

Private Tutoring in Jordan: Underpinning Factors and Impacts

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Abstract

This paper examines the factors underpinning the spread of private tutoring in Jordan and its social, educational and economic impacts. The high value attributed to education in Jordanian society increases the demand for private tutoring in general, and especially for students during the last year of secondary school. Boys recorded the highest demand for private tutoring. While the spread of private tutoring in Jordan is lower compared to other countries, it is higher in the southern part of Jordan compared to other regions within the Kingdom.

Introduction

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has few natural resources. Education is perceived by Jordanians as an important resource in securing a decent life for the people of Jordan. The desire to obtain the General Secondary Education Certificate Examination (GSECE) motivates many families to turn to private tutoring for their children. Hence, examining the prevalence of private tutoring in Jordan is of great importance as this phenomenon has increased despite significant investments of the state in the educational system.

Private tutoring is not specific to Jordan. It is a worldwide phenomenon and a large-scale industry in several countries (Davies 2004; Tansel and Bircan 2006; Dang and Rogers 2008). In many developed countries (e.g. Canada and USA) the demand for private tutoring has increased (Bray and Kwok 2003; Aurini, 2004). Private tutoring impacts society and its stratification. It is a generalized phenomenon, advantaging the upper social classes and exacerbating the burden on the lower established social classes. This implies that private tutoring is not perceived as a luxury. Tansel and Bircan (2006) argue that students who take private tutoring believe that their chances of successfully moving through the educational system will be increased. Moreover, they found that the spread of private tutoring is related to problems within the educational system in developing countries, including an inadequate number of universities, large class size, and low public educational expenditures.

Tansel and Bircan (2006) define private tutoring as "the education outside the formal schooling system where the tutor teaches particular subject(s) in exchange for a financial gain." This financial gain has an impact on the student's family. It adds additional financial commitments, as is the case for instance in Vietnam where private tutoring is an essential element of the household budget (Dang 2007). The economic impacts of private tutoring affect parents' decision to enroll their children in private tutoring based on children's gender (Safarzyńska, 2011). However, Elbadawy and colleagues (2004) found that in Egypt there is no difference between boys and girls in relying on private tutoring.

Some researchers have shown positive outcomes from private tutoring. Mischo and Haag (2002) concluded in their study that certain types of private tutoring can improve school performance. A Bangladesh study identified parents who reported a positive impact of for-profit private tutoring on their children's school performance (Nath, 2007). Moreover, private tutoring helps teachers improve their poor financial situation and social status. Popa and Acedo (2006) found that Romanian teachers who also work as private tutors may have more respected social status, enjoy greater economic rewards, and even exert political influence. Equally important, Davies' (2004) study in Canada found that parents who employ tutors are generally satisfied with public education, but they are less satisfied than other parents and tend to be more involved in their children's schooling. He concludes that for many parents, private tutoring represents "school choice by default," an affordable alternative to private schools. Private tutoring and its impacts in Jordan are not fully studied in spite of the prevalence of this phenomenon. Therefore it is important to identify the social, economic and academic factors and impacts on the families.

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Types of private tutoring in Jordan

There are three types of private tutoring in Jordan. The first type is one-to-one tutoring, in which a teacher teaches a student at home, either the student's or the teacher's. This type of private tutoring is very expensive compared to other forms of tutoring. The teacher is paid per hour, and the cost is influenced by the subject (e.g. Mathematics, English, Arabic, etc.), and by the teacher's reputation and experience in the subject. The second type is provided by school teachers in coordination with the school's administration, usually before school hours. This type is offered to students in primary and secondary schools. The teacher is not paid, but she/he is asked to tutor on a voluntary basis by the principal and the educational supervisor to help students improve their academic performance. The teacher is rewarded morally by getting a thank you letter from the principal. The third type of private tutoring takes place in "cultural centers".

There are 263 centers in Amman, the capital of Jordan (MOE, Dept. of Cultural Centers). However, not all of them provide private tutoring because the Ministry of Education has a broad definition of what a center is: "any educational institution which imparts any kind of knowledge and skills without being restricted by the age of the trainee or the duration of training, where training is in the form of training courses" (MOE, Dept. of Cultural Centers). These centers hold small-size classes and a "positive" environment for the student to interact with the teacher. These centers try to attract the well-known teachers in their specialties in order to attract more students. Centers are profit-oriented, but they are less expensive than one-to-one teaching. They offer the most popular type of private tutoring. The students usually attend these centers after school hours.

