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Libyan Teachers and Parents' Attitudes Toward Private Tutoring in Primary Schools in Misrata

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اتجاهات المعلمين وأولياء الأمور الليبيين نحو الدروس الخصوصية في المدارس الابتدائية بمدينة مصراتة

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Abstract:
This qualitative study investigates the views of educators and parents about the growing usage of private tutoring (PT) in primary schools in Misurata, Libya. When "shadow education" transitions from secondary to primary levels, it is critical to comprehend the interests of local stakeholders. Purposive sampling was used in semi-structured interviews with two English instructors and six parents to gain further insight into their experiences with extra instruction. Thematic analysis of the data reveals that PT is now viewed as a "structural requirement" rather than a luxury due to institutional faults such as crammed classrooms and a very demanding English curriculum that exceeds the time restrictions of formal schooling. The findings demonstrate that while private schools provide "controlled environments" and state-of-the-art technologies that improve children' reading and self-esteem, they also put a significant financial burden on families. Parents are increasingly relying on professional tutors to aid them with their studies because textbooks are getting harder. The research concludes that the aspirational goals of the Libyan English curriculum and the practical reality of public schools differ significantly. These results suggest that the Ministry of Education has to improve classroom facilities and align curriculum density with teaching time in order to reduce the growing reliance on the shadow education system.

Keywords: Shadow education, Private tutoring, Primary education, Misurata, Libya, Stakeholder attitudes, EFL pedagogy, Curriculum density, Qualitative research.

الملخص
تستكشف هذه الدراسة النوعية وجهات نظر أولياء الأمور والمعلمين حول الانتشار المتزايد للدروس الخصوصية في المدارس الابتدائية بمدينة مصراتة، ليبيا. ويعد فهم دوافع أصحاب المصلحة المحليين أمراً بالغ الأهمية مع انتقال ظاهرة "تعليم الظل" من المرحلة الثانوية إلى المرحلة الابتدائية. شارك في الدراسة ستة من أولياء الأمور ومعلمان للغة الإنجليزية من خلال مقابلات شبه منظمة، باستخدام العينة القصدية للتعمق في تجاربهم مع التعليم الإضافي. ويُظهر التحليل الموضوعي للبيانات أن الدروس الخصوصية لم تعد تُعد رفاهية، بل أصبحت "متطلباً هيكلياً" ناتجاً عن أوجه القصور المؤسسي، مثل الفصول الدراسية المكتظة، ومنهج اللغة الإنجليزية المكثف الذي يتجاوز القيود الزمنية للتعليم الرسمي. وتشير النتائج إلى أنه على الرغم من أن المراكز الخاصة توفر "بيئات منضبطة" وتقنيات حديثة تعزز ثقة الطلاب وإلمامهم بالقراءة والكتابة، إلا أنها تفرض أيضاً عبئاً مالياً ثقيلاً على الأسر. ونظراً لزيادة صعوبة المناهج الدراسية، بات أولياء الأمور يعتمدون بشكل متزايد على المعلمين الخصوصيين كبديل ضروري للدعم الأكاديمي الوالدي. وتخلص الدراسة إلى وجود فجوة كبيرة بين الواقع المادي للفصول الدراسية العامة والأهداف الطموحة لمنهج اللغة الإنجليزية الليبي. وتوصي هذه النتائج بضرورة قيام وزارة التعليم بتحسين ظروف الفصول الدراسية، ومواءمة كثافة المناهج مع الوقت المخصص للتدريس؛ للحد من الاعتماد المتزايد على نظام "تعليم الظل".

الكلمات المفتاحية: تعليم الظل، الدروس الخصوصية، التعليم الابتدائي، مصراتة، ليبيا، اتجاهات أصحاب المصلحة، طرق تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية لغةً أجنبية، كثافة المناهج، البحث النوعي.

