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## PRIVATE ENGLISH TUTORING MARKET IN ASTANA

### Abstract

The objective of the study is to evaluate the English preparatory education business in Astana, highlight the problems and make recommendations for future improvements. For this purpose, content analysis of published papers on this topic and a case study of private education in Astana were used. During the preparation of this study, we found a lack of studies on the economic aspects of the private tutoring market in Kazakhstan.

The findings reveal that the effectiveness of learning English in private versus public schools is contradictory, yet it has become a popular topic for research. To illustrate, 151 language schools were working in 2023 in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan. The most successful of them has 4-6 branches in one city or within the country.

Keeping the optimal size of students in groups, the content and teaching techniques were more diverse and engaging, and a supportive and friendly teaching style and communication allowed private English entities to be more productive in teaching English than public schools. Our recommendations for state and public language schools are divided into administrative and teaching improvements. Administrative measures include those made by management and relate to organising classes, creating supportive environments, scheduling, meetings, training, and marketing. Etc. Teaching measures include the development of curriculum, learning plans, technologies, assessments and feedback.

**Key words:** Kazakhstan, cram school, language school market, shadow education, English courses

### Introduction

Private English tutoring versus public education has its own advantages and drawbacks.

The absence of comprehensive, up-to-date, and localized data on the private English tutoring market in Astana is the reason for this study. While global reports exist, they don't capture the specific nuances, scale, and characteristics of the Kazakhstan market.

Private supplementary tutoring, often referred to as 'shadow education,' has become a widespread global phenomenon with significant social, economic, and educational implications. Driven by increasing competition for academic and professional opportunities, this market has been extensively studied in various regions, particularly East Asia. However, despite its growing prevalence in post-Soviet countries, there remains a notable lack of localized, empirical research on the private tutoring market in Central Asia, and specifically, in Kazakhstan.

As a significant political and economic hub, Astana presents a unique and compelling case for investigation. The city's rapid development and the national emphasis on English proficiency for global integration have led to a flourishing, yet under-documented, English tutoring market. While some studies have explored the role of private tutoring in university admissions in Kazakhstan, a comprehensive analysis of the motivations of students and parents, the characteristics of tutors, and the market structure in Astana is currently lacking in the academic literature.

This study aims to fill this critical gap by providing a detailed and nuanced examination of the private English tutoring market in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, a metropolitan city with developed education institutions. By doing so, it will not only contribute to the theoretical understanding of shadow education in a previously under-researched context but also provide crucial practical insights for educational policymakers seeking to address issues of social equity, as well as for parents and students navigating this increasingly complex landscape.

It is becoming more popular to study English as it is a lingua franca and has been used as a medium of communication and study in developing countries.

The efficiency of English cram schools and private tutors has been investigated from different perspectives. One study showed the higher effectiveness of private tutors against schoolteachers in all aspects of teaching [1]. However, numerous studies have revealed otherwise.

For instance, in China, the research findings suggested that there was no significant effect of private tutoring on entrance exams to higher education, with a possible note that regards students with not lower academic progress [2]. Myanmar evidenced adverse effects of private tutoring on the school performance of students, causing fatigue and consuming time, although highlighting that shadow education helped to keep the school education going [3].

English learning performance depends on attitude and motivation; intrinsic stimuli have a more substantial impact than extrinsic [4].

Effectiveness, differences between private and public education for the English language at schools have been studied in quite a few papers in Kazakhstan. In these papers, it is shown that geographical location, compelling teaching techniques, and other factors impacted the outperformance of private schooling.

Despite efforts, most public schools have shown subpar outcomes in enhancing students' English proficiency [5]. Factors that might be hindering progress could include issues related to teachers, students, or the schools themselves [6]. Consequently, it is common for students and parents to seek additional English language training outside of school. Parents may choose paid, out-of-school English courses due to their convenience, engaging teaching methods, and the higher quality they perceive in these options.

Hymes asserts that learning foreign languages outside of school is essential for developing communicative competence, which encompasses grammatical, strategic, and sociolinguistic skills [7]. Out-of-school English language training effectively addresses many limitations of traditional in-school instruction by offering personalized opportunities for language development and enhancing communicative competence [8]. Given the critical role of student motivation in learning English, as suggested by Nurshatayeva, such external learning environments may be more motivating, as they provide a more flexible and informal setting without the constraints of formal assessments and promote a supportive space for interaction and creativity [9].

However, the topic should be updated continuously as the market situation changes, and so should the state policy on this matter.

