be unwilling to expose the amount and types of tutoring they receive because the tutoring might seem to confer an unfair advantage in competition with their peers. Tutors may be unwilling to expose their activities when private tutoring is unofficial and their incomes untaxed. Parents may want tutoring to remain confidential because school authorities may interpret the demand for private tutoring as reflecting parents' lack of confidence in schools. Finally, governments may be unwilling to expose the private tutoring phenomenon, because it could be

perceived as an indicator of a failing education system. Thus, private tutoring often remains a "shadowy phenomenon" which is difficult to document (Bray, 1999).

While private tutoring has been a neglected topic for education policy analysis in Azerbaijan, it has been increasingly recognized to be of major importance. During the early years of the transformation period, drastic decrease in fiscal revenues squeezed public expenditures both as a proportion of GDP and in real terms,[1] threatening to severely erode Soviet education achievements. Although school enrolment remained high throughout the 1990s, the quality of educational provision has been gradually declining. For example, recent admission results for higher education institutions demonstrated serious problems with the knowledge capacity of secondary schools graduates. About half of the available enrollment quota for state-financed higher education programs was left vacant after the first round of admission processes because of the inability of graduates to pass entry examination requirements (World Bank, 2002, p. 48). While failure to successfully pass higher education entrance examination may indicate a deteriorating quality of general education, it could also be a sign of inconsistency between knowledge and skills taught in schools and those tested during centralized higher education entry examinations.[2] Whatever the reason, students seem to have increasingly sought the services of private tutors to supplement and, in some rare cases, to completely substitute secondary education offered by the state.

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[1] Between 1992 and 1995, for example, the share of the education budget as a share of GDP fell from approximately 7 percent to 3.5 percent. In 1995, government spending on education in real terms was only 27 percent of its level in 1992 (World Bank, 2002, p. 57). After the initial sharp drop in public spending on education, considerable efforts were made to protect education expenditures. As the prospects for growth improved, educational outlays grew in absolute terms between 1995 and 2001, but remained relatively stable at about 3.7% of GDP. Public expenditure on education is roughly in line with the world average of about 3.8 percent of GDP, but it is much lower than the average for OECD countries (5.9 percent in 1999). OECD countries indicate considerable variations among countries with respect to percentage of GDP spent on education. The range is from 3.8 percent or less in Greece, Turkey, Japan, and Korea to over 6.5 percent in the Nordic countries (OECD, 1998).

[2] In Azerbaijan, centralized university entry tests were introduced in 1992, substituting non-standardized oral and written higher education entry examinations previously conducted by individual higher education institutions.

The role of private tutoring has become particularly important in the context of increasing demand for higher education during the transformation period. Given the strong linkage between formal education and the employment market, or what Dore (1997) refers to as "the diploma disease," private tutoring is often seen as one of the best investments parents can make to prepare their children for the future (Bray, 1999). In addition to the "diploma disease," higher education is increasingly appealing to Azerbaijan's youth for other reasons, including a possibility to avoid recruitment into the army among male students. According to the State Student Admission Commission (SSAC, 2004), the number of applicants to higher education admission examinations has doubled since the beginning of the 1990s, moving from about 40,000 in 1992 to about 77,000 in 2000 to more than 90,000 in 2004. Of 70% of secondary school graduates who applied for higher education entry examinations, only 26.4% were enrolled (SSAC, 2004; SSC, 2002). In the context of rising demand for higher education, many secondary school students see private tutoring as a valuable means to better their chances of entering increasingly competitive higher education programs.

Given the increasing demand for private tutoring in Azerbaijan, it is important to examine its economic, social, and educational implications. While private tutoring may have many positive effects (such as improving students' learning, providing constructive activities for students after school, and providing additional incomes for tutors), it could also trigger a number of negative consequences (Bray, 1999). For example, private tutoring may distort the public school curricula, put enormous pressure on students, exacerbate social inequities, and trigger the spread of corruption in the education system. In the context of education decentralization and free market reforms in Azerbaijan, should private tutoring be welcomed or controlled? Is it a useful complement to public schools or a sign of rapidly deteriorating education system? This study attempts to examine the complexity of the private tutoring phenomenon in Azerbaijan, examine its consequences for the education system, and identify challenges that confront education stakeholders and policy-makers as they decide how to respond to this rapidly spreading and constantly changing phenomenon.

## Goals and Objectives of the Study

This study aims to examine the scope, causes, and impacts of private tutoring in Azerbaijan. For the purposes of this study, we adopt Bray's (1999) definition of supplementary private tutoring, which deals with tutoring provided by individuals and private entrepreneurs for profit-making, for subjects that are covered in school (such as languages and mathematics), "assessed by examinations and explicitly used in the gate-keeping process of transition from one part of an education system to another." (p. 20). The study focuses on private tutoring in secondary schools of Azerbaijan and analyzes factors underlying the demand for supplementary private tutoring in the country. In particular, the study aims to examine the following issues:

- General characteristics of private tutoring (scale, cost, geographic spread, and subjects)
- The main factors underlying the demand for private tutoring (quality of secondary education, higher education entrance examinations, education financing, etc.)
- Educational, social and economic impact of private tutoring on the education system (geographic, socioeconomic, and gender inequities)
- Policy options and alternative approaches

## Research Methodology

To reach the goals and objectives of the study, both quantitative and qualitative data was used. The quantitative data enabled us to identify the scope of private tutoring, while the qualitative data helped us to understand how the private tutoring phenomenon works and what are its causes and consequences. To identify the scope of private tutoring in secondary schools, two separate surveys were conducted among two student populations, including first-year university students and secondary school students. In addition, qualitative data was collected to examine the causes and consequences of private tutoring in Azerbaijan, including document analysis, as well as focus groups and interviews with multiple education stakeholders.

***Quantitative data***

Two quantitative surveys[3] were conducted to identify the scope and nature of private tutoring, as well as examine student attitudes towards private tutoring. The first survey targeted 1st year university students (freshmen). University student sample was chosen purposefully to ensure more forthright student responses about their private tutoring experience in secondary schools. Having just entered higher education institutions, the first year students have fresh memories about their private tutoring experiences in schools and do not feel intimidated to talk about it. Although the university sample provides important data, it does not represent all students leaving secondary schools in the country. Therefore, the second survey targeted secondary school students, thus expanding the respondents' pool and allowing us to report about all students graduating from secondary schools in the country. All quantitative data was collected with the assistance of the Center for Research of Development and International Cooperation "Sigma."

*University student sample (Population A).* A total of 913 respondents were surveyed from five universities in Azerbaijan, including Azerbaijan State Economics University (31.1%), Azerbaijan Teachers' Institute (15.8%), Baku State University (32.2%), Western University (10%), and Lenkoran State University (11%). The first four universities are located in the capital Baku and the last one in the south of the country. All universities are state, with the exception of Western University, which is a private university. The university student sample consisted of students studying in high and low demand programs.[4] Overall, 66.2% (604) of students from high demand programs (business- and law- related programs), 29.6% (270) from low-demand programs (pedagogical programs), and 4.3% (39) from other programs.[5] In particular, 43.4% (396) of surveyed students were enrolled in business-related programs, 22.8% (208) students in law programs, 29.6% (270) students in

[3] These surveys were based on a modified version of a questionnaire designed for the Lithuanian study on private tutoring (entitled "The scope of private tutoring for Matura examinations in Lithuania"), which was conducted by the Centre of Education Policy of Vilnius University in 2003.

[4] The high/low demand of university programs was identified based on the data from the State Student Admission Commission (2004) about the scores necessary to enter specific higher education programs. For example, the high demand programs required scores ranging from 350-600, while the low demand programs required scores below 350.

[5] Other programs include high-demand programs at private universities, which require low university entry test scores (e.g., political science, sociology, etc.).

pedagogical programs, and 4.3% (39) in other programs in universities.

*Secondary school student sample (Population B).* A total of 1019 students from secondary schools were surveyed. The sample included students from the last two grades of secondary school, including 45.6% (465) students from the 10th grade and 54.4% (554) of students from the 11th grade. The sample covered three geographic regions of Azerbaijan, including 49.8% of students from Baku (507), 25.6% from Gandja (261), and 24.6% from Lenkoran (251). Schools were selected based on the number of gradates admitted into higher education institutions (i.e., schools with the highest, medium, and lowest number of students admitted into universities). Information on the number of students successfully passing university entrance examinations was obtained from the State Student Admission Commission, which publishes these reports annually. For the purposes of this survey, three types of schools were identified, including secondary schools with the highest, average, lowest numbers of students entering universities. For each school type in the selected geographic areas, random sampling was used to identify schools for administering student surveys.

*Private tutor sample.* A small-scale, exploratory survey of 24 private tutors was used to examine the most popular subjects, as well as costs of private tutoring. Surveys were administered through the State Student Admission Commission, which attracts many tutors in different capacities – as test writers for centralized university entry examinations and tutors seeking teaching materials for their private lessons. The surveys were left in an accessible area and all interested tutors were encouraged to fill them out. Overall, 24 tutors filled out the survey. They included tutors of different subjects, including history (10), geography (8), biology (5), and Azeri language and literature (1).

***Qualitative data***

Qualitative data was collected through document analysis, focus group discussions, and interviews. It was used to complement quantitative data from student surveys and explain the causes and consequences of private tutoring.

*Focus groups.* Five focus group discussions were organized with teachers, students,

and parents to discuss their experiences with and opinions about private tutoring. Two focus group discussions were organized with school teachers, including a focus group with a sample of teachers from the Russian-language sector (8 people) and from Azeri-language sector (8 people). All teachers participating in focus group discussions were from different schools in Baku. Focus groups lasted from one to two hours and examined such issues as teacher perceptions of the dynamics of private tutoring growth, the impact of private tutoring on schools, teachers, and students, as well as positive and negative implications of private tutoring for public schools. In addition to school teachers, two focus groups were organized with first-year university students (a total of 15 students) and school students (a total of 10 students) to examine their experiences with private tutoring Finally, a focus group with parents of secondary school students was organized to examine their attitudes towards private tutoring (7 parents).

