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# Investigating the Effectiveness of Private Small Group Tutoring of English in Kazakhstan: Perceptions of Tutors and Students

OLESSYA AKIMENKO

The main focus of education studies has been on mainstream schools and institutions. However, the growing phenomenon of private tutoring has been largely overlooked by scholars. In Kazakhstan, numerous specialists offer private tutoring, and the tendency to supplement mainstream schooling continues to grow. The actual effectiveness of private tutoring, meanwhile, remains an open question. Since the study of English language is the most popular among the various subjects offered by tutors, this research studies the effectiveness of private tutoring of English and the way it can – or cannot – complement school education. This qualitative study explores the experiences of five private tutors and five privately tutored small groups of high-school students at private tutoring facilities in Astana, based on data obtained from semi-structured individual face-to-face and focus group interviews. The results of the study indicate that private tutoring is effective in enhancing students' knowledge of English, as well as serves as a remedial purpose by helping students to form the knowledge required by mainstream schools. However, it should be noted that for other tutored subjects the situation may be different. Also, the results of the research may not be representative for the whole country due to the small size of the sample.

*Keywords:* shadow education, informal education, private tutoring, small group tutoring

## Introduction

The education industry has recently been one of the major determinants of countries' economic and social development (Dang & Rogers, 2008). Not surprisingly, the education sector has attracted a significant amount of attention from both policymakers and researchers. Commonly, education studies have focused more on mainstream schools and institutions than on private schools. However, the growing phenomenon of private tutoring worldwide has not received as much attention or debate, and has been largely overlooked by scholars and policymakers in both western and post-soviet countries (Dang & Rogers, 2008). This probably stems from the fact that private tutoring industry remains underdeveloped in western regions (Bray, 1999), while in the post-soviet countries the number of researchers who would be interested in investigating the topic is limited. This notwithstanding, the private tutoring sphere of education has appeared to become a significantly developed parallel education sector, which supplies a growing body of students from mainstream schools with additional opportunities for schooling.

International literature on private tutoring suggests that its scope can depend on various cultural, economic, and educational influences (Baker, Akiba, LeTendre & Wiseman, 2001; Bray, 2003; Bray & Silova, 2006; Watson, 2008). Cultural values can affect the scale of private tutoring in different societies. For example, the levels of tutoring are particularly high in countries where effort is highly emphasized (Bray & Silova, 2006; Ireson & Rushforth, 2005). This could be the reason for the high popularity of the private tutoring in Asian cultures. Private tutoring is especially likely to be widespread in societies with more competitive culture. As Baker and LeTendre (2005) state, in some countries, such as Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, and others, high demand for private tutoring stemmed from the idea of national achievement facilitated by the government. The authors assert that a strategy to encourage national achievement led to subsequent rise in the popularity of supplementary tutoring. Meanwhile, in such regions as Central and South Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, private tutoring is mainly utilized as a tool to adapt to new socio-cultural realities and market economy (Murawska & Putkiewicz, 2006). Thus, cultural characteristics of certain nations are likely to influence the scope of private tutoring in these countries.

The use of private tutoring may also be influenced by various economic factors; in particular, it can be the income difference between well-educated and those who do not have sufficient educational background (Bray, 2003; Ireson, 2004; Kwan-Terry, 1991). According to Psacharopoulos and Patrinos (2004), education is generally perceived as a type of investment with a high probability of return; therefore, people are often willing to invest in it. This is particularly true for students in the countries of Central and South Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, due to the fact that they have experienced drastic economic changes and high rates of unemployment during the transformation period of the 1990s (Bray & Silova, 2006). Therefore, people in these countries try to escape the negative consequences of the transformation period with the help of education. As

Bray and Silova (2006) state, “many families invest in private tutoring to ensure that their children successfully enter higher education institutions and have access to better paying jobs in the future” (p. 32). In many societies, private tutoring has become a major industry, which on the positive side helps students to achieve their educational goals, and gives tutors the opportunity to raise their incomes; however, on the negative side, it can consume a big proportion of household expenditure, as well as exacerbate social inequality.

