

**Magdalena Kolber**

Uniwersytet Kazimierza Wielkiego w Bydgoszczy

ORCID: 0000-0002-8227-5475

Private supplementary tutoring as an example of controversial practice in the field of education. New contexts and analyses

Private tutoring has become the norm in the education sector in many parts of the world. Some data show that this trend has been increasing. Despite its significance, the problem has received very little attention in education research. The aim of this paper is to discuss this controversial phenomenon. The research problem focuses on finding answers to the following questions: What is the nature and the scale of this problem? Do private tutors increase students' learning autonomy or do they develop passivity? Why do parents employ private tutors for their children? The research method is a critical literature review.

Keywords: didactics, learning strategies, learner autonomy, parent involvement, private lessons, private tutoring, shadow education, tutor

Korepetycje jako przykład kontrowersyjnej praktyki edukacyjnej. Nowe konteksty i próby analizy

Korepetycje są znaną i powszechną formą dodatkowej nauki w wielu krajach. Dane pokazują, że trend ten nasila się z roku na rok. Pomimo eskalacji zjawiska jest ono przedmiotem tylko niewielu badań. Przedstawiony w pracy problem badawczy dotyczy odpowiedzi na następujące pytania: Jaka jest natura oraz skala korepetycji? Czy prywatne lekcje rozwijają autonomię w zakresie uczenia się? Dlaczego rodziny decydują się na współpracę z korepetytorem? W niniejszej publikacji zastosowano metodę analizy i krytyki piśmiennictwa literatury przedmiotu.

Słowa kluczowe: dydaktyka, strategie uczenia się, autonomia ucznia, zaangażowanie rodziców, prywatne lekcje, korepetycje, szara strefa edukacji, korepetytor

Introduction

According to *A New Pedagogical Dictionary*, *private tutoring* means instruction, usually paid, provided one-to-one or to groups of students who fall behind with their studies or who want to revise for subject competitions. The Polish equivalent is *korepetycja* and comes from two Latin words *con* and *repetitio* meaning *together* and *to revise* (Okoń, 2007, p. 182).

The term *private tutoring* is not new. Neither is it a local phenomenon. It is considered to be a significant component of the national education system in many developing countries. Moreover, private tutoring exists in parallel with mainstream education. It mimics the education sector “as the curriculum of the mainstream changes, so does the curriculum in the shadow. And as the mainstream expands, so does the shadow¹” (Bray & Lykins, 2012, p. 1). The term *private tutoring* covers various forms of activity. Students may be tutored individually in their own home or in that of the tutor. Another option is receiving tutoring in small, medium-sized, or large groups. At the extreme, tutoring may be delivered in large lecture theatres. Alternatively, tutoring may take place in an online, virtual environment in which tutors and pupils are separated by place and time (Bray & Lykins, 2012, p. 2). The underlying assumption of the study conducted by Bray and Lykins is that this phenomenon may have both positive and negative dimensions. An example of an advantage is the promoting of academic development. On the negative side, private tutoring may widen social inequalities, cause stress, create inefficiencies in education systems, and contribute to corruption (2012, p. 2). The aim of the article is to analyse and discuss this complex trend. With this in mind, the author will analyse determinants explaining its growth. Moreover, not only will the extent and nature of tutoring be examined, but also the link between being privately tutored and a student’s autonomy.

The scale and nature of private tutoring

There have been very few research projects investigating the scale and intensity of the problem. The reason lies in the fact that neither tutors, students nor parents are willing to provide information. First of all, tutoring is an informal, untaxed

¹ The terms *private tutoring* and *shadow education* are used interchangeably (Bray & Lykins, 2012; Bray, 2009).

activity.² Secondly, tutoring may mean that students are gaining a dishonest advantage over their classmates and do not trust their teachers. Parents, on the other hand, may avoid giving information for fear of their children being perceived as unintelligent (Bray, 2009). There are different kinds of individuals who provide private tutoring, ranging from trained (certified teachers) or untrained to full-time or part-time. The span of ages is broad. They are usually aged from their early 20s to their early 60s, as some are university students, some retired teachers, university professors, poets or writers (Bray, 2020, p. 14; Dang, 2011, p. 1).

