

Private tutoring through the internet: globalization and *offshoring*

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Abstract The private tutoring industry has come forward as the third great sector of education. The common sense representation about private tutoring is changing. The growing search for supplementary educational support services and the technological innovation have created a new paradigm. This paper focuses on one of the most interesting faces of this new phenomenon: the rise of private tutoring through the internet. The very promising market is considered by some analysts as a true explosion on the offer and demand levels. Many families are feeling increasingly unable to provide their children the “extra help” they need to meet the requirements of further steps in the education system. So, for several reasons, they are outsourcing and even offshoring this so important and competitive task. The field is full of learning and market opportunities. This is the new globalized world of the less shadow and progressively growing private tutoring in the XXI century.

Keywords Education · Private tutoring · Internet · Globalization

Introduction

In spite of the existence of an ever-growing amount of information and of the fact that the private tutoring

phenomenon is decreasingly a “shadow” issue, those who do not study this question with some depth will not understand the extraordinary dimension it has. This exponential growth is part of a clear tendency towards the globalization of almost everything. The educational field, in its several forms and dimensions, does not escape globalization, privatization, franchising, outsourcing and offshoring. Authors such as Dang and Rogers (2008: 4) believe that, besides the state and public education, the private tutoring industry has come forward as the third great sector of education.

In the minds of most people, the perception that still lingers over private tutoring is that of a tutor with one or two students around a table. In spite of the not very large *corpus* on the issue of private tutoring before the 1990s, some authors (e.g. Whewell 1837: 73–78) researched the theme, with different characteristics, more than a century ago. Others (e.g. Hutton 1831), around the same time, published important manuals for teaching at schools that could be used as instruments for private tutoring. Those authors had in mind private tutoring not only as a supplement to formal schooling, but also in the form of governesses and tutors working in the field of home schooling.

With the market evolving amid the growing search for supplementary educational support services and the technological innovations, a new paradigm has developed that has increased significantly the differences concerning that archetype. In this work, we present the most noteworthy aspects related to the area of private tutoring with the greatest growth rate: the use of the internet and technological tools to give educational support through an ever more diversified panoply of products from any part of the globe to millions of students worldwide.

Before starting this paper, and because it is appropriate to take into account the thematic, we must say that the internet was the source we used to find most of the material we used

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to write this paper. This was a strategic choice due to the subject matter we are approaching, but it is also due to the fact that there is plenty of available information on the internet and very little research on this issue available on paper.

Globalization, outsourcing and offshoring

The world is getting smaller, and the borders are decreasingly physical. Friedman (2005: 11) says that the world is watching a movement towards becoming flatter and smaller and that the phenomenon he calls Globalization 3.0¹ will empower even more individuals of the most diverse nationalities, creeds and training. The potential and the evolution of the market, especially with the utilization of new technologies, allow for a challenging ubiquity. In order for one to become a player, it is not necessary to be big or to have a big infrastructure. Before, we could only see from our window the landscape that our eyes could reach. Nowadays, from our electronic window we can grasp the whole world. Therefore, the market is truly global since our work can be done from anywhere. The market law never had such a vast portfolio of opportunities as nowadays. This is why some authors speak of the “death of distance” (Cairncross 2001: x) due to a revolution that is happening in the communication sector.

Globalization also changed learning the environment tremendously; the internet became a new educational resource. Because of the new technologies, education can be divided into off-line education and online education these days. Off-line education can be a traditional school or cram school or one-to-one educational method, whereas on line education can be an internet mobile network education. Online education means web-based education through internet, intranet, and extranet, and is a part of e-Learning (Sho 2004: 4). Similar concept of distance learning includes both online Learning and e-Learning, it is the broadest concept. Online education can be divided into public online education and private online education (Lee et al. 2008: 117).