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The Research Introduction

The surge of "shadow education" worldwide has drastically transformed education systems, particularly in developing countries where conventional schooling faces many challenges. With competition among students becoming more intense, supplemental instruction is becoming more commonplace. In Libya, private tutoring is historically famous especially in the preparatory and secondary levels but has experienced tremendous growth recently within the primary education. Understanding the educational shift will require the views of stakeholders, especially on the need and effectiveness of such extra courses. For families that want to excel academically, private tutoring is one of the top educational resources. Various investigations reveal the capacity of this kind of training to enhance student performance while providing the one-on-one attention many students miss out on in overcrowded classrooms (Bray & Kobakhidze, 2015; Aurini et al., 2013). In Misurata, students increasingly rely on private institutions for their procedural educational needs. However, with the growth of these private establishments, various changes have been noticed. For people looking to succeed in national certificate examinations, it has become a regular procedure. Nonetheless, the real influence of the phenomenon is highly dependent on both teachers' and students' attitudes and reasons for participating.

Statement of the Problem

Private tutoring is a perceived additional tool for use in a variety of education systems. According to Bray (2014), private tutoring renders a "shadow education" system of individualized training that helps learners close learning gaps. With personalized feedback, it helps learners understand complex concepts and improve exam scores. This method would make learning focused and academically motivating.

In Libya, the educational system is being pressurized to reach international standards and the increase in demand for private lessons in primary school clearly reflects this. Nonetheless, many students and teachers have regarded private tuition as a necessary alternative due to the perceived deficiencies of the official syllabus and teacher-centered training. According to Azizah et al. in 2024, the results confirmed this issue, where students are pressured to seek outside help to pass the national test.

From what I understand, there has not been any previous study that has investigated the views of educators and students specifically in the primary schools of Misurata on the prevalence and impact of private tuition. Through exploring these people's views, motivations, and experiences, we can better understand the schooling context of the locale. These realities will help address the increasing disparity between formal education and the expanding private education system.

The Purpose of the Study

This study aims to investigate the perspectives of teachers and parents regarding private tutoring in Misurata's primary schools and to determine whether they consider such instruction an essential requirement for academic success within the current Libyan primary education framework.

Research Question

This research is designed to explore the following central question: What are teachers' and learners' parents' attitudes regarding private tutoring as an educational practice in the primary schools of Misurata?

Significance of the Study

By offering information on opinions regarding private tutoring in elementary schools, this study makes a substantial contribution to the Libyan Ministry of Education. For Misurata's primary school teachers, this could offer guidance and assistance. Besides curriculum designers may find the results useful in improving the official syllabus to better meet the unique requirements of young students. Likewise, by increasing primary school teachers' comprehension of the difficulties and consequences of supplemental instruction, this study can help educational stakeholders address these issues in the classroom.

The scope of the study

The current investigation is restricted to the attitudes of educators and students regarding private tutoring, excluding other types of academic support, specifically within primary schools located in Misurata. The research subjects were selectively identified based on defined eligibility requirements.

Literature Review

Private Tutoring

Private tutoring (PT) is defined as fee-based academic instruction provided outside the free schooling offered by public systems (Bray & Silova, 2006). While once largely overlooked by educational planners and researchers (Bray, 1999), it has evolved into a global phenomenon often referred to as "shadow education"—a

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term first coined by Stevenson and Baker (1992). This metaphor describes a system of supplementary tutoring that mimics and grows alongside formal education, focusing specifically on academic subjects required for educational advancement (Bray, 2009; Bray & Lykins, 2012; Zhang & Bray, 2016). In many contexts, the rise of shadow education reflects a growing recognition of its potential to enhance language acquisition beyond traditional classroom settings, particularly as students increasingly rely on these paid services to supplement their formal studies (Gorbatenko, 2022). This trend often blurs the boundaries between public and private education, highlighting a global shift where PT is no longer a standalone entity but a reflection of the characteristics and perceived deficiencies of the mainstream system (Bray & Silova, 2006).

The aim to increase language proficiency and guarantee exam readiness is what motivates the widespread use of this technique, particularly in the form of Private English Tutoring (PET) (Zanolla, 2013). PT provides a degree of flexibility and individualized attention that traditional education frequently lacks because it comes in a variety of forms, from one-on-one sessions to group training (Lorenz & Stubbe, 2020). But there are drawbacks to this move toward private education. Werbińska et al. (2020) point out that the expansion of PT has wide-ranging effects on families and society, influencing how both teachers and students view the formal educational system. The use of PT is frequently the result of discontent with traditional education, which could exacerbate social inequality as it becomes a major concern for educational policy (Gorbatenko, 2022). Ultimately, the multifaceted nature of PT—encompassing supplemental instruction in core academic subjects like languages and mathematics (Bray, 1999)—underscores a transition from an ignored educational byproduct to a dominant component of the modern educational landscape that shapes the daily academic lives of primary school students.