In the 2013-2014 academic year, the Kazakhstan government implemented a multilingual language policy in secondary schools [10], where STEM subjects began to be taught in English, and the English language became equal to Russian and Kazakh as a medium for learning at schools and universities. As a result, more young people who study at universities and graduate from elite high schools with English instruction can communicate in English. Globalisation is evident in the form of launching universities offering double degrees in collaboration with foreign universities, providing multilingual higher education, the state scholarship program Bolashak, which enables students to enter foreign universities, and opening up opportunities for work abroad, as well as motivating students to learn English.

English tutoring in Kazakhstan has gained significant attention due to the increasing demand for English proficiency in both academic and professional settings. The rise of private tutoring centers and online platforms has been a notable trend, driven by the perception that English is a valuable asset for socio-economic success.

Nurmukhametova (2022) explores the role of private English tutoring centres in Kazakhstan, highlighting the influence of neoliberal ideology and language commodification. The study examines the perspectives of tutoring centre owners, students, and parents, revealing that private tutoring is seen as a means to enhance employability and socio-economic status<sup>1</sup>. The findings suggest that the demand for English tutoring is driven by the belief that English proficiency is essential for success in the global market.

Hajar and Karakus (2024) investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on English private tutoring in Kazakhstan. Their study, which focuses on first-year university students, finds that private tutoring was perceived as an encouraging environment for exam preparation and expanding knowledge. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, students valued the individual attention they received from tutors, which was lacking in their regular online classes [11].

The concept of "shadow education" refers to private tutoring that operates alongside regular schooling and often mirrors its curriculum. This phenomenon is prevalent in Kazakhstan, where private tutoring is seen as a supplement to formal education. According to Zhang and Bray (2021), private tutoring can take various forms, including one-on-one sessions, small groups, and online classes [12].

**Recent Study on Private Tutoring:** According to a study by Hajar and Karakus (2023), 42.4% of first-year university students in Kazakhstan have experienced English private tutoring (EPT) over the past year. Out of these, 64% received face-to-face tutoring, despite the health risks during the pandemic [13].

**Teacher Statistics:** The British Council's report from October 2022 mentions that there were 32,717 secondary school teachers of English in Kazakhstan during the 2021-22 academic year.

**Popularity of Private Tutoring:** Baizhumayeva's (2024) study highlights that private tutoring has become increasingly popular since the early 21st century, with many students seeking it to improve their chances of getting into prestigious universities [14].

The research hypothesis of this study is to confirm that the differences between private and public English tutoring are significant, and the former is more effective in terms of outcomes, which is the level of language skills obtained.

Overall, English tutoring in Kazakhstan is diverse and adaptable, catering to a wide range of learners. Whether you prefer online lessons, traditional classroom settings, or personalised one-on-one tutoring, there are plenty of options to choose from.

### **Materials and methods of research**

This study reviews recent literature on the private language teaching market in Astana. Sources include articles from Kazakhstani and international journals, and educational platforms. Literature review, analysis of data, and interviews were used to study the market of English language schools and their differences in Astana.

The data used for this paper is the latest and present trends in English language tutoring in 2023-2024.

The analysis of in-depth interviews conducted offline with 25 students who had experience of learning English both in public schools and in extracurricular educational institutions in Astana revealed many significant differences in the perception and effectiveness of the educational process. The criteria for selecting respondents were their participation in a private English class and age of 11-16 years old, as it is the age of most students studying English in private schools. Fifteen questions were asked, and it took over 30 minutes for each participant to answer.

Firstly, the majority of respondents (20 out of 25) noted a higher rate of language acquisition and steady progress when attending private language courses. Several factors explain this advantage:

- \* the optimal size of study groups (on average 6–10 students in private centres compared to 25–30 in public schools),
- \* the use of interactive teaching methods (game elements, project-based assignments, multimedia materials),
- \* the individualisation of the educational approach, including the opportunity for teachers to devote more attention to each student.

Secondly, the respondents emphasised the style of pedagogical interaction. About half of the interviewees pointed out that teachers in private centres demonstrate a more supportive and friendly style of communication. At the same time, in public schools, there is a tendency towards a formal and, in some cases, authoritarian pedagogical model.

Thirdly, structural problems of the school education system were identified. According to the respondents, overcrowding in public school classes (up to 35 students per class) significantly reduces opportunities for oral speech practice, which slows down the pace of mastering the material. At the same time, small groups in private centres create conditions for more intensive use of English in communication and practical tasks.

