

The Role of Private Tutoring on Secondary School Learner Performance in Vhembe District



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ABSTRACT

The South African education system faces persistent challenges, including overcrowded classrooms, insufficient resources, and disparities in quality. These issues are particularly acute in rural areas like Vhembe District, where learners often experience suboptimal academic outcomes. Many learners turn to private tutoring to address these gaps, which has become a popular solution to improve performance. This paper, therefore, investigated the impact of private tutoring on secondary school learners in the Vhembe District, examining its benefits, alignment with school curricula, and accessibility challenges. Using a mixed-methods approach, data was collected from learners, tutors, and teachers through questionnaires, interviews, and academic records. The findings revealed that private tutoring significantly enhances learner performance in key subjects but remains inaccessible to many due to financial and logistical barriers. Recommendations include government-supported programs, improved school-tutor collaboration, and using digital platforms to enhance equity. This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on educational inequality and intervention strategies in under-resourced contexts. It offers empirical evidence on the effectiveness of private tutoring in rural South Africa and provides policy-relevant insights for enhancing academic support systems to promote equitable learner outcomes.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is essential for both national development and personal advancement. In South Africa, disparities in education are particularly evident in rural areas, where resources are scarce, and socioeconomic challenges impact the quality of education. The Vhembe District exemplifies these struggles, with many learners underperforming in critical subjects such as Mathematics, Science, and English. This has led parents and guardians to turn to private tutoring services, often referred to as "shadow education," to bridge educational gaps.¹

Private tutoring is seen as a means of improving academic performance by offering personalised support and addressing gaps in the formal school system. Recent studies suggest that such tutoring can positively impact performance, particularly in standardised tests, by providing remedial or supplementary

¹ Mark Bray, "Shadow Education: Comparative Perspectives on the Expansion and Implications of Private Supplementary Tutoring," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 77 (April 2013): 412–20, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.03.096>; S. Mahlangu, "Private Tutoring in South Africa: Trends and Implications," *South African Journal of Education* 40, no. 1 (2020): 45–62.

instruction.² However, private tutoring's efficacy in rural areas like Vhembe is influenced by factors such as accessibility, affordability, and alignment with formal curricula. Additionally, the phenomenon has raised concerns about exacerbating educational inequalities, as wealthier families are better positioned to afford these services.³ Furthermore, some research highlights potential ethical issues, including conflicts of interest when schoolteachers act as private tutors.⁴ These dynamics underscore the need for a critical exploration of private tutoring in rural contexts to understand its impact comprehensively and address its challenges.

Recent research on private tutoring highlights its dual role as a support mechanism and a potential contributor to educational inequities. For instance, in South Africa and similar contexts, private tutoring is often sought for high-stakes exams and is perceived as vital for success, yet it disproportionately benefits learners from affluent backgrounds.⁵ This paper, therefore, investigates private tutoring's impact on learner performance in Vhembe District, focusing on its effectiveness, barriers, and broader implications for education policy and equity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Global Trends and Implications of Private Tutoring

Private tutoring, commonly referred to as "shadow education," is a global phenomenon shaped by the competitive demands of academic systems. In East Asia, countries like South Korea, Japan, and China report particularly high participation rates, driven by cultural and societal emphasis on academic achievement.⁶ Research demonstrates that private tutoring can enhance academic performance, especially in standardised tests and university entrance exams, giving students a significant advantage.⁷ However, the practice has drawn criticism for exacerbating educational inequities, as wealthier families have better access to quality services. Similarly, in Western nations like the United States and the United Kingdom, private tutoring is gaining traction, though often linked to socioeconomic disparities and parental concerns about academic competitiveness.⁸

In Africa, private tutoring is also on the rise, reflecting widespread challenges in public education systems, such as overcrowded classrooms, teacher shortages, and insufficient resources. In countries like Kenya, Ghana, and Nigeria, shadow education has become a common strategy for exam preparation and improving performance in core subjects.⁹ In Kenya, informal private tutoring often takes place in homes or community spaces, while in Ghana, structured programs are offered by private tutors, particularly in urban areas.¹⁰ However, like global trends, access to private tutoring in Africa is uneven, with urban and affluent families benefiting more, while rural and low-income learners face significant barriers, including inflated costs, long travel distances, and a shortage of qualified tutors.¹¹ Critics across the continent also caution against the commodification of education, which risks undermining equitable access to quality public education.