The Regional Context and Global Proliferation of Shadow Education

While private tutoring was once viewed as a phenomenon primarily concentrated in East Asia (Baş, 2024; Shokirova & Rasulov, 2024), it has evolved into a globalized "parallel system of instruction" that now spans diverse educational landscapes (Bray, 2013; Ventura & Jang, 2010). In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the growth of this sector is particularly pronounced, driven by systemic challenges such as overcrowded classrooms and perceived curriculum deficiencies within public schools (El-Araby, 2020).

This expansion is not limited to industrialized nations or major urban centers; rather, research indicates that tutoring has moved from urban hubs into rural areas and from developed to developing countries, reflecting a universal surge in demand for supplemental instruction (Edwards et al., 2019; Quan-gon, 2012). However, as Bray (2021a) emphasizes, the distribution of these services remains highly uneven, often dictated by geographic and spatial contexts (Golightly, 2016). In many developing contexts, this creates a significant divide where students in urban areas—who often have higher family incomes—access the best resources, while those in less central regions face limited options (Srivastava, 2019).

The dramatic rise of private tutoring in transitional and developing economies has sparked significant controversy regarding educational equity (Entrich, 2017). There is a growing concern that if public systems are perceived to be failing, students who cannot afford these private services are placed at a distinct disadvantage, particularly when competing for limited higher education placements (Bray & Silova, 2006). This dissatisfaction with formal schooling often fuels the "shadow system," allowing it to overshadow mainstream education and widen social inequalities (Joshi, 2019; Gorbatenko, 2022). Despite various government attempts worldwide to regulate or curb the expansion of shadow education, the practice continues to flourish, highlighting the necessity of understanding the specific geographic and socio-political factors that shape the attitudes of stakeholders toward these services (Fleischmann et al., 2015; Byun & Kim, 2020). For a city like Misurata, these global trends suggest that local attitudes are likely shaped by the interplay between regional educational quality and the socio-economic pressures felt by families and teachers alike.

Mismear (2025) examined the attitudes of Libyan EFL teachers and students toward private tutoring by analyzing the local educational scene; however, that study was restricted to the preparatory and secondary school levels in Misurata. The results demonstrated how advanced language proficiency and exam preparation for older pupils depend on extra training. By investigating the opinions of educators and students in particular within Misurata elementary schools, the current study closes this knowledge gap. The foundational stage of education, where tutoring techniques and stakeholder motivations may differ, was not covered by the prior research (Mismear, 2025), which concentrated on the secondary sector. This study offers a more thorough explanation of the tutoring phenomena as it starts in the early years of formal schooling by reorienting the focus to the primary level.

Methodology

The research Design

Aresearch design provides the framework through which a researcher systematically addresses research questions in a valid, objective, and meaningful way (Kumar, 2018). For the present study, which investigates **Libyan Teachers' and Parents' Attitudes Toward Private Tutoring in Primary Schools in Misurata**, a qualitative research design was adopted. Qualitative research is particularly effective when the aim is to gain an

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in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives, experiences, and interpretations. As noted by Ochieng et al. (2022) and Pituła and Sacher (2021), qualitative inquiry seeks to explain the underlying "how" and "why" of social phenomena, allowing researchers to explore complex issues within their natural contexts. Since attitudes toward private tutoring are shaped by social, cultural, and educational factors, this approach was considered most appropriate.

Additionally, qualitative methods are well suited for collecting culturally grounded data about individuals' beliefs, behaviors, and social realities (Mack et al., 2005). Exploring teachers' and parents' attitudes in the primary school context in Misurata required careful attention to personal viewpoints and contextual influences, which quantitative methods alone could not sufficiently capture. Interviews were selected as the primary data collection tool because they allow participants to express their thoughts, motivations, and experiences in detail. This method facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the factors influencing attitudes toward private tutoring, generating rich and nuanced data essential for understanding the phenomenon under investigation.

