



# The Phenomenon of Private Tutoring: Implications for Public Education

António V. Bento

University of Madeira (Portugal)

Maria Isabel Ribeiro

Polytechnic Institute of Bragança (Portugal)

This research study has as its main goal to describe the nature and the extension of private tutoring in secondary education, in the Autonomous Region of Madeira, giving special attention to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, the year that precedes the entrance in Higher Education. It was used a questionnaire to collect data from the 413 participants (who were finishing High School in Academic Year 2009-2010) with ages between 17 and 23 years. Of the total of respondents, 56,4% are of feminine gender and 42,1% are of masculine gender. During secondary education a significant number of students attended private tutoring classes in last two years, 44% and 41.9%, respectively. Mathematics is the subject that makes the majority of the students to look for this type of services (87,7%). Great part of the students spend 4 to 6 weekly hours in private tutoring classes (56,7%) in private centers (66,7%) and the financial expenses get up to 70 euros per month (68,4%). The majority of the students has a positive opinion (87,7%) about of this type of services, given the fact that their performance has improved allowing positive performance for those with more difficulties and excellence results for the ones with higher grades.

**Keywords:** Private tutoring, Secondary Education, Autonomous Region of Madeira

## Introduction

The phenomenon of private tutoring is defined, according to Costa, Neto-Mendes and Ventura (2008) as a structured set of activities developed outside of the school that has as main objective to improve school performance of students. According to Mark Bray (2008), this phenomenon has grown in the last decades in all regions of the world. Bray (2008) argues that private tutoring is stimulated by a competitive climate and a strong belief in the value of education for economic and social progress. According to this author, the increase of private tutoring classes is stimulated by a competitive climate and a strong belief in the value of the education for economic and social progress.

## Review of Literature

Thus, this research study intends to describe and analyse the nature and the extension of private tutoring in

---

António V. Bento, Ed.D., Professor of University of Madeira, Research Center in Education (CIE-UMa), Portugal  
Maria Isabel Ribeiro, Ph.D., Associate Professor of the Polytechnic Institute of Bragança (Portugal).

## THE PHENOMENON OF PRIVATE TUTORING: IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

one of the largest secondary schools of the Autonomous Region of Madeira (Portugal).

This phenomenon (private tutoring) has had a significant increase in Portugal and has not been a target for research by social and educational researchers (Neto-Mendes *et al*, 2003).

Bray (2006; 2010; 2011) has studied this issue at the international level and concluded that this phenomenon has been on the “shade” for different reasons: a) it exists because the normal system exists; b) copies the regular system and follows its changes; c) the public focus its attention at the regular system and not on the “shade”; d) the characteristics of the phenomenon on the “shade” are less distinct than the regular system.

Different studies have indicated that familiar factors constitute a determinant reason for the use of extra curricular activities, including private tutoring and academic lessons after the school (Azevedo, S. & Neto-Mendes, A. (2009). According to Lareau (2003) familiar factors frame the values of the pupils having a relevant impact in their academic development. Thus, the families with greater economic power have the possibility to access to a bigger diversity of resources and of superior quality. As a consequence, the pupils who receive private tutoring are capable to guarantee school success and, later on in life, their professional success. In contrast, pupils of families with low incomes and not receiving such academic services will not be capable to follow their colleagues and ending, many times, by giving up the school precociously. Results of several research studies have indicated that the parent’s economic, social and cultural capital is very important for the schooling support of their children. McLaren and Dyck, (as cited in Neto-Mendes *et al.*, 2003, p. 7) argue that parents with a higher cultural capital are more capable to decode the practices and policies of schools being able to provide a better school assistance to their children. On the other hand, Sharma (as cited in Neto-Mendes *et al.*, 2003, p. 8) concluded that private tutoring besides improving the grades of the pupils, on the tests, also have a motivational effect, reducing the fear of exams and increasing confidence and self esteem.

The implications of this parallel educational phenomenon are significant either for the specific student learning either for the future of the students who attend it. In fact, it raises questions of equality and equal opportunities as many families don’t have the financial capabilities to support that extra financial effort. Furthermore, the public system is not capable of providing the educational needs of its own students and families. A study conducted by Neto (2006) and another recent doctoral dissertation by Azevedo (2011) found that the parents with higher educational degrees and better financial situation are those who search for private tutoring for their children.

Some studies have found a positive correlation between the frequency of private tutoring and academic success. In Germany, Haag (2001) cited by Bray (2006) compared the academic success of a group of students of secondary education that had attended private tutoring with another group for control. The results indicated that the students who received private tutoring had improved their academic level as well as their motivation. Similarly, in Quénia, Buchmann (2002), concluded that the frequency of private tutoring was related to less academic retention and bigger academic progress. On the other hand, it has been found that private tutoring contributes for the social stratification. The most prosperous families can invest in better and more private tutoring services than families with little possibilities. The internet is becoming a great source to provide and receive private tutoring in a global market (Ventura & Jang, 2010). Success in school is very important; for example, in many countries, school success is a condition to guarantee a professional future and because of that the tutoring is generalized (Heyneman, 2011).