*Interviews.* A total of seventeen interviews were conducted with different education stakeholders to examine their perceptions of private tutoring and its impact on teaching and learning. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of 11 tutors, including nine school teachers working as tutors and a director of preparatory courses established by the State Student Admission Commission. The majority of the interviewed tutors were from Baku and one from a rural area in Azerbaijan. The main objective of these interviews was to examine teacher perspectives on the reasons for the growth of private tutoring, its impact on the education system, as well as the role of tutoring in closing the gap between teaching practices at schools and university testing system administered by the State Student Admission Commission. In addition, seven interviews were conducted with education policy-makers and other education stakeholders to discuss the issues of education quality (e.g., school curriculum, teaching, assessment), its relationship with private tutoring, as well as examine the attitudes of education stakeholders towards the growth of private tutoring. Interviews were conducted with three officials from the Ministry of Education (including the Minister of Education and the Head of Higher Education Department at MOE), one government representative (Chairman of the Education Committee of the Parliament of Azerbaijan), one representative of the Institute of Education Problems, and two representatives of the State Student Admission Commission.

***Limitations***

Any research on private tutoring commonly encounters various obstacles (Bray & Kwok, 2003). The study conducted in Azerbaijan was not an exception. One of the main logistical difficulties was securing letters of support from the Ministry of Education to be able conduct surveys in schools and universities. In a highly centralized educational environment of Azerbaijan, it was necessary to obtain a total of eight letters from the Ministry of Education to gain free access to education institutions participating in a survey. Despite numerous letters from the Ministry of Education, one higher education institution refused to participate in the study, reflecting a common fear among many representatives of state education institutions towards any sociological survey, especially the one on such a sensitive topic as private tutoring.

In addition to the logistical difficulties, the study encountered several methodological limitations. First, the university student sample was limited to students from a limited number of programs (i.e., high/low demand programs). It would be important to also include medium-demand programs to further examine the scope of private tutoring. Second, the university student sample was largely limited to state higher education institutions and did not account for the scope of private tutoring among private university freshmen. Third, the study had limited geographical coverage, with the student sample covering three regions of the country only. Finally, and more importantly, neither university students nor secondary school students had satisfactory experience with completing multiple-choice questionnaires. It took a lot of time and effort for the data-collectors to administer the surveys, including lengthy, thorough explanations on how to fill out the questionnaires. Finally, the available state statistical data may not always be accurate, with different state agencies reporting different statistical data on the same issue. Whenever possible, we made an attempt to cross-check all statistical data to ensure its validity.

Despite these limitations, this study is unique in that it represents the first attempt in Azerbaijan to thoroughly document the general characteristics of private tutoring (scale, cost, geographic spread, and subjects), the main factors underlying the demand for private tutoring (quality of secondary education, higher education entrance examinations, education financing, etc.), as well as educational, social and economic impact of private tutoring on the education system. Following a brief analysis of the education context within which the private tutoring has blossomed, the study will present the analysis of the main findings.

## II- THE CONTEXT: AZERBAIJAN'S EDUCATION IN TRANSITION

Any discussion of private tutoring requires a broader understanding of the education context in Azerbaijan. During the transformation period, the education system has faced serious problems and undergone major changes, most of which are related to the subsequent rise of private tutoring. In particular, it is important to highlight such issues as (1) the reduction of state spending on education and the subsequent rise of private financing of education, (2) the decline of education quality in schools (especially curricula-related problems), and (3) the introduction of centralized university entry testing. Combined, these education system issues help us better understand the context within which the private tutoring phenomenon has blossomed during the transformation period.

### Declining State Expenditure, Increasing Private Spending of Education

During the early years of the transformation period, a sharp drop in fiscal revenues led to declining state education expenditures. Between 1992 and 1995, the share of the education budget as a percentage of GDP fell from approximately 7% to 3.5%. In 1995, government spending on education was only 27% of its level in 1992 (WB, 2002, p. 57). After the initial sharp drop in public spending on education, considerable efforts were made to protect education expenditures. Despite economic recovery in the middle of the 1990s, investments in the education sector have increased, but remained considerably low compared to pre-independence levels. For example, education expenditure as a percentage of GDP has decreased from 7% in 1990 to 4.8%[6] in 2001 (State Statistical Commission of Azerbaijan Republic, 2004). As a result, the education system has deteriorated significantly during this period. As Golladay & Abdullayev (2003) describe, buildings have fallen into disrepair and inventories of furniture and teaching materials have become obsolete. Furthermore, the quality of the teaching force has declined as a consequence of inadequate compensation and insufficient access to opportunities for professional development.

Among the most negatively affected have been teachers. During the transformation

[6] The World Bank (2002) estimate of state expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP is 3.7% in 2001.

period, teacher salaries have declined rapidly and, today, they remain below the national average. Despite salary increases in the early 2000s, teacher salaries average US$20-25 per month[7] and currently constitute 60% of the subsistence minimum (WB, 2002; Sigma, 2005). Low pay makes it difficult to attract high quality candidates to the profession and weak incentive system makes it difficult to motivate teachers to teach full time or engage in professional development, especially outside of the major urban areas. Delays in payment, sometimes for months, force teachers into additional work to supplement their meager salaries, often through supplementary private tutoring.

While the state expenditure on education have declined, private spending on education have considerably increased. According to the World Bank (2002), there is some evidence that an increasing number of poor families cannot afford the increasing cost of education, particularly that of high quality education. For example, the Poverty Assessment report (World Bank, 1997) found that reduced real government spending on critical economic categories had been replaced in part by increased private spending for education. Since the mid-1990s, real private spending on education has sharply increased, especially in the form of informal payments (including payments for private tutoring).[8] Sharp increases in out-of-pocket payments highlight problems not only of deteriorating education quality, but also education access to and transparency of the education system.

[7] The norm for teaching is 12 hours for which teachers are paid between AZM 80,000 to AZM 120,000 (on average about between US$20 to US$25), however, the average load of teacher in urban areas is 18 and some teach up to two loads (24 hours) doubling their income. School directors are the main authority to increase the number of teaching hours, based on the school needs as well as some other non-transparent criteria (World Bank, 2002).

[8] The World Bank poverty assessment report (quoted in WB, 2002) indicates that private spending on education has considerably increased during the 1990s, mainly because of informal payments. As the WB report (2002) highlights, informal payments exist at both the supply as well as the demand side. At the supply side, it consists of buying jobs, paying to have more hours of teaching which then translates to more income. At the demand side, it ranges from paying to get into better schools or better classes with the best teachers within schools to paying for the basic needs, grades, absenteeism, and private tutoring.

**Decreasing Education Quality in Schools**

The real increase in public expenditures during the second half of the last decade did not result in improvements in the quality of education services (WB, 2002). Although indicators relating to education outcomes (e.g., student learning achievements) are not yet available to examine the effects of sharp declines in real resources available for education, available data suggest that the education sector no longer produces general school graduates with minimum standards to meet the skill and knowledge demands of the market economy or the minimum qualifications required by post-secondary education institutions (WB, 2002). For example, the results from the Student University Admission Examination clearly reflect the deterioration of the quality of general education, with an average applicant mastering only about 23-54% of the curriculum (SSAC, 2004). This is a clear indication that the majority of general school leavers fail to achieve a satisfactory level of knowledge on centralized higher education admission examination.

Among the main factors affecting education quality are (1) outdated, teacher-centered curriculum and teaching methods, (2) poor learning environment (as suggested by shortages of textbooks, reading and teaching materials, supplies and equipment, and poor physical infrastructure), and (3) an ineffective system of teacher development (in-service and pre-service teacher education). First, the present school curriculum is largely scientific and subject-driven, in contrast to the learner-centered and outcomes-based approach, which is a common dominant paradigm for curriculum development in the OECD countries and most of the developing world (CITO Group, 2003). The primary focus of the curriculum is on teaching facts rather than developing skills that allow students to apply knowledge in various situations. Curriculum is generally overloaded, consisting of a large number of subjects (already reduced, but still 26 at present). Typically, curriculum developers work in isolation, "designing curriculum content based on their scientific background, and have no feeling for what is really needed in the evolving society" (CITO Group, 2003). Teaching methods have generally been based on rote-learning rather than active, problem-solving skills.[9] Even where there is a desire to move away from this model,

[9] One study revealed that nearly 95% of the students had experienced a passive learning process (i.e., passive listening and questions and answers) and that interactive methods were not widely used by teachers (Crawford, 2000).

administrators face a lack of new teaching resources on contemporary teaching methods. Although the Education Reform Program (1999) aims to revise the general education curriculum and strengthen the skills and teaching methods of the teaching force through the provision of teacher professional development opportunities in interactive teaching methods, the implementation process remains slow.[10]

Second, the quality of the learning environment in most general schools has deteriorated considerably, contributing to low learning outcomes, low attendance, and the production of poorly trained school leavers. According to the World Bank report (2002), this is largely due to the lack of access to textbooks and reading materials, the shortage of basic teaching and learning materials and equipment, and the deterioration of the physical facilities. The quality of education is also uneven across the country, with rural schools facing more serious shortages of adequate supplies of educational materials[11] and having poorer physical facilities for satisfactory teaching and learning.[12] In urban areas (e.g., Baku), an acute shortage of school buildings exist because new school buildings have not been constructed to accommodate a growing population during the transition, resulting in overcrowding in urban schools. As a result, an increasing number of schools (75%) have adopted two and sometimes three shifts per day (WB, 2002). Because of the poor physical learning environment, qualitative reports suggest that teachers and students are demoralized and have little incentives to remain in schools.

Third, the quality of both pre-service teacher education and in-service training has

[10] Since 1999, the MOE has attempted to gradually introduce a new general education curriculum designed to better prepare students for participation in Azerbaijan's rapidly changing economy and society. This reform has also been supported through IDA-assisted Education Reform Project (LIL) that started the curriculum reform process for selected grades. The overall education reform plan includes comprehensive changes in curriculum, teacher training and institutional reform within sector. In 2002 Education Reform program was reviewed, and a Ten Year Strategy funded by the World Bank was elaborated. It is planned that education reform will be implemented in three stages, with the support of a World Bank loan of approximately US$ 73 million (phase I of US$18 million, phase II of US$25 million, and phase III of US$30 million.

[11] According to the World Bank (2002) estimates based on qualitative reports, only about 60-70% of the students in grades 5-11 in rural areas have core textbooks. Moreover, the limited textbook supply tends to be old, based on obsolete knowledge and of poor condition.