Studies also suggest that private tutoring is usually used more extensively in the countries with high levels of competition for educational opportunities, accompanied by close connection between academic performance and opportunities in higher education and, later, in the labor market (Baker & LeTendre, as cited in Bray & Silova, 2006). Bray and Silova (2006) argue that students tend to view private tutoring as an enrichment strategy in societies where only the examination performance can define whether they can successfully move to the next level of educational system. The examples of this can be seen in different countries, such as highly competitive university entrance examinations in Turkey, strict secondary school admission process in Japan, and close relations between best universities and labor market in Taiwan (Bray & Kwok, 2003; Stevenson & Baker, 1992; Tansel & Bircan, 2006). All these facilitate students to use private tutoring, which is perceived as the most obvious way to survive in such a competitive environment. Countries where education systems are less dependent on high-stakes examinations, therefore have lower incidence of private tutoring, in comparison with those where examinations play an important role.

In Kazakhstan, private tutoring has existed since the beginning of the Soviet period, yet in a discreet and unofficial form (Kalikova & Rakhimzhanova, 2009, p. 93). The industry, however, has flourished after the country became independent in 1991 and continues to draw both qualified and unqualified personnel into its ranks. Nowadays, numerous educators practice private tutoring in Kazakhstan and the tendency to supplement mainstream schooling continues to grow. This trend could be observed in other Asian countries, which try to compete globally in the process of their development. The actual effectiveness of private tutoring, meanwhile, remains an open question.

Therefore, the focus of my research was the effectiveness of private tutoring of English, and the way it complements and impacts upon school education. English language was chosen as it is the most popular among various subjects offered by tutors. In my research, I concentrated on privately tutored groups of high-school students in organizations which provide private tutoring in Astana, as high-school students have increasingly constituted the main consumers of this service, specifically in large cities (Kalikova & Rakhimzhanova, 2009).

This qualitative study explores the experiences of five private tutors and five privately tutored small groups of high-school students at urban private tutoring facilities. I investigated how private tutors perceive their contribution to the formation of students’ knowledge of and skills in English, and their contribution to meeting the learners’ expectations of the program of instruction, thereby elucidating students’ views on whether the knowledge and skills they received correspond to their needs and expectations. This study centered on the following research questions:

- RQ1: How do private students establish the criteria by which they judge whether the program of private tutoring is effective?
- RQ2: What is private tutors’ understanding of effective tutoring and how are these understandings applied in learning situations?

## Literature Review

Private tutoring is generally characterized as “tutoring in academic subjects which is provided for financial gain and which is additional to the provision by mainstream schooling” (Bray & Kwok, 2003, p. 612). The given definition allows us to clearly distinguish between tutoring which is supplied by private entities, and that which is administered by the state. Private tutoring can take many forms: from after-school cram schools, for example, *juku* in Japan, to one-on-one tutoring, courses for examination preparation, and even preparatory examination schools, such as Japanese *yobiko* (Baker et al., 2001). All this shows that private tutoring is a significantly versatile sector, which can cover a great variety of students’ educational needs.

Many researchers refer to private tutoring as “shadow education” because its size and capacity can be shaped by mainstream education (Bray, 1999; Bray & Kwok, 2003; Stevenson & Baker, 1992). Stevenson and Baker (1992) called shadow education “a set of educational activities outside formal schooling that are designed to improve a student’s chances of successfully moving through the allocation process within school” (p. 1640). The researchers implied that the spread of private tutoring occurs simultaneously with the distribution of students in the mainstream educational system, and during the transition from school to higher educational institutions. Private tutoring as a phenomenon has quite a long history. Previously, however, it attracted only a

limited number of researchers. Governments and policymakers have not paid much attention to out-of-school tutoring even though in several countries it has been a major issue for the last few decades (see e.g., Bray, 1999; Bray, 2006; Bray, Mazawi & Sultana, 2013; Bray & Silova, 2006; Ireson, 2004; Ireson & Rushforth, 2005). Meanwhile, a significant body of research on privatization in education shows that private tutoring is not merely a “private” phenomenon. In fact, it is interrelated with the mainstream schooling and acts accordingly (Baker et al., 2001; Heyneman, 2011; Silova, 2010; Stevenson & Baker, 1992). As private tutoring closely follows the curriculum in mainstream schools, when the curriculum undergoes changes, so does the shadow education.

Despite the different opinions on what private tutoring includes, this research utilizes the working definition of Foondun (2002): private tutoring is an “extra coaching in academic and examinable subjects that is given to students outside school hours for remuneration” (p. 487). This definition, in my opinion, clearly reflects the nature of private tutoring in Kazakhstan as many students here attend private tutoring facilities after school to receive training in the subjects they have difficulties with at school.