The Data

To better understand the private tutoring phenomenon in Jordan, this paper will discuss the results of a survey carried out by the Ministry of Education in Jordan in 2006, along with six focus groups that were conducted in three provinces. These provinces account for 71.4% of the total population of Jordan (Amman 38.7%, Irbid 17.8%, and Zarqa 14.9%) (Department of Statistics, 2011). Three focus groups were conducted in Amman (two for mothers and one for fathers); two focus groups were conducted in Zarqa (one for mothers and one for fathers), and one focus group was conducted for mothers in Irbid. The focus groups were implemented in June 2012.

The composition of the focus group took into consideration several participant characteristics including gender, education, income, and age. The average number of participants in the focus groups was seven. The participants' age ranged between 38-59 years. The marital status for all the participants was married, and they had current and/or previous experience in private tutoring. Most of the female participants were housewives, but some worked as teachers or in other occupations. The male participants were typically occupied as teachers, engineers, nurses, or government employees, or were retired. The study used a set of questions intended to identify the reasons parents send their children for private tutoring, the respective roles of mothers and fathers in taking decision on private tutoring, and the economic, social, and educational implications of private tutoring on the families.

Findings

This section discusses the prevalence of private tutoring in Jordan and analyzes the economic, social, and academic impacts of this phenomenon on Jordanian families. These results are based on the Ministry of Education's survey and six focus groups that were carried out in three major provinces.

Prevalence of private tutoring in Jordan

The quality of education varies between public and private schools. Private schools tend to provide better educational facilities than public schools and United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) schools, which serve Palestinian refugees in Jordan. In the central region 66.2% of students study in public schools, compared with 82% for the southern region and 83.2% for the northern region (MOE, Educational Statistical Report 2010-2011). In one previous study conducted by Jordan's Ministry of Education on a sample of 1,302 parents, 132 students, and 133 teachers, 54% of respondents indicated that their children relied on private tutoring (Habashneh & Al-Naimi 2006).

The highest proportion of private tutoring was in urban areas, 52.08%, compared to 47.02% in rural areas. The percentage of students relying on private tutoring in Jordan varied between the Center, North, and South regions, where the percentage in each region was 50%, 55%, and 57%, respectively (Habashneh & Al-Naimi 2006). The higher reliance on public schools in the southern and northern regions may explain the higher demand for private tutoring in these regions.

Students mentioned several reasons for taking private tutoring. One reason was the desire to get high marks in order to enroll in universities and in certain specializations (e.g. medicine, engineering, information technology) (Habashneh & Al-Naimi 2006). These results were in agreement with another study by Al-Farra (2009), who concluded that the main reason for private tuition is to improve exam grades. Moreover, the parents in the focus groups, particularly in Amman and Irbid, mentioned that the main reason for getting private tutoring for their children is to pass the GSECE. The parents in Amman focused on the importance of passing the GSECE as an entry point to obtain a high social status, while in Zarqa the parents emphasized getting high marks to qualify for university admissions. Some parents (mothers & fathers) responded that the most important reason to get private tutoring, either by the parents themselves or by others, lies in the need to pass the courses, especially in grade 12, while other parents responded that the main reason is to get very high scores in the GSECE to qualify students to enroll in a university. The high grades required for admission to the universities, and the increase in competition for university enrollment has led to the increased demand for private tutoring.

The parents in the focus groups responded that private tutoring is widespread in Jordan, and they associate this phenomenon with school teachers. Some parents attribute the spread of private tutoring to low teacher salaries, and they consider it an economic and educational problem. However, parents believe that the benefits from private tutoring are much more important than its economic costs, because it may eliminate a larger problem: *failure*. This indicates that parents are forced to shoulder the high financial burden imposed by private tutoring due to social expectations. Other studies highlighted additional reasons to seek private tutoring, including the prevalence of obsolete teaching methods, low academic performance of students, poor academic skills of some teachers, and the desire to obtain more information on the course subject (Habashneh & Al-Naimi 2006, Al-Farra 2009).