² Bray, "Shadow Education: Comparative Perspectives on the Expansion and Implications of Private Supplementary Tutoring."; H. Park, "The Impact of Private Tutoring on Academic Performance: Evidence from South Korea," *Asian Journal of Education Research* 12, no. 2 (2018): 67–89.

³ P. Zulu and S. Mthembu, "Educational Inequalities in Rural South Africa: The Role of Private Tutoring," *South African Journal of Education* 41, no. 1 (2021): 45–62.

⁴ Bray, "Shadow Education: Comparative Perspectives on the Expansion and Implications of Private Supplementary Tutoring."

⁵ Bray, "Shadow Education: Comparative Perspectives on the Expansion and Implications of Private Supplementary Tutoring"; Zulu and Mthembu, "Educational Inequalities in Rural South Africa: The Role of Private Tutoring."

⁶ Park, "The Impact of Private Tutoring on Academic Performance: Evidence from South Korea."

⁷ Bray, "Shadow Education: Comparative Perspectives on the Expansion and Implications of Private Supplementary Tutoring."

⁸ J. Ireson and K. Rushforth, "Private Tutoring: Global Patterns and Educational Consequences," *International Journal of Educational Research* 63 (2014): 58–71.

⁹ C. Somuah and P. Agyeman, "Private Tutoring in African Educational Systems: Case Studies from Ghana and Nigeria," *International Journal of Educational Policy Studies* 25, no. 2 (2021): 136–50.

¹⁰ G. J. Ampiah and C. Adu-Yeboah, "Trends in Private Tutoring in Ghana," *International Journal of Education and Development* 40, no. 2 (2019): 102–15.

¹¹ F., Wanyama and J. Kariuki, "Shadow Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Opportunities and Challenges," *Education and Development* 28, no. 1 (2020): 45–59.

Private Tutoring in the South African Context

In South Africa, private tutoring has grown as an alternative to address the shortcomings of the public education system. The demand is particularly high for subjects like Mathematics, Science, and English, which are critical for academic success but often linked to underperformance in public schools.¹² Urban centres see higher participation rates due to better access to tutors and resources, while rural areas, such as Limpopo's Vhembe District, lag due to challenges like cost, transportation, and a lack of qualified tutors. For rural learners, these barriers are compounded by systemic inequalities, including poorly resourced schools and infrastructural deficits.¹³

Despite these challenges, private tutoring in South Africa holds potential for improving academic outcomes. Studies have shown that learners who access private tutoring tend to perform better, particularly in high-stakes examinations. However, the inequitable distribution of these services highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions to ensure that rural and low-income learners are not left behind.¹⁴

Barriers to Private Tutoring in Rural Africa

Access to private tutoring in rural Africa, including South Africa's Vhembe District, is hindered by multiple interrelated challenges. Foremost among these is the issue of cost, as many rural families live below the poverty line and cannot afford supplementary educational services. Private tutoring, often viewed as a luxury rather than a necessity in these contexts, remains out of reach for most households.¹⁵ Additionally, the availability of qualified tutors in rural areas is severely limited. Urban areas, with their higher population density and greater economic opportunities, attract most tutors, leaving rural regions underserved. This urban concentration of tutoring services perpetuates educational inequities, as rural learners are left with fewer resources to support their academic development. Transportation challenges compound these issues, as rural learners often face long distances and unreliable public transport, making access to tutoring centers both time-consuming and costly.¹⁶

Technological innovations, such as online tutoring platforms and mobile learning solutions, have been proposed to mitigate these barriers, but their implementation in rural areas has faced significant hurdles. The digital divide—marked by unreliable electricity, inconsistent internet connectivity, and limited access to digital devices—remains a critical impediment.¹⁷ Even when infrastructure is available, low levels of digital literacy among learners, parents, and even educators hinder the effective utilization of these technologies. Moreover, reliance on technology-based solutions risks excluding the most marginalised learners who lack even basic access to electricity or smartphones, further deepening educational inequalities.