Participants

The participants of the current study consisted of two primary school English language teachers and six parents of primary school students in Misurata, Libya. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who possessed direct, rich experience with the "shadow education" system—teachers actively involved in private tutoring and parents currently utilizing these services for their children (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022; Mismear, 2025). This dual-stakeholder approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted perspectives surrounding supplemental education within the local context. Although the sample size comprises eight participants, it aligns with qualitative research paradigms that prioritize data depth and richness over statistical generalizability. Recruitment was guided by the principle of data saturation, concluding when additional interviews yielded redundant information and no new conceptual themes emerged.

Data-Gathering Instrument and Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather information in order to gain a thorough understanding of the reasons for shadow education. In accordance with the researcher's established dissertation work, Mismear (2025), formal letters to the Misurata Education Inspectorate and school authorities were used to get official approval. Due to the participants' personal and professional obligations, telephone interviews were done one on one.With the participants' permission, these sessions, which lasted around [30 to 45] minutes, were audio recorded. All participants opted to voice their ideas in Arabic, despite the researchers' fluency in English, therefore verbatim recording and subsequent translation into English were required. The translations were confirmed by an outside assessor to preserve language and contextual correctness in order to guarantee the validity and reliability of the data.

Data Analysis

The study utilized thematic analysis to process the qualitative data, a recursive and complex process inherent in qualitative research (Jacelon & O'Dell, 2005). This flexible approach allowed for inductive theme development grounded in the participants' actual experiences and helped reveal underlying meanings (Dawson, 2002). The analysis involved a systematic framework of coding raw responses and classifying them into broader categories. By grouping similar viewpoints and identifying patterns, the researcher developed significant themes that provide a clear picture of the prevailing attitudes toward private tutoring in the Misurata primary school context.

Research Ethics

Research ethics emphasize honesty, objectivity, and integrity and offer crucial standards for responsible behavior (Parija & Ravindran, 2019). I followed stringent guidelines to assure ethical compliance in this study, protecting the participants' privacy and dignity (six parents and two instructors) (Khatri & Bansal, 2023). Obtaining informed consent was essential to this procedure; each participant was told about the purpose of the study, their voluntary involvement, and their ability to withdraw at any time.

In order to build a high degree of confidence, I promised that all participants would remain strictly anonymous and that audio recordings would be kept private. I also made sure that no personal names, identifying information, or particular educational institutions or instructors stated during the interviews would be revealed (Mismear, 2025). In order to guarantee that participants felt at ease and could adequately convey their attitudes, I also provided linguistic flexibility by conducting interviews in both Arabic and English. By adhering to these ethical guidelines, I gave participants' safety top priority while preserving the reliability and integrity of the study's conclusions (Heigham & Croker, 2009).

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Findings and Discussion

1-Tutors' Perspectives on the Prevalence of Private Tutoring

Tutors' Perspectives on Private Tutoring's Prevalence:

The majority of tutor participants described private tutoring (PT) in Misrata as a structural requirement in the current educational environment rather than as a supplementary activity. Participant 5 highlighted that PT is now a "essential or semi-essential requirement" while talking about why this phenomenon has expanded so widely. This implies that tutoring is now a fundamental component of a child's education rather than just a remedial aid. This view is consistent with the worldwide phenomenon known as "shadow education," in which additional tutoring serves as a parallel system that both supports and mimics formal education (Guill et al., 2019; Yung, 2021).

Participant 8 identified "Institutional Deficiencies" as a crucial motivator in addition to systemic requirement. This participant claims that the private sector is essentially compelled to supply the facilities that are physically lacking in public elementary schools, such as quiet spaces and specialized, one-on-one attention. The results show that students find it difficult to keep up with the demanding requirements of the curriculum inside the formal system; this difficulty has also been reported in recent regional studies by Aouissi (2023) and Fakih et al. (2022). This suggests that PT is frequently a response to the public sector's failure to address students' basic intellectual and physical demands.