[12] In some cases, especially in rural areas, deteriorated school buildings may present a serious hazard since many are in need of major repair (e.g., roof, heating, water, sewerage). Many schools in rural areas also lack regular electricity (WB, 2002).

deteriorated during the transformation period, further contributing to the declining quality of general education. In the area of in-service training, resource constraints have restricted the provision of effective in-service training during the 1990s.[13] Although in-service teacher training has remained relatively stable throughout the transformation period, its geographical coverage and the quality of service provision have suffered. For example, the Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) study indicated that about 15% of teachers in rural areas never attended in-service teacher training programs (MOE, 2002 p. 53). Despite some attempts at piloting demand-driven, school-based teacher training models, the state in-service training process has remained rather mechanical and is more supply than demand-driven, showing deficiencies in quality and effectiveness (WB, 2002; Crawford, 2000). In the area of pre-service teacher education, there is limited awareness of the range of possible methodologies (e.g., modern teaching and learning methodologies) and limited qualifications and experience of teacher training staff to introduce major changes (WB, 2002). As the Head Specialist of the Higher and Vocational Education Department of the Ministry of Education Natik Ibrahimov stated, the quality of pre-service teacher education has decreased and the newly trained teachers are less likely to match the criteria of qualified teachers. As a result of limited professional development opportunities and ineffective initial teacher training, teacher professionalism and morale have suffered, further contributing to the decline of education quality in schools.

Combined, a brief examination the main factors affecting education quality - outdated, teacher-centered curriculum and teaching methods, poor learning environment, an ineffective system of teacher development – suggest that the current educational system is not producing graduates with knowledge and skills that meet the demands of the new economic and political environment. Given the "diploma disease" and the increasing value placed on education during the transformation process, these shortcomings of the education system are increasingly addressed through private tutoring. This becomes especially evident from the increased perception among students that private tutoring is essential to good education (SSC, 2001, p. 148).

[13] In-service teacher training is provided in Baku by the Baku In-service Education Institute and outside Baku, through twelve regional affiliates of the Azerbaijan Teachers Institute. However, most of these twelve teacher training centers are poorly staffed and equipped to deliver effective teacher training (WB, 2002).

**Introducing New Higher Education Admission System**

> *"My two granddaughters were admitted into universities because they were hard learners. Both of them achieved their goal of becoming a student in a university of their dream, because the university entrance tests have been transparent and objective... I would like to congratulate all the students who have been accepted to higher education institutions because of their deep knowledge…"*
> Grandfather's letter to SSAC journal "Abiturient" (2004, November)

The declining quality of general education has become particularly evident with the introduction of the centralized university entry examinations, which illustrated that secondary school grades were not compatible with centralized examination scores. According to the State Student Admission Commission (2004), only 19.5% of all applicants with excellent grades in secondary school scored similarly during the university admission examination. Meantime, most applicants (97%) with fair/satisfactory grades in school were able to score only between 0 and 200 (which is below the average satisfactory level). In order to better understand the role of private tutoring in filling the gap in students' academic knowledge and skills, it is necessary to say a few words about the history of the centralized higher education admission system, which was introduced in 1992.

The new university admission system was initiated in the context of anti-corruption measures in higher education admissions, which were previously administered by each higher education institution based on relatively subjective oral and written student examinations. In an effort to break away from the Soviet practices and fight higher education corruption, the Popular Front of Azerbaijan asked the Turkish government for assistance with the introduction of centralized university examinations. The subsequent establishment of the State Student Admission Commission (SSAC) has severely limited the freedom of higher education institutions in administering student admissions and thus reduced corruption at the level of university entry (i.e., a common practice of paying for university placements). Currently, the SSAC determines the admission of students to higher education institutions and upper secondary schools into five broad occupational areas[14] through the national testing of graduates in 32 regions of Azerbaijan. Over the past decade, the SSAC has significantly improved its technical capacity to

[14] When applying for the centralized university entry examination, applicants may choose up to 15 occupations, which are divided into five main occupational groups. The first group (mathematics, physics, engineering, chemical technology, architecture, art design), the second group (economic, management, geography), the third group (humanitarian, art, music), the fourth group (medical, biology, chemistry, sports), and the fifth group (sociology, psychology, pedagogic). According to SSAC (2004), the most popular occupational groups are the first (mathematics, physics, engineering, chemical technology, architecture, art design) and the second (economic, management, geography), while and the least popular is the fifth group (sociology, psychology, pedagogic).

carry out more transparent, fair, and large scale national university entrance examinations (WB, 2002).

The new centralized testing system has brought a principally new approach to assessing student learning outcomes. Testing questions are designed to assess student learning competencies based on specific criteria, including student knowledge of subject terminology and factual information, as well as student ability to generalize, explain, calculate, predict, and recommend actions. While the introduction of centralized university entrance testing brought a new approach to the assessment of learning outcomes, the school-based assessment system did not substantially change. Given the absence of national student assessment system, mastery of basic learning competencies is currently equated with successful completion of grades. Nearly all assessment of student learning in grades 1-11 is classroom-based, carried out by teachers evaluating their own students. The purpose of the existing assessment is to ascertain what students can remember rather than their learning abilities. The present school-based and teacher-centered system is not providing a sufficiently clear picture of what students actually know, understand, and are able to do in terms of nationally set standards (WB, 2002). While all questions included on centralized testing examinations are entirely based on school curriculum,[15] it is not surprising that the majority of "good" students do poorly on centralized university entry examinations given a glaring discrepancy in assessment approaches used in schools and SSAC.
To be admitted to state-funded higher education programs, applicants must have a precise knowledge of the four main subjects in their preferred occupational group, as well as score highly on the general section of the test.[16] Given a declining education quality in general and imperfect school-based student assessment in particular, it is not surprising that many applicants decide to use the assistance of private tutors during preparation for the highly competitive university entry examinations.

[15] According to the Head of Testing Methodology Department of SSAC Rahim Guseynov, the questions included in centralized test completely match school curriculum and any changes in school curriculum are immediately reflected in university admission tests.

[16] For each occupational group, the test is comprised of the main section (which includes four subjects) and a general section (which includes five other school subjects not included in the main section). The main section of the centralized test includes different subjects depending on the subject/occupational category. For the first group, the main section includes testing questions on mathematics, physics, chemistry, and native language/literature; for the second group - mathematics, geography, foreign language, and native language/literature; for the third group - history, geography, foreign language, and native language/literature; for the fourth group - biology, chemistry, psychics, and native language/literature; and for the fifth group - mathematics, history, foreign language, and native language/literature (see Appendix A).

## III- FINDINGS

For the purposes of this study, it is important to distinguish between different types of supplementary tutoring, including one-on-one private tutoring offered by individuals (which will be referred to as "private tutoring lessons" in this study) and group tutoring offered by institutions (which will be referred to as "preparatory courses"). Given the vast majority of students used private tutoring lessons, as opposed to preparatory courses, this section will primarily focus on private tutoring lessons. Based on the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data from the university and school student samples, this section will examine the general characteristics of supplementary tutoring (scale, geographic spread, subjects, intensity, and cost), the main factors underlying the demand for private tutoring (quality of secondary education, higher education entrance examinations, education financing, etc.), as well as educational, social and economic impact of private tutoring on the education system.

### General Characteristics of Private Tutoring in Azerbaijan

General characteristics of private tutoring include its scale, geographic spread, subjects, costs, and intensity at a secondary education level.

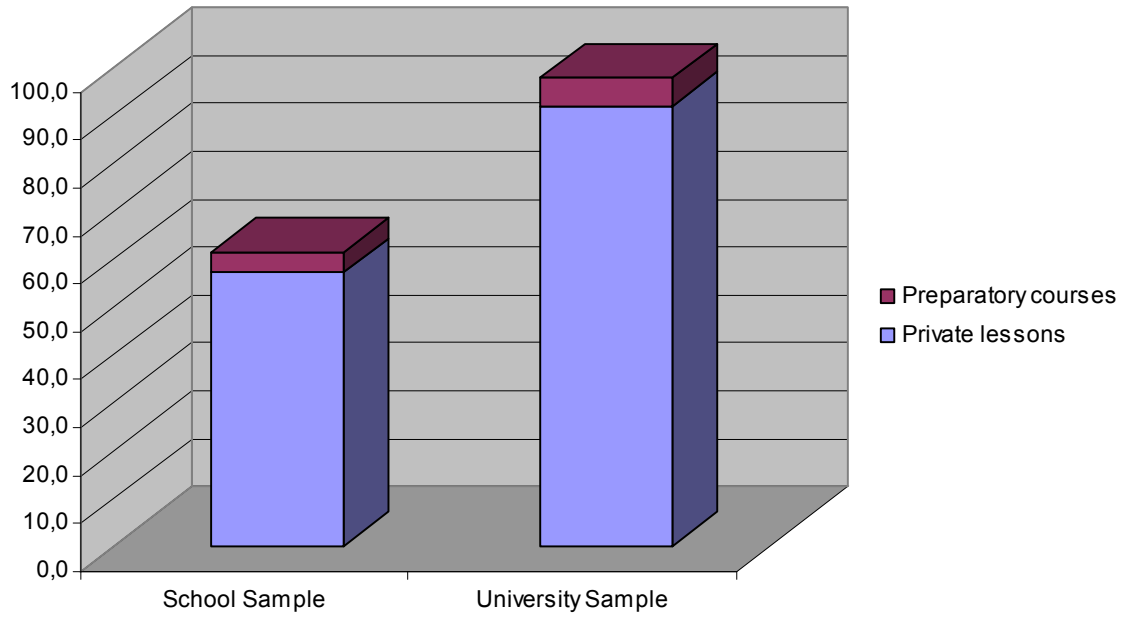
#### *The Scale of Private Tutoring*

For most children of Azerbaijan, formal educational instruction neither begins nor ends with school. The majority (61.8%) of secondary school students uses supplementary private tutoring before the beginning of the school day and proceeds from their schools to some form of tutoring at the end of the day. Of all surveyed school students, 57.1% use private tutoring lessons and another 4.2% attend preparatory courses (see Figure 1). These findings confirm earlier data from the survey conducted by the State Statistical Agency (2002), which estimated that 56.3% of students use some form of private tutoring (e.g., supplementary training with teachers and tutors). Of those school students taking private tutoring lessons, the majority (93%) reports starting to use private tutoring in secondary schools, with 55% of students hiring tutors from the $10^{th}$ grade and 38% from the $11^{th}$ grade. A small group of students have used private tutoring services in earlier grades, with 5% of

students using private tutors from the 9th grade and 1.5% already in primary school (5th-8th grades). Generally, the number of students attending private tutoring lessons increases with the grade, with 52.7% of ten-graders and 60.8% of eleven-graders using private tutoring in secondary school.