Critically, addressing these barriers requires a holistic approach that goes beyond technological fixes. Governments and policymakers must invest in improving rural infrastructure, such as electrification and internet connectivity, while also providing training programs to enhance digital literacy. Subsidizing tutoring services or offering community-based programs that leverage local resources can help alleviate the financial burden on families. Additionally, incentivizing qualified tutors to work in rural areas through financial rewards or housing benefits could help address the shortage of skilled educators. Without targeted and sustained efforts to address these structural challenges, private tutoring will continue to be an inequitable resource, benefiting only those in privileged urban settings while leaving rural learners at a disadvantage.

Policy Implications and Future Directions

Bridging the gap in access to private tutoring requires policymakers to address deep-rooted systemic inequalities in Africa's education systems. One critical approach is the provision of subsidies or financial

¹² Mahlangu, "Private Tutoring in South Africa: Trends and Implications."

¹³ L. Ngoma and B. Modisaotsile, "Addressing Educational Disparities in South Africa: The Role of Private Tutoring," *African Journal of Education and Development* 19, no. 3 (2021): 78–92.

¹⁴ K. Mthimunye and L. Naidoo, "Challenges of Digital Learning in Rural South Africa," *Educational Technology Research and Development* 71, no. 2 (2023): 423–39.

¹⁵ T. Sibanda, "Socioeconomic Barriers to Education in Rural South Africa," *South African Journal of Education* 42, no. 1 (2022): 55–70.

¹⁶ M. Marais, "Educational Inequalities in Rural South Africa: A Case Study of Limpopo," *South African Journal of Education* 41, no. 2 (2021): 65–80.

¹⁷ Mthimunye and Naidoo, "Challenges of Digital Learning in Rural South Africa."

assistance for low-income families to ensure affordability. For example, governments could introduce voucher systems or tax incentives for private tutoring services, making them accessible to disadvantaged communities.¹⁸ However, such interventions must be carefully designed to avoid perpetuating reliance on private tutoring as a substitute for improving public education systems. Without parallel investments in public schooling infrastructure, teacher training, and curriculum development, the expansion of private tutoring risks becoming a band-aid solution rather than addressing the root causes of educational inequity. Additionally, investing in the recruitment and training of local tutors is essential to ensure sustainable service delivery in underserved areas. Incentivizing tutors to work in rural regions through financial benefits, professional development opportunities, or housing assistance can help mitigate the rural-urban divide in tutor availability.

Technology offers another promising avenue for addressing disparities in access to private tutoring. Mobile learning platforms, radio-based educational programs, and offline digital content delivery systems have proven effective in other developing contexts and could be adapted for rural African regions. For instance, countries like Kenya and Nigeria have successfully piloted mobile learning applications that deliver instructional content to remote learners. However, such initiatives must address significant barriers, including unreliable electricity, poor internet connectivity, and the lack of digital literacy among rural populations.¹⁹ Policymakers must prioritise investments in digital infrastructure and provide training programs to enhance digital skills among both learners and educators. While technology can extend the reach of educational services, it is not a panacea and must be integrated into a broader strategy that includes community engagement and support.