It has been several years now that functions such as software development, salary processing, document digitalization, data base construction and data processing, client support, edition of publication are dislocated into countries such as the Philippines, Russia, China, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia or South Africa with the main

argument of the low workforce costs with a satisfactory quality. The country which has drawn the most attention from companies that opt for offshoring in providing services from several years now is India. From providing accounting services for companies and individuals to providing legal assistance, helpdesk lines for several products and services, telemarketing, radiology² and pedagogical support or management and pedagogical evaluation, the Indian entrepreneurs have shown a capacity to attract investments and clients from all over the world. Besides all this, many non-Indian entrepreneurs have chosen to offshoring their business into India due, mainly, to the low prices and quality of service which is guaranteed by a great number of highly specialized workers. In what this piece of research is concerned, we see outsourcing as *the process of outward mobilization of resources that the organization does not have or that, in case of having those resources, do not ensure an appropriate relationship of cost-benefit*. From an economic view point, the logic underlying outsourcing is that of the reduction of the costs of the operation through the competitive advantage of a provision of services according to the same quality patterns at a lower cost (Wikipedia 2008a, b). In spite of the promiscuity that reigns due to the undifferentiated use of the words outsourcing and offshoring, there is a fundamental difference between them. Blinder (2005: 1) explains that the first one is a domestic phenomenon that is already old and that has no connection with globalization or international commerce, while the second one is related with outsourcing tasks to companies or subsidiaries that contract people from outside the country of origin of the main company. Upadhye (2007) establishes a difference between offshoring, which corresponds to the cases in which “the functions are performed in a foreign country by a foreign subsidiary of the company”, and offshore outsourcing, cases in which a company hires “an external organization to perform some functions of the business in a different country from that where the product or the service will be sold or consumed”. In spite of, sometimes, and specially in a first stage, the levels of productivity of the local employees of offshoring are inferior to those of the employees of the country of origin of the company (Boersen and Van Gils 2005: 3) many have opted for this form of production.

By researching the private tutoring offshoring phenomenon, we became aware of the dominant importance of India as a service provider at this level. Apparently, the main argument for this predominance is a cocktail that mixes sense of business opportunity, high competence given by an

¹ According to Friedman (2005: 10) “while the dynamic force in Globalization 1.0 was countries globalizing and the dynamic force in Globalization 2.0 was companies globalizing, the dynamic force in Globalization 3.0—the thing that gives it its unique character—is the newfound power for *individuals* to collaborate and compete globally.”

² Bhagwati et al. (2004: 93) mention the example of digitalized x-ray exams of American patients sent via the internet in order to be read by radiologists in Mumbai, India. These specialists write the report and send it by email to America.

extremely demanding and competitive educational system, low price of the provision of services and the proficiency in English. Perhaps, the competitive advantage that mostly directs offshoring to India and not, for instance, to China is the high proficiency in English of millions of Indians. China can compete and, in some domains, even surpass India in the capacity to attract offshoring in what concerns the production of goods and components, but in service provision it has the handicap of the language. Besides these arguments, there is another aspect that should be regarded—the very old rooting of private tutoring in Indian culture. In India, private tutoring is the norm. Most students have private tutoring sessions, regardless of their specific form. It is something that is part of the way of life of many Indian people. There is, therefore, a legion of private tutors that have competence and experience in this field. In fact, in India there is a multitude of highly qualified people ready to work for low wages when compared to western patterns. We shall see in the next section of this work the main characteristics of this phenomenon that has placed India as a main actor in the globalized market.

The marriage of convenience between America and India

Some say that vision is the art to see the invisible. Others say that the hardest thing to predict is the future. In late 1990s, a set of events triggered the end of thousands of companies of the emerging segment of the new technologies. Nonetheless, these events were seen as opportunities by some companies that would not give up and by others who saw in them the right moment to enter the market. At that time, some companies had commitment, a feeling to take chances and a globalized vision that allowed them to make more and better with more limited budgets. In spite of the significant cultural differences between the two countries, it occurred a sort of germination after a fire, and the Indian and American entrepreneurs understood that it was possible to use the vast brainpower of India, without moving people, to perform with great quality and at a low cost an enormous amount of tasks that had a higher production cost in America. There was then a growing marriage of convenience between American, Indian and Indian-Americans so as to promote businesses in which the variables space and distance were seen as increasingly less important. Why did not this association occur with another country in such an intense form?

Since India became independent it has invested in an educational system that has clearly privileged the scientific and technical sides in order to train a part of their intellectual and economical elites. This part, in a country which has today more than a billion inhabitants, is truly a large number of people. According to what Friedman says (2005:

104–105) since the 1950s India has created Institutes of Technology and Institutes of Management with extremely high patterns of student selection and training. The high number of candidates and the demand that is placed in the teaching allowed for the production of millions of graduates who are extremely able in the fields of engineering, software development, computer network management. The Indian market did not have the capacity to absorb this entire highly qualified workforce. Therefore, many have immigrated into America, thus reinforcing the workforce of many companies of this new economy; most stayed in India but frequently with poorly paid jobs or unemployed. This highly qualified workforce was noticed by entrepreneurs with sense of opportunity and a complex relationship was built, one in which there is no longer, as in the beginning, a total subordination of the Indian regarding the American. Indian companies have already shown what they are able to do with both speed and quality. Increasingly often, they assume proactively the offering goods and service with added-value.