The scale and nature of private tutoring differs among various countries and cultures. In East Asian societies, this form of education is deeply rooted in the Confucian tradition which places huge importance on education and student diligence. In this part of the world, it is mainly the parents of high achievers who resort to private lessons (Bray, 2009, p. 24). One of the reasons Asian parents decide to employ a private tutor is to improve their children's grades and GPA (Grade Point Average). This educational activity may take many forms. It can be organised by students' parents, by private tutoring centres or even by teachers themselves. Students can receive online or face-to-face tutoring. They can join individualised classes (one-to-one), small groups or large classes. Some Asian companies organise tutoring in large theatres, which can seat up to 300 students (Dang, 2011, p. 1).

Private tutoring has long been evident in Asia and now has spread to other parts of the world, including European countries. In the former Soviet Union countries and Eastern Europe, private tutoring became popular in the 1990s when economies collapsed and teachers were compelled to find extra income. In Western Europe, North America and Australia, tutoring is not as vigorous an activity as in East Asia and the former Soviet countries but this phenomenon expanded when policymakers emphasised competition among schools. Similar to South Asia, in Africa, tutoring has existed for a long time and, thus, has become a regular part of daily life. When it comes to Latin America, tutoring is visible mostly among upper secondary students (Bray, 2009, p. 24).

In Poland, private tutoring was not the subject of social debate until 1988. One of the reasons was that the communist government propagated an image of the school as a flawless institution (Putkiewicz, 2006, p. 185). The collapse of communism brought numerous changes: political, economic and social. Due to these, as well as transformations in the structure of education (mainly a reduction in the number of non-secondary schools), the number of upper secondary

² Although not always. In England, as a result of the outbreak of Coronavirus (COVID-19) disease and temporary school closures, tutoring has become a part of the government's catch-up plan. Students who have fallen behind are expected to be offered focused tuition (Richardson, 2020).

students aspiring to continue their education increased. A new way of thinking spread among students and parents, the basis of which was the belief that education is the best investment in the future (Putkiewicz, 2005, p. 120). The schools, however, reacted to this new reality with “resistance, apathy, or... offering private tuition” (Putkiewicz, 2005, p. 120). The study conducted by Elżbieta Putkiewicz shows that 45% of students received tutoring (2005, p. 93). Moreover, the same research reveals that 50% of the respondents agree or totally agree with the statement that *Teachers encourage students having difficulties to take private tuition* (2005, p. 121). More recent studies conducted by Piotr Długosz show that this trend has been increasing. The collected data indicate that among 3,479 school leavers, 52% had received private lessons (Długosz, 2017). It is important to highlight that the private tuition industry started to boom amid the coronavirus pandemic. According to a recent study carried out by CBOS, the majority of parents declared in the last days of September and in the first week of October 2020 that one of their children is attending or will be attending private extracurricular classes in the school year 2020/2021 (CBOS, 2020).

The features of shadow education have also been visible in other European countries. In Hungary, for instance, private lessons were taken by 60% of school leavers, and in Ukraine by 71% (Długosz, 2017). Martina Kubanova’s study results reveal that out of 926 first-year Slovakian university students 56% reported having received tutoring and/or attended preparatory classes in their final year of secondary school (2006, as cited in Bray, 2020, p. 6). As for Spanish students, PISA data suggests that 63% of 15-year-olds were receiving tutoring in 2009 (Bray, 2020, p. 6).

Why do families employ a private tutor?

First of all, the assumptions on which the educational system is based encourage tutoring. Rote learning seems to prevail over deep learning. As a result, students are required to memorise the material rather than understand it. Covering the curricula is believed to be more important than critical thinking or understanding. Setting educational priorities in such a way does not contribute to preparing students for independent or self-regulated learning. Secondly, students are increasingly competitive. They are aware that there is competition in the educational market and thus they believe that a renowned university will make their life successful and complete. They realise that the rat race begins as early as primary school. Their parents think similarly. Getting their youngster into the best school or university has now become a competitive sport. A lack of faith that children can prepare for exams themselves and the fear that others will get a higher score

make tutoring more and more popular, and it is even becoming an educational requirement at school (Bartosz & Bloch, 2009, pp. 116–117).