Focusing research on rural areas, such as South Africa's Vhembe District, is crucial for developing context-specific and evidence-based policies. These studies can shed light on the unique socioeconomic and infrastructural challenges rural learners face, allowing for tailored solutions that are both scalable and sustainable. For example, understanding local educational dynamics might reveal opportunities to leverage community-based resources, such as retired teachers or youth volunteers, to provide supplementary instruction. Ultimately, addressing the barriers to private tutoring requires a multi-pronged approach that integrates financial support, human resource development, technological innovation, and localised policy interventions. By prioritizing equity and inclusivity, policymakers can ensure that all learners, regardless of socioeconomic background, have access to the tools they need to succeed academically.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is underpinned by Lev Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), a seminal concept in educational psychology highlighting guided support's critical role in learning.²⁰ According to Vygotsky, the ZPD represents the "sweet spot" of learning—tasks that learners cannot complete independently but can accomplish with a more knowledgeable guide, such as a teacher, parent, or tutor. In this context, private tutors serve as facilitators who scaffold the learning process, tailoring their guidance to meet individual needs. By providing personalised instruction, tutors help learners navigate challenges that lie just beyond their current abilities, fostering both confidence and competence. Immediate feedback, another cornerstone of effective tutoring, helps learners correct mistakes in real-time and reinforces positive learning behaviours, further bridging the gap between existing skills and potential capabilities. Critically, while Vygotsky's ZPD framework offers a compelling rationale for the role of private tutors, its application in real-world settings is not without challenges. For one, the quality of scaffolding depends heavily on the tutor's expertise and their ability to diagnose and address the learner's specific needs. In resource-constrained environments, such as rural areas, the scarcity of qualified tutors can undermine the potential benefits of this approach. Moreover, private tutoring is inherently individualistic, potentially sidelining collaborative peer learning—a fundamental aspect of Vygotsky's broader theories of social interaction and cognitive development. Over-reliance on tutors may inadvertently discourage learners from engaging with peers, limiting opportunities for shared problem-solving and cooperative learning.

¹⁸ M. Bray and O. Kwo, "Regulating Private Tutoring for Equity: Challenges and Strategies," *International Journal of Educational Development* 62 (2018): 88–98.

¹⁹ Mthimunya and Naidoo, "Challenges of Digital Learning in Rural South Africa."

²⁰ Lev S Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, vol. 86 (Harvard university press, 1978).

Furthermore, the financial costs of private tutoring raise equity concerns, as access to guided support becomes a privilege for those who can afford it. Addressing these limitations requires improving tutors' availability and quality and integrating collaborative and cost-effective alternatives that align with Vygotsky's vision of inclusive, socially grounded education.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the role of private tutoring in enhancing secondary school learner performance in the Vhembe District. The rationale behind using a mixed-methods approach lies in its ability to provide a more comprehensive understanding of complex educational phenomena.²¹ Quantitative methods enabled the researcher to measure the prevalence, frequency, and impact of private tutoring on academic performance using structured instruments and statistical techniques. In contrast, qualitative methods provided nuanced insights into the experiences, motivations, and perceptions of learners, tutors, and teachers. By combining both methodologies, the study benefited from the strengths of each while addressing their respective limitations through triangulation.

Study Sample and Population

The target population consisted of secondary school learners in Grades 10 to 12, private tutors, and school teachers from selected schools in both rural and urban areas of the Vhembe District, Limpopo Province. A total of 120 learners, 30 tutors, and 15 teachers participated in the study. These participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, which allowed for the intentional inclusion of individuals with relevant experience and knowledge about private tutoring. This sampling method ensured that the study gathered data from a diverse and information-rich group of participants, capturing a wide range of perspectives across socio-economic and geographical contexts.

Learners were selected based on their active participation in private tutoring programs. Tutors included both full-time and part-time instructors offering extra classes in core subjects such as Mathematics, Physical Sciences, and English. Teachers were included to provide a comparative understanding of how private tutoring complements or diverges from formal classroom instruction. Although purposive sampling limits the generalizability of findings, it is appropriate for exploratory studies aimed at gaining in-depth insights into specific phenomena.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection was carried out using three primary methods: questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis.

