



The expansion and roles of private tutoring in India: From supplementation to supplantation



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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses relationships between private supplementary tutoring and mainstream schooling in urban Maharashtra, India. The role of private tutoring progressively expands from the lower to the higher grades, and is especially visible in Classes 11 and 12 when it seems to supplant rather than supplement mainstream schooling. The paper notes the complex interplay of social, economic and educational factors in the shifting relationships, and has relevance not only for other parts of India but also other countries. The dynamics of private tutoring should be considered when conceptualising educational processes and devising policies for schooling, especially in relation to social inequalities and the efficiency of school systems.

1. Introduction

Across the globe, private supplementary tutoring (PST) has become a major educational issue for policymakers, practitioners and researchers, and has received attention in this journal as well as elsewhere (e.g. Bray et al., 2016; Entrich, 2018; Jheng, 2015; Jokić, 2013; Pallegedara and Mottaleb, 2018). Increasing numbers of children in public schools, and sometimes also their counterparts in private schools, receive additional instruction outside school hours on a fee-paying basis. This instruction may be delivered on a one-to-one basis, in small groups, in large classes or over the internet. Some forms of tutoring are commonly called shadow education on the grounds that their curricula mimic the provision in schooling (Aurini et al., 2013; Bray, 1999, 2009). Other forms of tutoring expand on and complement the curriculum of schooling; and, as this article notes, some tutoring actually supplants schooling.

India is among countries with significant scale of PST. A 2014 survey by the government's National Sample Survey Office (NSSO, 2016, p. 98) reported enrolment rates in commercial enterprises known as coaching centres of 37.8% among boys at the level of lower and higher secondary schooling, and 34.7% among girls. Additional students, not recorded, would have been receiving individual and small-group PST from teachers, university students and other informal providers. A second survey, focusing on 12 cities though with a small and perhaps biased sample in each, reported that in 2013 "up to 95% [of] students in high schools" were receiving private tutoring (ASSOCHAM, 2013). Whatever the actual number, tutoring dominates the lives of

many families – including those who worry that their children are not receiving it – and is highly visible on billboards, websites, and the shop-fronts of tutorial centres.

Despite the widespread nature of the phenomenon in India, little research has been conducted there. The present study focuses on the experiences of higher secondary students in an urban region of Maharashtra State. It is a qualitative study that assesses the role of PST in relation to mainstream schooling. Some forms of tutoring have moved beyond supplementation to become substitutes that supplant regular schooling. This evolution has significant implications for educational structures and processes, and for malpractices resulting from an unorganised and unregulated tutoring sector. Informal evidence suggests that patterns in Maharashtra have parallels elsewhere in India, though to the authors' knowledge they have not been examined in the way that is done in this paper. Similar remarks apply to other countries, so the paper has international as well as national and local relevance.

2. Literature review

In line with much existing literature (e.g. Bray, 1999; Kobakhidze, 2014; Pallegedara and Mottaleb, 2018; Zhang, 2014), this paper focuses on educational provision beyond that provided by formal schools on a fee-paying basis. Studies in countries with extensive private tutoring have shown a backwash on mainstream schooling (Bray et al., 2016; Jokić, 2013). Despite the likely positive effects on students' academic performance, several major problems are commonly identified. One is about the burden on students caused by excessive focus on

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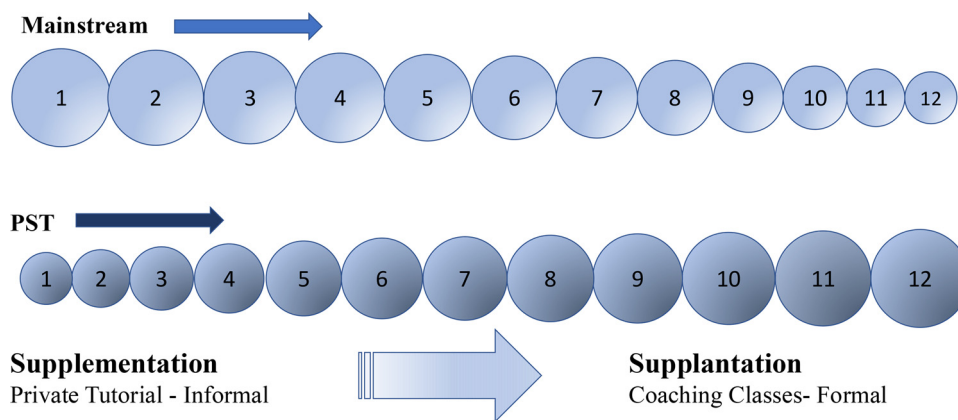


Fig. 1. Hypothesised relative roles of mainstream schooling and private tutoring. Note: Each circle represents the school year, e.g. 1 is Class 1, 2 is Class 2, etc.

examination-oriented skills; and a second is about reduced momentum to improve public education because of diverted motivation for quality improvement. In the most problematic situations, students absent themselves from mainstream schools in order to devote their time and energy to PST. This has been noted anecdotally in countries as diverse as China, Egypt and Myanmar, and has been touched upon by researchers in Azerbaijan and Turkey (Silova and Kazimzade, 2006, p. 128; Tansel and Bircan, 2008, p. 19), but has not been investigated thoroughly. Such absenteeism has serious repercussions on mainstream schooling; and as private tutoring participation rates grow, absenteeism tends to rise further.