One of the heritages of the end of the dot.com companies boom (the famous crash in 2000) was an enormous amount of optic fibre cables with the capacity to transmit great amounts of information to the whole world that were already installed. This infrastructure existed but it was not being fully used. Some companies realized the exceptional potential of this digital infrastructure to relocate the production of many goods and services in a puzzle in which each part played a function regardless of where the activity was developed. The local constraints such as legislation, corruption, culture, social movements are often diminished or surpassed when you use a digital infrastructure through the network of optical fibre cables or satellites in order to perform the internal or external communication of the companies. In the case of private tutoring through the internet, this infrastructure is absolutely crucial for the concretization of the business.

The market of private tutoring through the internet

The market of private tutoring through the internet is a phenomenon that is part of a scenario of growing use of new technologies in which the offer of extremely dynamic technologic paraphernalia is mixed with the quest for answers to personal and social needs through virtual means. All types of education and tutoring “can now be provided across borders, most obviously via the Internet” (Bray 2009: 102; Bray 2006a, b: 519). The area of teaching through the internet has used as one of the main arguments for its growth the fact that it promotes, among other aspects, a communication that is focused on the student. Due to this, it is also argued that the responsibility and commitment towards learning will be felt by the student in a higher extent than in

traditional teaching. However, since the introduction of the new technologies in the educational arena we have noticed that, frequently, the potential and promises do not match what is truly conquered by the educators. A decade ago, speaking about the fast growth of the internet and of the potential of online education, Warschauer (1998:68) wondered if we were again living the cycle of “glorification and disappointment”.

The growth of the industry of private tutoring has been so spectacular that some analysts consider that we are watching a true explosion both on the level of the offer and on the level of demand (Thompson 2007). The movement towards the rise of the high stakes testing from which the SAT and ACT³ are examples has functioned as a catalyst for the market of private tutoring under various forms once that it highlights the separation between what students know and what some individuals and organizations define, in an arbitrary fashion, they should know. Families, frequently through the influence of the media, demand in an increasing manner external help that can guarantee more chances of success for their children, transforming them, sometimes, in a sort of “racing horses” since their younger years, which leads some authors to speak of a parent frenzy fuelled by anxiety (Paul 2007: 36) and by research itself. This is the case of study recently conducted with 36 thousand children in pre-school years in the United States of America, Canada and England in which it is stated that “competences at the level of mathematics and reading at the beginning of schooling are consistently associated with higher levels of academic performance in the following years” (Duncan 2007: 1444). It is also manifest here a process of outsourcing and even of offshoring. Families see themselves as being unable, for the most varied reasons (time, level of knowledge, availability), to grant their children the “extra help” they need to achieve the so much desired success.

In this scenario, in spite of the true industry with billions of founding and, many often, present in the great world stock markets, even though we do not have enough data, it seems that the private tutors that use the traditional form of in presence individual teaching or with a small group still have a high demand. Nevertheless, this domestic dimension, in the shadow, is increasingly getting more competition from companies with resources, visibility and arguments that are not easy to fight against. One of the examples that is the most different from the classic prototype of private tutoring is certainly that of the “God Tutors” (expression by which they are called in Cantonese) in Hong Kong. Cheng (2007) says that these tutors use attractive techniques, like the movie or music, and can grant the near devotion of thousands of students. The “god tutors”, whose faces and advertising are everywhere in enormous outdoors, in billboards in buses and