To gain an in-depth, qualitative understanding of the private English tutoring market in Astana, a semi-structured interview approach was adopted. This method was selected because it enables a rich exploration of participants' motivations, experiences, and perceptions that are not easily captured through quantitative methods.

Tutors were selected based on their experience and willingness to participate. Initial contacts were made through professional networks and social media platforms for tutors in Astana. These initial participants then recommended other potential interviewees (snowball sampling).

It should be emphasised that the positive perception of private courses does not exclude certain limitations. Two respondents indicated that the high cost of tuition in language centres makes these services not accessible to all families. Nevertheless, overall, the majority of respondents consider private education a more effective tool for achieving language competence.

Thus, the interview results confirm the existence of systemic differences between public and private models of English language teaching in Astana. Private educational centres demonstrate greater adaptability to the needs of students and their families, which in the future forms a sustainable demand for the services of private tutors and language courses.

### Results and discussion

Results of interviews with 25 students attending out-of-school online and offline English courses showed that there is a difference between learning English in regular public schools and private language centres in Astana. First, in out-of-school establishments, the progress and speed of language acquisition were faster and higher due to the optimal size of students in groups, the content and teaching techniques were more diverse and engaging. Some students mentioned that teachers in out-of-school private centres use a supportive and friendly teaching style and communication in comparison with schools, where students can be scolded. Due to the crowded size of groups at public schools, especially in big cities like Astana, the pace of learning is hindered and slowed.

The most popular search engine in Kazakhstan, which can be considered a business handbook called 2gis, showed 736 private English learning schools located in Astana. Most of them offer a range of language-related services. For example, English language education combined with classes in other foreign languages, preparation for admission to foreign universities, or progression to national secondary education establishments.

English is beginning to be taught in Kazakhstan at preschools for a limited time for children aged 5-7. After that, at state school pupils starting from the 1st grade (year) study English or other available foreign languages 2-3 times a week for a duration of 40 minutes. Private schools offer more subjects taught in English. One pupil's group might comprise 12-15 people. For example, in rural areas, the number of schoolchildren is less due to the decreasing population because of rural-urban migration. In contrast, in big cities, like Astana, Almaty, and Shymkent, the population has been increasing; therefore, the number of English students at school is bigger.

English can be learned at language schools and preparation admission centres, whose target audience is students entering the privileged Secondary and High schools, both state and private ones. There are numerous Language Centers offering language education for those in need remotely and on site. They are the key private educational institutions for language skills acquisition in cities. The number of these entities varies depending on market conditions. To illustrate, 151 language schools were working in 2023 in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan. The most successful of them has 4-6 branches in one city or within the country.

Table 1 - Number of English learning establishments in Astana

Types of entities to study in English	2023	2024	Growth, 2024/2023 in %
Kindergarten with English classes	15	18	+20
Preparatory centre for school	6	821	13 583

Preparatory centre for privileged Secondary and High schools	18	111	516
Language Schools	151	781	417
Preparatory center for abroad Education	13	132	915
Note: Compiled by authors based on <a href="https://2gis.kz/">https://2gis.kz/</a>			

The number of entities is growing in each category. The highest growth is shown in the sector of the Preparatory Centre for Schools. Preparatory centre for abroad Education ranked the second, and Preparatory centre for privileged Secondary and High school number followed.

Table 2 – Price range for English learning establishments in Astana, for 2023-2024

Types of entity to study English	Average price per group, per month, KZT	Average price for individual class, per hour, KZT
Kindergarten with English classes	60,000-180,000	n/a
Preparatory center for school	45,000-65,000	n/a
Preparatory center for privileged Secondary and High schools	44, 000	5,000
Language Schools	40,000	7,000
Preparatory center for abroad Education	54,000	n/a
Note: Compiled by authors based on <a href="https://2gis.kz/">https://2gis.kz/</a>		

All data on tuition fees and the number of schools were collected during 2023 and 2024 years. Prices for education in English varies depending on location, services and other factors.

The advantages of private English schools over public schools include an engaging teaching style and a motivating environment, small classes, a focus on skills rather than a program, and classes delivered by native speakers. These advantages allow private classes to show better learning outcomes for students.

Various features differentiate teaching English in public school or private establishments. One of them is personalization and flexibility in delivering. Due to standardized curriculum in public English classes, they cannot adjust it to the specific needs of students. In contrast, private tutoring offers flexible programs suited to students' interests.

