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**‘I don’t learn at school, so I take tuition’
An ethnographic study of classroom practices and
private tuition settings in the Maldives**

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Abstract

This study explores the classroom practices of both secondary classrooms and private tuition settings in the Maldives. By adopting ethnographic methods of data collection informed by an interview as social practice approach, the study aimed to further understanding of these practices in urban and rural classrooms and in private tuition settings in the context of the Maldives.

Qualitative data was collected through observation, interview and document analysis over the course of nine months. Detailed observations of the learning sites and interview as social practice were applied when conducting interviews with teachers, students and parent in the three various settings. Participants of this study included six teachers from the two secondary schools; students and parents from both schools; six private tuition teachers; and four students and parents from private tuition settings. Rich contextual data was obtained relating to classroom practices, and private tuition settings and their interrelationship in the Maldives.

The analysis of the data was on-going throughout the observations. Thematic analysis was adopted within an interview as social practice approach, by examining the ‘hows’ as well as the ‘whats’ of the interviews. The detailed ethnographic ‘thick descriptions’ were analysed, including in-depth reflection on the interviews and how they were used as communication tools in social situations.

The findings of the study revealed that the practices of teachers and students in the classrooms were shaped by: the sustained mini exam sessions of teaching and learning, the absence of teachers’ voices in decision-making; teacher-centred approaches; passive learning; the physical conditions of the classrooms; and ever-present concerns about noise and managing time in the classroom. The analysis was extended to uncover the complex reasons that led students and their parents to opt for private tuition, and how these reasons were interrelated with classroom practices. In addition, it was found that teachers preferred to give private tuition not only for financial reasons, but also to counterbalance some of the pressures they experienced in classroom settings.

The study revealed the value of the interview as social practice approach within an ethnographic study as well as the need for sustained enquiry within and across both classroom and private tuition settings so as to reveal the meaning and significance of the practices that form learning contexts in both public and private contexts in the Maldives.

Dedication

In memory of my dear late grandmother, Maama;

My pillar of strength

Katha, for your inspiration

Mamma and Bappa for your unconditional love

My loving daughter Aisha, for all the joy you bring me.

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