

Ireson, Judith; Rushforth, Katie

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DIPF | Leibniz-Institut für Bildungsforschung und Bildungsinformation
Informationszentrum (IZ) Bildung
E-Mail: pedocs@dipf.de
Internet: www.pedocs.de

Judith Ireson & Katie Rushforth

Why do parents employ private tutors for their children?

Exploring psychological factors that influence demand in England

Abstract

As parents play a key role in their children's education, this paper considers psychological factors that may influence parents' decisions to provide private tutoring. It draws on the notion of parental involvement in their children's education and examines relations between parents' views of striving for achievement, family support for learning and the employment of tutors. Data was collected through a questionnaire survey of 1,170 parents whose children were in Year 6 (age 10–11 years), Year 11 (age 15–16 years) and Year 13 (age 17–18 years) and from interviews with 58 parents. All questionnaires contained measures of home support for children's school work and parents' views of striving for achievement, together with questions on extra classes and private tuition and reasons for providing these. More home support is provided for children in Year 6 and by parents with higher educational levels. Parents who value educational achievement and self-regulation tend to provide higher levels of home support. The employment of private tutoring is predicted by parents' educational level and their views of self-regulation and achievement. Evidence from interviews suggests that the employment of a private tutor may be seen as part of the parental role and that parents calibrate the need for private tutoring against the family's intellectual capital and resources. These findings suggest that psychological factors deserve consideration alongside contextual factors when seeking to understand the uptake of private tutoring.

Keywords

Private tutoring; Parents; Shadow education; Psychological factors; Tutors

Prof. Dr. Judith Ireson (corresponding author) · Dr. Katie Rushforth
Department of Psychology and Human Development, Institute of Education, University of
London, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AA, England
e-mail: judy.ireson@ioe.ac.uk
k.rushforth@gmail.com

Warum nehmen Eltern Nachhilfe für ihre Kinder in Anspruch?

Eine Untersuchung psychologischer Faktoren, die Nachfrage nach Nachhilfe in England beeinflussen

Zusammenfassung

Da Eltern eine Schlüsselrolle bei der Bildung ihrer Kinder einnehmen, betrachtet dieser Beitrag die psychologischen Faktoren, welche die Entscheidung von Eltern beeinflussen können, Nachhilfe für ihre Kinder in Anspruch zu nehmen. Anknüpfend an den Gedanken der elterlichen Einbindung in die Bildung ihrer Kinder werden Beziehungen zwischen elterlichen Wahrnehmungen des Leistungsstrebens, familiärer Lernunterstützung und der Inanspruchnahme von Nachhilfelehrkräften untersucht. Die Daten wurden mittels einer schriftlichen Befragung von 1170 Eltern erhoben, deren Kinder Jahrgangsstufe 6 (10–11 Jahre), Jahrgangsstufe 11 (15–16 Jahre) bzw. Jahrgangsstufe 13 (17–18 Jahre) besuchen, sowie in Form von Interviews mit 58 Eltern. Alle Fragebögen enthielten Maße zur häuslichen Unterstützung bei den Schularbeiten der Kinder und zu elterlichen Wahrnehmungen des Leistungsstrebens, sowie Fragen zu zusätzlichem Unterricht, Nachhilfe und den Beweggründen für deren Inanspruchnahme. Kinder in Jahrgangsstufe 6 sowie Kinder, deren Eltern ein höheres Bildungsniveau aufweisen, erfahren mehr häusliche Unterstützung. Eltern, die Wert auf Bildungserfolg und Selbstregulation legen, neigen in stärkerem Maße dazu, ihren Kindern Unterstützung im Elternhaus zu bieten. Das Bildungsniveau der Eltern sowie deren Sichtweisen bezüglich Selbstregulation und Leistung sind Prädiktoren für die Inanspruchnahme von Nachhilfeunterricht. Die Auswertungen der Interviews weisen darauf hin, dass die Inanspruchnahme einer Nachhilfelehrkraft als Teil der Elternrolle gesehen werden kann und dass Eltern einen Bedarf an Nachhilfe im Abgleich mit den intellektuellen Mitteln und Ressourcen der Familie bestimmen. Diese Befunde legen nahe, dass psychologische Faktoren neben Kontextbedingungen berücksichtigt werden sollten, wenn man die Inanspruchnahme von Nachhilfe verstehen möchte.

Schlagworte

Nachhilfe; Eltern; Shadow Education; Psychologische Faktoren; Lehrkräfte

1. Introduction

Theoretical approaches that have been used to explain the worldwide demand for private tutoring or shadow education tend to emanate from economic, educational or comparative perspectives (Bray & Silova, 2006; Dang & Rogers, 2008). These perspectives focus on factors at a macro level that influence demand such as the quality of national education systems, the extent of competition through high

stakes testing for places in secondary schools and higher education, and the economic advantages gained from higher level qualifications. While these factors are significant, this paper argues that more proximal, psychological factors may also play a part in parents' decisions to employ private tutors and therefore deserve greater consideration in the research literature.

International research points to cultural, economic and educational factors that drive the demand for private tutoring (Bray & Silova, 2006). Economic and educational factors at a macro-level include expenditure on public education, characteristics of education systems and household income (Dang & Rogers, 2008). These models help to explain variation in the take up of private tutoring in different countries and illustrate that the quality of public education and family income are related to the demand for private tutoring. They also inform thinking about the context of the private tuition market in a given country and the factors that may need to be modeled (Bray & Silova, 2006; Ireson, 2004).