### Methodology

This research study intends to describe and analyse the nature and extension of private tutoring in the senior students of one of the largest secondary schools in Madeira (Portugal). The collection of data was carried out by inquiries, the type of inquiry that in the opinion of Tuckman (2002) is very frequent in the field of education and it has an undeniable value in collecting data from a big parcel of the population.

Four hundred and thirteen senior students of one of the largest schools in the Autonomous Region of Madeira participated in this study by responding to a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to get data on demographics and specific information on private tutoring participation. The questionnaire was anonymous and took about fifteen minutes to complete. The questionnaire used is constituted by 22 questions (closed and multiple choice) and can be divided into three sections. The first one, includes questions related to demographics: personal, familiar and geographic data; area of study, age, sex, residence, level of education and occupation of their parents. The second part included questions related to school performance of the participants and the frequency of private tutoring classes and, finally, the last part is related with the intention of the participant to continue their studies in higher education, specifically, if they intend or not to apply for higher education and which major would like to attend.

It was used the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, 18.0 version) program to process the data. To verify whether there is an association between the frequency of tutoring and level of education of parents we applied the Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ). We used a significance level of 5%.

### Results and Discussion

Of the 413 respondents, 56,4% are of masculine gender and 42,1% are of the feminine gender. The average is 17,9 years ( $SD=0,94$ ) of age and students are distributed by five areas of knowledge, namely, Sciences and Technologies (48,7%), Languages and Humanities (19,4%), Visual Arts (14,5%), Socio-economics (9,7%) and Computer Technology (7,6%). More than half (58,6%) lived in the urban area of the main city of Madeira (Funchal), the urban area. Taking into account the education level of the parents, it is verified that of the total of respondents, 10,2% of fathers and 15% of the mothers possess higher education degrees. However, a reasonable percentage of students' parents (31% fathers and 20,4% mothers) have a schooling equal to or inferior to 4 years. The three more representative professions are, for the mothers of the inquired subjects, the liberal professions, such as clerical, commerce and services with 30,5%, following housewives with 22,3% and teachers with 10%. The most representative professions of the fathers are commerce and services (23,2%), self-employed (13,3%) and entrepreneurs (12,8%)

Twenty four percent of the subjects had failed, at least once, during their schooling path. The girls are who frequent more the private tutoring classes (41,9% versus 36,5%).

The results proved to be an association between the variables "higher education of parents" and "private tutoring attendance" (10<sup>th</sup> grade:  $\chi^2=10,363$ ;  $p=0,001<0,05$ ); (11<sup>th</sup> grade:  $\chi^2=5,425$ ;  $p=0,007<0,05$ ) and (12<sup>th</sup> grade:  $\chi^2=7,37$ ;  $p=0,007<0,05$ ). These results corroborate previous findings (Costa *et al.*, 2007; Costa, Neto-Mendes & Ventura, 2008).

Private tutoring classes took place at Tutoring Centres (66,7%), at homes of tutors (31,4%) and some other places (1,9%). These results are different from the ones gotten by Bento (2009). According to this author the majority of the students had tutoring sessions in the home of their tutors. However, according to Costa *et al.*

## THE PHENOMENON OF PRIVATE TUTORING: IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

(2008) the use of the Tutoring Centres is increasing at a world-wide level.

In 12<sup>th</sup> grade, the subject that pupils looked for more support was Mathematics (87,7%), followed by Chemistry (8,8%), Descriptive Geometry (8,2%), Portuguese (5,3%), Biology (3,5%), Physics (2,9%), English (2,3%) and Economics (0,6%). Similar results had been found by Costa *et al.* (2007), Ventura *et al.* (2008) and Bento (2009). Mathematics is the discipline in which students have more difficulty. For Ventura *et al.* (2008) Mathematics is the main “engine” of the phenomenon of tutoring and is clearly the discipline with the biggest number of pupils receiving tutoring outside of school showing a significant difference in relation to the other disciplines.

In relation to the monthly hours and expenses spent in private tutoring, it is verified that the majority of the pupils has between 4 and 6 hours (56,7%) of weekly sessions and the expenses are up to 70 euros a month (68,4%).

In relation to the impact of private tutoring in school performance of the student, it is concluded that 87.7% of the respondents agree that their school performance improved with the frequency of tutoring sessions. Similar results were found by Ventura *et al.* (2008): students had a very positive opinion on the effects of private tutoring on their academic success levels.

