

Research Paper



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REDEFINING PRIVATE TUTORING

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ABSTRACT

Pprivate tutoring industry has recorded a growth of 35% in the last five years in India. This paper argues that this growth rate is underestimated as there are various forms of supplementary tutoring which often go unrecorded. Through the anecdotal evidences, this paper suggests to call this industry as supplementary tutoring industry, rather than private tutoring industry and suggests to extend its dimensions to free tuitions, supplementary vocational training, training on short term add on courses and online tutoring into supplementary tutoring industry.

KEYWORDS: Private tuitions, coaching, vocational education, free tuitions

JEL Classifications: I20, I21, I24, I29

Section 1: INTRODUCTION

A recent survey conducted by the Associated Chamber of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) reveals that private tutoring industry in India is becoming a multi-billion dollar industry with a growth rate of about 35% in the last five years¹. The tutoring market in India is estimated to be close to \$45 billion and is expected to touch \$70 billion by the end of 2017². However, the scope of this billion dollar industry is actually underestimated because of the use of insufficient definition of private tutoring in the Indian context. This paper presents anecdotal evidences on why the definition of private tutoring is insufficient and argues that there is a need to broaden it³.

Most of the papers on private tutoring in India follow the definition by Dang and Rogers (2008) who define private tutoring as a fee-based tutoring that provides supplementary instructions to children in academic subjects they study in the mainstream education system (Azam, 2015; Dongre and Tewary, 2015). This system is sometimes refers to as “shadow education” as it mimics the regular education system

(Azam, 2015). There is huge literature for India and for other countries which documents the nature, scope, determinants, advantages and disadvantages of private tutoring, and its impact on learning outcomes of the students (see for instance, Dongre and Tewary, 2015; Snehi, 2010; Jayachandran, 2014, for India, and Bray, 2003; Ireson, 2004; Bray and Kwok, 2003 for other countries).

Some studies argue that private tutoring is cost effective and efficiency improving in providing knowledge about the subjects and improving the scores (compared to private schooling, and compared to the costs involved in undertaking measures to improve quality of public education system) (Dang and Rogers, 2008). Private tutoring is much more flexible and cater to the individual needs and overcomes the gaps and deficiencies in students’ learning (Snehi, 2010). It caters to the need of the market economy of “diploma disease” (Dore, 1976, as cited by Dang and Rogers, 2008), whereby students can stay longer in the education system (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2004) and have higher returns. However, some other studies argue that private tutoring is a result of failure of the public

education system (Kim and Lee, 2004) and growing competition in the entrance examinations for university admissions (Snehi, 2010)⁴. In some countries like Cambodia, Korea, Mauritius, and Myanmar, private tutoring has been banned (at various times) as it increases social inequalities (Dang and Rogers, 2008)⁵.

Despite this huge literature, researchers find it difficult to conduct any meaningful study on private tutoring, which is due to the difficulty in getting responses from both demand and supply sides of the private tutoring market. On the demand side, parents and students are unwilling to reveal the details pertaining to private tuitions as it gives a signal that they do not have confidence on school teachers, and on the school education system, in general, and hence have an “unfair advantage in competition with their peers” (Bray and Kwok, 2003). On the supply side, tutors, who especially give tuitions unofficially, and have untaxed income from private tutoring, are unwilling to reveal that they take tuitions (Bray and Kwok, 2003). Moreover, many tutors work independently, who are often not identified (Ireson, 2004)⁶.

Given this drawback in identifying the tutors and number of students taking tuitions, in this paper we redefine private tutoring. With the changing education system, the definition of private tuitions should also change and hence this paper opens up a debate on exactly what private tutoring should be? This paper puts forth the arguments through various case studies. Detailed qualitative survey was conducted with the Delhi University under-graduate students on private tutoring. The full set of results is not presented here. However, responses given by some of the students are presented as case studies to put the arguments in a logical sequence. The main result of the paper is to include free remedial classes, vocational training, training on short-term add-on courses and online lecture sessions in the definition of private tutoring and it can be called as *supplementary tutoring*, rather than simply private tutoring. Section 2 presents the case studies and hence explains the need to broaden the definition of supplementary tutoring. Section 3 concludes.

Section 2: UNDERSTANDING CASE STUDIES TO REDEFINE PRIVATE TUTORING

Following the definition of private tutoring given by Dang and Rogers (2008), (mentioned above), private tutoring is characterized by the following features: (1) fee based; (2) supplementary instructions; (3) for academic subjects; and (4) studied in the

mainstream education system. The case studies presented below are all the anecdotal evidences where students take private tutoring or coaching in some form or the other, but they refute either one or more than one aspect of the private tuitions defined above. Thus, we call it *supplementary tutoring*, rather than private tutoring⁷.