There was a consensus among the parents that there is no distinction between boys and girls with regards to private tutoring. Some parents attribute this to religious beliefs preventing discriminating between males and females. This contrasts with the experience of some parents and the nature of past Jordanian society, which did not encourage and sometimes prohibited parents from sending females to school. The spread of education has overcome the influence of previous circumstances, and has encouraged parents to realize the necessity of sending females to schools and universities. However, some parents believe there is a preference for the male, because females are expected to marry, so there is no need for them to study. This result is in agreement with Habashneh & Al-Naimi (2006) who found that male students recorded the highest demand for private tutoring in all grades. Moreover, in mathematics the private tutoring is more prevalent among males than females (Al-Farra, 2009). This may be interpreted as a result of discrimination against females in a largely patriarchal society. This discrimination is socially supported, and is propagated by religious, symbolic, linguistic, and cultural systems which exclude or devalue women in all aspects of life (Waters 1998).

Private tutoring is in demand at all educational stages. The results of the 2006 Ministry of Education survey (Habashneh & Al-Naimi 2006), show that the lowest percentage of private tutoring was in the first four elementary grades (4.3%). More students take private tutoring in mathematics (33.3%), followed by students studying English (19.9%), science (13.7%), and Arabic (3.11%). The highest percentage of private tutoring was 53.6% among students in grade 12, followed by 12.4% among students in grade 11 (Habashneh & Al-Naimi 2006). Also, there is a high demand among students in grade 8 and 10 to get private tutoring, 51.9% and 38.1%, respectively (Al-Farra, 2009). Such high demand for private tutoring in grade 12 is partially due to the high grades required for admission to universities, which motivates families to get private tutoring for their children to increase their opportunities to enroll at a university.

Another factor that affects the prevalence of private tutoring is the type of academic branch. Habashneh & Al-Naimi (2006) found in their survey that the highest demand for private tutoring in grade 11 is in the literary branch (18%), followed by other branches (e.g. agriculture, industrial, nursing, and information technology) (10%), and scientific branch (7%).

However, the results show that the situation varies significantly when including the second secondary grade (grade 12). The scientific branch recorded the highest demand for private tutoring (84%), followed by the literary branch (78%) and other programs (38%). This distribution indicates the crucial importance of grade 12 as a point in the transition into higher education and into other life opportunities, for both parents and students.

Impacts of private tutoring

The results of the survey and focus groups show three main impacts of private tutoring on the family. These impacts are economic, social, and academic.

Economic Impact

While the Jordanian annual average family income from all sources is 8,824 Jordanian Dinars (JOD), or about US\$12,400 (Dept. of Statistics 2010), the annual average family expenditure is 9,626 JOD (US\$13,600), of which 12.7% is spent on educational services (Dept. of Statistics 2010). The Ministry of Education's survey showed that 85% of the families spent almost 100 JOD (about US\$140) per month. In relation to that, 44.1% of the parents said that an improvement in the quality of teaching will prevent the spread of private tutoring. Some parents indicated that poor economic conditions prevented them from providing private tutoring to their children, that private tutoring is a waste of time, and that the formal education is sufficient.

The results of the focus groups show a consensus among the participants on the negative economic impact of private tutoring on family income, which was very clear in Irbid. Some parents admitted that private tutoring is a big problem, but at the same time it solves a bigger problem of being criticized for having a failed son or daughter, thus the social cost of failure outweighs the financial cost of private tutoring. While parents recognized that private tutoring is a very big economic, social, and educational problem, they emphasized that the economic aspect of this phenomenon jeopardizes the Jordanian family's ability to secure the basic needs of its members. However, parents recognize the importance of private tutoring to help their son or daughter pass the exams, especially the GSECE. Therefore, parents are willing to shoulder the financial burden of private tutoring to ensure the success of their son/daughter in the GSECE. The importance of the GSECE stems from the need to secure a job and pave the road for the student to pursue his/her advanced studies.