The fact that the majority of school students begins to use private tutoring in the last two grades of secondary school suggests its connection to high-stakes testing, i.e. centralized university entrance examinations. This connection becomes even more apparent after reviewing the findings from the university student sample. Of all surveyed freshmen, 91.8% reported using private tutoring lessons and 6% preparatory courses as supplementary study in secondary school (see Figure 1). This is an indication of a worrisome trend that university enrollment is practically impossible without supplementary private tutoring in Azerbaijan. As data from the university survey confirms, a vast majority of the respondents (89.2%) admitted that private tutoring had either great or some impact on their university entrance examination results.

Figure 1. The Scale of Private Tutoring in Azerbaijan' (percentage of secondary school and university student samples)



Interestingly, data from the university student sample suggest that the use of private tutoring does not vary by the level of demand of higher education programs. For example 92.9% of students in high-demand programs (such as law and business) and 90.5% of students in low-demand programs (such as pedagogical) used private tutoring to prepare for university entrance examinations. In other words, private tutoring seems to be equally widespread among students from both high- and low-demand academic programs, highlighting an essential role of private tutoring in student admission to *any* higher education program.

***Geographic Spread of Private Tutoring***

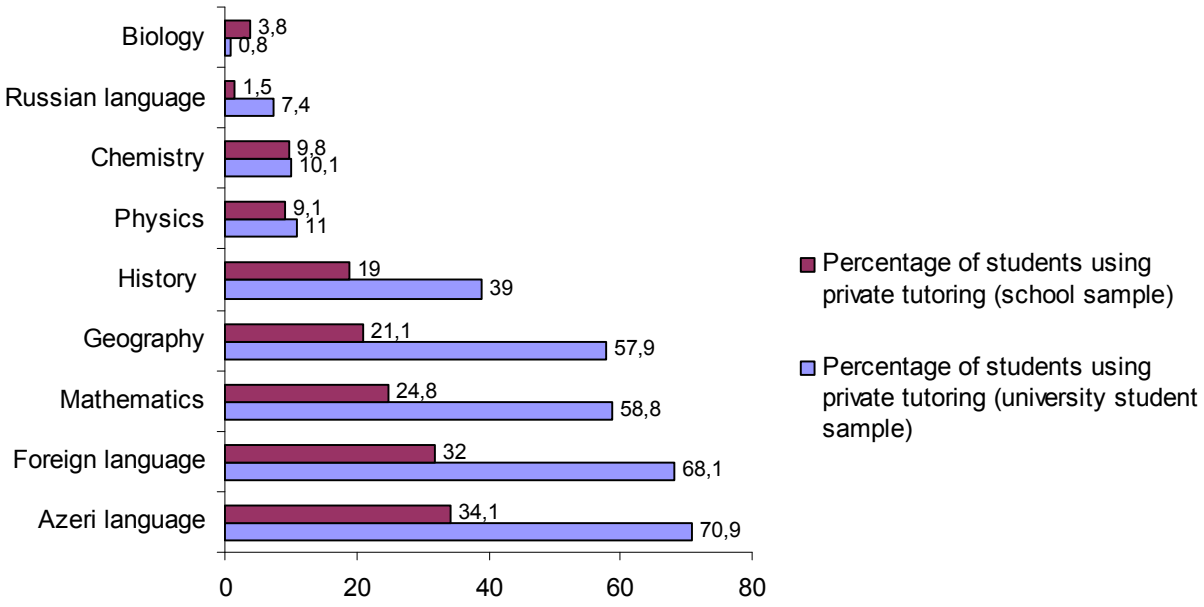
Private tutoring seems to have no geographical borders in Azerbaijan. It is relatively equally widespread across the country, including both urban and rural areas. For example, 58.8% of secondary school students from Baku, 57.4% of students from Lenkoran area, and 53.6% of students from Gandja area reported using private tutoring in the last two grades of secondary school. Data from the university student sample reveals that approximately 90% of all surveyed students, no matter whether they graduated from urban or rural school, used private tutoring to prepare for university entrance exams. For example, 91.4% of students from Baku and 90.5% of students from rural areas used private tutoring to enter universities. While the use of private tutoring seems to be fairly equal across different geographical areas of the country, university admissions seem to favor students from urban areas. For example, the university student sample reveals that approximately 75% of students come from large urban areas, suggesting that private tutoring may be of better quality and/or used more frequently there (see a more detailed discussion of this issue in the following sections).

***Academic Subjects***

Among the most popular academic subjects offered through private tutoring are Azeri language and literature, foreign language, mathematics, geography, and history (see Figure 2). While the use of private tutoring in the first three subjects (native language, foreign language, and math) generally corresponds to international trends (i.e., the subjects needed for educational and socio-economic advancement), geography and history are usually not among the top subject choices for private tutoring in other education contexts. In the case of Azerbaijan, however, these subjects are important because they are included on the

centralized university entrance examinations and bear more weight compared to other subjects, thus allowing students to collect more points on the test. For example, Azeri language and literature are included on higher education entrance examinations for all five occupational groups, mathematics and foreign languages for three out of five groups (including some of the most highly demanded programs such as economics, management, law), and history and geography for two groups (including such high-demand programs such as international relations and law). Interestingly, the use of private tutoring in sciences is less widespread, with only about 10% of students attending private tutoring lessons in physics and chemistry, and less than 4% in biology.[17]

Figure 2. Percentage of Students Taking Private Tutoring in Specific Subjects (university and school student sample)




[17]For the university sample, the low percentage of students using private tutoring in sciences (biology, chemistry, physics, etc.) can be explained by the fact that the study did not target students from higher education programs that include science subjects on centralized university entrance examinations (i.e. programs I & IV). The students surveyed were from higher education programs II & IV, which require the following subjects on entrance exams: mathematics, geography, foreign language, and native language/literature (for the second group) and mathematics, history, foreign language, and native language/literature (for the fifth group).

### *The Intensity of Private Tutoring Use*

University and school student samples suggest that students spend on average three to four academic hours[18] a week (equivalent of four to five regular hours) on one subject with a tutor, with more than 60% of students spending three or more academic hours a week with a private tutor. The majority of the surveyed university students (79%) reported that they used private tutoring in three or more subjects on a regular basis throughout the last school year to prepare for entrance examinations. On average, this equates to at least 9-12 academic hours a week (equivalent to 12-16 regular hours a week), which students spend studying in addition to a regular school load.

Findings from the school sample provide slightly different data, with 31.8% of students using private tutoring in three or more subjects and 25.2% in one or two subjects. The intensity of private tutoring increases in the last grade of secondary school. Of all students using private tutoring in secondary school, 42.9% of ten-graders and 65.1% of eleven-graders use private tutoring in three or more subjects. While there is a discrepancy in the reported intensity of private tutoring use among university and student samples, the fact that university student sample used private tutoring more frequently may indicate that they were successfully admitted to higher education institutions precisely because they spend more time with tutors while preparing for university entrance exams.

### *The Size of Private Tutoring Groups*

Data from the survey of university and school student samples reveal that only 17% of all surveyed students attend one-on-one private tutoring lessons. The majority of students attend private lessons organized for groups of 2-5 people (see Table 1). For example, 32% of the respondents attend lessons organized for a group of 2-3 people and 24% study in a group of 4-5 people. Some students attend private lessons organized for a group of more than six students, although the answers vary among the university and school students populations. For example, 18.2% of university students and 26.5% of school students report studying in groups of more than six students during private tutoring lessons.

[18] In Azerbaijan, one academic hour of private tutoring equals 80 minutes.

Table 1. The size of private tutoring lessons (percentage of university and school student sample)

| The Size of PT Lessons | University Sample | School Sample |
|---|---|---|
| Individual lessons (one-on-one) | 17% | 17.1% |
| A group of 2-3 people | 31.8% | 32.3% |
| A group of 4-5 people | 24% | 24.1% |
| A group of more than 6 people | 18.9% | 26.5% |

The size of preparatory courses offered by institutions is much larger compared to individual private tutoring. According to the representatives of institutions offering preparatory courses, an average size of groups is about 20 students. However, data collected for this study reveals slightly smaller size of preparatory course groups. For example, 51% of university sample enrolled in preparatory courses studied in groups of 5-10 students and 34.5% in groups of 10-20 students. Closely resembling an average size of public school classrooms, preparatory courses are less attractive among students because of its larger size.

***The Costs of Private Tutoring***

The costs of supplementary private tutoring vary significantly by the type of private tutoring, with preparatory courses offered by institutions being considerably cheaper than individual private tutoring lessons. Preparatory courses are usually more popular with low-income families who could afford to pay 800,000 manat (approximately US$160) per year for a full preparatory course package consisting of 3-4 subjects. Generally, however, students prefer individual private tutoring lessons, which cost much more. On average, school students report spending US$157 for one subject and US$434 for all subjects of private tutoring lessons annually. The costs for private tutoring lessons vary significantly, with almost 5% of all surveyed students paying more than US$1000 per year.

School sample reveals that the amount spent on private tutoring increases with the grade level, with 11-graders spending approximately US$50 more on private tutoring than 10-graders. Interestingly, university students report spending higher amounts on private tutoring during the

last year of secondary school, with an average of US$220 per subject and US$827 for all subjects spent annually. There are several explanations for this difference. First, the sample of school students was more varied geographically and included a higher number of students from rural areas, whereas the majority of university student sample came from Baku. Given higher socioeconomic level of households in the capital city, it is likely that students from urban areas spend more on private tutoring compared to students from rural areas.[19] Second, it is important to note that university students constitute a select group of young people, who may have successfully entered universities precisely because they spent more money on private tutoring in the first place.

According to both university and school student samples, history and foreign language lessons are among the most expensive, with students spending on average over US$170 per subject a year. As mentioned above, history and foreign languages are among the required subjects on centralized university admission examinations for some of the most highly demanded programs (e.g., law, international relations, etc.), which explains higher tutoring fees for these subjects on the private tutoring market. Furthermore, there is generally a lack of foreign language teachers in Azerbaijan (WB, 2002), which further contributes to higher fees charged by private tutors of foreign languages compared to those of other subjects.

Generally, the majority of the surveyed students think that private tutoring lessons are expensive, with 76.2% of school sample and 80.7% of university sample agreeing with this statement. Private tutoring costs differ by regional areas. Students in Baku spend on average US$200 more than students from Ganja and Lenkaran areas for all subjects per year. For example, students from Baku spend on average US$517 for all subjects per year, while students from Lenkaran US$343 and students from Gandja US$348. This is not surprising given lower socio-economic levels of households in rural areas of Azerbaijan. Private tutoring lessons are most expensive in the capital Baku (with some tutors charging around US$10-25 per academic hour) and least expensive in rural areas (with tutors charging on average US$1-3 per academic hour).[20] Finally, private tutoring costs also depend on the type of tutor, with the most expensive

[19] Please see a section on equity for a more detailed discussion of this issue.