Impact of Environment and Class Size

The physical classroom setting was cited by the tutor participants as the main driver behind the move to private tutoring. The learning process is hampered by "overcrowded classrooms and student hyperactivity," according to participant 5. The tutors contended that public school settings, which frequently have more than 35 to 40 students per room, are too chaotic for efficient language acquisition because primary-level children typically have shorter attention spans. This result shows that tutors are clearly aware of how the size of the classroom significantly affects pedagogical success.

Research by Brundrett (2021) and Laitsch et al. (2021) supports these findings by showing that a teacher's ability to give each student personalized attention is greatly reduced in higher class sizes. The results of this study demonstrate that tutors saw the private center's "controlled environment" as an essential substitute for concentrated learning. According to Khamis and Al-Saad (2022), crowded classrooms result in decreased student involvement; as a result, parents look to the private sector to make sure their kids get the calm, regulated environment needed for language development.

Pedagogical Gaps and Teaching Effectiveness

The instructors' conviction that "depth over rote learning" is superior in the private sector is one of the study's key findings. Private tuition, according to participant 5, "transcends simple exam preparation" and instead promotes a "deep understanding of the language." This implies that the private tutor has the luxury of time to guarantee true comprehension, but public institutions are frequently compelled to "surface-level" instruction due to systemic demands and time limits. This is consistent with Cheng's (2022) observation that students seek PT when their unique learning preferences are not met in traditional classroom settings.

The results, however, also point to a degree of caution with regard to this prominent effectiveness. Participant 8 expressed worry that the quality of shadow schooling is only as high as the tutor's specialized academic background, pointing out that the effectiveness of these sessions significantly rests on "individual competence." This suggests that although the private sector fills lack of education in schools, it also adds a new quality control variable. This worry is in line with the idea that, in the absence of specialized training, instructors might resort to the same conventional techniques they oppose in the public sector, underscoring the necessity of skilled educators in both settings.

Parents' Perspectives on Private Tutoring

All of the parent participants agree that private tutoring (PT) is an essential "intervention" in the educational process. It is a "essential bridge" between the family and the school, according to participants 6 and 7, implying a mutually beneficial relationship in which neither institution can succeed on its own. Tan's (2020) research on how deeply embedded parental views and wider cultural influences influence the decision to enroll in supplemental education is reflected in this viewpoint. The results, however, clearly show a more depressing reality; Participant 3 emphasized the substantial "financial burden" imposed on families with moderate incomes. This suggests that although parents see physical therapy as a "crucial investment" in their kids' academic future (Kim & Goodman, 2021), the choice is frequently framed by a feeling of academic and social obligation rather than being entirely voluntary.

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Insufficient Clarifications and Classroom Restrictions

Concerns about what they saw as the "rushed" nature of public school instruction were voiced by parents. Participant 4 observed that the rigid constraints of the classroom clock frequently prevent lecturers from explaining lessons "thoroughly." This observation is consistent with the findings of Aouissi (2023), which show a clear link between an excessively demanding curriculum and inadequate instructional time. The results demonstrate that PT successfully closes a structural gap for primary-level pupils, who naturally need repetition and slow-paced instruction to acquire foundations. Tutoring guarantees that the fundamental objectives of the curriculum are fulfilled by offering "tailored support" and extended learning opportunities that go beyond the capabilities of traditional settings (Nugroho & Jailani, 2019).

Curriculum and Textbook Complexity

One of the main themes in the parental interviews was the "density" of the current English curriculum in Libya. Participants 1, 2, and 7 emphasized that contemporary textbooks are "more complex" than earlier ones, frequently surpassing the ordinary parent's linguistic capacity to support their child. This supports the results of Ghosh and Bray (2018) and Altinyelken (2013), which show a robust relationship between increasing tutoring rates and curricular intensity. PT is increasingly being used as a "replacement for parental help" (Bray, 2017), as seen by Participant 1's open admission that her own educational history prevented her from supporting her child's studies. This suggests that the family environment can no longer offer the required academic scaffolding without outside professional assistance as curriculum become more specialized.

Outcomes and Effects of Individual Tutoring

Parents have discovered objectives that go beyond simple grade improvements, such as psychological and overall development. Parents observed noticeable improvement in "alphabet recognition" and "pronunciation," which is in line with Cheng's (2022) study on the efficacy of focused literacy tutoring. Additionally, Participant 1 emphasized the importance of contemporary teaching by pointing out that "smart display technologies" indicate that primary learners benefit more from private centers' adaptive and visual features than from the conventional approaches used in classrooms.