in train stations and even in the front pages of the newspapers, tutor 100 students at a time. This is a fantastic business in which each one of these individuals, working around 40 h per week, can earn around 40 thousand Euros in 1 week. Thus, they can afford to practice a true cult of the image in order to impress even further their clients. These “icons” drive around in Lamborghini or Ferrari cars, wear dressy clothes and attract a vast number of clients eager for increasingly higher academic classifications (Cheng 2007). Sex appeal has become an argument to add to knowledge and ability to teach in the marketing strategy that supports the budding of some of the tutors. There are companies who choose their tutors according to their physical attributes. Angela You and Stella Cheng are two private tutors who work for Modern Education, one of the pioneer companies in this business in Hong Kong, and who spend weeks working with fashion designers in order to decide which miniskirts and high heel shoes they should wear in the next promotional campaign. The president of the company, Ken Ng, mentions that “their long legs are the most beautiful in the private tutoring industry” (Associated Press 2007a). These strategies, with many similarities with the promotional machines of the pop and movie stars, include teams of stylists, hairdressers, photographers and websites with pictures of these idols to whom nicknames such as “the godfather of science” or “the queen of English” are given (Associated Press 2007b). In the end, these private tutors and the complex promotional machines that support them are only using an aggressive marketing oriented towards the culture of consumerism of the young people in order to attract their attention. Nevertheless, this would not be enough if there was no impact at the level of the results on the two difficult and decisive exams that the young have to surpass during the 7 years of secondary schooling in order to have access to higher education. Many of these “god tutors” are supported by teams of analysts who try to, and frequently succeed, “guess” some of the exam questions from patterns identified in previous exams (Associated Press 2007a, b).

The offer we shall now analyse with further detail is the one that uses the internet and other new technologies in order to sell synchronous and asynchronous private tutoring in a globalized scenario that questions many of our prejudices in the cultural, linguistic, communicational, didactic and pedagogical domains.

From the end of the 1990s (Hua 2006), there were created companies that use specific software such as electronic boards, image processors, video cameras and broadband internet connections and that promote private tutoring in actual or deferred time between private tutors and the students. The most original aspect of this process is that, in many cases, the private tutors are in Bangalore or Cochin, in India, and the students are in the USA, Australia, New Zealand, England, Malaysia or Singapore.

³ See more information further in this paper.

Taking advantage of the federal founding, the scientific and pedagogical quality of the Indian private tutors, their low cost, the flexibility of timetables and the security for the students and their families, these companies of online academic support have developed greatly in the last years.

This is the case of the *StudyLoft*,⁴ created in 2005 in Chicago by Bikram Roy, an Indian descendent born in the USA. The company office in Bangalore gave in 2006 private tutoring sessions through the internet to 5,400 American students (Bray 2006a, b). Roy remembered when he was a student, going around the campus looking for help and spending entire nights studying. He realized that probably the higher education students would be willing to pay for private tutoring that could solve their immediate problems and that could enlighten doubts at any time of the day or night, often to help them make homework that should be presented the following day. Thus, profiting from the NCLB⁵ funds, he created *StudyLoft* with the intention of selling private tutoring at a low cost through the internet in the fields of Mathematics, Statistics, Accounting, Economy, Chemistry, Physics and Biology, betting in particular on the timetable between 8 pm and 4 am (Conroy 2005).

In Portugal, the University of Évora, began in 2007 the Project “Específicas”⁶ with the objective of granting free private tutoring through the internet to 12th grade students that want to do the national exams. Therefore, secondary and university teachers explain through the internet subjects that are related with the national specific tests. These virtual tutors guarantee an answer to the questions that are submitted to them in the maximum deadline of 24 h. According to the pro-rector of the University of Évora, “there are many students who cannot pay a private tutor. In this website, they can find tutoring without expenses” (Mundo PT Online: 2007).

In Korea, internet private tutoring is a relatively new approach compared with traditional one-to-one or group private tutoring. In the mid 1990s, the government began

providing tutoring courses through broadcasts on the Educational Broadcasting Station (EBS) and it is also available on internet. Government-based online private tutoring introduced to deal with unbalanced distribution of education. The assumption is if the educational services are provided by a public sector, the education cost would be cheaper, education and private tutoring would be connected, and the education inequality would be mitigated. In this context, Korean government strongly supported educational broadcasting service. According to ‘2.17 Plans to Reduce Private Education Cost’ on February 17, 2004, EBS tutoring program was implemented as an important measure to absorb the demands for private education into the public education system. Recently, Myung-bak Lee government (2008-present) proposed Educational Plans for the Reduction of Shadow Education through the Enhancement of the Competitiveness of Public Education. One of the important policy measures is to provide high quality of EBS programs. It includes providing customized programs, higher incentives for instructors, developing quality of textbook, and introducing the study planners.