Case study 1: Free Supplementary Tuitions

Private tutoring is generally fee based. However, some students take tuitions free of cost, which often go unrecognized. For instance, elder siblings regularly teach their younger siblings, seniors taking remedial classes of their juniors, community members offering tuitions to students from minority groups, and many others (Ireson, 2004). One of the students in our survey responded,

“I have never taken any private tuitions or coaching in my school days. My mother is a school teacher. She used to solve all my doubts...The doubts which she couldn't solve; I used to take them to her school and got them solved from her colleagues. Almost every fortnightly, I used to visit my mother's school.”

This response satisfies three aspects of the definition of private coaching: supplementary instructions, academic subjects, and subjects studied in the main stream education system. However, it does not satisfy the property of “fee based structure”. Similar type of responses we got from other students also, who took free tuitions from their elder siblings, cousins, relatives, and neighbours. “There are various NGO's and students' voluntary groups who take free remedial classes for students who come from backward backgrounds.” responded another student.

These unpaid suppliers of supplementary tutoring are never counted as providers of private tutoring, but satisfies all other aspects of it and can have merits and demerits that private coaching has. If these are considered as part of supplementary tuition or coaching, then the percentage of students taking tuitions will increase. Moreover, calculating their economic value will increase the size of this industry⁸.

Case Study 2: Privately provided supplementary vocational education

Vocational training taken in any field is not considered as part of private tutoring, as vocational courses, by definition, are not part of academic subjects. However, students take tuitions of vocational courses to supplement their academic subjects in the main stream education system. A student said,

“We have been taught statistics as part of our curriculum and there were some computer based practical sessions. I have never worked on computer earlier. I don’t even know how to open it [switch it on]. Moreover, we were not having any computer lab or computer instructor to whom we could approach to. I have to undergo a six-month computer course at a private computer centre... I admit that it was only because of that computer course that I could successfully submit my semester assignments.”

The response of this student reveals that she has taken fee-based, supplementary instructions for a course taught in mainstream education. However, it wasn’t an academic subject for her. It was a vocational training programme for her. Completing her response, she added “I am now continuing this computer course and enrolled in a complete 3-year programme, along with my college education.” This student will definitely have an edge over other students as now she has a diploma certificate along with her regular college degree⁹. These kinds of vocational training which the mainstream education institutions are unable to provide, are never counted as part of private tutoring. Inclusion of students taking vocational training, either from government or from private institutions which the main stream education system is unable to provide, in the definition of supplementary tutoring, will increase the figures of this billion dollar industry¹⁰.

Case study 3: Supplementary subjects in the mainstream education system

School education boards in India have five main subjects. However, some education boards allow additional subjects to the students, like home science, information practices, physical education, or a third language (could be any local or foreign language)¹¹. In response to the question on additional subject taught in class XII, a student highlighted the importance of having additional subject. He said,

“I didn’t score well in History, so I included physical education as my main subject in calculating my percentage... [He proudly claimed] I go to gym every day. Physically, I was the fittest in my class. Thus, I scored highest in the practical of physical education.”

Thus, it appears that this student was getting supplementary instructions for his subject, physical education, which he included in the five main subjects to calculate his percentage, by paying monthly fees to a

gym. Another student had a similar response related to the subject Home Science. She said, “What we were taught in that subject [Home Science] is something I do daily. I had tuitions for all other subjects, but I never felt taking tuition for this subject.” These subjects are not part of academic subjects, but are being taught in the mainstream education system. Students get supplementary tutoring for these subjects time and again, in different forms. Including these additional subjects as part of supplementary tutoring will raise the percentage of students taking tuitions¹².

Case Study 4: Publically provided Add-on Courses

University of Delhi offers various short-term add-on courses to its students, which students can pursue along with their main stream education, like certificate course in foreign languages, media studies, journalism, food technology and preservations, classical and instrumental studies, and many others¹³. In response to the question of enrolment in any short-term add-on courses, a student responded,

“I am enrolled to a yearlong French language course... Classes are held in my college only... There are lot of things I couldn’t understand in French. So, I have arranged a private tutor who comes every Sunday to give me French tuitions.”

These language courses or other short term add on courses are fee based, publically provided courses, but this student has taken coaching for them. Another student, enrolled for German language course said,

“This language course [German language] is provided by DU [acronym for Delhi University], so it’s very economical. If I would have to learn German from outside, I would have to pay a huge sum of money... I have plans of doing my masters in Economics from Germany.”

These language courses are not main academic subjects but are provided by the government educational institution and students are taking tuitions for them. This implies two things. One, these short term add on courses are provided by a government institution, and hence cannot be part of private tutoring. Two, students attend classes for these courses to supplement their main stream education, to prepare themselves for their future prospects. Combining these two points imply that government is providing supplementary tutoring to the students to prepare for their future. Thus, extending the definition of supplementary tutoring to include these

short-term add-on courses will broaden nature and scope of this industry.

