

Guill, Karin; Spinath, Birgit

## **Special issue editorial. Effects of private tutoring**

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**peDOCS**  
Deutsches Institut für Internationale Pädagogische Forschung (DIPF)  
Mitglied der Leibniz-Gemeinschaft  
Informationszentrum (IZ) Bildung  
Schloßstr. 29, D-60486 Frankfurt am Main  
E-Mail: [pedocs@dipf.de](mailto:pedocs@dipf.de)  
Internet: [www.pedocs.de](http://www.pedocs.de)

Karin Guill & Birgit Spinath

## Special Issue Editorial

### Effects of private tutoring

In most countries, large numbers of students not only attend the mainstream education system but also attend private tutoring classes. Private tutoring as examined in this special issue can be best characterized by its strong connection to mainstream schooling. It focusses on academic subjects already taught in school in order to improve students' academic achievement, in contrast to, e.g., musical, artistic or sports skills. Families usually have to pay fees for private tutoring (Bray, 2010). Modes of private tutoring can largely differ: While one-to-one tutoring or tutoring in small groups of up to about five students is common in Western European countries, in other parts of the world, it is offered in groups as big as the usual class size in the public school system or can even fill complete lecture theatres. This last form is, for example, found in Hong Kong and South Korea. Private tutoring via the Internet has become more important in recent years (Bray, 2009; Ventura & Jang, 2010).

Private tutoring in its different forms is a nearly universal phenomenon in all education systems. However, participation rates vary enormously. Western European and North American countries have quite low tutoring rates, ranging from less than 10% up to about 25% of an age cohort, while private tutoring is much more common in Eastern European, Asian, and African countries. Private tutoring participation rates of 50% and more are often found in these countries (Bray, 2009; Guill, 2012). Usually, students from high-income families are more likely to attend private tutoring. At the same time, some countries subsidize private tutoring for socially disadvantaged students.

Although numerous students attend private tutoring, we know very little about the effects of private tutoring – in striking contrast to the amount of information that has been gained from the continual evaluation of public schools. Studies such as the *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) launched by the *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD), represent

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Dr. Karin Guill (corresponding author), Institute for School Development Research, TU Dortmund University & Leibniz Institute for Science and Mathematics Education at the University of Kiel, Olshausenstraße 62, 24118 Kiel, Germany  
e-mail: guill@ipn.uni-kiel.de

Prof. Dr. Birgit Spinath, Department of Psychology, Heidelberg University, Hauptstraße 47–51, 69117 Heidelberg, Germany  
e-mail: birgit.spinath@psychologie.uni-heidelberg.de

numerous countries' aims to evaluate their education systems. This international comparison of the effectiveness of national education systems is complemented by many countries' efforts to evaluate their schools' performances. The No Child Left Behind Act in the USA might be the best known attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of schools in order to improve academic achievement and to make schools accountable for their students' learning progress. However, these national and international monitoring programs are limited to the evaluation of the public education systems.

Meanwhile, theorizing and empirical investigations as to why and how private tutoring affects academic achievement in the mainstream education system are still in the early stages. Up until now, there is no established knowledge about which private tutoring settings work in which education system or which students especially profit from private tutoring lessons. Additionally, more knowledge about the effects of private tutoring on students' motivation, and their self-regulated learning independent from private tutoring would be valuable. While this special issue will not answer all of these questions, it is a further step towards improving our knowledge about the effects of private tutoring. Each empirical contribution focusses on the extent and effects of private tutoring in a specific country by adopting different theoretical and methodological approaches, although the special issue does not aim at a direct comparison of private tutoring in different countries. The composition of the empirical papers reveals that the research questions regarding the effects of private tutoring can be located on different levels ranging from the evaluation of a specific intervention program to the analysis of the role of private tutoring as part of a society's education system. On the methodological level, the contributions profit from the specific strengths of qualitative and quantitative data as well as from experimental and non-experimental large-scale studies. The different approaches of the empirical papers are complemented by two discussions. On the basis of an integrative and systematizing view of the papers, on the one hand, their specific strengths and limitations are discussed and, on the other hand, future research directions regarding the effects of private tutoring are outlined.