Internet private tutoring programs are available on both public sector such as EBS⁷ and private sector such as megastudy, edunet, YBMsisa, edubox⁸ and etc. Private sectors are more actively increased by demand of private tutoring. The demand of internet-based learning has been increased gradually, online website market have been increased rapidly in Korea. It is regarded as huge business.

In the private tutoring through the internet market, there is another segment that has been developing significantly—the offer of private tutoring online by libraries to their users. This way, the libraries increase their notoriety and the number of those who seek them. For instance, the Seattle Public Library offers their users online tutoring from the 4th to the 12th grade in Mathematics, Sciences, Social Studies and English, every day from 3 to 10 pm (Dunnewind 2005). This and many other American libraries outsource this provision of services to the *Tutor.com*⁹ company. Tutor.com has contracts with 1,600 libraries and school districts through the Live Homework Help since 2000 and in 2007 has grown 163.7%, now being the 31st company in the ranking of the education industry companies with the fastest growth (Inc.com 2007). This company with office in New York has only 46 employees who manage a network of over 2.200 private tutors in subjects that range from Algebra to Trigonometry, Chemistry and English (Tutor.com 2008a). The company is also involved in specific programmes founded by the Kansas

⁴ <http://www.studyloft.com>.

⁵ The *No Child Left Behind Act*, published in 2002, states that the school districts where there are students from low income families and with repetitive low academic achievement have to grant free supplementary academic support. In reality, the NCLB Act demands that the Title 1 schools (those that via the NCLB Act get the federal founding to educate disadvantaged children) that have not shown an adequate progress in what concerns the improvement of the academic success of their students for three or more years offer supplementary educational services to the students from disadvantaged families. The goal is to get these students to achieve at least the minimal standards of performance in the standardized tests applied in each State. Therefore this federal program gives astronomic founding to the States. These use their structures to comply with the legal imposition or outsource to private companies that have bloomed. Many of them, both in presence and through the internet, appear precisely because they saw in the federal program a seductive business opportunity in these remedial tutoring programs.

⁶ <http://www.especificas.uevora.pt>.

⁷ <http://www.ebs.co.kr>.

⁸ <http://www.megastudy.net>, <http://www.edunet4u.net>, <http://www.ybmsisa.com>, <http://www.edubox.co.kr>.

⁹ <http://www.tutor.com>.

and Alabama governors—HomeworkKansas¹⁰ and HomeworkAlabama¹¹ (Tutor.com 2008b).

Basically, the online private tutoring companies provide, in different combinations and with different profiles, the following services: help in homework making; private tutoring; exam preparation; help in written papers; classification of written papers.

In terms of the configuration of private tutoring companies through the internet that use human resources based in India, there are three realities. Companies such as TutorVista have their headquarters in India and it is there that they have their private tutors. Others, such as the Growing Stars, have their headquarters in America, but most of their private tutors are in India. Finally, companies such as BrainFuse offshore a part of their private tutors, but recruit in America most of their private tutors (Ciano 2007: 33). These are different entrepreneurial strategies from the company managers regarding the courage to face social prejudices in general and of the potential clients themselves and the ability to face the pressures of the unions and of those who do not approve the dislocation of employment abroad.

Specificities of private tutoring through the internet

The use of the Internet to provide off-line (downloadable lessons) and online tutoring is increasing and has no borders. The flexibility of this approach is not offered by face-to-face schooling (Bray 2009: 105). The development of infrastructure, technologies, hardware and software offer growing possibilities and a great potential for government authorities and for the private sector. One example of promising technology development is the WhiteBoard, or virtual electronic board.¹² This is a tool with a space where one can draw figures, graphics, images and mathematical expressions. Besides that, it has chatting systems through text instant messaging and audio and video transmission. The users that are online can visualize in actual time the changes that are made in the electronic board. These different functionalities can be customized for each specific product. In addition, the teacher or private tutor can broaden or restrict the user privileges for each of the students according to the specific activities that are being developed at the moment. In the case of online private tutoring, the private tutor uses a different colour from the one the student uses in order to build and correct equations.

Some companies use life feed video systems that allow the private tutor and the student to see one another, increasing communicational exchange, credibility and

communicational effectiveness. In what concerns sound transmission, some companies make use of VOIP, a telephone that uses the internet to make free calls.

A tool that has shown to be very useful, especially in online private tutoring for homework making, is the scanner that allows the students to digitalise a worksheet, a formative evaluation test or any other document and send it by email to the private tutor. The private tutor can also use this technique. This way both will be seeing at the same time the material on which the tasks are to be performed.