Family financial resources influence demand for private tutoring within a single country, with several studies showing that children in higher socioeconomic status families are more likely to have tutors than children in poorer families. This relationship is found in countries such as England (Ireson & Rushforth, 2011), Ireland (Smyth, 2009), Canada (Davies, 2004), Turkey (Tansel & Bircan, 2006) and Hong Kong (Bray & Kwok, 2003). In these countries, the cost of private tuition can be substantial, especially if continued over several terms, or for more than one subject. Even so, as Davies (2004) pointed out, parents may use private tutoring as an affordable alternative to private schooling.

High rates of private tuition in South East Asian countries have been attributed to cultural factors, specifically the influence of the Confucian tradition which values the role of effort in educational success (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Salili, 1996; Lee, 1996). In contrast, Tweed and Lehman (2002) propose that the USA and other 'culturally Western' groups have been influenced by the Socratic tradition which places emphasis on the questioning of authority, a tendency to evaluate and self-generated knowledge.

A small number of studies have explored psychological factors that may influence the uptake of private tutoring. Lee, Park, and Lee (2009) use expectancy value theory to explain the initial and sustained investment in private tutoring. They propose that motivation to engage in private tutoring is a function of the perceived value of education and parents' expectancy of their child's success in achieving target grades (Lee, Park, & Lee, 2009). They argue that parents see private tutoring as an investment in their child's future economic status, calculating that the benefits of a university degree in terms of future earning potential make it worthwhile.

1.1 Parental involvement

Parents' perceptions of their role may also impact on their decision to invest in private tutoring but as there is very limited research on this topic we draw on work that examines parental involvement in their children's education, which offers some useful lines of enquiry. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) argued that parents' decisions to become involved in their children's education are a function of three constructs: the parent's construction of his or her role in the child's life; the parent's sense of efficacy for helping their child succeed at school, defined as a person's belief that he or she can act in ways that will produce desired outcomes (Bandura, 1997); and the general invitations, demands and opportunities presented by both the child and the child's school. Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, and Sandler (2007) found support for this model in a study that examined two types of parental involvement, namely home-based involvement and school involvement. Both types of involvement were predicted by parental beliefs about what they should do and how active they should be in relation to their child's education; parents' sense of efficacy for helping their child with school work; and child invitations and parents' time and energy for involvement. These constructs would appear to be relevant when considering factors that might affect parents' decisions to seek private tutoring for their child.

Parents' beliefs about their role and activity in relation to homework in the UK involve monitoring, support and help (MacBeath & Turner, 1990). Cooper, Lindsay, and Nye (2000) identified three dimensions of parenting style pertaining to parents' role in homework, namely autonomy support, direct involvement and provision of structure. They surveyed over 700 parents in Tennessee and found that when parents provided autonomy support and structure through clear and consistent guidelines for homework completion, their children completed more homework and performed better on school achievement measures.

Parental beliefs about their role and involvement in children's homework tend to change as their children grow older and move from primary (elementary) to secondary school. Monitoring, support and help were all more common when children were in primary school and decreased in the secondary phase (MacBeath & Turner, 1990). Most parents saw their child's homework and talked about what they were doing, however parents were more likely to report having insufficient knowledge to help their children in secondary school, especially if they themselves had less formal schooling (MacBeath & Turner, 1990). Similarly, most parents in England believe that family members are able to offer sufficient support for school work during the primary phase of education, but fewer feel able to do so when their children are in secondary school (Ireson & Rushforth, 2011). Cooper et al. (2000) found that parents provided more autonomy support and less direct involvement when their children were in higher grade classes.

Very few studies have attempted to model home, school and student factors. An exception is the work of Trautwein, Lüdtke, Schnyder, and Niggly (2006) who proposed a multilevel model to predict homework effort, which incorporated fac-

tors at classroom, subject domain, student and parental level. In a study of student motivation and effort for homework completion among Grade 8 and 9 students in Germany they found that classroom and student level factors had larger effects than family background and parental homework help (Trautwein & Lüdtke, 2009). Student level factors included domain specific motivation and the stable personality characteristic of conscientiousness. Given a lack of consensus in the literature about the salient features of parental involvement and the paucity of longitudinal studies that would enable researchers to determine the causal direction of effects, more work is needed to identify relevant parental factors.

Other factors that may be relevant, particularly in relation to the employment of tutors, are parental beliefs about learning and educational achievement. Parents may place a greater emphasis on their children working hard if they believe that effort is a means to increase ability and raise achievement, as compared with parents who see ability as placing a limit on achievement (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Dweck, 2008). Also, in diverse cultures, parents differ in the extent to which they encourage children to be self-directed in their learning (Tudge et al., 1999) and the extent to which they organize their children's lives around educational activities (Lareau, 2003). Such differences may stem from both the value placed on education and beliefs about the importance of self-regulation for achievement in school and success in life.

A view that parental beliefs and values may underpin both their support for homework and the employment of private tutors is also suggested by the finding that "parents who employ tutors are more involved in their children's education and appear to use tutoring as a strategy to help their children succeed at school" (Davies, 2004, p. 250). This finding deserves to be tested as it could be that parents who place more emphasis on education are simply better informed, or that involvement in home learning and private tutoring are both affected by another unobserved characteristic, such as parents' beliefs about learning and the value they place on achievement.