### ***International Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Private Tutoring***

The actual effectiveness of private tutoring, in the sense of raising learning achievement, has been a great concern for students and parents, as well as for policymakers. As Bray (2011) asserts, this question is “difficult to answer unambiguously” (p. 47). For him, as with other forms of education, the effectiveness of private tutoring largely rests upon the motivations of both tutors and tutees. Types of tutoring and their varying pedagogic approaches can also contribute to the perceptions of the effectiveness of private tutoring.

Several studies (Guill & Bensen, 2010; Ireson & Rushforth, 2005; Rushforth, 2011) have shown that the effectiveness of tutoring is difficult to prove. Generally, it can be inferred that much depends on the students’ background and their aspirations, as well as the compliance of private tutors’ methods of teaching with the pedagogical approaches of mainstream teachers. Commonly, it is presumed that in most cases private tutoring is perceived positively, since if it was not, it would not be used by so many students. According to the findings of an empirical study by Mischo and Haag conducted in Luxembourg (2002), 54 per cent of the students surveyed said that tutoring was useful, with a mere 4 per cent stating that it was not helpful (p. 265). In Lithuania, the pattern was slightly different; 55.4 per cent of the sampled students who used private tutoring to receive good results in university entrance examinations reported that it helped them significantly, while 36.1 per cent asserted that it was not specifically effective. As little as 5.0 per cent of students considered private tutoring having no impact on them (Silova & Bray, 2006, p. 86). Clearly, the majority of students agreed on the positive influence of private tutoring on their educational achievement. A number of researchers (Guill & Bensen, 2010; Ireson & Rushforth, 2005; Rushforth, 2011; Smyth, 2008) have analyzed the examination scores of pupils from various grades to find how private tutoring may have influenced students’ progress. Both large-scale quantitative studies and small-scale qualitative ones have shown that it is difficult to clearly state if tutoring “works” and whether it is effective (Bray, 2011). As Bray (2011) asserts, several things can influence how effective private tutoring will be, for example, the previous background of the students and the compliance of private tutors’ methods of teaching with the approaches used in mainstream schools.

### ***Private Tutoring in Kazakhstan***

In Kazakhstan, private tutoring has endured since the Soviet time (1920-1991); however, this industry flourished significantly during the post-independence period (1991 until present). It is evident that private tutoring has become more widespread since Kazakhstan became independent, although it is difficult to define its scope and nature due to the scarce sources of available data (Kalikova & Rakhimzhanova, 2009). As Kalikova and Rakhimzhanova (2009) assert, the main controversy of the phenomenon is that although it seems to provide children with an opportunity to enhance the quality of their education and create additional source of income for teachers, at the same time it undermines the principles of equal access to education. Their study is one of the very few, if not the only study, that provides initial steps in drawing the real picture of the private tutoring market in Kazakhstan. In their study, the authors investigate the usage of private tutoring by students transitioning from secondary to higher education. The study investigated the experiences of 1,004 first-year university students and 37 university professors from the six largest state universities in the cities of Almaty and Shymkent. It is a national case study, which is a part of a larger-scale study of private supplementary tutoring in Central Asia sponsored by UNESCO and the Open Society Institute’s (OSI).

As Kalikova and Rakhimzhanova (2009) state, in Kazakhstan, private tutoring can serve different purposes:

At the preschool level, private tutoring is used to prepare children for entry into elementary school. At the basic education level, private tutoring is used for remediation purposes or to increase students' academic competitiveness. At the high school (upper secondary education) level, students use private tutoring to improve their academic achievement on tests and examinations. (p. 93)

