

## Review

# Private tutoring: A critical analysis of world experiences

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### Abstract

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**This paper critically analyses private tutoring experiences from different parts of the world. The paper shows a worldwide private tuition experiences. It presents the impact of private tuition in society. It gives a hint on perceptions of parents and students towards private tuition. Also, it shows the nature and how the tuition is conducted. And it concludes by giving recommendations to governments of countries on the issue of private tuition. Most importantly, it raises critical issues that need attention to interested researchers in the field of education. The paper is beneficial to education policy makers, educational administrators, parents, students, educational researchers and any other key educational stakeholder (s).**

**Keywords:** Private tutoring, Tuition, Education, Policy makers, Stakeholders

## INTRODUCTION

### Private supplementary tutoring: A world overview

Private supplementary tutoring sometimes called private tutoring or private tuition refers to an instructors teaching of subjects or courses as a way to earn extra income, usually it is conducted out of mainstream system. This does exclude remedial teaching in schools or family academic support to learners (Bray 2003 and Foondun, 2002, Dindyal, 2007). Therefore private tutoring has two features first learners must be paying the instructor; second, the learning should be supplementing the mainstream school system.

Private tutoring is a global concern prevailing in developing and developed economies. Despite its popular impacts, it poses extra educational costs and scolds from parents (Foondun, 2002) Private tuition is said to be a usual business in countries like Japan, Malaysia, Mauritius, Brazil, Cambodia, Egypt, Guinea, Hong Kong, Korea, Malta, Morocco, Myanmar, Singapore, Sri-lanka, Taiwan, Zimbabwe and Tanzania. Students use private tuition centres as a means of obtaining higher grades in their examination. Harutyunyan *et al.*, (2008) report that when students are about to do a test most of them go for private tutoring as a way to prepare themselves well. In some countries like Armenia, learners

attend private tutoring to meet criteria for government funding. Also they want to meet criteria to join university education to avoid joining national service (military service). Interestingly, university students in the UK seek for private supplementary tutoring because of inadequate teaching in their universities (The Sunday Times, 2009:1). Therefore, in some countries students go for tuition because of dissatisfaction of the mainstream teachers' performance. In some countries, private tuition has become part of educational environment to the extent that few people really question its existence. The scales vary to a great deal from country to country (Bray, 2007:7, 8). Parents are ready to invest large sums in private tuition in order to give their children the best preparation for exams and facilitate access to higher level of studies and to the best schools. Need for higher education for employment fuel the demand for private tuition as a complimentary to course in formal education (Bray, 2007: 11).

A 1995 survey of grade 6 pupils in three urban and four rural schools in main land Tanzania found that 26% received tutoring. In Dar-es salaam schools, 70% of grade 6 pupils received private tutoring in 1998. A 1995

survey of 2,286 grade 6 Zanzibar pupils found 44% received extra lessons, though not all pupils paid for classes (Nassor *et al.*, 1998 in Bray, 2007). These studies show that private tuition is more prevalent in urban areas than in rural areas and that some of the students receive tutoring without paying anything; however, the reasons for both are not established. The Cambodian study ...among the urban schools in the sample, 61% reported that their children received private supplementary tutoring, whereas, the proportion among rural schools was just 9 per cent (Bray, 1999 in Bray, 2007, p. 30)

In 1970's, John Stone, an American economist, put forward a theory of cost sharing in higher education. In his view, in any social system, or countries governments, parents, taxpayers, and higher colleges must share the cost of higher education. This theory came into implementation in many countries in 1980's. Similarly, Schultz (1990) developed a theory, namely Human Capital Cost. In his theory he argued that education investment is a kind of human capital investment and schools are regarded as specialized factories producing degree; educational institutions can be regarded as industrial sectors. Therefore, like the factories and industrial sectors, schools and educational institutions also should attach importance to educational expenses, because cost is the basic problem in economics of education research. Education cost is the basic problem in the development of education (Tang and Zhan, 2010, p. 141). It is obvious that the two theories emphasize on the concept of cost of education that, education is not provided freely one must pay for it. These theories probably guide the costs incurred by parents in private tuition centres and mainstream system education. However, it is really contradictory for a mainstream teacher conducting private tuition to students from his/her own class because this is double payment for the same job, this phenomenon is an interesting one in the educational field.