Secondly, the size of the student group. Normally, in state schools, the classes include over 20 pupils, which are then divided into two classes to study languages, as a result. One class consists of over 10 people, which is not an efficient size. For a 40-minute class working with 10 or more students to deliver the new topic and check understanding is not enough. In our opinion, a language class should not have more than 6 students. Next is teaching methods. Tutors can employ a variety of teaching methods and materials, including interactive and multimedia resources, to keep students engaged and cater to different learning styles. While state schools also use a range of teaching methods, they might be more constrained by the curriculum and available resources.

In state schools, maintaining student engagement can be more challenging due to the larger class sizes and standardised curriculum. Students often find tutoring sessions more engaging because of the personalised attention and tailored content. Tutors can quickly adapt to the student's interests and needs, making learning more enjoyable.

Feedback in tutoring sessions tends to be immediate and specific. This allows students to understand their mistakes and learn from them quickly. While state schools provide regular

assessments, the feedback might not be as immediate or personalised due to the larger number of students.

What can be done to improve the learning outcomes of English in public schools in Kazakhstan?

There are several ways which can be divided into administrative and teaching improvements. Administrative measures include those made by management and relate to organising classes, schedules, etc.

To start, the size of English classes should be decreased to 6 students.

Additionally, if there are no available rooms in schools, these classes could be delivered on the basis of private English classes, so it can be a partnership between the state and private entities, which is also beneficial in the long term.

Other recommendations follow:

- Improve the selection process for teacher training programs and provide incentives to attract and retain high-quality teachers.

- Update the infrastructure and teaching methodologies in pedagogical universities to better prepare future teachers for the 21st-century classroom.

- Encourage peer reviews and collaborative learning to help students learn from each other and develop critical thinking skills.

- Use formative assessments to provide ongoing feedback and adjust teaching methods to meet students' needs better.

- Develop community-based programs that promote English learning, such as language workshops and cultural events.

- Involve parents in the learning process by providing them with strategies to support their children's English learning at home.

- Provide students and teachers with the necessary technology, such as computers and internet access, especially in rural areas.

- Incorporate blended learning approaches, combining traditional classroom instruction with digital tools and online resources.

- Implement targeted support programs for students from low-income families to help bridge the achievement gap.

- Ensure that all students, regardless of their socio-economic background, have access to quality learning materials and resources.

- Integrate project-based learning to help students apply their English skills in real-world scenarios.

- Revise the English curriculum to include contemporary topics, diverse literature, and practical language use.

- Establish ongoing professional development opportunities, including workshops, seminars, and exchange programs with international educators.

- Invest in comprehensive training programs for teachers, focusing on modern teaching methodologies, classroom management, and the use of technology in education.

For private language centres, some suggestions to improve their financial and methodological outcomes can be done as well.

For instance, establishing quality assurance processes to ensure that teaching standards are consistently met, implementing feedback mechanisms to gather input from students, parents, and teachers to identify areas for improvement, maintaining a strong online presence through a professional website, social media, and online advertising to attract new students, engaging with the local community through events, workshops, and partnerships with schools and other organizations, keeping parents informed about their child's progress through regular updates and parent-teacher meetings, involving parents in the learning process by providing them with resources and strategies to support their children's language learning at home, organizing group classes based on proficiency levels to ensure that students are learning at an appropriate pace, creating efficient timetables that minimize downtime and maximize instructional time, offer virtual classes and online tutoring to

provide flexibility and accessibility for students, utilizing digital tools and resources, such as language learning apps, online exercises, and interactive whiteboards, to enhance the learning experience, conduct regular assessments to monitor progress and adjust learning plans accordingly, develop personalized learning plans for each student to address their unique needs and learning styles, organizing workshops focused on specific areas such as classroom management, student engagement, and innovative teaching techniques, providing continuous training for teachers to keep them updated on the latest teaching methodologies and technologies.

### Conclusion

The number and prices for services at English learning establishments in Astana are growing, as is the demand in the market. The number of entities is growing in each category of establishments. The highest growth is shown in the sector of the Preparatory Centre for Schools. Preparatory centre for abroad Education ranked the second, and Preparatory centre for privileged Secondary and High school number followed. More and more young people are starting to study English at an early age, from kindergarten. To illustrate, 151 language schools were working in 2023 in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan. The most successful of them has 4-6 branches in one city or within the country.

Prices for education in English vary depending on location, services and other factors.

