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Abstract

The notion of selecting students based on academic achievement into different schools at certain points in their educational careers is one that has long been contested in education. In this paper I consider the role selective schooling may play in driving families' demand for private tutoring – a phenomenon currently growing in many regions of the world. The paper explores the 'extreme case' of South Korea – a country with some of the highest spending on private tutoring globally and also a long history of selective schooling. Drawing on interviews with experts and key stakeholders in the Korean education system, the paper reports a number of findings. Interviewees for this project were in many respects critical of a 1970s 'equalisation' of Korean schooling, though they also viewed moves back towards selection as fuelling 'shadow education'. Concern about this has driven governments to curb selective schooling for a second time in Korean history.

Keywords

Selective schools; tracking; private tutoring; shadow education

Introduction

The idea in education of selecting students based on their academic achievement into different schools for those who are more or less 'able' is one which has historically been critiqued by scholars stressing the divisive nature of selective schooling and its largely negative impact on disadvantaged groups' educational outcomes. Debates about selective education typically focus on the way that middle class families tend to flock towards prestigious selective schools, leaving others behind in less prestigious non-selective institutions. Comparatively less has been said to date on the *means* by which families seek to access selective schooling, including the possibility that selective education may increase families' expenditures on private tutoring. Private tutoring is a transnational phenomenon and a global industry that has grown considerably in recent years (Aurini et al, 2013; Park et al, 2016). It may compound already unequal access to 'top-tier' schools (given parents' unequal capacities to pay for tutoring) while also contributing to changing norms about who ought to pay for school-level education, and financial burdens are created for families who do engage, particularly those on lower incomes. Scholars such as Bray (2011; 2017) have argued that it is important for researchers in the field of education to explore factors which may fuel growing private tutoring demand in societies, particularly at a time when tutoring industries in many countries are still relatively modest in size. Such may give 'opportunities to avert some of the major problems experienced by countries in which it has become engrained in cultures and daily lives' (Bray, 2011: 15).

What may be known so far in the world about relationships between the presence of selective schooling in a society and the extent to which families will deem it worthwhile to pay for extra tuition for their children? Here, South Korea (hereafter Korea) constitutes a fascinating 'extreme case' (Gerring, 2008). It is a country with some of the highest levels of private tutoring in the world and as a result can offer us helpful 'leverage' in generating hypotheses (ibid, p.645) about what may drive private tutoring demand in a society. Findings presented in this paper report on a study exploring the views of 29 experts and key stakeholders in the Korean education system on factors

contributing to the rise of private tutoring over several decades in Korea. This study was broad and exploratory in nature; however, the current paper reports on a particularly salient area of findings which emerged – namely the large extent to which interviewees linked trends towards increased private tutoring in Korea with what are also extensive Korean experiences of selective schooling.

The paper proceeds as follows: first, the basic notion of selective schooling in education is introduced and some arguments are outlined briefly both in favour of and against this type of education. A specific association is then posited between selective education and the phenomenon of private tutoring, and a rationale presented for choosing the ‘extreme’ case of Korean education in order to explore such an association. Methods deployed in the research underpinning this paper are subsequently outlined and a number of key findings are reported. At the end of the paper I reflect on selective education as being one among a number of factors driving demand for private tutoring in Korea, albeit a particularly salient factor.

Selective schooling in education – proponents and critics

Why might selective schooling be desirable? Proponents of academic selection or ‘between-school tracking’ in education systems across the world have often historically argued that there is a certain *economic efficiency* within societies which comes from allocating different types of students, who naturally possess differing talents and abilities, to separate tracks of schooling offering different knowledge and skills and training (see e.g. Prais and Wagner, 1985). Educationalists have also at times emphasised an idea that differentiated and hierarchically organised schooling can often be *meritocratic* (see e.g. Saunders, 1995). Students who are innately gifted and who work hard to pass school entrance exams within selective education systems will, it is often argued, deservedly receive ‘superior’ schooling. Many argue this can be the case even where students come from disadvantaged backgrounds, as these students will be able to access ‘top-tier’ schools to which they may otherwise have no access (e.g. in a system where students are allocated to local neighbourhood schools).