In Kazakhstan, the demand for private tutoring is facilitated by several factors, such as the growing amount of work students need to do at school, as well as the dominance of outdated teaching methods. Kalikova and Rakhimzhanova (2009) claim that mainstream education focuses mainly on the best-performing students. Thus, students who lack learning ability are unable to cope with the school curriculum and therefore have to seek help from private tutors. Furthermore, the current educational system creates significant competition among students by conducting Olympiads (academic competitions in specific subject areas). These, together with high stake examination UNT, force some students to turn to private tutoring to excel in studies and raise the chance of entering the most prestigious higher education institutions (Kalikova & Rakhimzhanova, 2009). The results of the study showed that 56.9 per cent of those surveyed stated that they used private tutoring in order to have a better chance to get into a prestigious university. At the same time, 50.2 per cent of students agreed that the school had not fully prepared them for university entrance examinations, while 81.0 per cent blamed their teachers for poor delivery of the subject matter. Almost 50 per cent of the respondents shared the opinion that private tutoring was their sole option if they wanted to prepare for university entrance examinations. A massive 84.6 per cent asserted that those students who take private tutoring had higher chances to pass university entrance examinations than students with the same abilities but who did not employ the tutor to help them (Kalikova & Rakhimzhanova, 2009, p. 110). Of course, the study can only draw conclusions about the situation in two cities, while in other parts of Kazakhstan more research is necessary to address the scope of private tutoring fully. Nevertheless, from this study it can be inferred that, at least in two Kazakhstani cities, the surveyed students admitted the existing discrepancy between the content of the school curriculum and the requirements of university entrance examinations.

According to Kalikova & Rakhimzhanova, (2009):

while the main factors driving the demand for private tutoring are educational, it is important to acknowledge the impact of socio-economic and socio-cultural factors on the private tutoring market in Kazakhstan. Post-Soviet transformation towards a free-market economy has triggered the commercialization of education, which has both positive and negative implications for society. (p. 101)

High-income families happily embraced the new opportunities to invest in their children's education, with the help of private schools, private tutoring, or study abroad. On the other hand, families with a lower income realized that the mainstream education system does not fully prepare their children to compete successfully in the education and labor markets. Therefore, as more and more parents and students turn to private tutoring, it is important to address the effectiveness of the latter. The following study provides initial steps in answering the question whether private tutoring pays off in Kazakhstani context.

## **Research Methodology**

To explore the teachers' and students' experiences with private tutoring, I have employed a qualitative approach. The data was collected in March and April of 2014. The qualitative approach was used due to its ability to provide complex descriptions of how people experience a given research issue (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namey, 2005). As the qualitative approach is concerned mainly with developing explanations of social phenomena (Hancock, 1998), it helped me to get insight of the social setting in which private tutoring exists. Moreover, a qualitative approach allowed me to explore how my research participants make sense of their experiences (Merriam, as cited in Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013) with private tutoring. Most importantly, using a qualitative approach gave me the possibility to work closely with research participants and to gain insight of how participants think, learn and feel about events and instances.

## ***Narrative Inquiry***

In my research, the specific approach to qualitative research design that was utilized was that of a Narrative Inquiry since the study fully depends on only one type of source – the in-depth interviews. However, for coding and data analysis procedure, the elements of grounded theory were applied, due to the fact that grounded theory methods are most appropriate when the researcher “attempts to derive a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants in a study” (Creswell, 2003, p.

14). Previously grounded theory methods have not been utilized in order to investigate the effectiveness of private small-group tutoring, which only adds to the uniqueness of the given study.

### ***Sampling and Data Collection Instruments***

Following Hycner's (1999) assertion that "the phenomenon dictates the method including even the type of participants" (p. 156), in my research I have employed purposive sampling, which is recognized by Welman and Kruger (1999) as the most important type of non-probability sampling to select research participants. I have chosen the sample based on the purpose of the research, trying to find those who "have had experiences relating to the phenomenon to be researched" (Kruger, 1988, p. 150) and who could help me to build the whole picture of the effectiveness of private small group tutoring. The inclusion of two parties participating in the process of private tutoring (private tutors and privately tutored students) allowed me to address both my research questions at the same time.

Since it was my intention to study the tutors and students' perceptions of private tutoring in their natural setting, I chose ten private tutoring facilities which provided small-group tutoring (from three to five students in a group) of English for high-school students for remuneration. From ten initially selected facilities, three agreed to cooperate, while others remained reluctant to participate or declined the offer. Further, these tutoring facilities will be referred to as Private Tutoring Facility 1, Private Tutoring Facility 2 and Private Tutoring Facility 3. In these facilities, I selected five private tutors of English who were willing to participate: two tutors in Private Tutoring Facility 1, two tutors in Private Tutoring Facility 2, and one tutor in Private Tutoring Facility 3. Then, I selected five small groups of tutored high-school students. The focus group sample included two groups of students from Private Tutoring Facility 1, two groups of students from Private Tutoring Facility 2, and one group from Private Tutoring Facility 3. I decided to collect the data from both students and tutors for the sake of data triangulation, a procedure which involves the use of various sources of data to check and establish validity in studies (Bryman, 2003; Guion, Diehl & McDonald, 2011).