In the case of private tutoring through the internet in which the private tutors are in India and work from Bangalore, Cochin or any other town to teach students that are in America, the companies (for instance Growing Stars or TutorVista) train their employees in order to reduce their more British accent and wording. Besides, they receive lessons in American culture “including the rules of baseball and the most popular movies and music” (Hua 2006). Due to the cultural and age differences that typically separate the private tutors from their students, in this case, it is necessary to give the private tutors some knowledge that can make them more at ease and it is indispensable to create a common language that allows a minimum of informal communication at least at the beginning of each session. For many private tutors, it is from this that a relationship that allows compensating the distances, namely the physical, is built. This relational factor, this intimacy at a distance, attracts many of the students and is used as a competitive advantage when compared to the school teaching. This way, many of the students are able to feel that they get more attention from the private tutor than they get from the teacher. In fact, during the online session, the private tutor attention is focused exclusively on the student.

Advantages of private tutoring through the internet

Making use of the internet to have private tutoring can have a great number of advantages both to students and to their families. One of the main reasons to choose the internet is the cost. Private tutoring through the internet cost around 15–25 dollars an hour or 100 dollars a month if you buy a 24/7 free access package. On the other hand, face to face private tutoring in New York, for instance, can cost a fortune that many families cannot afford. The training program for the SAT¹³ test of the Huntington company in 2002 cost 2,700

¹⁰ <http://www.homeworkkansas.org>.

¹¹ <http://www.homeworkalabama.org>.

¹² At <http://www.scriblink.com> you can grasp how this software works.

¹³ SAT, Scholastic Aptitude Test or Scholastic Assessment Test, is a set of standardized tests, introduced in 1901 in the United States of America, in order to filter the access to higher education promoted by The College Board, a non-profit American organization. The SAT is comprised by the SAT Reasoning Test, thus designated from 2005 on, and the SAT Subject Tests. The SAT Reasoning Test is prepared to measure the critical reading, the written expression and the

dollars (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education 2002: 68). According to the same journal, this value is around 10% of the total annual income of a typical black American family. These values are impossible to bear and deepen the cultural capital, success and well-being differences between the poorer and the wealthier. Even higher prices were the ones that some individual private tutors of the Manhattan area asked for around this time, some of them charging around 300 dollars per hour for the SAT preparation (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education 2002: 69). According to Cole (2005), there were American companies that send their best private tutors to the homes of the clients in order to prepare them for the SAT at a varying price per hour: Princeton Review charged 300 dollars per hour, Inspirica charged 525 dollars and Advance Testing charged 685 dollars. According to the same author, a 24-h preparation for the SAT package sold, for instance, by Princeton Review with a top private tutor with over 10 years of experience can cost 7.200 dollars (Cole 2005). As we can see, these prices are clearly out of the reach of most families, but even so they are a growing fringe of the market. In Korea context, private tutoring is regarded as one of major economic activities. The Korea National Statistical Office (2007) indicated that the growth rate of the expenditure on private tutoring was 25% per year and the total revenue was 20.4 trillion Korean won (approximately \$12 billion). The cost of private tutoring varies by its type. Student spends the most when they have a one to one private lesson and the least spends to use internet private tutoring. One to one private tutoring is approximately 5 times more expensive than internet private tutoring (Korea Development Institute 2004). The survey of Ministry of Education (2004) indicated that higher SES students are more likely to receive one to one private tutoring, whereas lower SES students have a tendency to receive internet private tutoring. Especially, students from rural area use more internet tutoring than urban area. Most forms of private tutoring self-evidently maintain or exacerbate social inequalities since high-income households are more easily

Footnote 13 continued

mathematical competences needed to have academic success in higher education. The SAT Subject Tests are designed to measure the knowledge and competences in specific scientific areas. Most of the questions are multiple choice questions, but the candidates also have to write an essay in 25 min. The set of these tests lasts for a marathon of 4 h (ETS 2008).

According to Monson (2007), in 2007, there was national total of 1.495.000 American secondary school students that were submitted to the SAT and 1.300.000 that opted for the other test, the ACT. This test began to be done by ACT, an independent non-profit organization, in 1959 and includes, nowadays, 215 questions on English, Mathematics, Reading, Sciences and Writing (ACT 2008) and has the same objectives of the SAT.