[20] Research "Formal and non-formal payments in the educational system of Azerbaijan," which was conducted by Sigma (2000) shows higher costs of private tutoring lessons, with foreign language and math tutors charging up to $30-40 per academic hour in Baku and $10 in rural areas.

tutors being affiliated with the State Student Admission Commission as test writers.

While one of the common beliefs is that higher investments in private tutoring in secondary school could increase the probability of students' admission into state-financed higher education programs (thus relieving parents from paying for the education of their children for the next four years), this does not seem the case in our study. Based on the findings from the university student sample, paying large sums of money for private tutoring in secondary schools does not necessarily guarantee student admission into state-funded groups. For example, approximately 40% of those who paid less than $400 a year for private tutoring and only 25% of those who paid over $1000 were admitted into state-funded higher education groups. Overall, approximately one third (32.6% or 237) of those who took private tutoring lessons in secondary schools study in state-financed higher education programs, whereas the majority (67.4%) studies in self-financed groups (i.e. pays for their education).

## The Private Tutoring Market: Producers and Consumers

This section examines the main players on the private tutoring market, including the producers (institutions and private tutors) and consumers (students), as well as those who are left out of the private tutoring market.

### *The Producers: Who Offers Private Tutoring and Why?*

From the legalization and taxation point of view, preparatory courses are a single form of private tutoring that has been institutionalized and is regularly reporting to tax authorities based on a transparent accountability system.[21] Preparatory courses are offered by several institutions, including universities, private Turkish agencies, and a tutoring centre established by the SSAC. The majority of tutors of preparatory courses are university lecturers and professionals from the field of study, although some are teachers. Interestingly, interviews with the representatives of preparatory courses indicate that

[21] For institutions offering preparatory courses, the formula for incomes distribution looks the following: 18% VAT (value added tax), 60% payment to the teacher, 40% income of an institution offering preparatory courses.

many instructors use these preparatory courses as a spring-board for individual private tutoring. For many of them, preparatory courses present a great opportunity to build a clientele base and become known among potential tutees for individual private lessons.

Of all surveyed students taking individual private lessons, over 70% reported that their private tutors were teachers (72.3% of university sample and 79.8% of school sample). Private tutors from higher education institutions seem to be much less popular, with only 11.7% of university sample and 8.2% of school sample using private tutoring services offered by university professors and lecturers. Data from student questionnaires further confirm these findings, with 78.2% of students disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that university lecturers are better private tutors than secondary school teachers. Reflecting on how private tutoring changed over the last decade, interviews and focus groups suggested that the popularity of tutors has shifted from university professors/lecturers to school teachers in the beginning of the 1990s. This coincided with the creation of the State Testing Committee in 1992, which took control over all university entrance examination procedures in an effort fight corruption in universities.[22] As a consequence, university professors, who were previously powerful in influencing university admission outcomes, had lost their popularity as private tutors.

A survey conducted by State Statistical Agency (2002) indicates that approximately 45% of all teachers are involved in private tutoring, with 47.6% in urban areas and 38.6% in rural areas (p. 140).[23] Interestingly, 40-50% of students from our survey reported that their private tutors were teachers from their own schools, with 38.5% of university sample and 51.1% of school sample confirming these findings. Approximately one third of all surveyed students reported that their tutors were teachers from other schools. Of school sample, 25.6% of students reported that their tutors were their "class teachers" (i.e., homeroom teachers) and 25.5% reported that that their tutors were other teachers from their own schools (i.e., possibly teachers who are teaching different subjects to these students during school hours). The majority of students (over 60%) indicated that it was common for students to ask their

[22] During the Soviet period, corruption was widespread in universities and the three countries in the Caucasus were infamous for selling university admissions.

[23] The survey included a sample of 1708 teachers.

teachers for private lessons and that the teachers encouraged students to take private lessons with them. Interestingly, most of the survey respondents thought that it was not problematic for teachers to tutor their own students, with 60.8% of school sample and 54% of university sample disagreeing with a statement that teachers should not be allowed to offer private tutoring lessons to their own students. However, data from student interviews and focus groups suggest that many teachers force their students to pay for supplementary private tutoring lessons, threatening to lower their grades otherwise.

Interviews with teachers working as tutors indicate that one of their main motivations for offering private tutoring lessons is to gain additional income to supplement their small salaries. Student surveys confirm these findings, with 56.6% of school sample and 71.1% of university sample agreeing with a statement that the main reason for private tutoring is for teachers to receive additional financial income. With a salary constituting only 60% of the subsistence minimum, teachers are looking for other sources of income and private tutoring seems to be one of the most profitable ones at this time.

***The Consumers: Who Takes Private Tutoring and Why?***

The majority of students taking private tutoring are secondary school students who use private tutoring to prepare for university entrance examinations. Of all surveyed students, the vast majority (90% of school sample and 93.9% of university sample) agreed with a statement that students use private tutoring to increase their chances of entering higher education institutions. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents (54.4% of school sample and 64.5% of university sample) believe that students who use private tutoring are more likely to enter universities compared to students of the equal abilities who do not use private tutoring. Overall, students report a combination of reasons for taking private tutoring. The most frequently mentioned reason is "to better prepare for university entrance examinations only," followed by "filling a gap in knowledge," "memorizing and systematizing topics learnt earlier," and "better understating topics taught at school" (see Table 2).

Table 2. The main reasons for the use of private tutoring in secondary school (percentage of university and school samples)

| **Main reasons for private tutoring** | **University Sample** | **School Sample** |
|---|---|---|
| To better prepare for the university entrance tests only | 36.5% | 27.8% |
| To fill a gap in knowledge | 37.2% | 21.5% |
| To remember and systematize topics learned earlier | 28.8% | 16.3% |
| To better understand topics taught at schools | 24.1% | 14.5% |
| My friends took it, that is why I decided to take private tutoring | 3.7% | 6.2% |
| Parents made me take private tutoring | 1.2% | 0.6% |

Students seeking the services of private tutors are typically good learners, with the majority (87.6%) getting the highest marks in school (i.e., four and five based on a five-point grading scale). This contradicts a usual assumption that private tutoring is form of remedial assistance for bad students, which has been widespread during the Soviet period. In fact, 78% of school sample and 89.2% of university sample disagree with a statement that "only low achieving students take private tutoring." In the context of Azerbaijan, it is good students who find it necessary to use supplementary private tutoring in order to compensate for the shortcomings of the education system and prepare for university entrance examinations (see the next section for the discussion of education quality).

The likelihood of students taking private tutoring depends on the education level of their parents. The higher the education level of their parents, the more likely that students would take private tutoring ($X^2$=10.116, $p<0.05$ for father's education and $X^2$=12.181, $p<0.05$ for mother's education). For example, 60% of students taking private tutoring lessons have parents with higher education, compared to about 40% of students with parents having no formal education (i.e. no diploma). While mothers' professional occupation has no statistically significant relationship to the probability of students taking private tutoring, fathers' occupation shows a significant relationship ($X^2$=9.57, $p=0.002$). It could be explained by cultural factors – fathers are often perceived as the main bread-

winners in the families and therefore making the financial decisions with regard to the overall family expenditures, including private tutoring.

There are no considerable gender differences between students using private tutoring, with 55.3% of female students and 59.9% of male students from the school sample attending private tutoring lessons. The 4% gender difference favoring male students may be explained by two factors. First, qualitative data suggests that some families (especially large families) prefer to invest in the education of their sons rather than daughters, believing that boys have better chances of getting well-paid jobs and supporting their families later on. Second, some families view private tutoring as a mechanism to increase their sons' opportunities to enter higher education institutions in order to avoid military service.

***Who is not taking private tutoring and why?***

A survey of school students indicates that 42.9% (437) of children do not take private tutoring in secondary school. Of these respondents, one half (51.8%) thought that they could do well without private tutoring, including 33.4% (145) of students who thought that they could do well without tutoring in general and 18% (78) who were sure that they could successfully pass entrance examinations without the help of private tutors. Approximately 15.4% (67) said that friends and relatives helped them free of charge.

Approximately one quarter (23.5% or 102) of all respondents not taking private tutoring indicates financial reasons, explaining that private tutoring lessons are too expensive. Indeed, the number of students not taking private tutoring is slightly higher among those students who estimate their family welfare as "bad" or "below national average." Of the respondents reporting their family welfare as "below the national average," 55.6% do not take private tutoring, whereas the number is somewhat lower (37.8%) among students reporting their family welfare as "good."

***Individual Lessons vs. Preparatory courses***

The vast majority of students engaged in private tutoring prefers to take individual private tutoring lessons (offered by individuals), rather than preparatory courses (offered by institutions). Although preparatory courses are much cheaper compared to individual private tutoring lessons, preparatory courses seem much less attractive. Of all surveyed students, only 4.2% of school sample and 6% of university sample attending preparatory courses. Generally, students believe that individual private tutoring lessons are more effective in preparing students for university entrance examinations than preparatory courses. For example, the majority of surveyed students (over 60%) stated that they would prefer to attend individual private tutoring lessons instead of preparatory courses in order to prepare for university entrance examinations. Over 75% of students thought that individual private tutoring lessons would have greater positive impact on exam outcomes. Students cite large class size and traditional approaches to teaching/learning as the main reasons for not choosing preparatory courses.

## Educational, Social, and Economic Impact of Private Tutoring

Private tutoring has major implications for educational, social, and economic development. This section examines the impact of private tutoring on (1) public education, (2) social inequalities, and (3) economic development.

***Private Tutoring and Threats to Public Schools***

Private tutoring has a mixed impact on public schools. On the one hand, it provides students a chance to extend their learning and gain additional knowledge and skills outside of school. On the other hand, it has a number of negative consequences. First, qualitative data suggest that private tutoring may decrease student motivation to learn in school. Interviews with teachers indicate that some students become disinterested in public schools, thinking that private tutoring is a more effective, engaging, and essential way to prepare for centralized university examinations. Students explain that private tutoring lessons are usually student-centered and interactive, which is rarely available in public schools.

Second, private tutoring may increase school non-attendance. While this is not officially documented,[24] several interviewed teachers and school directors from the capital city report that school non-attendance increases shortly before the end of the school year (especially in the last grade of secondary school), when students begin skipping classes in order to attend private tutoring lessons during school hours. Some students pay bribes to their teachers or school administrators to be excused from school and instead go to private tutoring lessons. While this practice does not seem to be widespread in Azerbaijan at the moment, more than a few reports of its existence gives a clear indication of a lack of confidence in the state education system among students and parents, which is a major cause for concern.