Two types of interviews were applied as the main data collection instrument: individual face-to-face and focus group interviews. Interviews were both structured and semi-structured. Each interview, either group or individual, contained approximately 10-15 questions. One-to-one interviews were conducted with five private tutors. There were two interviews with each of them, each lasting approximately 30 minutes. Focus group interviews were conducted with five privately tutored groups of high-school students. Each group participated in one 30-40-minute interview.

### **Data Analysis**

Strauss and Corbin (1998) view data analysis as a process of breaking down and organizing data in order to develop an understanding of the phenomenon. The study exploits the following procedures of data analysis for grounded theory research developed by Strauss and Corbin: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

After both individual and group interviews were transcribed, they were broken down into phrases and sentences that represented the participants' main ideas. The resulting list of concepts formed the open codes which are presented below. Table 1 presents the cluster of open codes related to the first research question about how private students judge the effectiveness of private tuition.

Table 1  
*Perceived Qualities of the Effective Tutor*

Open code	Examples of participants' words
Able to create rapport with students	Understands students' needs Responds to students' needs
Able to create positive atmosphere	Able to elate students' mood if they are depressed Able to create an enjoyable discussion for students
Able to motivate students to study	Uses games Uses discussions
Experienced and knowledgeable	Has a very good command of English Able to sustain the conversation on different topics
Confident	Confident in her knowledge and experience Not afraid to make mistakes

Respectful to students	Does not humiliate or offend students Treats students as equals to her
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Interestingly, all responses of students regarding their tutors were positive; no negative responses were detected. Students especially emphasized the fact that, in comparison with their mainstream schools, their classes at private tutoring facilities were much more enjoyable and interesting. All students highlighted the fact that tutors are always ready to help when they need it – the aspect that they lacked significantly at school.

Students also reported on their achievements while studying English language at a private tutoring facility (Table 2).

Table 2  
*Learning Outcomes of Using Private Tutoring*

Open code	Examples of participants' words
Increased vocabulary	Able to use new word in practice Able to read and express what has been read in my own words
Improved speaking skills	Increased confidence in speaking English
Improved grammar knowledge	Learned grammar that previously has been difficult to understand

Overall, students noticed that they significantly improved their level of English knowledge and enhanced their speaking skills. Additionally, many students stated that after studying at the private tutoring facility, they finally could understand and use different grammar concepts that previously were difficult for them at school.

To get at the second research question, regarding tutors' understanding and application of effective tuition, tutors were asked about what characteristics, in their opinion, an effective tutor should possess.

Table 3 illustrates their responses.

Table 3  
*Ideal Characteristics of the Effective Tutor*

Open code	Examples of participants' words
Good psychologist	Able to find approach to each student Patient
Methodologically grounded	Using advanced methods of teaching
Respectful to students	Should see the individuality in each student
Demanding	Strict, but not too much
Passionate	Not just earn your living, but love your profession Not just come to your lessons but try to give knowledge to students
Good actor	Regardless of the problems in your personal life, come to your class with a smile and in a good mood
Sociable	Open Easy-going
Authority for students	Good role-model
Charismatic	Able to make students interested
Creative	Open for new experimentation
Open to critique	Ready to accept critique from colleagues, students, and parents

When private tutors were asked whether they possessed the characteristics of an effective tutor, and whether they find their teaching successful, the majority of tutors regarded their teaching as effective, although to various extents. Some of them had difficulties with reviewing their teaching critically. However, all of them stated that they try to improve their teaching all the time and that they are open for new experiences that can enhance their teaching approaches.

This grouping of open codes into categories is the second step in the process of coding. The purpose of the following coding procedure was to construct a number of categories connected with experiences of the participants. After comparing the concepts for similarities and differences, several distinct categories emerged. After this, the categories were connected with the help of relational statements, or “statements derived from the data denoting associations between this category and others” (Mewborn, 2005, p. 60). With regard to other categories, the relational statements are presented in Table 4.

Table 4  
*Relational Statements*

Main categories	Relational statement
Effective tutor characteristics Effectiveness of private lesson	The effectiveness of private lesson substantially depends on the characteristics of private tutors.
Tutors' reluctance to work at mainstream schools Appeal of work at a private tutoring facility	Tutors prefer to work in private tutoring facilities due to a number of factors.
Mainstream schools are unable to satisfy students' needs in learning English language Reasons why students turn to private tutoring facilities Contribution of private tutoring in building students' knowledge of English	Tutoring at private facilities plays great role in helping students satisfy their learning needs.