Moreover, the GSECE has a significant social impact on the family; therefore, parents invest great efforts and bear economic burdens to provide private lessons for their children. Parents disagreed on the specific cost of private tutoring. The fathers responded that the cost is around 150 JOD per month (~ \$ 212), while the mothers said that the cost is higher than this. This could be due to the different types of private tutoring (at home or at the centers) in addition to the number and type of subjects the student takes. However, everyone agrees that private lessons are expensive and consume around 30% of the family income, affecting provision of many daily life needs, but the importance of private tutoring and the ultimate goal behind it may lighten those costs on the family. This shows clearly that parents are willing to bear the financial burdens of private tutoring in return for teaching their children so that they will not flunk and expose the family to social criticisms.

Social Impact

Private tutoring is acknowledged by Jordanians to be a problem. Many social issues are related to private tutoring, including social stratification, social roles among family members, social status, and social relations. The results of the focus groups show that there is a consensus among the participants in the focus groups that private tuition is a big social, economic and educational problem for the family. Some parents believed that this phenomenon had become a "*fashion*". In Amman, some fathers mentioned that private tutoring became a business as in Egypt, and it is prevalent especially in the rural areas, which is consistent with the Ministry of Education's survey in 2006. Some parents refused to consider private tutoring as ostentation, while others, especially mothers, said that this may be the case. Everyone agreed that the most important advantage of private lessons is high likelihood of success in classes, and that the most important drawback is the large financial cost.

The results of the focus groups show that the most important reason that some parents do not turn to private tutoring is the lack of financial resources. However, there was disagreement concerning the decision-maker regarding private tutoring. For example, in the province of Irbid, the mothers said that the fathers are the ones who make the decision in this regard, while in Amman and Zarqa provinces, the mothers indicated that they are the ones who make the decision. Others said that it is a process where the two sides (parents and children) discuss it and agree upon what to do. Despite this variability, the results of the focus groups show that the mothers in Jordan are generally the ones who decide whether their son/daughter should have private tutoring or not.

The parents preferred private centers over private tutoring in the house because the cost at the centers is lower than the cost of a private lesson at home. This is a way to reduce the financial burden on the family. Moreover, some mothers mentioned that private lessons at the house may lead to problems with the husband and other social problems. However, some parents (mothers and fathers) preferred the house as a place for their children to take private lessons, because the parents have control over their children and can ensure that they are getting the study they need, even though this will cost more. Many mothers emphasized that the house is the suitable place for girls to take private lessons.

Private tutoring is believed to widen the social gap among the people, because lack of financial resources to pay for private tutoring could lead to further loss of social status and financial resources. This will intensify other social problems such as poverty, unemployment, and crime, where State and society will suffer alike. Tansel and Bircan (2006) argue that social status is a factor that influences the increased demand for private tutoring, where wealthier families are more likely to have private tutoring for their children than other families. In general, the parents did not show any discrimination between males and females in terms of taking private lessons. This position stemmed from religious and social aspects. However, the oldest son may receive special attention in getting private lessons in order to become a role model to his siblings.

Academic Impact

When they were asked about the role of the teacher in encouraging students to take private tutoring, the mothers in the focus groups indicated that the teacher plays a great role, especially in Irbid. In Amman and Zarqa the participants blame the teacher and the poor economic conditions of the teacher for encouraging private tutoring.

Parents disagree regarding the benefits that could be gained from private tutoring. The parents generally based their responses upon their own experience with private tutoring. However, most of them said that regardless of some disadvantages, private tutoring remains a means to success in school.

Educational problems caused by private tutoring are centered around weakening of the educational process in schools because private tutoring may become an alternative to public schools, despite the economic cost. Some participants wonder if they should not consider private schools over private tutoring, because private schools provide an atmosphere similar to private tutoring and may fulfill the same purpose.

Conclusions

Education is highly valued in Jordanian society. Private tutoring is perceived by many as a means to enhance educational opportunities that facilitate social mobility. Private tutoring is a big social, economic and educational problem for the family, and has a negative economic impact upon family income. However, GSECE (Al-Tawjihi) has a significant social impact on the family; therefore, the parents invest great efforts and bear economic burdens to provide private lessons for their children. Parents lacking financial resources often cannot turn to private tutoring, which may further decrease their social status if their children are unable to further their careers and education. Private tutoring at the house may lead to problems within the family, but is preferred by some. In general, parents did not show any discrimination between males and females in terms of providing private tutoring. Due to weak formal education, private tutoring is rapidly becoming an alternative to public schools.

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