As this brief review of the literature shows, psychological factors have rarely been considered in research on the part played by parents in the uptake of private tutoring, whereas theory and research on parental involvement suggest a number of parental factors that may be of interest. At the psychological level these include parents' perceptions of the importance of educational achievement and the self-regulation required to achieve it; parental role construction and sense of efficacy.

This study aims to examine a range of factors that may influence parents' motivation to employ private tutoring for their children. It examines whether there is a relationship between private tutoring and family support for home learning and explores how parents perceive their role in relation to the provision of private tutoring for their child. Based on the research literature we expected to find that parents provided more support for home learning for younger children in Year 6 than for those in Years 11 and 13. In addition we hypothesized that (a) parents who provide more support for home learning tend to provide more private tutoring; and (b) parents who value striving for achievement are likely to offer more support for

home learning and to provide private tutoring. We also explored the question ‘How do parents perceive their role in relation to the provision of private tutoring?’

2. Method

2.1 Design of research

Data from parents was collected as part of a larger study designed to collect information from both students and their parents. Students in Years 6, 11 and 13 were surveyed in a sample of 30 primary schools and 34 secondary schools and colleges in central and southern England that were selected through stratified sampling to ensure that a range of demographic areas were included. The final sample comprised over 1,100 students in each year group. Students completed questionnaires in school and were asked to take a questionnaire home for their parents to complete. A sample of parents who completed questionnaires was invited to take part in interviews which were designed to assist in the interpretation of the quantitative findings and to explore parents’ role perceptions.

2.2 Samples

2.2.1 Parent questionnaire sample

Questionnaires were distributed to parents of all 3,615 pupils in the original sample and 1,170 were returned, giving a 32% overall return from the original sample. There was a stronger response from parents of children in Year 6 with 474 questionnaires returned, giving a return rate of 38%, and an acceptable return of 359 questionnaires by parents of children in Year 11 (29%) and 337 in Year 13 (30%). (Further details of the school and pupil samples are available in Ireson and Rushforth, 2011). Of the respondents who completed questionnaires 80.3% were mothers, 17.4% fathers, 0.2% carers and 0.5% other, with 1.7% not reporting their relationship to the child. The parent sample contained similar proportions of respondents whose highest level of education was school (31%), college (39%) and university (30%) and thus provided a good basis for analysis.

2.2.2 Parent interview sample

Information from parent and pupil questionnaires was used to select a sample of parents for interview, with the aim of including parents from schools where there were differing levels of participation in private tuition. Rates of tuition were calculated by school from the data collected from the student questionnaires and demonstrated a wide range from schools in which no students reported private tuition

to schools in which over 59% of students reported that they had received tuition. Two or three schools were selected with high, middle and low levels of participation for each year group. Ten families that had indicated an interest in taking part in interviews were then contacted in each of the three bands, including both parents who employed and did not employ tutors. A total of 58 interviews were completed, 17 with Year 6 parents, 20 Year 11 and 21 Year 13.

2.3 Measures

A Family Support Questionnaire was designed to collect information from parents about:

- private tutoring in school subjects;
- their child's participation in organized sports, arts and community activities;
- reasons for arranging extra tuition, and for not arranging tuition;
- support provided at home for the child's schoolwork;
- beliefs about learning;
- parents' educational and occupational level.

The questionnaire was divided into sections for each topic and the majority of responses could be completed by ticking a box or writing a few words. Supplementary questions provided space for more extended written answers.

2.3.1 Parent support scale

A scale was constructed for this study, with nine items indicating a variety of ways in which parents could help their child with homework including:

- check that they do their work;
- explain work they find difficult;
- find useful information;
- buy books and other resources;
- penalize them for not doing their work;
- give rewards for doing their work;
- give advice on study strategies;
- organize activities to support work in school;
- provide encouragement and support.

Parents were presented with a list of the nine statements and asked to indicate on a 3-point scale whether they provided each type of support rarely or never, sometimes, or often. Inter-item correlation analysis indicated low to moderate levels of correlation between items and reliability statistics for the 9-item scale were satisfactory ($\alpha = 0.74$). The scale was normally distributed ($M = 19.8$, $SD = 3.2$).

2.3.2 Striving for achievement scale

A scale was constructed for this study to indicate parents' beliefs about the importance of ability, effort and self-discipline in achievement. Parents were presented with nine statements and asked to indicate their level of agreement on a 5-point scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Exploratory factor analysis indicated a two factor solution with five items loaded on one principal component and two items on a second component. The first component included items reflecting the value of self-discipline and achievement in school. The second component included items on ability but had low reliability and was dropped from the analyses. The 5-item scale was composed of the following items:

- It is important to me that my child gets good grades at school.
- Self-discipline is essential for success in life.
- It is worth putting in extra effort for schoolwork even if this means having less time for fun.
- People who do well in school get the best jobs.
- It is important for my child to try hard at school.

The 5-item scale was normally distributed ($M = 9.9$, $SD = 2.6$) and internal reliability was satisfactory ($\alpha = .65$).