The results point to a substantial psychological impact that goes beyond academic abilities; Participants 4 and 5 noted that tutored students become "more interactive" and involved in their education. This bolsters the idea that PT gives kids a "safe space" to ask questions without worrying about being criticized, which increases their self-confidence. The ideas of Regmi (2023) and Yung and Chiu (2020), which argue that the individualized character of shadow education creates a level of student agency that is challenging to attain in crowded conventional classrooms, are consistent with this transition from passive to active learners.

Implications

The results pertaining to the frequency of private tutoring (PT) in Misrata primary schools show a substantial change in the educational environment, where tutoring is now considered a "structural requirement" rather than a luxury. A lack of pedagogical self-sufficiency inside the formal school system is suggested by the agreement among tutors and parents that physical therapy is a "essential bridge." This suggests that the public sector's existing incapacity to provide the environment necessary for language acquisition leads to a parallel "shadow system" that aims to compensate for institutional weaknesses. On the one hand, this implies that the private sector is successfully providing the peaceful environments and "tailored support" that students need. However, the "financial burden" that parents highlighted indicates that there is growing inequality in access to education.

The findings also revealed a deep disconnection between the complexity of the Libyan English curriculum and the time allocated for classroom instruction. The "rushed" nature of public school lessons, as described by parents, indicates that the "density" of the textbooks is incompatible with the rigid constraints of the school clock. This mismatch forces teachers into "surface-level" or rote instruction, which fails to meet the needs of primary-level learners who require repetition and depth. This study implies that curriculum designers must either lengthen the amount of time that English is taught in elementary schools or modify the material to make it more age-appropriate. Without these changes, the curriculum stays "abstract and complicated," encouraging unfavorable attitudes in young students and requiring physical therapy as a "replacement for parental help."

Additionally, the effects of class size and atmosphere on learning outcomes have important ramifications for school administration. Pedagogical success is physically limited, as seen by the contrast between the "controlled environment" of private centres and the "chaotic" atmosphere of packed public classrooms with more than 35–40 students. In a packed classroom, even the best teacher cannot give the "individualised attention" required for language development. This implies that parents will continue to see the formal system as insufficient until there is a deliberate reduction in class numbers or an improvement in classroom management within public schools, further solidifying the need for the private sector.

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In contrast to the conventional approaches employed in public schools, the results emphasized the greater role of technology and "smart display" instruments in private centers. The fact that these technologies improved student "interaction" and established a "safe space" for learning implies that the conventional, low-tech method used in public classrooms is no longer enough for today's students. This suggests that in order to guarantee that students are interested and involved, the Ministry of Education must provide visual aids and adaptive technologies to public primary schools. The shift from passive to active learning seen in tutored students suggests that pupils acquire the "psychological confidence" required for fluency when given the appropriate resources and settings.

Lastly, the warning about the "individual competence" of tutors points to a serious weakness in the shadow education industry's quality control. Although PT now covers a pedagogical void, some tutors' lack of specialized academic expertise could result in a cycle of traditional, inadequate teaching approaches being used outside of the classroom. This suggests that both the public and private sectors need to adhere to a single standard for teacher preparation. The high-level requirements of the English curriculum and the actual pedagogical support offered to students are clearly out of sync, indicating that professional development needs to be a constant priority in order to prevent "shadow education" from merely replicating the structural flaws of the traditional classroom.

Conclusion

This study investigated parents' and tutors' opinions on private tutoring (PT) as a teaching method in Misurata's elementary schools. The results show that despite PT's official status as a supplemental activity, institutional flaws in the formal education system have made it a structural need. These activities are motivated by overcrowded classrooms and a thick curriculum that takes up more teaching time than is available, even if some participants see PT as a "essential bridge" that offers the individualized support and technologically advanced conditions lacking in public schools. Furthermore, the intricacy of contemporary textbooks and the financial strain on families have made professional tutoring a necessary substitute for parental guidance. These differences demonstrate a glaring mismatch between the pedagogical and physical realities of the public school classroom and the aspirational objectives of the Libyan English curriculum.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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