Overall, these comments are in accordance with the findings reported by Judith Ireson and Katie Rushforth. Of the 240 respondents who provide additional support for their children, 71% did so in order to improve understanding of the subject. Other common reasons were to increase confidence (69%), to help achieve the highest examination grades (59%), to help ensure they obtain a place in secondary school/sixth form or university (40%) (2014, p. 22).

A qualitative comment from the same study shows that employing a private tutor is a new parental duty. One parent expressed this obligation in the following words:

I wouldn't have done it if we'd been in a comprehensive system... I'm quite happy with the work the school does with them and I don't really think it should be necessary... for parents to tutor children outside...

I know a lot of people do for various reasons but my reasoning with that was that it wasn't because I thought the school wasn't doing enough but he personally needed that support for the 11Plus... I don't agree with that system anyway but we're stuck with it here. And you always try and do the best for your child even if it's against your principles. (Ireson & Rushforth, 2014, p. 28).

Ireson and Rushforth think that “parents weighed their child's needs against the intellectual capital in the family, time available and emotional considerations, as well as considering their efficacy of private tuition” (2014, p. 28).

Some researchers put forward the claim that, apart from contextual factors, psychological aspects ought to be considered when attempting to understand the uptake of private tutoring. According to Ireson and Rushforth, parental involvement may influence their decision to hire a private tutor. In the literature, two types of parental involvement can be found, namely school-based and home-based. School-based involvement refers to parents' attendance at school activities (e.g. attending and supporting school meetings, events, attending parents' meetings, volunteering at school). This type of parental engagement creates the opportunity for both parents and teachers to form reciprocal respect and understanding. Home-based involvement consists of assisting the child's education outside of school. Such forms include: helping with homework, discussing school events, responding to academic study demands (Mataa, Pedrob & Peixotoa, 2018, p. 78). Both types of involvement are a function of three constructs: parental beliefs about how they should act in relation to their child's education; parents' sense of efficacy in helping their child with school work; and child invitations and the time and energy that parents have available for involvement (Green et al.,

2007, as cited in Ireson & Rushforth, 2014, p. 15). Previous studies were limited to showing a consistent, positive relationship between parents' involvement in their children's education and student outcomes. Ireson and Rushforth (2014) hold the view that future research should examine in more detail parental beliefs and their sense of efficacy as the factors affecting their decisions to employ private tutors for their child.

Private tutoring – lights and shadows

Private tuition has numerous advantages and disadvantages. The negative aspect of tutoring can be related to work ethic, when the teacher recommends that one of their students needs tutoring. Moreover, it is widely known that tutoring exacerbates student inequality when accessing education as it requires expenditure that cannot be afforded by all parents (Bray, 2007; 2020). Another concern is that too many private lessons not only occupy a large amount of student time, but may also have a negative impact on teen health. A survey of 38 schools in Vietnam found that the majority of parents (76%) believe that private tutoring leaves their children no time to study on their own, and nearly half of respondents (49%) think that after school tutoring has a harmful effect on their children's physical and mental health (Dang, 2011, p. 1).

Nevertheless, this phenomenon also appears to have a positive side. Receiving private tuition gives a student a sense of security, increases the chance of winning a subject competition, allows them to study at their preferred university, or to change their main subject. This is particularly true in the case of an inflexible education system, an example of which is Vietnam. Hai-Anh Dang describes this rigidity as follows:

Until recently only a few universities were multi-disciplinary, while the majority was devoted to a single discipline. Once admitted to a university, it was not easy for students to transfer to another school or even to change their major (within the discipline) at the same school. (2011, p. 2).

Further research in this field has unveiled other advantages. The study conducted by Magdalena Kolber (2012) covered 371 secondary school students aged 16–19. Its aim was to determine the relationship between the environmental factor – receiving tuition – and the use of foreign language strategies and to answer the following research question: Does receiving tuition differentiate the use of foreign language strategies?