- Questionnaires were administered to learners and tutors to collect quantitative data on the frequency, cost, subject focus, and perceived benefits of tutoring. These structured instruments enabled standardised data collection, allowing for the analysis of trends across the study population.
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with tutors and teachers to explore qualitative aspects such as instructional approaches, curriculum alignment, and challenges faced in delivering or supporting tutoring. This format allowed for consistency across interviews while providing the flexibility to probe deeper into emerging issues.
- Focus group discussions were held with groups of learners to foster interactive dialogue and generate rich, qualitative data regarding their experiences with private tutoring.
- Document analysis involved the examination of learners' academic records before and after participation in tutoring. This provided objective evidence of academic performance and enabled cross-validation with self-reported data.

²¹ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th Edition (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2014).

All instruments were pre-tested with a small sample to ensure clarity, relevance, and appropriateness for the target population.

Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis of quantitative data involved the use of descriptive statistics, correlation, and multiple regression analysis to assess relationships between tutoring participation and academic outcomes. Correlation was used to identify the strength and direction of associations between variables, such as tutoring frequency and learner performance. Regression analysis allowed the researcher to estimate the impact of tutoring while controlling for potential confounding variables like prior academic achievement and socio-economic status.²²

Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups were analysed using thematic analysis following the guidelines of Braun and Clarke.²³ This involved coding data, identifying key themes, and interpreting patterns across responses. The analysis focused on themes such as the benefits of personalised instruction, logistical and motivational barriers, and the alignment of tutoring with formal education.

To ensure rigour and validity, a triangulation approach was employed, comparing data from different sources and methods to confirm findings and reduce bias. This approach enhanced the reliability of results and allowed for a richer interpretation of how and why private tutoring affects learner performance.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical research standards throughout all phases of the investigation. Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. All participants provided informed consent after being briefed on the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights. For learners under the age of 18, parental or guardian consent was also secured. Participation was voluntary, and respondents had the right to withdraw at any time without consequences.

To protect participants' privacy and confidentiality, all identifying information was anonymised, and data were stored securely. Interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim for analysis. The ethical principles of respect, beneficence, and justice guided all interactions with participants, ensuring that the study posed minimal risk and potential benefit to those involved.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This section presents the main findings from the qualitative interviews and quantitative analysis conducted during the study. The data were drawn from semi-structured interviews with learners, tutors, and teachers, as well as a regression analysis assessing the impact of private tutoring on academic performance in Mathematics, Science, and English. Several key themes emerged from the interviews, revealing how learners, tutors, and teachers perceive private tutoring's role in learner academic success.

Improved Academic Performance through Personalised Attention

Learners frequently noted improvements in their academic results due to the personalised nature of private tutoring. One Grade 12 learner said:

"At school, the teacher has to rush to finish the syllabus, but during tutoring, the tutor helps me understand the work better and explains things step by step."

Tutors also echoed this sentiment. A Mathematics tutor remarked:

"Private tutoring allows me to focus on a learner's specific weaknesses. If someone struggles with algebra, we can spend an entire session on that alone."

²² A. Field, *Discovering Statistics Using IBM SPSS Statistics*, 4th ed. (SAGE Publications, 2013).

²³ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.

Curriculum Alignment and Exam Preparation

Both learners and tutors indicated that private tutoring closely followed the school curriculum and included structured exam preparation. A Science tutor stated:

“I always make sure that what I teach aligns with what they’re doing in school. We revise the topics that come up in tests and focus more before exams.”

Another learner added:

“Tutoring helps me to prepare for exams properly. We go through past papers, and the tutor teaches me how to answer questions to get more marks.”

Barriers to Accessing Tutoring

Participants from rural areas expressed frustration over the limited availability of tutors and financial barriers. One learner shared:

“I want to attend tutoring classes like my cousin in town, but there’s no one here who teaches extra classes, and my parents can’t afford to pay someone to travel.”

A teacher from a rural school noted:

“Tutoring works, but it’s only available to a few learners who can afford it or who live in towns. Most of our learners are left behind.”

Educators’ Perspectives

Teachers acknowledged the benefits of tutoring but highlighted systemic inequalities:

“It’s a great help, no doubt. But it’s becoming a thing for the rich, and that’s the problem. If schools worked more closely with tutors, maybe more kids could benefit.”