### **Nature of tuition: a world perspective**

Bray (2007) argues that private tuition centres are a result of a need of higher education towards employment, thus leading to mushrooming of tuition centres as a complimentary education to formal education. May be the idea arising from this argument is that the education provided in the formal system of education is an impaired education; it needs a supplementary system of education to make it complete, if this is the case, probably there are two things we need to think about: first, how to make the formal education complete such that it does not need a complimentary system. Second, to include the informal complimentary system of education in educational policies in order to formalize and make it operate under legal grounds to maintain accepted standards of

education. It may not be rational to embark on formalizing or improving the system without satisfactory studies on the subject. As Bray (2001) notes, despite the great impact on academic success, social disparities and economic progress, educational policies are more or less silent on this issue, but it is clear that this issue needs greater attention today than ever before.

As noted earlier, in countries like Armenia, students attend private tutoring to pass examinations in order to get educational funding from the government or avoid joining the national service (Bray, 2008). In the UK learners attend tuition because of inadequate teaching they get from their mainstream university teachers (The Sunday Times, 2009). In some instances, teachers go for private tutoring to supplement their monthly salaries. As Bray (2007, p. 38) asserts; "Many teachers in Cambodia supplement their official salaries by giving supplementary tutoring to their own pupils. Pupils pay a daily fee directly to the teacher for each lesson." "We don't like the system" complains one parent "but we have no power to change it." Therefore, private tuition in Cambodia is a coping strategy for teachers due to low official salaries they receive; "many parents have sympathy for teachers because they realize that official salaries are too low for teachers to support their families without extra income" (Bray, 2007, p. 38).

Yet in some countries, like Cyprus, Indonesia, Lebanon, Nigeria and Russia the issue of private tuition and reasons for, advanced, include covering syllabi and low income to teachers. Some scholars attribute the development of private tuition to overall trend of privatization and marketisation of education (Bray, 2007, p. 11)

In Tanzania, most Tanzanians are increasingly concerned about their children's academic success. Education is fundamental to life and because of dynamics in public schools most parents hire private tutors to teach their kids (The Arusha Times, 2009). This assertion suggests that there is poor performance of teachers in public schools; similar view was reported by a study conducted by the World Bank, which reported that in most African countries primary school teachers are not in schools in 15 to 25% of their working time; even those who are in schools do not teach (The Citizen, 2010). This suggests irresponsibility and lack of accountability in our public schools' teachers. This tendency is called "quiet corruption" which has long term consequences because children are denied of proper education due to absentee teachers. Therefore, quiet corruption might be one of the nature of the private tutoring in Tanzania and else where in Africa. Other causes include recruitment of unqualified teachers, lack of teaching materials and shortage of well equipped laboratories (The Citizen, 2010). Furthermore, the shortage of science teachers might be a contributing factor to mushrooming of private tuition centres in Tanzania, as president Kikwete once said; there was critical shortage of science subjects' teachers, saying

that, the situation was worse in Tanzania than it was in other African countries (The Citizen, 2010)

Dindyal (2007) conducted a study in Mauritius and found that the commonest reason for private tutoring was source of revenue. Also teachers wanted to get more practice and experience to become better teachers. Moreover, they wanted to help weaker students to catch upon class work by giving them harder problems not covered in class.

### Forms of private tuition conducted

As noted earlier, tuition classes are ubiquitous in both emerging and developed economies. The forms of private tuition include individual based, in small groups and lectures in huge auditoriums. Ways that are used include: face-to-face, by telephone, by mail and internet (Bray, 2001; Hof, 2013).

### Time, Target group and level

Studies show that private tuition takes place just before examinations, in every evening, in every weekend and during vacations. Normally, both low achievers and high achievers go for tuition. Low achievers go for tuition to improve their performance whereas high achievers go for tuition for maintaining competitive edge (Bray, 2001; 2005)

The levels that are involved include primary, junior secondary and senior secondary (Bray, 2001, 2005). Although Bray does not mention university level private tutoring, it is now happening in some regions of the world like in the UK. In Cameroon, many of the clients for private tutors are middle and low income students in public schools. Richer families send their children to private schools, which are considered qualitatively superior and provide a form of education which many parents consider adequate without supplementation. Poorer families can not afford this, so instead they seek to bridge the gap by sending their children to private tutors, ( Tembon, 1999 in Bray, 2007, pp. 62,63). This means that adequately taught students do not need private tutors, this argument is similar to the reason for private tutoring in UK, which is inadequate tutoring in ordinary classrooms; however, this needs to be handled with care because no study has reported that students studying in reputable private schools never attended private tuition during vacations, weekends or after classes hours may be this is an interesting phenomenon that needs research attention.