2.3.3 Parent interviews

Interviews were designed to provide additional information to expand on and assist in the interpretation of parents' questionnaire responses. Questions were semi-structured and explored in greater depth some of the themes covered in the questionnaires. Parents were asked about the help they provided for school work, their reasons for employing and not employing a private tutor and opinions of paying for extra help. All interviews were undertaken by the second author who arranged a convenient place to meet, including in parents' own homes. Interviews were recorded and transcribed and major themes were then identified through a grounded theory approach. A subset of data relating to parents' perceptions of their role in relation to the provision of private tutoring is reported in this paper.

2.4 Procedure

The planned strategy for delivering questionnaires to parents was for students to take the questionnaires home for their parents to complete. Researchers visited schools to oversee the completion of student questionnaires and handed out the parent questionnaires at the end of the session. Due to low response rates, researchers subsequently mailed questionnaires to parents using the address information supplied by students. This was necessary as schools were not willing to supply parents' contact details. To increase the response rate, freepost envelopes

were supplied so that parents could return questionnaires directly to the research office without incurring postal charges and a prize draw for shopping vouchers was offered as an incentive.

3. Results

3.1 Descriptive statistics for students with and without tutoring

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics for key variables, comparing students whose parents reported that they employed a private tutor with those who did not. Measures of student attainment in Year 6 were obtained from the average scores of national Key Stage 2 tests in English, mathematics and science; the Year 11 measure was the average score for national GCSE examinations in English, mathematics and science. These data were supplied from government sources. As may be seen from the table, both Year 6 and Year 11 student achievement is slightly higher for students with tutoring, which may reflect the influence of several factors, such as having a tutor or becoming more motivated to achieve a good result.

Of the parents who employed a private tutor, 40% reported having a university education as compared with 26% of parents who did not employ tutors. The rate of tutoring was slightly higher in Years 6 (18%) and 11 (19%) than in Year 13 (14%) when students take A levels in preparation for university entrance. In England, Year 11 is the last year of compulsory schooling and only students who have good GCSE results progress to Years 12 and 13, so there is an element of selectivity for this group.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics (*M* and *SD* or proportion) for students with and without tutors

	<i>N</i>	Students without private tutors		Students with private tutors	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Attainment Year 6 (Mean APSKS2)	397	28.7	3.8	29.5	3.3
Attainment Year 11 (Mean KS4)	306	41.5	8.0	43.7	7.0
Family support for homework	961	19.6	3.2	20.7	3.1
Striving for achievement	995	16.0	2.7	16.1	2.4
Parents with university education (%)	237	74%		26%	
Year 6 parent sample (%)	422	82%		18%	
Year 11 parent sample (%)	320	81%		19%	
Year 13 parent sample (%)	299	86%		14%	

3.2 Private tutoring in school subjects

Parents were asked whether their child had any extra tuition in school subjects, outside of normal lessons. They were presented with four types of private tuition or classes outside of normal lessons and were asked to indicate whether or not their child had each type. Of the parents who responded, 19.5% indicated that their child had extra lessons before or after school, 17.3% had a private tutor, 8.7% had extra lessons during school holidays and 8.2% had extra lessons at weekends. Of the 938 parents who indicated whether they provided tuition, 703 (75%) did not provide tuition, 112 (11.9%) reported one type of extra tuition, 73 (7.8%) reported two types, 39 (4.2%) three types and 11 (1%) all four types of extra tuition. Thus, for example, some students received individual tutoring, which would take place during the school term, as well as extra lessons during school holidays and at weekends. Two measures of tutoring were used in the subsequent analyses: the employment of a private tutor, and the number of different types of tutoring supplied, which ranged from 0 to 4. This measure includes extra lessons that may have been in a group as well as one-to-one sessions with a private tutor. As rather few parents ticked three or four types the number of categories was reduced and the final regression analyses were run using a binary measure denoting any type of tutoring, or none. Measures used are described for each analysis in the relevant sections that follow.

3.3 Motivation for private tutoring

Respondents who indicated that their child had a private tutor or attended extra classes out of school that was paid for were asked to indicate the main reasons for doing so. The question gave 11 options for the respondents to choose from as well as space to provide any other reasons. Of the 240 parents who provided tutoring and answered this question, 70.8% did so to improve understanding of the subject and 69% to increase self-confidence. The third and fourth ranked reasons were to help achieve the highest examination grades (59%) and to help ensure their child obtained a place in secondary school/sixth form or university (40%), both of which indicate that private tutoring was provided to help the child make a successful transition to the next phase of education. When these two items are combined, success in examinations becomes the most important reason for parents to provide private tutoring for their child (Table 2).

Table 2: Parents' reasons for arranging extra tuition for their child (number and percentage) in rank order

Reason for arranging extra tuition	N = 240	
	n	%
To improve understanding of the subject	170	71
To increase self-confidence	166	69
To help achieve the highest examination grades	141	59
To help ensure s/he obtains a place in secondary school/sixth form or university	97	40
To help my child keep up with work in school	90	38
Because my child does not get enough support from school	50	21
The family is not able to provide enough help	38	16
Because my child does not learn well from the teachers in school	37	15
It seems the natural thing to do	33	14
To increase the time s/he spends studying	30	13
I would feel guilty if I did not help my child in this way	24	10

3.4 Preventive factors that reduce demand

All parents who completed questionnaires were asked to provide reasons for not having private tutoring. Parents whose children had private tutoring were asked to answer this question for the subjects not covered with their tutors. The question gave 12 options for the respondents to choose from as well as space to provide any other reasons. Of the 1,018 parents who completed this question, the most common reason given was 'my child is doing well enough without a tutor' (73%) closely followed by 'private tuition is too expensive' (60%), 'there is no need as members of the family provide enough help' (57%) and 'my child does not want to have private tuition' (51%) (Table 3).