Case Study 5: Online Tutoring/ Lectures

Students from all fields and at all levels, especially in urban and semi-urban areas, are actively taking the advantages of online tutoring lessons. Given the gap in the demand and supply of trained teachers, many start-ups are taking this as a business opportunity and are developing live online tutoring sessions. With the increasing availability of broadband connectivity at affordable rates, the future of online tutoring market is highly promising from its current status of less than one percent of the market¹⁴. Responding to the question on taking help from online sources, a student responded, “Lot of friends have tuitions. But whenever I have any problems, I switch to YouTube videos. It’s the most versatile way of learning and that to free of cost.”

The statistics available for online tutoring are from those sources where students and tutors register themselves for online courses and have paid subscriptions. There are many free tutorial sessions, home assignments, tests, and lectures, which students can refer to and learn by themselves. Including these in the estimation of the extent of online tutoring, will increase the percentage of students getting access to supplementary tutoring in India.

Section 3: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper presents the extent of private tutoring industry in India and argues that the scope of this industry is under estimated due to use of insufficient definition of private tutoring. Through a primary survey conducted among the under graduate students of University of Delhi, this paper presents anecdotal evidences and puts forth the argument of broadening the definition of private tutoring and to call it *supplementary tutoring*. The three main areas which the paper suggests to include in the definition of supplementary tutoring are: one, free tutoring and remedial classes provided by relatives, neighbours, and students’ voluntary groups; two, vocational training, provided by the government or privately provided; and three, online tutoring and freely available lecture notes. Though this paper does not go in to the depth of the valuation of supplementary tutoring industry, however, it opens a debate for future research on supplementary education and calculation of its value for India.

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Notes

¹ Source: ASSOCHAM, “Private coaching poaches mainstream education”, <http:// ASSOCHAM.org/newsdetail.php?id=4050> (accessed on May 23, 2017)

² Source: <http://businessworld.in/article/Business-Of-Private-Tutorials-In-India-Now-A-Multi-Billion-Dollar-Industry/28-07-2016-100972/> (accessed on May 24, 2017)

³ This paper uses the terms private tuitions, private coaching, or private tutoring interchangeably.

⁴ As per the definition of private tutoring by Dang and Rogers (2008), coaching taken for the preparation for the university admission entrance examinations and for public sector employment examinations (like civil services, bank jobs, etc.) are not included. However, in the Indian context, these coaching are part of private coaching industry. It is argued that the students may find the main stream education to be insufficient to prepare them for further studies or for government sector jobs (Snehi, 2010).

⁵ Those who can afford private tutoring invest in human capital of their children and hence enjoy higher returns of this investment, leading to intergenerational inequality (Bray and Kwok, 2003).

⁶ For instance, a student can take coaching from a neighbor, without giving any fees.

⁷ To remain confidential, we are not mentioning the names of the students whom we have interviewed. Moreover, to remain gender neutral, we have tried to refer to a student in both the forms, males and females.

⁸ Creating counterfactuals is a way to measure the value of these informal ways of tuitions. Researchers ask questions like, “What money will the household spend if their child has to get tuition from outside than from his own elder sibling?” These types of counterfactual studies are conducted in knowing the economic value of the work done by the housewives, which otherwise are not considered as economic activity. Researchers have found that the value of GDP increases with the inclusion of this calculated economic value of the work done by housewives (source: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brycecovert/2012/05/30/putting-a-price-tag-on-unpaidhousework/#4f3d74cc35c6> (accessed on May 24, 2017). Calculating similar value for free private tutoring is beyond the scope of this paper, but we might deal with it in future studies.

⁹ This certificate can be used as a signaling devise or as a human capital enhancement instrument in the labour market (Gupta, 2015).

¹⁰ Note that here we are not arguing to include all vocational training into supplementary tutoring. Consider an example. A student who wants to make her career in aviation industry is undergoing training of Air Hostess. This is not supplementary tutoring. However, if she has to supplement her training by joining English speaking or personality development classes separately, then these extra classes of English and personality development can be considered as part of supplementary tutoring.

¹¹ Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) is the central educational board for school education in India. There are state boards also, but the working system of these boards is more or less similar.

¹² Value of supplementary tutoring in this form can be calculated by forming counterfactual questions, similar to the ones explained in footnote number: 9

¹³Details are available at Delhi University website, www.du.ac.in (accessed on May 24, 2017).

¹⁴Source: <https://yourstory.com/2016/09/online-tutoring-market-india/> (accessed on May 24, 2017)

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