More information on these exams can be found, for instance, in the website of The College Board (2008), in the website of the Educational Testing Service, or in the Wikipedia (2008b).

able to afford greater quantities and better qualities of tutoring compared with low-income households (Bray 1999: 61). Excessive expenses of private tutoring cause not only financial but also social inequality issues in Korea. Internet private tutoring may offer some advantage to students from lower SES families and rural areas and also internet private tutoring can be effective to provide access to private tutoring to the low-income families and families in the rural, remote and mountainous areas. Therefore, internet private tutoring could contribute to mitigate the educational inequality among classes and regions.

We have to take into consideration the safety of the users as well. With the increase of the insecurity and criminality levels, the clients feel safer getting private tutoring at home. Even in the cases where the private tutoring sessions are given by private tutors who go to the home of the students, the formula used by companies such as *Academia*¹⁴ (France) or *Explica Tudo, Professores ao domicílio*¹⁵ (Portugal), there is a potential danger for the safety of the students. Besides, there is always a certain lack of privacy by facilitating the entrance of a stranger in our own home. Precisely in order to increase the sense of security of the families and students, some online private tutoring companies record all sessions in order to avoid any potential harassment situation from the private tutors or allegations made by clients.

Another important factor is comfort. It is much more user friendly to be comfortably seated in our own home instead of having to go somewhere else. You do not waste time in public transportation, you do not have to face the weather conditions and you save a lot of time. Parents, who quite often carry their children to the private tutors or private tutoring centres, save a lot of time and money in fuel. With this formula, an hour of private tutoring effectively is an hour spent on this task and not to one or two more hours spent in travelling. In isolation this may seem insignificant, but if we take into account a whole school year, we have situations in which the students, and the people that occasionally go with them, will save hundreds of hours and a lot of money by choosing the online private tutoring.

The study adapted to the learning rhythm of each student and the flexibility of timetables also attracts many clients. More important seems to be the fact that the students feel much more at ease to place questions and to address their doubts on an online environment. When they are in the classroom or in a group at a private tutoring centre they feel ashamed to assume that they do not know some things they should know. Sometimes, they fear being victims of embarrassment by their colleagues, or even of bullying situations, due to the fact that they show their ignorance

¹⁴ <http://www.academia.fr>.

¹⁵ <http://www.explicatudo.pt>.

regarding certain subjects or because they have a slower learning rhythm. As a result of these inhibitions, the students do not evolve as much as they could with the help of their private tutors. Directly related with this question, there is also the customization of the online environments in what concerns the rhythm of progression in learning. In many of the offers on this level, it is the students who modulate the rhythm. The private tutors encourage and try to motivate the students to progress, but do not impose rhythms. Naturally, this flexibility is not a positive characteristic for every kind of personality. There are students who without an external pressure to keep a certain rhythm and to develop a set of tasks according to a pre-defined chronogram tend to lack back on their involvement and to give up.

The factor that is seen by many as a crucial one in the process of communication, the “eye to eye contact”, becomes, for some shyer children, a stress factor, especially after a long day of school classes. These students will have the tendency to feel much less intimidated by the fact that their communication with the private tutors does not include the visual contact in the most common online private tutoring environments.

Some students have a great difficulty in dealing with colleagues that have disruptive behaviours and in keeping their concentration. Sometimes, these situations also occur in environments of traditional group private tutoring. It is also easier to keep a higher concentration environment with online private tutoring and, as such, the potential for real learning is greater.

Many of the advantages of online private tutoring are still more attractive when we speak of students with special education needs. Companies such as the American *Click2Tutor*¹⁶ developed a specialized area to answer the needs of this market. This corporation gives supplementary educational support through the internet to students with dyslexia, dyscalculia or attention deficit disorder. The comfort and security given by this kind of learning can be quite seductive for students and their families. Taking into account that special educational needs are predictive factors for bullying, the temptation to use private tutoring in this protective environment is even greater.

Another situation in which online private tutoring can be a solution or, at least, a palliative is in the case when the students are unable to leave home or the hospital. Private tutoring through the internet can maintain the connection with the knowledge and some discipline in the learning process in order to facilitate the return to the academic activities after the recovery.

Online private tutoring also has a very important playful character. The computer, the internet, the chats and instant messaging services are increasingly familiar for all the

young people. The dynamic that this technological and communication paraphernalia renders has many similarities with the interactions that the young people establish in their social life in the internet. Besides that, some parents will see in this formula a new opportunity to familiarize their children with the new technologies, which are increasingly more present in the work market.