One important thing to note is that student's poor performance is common in public schools. This is from analysis of various studies conducted in different parts of the world. Scholars like Wedgwood (2005, p. 49) observe: "public schools provide a poor quality of

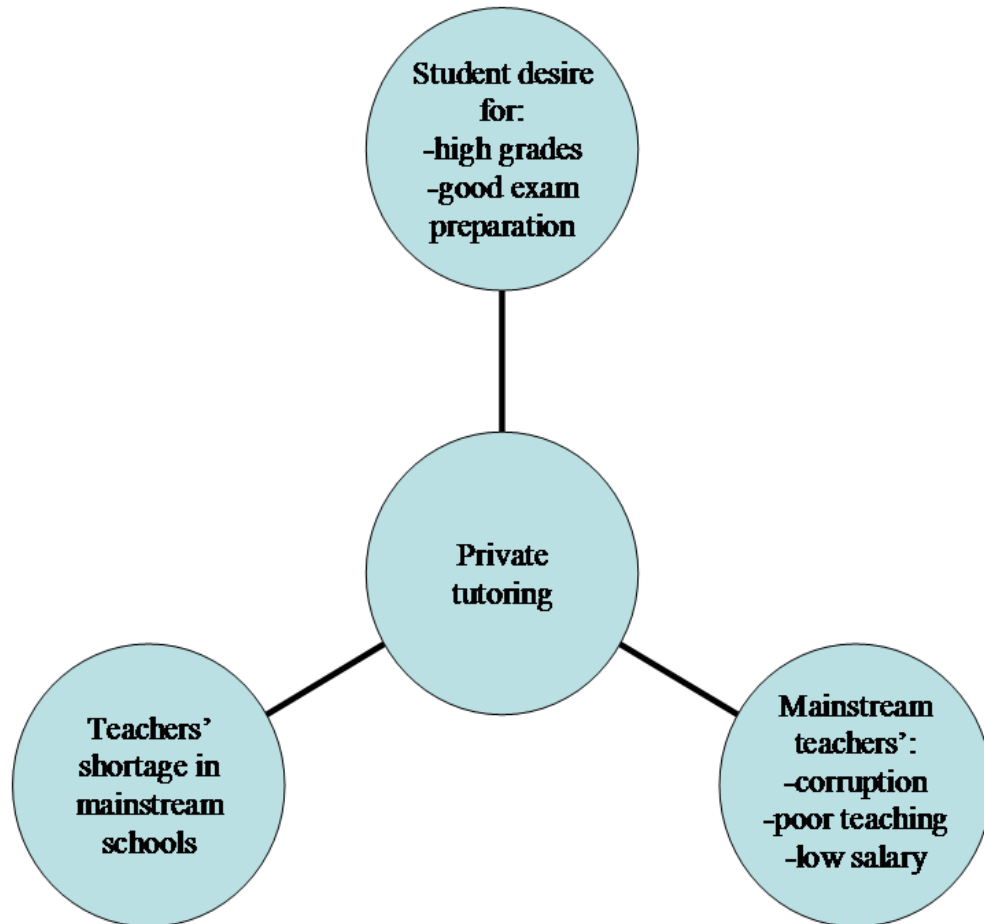
education" this assertion support the conclusion above concerning public schools. This is assumed to be attributed to acute shortage of teachers in public schools. This may be the case in developing countries like Tanzania. The citizen (2010) reports that there is acute shortage of teachers in Mtwara region because there were only 816 teachers out of 2528 required in secondary schools.

### Implications of private tuition

Usually families with necessary resources are able to secure not only greater quantities but also better qualities of private tutoring. Children receiving such tutoring are then able to perform better in school, and in the long run to improve their life time earnings. By contrast children from low income families who do not receive such benefits may not be able to keep up with their peers and may drop out of school at an earlier age (Bray, 2005, p. 1; see also Hof, 2013; Varma, 2010; Wedgwood, 2005; Swilla, 2009).

This assertion by Bray suggests three things: first, inequality in terms of performance among students may occur, second, economic disparity in life time earnings between students hailing from low income families as compared to those from high income families and third students from low income families are likely to drop from schools at earlier age. Foondun (2002) and Al-Mukhatar (2010) agree that private tuition results in big financial burden on the part of parents; this is apart from its popular impacts. Moreover private tuition causes lack of curriculum sequence and diversities in classrooms. In addition to that, private tuition reduces a load to mainstream teachers and students understand materials taught in ordinary classroom (Bray, 2007). However, Varma (2010) notes that teachers are much likely to concentrate more on their private lessons than concentrating on what they are paid to do.