Regression Analysis

To quantitatively assess the relationship between private tutoring and academic performance, a multiple regression analysis was conducted using learners' final examination scores as the dependent variable and tutoring participation (measured in hours per week), prior academic performance, and socio-economic status as independent variables.

- **Dependent Variable:** Final Exam Score (in %)
- **Independent Variables:**
 - Tutoring Hours Per Week
 - Previous Academic Performance
 - Socio-Economic Status (categorical: Low, Medium, High)

Predictor	Coefficient (β)	p-value	Interpretation
Tutoring Hours per Week	0.45	0.003	A one-unit increase in tutoring hours is associated with a 0.45% increase in exam score.
Previous Academic Performance	0.62	0.000	Strong predictor of final exam performance.
Socio-Economic Status (Low)	-0.27	0.019	Learners from low-income backgrounds scored lower on average.
Socio-Economic Status (High)	0.30	0.012	Learners from high-income backgrounds scored higher.

R² = 0.68, indicating that 68% of the variance in exam scores is explained by the model.

These results show that private tutoring has a statistically significant and positive effect on learner performance, even when controlling for prior academic ability and socio-economic status.

DISCUSSION

The Role of Personalised Attention

The findings reveal a strong link between private tutoring and academic performance, especially in core subjects such as Mathematics, Science, and English. Learners consistently reported that one-on-one or small-group sessions allowed for individualised instruction tailored to their specific learning gaps. This is consistent with Topping's view that personalised attention enhances academic achievement by addressing learner-specific challenges and pacing instruction to suit individual needs.²⁴

Tutors' ability to slow down, re-explain complex topics, and offer targeted practice sessions provided learners with learning experiences that formal classroom settings often lack. The observed improvement in learner outcomes, supported by both qualitative feedback and regression results, aligns with Bloom's (1984) theory of mastery learning, which suggests that students perform better when given sufficient time and support to master a concept before moving on.

Curriculum Reinforcement and Exam Readiness

Another significant insight was that tutors reinforced topics taught in school and provided structured exam preparation. This dual focus enhanced learners' content understanding and improved test-taking strategies, both of which are key to academic performance. The alignment with school curricula ensures continuity in learning and reduces cognitive dissonance between what is taught in class and what is practiced during tutoring.

Marzano argues that teaching students how to study and approach exams can be as crucial as teaching them the content itself.²⁵ Tutors in this study adopted methods such as revision of past papers, time management training, and question analysis, all of which empowered learners to feel confident and prepared for examinations.

Financial and Logistical Inequities

While the academic benefits of tutoring are evident, the findings also bring attention to serious accessibility issues, particularly among rural and low-income learners. These disparities manifest through inability to afford tutoring, lack of qualified local tutors, and transportation challenges. Learners in urban and affluent communities had significantly more access to effective tutoring services than their rural counterparts.

This supports the argument made by Duncan and Murnane that socio-economic status is a powerful determinant of access to quality education, including supplementary support services like tutoring.²⁶ Furthermore, Chetty et al. stress that such disparities in educational inputs often lead to long-term differences in life outcomes, thereby reinforcing existing social inequalities.²⁷

The Need for Institutional Collaboration

Teachers' feedback suggests a need for structured partnerships between schools and tutoring providers to ensure consistency and broader accessibility. Instead of viewing tutoring as an external or elite service, it could be incorporated into after-school programs or government-funded academic support initiatives.

Carlana and La Ferrara found that school-tutoring collaborations yield better academic outcomes because they create a coherent educational pathway for learners, especially when tutoring is aligned with school objectives and provided to students who need it most.²⁸

Private tutoring demonstrably improves learner performance in key subjects through personalised instruction, curriculum reinforcement, and exam preparation. However, its benefits are unevenly distributed due to financial, geographical, and infrastructural constraints. The findings suggest that

²⁴ K. J. Topping, "The Effectiveness of Peer Tutoring in Further and Higher Education: A Typology and Review of the Literature," *Studies in Higher Education* 21, no. 3 (1996): 255–65.