It is worth noting that parents of younger children were more likely to indicate that 'There is no need as members of the family provide enough help' (64% of Year 6 parents, 51% Year 11 and 53% Year 13) ($\chi^2 = 15.66$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$). This response indicates that parents feel more capable of helping children with work in the primary curriculum than the more advanced GCSE and A level work in secondary school. Interestingly, there was a discrepancy between the pattern of responses to this item and to a similar item in the list of reasons for having a tutor 'The family is not able to provide enough help' which only 16% of parents gave as a reason for employing a tutor.

Table 3: Parents' reasons for not arranging extra tuition by year group (number and percentages) in rank order

Reasons for not arranging extra tuition	<i>N</i> = 1,022	
	<i>n</i>	%
My child is doing well enough without a tutor	746	73
Private tuition is too expensive	608	60
There is no need as members of the family provide enough help	577	57
My child does not want to have extra tuition	522	51
Private tuition puts too much pressure on children	423	42
There is no need as the school provides extra classes	351	35
It is something I have never thought of doing	322	32
It is too difficult to find a good tutor or class	269	26
It is unfair for some children to have tutors	217	21
There is no point as people can only achieve according to their ability	155	15
It is too difficult to arrange transport	119	12
My child is a carer and has no time for extra tuition	33	3

3.5 Family support scale

The family support scale consisted of nine statements about different types of support the family might provide for homework, ranging from a general level of providing support and encouragement, to explaining work their child found difficult. Each item was scored on a 3-point scale such that high scores represented a high level of involvement.

Family support for school work varied a great deal, from the lowest possible score of 9 to the maximum of 27. Scale values were calculated and used to examine differences between year groups. As expected, parents gave more support to children in Year 6 ($M = 21.0$, $SD = 2.5$) than in Year 11 ($M = 19.7$, $SD = 3.2$) and Year 13 ($M = 18.3$, $SD = 3.2$). This difference was statistically significant ($F(2, 1071) = 76.3$, $p < .000$, $\eta = .13$).

Year 6 parents were more likely to explain work their children found difficult (78%), compared with Year 11 (35%) or Year 13 (23%) ($\chi^2 = 310$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$). Similarly, parents were more likely to check that their children did their work when in Year 6 (86%) than in Year 11 (58%) or Year 13 (44%) ($\chi^2 = 169$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$), thus supporting a view that older children are expected to learn more independently. Year 6 parents were also more likely to organize activities to support work in school (66% doing so sometimes or often) compared to 50% in Year 11 and 47% in Year 13 and to give more advice on study strategies, with 48% of parents of Year 6 giving advice often, compared with 45% Year 11 and 36% Year 13 ($\chi^2 = 19.3$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$).

In the sample as a whole, moderate levels of correlation were found between checking work and several other types of parental support. Parents who checked that their children did their work also explained work that children found difficult ($r = .48, p < .01$), helped them find useful information ($r = .37, p < .01$), offered advice on study strategies ($r = .31, p < .01$), encouraged and supported them ($r = .23, p < .01$), rewarded them for doing their work ($r = .22, p < .05$) and organized activities to support their work in school ($r = .20, p < .05$).

Mean scale values were used to examine whether parents who provided higher levels of support for homework also provided private tutoring. This analysis used a measure of the number of different types of tutoring supplied, as described in section 3.2. There was no significant difference between mean homework support for children who did not have private tutoring ($M = 19.7, SD = 3.2$) and those that had some ($M = 19.8, SD = 3.1$), however, more intensive support was provided by a group of 58 parents whose children received two or more types of tutoring ($M = 20.8, SD = 3.3$). The difference between the means of the groups with one type of tutoring and two or more types was statistically significant ($t = -2.9, p < .005$). These findings give only partial support to the second hypothesis that parents who provide tutoring tend to be more involved in their children's education, in that parents who provided one type of tutoring did not show greater involvement, whereas parents who provided more than one type were more involved.

3.6 Striving for achievement

The striving for achievement scale contained five items that tapped parents' beliefs about the role of self-discipline in learning and the importance of achievement in school. Scale values were calculated by adding all the scores from the five items in the scale. Each item was scored on a 5-point scale from 1 for strongly agree to 5 for strongly disagree (one item was reverse scored). The scale was reversed so that higher values indicated that parents believed more strongly in the importance of effort, trying hard, self-regulation and obtaining good grades.

Mean values of the striving for achievement scale were higher for parents who provided one or more types of private tutoring ($M = 16.4, SD = 2.5$) than for those who did not ($M = 15.8, SD = 2.6$) ($t = -3.5, df = 1075, p < .001, \eta^2 = .01$). The effect size is small, however the findings suggest that parents who provide private tutoring for their children tend to place greater value on achieving high grades, effort and self-discipline and thus give support to Hypothesis 2. There were no significant differences between year groups.