The context for much international literature is the rise of privatisation in the education sector, which has displaced the view that schooling should be exclusively a state-provided service (Macpherson et al., 2014; Verger et al., 2016; Ward, 2013). Much of the literature on privatisation in education has focused on schools, highlighting both market-oriented reforms within public schools and the proliferation of private institutions alongside public ones (e.g. Ball and Youdell, 2008). The expansion of PST is a further mechanism through which balances of public and private have been altered (Aurini et al., 2013; Bray, 2017; Manzon and Areepattamannil, 2014; Silova et al., 2006; Zhang and Bray, 2017). As this paper shows, it is largely a bottom-up process rather than the result of deliberate policies. It results in what Cowen (2009) called “shape-shifting”. Cowen was more concerned within the field of comparative education with policies and practices that cross international borders, but the present article shows that shapes also shift over time within single jurisdictions.

Turning specifically to the literature on PST in India, the few available studies (e.g. Aslam and Atherton, 2013; Azam, 2015; Majumdar, 2014, 2018; Salovaara, 2017) reflect views in the wider literature that PST can compensate for shortcomings in mainstream education but may also contribute to inefficiencies. The research also highlights the impact of PST on social disparities by creating unequal learning opportunities. Although overall enrolment rates in tutoring are high, many students have to enrol in cheaper forms that do not meet their needs effectively. Among ironies is that many students indicate that they seek tutoring because their schools have large classes and ineffective teaching, but then proceed to tutoring in classes of similar sizes taught by tutors with doubtful qualifications and credentials (Agarwal, 2015; Maheshwari, 2015).

Further issues arise from the fact that PST seemingly nullifies the efforts of well-intentioned government initiatives such as Right to Education (RTE) Act and *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA)¹ that aim to provide equal and good quality educational opportunities to every child

(Sen, 2009). The RTE Act required private schools to accept students from all social strata under a 25% reservation quota scheme (MHRD, 2016), but students who climb the educational ladder from government schools to private schools may be driven to PST to keep up with their peers (Kulkarni, 2016, 2017). The West Bengal State government’s removal of English from the elementary curriculum with the intention of making primary education accessible to rural and poor children caused many parents to enrol their children in private English lessons to bridge the gap; and once this pattern had become established, reversal of the government policy did not lead to withdrawal from PST (Roy, 2010). Curricular load is often cited as one of the drivers of PST, both nationally and internationally (e.g. Jokić, 2013; Maheshwari, 2015; Sen, 2009). However a study in Bengaluru, Karnataka State, observed high enrolment rates irrespective of streams that had differing curricular loads (Ghosh and Bray, 2018). PST also seems to contribute to dropout rates because some parents see no educational future for their children if they are unable to supplement their mainstream schooling with private tutoring (Chugh, 2011; Chhapial, 2013; Sen, 2009).

3. Research objectives

This study in a society with high PST participation rates focused on relationships between private tutoring and mainstream schooling. It was based on the hypothesis that private tutoring has become so important in higher secondary students’ lives that it plays a larger role than the mainstream. As illustrated in Fig. 1, when the role of private tutoring exceeds that of the mainstream, it may not be just supplementary in nature and is likely to supplant mainstream education. The mode of private tutoring is also likely to change from informal tutoring services to more formal provision.

The study investigated the roles of PST vis-à-vis mainstream education in the lives of higher secondary students in terms of 1) their choices of tutorial class, costs, and class size, 2) subjects, 3) time spent and curriculum covered, and 4) relationships with teachers in their mainstream institutions and tutors in the private tutoring. The research focused on science students since they are generally considered the elite in highly competitive circumstances. In 2017, 37.2% of students sitting the Maharashtra State Board Class 12 examinations were in the science stream, 24.8% were in the commerce stream, 33.8% were in the arts stream, and 4.2% in vocational courses. The number of Science students was about 559,000, of which 70% also sat engineering/pharmacy entrance tests and 45% sat medical entrance tests (MSBSHSE, 2017). The study also sought to understand the expansion of private tutoring during their years of schooling since Class 1. The aims led to the following questions:

- 1 What role has PST played in the lives of the students in their two years of higher secondary schooling (Classes 11 and 12) vis-à-vis

¹ The *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA) programme, operational since 2000/01, aims at the universalisation of elementary education irrespective of gender and social category (MHRD, 2016).

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