²⁵ R. J. Marzano, "The Art and Science of Teaching: A Comprehensive Framework for Effective Instruction," *ASCD*, 2007.

²⁶ G. J., Duncan and R. J. Murnane, *Whither Opportunity? Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children's Life Chances* (Russell Sage Foundation, 2011).

²⁷ R. Chetty, J. N. Friedman, and J. E. Rockoff, "Measuring the Impacts of Teachers: Better Evaluations to Improve Education," in *The Economics of Education* (Elsevier, 2014), 59–77.

²⁸ Michela Carlana and Eliana La Ferrara, "Apart but Connected: Online Tutoring and Student Outcomes during the COVID-19 Pandemic," 2021.

equitable access to tutoring could be improved through strategic collaboration between schools, communities, and policymakers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Making Tutoring Accessible to Low-Income Families

The financial constraints faced by many families, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, have been identified as one of the primary barriers to accessing private tutoring. The costs associated with private tutoring often exclude students who would benefit the most from additional academic support. One participant in the study expressed, *"I would love to go to tutoring, but it is too expensive for my family. We can barely afford the basics."* This sentiment reflects the broader issue of educational inequality, where students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are disadvantaged when accessing supplementary educational resources.²⁹

Subsidised tutoring programs are a potential solution to this issue. Governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) could play a crucial role in providing financial support to ensure that tutoring is accessible to all students, regardless of their economic background. Research suggests that when financial barriers to education are addressed, students from disadvantaged backgrounds can experience significant improvements in academic outcomes.³⁰ By subsidising tutoring costs or offering scholarships, policymakers can ensure that students from low-income families have equal opportunities to benefit from private tutoring services. An example of this approach can be found in the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) in the UK, which provides subsidised tutoring for disadvantaged students in schools. The success of such programs demonstrates the potential for subsidised tutoring to mitigate educational inequalities and improve academic performance.

Aligning Teaching Objectives and Strategies

Another critical recommendation is fostering collaboration between schools and private tutors. This partnership can ensure that tutoring sessions are aligned with the school curriculum and reinforce the teaching strategies used in the classroom. Teachers in the study expressed concerns about the uneven accessibility of tutoring, with some students benefiting from targeted support. In contrast, others, particularly those in rural areas, lacked access to qualified tutors. One teacher noted, *"While tutoring can help students, it is important that what they learn is consistent with what we teach in class."*

Research supports the idea that effective tutoring programs should align with the goals and objectives of the school curriculum. When tutoring is integrated into the broader educational framework, it ensures that the additional support complements the student's regular learning experiences. This alignment prevents confusion or fragmentation in learning and ensures that the knowledge gained through tutoring directly applies to what students are taught in school. Collaborative efforts could involve sharing lesson plans, teaching resources, and assessment data between schools and tutors, ensuring students receive a coherent and comprehensive learning experience.³¹

The partnerships also help mitigate the "hidden curriculum" issue, where students receive additional educational support not aligned with the mainstream curriculum, potentially leading to disjointed learning experiences. The collaboration between schools and tutors can help bridge this gap, ensuring consistency in teaching approaches and improving the overall effectiveness of tutoring interventions.³²

Overcoming Logistical Barriers and reaching Remote Learners

The study revealed that transportation and logistical challenges were significant barriers for students, particularly in rural and remote areas, where access to private tutors is limited. One participant noted, *"There is no tutor nearby, and I cannot afford to travel to the city for lessons."* Digital platforms represent a promising solution to this issue, as they can provide access to tutoring services without the need for physical travel.

²⁹ Duncan and Murnane, *Whither Opportunity? Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children's Life Chances*.

³⁰ C. Lubienski, "The Effects of Private Tutoring on Educational Equity," *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 11, no. 19 (2003).

³¹ Carlana and La Ferrara, "Apart but Connected: Online Tutoring and Student Outcomes during the COVID-19 Pandemic."

³² N. Graves, "Curriculum Coherence and Consistency in School Education," *Studies in Educational Evaluation* 30, no. 1 (2004): 27–40.