Third, private tutoring may lead to physical exhaustion among students and teachers. On average, students spend 28 hours at school (38 lessons) and additional 12-16 hours in private tutoring lessons every week. Combined, this constitutes over 40-44 hours a week, which equates to more than a full working day of an adult. Exhausted, many students relax in school, saving their energy for private tutoring lessons. While "the private tutoring fatigue" is especially common among students, teachers are also affected. Given most private tutors are teachers in public schools, they offer private tutoring lessons in the evenings. Tired after the full day of teaching (often up to 12 hours a day) and demoralized because of low salaries (60% of the subsistence minimum), teachers are likely to invest less time in preparation for the following school day. According to the interviews with teachers, they feel motivated to invest more time into preparing for private tutoring lessons, because it is more rewarding both financially and educationally.

[24] Interviews with students and teachers reveal that student absence is often not officially recorded. Fearing that they will be reprimanded for school non-attendance by school administration, students pay bribes to their teachers or school directors to conceal their absence.

**Private Tutoring Fever:**
**A Typical Day from a Secondary School Student's Life**

During the last year of secondary school, my daily schedule was completely full, keeping me busy from early morning until late at night. My parents hired four tutors for me to cover the basic subjects required for the centralized higher education examinations for my occupational area – Azerbaijani language, English language, mathematics, and history. The most important subject was mathematics because you can receive the greatest points for the correct answers.

I spent the entire last year of secondary school on the road, traveling from one tutor to another and I always wanted to sleep. I lived each day as robot, automatically going through the same routine day after day – weekdays, weekends, and holidays. Usually, I got up at 6 a.m. in order to prepare homework for private tutoring lessons. Closer to the entrance exams, however, I sometimes put on the alarm clock for 3 or 4 a.m. to make sure that I prepared well for private tutoring lessons. By 8 a.m., I was dressed and ready to go to school. I usually went to school for the first couple of lessons and then left school to study with tutors until the rest of the day. I was at home after 9 p.m. and prepared school and private tutoring homework until midnight. The last month before university examinations I went to my tutors every day, like to a real job. I had only one idea in my head – to pass tests and enter the university, nothing else.

Private tutoring lessons involved a lot of drilling and memorization, but I also opened a lot of new and interesting things for myself that I had never learned at school. Some teachers simply ignored us during the last two years of secondary school, especially if we did not take private tutoring lessons with them. I practically did not see my schoolmates during the last year of secondary school. Half of the class was absent, having paid teachers for not marking their "absence" in the class journal. Everyone thought that time was better spent with private tutors, not with teachers at school.

I had a conflict with some of my schoolteachers because I refused to take private tutoring from them. Having found out that I have another tutor, a teacher of mathematics expelled me from the class and told me and my parents that we did not understand who the real tutor was – "You can't even distinguish the real from the forgery!" Throughout the whole year, I had problems with this teacher and I was afraid that he would get back at me during school final examinations.

This year was difficult on my family in terms of family finances. My parents saved money on everything they could to pay for my tutors. Of course, they tried to choose the best tutors, whose services are very expensive. We paid tutors approximately $200 per month, which is a large sum of money for my family which is not very rich. Although my parents tried to hide it from me, I knew that they sold some valuable things from our house that year. Now my brother is graduating from school and the "tutoring fever" has plagued our home again. My parents have decided to hire the most expensive and prestigious tutors, which have a 100% rate of their student enrolling in universities. If my brother gets high scores on the exam, there is a chance that he will study in a state-financed higher education group. It was not the case with me and we now need to pay up to $600 per year for my higher education.

Looking back, I think that going to school was a waste of time. I would have been better off studying with private tutors only.

Fourth, public education is beginning to lose one of its most important functions – youth socialization and civic awareness. Exhausted after many hours of studying at school (during regular school hours), attending private tutoring lessons (after school hours), and preparing for school and tutoring lessons at home (in the evenings and mornings), many students have neither interest nor energy to engage in extra-curricula activities. Interviews with teachers highlight that some of the most socially active students become disinterested in school extra-curricula activities during the last two grades of secondary school. Their full and undivided attention is given to private tutoring in a mad race for positive outcomes in centralized higher education entrance examinations.

> *"…Private tutoring is killing the [public] school. I would like to learn more than four subjects required at the university entrance testing, but I don't have time for it and school teachers are not really interested in teaching us during the last two years of school. I would like to get involved in some extra curricular activities and to spend more time with my schoolmates, but it is not possible. I feel imprisoned by private tutoring lessons. My dream is a school where supplementary private tutoring is not necessary after school hours."*
>
> From a focus group with school students (Baku, 2005)

Finally, and more importantly, private tutoring may lead to the distortion of the official curriculum in public schools, which is particularly prominent in education systems where supplementary private tutoring is provided by teachers who already have responsibility for their students in the public education system (Bray, 1999). On the one hand, teachers interviewed in this study said the school curriculum is overloaded and that they could not possibly cover all of it during regular school hours. They explained that private tutoring was necessary to ensure that students master everything prescribed by the state program. On the other hand, the majority of the students in this study indicated that curricula in fact is not overloaded (see Table 3), which may indicate that school teachers teach below their capacity level and intentionally do not cover the full curriculum during school hours to increase the demand for private tutoring. Knowing that some parts of the curriculum are essential for student success at centralized higher education examination, teachers may deliberately omit some topics from their public school lessons. While this is a widespread practice in such countries as Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Egypt (Bray, 1999), its existence, scope, and impact on public education should be seriously evaluated in Azerbaijan.

***Private Tutoring and Increasing Social Inequities***

A widespread system of private tutoring puts some children at a disadvantage. The findings of this study indicate that higher education is largely inaccessible to those who have not taken private tutoring during the last grades of secondary school. Of all surveyed university students, the vast majority (over 91%) took private tutoring and only 8% did not take tutoring lessons to prepare for centralized entrance examinations. This means that students are unlikely to get admitted into any higher education programs (whether high- or low-demand) without first investing into private tutoring. Clearly, this puts some children in a disadvantage, especially those who cannot afford to pay for increasingly expensive private tutoring lessons.

This is particularly evident in the case of children from poor families and rural areas. Data from this study shows that there is statistically significant relationship between students' perception of their family welfare and the use of private tutoring ($X^2$=12.947, $p<0.01$). For example, students who perceive their family welfare as below the national average are less likely to use the services of private tutors, compared to children who perceive their family welfare as average or above the national average. Even if poorer families use private tutoring, they are likely to spend much less on it, compared to wealthier families. According to the findings of the household survey data (WB, 2001), the non-poor spends six times more than the very poor on various educational services, including private tutoring. This means that poorer families not only have less access to private tutoring, but also have less access to quality private tutoring. The survey results show that the majority of the respondents (68.9%) agree that students of wealthier parents can hire better tutors. While household income levels show little disparity in enrollment rates in primary and secondary education, there are large disparities in enrollment at the higher education levels, especially for upper secondary and higher education. According to the World Bank report (2002), about 30% of students in higher education come from the richest quintile, while only 12% came from the poorest quintile (p. 62). Given the relationship between private tutoring and higher education admissions, it is likely that the very poor are less likely to access quality secondary education, receive private tutoring, and attend post-

secondary education.

In addition to socioeconomic inequities exacerbated by private tutoring, there is evidence of the emerging rural/urban inequities. The university student sample reveals that approximately 75% of enrolled first year students come from large urban areas, suggesting that private tutoring may be of better quality and/or used more frequently there. Indeed, students in Baku spend on average 40% more than students from Ganja and Lenkaran areas on private tutoring per year. Furthermore, Baku residents dominate the group of students who spend over $1000 per year on private tutoring, with students from the capital city constituting 81% of those who paid more than $2000 per year and for 88% of those who paid $1000-2000 per year. This is not surprising, given that urban areas have higher concentration of the wealthiest strata of the population. Undoubtedly, students from rural areas are at a disadvantage, spending considerably less on supplementary private tutoring. This is further confirmed by other quantitative studies (Sigma, 2000), which found that private tutoring was unaffordable to 48.6% of families in large cities, 60% in regional centers, and 61.8% in rural areas (p. 54). Furthermore, academic disadvantage of students from rural areas is evident in centralized higher education entrance examination scores. The further the school is located from the capital city, the smaller the percentage of students scoring high on the centralized exam. For example, a total of 6.1% of high achievers come from Baku, whereas the number is three times lower in rural areas, approximately at 2% (SSAC, 2004).

Combined, this research suggests that children from poor and rural areas are more likely to have been affected from a deterioration of educational quality during the transformation period. Having less access to supplementary education opportunities in the form of private tutoring, students from poor and rural areas have less access to quality education, resulting in inequitable higher education admission and consequent labor market outcomes.

***Private Tutoring and Growing Corruption in Schools***

> *"If my salary was sufficient to meet my basic needs, which are really modest, I would gladly stop this slave tutoring work…"*
>
> *School-teacher (focus group)*

Data from this research and other studies (WB, 2002; Sigma, 2000) suggest that there is an emerging relationship between private tutoring and corruption in secondary schools. Quantitative and qualitative data indicate that corruption is firmly anchored to the existing low wages in the education sector that lead to poor teaching and make teachers susceptible to accepting bribes to inflate grades or to teach below their capacity to gain extra income through supplementary private tutoring. The survey results reveal that 71.1% of university students believe that the main reason for private tutoring is for teachers to receive additional financial income. Similarly, interviewed teachers admit that difficult financial situation forces them into private tutoring. In order to make their ends meet, many teachers artificially create demands for tutoring through the lowering of student grades, distorting the official curriculum, and sometimes blackmailing their students. As students explained, teachers do not always want to teach the whole curriculum at school (see Table 3). It is much profitable to do it outside of school, for fees (Sigma, 2000).

Since approximately half of all surveyed students use their own teachers as tutors, it is a clear indication that corruption is fairly widespread in secondary schools. The majority of students reveal that it is common for students to ask their class teachers to provide private lessons for them (64.6% of university sample and 60.8% of school sample) and admit that their class teachers encourage students to take private tutoring lessons with them (55.8% of university sample and 60.4% of school sample). Students also indicate that teachers treat students who get private tutoring better than students who do not get such help (see Table 3). Interestingly, this fits well with the Transparency International Azerbaijan findings, which reveal that over 50% of respondents admit that they have had personal experiences with extortion in the education area (p. 8). In fact, 54.7% of the respondents think that it is impossible to receive education services without paying a bribe (p. 27) and 49% admit paying a bribe themselves (p. 31). Ranked as one of the most corrupt

countries in the world,[25] Azerbaijan is becoming accustomed to corruption, with a considerable portion of the Azeri society viewing it as a normal phenomenon of everyday life (Transparency International Azerbaijan, 2004). Interestingly, private tutoring has in a way helped to institutionalize corruption at the secondary education level by masking financial extortion under the name of supplementary private tutoring.