During selective coding the main categories were analyzed in order to find similarities and differences, which resulted in the appearance of one main construct, or overarching theoretical category. The following construct was named “The concept of effective tutoring” and involved the main categories representing tutors and students' perceptions regarding private tutoring.

The emergent theory proposes that private tutoring is generally effective in helping students to enhance their knowledge of English. The effectiveness of tutoring depends on the personal and professional characteristics of the tutor, and the way tutor organizes his or her classes. Additionally, one more surprising fact came forward during data analysis process. It is considered common sense that private language training courses allow students to increase their level of mastering beyond what is provided by schools. However, my research indicates that the role of these courses is in fact wider. Thus, in many cases it was revealed that private language courses help students not only to improve their language skills, but also acquire the minimum level of knowledge required by the state.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The findings of this study show that the private tutoring of English that is offered by private tutoring facilities in Astana is generally perceived as effective by both private tutors and privately tutored groups of students in terms of enhancing students' knowledge and helping them to keep up with their English classes at school. As Bray (2011) asserted, whether private tutoring “works” significantly depends on the attitudes and motivations of students, and the skills their tutors possess. This study confirmed that the effectiveness of private tutoring of English mainly depends on personal and professional qualities of the tutor. How the tutor organizes his or her classes also plays an important role.

The findings are organized by the research questions that guided this exploration.

***RQ1: How do private students establish the criteria by which they judge whether the program of private tuition is effective?***

Students' responses regarding their private tuition were consistently positive, showing a high level of overall satisfaction with private classes of English. The most important aspect that all students stressed in their responses was that their classes at private tutoring facilities were substantially more enjoyable and interesting than English classes at school. Also, all the students stated that tutors are constantly responsive to their needs and always ready to help when students have difficulties with their studies. In comparison, many students mentioned that at school teachers of English do not focus on whether all students successfully grasp the new material or not.

Furthermore, most students pointed out that they liked the fact that their private tutors were able to create a positive atmosphere in class. Some students particularly noted that their tutors had a good sense of humor and could make them laugh. As they said, this helped them stay interested and enjoy the lessons more. Another important factor, according to students, was that tutors were able to motivate them to study by using varied class activities, including games, films and discussions. Students stated that such diverse activities kept them from becoming bored and helped them focus on what was being taught. Students also emphasized that their tutors were more experienced and knowledgeable than their English teachers at school. Tutors were always able to accompany the new material with clear explanations, and ready to answer any questions that students had. Moreover, tutors taught students not to be afraid of their mistakes, which, according to students' responses, helped them significantly in becoming confident users of the English language.

With regard to the outcomes of using private tutoring of English, all students noted that they improved their overall level of English knowledge, though to different extents depending on the length of tutoring. The students reported that they started to speak English more fluently. Some of them even stated that previously they were unable to speak English at all, and only here, at private tutoring facility, they started to speak it. Furthermore, almost all students stated that they were able to enhance their English vocabulary and improve their knowledge of grammar. Many students stated that private tutoring helped them to finally understand and successfully apply those grammar concepts that they were not able to grasp at school.

Overall, from students' responses it is evident that private tutoring of English in private tutoring facilities in Astana proves to be effective in meeting and fulfilling students' needs, both of remedial and enrichment nature.

***RQ2: What is private tutors' understanding of effective tuition and how are these understandings applied in learning situations?***

With the help of interview questions, tutors successfully drew a picture of an ideal tutor and the way such a tutor should teach. Their responses, though diverse in context, were increasingly similar in what they considered effective tutoring. All tutors emphasized that an effective private tutor should use advanced teaching methodology, although there were opinions that even most state-of-the-art methods may be ineffective if the tutor possesses a personality unattractive to students (e.g., not charismatic, not interesting as a person). Thus, personal qualities of a tutor can play a major role in whether he or she is successful as a tutor or not. Tutors pointed out that effective tutors should be good psychologists as well, to find an approach to each student, and create a rapport with them. Students should feel that the tutor respects them and sees the individuality in each of them. The tutor also should be cautious in his speech and actions, because all students are different and some are particularly sensitive and could be easily offended. When asked whether they find their tutoring effective, tutors generally regarded their teaching as successful and effective because, as they commonly stated, they could see the progress their students made with their help. Nevertheless, despite being satisfied with the results of their students, tutors still were working towards further improvement of their teaching.