The first paper of *Ireson and Rushforth (2014)* explores the psychological factors for why parents in England organize private tutoring for their children. The authors relate the use of private tutoring to theoretical approaches and empirical findings, which indicate the conditions under which parents become involved in their child's school education and specifically support their child when it comes to homework. For their empirical analyses, they draw on data from a questionnaire survey with 1,170 students aged between 10 and 18 years and on additional qualitative data from a subsample of parents. While there was only partial support for the hypothesis that parents whose child receives private tutoring are more involved in their child's education, the study revealed by ordinal regression analyses that parents who value educational achievement and self-discipline are more likely to invest in different forms of private tutoring. Evidence from the interview data revealed that families weigh up the child's needs and their own intellectual as well as

financial resources to support their child when opting for or against private tutoring.

While the parents in the first contribution give “success in examination” (p. 21) as the most important reason to employ private tutoring for their child, the paper of *Guill and Bos (2014)* examines in a large secondary school sample in Germany whether privately tutored students indeed improve their academic achievement. The authors elaborate on the chances of private tutoring being successful by integrating it into a model of instructional effects of classroom teaching. Drawing on longitudinal data from 4,701 students from Grade 7 and Grade 8, they were able to show by descriptive analyses that the majority of parents and students recognized an improved academic achievement in mathematics due to private tutoring. However, neither hierarchical regression analyses nor analyses based on propensity score matching revealed any advantages of privately tutored students compared to non-tutored students in their mathematics marks or achievement test results when controlling for cognitive, social, motivational and school level covariates.

While Guill and Bos concentrated on the overall effects of private tutoring for all tutored students, the paper of *Lambert and Spinath (2014)* has a special focus on students with mathematical learning disabilities (MLD). It also took place in Germany. The authors present the Waterglass Intervention Program (WIP) as an intervention targeted at the specific deficits of children with a MLD diagnosis. With a pre-post-test control group design they evaluated the effects of the WIP compared to private tutoring in a sample of 46 elementary school students. At the end of the intervention period of approximately two years, on average, all children improved their mathematical achievement as measured by grades, a standardized mathematics achievement test and parents’ assessments. However, the WIP group showed significantly stronger gains in all three indicators with medium to large effect sizes.

*Brehm and Silova (2014)* widen the focus of this special issue from several perspectives. Their study took place in a culturally and economically very different setting, in Cambodia. The authors contextualize the phenomenon of private tutoring in the history and current development of Cambodia’s educational system and discuss its role in maintaining social stratification. For their empirical analyses, the authors draw on multiple data sources from classroom observations, focus groups, and informal interviews, and the grades of 36 students in monthly school tests. Private tutoring is mostly offered by the classroom teacher, but in considerably smaller groups, although they still comprise 15 to 20 students. According to the interview data, the curriculum is systematically split up between public school classes reserved for learning theory and private tutoring classes offered for the practical application of the theoretical concepts. Students who regularly attend private tutoring classes score considerably higher on the monthly tests than students who seldom attend these classes. Lacking economical resources is the main reason given for not attending private tutoring classes.

In the discussion section of the special issue, *Mischo (2014)* and *Wittwer (2014)* take an integrative view on the empirical papers and outline future direc-

tions for research on private tutoring. They systematize the contributions – on the one hand, by means of the different systems affected by private tutoring and, on the other hand, by the functional chain of conditions, processes and effects of private tutoring.

*Mischo* discusses the empirical studies of the special issue from the perspective of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and allocates the different approaches and results to the microsystems of private tutoring, school context and student's family, to the corresponding mesosystems of family/private tutoring and school context/private tutoring, and to the macrosystem of the social context. He recommends examining the extent to which research on teacher competencies and especially research on pedagogical content knowledge in different subjects can be transferred to research on private tutoring.

*Wittwer* discusses the results of the four empirical studies of the special issue by dividing them up into three facets; the conditions, processes, and effects of private tutoring. Furthermore, he suggests directions for future research in the field of private tutoring by relating it to research on (non-private) tutoring. In particular, he discusses the contents of private tutoring and the tutor's qualification as core characteristics of private tutoring. Concerning the question of what makes private tutoring effective, he introduces tutor-centered, student-centered constructive or interactive coordination perspectives from tutoring research. Finally, he widens the focus by discussing instructional alternatives for private tutoring.

The special issue is completed by three book reviews from *Davies*, *Mayr*, and *Kim*, each of them presenting and discussing recent publications on the extent and effects of private tutoring in the USA, Germany, and Asia.

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