Table 3. Student Statements Regarding Corruption-Related Issues (percentage of university and school sample agreeing or strongly agreeing with a statement)

| Corruption-Related Statements | University Sample | School Sample |
|---|---|---|
| It is common for a student to ask his/ her class teacher to provide private lessons for him/ her. | 64.6% | 60.8% |
| Class teachers encourage pupils who have problems with subject matter to take private lessons. | 55.8% | 60.8% |
| One of the main reasons for private tutoring is so that teachers can receive additional financial income. | 71.1% | 56.6% |
| Students use private tutoring because the school curricula are overloaded. | 29.7% | 33% |
| Students use private tutoring because the school's curricula do not cover everything that is required on university entrance exam. | 68.5% | 56.3% |
| Students use private tutoring because teachers do not explain subject matter thoroughly. | 53.2% | 32.7% |

[25] According to the Transparency International Report (2004), Azerbaijan is ranked 140 of 145 countries in a Corruption Perception Index. Of a maximum ten score (with ten being least corrupt and one being most corrupt), Azerbaijan has scored less than two (2).

### *Private Tutoring and the Shadow Economy*

Given that 57.1% of surveyed students report using private tutoring in secondary school and taking into consideration that average costs are about US$434 per year, annual revenues of private tutoring in Azerbaijan could be estimated over US$57 million.[26] One of the outcomes of the direct expenditures on private tutoring is that it gives substantial income to large numbers of tutors. While some of these tutors already have other sources of income (e.g., working as teachers in public schools), others have no alternative sources of income. In these circumstances, private tutoring becomes an important income generation activity for many people who otherwise could have been unemployed. Because tutoring is a shadow activity (i.e., not legalized), all of the revenue received by tutors is beyond the reach of government tax collectors. If taxed, this revenue could have been over US$10 million in 2004 alone.

## The Main Factors Underlying the Demand for Private Tutoring

As the previous sections highlight, there is a high demand for private tutoring on Azerbaijan's education market. This demand is driven by multiple education stakeholders, including the students (and their plea for quality education), their parents (and their hope for a better future for their children), as well as tutors themselves (and their drive for more adequate financial compensation). This research suggests that the main factors underlying the demand for private tutoring include, but are not limited to: (1) educational factors (i.e., the quality of education in public schools), (2) sociocultural factors (i.e., the high value of education in a society), (3) economic factors (i.e., salary differentials among teachers).

### *Educational Factors: Private Tutoring as a Compensation for the Declining Education Quality in Public Schools*

The majority of the respondents indicated education-related factors as the main reasons for their use of supplementary private tutoring. Of a university sample, for example, 37.2% took private tutoring to fill a gap in knowledge, 28.8% to memorize and

[26] 57.1% of all secondary school students (231000) constitute 131901 students who pay, on average, $434 a year on private tutoring for a total of 57 million a year.

systematize topics learned earlier, and 24.1% to better understand topics taught in schools (see Table 2). This indicates that students are losing confidence in the quality of education provided in public schools and, therefore, are seeking supplementary private tutoring to meet their educational needs. Of the university sample, 75.9% of the respondents agreed that low quality of teaching in schools was the main reason for their decision to take private tutoring.

> *"……We are now observing the growth of private tutoring in our country. The worse the education quality in school, the better for my business. The tendency towards paying for education is obvious and private tutoring is becoming more and more popular."*
> From an interview with a private tutor (January, 2005)

Interviews with students and teachers confirm findings from numerous national and international reports that highlight the declining quality of education in schools, which is reflected in the prevalence of traditional teaching/learning approaches (i.e., an emphasis on memorization of facts and a lack of interactive, student-centered teaching methods), overloaded curriculum, and a low quality of textbooks. For example, interviews with teachers explain that the current curriculum is so overloaded that there is simply not enough time to cover everything in the program.[27] In some subjects, the content of the required programs increased, while the number allotted time for some subjects decreased during the last decade.[28] Having to cover a substantial amount of information in a short period of time, students often acquire only superficial knowledge of the subject. According to the statistics of State Student Admission Commission (2004), an average applicant masters only 23-54% of the curriculum. Agreeing that school curricula do not cover everything that is required on university entrance examinations (56.3% of school sample and 68.5% of university sample), it is not surprising that the majority of students seek the services of private tutors.

Presently, private tutoring compensates for these shortcomings of the public education system. According to the survey results, every second student agrees with the statement

[27] For example, history is currently taught for six years and the curriculum includes 12 textbooks; mathematics (algebra and geometry) is taught for seven years and the curriculum includes 12 textbooks, including seven textbooks in algebra and five textbooks on geometry (Ganiyeva, 2005).

[28] During the Soviet times, for example, physics was taught four or five times a week. While the curriculum/program has practically remained the same, physics is now allotted only one hour a week.

that "private tutoring is the only way to get high quality education" (52.7% of school sample and 59.5% university sample). Interviews with students explain that private tutoring offers them a more individualized approach to learning, which is rarely present in public schools. For example, students suggest that private tutoring lessons are usually organized for small groups of students, they are usually interactive, teaching students to analyze facts, organize data, think critically, and draw conclusions. Additionally, tutors develop other important skills, often overlooked in schools. For example, interviews with tutors and students indicate that private tutoring aims to ensure psychological readiness of students for centralized examinations, promptness of intellectual reaction, culture of speech, presentation skills, professional orientation, as well as other skills and abilities important for both higher education admission processes and the future labor market. More importantly, good tutors foster students' desire to learn, which many children lack in secondary schools. Combined, private tutoring acts to compensate for the shortcomings of the public education system, providing students with the quality of education that they expect in order to better prepare for university entrance examinations and participation in the labor market.

### *Sociocultural Factors: Private Tutoring and Increasing Value of Education during the Transformation Period*

Sociocultural factors may encourage parents to invest in private tutoring for their children. These factors form part of broader cultural beliefs about the value of educational attainment. Rapidly escalating number of secondary school graduates taking university entrance examinations (e.g., presently at over 70% of all secondary school graduates) suggests that the "diploma disease" is on the rise in Azerbaijan. Those who see education as a way of escaping the hardships of the transformation period may invest in private tutoring to ensure that their children successfully enter higher education institutions and have access to better paying jobs in the future. For example, this study indicates that parents with higher levels of education are more likely to invest in supplementary private tutoring of their children. However, data also reveals a fairly large percentage of parents with incomplete secondary education (50% of fathers and 54.5% of mothers) and no secondary education at all (45.5% of fathers and 41.2% of mothers) who

decide to invest in private tutoring of their children. Similarly, approximately 51% of fathers with low-income jobs (e.g., unskilled laborers, farmers) or without employment make decisions to invest in supplementary private tutoring of their children. Interviews with parents explain that they see private tutoring as an important mechanism for the academic and economic advancement of their children.

Overall, the prestige of education has remained high during the transformation period. This has been also confirmed by other qualitative studies, examining parent opinions about the level of education they consider sufficient for their children (Sigma, 2000; UNICEF, 1995). For example, one qualitative study indicates that most of respondents in large cities (78.2% of all respondents in this group), as well as in regional centers (77.3%) and villages (65.5%) want their children to receive higher education (Sigma, 2000). The high prestige of education in Azerbaijan was noted also by some foreign experts. For example, the Report of UNICEF Mission (1995) highlighted that "there is very strong family tradition [valuing education] in the country. Families are ready to sacrifice a lot to ensure their children to receive high quality education."

With the introduction of centralized higher education entrance examinations, many parents have realized that they no longer need to have "connections" to ensure university entrance for their children, but can now rely on centralized examination system for fair outcomes. However, parents also believe that public schools are unlikely to prepare their children for highly competitive centralized examinations and therefore choose to hire private tutors to supplement education received in schools. The assumption is that private tutoring would increase student chances of higher education enrolment and that university diploma would then ensure better employment opportunities for youth. In reality, however, higher education degree may not be as valuable as traditionally assumed. Currently, approximately 60% of all unemployed have higher or upper secondary education degrees: 21.8% and 37.5% respectively (State Statistical Agency, 2003). While many parents realize that having a higher education degree is not a guarantee against unemployment, they believe that it may be the best investment a family can make to prepare its children for the future.

### *Economic Factors: Private Tutoring as Indispensable Income Generation Activity for Teachers*

In addition to educational and sociocultural factors, economic factors drive the demand for private tutoring. In the case of Azerbaijan, as many other countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the rise of private tutoring has been (at least partially) triggered by declining socioeconomic status of teachers. For example, qualitative research conducted by Sigma (2000) confirms that the overwhelming majority of teachers interviewed (79.9%) identified their living standards as "low" and "very low," with 56.1% and 23.8% respectively. Teachers explained that financial constraints and a shortage of workload force them to supplement their meager salaries through engaging into other income generating activities, including private tutoring. In the context of Azerbaijan, teachers are driven to supplementary tutoring simply in order to survive. As qualitative research indicates, some teachers are so distraught by their economic destitution that they resort to corrupt activities by forcing their students to take private tutoring lessons with them.

The relationship between declining teacher wages and the growing demand for private tutoring is not unique for Azerbaijan. As Bray notes (1999), similar patterns are evident in many countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, were government inability to pay teacher salaries at a level matching the soaring inflation rates forced teachers to look for alternative ways to generate income. At the same, many of the most qualified teachers left schools altogether, thereby precipitating a decline in the quality of education, which required parents to pay for supplementation to ensure that their children would receive adequate education. As Bray (1999) notes, the rise of supplementary tutoring in these countries has little to do with either broad culture or the nature of examinations, but was instead a response to collapsing structure for paying teachers adequate salaries. While economic factors are not the only causes driving the demand for private tutoring in Azerbaijan, they are certainly some of the most powerful.

## IV- CONCLUSIONS, POLICY ALTERNATIVES & RECOMMENDATIONS

There are several myths about the education system in the Azerbaijan's society. Many people believe that the education system is working well, that corruption has been eliminated from schools, and that students have equal chances to continue their studies in higher education institutions. These myths conceal important problems facing Azerbaijan's education system and hamper education reform efforts, which are currently underway. Based on quantitative and qualitative research on private tutoring, this study attempts to refute these myths in an effort to open a discussion about the future of Azerbaijan's education system.