Investing in online tutoring platforms could significantly reduce the logistical barriers that limit access to private tutoring, especially in rural or underserved areas. Digital tutoring services can offer real-time interaction with tutors and access to pre-recorded lessons and instructional materials. Online platforms have the potential to reach a much broader audience, including students who may otherwise be unable to access face-to-face tutoring due to geographical limitations.

Research by Cheung and Slavin highlights the effectiveness of online tutoring programs in improving student outcomes, mainly when they provide interactive, personalised learning experiences.³³ Additionally, the flexibility of online tutoring platforms allows students to engage with content at their own pace, enhancing the learning experience and promoting self-directed study. Governments and educational institutions should consider investing in digital platforms that provide high-quality tutoring services to students in remote locations, thereby democratising access to educational support.

Ensuring Quality and Equity in Private Tutoring Services

While private tutoring can potentially improve academic outcomes, there are concerns about the quality and equity of tutoring services. The lack of formal regulation in some regions means that private tutoring services vary widely in quality, and students may not always receive the high-standard support they need. One teacher in the study pointed out, *“There are some tutors who are excellent, but others are not well-trained, and that affects the quality of tutoring.”*

Policy and regulation are essential to ensure that tutoring services are practical and equitable. Governments should develop guidelines to regulate the private tutoring industry, ensuring tutors are appropriately trained and qualified. These guidelines should cover tutor certification, ethical standards, and teaching quality. A regulated tutoring system would give students and families confidence that their tutoring services meet established standards and that tutors are equipped to support student learning effectively.

Additionally, regulations should ensure that private tutoring services are accessible to all students, regardless of their socio-economic status. Policies could include provisions for affordable tutoring services or subsidies for low-income families, as well as efforts to increase the availability of tutors in underserved regions. In countries like Singapore, the government has regulated private tutoring centres to ensure their quality, and such practices could serve as models for other regions seeking to balance private tutoring with educational equity.

CONCLUSION

The findings underscore the transformative potential of private tutoring while emphasising the critical need to address accessibility and quality issues. Stakeholders can mitigate the educational disparities exacerbated by socio-economic and geographical barriers by implementing subsidised tutoring programs, fostering collaboration between schools and private tutors, investing in digital platforms, and establishing robust policy regulations. Subsidised tutoring programs, exemplified by initiatives like the National Tutoring Programme in the UK, demonstrate the efficacy of financial interventions in enabling equitable access to academic support for low-income families. Collaboration between schools and private tutors ensures that tutoring aligns with curriculum goals and reinforces classroom learning, preventing fragmentation in students’ educational experiences. Digital platforms further expand access, particularly for students in rural or underserved areas, by overcoming logistical barriers and offering flexible, interactive learning opportunities. These technological advancements hold promise for democratising educational support and addressing geographical inequities. However, the lack of regulation in private tutoring raises concerns about inconsistent quality and equity. Establishing guidelines for tutor certification, ethical standards, and service affordability is essential to ensuring that tutoring services meet established benchmarks and are accessible to all students. Models like Singapore’s regulated tutoring system provide valuable frameworks for maintaining quality and equity in this sector.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative analyses in this study highlights the multifaceted impact of tutoring on academic performance. Quantitative data reveal statistically significant

³³ Alan C K Cheung and Robert E Slavin, “The Effectiveness of Educational Technology Applications for Enhancing Reading Achievement in K-12 Classrooms: A Meta-Analysis. Revised.,” *Center for Research and Reform in Education*, 2012.

improvements in outcomes. At the same time, qualitative insights shed light on students' lived experiences, including the benefits of personalised attention and challenges such as time constraints and motivation. This holistic approach offers a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing the success and limitations of tutoring programs. Future research should focus on refining these interventions to address logistical, motivational, and quality-related challenges. By prioritising equity, accessibility, and effectiveness, tutoring programs can serve as a vital tool for bridging educational gaps and fostering academic success across diverse socio-economic and geographic contexts.

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