Keeping the optimal size of students in groups, the content and teaching techniques were more diverse and engaging, and a supportive and friendly teaching style and communication allow private English entities to be more productive in teaching English than public schools.

Our recommendations for state and public language schools are divided into administrative and teaching improvements. Administrative measures include those made by management and relate to organising classes, creating supportive environments, scheduling, meetings, training, and marketing. Etc.

Teaching measures include development of curriculum, learning plans, technologies, assessments and feedback.

Our quantitative data represents a snapshot of the market in 2023-2024 and highlights the need for future longitudinal studies to track the market's evolution.

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## АСТАНАДАҒЫ АҒЫЛШЫН ТІЛІНДЕГІ ЖЕКЕ РЕПЕТИТОРЛЫҚ НАРЫҚ

### Андатпа

Зерттеудің мақсаты - Астанадағы ағылшын тіліне оқытуға дайындық бизнесін бағалау, саладағы мәселелерді анықтау және алға қарай жетілдіру бойынша ұсыныстар беру. Мақсатқа жету үшін тақырып бойынша жарияланған мақалалардың мазмұнын талдау және кейс-стади жеке білім беруді зерттеу әдістері қолданылды. Осы зерттеуді дайындау барысында Қазақстандағы жеке репетиторлық нарықтың экономикалық аспектілері бойынша зерттеулердің жоқтығы анықталды.

Нәтижелер: жеке және мемлекеттік мектептерде ағылшын тілін үйренудің тиімділігі қайшылықты болғанымен бұл зерттеу үшін қажет тақырыпқа айналды. Мысал ретінде, 2023 жылы Қазақстанның астанасы Астанада 151 тілдік мектеп жұмыс істеді. Олардың ішіндегі ең табыстыларының бір қалада немесе ел ішінде 4-6 филиалы бар.

Топтардағы оқушылардың оңтайлы санының сақталуы, оқыту мазмұны мен оқыту әдістерінің әр түрлілігі мен тартымдылығы, оқытуда қолдау көрсетілуі және өзара достық қарым-қатынастың болуы мемлекеттік мектептердегі ағылшын тілі пәндерін оқытуға қарағанда ағылшын тілін жеке оқытудың нәтижелі болуына мүмкіндік берді. Біздің тілді оқыту бойынша мемлекеттік мектептерге арналған ұсыныстарымыз әкімшілік тұрғыдан жақсарту және оқытуды жетілдіру болып бөлінеді. Әкімшілік шараларға басшылық қабылдаған шаралар жатады және олар сабақтарды ұйымдастыруға, қолайлы орта құруға, кестеге, кездесулерге, тренингтерге, маркетингке қатысты. және т.б.

Оқыту шараларына оқу жоспарын, оқу жоспарларын, технологияларды, бағалауды және кері байланысты әзірлеу кіреді.

**Негізгі сөздер:** Қазақстан, қрам мектебі, тіл мектебі нарығы, көлеңкелі білім беру, ағылшын тілі курстары.

## РЫНОК ЧАСТНЫХ РЕПЕТИТОРОВ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА В АСТАНЕ

### Аннотация

Цель исследования - оценить бизнес в сфере подготовительного обучения английскому языку в Астане, выявить проблемы и дать рекомендации по дальнейшему улучшению. Для этой цели были использованы методы контент-анализа опубликованных статей по данной теме и изучение конкретных примеров частного образования. В ходе подготовки данного исследования мы столкнулись с отсутствием исследований экономических аспектов рынка частного репетиторства в Казахстане.

Полученные данные: эффективность изучения английского языка в частных школах по сравнению с государственными противоречива, но стала популярной темой для исследований. Например, в 2023 году в столице Казахстана Астане работала 151 языковая школа. Наиболее успешные из них имеют от 4–6 филиалов в одном городе или внутри страны.

При оптимальном количестве учащихся в группах содержание и методы преподавания стали более разнообразными, а привлекательный, поддерживающий и дружелюбный стиль преподавания и общения позволяют частным английским учебным заведениям быть более продуктивными в преподавании английского языка, чем государственным школам. Наши рекомендации для государственных языковых школ подразделяются на административные и педагогические улучшения. Административные меры включают в себя меры, принимаемые руководством, и они касаются организации занятий, создания благоприятной среды, расписания, встреч, обучения, маркетинга и т. д. Педагогические мероприятия включают разработку учебной программы, учебных планов, технологий, оценок и обратной связи.

**Ключевые слова:** Казахстан, қрам-школа, рынок языковых школ, теневое образование, курсы английского языка.

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