There was a significant but low correlation between the striving for achievement scale and the family support for school work scale ($r = .13, p < .001$), which suggests that parents who place a high value on effort and achievement in school tend to provide higher levels of support for school work. Multiple regression analysis was considered as a means of estimating whether the two scales, family support for school work and striving for achievement, predicted the uptake of private tutor-

ing in addition to the respondents' educational level. As the distribution of the dependent variable, private tutoring, was not normally distributed it was necessary to use the SPSS Ordinal Regression procedure, Polytomous Universal Model (PLUM) which is an extension of the general linear model to ordinal categorical data.

Before running the regression analyses, we considered the inclusion of students' level of attainment in national tests as a potential explanatory variable, however, no significant associations were found between the measures of private tutoring and achievement for the Year 6 or Year 11 samples. In addition, regression analyses were run to estimate the effect of pupils' level of attainment on the provision of private tutoring, when parents' level of education was included in the model. Separate analyses were computed for Year 6 using Key Stage 2 tests scores and for Year 11 using Key Stage 4 mean levels for English, mathematics and science. Key Stage tests are national tests taken by all students at the end of Year 6 and Year 11. Students' level of attainment had no significant effects when parents' level of education was included in the model and so was not included in subsequent models.

We also considered the inclusion of schools as an explanatory variable in the regression models, as an earlier analysis of the student data demonstrated that there were differences between schools in the number of students with tutors. We found that adding school as a covariate in the regression models had no significant effect on the outcome measures of tutoring but it did reduce the effect of parents' level of education. The lack of school effects may be due in part to the number of schools included in this study (30 primary and 34 secondary), which meant that the relatively small number of students with tutors were dispersed thinly across the schools. The school indicator was not included in the subsequent analyses.

Two separate ordinal regression models were examined; the first with parents' level of education and the striving for achievement scale and the second with parents' level of education and the family support for school work scale. In both cases the dependent variable was a measure of the number of types of private tutoring received: no tutoring, one type, and two or more types (see section 3.2). To increase the reliability of the analyses it was necessary to reduce the number of empty cells, which are commonly encountered when using this procedure, so both scales were reduced to five categories of response. Due to low frequencies the lowest two categories of the striving for achievement scale were subsequently combined, leaving four categories. Parents' highest level of education was recorded in three categories (school, college or university).

Estimates of the effects of striving for achievement and parent education level on the number of types of tutoring are displayed in Table 4. As expected, the estimates show a significant effect of parents' educational level ($B = 0.25$, $SE = .09$, $p < .01$). They also show significant effects of striving for achievement, such that parents with more strongly held views (Group 4) are significantly more likely to employ two or more types of tutoring for their children. Estimates for Groups 2 and 3 are identical ($B = -0.48$, $SE = .20$, $p < .05$) whereas the estimate for Group 1 is significantly lower ($B = -1.0$, $SE = .35$, $p < .01$). These findings indicate that parents who placed a higher value on educational achievement and self-discipline were

more likely to employ several forms of private tuition. The value of the *Pseudo R²* statistic was small (*Cox and Snell R²* = .02), indicating that the model explained a small amount of variance. A similar analysis was run with the support for homework scale and there were no significant effects.

Table 4: Estimates of effects on tutoring

Parameter estimates	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	Wald	95% CI	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
No tutoring	0.90 (.24)***	14.0	0.43	1.40
One type of tutoring	1.80 (.25)***	55.9	1.40	2.30
Striving for achievement scale 1 (low)	-1.00 (.35)**	8.7	-1.70	-0.34
Striving for achievement scale 2	-0.48 (.20)*	5.5	-0.88	-0.08
Striving for achievement scale 3	-0.48 (.20)*	5.7	-0.86	-0.09
Striving for achievement scale 4 (high)	0 ^a	–	–	–
Parent education level	0.25 (.09)**	8.0	0.08	0.43

Notes. *R²* = .02 (Cox & Snell), .03 (Nagelkerke). Model $\chi^2 = 20.0$, *df* = 4, *p* < .001.

^aParameter set to zero.

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

3.7 Parents' role perceptions, resources and efficacy

The qualitative data from interviews elaborated on parents' perceptions of their role and on their sense of efficacy for supporting children's work at home. Parents also talked about demands from the education system, particularly in terms of how well their child was doing at school and the grades needed to progress to the next stage in their education.

3.7.1 Calibrating the need for tuition: Parental resources and sense of efficacy

Parents referred to specific levels of achievement required by their child to progress to the next phase of education. In an area where the 11Plus examination was used to select Year 6 pupils for entry to grammar schools, parents were conscious of the need for their child to do well and they were often aware that other parents employed tutors. Comments such as 'a lot of them had tutors to get them through the 11Plus' were made by several parents. Similarly a realization that their child was unlikely to achieve the specific GCSE grades required for entry to a desired college course or to be allowed to progress to Year 12, or the A level grades required for entry to university also prompted parents to consider employing a tutor. One parent expressed a form of monitoring of the situation and a sense that although she was able to provide sufficient support at present, she was keeping an

eye on her child's progress and would employ a tutor if needed. "I feel if the child needs it and you're unable to help yourself, yes, I wouldn't hesitate in getting the tuition, paying for it ... I feel that I'm enough for her at the moment."