Overall, many of tutors' responses reflected those of their students, which means that tutors not only possess the characteristics of the effective tutor, but, at the same time, are able to apply these qualities in practice, thus confirming that private tutoring of English can be considered effective in the context of private tutoring facilities in Astana.

***Limitations***

This study is significant as it provides insight into the perceptions of both private tutors and privately tutored students regarding the effectiveness of private tutoring of English in private tutoring facilities in Astana. However, several limitations should be considered when examining the findings from this project. First, the study was carried out solely in private tutoring facilities, without involving other types of tutoring. In addition,

the small participant sample cannot be representative for the whole population of the country. Therefore, the study cannot draw any conclusions regarding the effectiveness of private tutoring on a general scale. Second, the study involved only the private tutoring facilities in Astana, the city where private supplementary tutoring is widespread. As such any attempted generalization to other parts of the country should be treated with caution. Also, it should be noted that as the study relied on information collected from students and tutors in private tutoring facilities, the responses of the students could be influenced by the fact that the interviews took place in tutoring facilities, which could have put additional pressure on participants. Students may have reported higher satisfaction because they knew that their parents were paying for this service. Therefore, the findings may reflect merely the perceptions of students, not the actual situation. Finally, as the focus of the research study was the private tutoring of English, the pattern for the other tutored subjects can be substantially different.

### Implications and Conclusion

The goal of the current study was to use narrative inquiry to explore the experiences of five private tutors and five privately tutored groups of high-school students at private tutoring facilities in Astana, Kazakhstan. The findings of this study reveal that private tutoring of English has become not only an important part of the education market in Astana, but also may be a crucial complement to the mainstream educational system. The results have shown that without the use of private tutoring of English, some students may not be able to meet the requirements of the mainstream system, and others might have fewer opportunities to go beyond the regular curriculum which did not satisfy their needs. Hence, the demand for private tutoring at least in this study, appears to be driven at least in part by the deficiencies of the mainstream education system, which according to the students fails to meet the challenges and demands of its users. The following recommendations may contribute to the improvement and advancement of the positive aspects of private tutoring, while avoiding the negative implications:

- *Improve the quality of English classes in mainstream schools.* Considering that the popularity of private tutoring primarily may stem from the ineffectiveness of the mainstream education system, it is important for policymakers to launch a number of educational reforms that will improve the mainstream system. Such reforms could focus primarily on the program which is utilized by English teachers, the introduction of progressive and innovative methods of teaching English, and the reduction of paperwork. If teachers are given more freedom and flexibility in terms of choosing the teaching approaches they will likely improve the way they organize their classes.
- *Create links between the private and public sectors.* Improving the mainstream system can be a difficult task, as well as a lengthy one. Therefore, while mainstream system undergoes changes, the private sector is likely to expand. Thus, there will be only further blurring of the boundaries between two sectors. For the situation to remain beneficial for both sectors, educational cooperation between private entities and mainstream schools should be established. For example, private tutoring facilities may be able to offer specific services to schools that are free or paid at a lower rate. Private tutors can also conduct seminars where they can share their knowledge and experience with school teachers.
- *Give subsidies to private sector.* The government may decide to encourage tutoring in order to complement the deficiencies of the mainstream schools. They can subsidize especially effective private tutoring facilities to provide supplementary tutoring to students at schools.
- *Analyze the private sector to learn about the disadvantages of the mainstream system.* It can be difficult to analyze the real state of the mainstream system due to a number of obstacles, such as getting permissions and dealing with bureaucracy matters. Also, students and teachers at school may be unwilling to reveal the deficiencies of the system. As this research suggests, private tutoring facilities can be an excellent source of data on both private and mainstream schooling.

The current study provides initial steps in investigating the effectiveness of private tutoring in Kazakhstan. Its uniqueness also stems from the fact that aspects of grounded theory approach in combination with narrative inquiry have never been applied to examine the phenomenon of private tutoring in Kazakhstan before. Despite its obvious limitations, the study sheds light on the phenomenon that has become especially pervasive in recent years and explores the important aspect of private tutoring effectiveness. The findings of this study can provide a platform for further research both locally and internationally.

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