To collect data, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (Version 7.0),

developed by Rebecca Oxford (1990), was used. This instrument is based on R. Oxford's Taxonomy of language learning strategies and comprises 50 statements referring to direct and indirect strategies. The groups that belong to direct strategies are: memory, cognitive, and compensation. Indirect strategies, on the other hand, consist of metacognitive, affective, and social. The study showed that the mean of direct strategies for students who took private classes is higher than the mean for students who did not receive private tuition. A similar regularity occurs in the case of indirect strategies. The mean of indirect for students who took private classes is significantly higher than the mean for students who did not receive tuition in English. A further insight gained through additional analysis is that taking part in extracurricular lessons differentiates the use of various learning strategy subgroups (only in the case of compensation strategy was the difference statistically non-significant, the p-value was higher than 0.05). The study showed that learners who receive private tuition are more strategic than learners who do not have private tutors. This strategic activity consists of using *cognitive strategies* (practising, receiving and sending messages, analysing and reasoning, and creating structure for input and output), *memory strategies* (creating mental linkages, applying images and sounds, reviewing well, employing action), *metacognitive strategies* (centring one's learning, arranging and planning learning, evaluating learning), *affective strategies* (lowering anxiety, taking one's own emotional temperature), and *social strategies* (asking questions, cooperating with others, empathising with others) (cf. Kolber, 2015; 2019).

One may wonder why students who take private tuition are more strategic. Two explanations are probable. One is that tutors might integrate strategy training into language teaching processes. This implies that learners learn and practice strategies with actual language tasks. Another explanation is that parents of a higher socio-economic status are more likely to provide private tuition. The latter is in accordance with Długosz's findings. In his article, he examines the socio-economic factors underlying the demand for private tutoring. His analysis reveals that private lessons are taken most often by students from more affluent and educated families, who live in big cities, study at prestigious high schools and have better average marks (2017).

The above findings are similar to those reported by Bogna Bartosz (2008). In her study, which covered first-year psychology, Bartosz found that thanks to private tuition students are able to learn two types of skills – “hard” and “soft”. First, they gain knowledge, which helps them to pass exams successfully. Moreover, they develop soft skills, such as exam preparation strategies, increased self-confidence, and stress management. Such research findings lead to the conclusion that private tutoring is an active strategy, as tutees take active roles in their education. This engagement means that they discover their preferred learning strategies or

styles, and they also know how to plan their learning. This planning strategy refers to an ability to select goals and subgoals. Last but not least, they develop affective strategies. Learners applying such strategies are able to cope effectively with emotional problems.

Anna Malenda (2005) draws a distinction between two types of tutors – a craftsman representing a teacher-driven approach, and a passionate who is concerned with learner-centred pedagogy. The first, a craftsman, is focused on covering exam syllabuses. Their aim is to prepare their tutees so that they answer exam questions adeptly and gain maximum marks. Thus, their activities include mainly: doing practical revisions, working through exam papers, bridging learning gaps, explaining difficult concepts or subject areas. One might suggest that such a tutor will not be interested in their students gaining autonomy, as their main task is to transmit knowledge rather than increasing a learner's awareness about the contribution they can make to their own learning process. The latter, a passionate, has an emotional attitude to their teaching. Their aim is to engage young people in the excitement of learning. In order to achieve this, they attempt to learn about their tutees' learning needs, motivation, self-esteem, or learning styles. Collecting information about a student's home environment is also of great significance. A passionate tutor is convinced that, thanks to such activities, it will be easier not only to prepare a student successfully for a test or an exam, but they can also change a student's attitude to a given subject of study or, in the long run, develop self-instruction.

Conclusions

This paper has shown that private tutoring is visible in most parts of the world. Moreover, both the negative and positive dimensions of this phenomenon have been presented, with an emphasis on expanding the list of advantages. Not only do tutors help their students prepare for tests or examinations, but they also assist them to become more autonomous learners. Students who have private tutors use more cognitive, memory, metacognitive, affective and social strategies. The general message of the reflections presented above is that much more attention should be given to shadow education by educators, researchers and policymakers. Private tutoring is interesting to study not just because of the reasons it is undertaken, which are increasing in scale and significance, but also because of its considerable impact on students' academic attainment.