As noted above, the majority of responses to closed questions indicated that the family was able to provide sufficient help, however about one third were unable to do so. Parents elaborated on the reasons why they felt unable to provide sufficient support, including their own limitations when it came to helping their children with certain subjects. Some acknowledged that they themselves had difficulties with specific aspects of the curriculum and therefore felt unable to help their child. One parent expressed how she felt unable to help her child with spelling.

I can do the maths and the sciences but the English side I struggle with you know so ... he has a tutor who gives him English lessons ... he's had it since he was five on and off because he was struggling at school and because I can't help him with his spellings because I suffer from exactly the same problem.

Another parent commented on a lack of efficacy in helping with mathematics due to differences in the methods used in schools, so it was preferable to employ a tutor who knew the current methods, rather than risk confusing the child with methods the parent would use.

He found the extra one to one help with the maths particularly useful because she knows ... this tutor ... knows the kind of things they do in the curriculum now which is something ... if I started trying to help him with his maths I'd be showing him how I used to do it however many years ago and it would be all wrong, so she certainly helped him there.

Others who felt able to support their child had insufficient time to do so, or found it less stressful to have help from a tutor, to alleviate what they thought would be difficult interactions between themselves and their child if they tried to help, even though they were familiar with the content. Comments included "It took the stress off me a bit because I knew that once a week somebody would be coming to help" and "... it's (preparation for the 11Plus) something I feel I can't do with her, 'cause there'd just be a clash".

These comments suggest that homework monitoring is a means for parents to obtain information about their child's progress. The question then is how parents respond to that information and take actions to redress the situation if they think their child would benefit from additional help. At this point their role beliefs may come in to play.

3.7.2 Parental role and role conflict

In talking about their role, a number of parents spoke about private tutoring as if it was their only real option or something that seemed the natural thing to do – they had fully accepted that private tutoring was part of their role as a parent. As one parent put it “I’d feel guilty frankly if I didn’t do what I could in that respect”. The sense of guilt referred to by this parent implies that providing a tutor is accepted as part of one’s duty and obligation as a parent.

Some parents spoke about private tuition as compensating for the role they ‘should’ provide in their children’s education, which they did not fulfill but felt they ought to. As one parent put it “I’m paying for peace of mind aren’t I?”.

Although some parents saw the provision of a private tutor as an obligation, there were also some who thought it was unfair for children to have tutors. One parent expressed a sense of conflict due to being in a selective area.

... 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.

This parent reflected the views of others who did not feel entirely comfortable about employing a tutor but felt pressured by the competitive, selective educational system. Some admitted that it was against their principles yet the needs of their child came first and they felt compelled, especially by 11Plus selection.

The qualitative comments illustrate parents’ perceptions of their role as well as some of the complexities they faced when reaching decisions about the amount of support to provide for their child. They suggest that parents weighed their child’s needs against the intellectual capital in the family, time available and emotional considerations, as well as considering the efficacy of private tuition. A sense of obligation to provide educational support was modulated by parents’ beliefs that they would be able to find a suitable tutor and that tutoring would have the desired effect.

4. Discussion and conclusions

This study aimed to identify psychological factors that may influence parents’ decisions to provide private tutoring in the form of private tutors and paid for classes to support their children’s learning and achievement in school subjects. It ex-

amined parents' motivation for employing private tutors, perceived efficacy of the family to support a child's school work and beliefs about the value of academic achievement and the importance of qualities of effort and self-regulation in learning. Parents' role perceptions were also explored.

Two scales were constructed for the research, one to measure family support for homework and a second to tap parents' orientations to striving for achievement. Both scales were found to have good psychometric properties with acceptable internal reliability. Homework scale items were conceptualized in terms of cognitive and practical forms of assistance that parents might offer. Items ranged from a general level of 'support and encourage' to more specific assistance such as giving advice on strategies. One item 'Do work for them' was endorsed by very few parents and showed low correlations with all other items so was not included in the scale. Most of the remaining items could be considered as forms of monitoring and support (MacBeath & Turner, 1990) or autonomy support as conceptualized by Cooper et al. (2000), as they captured actions that parents might take to encourage and assist their children without becoming directly involved. Our findings indicate that although parental support for homework varied a great deal, there were very few parents who did not give any support at all. In line with previous research (Cooper et al.; MacBeath & Turner, 1990) a higher level of support for homework was provided for the younger children in Year 6, as compared with those in Years 11 and 13. Parents of younger children were more likely to check that work was completed, which is consistent with previous research showing that older students are expected to be more independent learners (Cooper et al., 2000; MacBeath & Turner, 1990). Parents of younger children were also much more likely to explain work that the children found difficult, which supports MacBeath and Turner (1990)'s finding that parents are less knowledgeable about the secondary curriculum and feel less able to help. These findings are helpful in validating the Family Support scale developed for this study.

Initially, items for the striving for achievement scale were based on the notion that parents who held an incremental view of intelligence, as opposed to an entity view that sets a limit on achievement, would endorse effort as a means of increasing achievement (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Dweck, 1999). Items tapping the value placed by parents on educational achievement were also included. Factor analysis indicated that a separate latent variable underpinned the five items that formed the striving for achievement scale and conceptually this scale reflects beliefs about the importance of self-regulation and achievement. Parents who score highly on the scale value their children's effort as a means of achieving good grades at school.