Another extremely important aspect is that with online private tutoring there are no geographical constraints both for the service providers and to their clients. Suppliers of internet tutoring can serve remote populations as easily as urban ones, and can do so in any language that is convenient. Thus, for example, tutors in India can serve clients in the USA through the medium of English, and tutors in mainland China can serve clients in Hong Kong or Singapore through the medium of Chinese (Bray 2009: 28). As we have seen, for instance, companies with headquarters in California, whose brainpower is in India, provide educational services to clients all over the world. Besides that, these clients, regardless of where they are, can have their private tutoring sessions as long as they have the necessary technological infrastructure. We are, therefore, in a very appellative and comfortable ubiquity situation. In Portugal, there are many regions, especially in the central and northern interior part of the country, where the families and students do not have access to traditional private tutors because there are none. Online private tutoring could be a solution for these cases also.

Finally, there is a crucial aspect that helps to attract clients for the online private tutoring proposals. It is the professionalism, or at least the image of professionalism, that these companies transmit to their potential clients and effective clients. Well-built internet sites, with a modern and professional image, in many of them including the possibility of having free sessions¹⁷ for the clients to check the adequacy and quality of the proposal, with the guarantee of the return of the money already paid in case of dissatisfaction with the service, with the guarantee of replacement of the private tutoring at request of the client, with the possibility of convenient and safe payment through the internet, help to make this offer more credible. Besides this, many of these offers have a hierarchic, logic, well-built structure and guarantee a quality control that inspires confidence to students and their families. Companies such as *Sylvan*¹⁸ apply tests for evaluation of competences before the students start the private tutoring sessions. Thus, besides giving an image of professionalism, they can have a reference of the level of aptitude of the student from the beginning. This test will often also be used in order to make students and their families even more aware of the need of supplementary

¹⁶ <http://www.click2tutor.com/special-needs.html>.

¹⁷ It is the case of Tutor.com (<http://www.tutor.com>) that on their homepage offers 25 min of online private tutoring.

¹⁸ <http://tutoring.sylvanlearning.com>.

academic support. Besides this, the company, the students and the families can, latter, compare the level of knowledge and competences from the beginning with the one that the student has at any time during the time he/she has private tutoring sessions. Many of these companies regularly send their clients progress reports. These reports and, especially, the potential higher academic results, tests or exams, are the robust, documented evidences that can keep the clients and can bring new ones. Success brings more success. Still in the field of the credibility of this online private tutoring proposal, almost every company has a rigorous selection process for their private tutors, through, namely, the presentation of academic credentials and of proofs of teaching professional experience, initial training for the specificity of the functions of online private tutor, systematic quality control when the private tutor is already on the job and in-training services.

Conclusion

During recent decades, private tutoring has become a worldwide phenomenon and regarded as a vast enterprise. Also, in recent years, educational environment has been rapidly changing because of the growth of technology and internet. Internet-based educational programs are widely used in various educational area.

This paper tried to present a panoramic view over the phenomenon of online private tutoring in an increasingly globalized environment in which technology and the inventive and entrepreneurial capacity are accomplishing an extremely curious phenomenon of ubiquity of intellectual service provision of added value and of service provision that does not imply population movement. In this sense, the concept of globalization, outsourcing and offshoring has been introduced. Paradoxically, offshoring and globalization allows for intercultural dialogue and sharing of knowledge and skills, guaranteeing the keeping of the Indian private tutors in their locus of reference and allowing that a substantial part of the profit generated by their work can contribute for the development of their country. Thus, the professional can work in the global market without having to move. The market of private tutoring through the internet is growing world-wide. Private tutoring through the internet can have a great number of advantages. Especially, because of the low cost, it can be an important variable to increase access to quality and equity in education.

Even though private tutoring through internet is a relatively new approach, but it has now become an important implication for the private tutoring. Many of the traditional barriers to private tutoring with high quality standards can be erased using the online format that we have described in this paper. Students and families from everywhere can find

affordable support from high-quality tutors, no matter in which country they work. This growing tendency can give an important contribution to increase equity in education through the improvement of digital platforms allowing the perfect matching between the needs of those that are looking for private tutoring and the ones that can provide that kind of support. In the middle rests a strong challenge for public and private education.

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