References

- Bartosz B. (2008). Korepetycje – bierna czy aktywna forma radzenia sobie z problemami w nauce? In: A. Keplinger (ed.), *Bierność społeczna* (pp. 347–363). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Psychologii i Kultury ENETEIA.
- Bartosz B. & Błoch B. (2009). Korepetycje – norma w polskiej szkole? *Psychologia w Szkole*, 3(23), 203–210.
- Bray M. (2007). *The Shadow Education System: Private Tutoring and Its Implication for Planners*. Paris UNESCO: International Institute for Educational Planning.
- Bray M. (2009). *Confronting the shadow education system. What government policies for what private tutoring?* Paris UNESCO: International Institute for Educational Planning.
- Bray M. & Lykins C. (2012). *Shadow Education Private Supplementary Tutoring and Its Implications for Policy Makers in Asia*. Philippines: Asian Development Bank.
- Bray M. (2020). *Shadow Education in Europe: Growing Prevalence, Underlying Forces, and Policy Implications*. Retrieved 10 January 2021 from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2096531119890142>
- CBOS (2020). *Wydatki rodziców na edukację dzieci w roku szkolnym 2020/2021*. Retrieved 10 January 2021 from https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2020/K_136_20.PDF
- Dang H. (2011). A bird's-eye view of the private tutoring phenomenon in Vietnam. *International Institute for Asian Studies*. Retrieved 10 January 2021 from <https://www.iias.asia/the-newsletter/article/bird%E2%80%99s-eye-view-private-tutoring-phenomenon-vietnam>
- Długosz P. (2017). Korepetycje uczniów jako przykład praktyki w polu edukacyjnym – Polska, Ukraina, Węgry. *Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny*, 244, 108–133.
- Ireson J. & Rushforth K. (2014). Why do parents employ private tutors for their children? Exploring psychological factors that influence demand in England *Journal for educational research online*, (6), 12–33.
- Kolber M. (2015). Strategie uczenia się języka angielskiego w liceach ogólnokształcących. *Edukacja Ustawiczna Dorosłych*, 3, 30–38.
- Kolber M. (2019). The relationship between language learning strategies and learned helplessness. *Przegląd Pedagogiczny*, 2, 250–262.
- Malenda A. (2005). Korepetycje jako pozaszkolna forma uczenia się i nauczania. In: T. Bauman (ed.), *Uczenie się jako przedsięwzięcie na całe życie* (pp. 203–210). Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”.

- Putkiewicz E. (2005). *Korepetycje – szara strefa edukacji*. Warszawa: Instytut Spraw Publicznych.
- Oxford R.L. (1990). *Language Learning Strategies. What Every Teacher Should Know*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Okoń W. (2007). *Nowy słownik pedagogiczny*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie Żak.
- Putkiewicz E. (2006, 21–25 October). *Private tutoring in Poland. 31st Annual ATEE Conference: Co-operative Partnerships in Teacher Education*. Portorož (pp. 185–197). Retrieved 10 January 2021 from <http://www.pef.uni-lj.si/atee/>
- Parents' Spending on Education of Children in School Year 2020/2021 Nr 136/2020.
- Kolber M. (2012). *Strategie uczenia się języka obcego a wyuczona bezradność (na przykładzie uczniów liceów ogólnokształcących)*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Uniwersytet Kazimierza Wielkiego, Bydgoszcz.
- Mataa L., Pedrob I. & Peixotoa F.J. (2018). Parental Support, Student Motivational Orientation and Achievement: The Impact of Emotions. *International Journal of Emotional Education. Special Issue*, 10(2), 77–92.
- Richardson H. (2020). *Plans for a national tutoring programme to be unveiled*. Retrieved 10 January 2021 from <https://www.bbc.com/news/education-53066557>