Parents who scored highly on the striving for achievement scale tended to give more support for homework. This suggests that parents who value effort as a means to educational achievement are likely to be more involved in their children's education at home, however, caution should be exercised in interpreting this finding as the correlation coefficient was low. Our analysis identified a relatively small group of parents that we consider to be 'intensive educators' as they placed a high

value on effort and achievement in school and also provided several types of tuition as well as giving high levels of support for homework.

These findings give partial support to the hypothesis that parents who provide private tutoring tend to be more involved in their children's education, as proposed by Davies (2004). However, we also found that the striving for achievement scale was a significant predictor of private tutoring when educational level was included in the model. This suggests that parents' views of striving underpin both their support for homework and their participation in private tutoring.

It seems plausible that parents who monitor their children's homework are more likely to notice whether work is being set at an appropriate level and to recognize a need for additional support. This view gains some support from the reasons given by parents for not employing a tutor, where almost three quarters felt their child was doing well enough without a tutor and over half thought that the family provided enough help. The picture is not entirely clear however, as relatively few parents who did employ tutors gave as a reason the inability of the family to give sufficient support. Also, the effect of home support on private tutoring was not significant when parents' education level was controlled statistically. It would appear that several factors come into play and that homework monitoring is one of several sources of information that affect parents' decisions to employ private tutors. Parental resources such as intellectual, financial and social capital affect their ability to identify and redress concerns about a child's difficulties with school work. Some parents might expect their child's teacher to help whereas others might turn to a tutor or seek extra classes, and some parents might do both. Parents in different social circumstances have different resources and expectations, with working class parents being more likely to ask a teacher for help (Reay, 1998). Our findings revealed that there was wide variation in parents' perceptions of their role in relation to the employment of tutors, and these deserve to be explored systematically with larger samples in future research.

Parents' sense of efficacy for helping children with their school work was evident through a high level of agreement with the statement that 'there is no need (for a private tutor) as members of the family provide enough help'. Consistent with this, most parents checked that their child did their homework, explained work the child found difficult, helped to find information and gave advice on study strategies. Nevertheless, parents recognized their own limitations, particularly if they experienced difficulty with specific aspects of learning, and fewer parents of older children felt that the family could provide enough help.

Performance in tests and examinations was a major factor driving demand for private tutoring and this is consistent with research in many countries (e.g., Davies, 2004; Ireson & Rushforth, 2011; Smyth, 2009). Parents in our survey identified two additional drivers, namely to improve understanding of a subject and increase confidence, which were ranked in the top three reasons for employing a tutor. Improved understanding and appreciation of a subject may be key aspects of students' motivation to learn as they underpin enjoyment of a subject for its own sake, while improved confidence may encourage a student to continue taking

a subject in the future. Interestingly, parents' rankings are very similar to those of students, who also place increased understanding and confidence in their top three reasons for having a tutor (Ireson & Rushforth, 2011).

Parents indicated a number of preventive factors that may reduce the demand for private tutoring. One of these is the cost of employing a tutor, noted by over half of the respondents who indicated that private tuition was too expensive. This is hardly surprising in view of the costs charged by some agencies, which according to a survey in 2008 were between £23 and £29 per hour on average for a one hour tutorial (Tanner et al., 2009). Children who have specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia may need help over an extended period of time and for some parents, this level of support is simply not affordable. Other preventive factors were that private tutoring put too much pressure on children or that a child did not want a tutor. For a variety of reasons, parents who perceive a need for additional support may be unable or unwilling to provide it, or their children may resist offers of help. Provision of extra classes or one to one tuition in school could reduce the need for parents to make their own arrangements.

Inevitably, there are limitations of this study that should be acknowledged. When selecting schools for the research, care was taken to ensure an adequate representation of schools in a range of demographic areas, in order to counteract the tendency for lower response rates in less affluent families. Researchers went in to schools to administer questionnaires and succeeded in obtaining responses from students from a range of backgrounds. Students then took questionnaires home for their parents to complete but this strategy produced a low rate of return and was supplemented with direct mailing which relied on accurate addresses being provided by students. Also, in common with many studies that rely on questionnaire returns there was an element of self-selection in the parent sample. As compared with the student sample, the parent sample contained a lower proportion of parents with lower levels of education. Nevertheless, the sample contained a balance of parents with different educational levels, which was adequate for the purposes of this study. In essence the student and parent analyses may be seen as two separate studies, each with their own internal controls.

This research suggests that several psychological factors come into play as parents make choices about supporting their children's schoolwork at home and deciding whether to employ private tutors. They include parents' beliefs about the importance of striving for achievement, the value they place on academic achievement, their sense of efficacy in helping their child with schoolwork, the intellectual and financial resources the family is able to provide, and the demands made by their child and by the education system. Parents engage in a process of monitoring and weighing up their child's progress, particularly when it comes to taking tests and examinations that are the gateways to the next phase of education. By uncovering psychological factors that may influence parents' decisions to employ tutors, this paper offers a starting point for the development of robust models that combine relevant psychological factors with other factors that are already established in the literature. The landscape of private tutoring is changing and it is crucial for re-

searchers to gain a better understanding of parents' perspectives so as to help them navigate through what is currently an unregulated market.

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