### Conclusions

This research study intended to describe and to analyse the nature and extension of the phenomenon of private tutoring in the Autonomous Region of Madeira. The 413 respondents, secondary senior students, have ages between 17 and 23 years. Of the total of respondents, 56,4% were of feminine gender and 42,1% were of masculine gender. During secondary education, a significant number of students attended weekly private tutoring sessions, on the 10<sup>th</sup> (28,1%), 11<sup>th</sup> (44%) and 12<sup>th</sup> grades (41,9%). Mathematics is the subject that makes the majority of students to look for this type of educational service (87,7%). A great part of students spend between 4 and 6 hours, weekly (56,7%) in private Centres (66,7%) and the financial expenses average 70 euros a month (56,7%). The majority of the students consider positive (87,7%) the frequency of private tutoring sessions.

This parallel educational issue raises important questions that need to be studied and reflected on: a) the inequity introduced in the student population - are the prosperous families that can get the better and longer private tutoring services. In Portugal, the government introduced legislation (1999 and 2005) in order to regulate this phenomenon (i.e., permission needed for teachers to provide private tutoring and prohibition to provide private tutoring to own students or students of their own schools) however, this legislation has not been followed neither controlled; b) the other important question is the quality of public education – public schools are not providing the educational services that families and students look for; c) another important question is related to rankings of schools – the schools that are on the first places (which in Portugal are private schools) are benefiting from the private tutors who prepare their students introducing one aggravation for public schools which are not able to select their students. These issues need to be addressed in future studies.

### References

- Azevedo, S. (2011). *A atividade das explicações: Um estudo no Ensino Secundário e Superior*. (Tese de doutoramento não publicada), Universidade de Aveiro, Aveiro.
- Azevedo, S. & Neto-Mendes, A. (2009). *As explicações (aulas particulares) no Ensino Secundário e Superior em Portugal*:

- Apresentação de um estudo. *Revista Eletrónica de Educação*, 3(2), 84-104.
- Bento, A. (2009). O fenómeno das explicações: políticas educativas, sucesso escolar e seus determinantes – um estudo exploratório na Região Autónoma da Madeira. In L. Rodrigues & J. Brazão (Org.). *Políticas Educativas: Discursos e práticas* (pp.311-324). Grafimadeira: Funchal.
- Bray, M. (2006). Private supplementary tutoring: comparative perspectives on patterns and implications. *Compare*, 36(4), 515-530.
- Bray, M. (2008). *Private supplementary tutoring: dimensions, implications and government responses*. Paris: UNESCO International Institute for educational Planning.
- Bray, M. (2010). Researching shadow education: Methodological challenges and directions. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 11(1), 3-13.
- Bray, M. (2011). *The challenges of shadow education: Private tutoring and its implications for policymakers in Europe*. Lyon: NESSE. Retrieved from <http://www.nesse.fr/nesse/activities/reports/the-challenges-of-shadow-education-1>.
- Buchman, C. (2002). Getting ahead in Kenya: social capital, shadow education, and achievement. In B. Fuller & E. Hannum (Eds), *Schooling and Social Capital in Diverse Cultures* ((pp. 133-159). JAI Press: Amesterdam.
- Costa, J., Neto-Mendes, A., Ventura, A. & Azevedo, S. (2007). O fenómeno das explicações: aspectos da realidade e do contexto global. *Ensaio: ava. pol. públ. edu.*, 15(57), 475-488.
- Costa, J., Neto-Mendes, A. & Ventura, A. (2008). *Xplika: Investigação sobre o mercado das explicações*. Aveiro: Universidade de Aveiro.
- Heyneman, S. (2011). Private tutoring and social cohesion. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 86, 183-188.
- Lareau, A. (2003). *Home advantage: Social class and parental intervention in Elementary Education*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Neto-Mendes, A., Costa, J. & Ventura, J. (2003). Ranking de escolas em Portugal: Um estudo exploratório. *Revista Iberoamericana sobre Eficacia y Cambio en Educación*, 1(1), 1-13.
- Neto, M. (2006). *A procura de explicações: as razões dos pais*. Dissertação de Mestrado. Universidade de Aveiro. Aveiro, Portugal.
- Tuckman, B. (2002). *Manual de investigação em educação* (2ª Edição). Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian.
- Ventura, A.; Costa, J., Neto-Mendes, A. & Azevedo, S. (2008): 'Dimensão e Características da Frequência de Explicações no 12º Ano: Do Local ao Nacional' ['Dimensions and Characteristics of Tutoring Attendance in Year 12: From Local to National'], in Costa, Jorge Adelino; Neto-Mendes, António & Ventura, Alexandre (Eds.), *Xplika: Investigação sobre o Mercado das Explicações* (pp.119-145). Aveiro: Universidade de Aveiro.
- Ventura, A. & Jang, S. (2010). Private tutoring through the internet: Globalization and offshoring. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 11(1), 59-68.