Due to implications of private tuition centers several policy implications have been set out to address the problem. These include Laissez-faire, letting the market control the situation. Monitoring without interfering, collecting data on income of private tutors and collecting taxes equivalent to that collected from (a) main stream teacher(s). Regulation and control, this is, checking the implementation of syllabi, inspecting, registering and inducing sanctions where necessary. Encouragement, viewing private tuition as productive and thus should not be banned. A mixed approach, this is, mainstream teacher should not be involved. Lastly, prohibition, that is to say, commercial supplementary tutoring should be banned (Bray, 2007). The speculated implication of private tuition centres, is, in the long run public schools will turn into mere examination centres instead of being both teaching and examination centres. Given this



Source: Author own construct (2014)

Figure 1. Private Tutoring conceptual framework

stance, policy makers need to draw their attention on the issue. Analysis of literature suggests that, among other things, public schools do not provide adequate education, thus resulting in students hunting for private tutoring. Therefore, it is the role of education planners and administrators to take on board the controversial situation.

Some students have reached a stage where they do not concentrate during mainstream teacher instruction/class. As Dindyal (2007 p. 16) reports:

The shadow system has grown out of proportion and is now posing a challenge to the regular formal system of education. Students taking private tuition are neglecting school work and the value system is such that the work done by private tutors takes precedence over the work done by regular teachers in schools.

Despite the fact that, private tuition has numerous unpopular impacts in society, it has its brighter side. Some individuals who never enrolled at a certain level of education may join the private tuition classes and climb to the highest possible academic ladder. A similar view has

been hinted by Teal (2008) when he observes: "...in the Southern Asian context ...a number of individuals (particularly girls) never enroll in secondary schools, but still complete various levels of education 'privately'.

### Perceptions of students and parents towards private tutoring

There is very little information from studies that show the perceptions of students towards tuition centres in the world. However, very little has been said by Bray (2007) on perceptions of parents towards private tuition in Cambodia, where, although parents paid for tuition of their children they had negative attitude towards tuition conducted after classes in Cambodia. A student survey conducted by Dindyal (2007, p. 12) showed that the students favoured more their private tuition teachers than their mainstream teacher counterparts; also, class sizes and practice were reflected as major determinants of private tuition effectiveness, as part of

the report reads:

On the whole students acknowledge the contribution of private tuition in their learning process. They claim that private tuition teachers are the ones they can choose unlike their classroom teacher. The students mention that their choice of private tutor is based on the recommendations of their parents or peers. The greatest advantage of having a private tutor is that they have somebody to discuss their difficulties on an individual basis and the opportunity to practice more problems. However, they acknowledge that this advantage ceases when the private tuition classes are big, at times as big as their normal classes, if not bigger. Most of the students noted that the whole syllabus is covered but emphasis is laid where the students encounter problems.

The student comment above informs us that the problem of ineffective teaching is partly linked to too big classes in the mainstream school system in most countries. This situation may result in little or non-existent of individualized help in schools.

## CONCLUSION

Private tutoring is now becoming a common phenomenon all over the world. From the analysis made through surveying literature, private tutoring has come into existence because of a number of reasons. The reasons include students wanting to get higher grades, funding from government, qualification to join higher level of education, also, poor performance of the mainstream teachers, as a way to prepare for exams, as complementary to formal education, in addition to that, low salaries of teachers, corruption, shortage of teachers/qualified teachers in some subjects like Science and Mathematics and irresponsibility. That is still not well known concerning the reasons for private tutoring, is, some studies show that private schools provide adequate education such that students studying in those schools do not need extra-outside-school instruction. This suggests that inadequate instruction has its home in public schools. This takes us to another key idea that inadequate instruction is a root of the mushrooming private tutoring. Therefore, the challenge is on what to do to make our public schools/universities have adequate instruction? In the mean time, we need to conduct a comparative study to see to what extent both private and public schools students attend private tuition. Although, it is an irrefutable fact that most private schools students do better in their final examinations. And this may be the reason why high income families are increasingly taking their children to private schools. Also, it is speculated that private schools might be doing well because few students join them. This is because most parents cannot afford

the costs, thus enabling teachers in those schools handle the students better during teaching-learning process.

Therefore, it is recommend that in order to provide adequate education in public schools teachers should be paid well so that they do not initiated private tutoring to generate extra-income. Also, governments all over the world should make sure that the number of students per class is small enough for the teacher/lecturer to manage during instruction. School administrators and teachers should make sure that enough practice/drills are given to students in their respective schools and classes.

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