### *MYTH #1 - All students have equal opportunities to enter higher education institutions*

While it is commonly assumed that student access to higher education has become more equitable with the introduction of centralized higher education entrance examinations, it is not true in reality. This study suggests that higher education is not accessible to all good students. First and foremost, it is accessible to those students who can afford supplementary private tutoring during the two last two years of secondary school. Of all surveyed university freshmen, 91.8% report taking private tutoring lessons on a regular basis through the last two grades of secondary school to prepare for university entrance examinations. The percentage of students using private tutoring varies neither by the higher education program demand (e.g., high/low demand) nor by the program finance form (state/self-financed groups). This means that private tutoring has become a necessary precondition for getting accepted into *any* state higher education program. Clearly, a widespread system of private tutoring puts some children at a disadvantage. The most affected are students from poor families and rural areas. Having less access to supplementary education opportunities in the form of private tutoring, students from poor families and rural areas have less access to quality education, resulting in inequitable higher education admission outcomes.

***MYTH # 2- Corruption has been eliminated in the education sector with the introduction of a centralized higher education entrance examination system***

Many people believe that corruption has been eliminated from the education system with the introduction of centralized higher education entrance examinations. While corruption has certainly receded, especially at the higher education entry level, it has not completely disappeared from the education sector. This study suggests that *corruption has shifted to other levels of the education system*, including secondary schools. Knowing that some parts of the curriculum are essential for student success at centralized higher education examinations, many teachers deliberately omit some topics from their public school lessons in order to increase the demand for private tutoring after school. Such teachers have a vested interest in the high-stakes examination system and use features of the present education systems to their own advantage, i.e. to supplement their meager salaries through supplementary private tutoring. With approximately half of all students using their own teachers as tutors, the likelihood of a widespread corruption in secondary education is high.

***MYTH #3 – The value of education is decreasing in Azerbaijan***

Many national and international reports on the status of the education system in Azerbaijan warn that the value of education has been decreasing since the collapse of the Soviet Union (WB, 2002; UNICEF, 1995). This research suggests the opposite – the value of education has remained high, which is especially evident in the growing number of student applications for centralized higher education entrance examinations. It is the value of *public education,* which has been rapidly declining. This study indicates that the majority of secondary school students is losing confidence in public schools and, as a result, is seeking the services of private tutors to help them prepare for university entrance examinations. For many of Azerbaijan's secondary school students, private tutoring is now substituting classroom learning – a trend that must be acknowledged as a sign of a broken system (Lepisto, 2004).

Undoubtedly, the rise of private tutoring in Azerbaijan stems from major shortcomings of the public education system. While private tutoring may have positive effects on

individual students (i.e., providing an opportunity to learn more outside of school), its overall impact on the public education system in Azerbaijan is worrisome. As this study illustrates, the private tutoring phenomenon has begun to distort the public school curricula, put enormous pressure on students, exacerbate social inequities, and accelerate the spread of corruption in the education system. More dangerously, a rapid growth of private tutoring has signalled that the majority of Azerbaijan's students and parents are losing confidence in public education and are looking for education alternatives in the private tutoring market.

Despite strong indications that the public education system is in serious distress and that education stakeholders are losing trust in public schools, Azerbaijan's education policy makers have been overlooking the private tutoring phenomenon and discounting the seriousness of its effects on public education. In Mark Bray's (1999) terms, Azerbaijan's government has taken "a laissez-faire approach," with policy-makers ignoring the private tutoring phenomenon because of other pressing demands. With market forces reigning in all spheres of private and public life in Azerbaijan, some government officials have, in fact, argued in favour of "marketization" of education, saying that markets (including the private tutoring market) are best left to regulate themselves. Left unmonitored and unregulated, however, the private tutoring epidemic may have unprecedented negative effects on the already strained public education system. As this study illustrated, private tutoring has already begun not only to supplement, but also substitute public education for the majority of Azerbaijan's students. Those students who cannot afford private tutoring and must rely on public schools exclusively, now find themselves at a major disadvantage when applying to higher education institutions.

**Policy Options: From a laissez-faire approach to awareness raising and monitoring**

Currently, the Azerbaijan's government takes a *laissez-faire approach* to private tutoring (i.e. deliberately ignoring the issue), which is not effective in the context of decreasing quality of public education, increasing inequities, and widespread corruption in public schools. In the current circumstances, a more active governmental response may be more meaningful. Of available policy options to address the issue of private tutoring, Bray (1999) identifies six general responses which are most commonly used by government

officials and policy-makers worldwide (see Appendix B). In addition to a *laissez-faire approach,* which is currently evident in Azerbaijan, governments may choose the following policy options: (1) monitoring without intervention (i.e. gathering data for strategic planning of public education development), (2) regulating and controlling (i.e., regulating the market in order to alleviate negative consequences of private tutoring), (3) encouraging (i.e., disseminating information on private tutoring, co-financing), (4) prohibiting (i.e. completely banning private tutoring), and (6) mixed approach (i.e., prohibiting some forms of private tutoring, while encouraging others).

While all of these approaches have their pros and cons, a careful consideration of the complexity of Azerbaijan's context is necessary before any decisions are made about how to respond to the private tutoring phenomenon. At this stage, neither formal support nor complete prohibition of private tutoring seems appropriate. These extreme solutions have proven ineffective worldwide (Bray, 1999) and are unlikely to address negative consequences of private tutoring in Azerbaijan. First, formal support of private tutoring may lead to an increasingly unmanageable private tutoring market, which could eventually substitute the public school system for wealthier students, further exacerbating social inequities in the country. Second, a complete prohibition of private tutoring is unlikely to be effective in Azerbaijan because of the government's incapacity and a lack of financial resources to enforce the measures. This is particularly true in the case of "one-on-one" private tutoring, where government control is practically impossible. Furthermore, a complete prohibition of private tutoring will not address some of the most important systemic issues, which are the cause of private tutoring in the first place (i.e., insufficient teacher salaries).

Based on the quantitative and qualitative data collected for this report, it is clear that the *laissez-faire approach* is no longer acceptable in the case of rapidly spreading private tutoring phenomenon in Azerbaijan. It is important that Azerbaijan's policy makers consider more active involvement in monitoring and, perhaps, regulating the issue of private tutoring. While specific policy action should be thoroughly discussed with the involvement of the major stakeholders (including school teachers, education administrators, parents, government officials, and NGO representatives), the first steps

should include the following broader actions:

- *Public awareness raising about the nature, scale, and implications of private tutoring on the public education system*

  One of the reasons for the escalating practice of private tutoring in Azerbaijan is public unawareness about the scale and negative effects of private tutoring on the public education system and Azerbaijan's economy. It is important that major education stakeholders (e.g., parents, teachers, and school administrators) in general and education policy-makers (e.g., Ministry and government officials) in particular are better aware of the potential threats that private tutoring has brought to the public education system. Given that private tutoring has begun to substitute classroom instruction for the majority of Azerbaijan's youth, the question is – *why do you need public schools when you have private tutors?* While few doubt the indispensable value of public education, it is important that major education stakeholders realize the negative impact of private tutoring on public schools. A public awareness or "sensitization campaign" (Bray, 1999) can endeavour to reduce the demand for private tutoring through speeches, newspaper articles, television programs, and pamphlets. Education policy-makers and NGO representatives can also stimulate a more active engagement of communities, parent-teacher associations, and school boards in reducing the negative effects of private tutoring on public schools by monitoring such ethical issues as the distortion of school curriculum and corruption in schools. More importantly, these local structures can ensure that excessive, unethical use of private tutoring does not put any students at a disadvantage.

- *Continuous monitoring of the nature, scope, and impact of private tutoring on the public education system*

  It is important to systematically monitor the nature, scale, and impact of private tutoring on the public education system. Such information will not only raise awareness among education stakeholders about the effects of private tutoring, but will also help in the planning of a reformed public education system. For example, data on private tutoring costs may be helpful both for taxation purposes and for

determining teacher salaries. More importantly, systematic monitoring is necessary to ensure that certain groups do not become more disadvantaged as a result of a lack of access to private tutoring. While monitoring is a non-intervention strategy, it is the very least that could be done concerning the worrisome trends in private tutoring in Azerbaijan. It is crucial that policy-makers are aware of changes in the private tutoring market and use this information for reforming the public education system.

- *Efforts to regulate the nature, form, and quality of private tutoring*

  In the long-term, Azerbaijan policy-makers should strive for basic regulation of private tutoring. This means that the Ministry could regulate the nature, form, and quality of supplementary tutoring offered to students. For example, the Ministry may consider prohibiting teachers from tutoring their own students for financial gain or from offering private tutoring lessons during school hours. Given a growing demand for private tutoring over the last 15 years, some form of government control may be helpful to avoid student manipulation by teachers and to ensure that all students have equal education opportunities.

- *Efforts to reduce the demand for private tutoring through improving the quality of public education*

  While public awareness, systematic monitoring, and basic regulation are important in addressing the negative impact of private tutoring on public schools, real changes can be achieved in a sustainable manner only if the quality and relevance of public education is improved through such systemic efforts as developing new curriculum and standards, ensuring adequate teacher remuneration, and improving the overall learning environment in schools. If public policy is focused on the providers of the service (i.e. teachers), it is important to consider such systemic changes as teacher salary increases and/or introduction of professional codes of conduct that regulate potential conflicts of interest (i.e., teachers tutoring their own students). If the focus is on the recipients of the service (i.e. students and their parents), possible strategies

could focus on decreasing competitiveness among students (e.g., by avoiding public ranking of schools and students) and increasing student motivation to learn (e.g., by ensuring that school curriculum is not overloaded and that innovative, learner-centered teaching/learning methods are used).

From the policy-making and planning perspective, the issue of private tutoring can no longer be ignored. Given its unprecedented scale and negative impact on the public education system, private tutoring deserves much more attention than it has been given thus far in Azerbaijan. However, any decision to address the issue of private tutoring should not be a political decision. Rather, it should be a professional policy decision, which is developed in deliberation with the major education stakeholders and based on a thorough examination of the existing data, systematic evaluation of available policy options, and careful assessment of potential policy outcomes. It is important to ensure that not only the symptoms but also the causes of the private tutoring epidemic are addressed in order to alleviate its adverse effects on public education and society at large.

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