Selective schooling has, however, long also had vocal critics. Considering first principles, scholars such as Goldthorpe (1997) have argued that formalised assessments within education and beyond of what may constitute ‘merit’ will always be problematic because they involve *subjective judgements*. Such judgements, too – along with their associated unequal distributions of educational opportunities – usually favour the middle classes, and notably education systems where students are subject to early ‘tracking’ have been shown to be associated with higher levels of social stratification (Hanushek and Woessman, 2006; Dupriez and Dumay, 2006; West and Nikolai, 2013; Schleicher, 2014). While selective schooling may help some less affluent students to achieve their potential, access to such schooling is ultimately skewed towards more advantaged groups, and for the majority of disadvantaged students *unable* to access ‘top-tier’ schools in a selective system, there can be negative effects on the schools they *do* attend (with respect to student social compositions and resources) and so on their educational outcomes (Andrews et al, 2016; Kerckhoff, 1993; Schagen and Schagen, 2003; Levacic and Marsh, 2007; Maaz et al, 2008; Gamoran, 2010; Boliver and Swift, 2011; Burgess et al, 2014).

Private tutoring across the world – driven in part by selective education?

One possible compounding issue is the notion that selective schooling may increase families’ *private tutoring expenditures*. Private tutoring is a phenomenon which Park et al (2016: 232) describe as having undergone a ‘massive worldwide increase’ in recent years.ⁱ Following Bray (2010), it is defined here as comprising tutoring which takes place *outside the formal school day*, which *focuses on academic subjects* students already study inside school, and for which families pay *fees*. Such

tutoring takes a wide variety of forms, ranging from one-to-one provision in family homes through online provision to larger group tuition inside formal private institutions. A proliferation of local, national and international tutoring franchises has emerged throughout the world in recent years. Such franchises have been part of a wider and ever-intensifying global education industry wherein networked actors outside the state increasingly market and sell transnationally not only tutoringⁱⁱ but a multitude of other education services (Ball, 2012; Verger et al, 2016):

‘Today, nearly everywhere in the world, students take part in a myriad of structured academic activities after the formal school day ends’ (Park et al, 2016: 232)

Bray and Kwo (2013) argue that private tutoring is a phenomenon about which governments ‘prefer not to know too much’ (p.491). Such tutoring – or ‘shadow education’ (Stevenson and Baker, 1992) as it is often termed – tops up public spending on education and it contributes to shifting norms about who *ought* to pay for education. This arguably helps governments in an era when education is key within strategies for social investment (Van Kersbergen and Hemerijck, 2012). However, important inequality implications also arise, because parents across the world possess markedly unequal resources to devote to private tutoring (Ireson and Rushforth, 2011; Francis and Hutchings, 2013; Chanfreau et al, 2015a). As expenditures increase, pressures are generated for families on lower incomes to spend, but at the same time already substantial advantage in education for more affluent groups becomes ‘effectively maintained’ (Lucas, 2001; Park et al, 2016; Bray, 2017) because such groups will always be able to afford more and better quality than lower income families can. Intergenerational social mobility is arguably particularly hampered in systems where a larger proportion of total education spending is private, because student achievement becomes even more strongly influenced by parents’ ability to deploy private economic resources (see e.g. Jerrim, 2017; Gurun and Millimet, 2008).ⁱⁱⁱ Ball (2010) has furthermore critiqued ‘hyper-developmentalism’ in childhood – part of middle class ‘concerted cultivation’ of children (Lareau, 1987; Vincent, 2012). He highlights private tutoring as being part of growing trends towards accelerated learning as parents strive to secure competitive advantage for their children within ‘local economies of student worth’ (p.155).

Dynamics outlined above regarding private tutoring and its growth have led some to call for more research in particular into ‘the role of government in the expansion of shadow education systems’ (Lee et al, 2010: 98; Bray, 2011; 2017). Here the matter of government policies on selective education may be considered pertinent. Within hierarchically-tiered or ‘tracked’ national schooling systems offering prestige and positive pupil ‘peer effects’ *only for some* at certain points in students’ educational careers, students taking school entrance exams are arguably under significant pressure to succeed. Bray (2011; see also Bray and Lykins, 2012) has argued that competitive ‘high stakes’ testing for students (which would include school entrance exams) may in many societies be one key driver of families’ demand for private tutoring. In such circumstances it is reasonable to surmise that many may be motivated to spend significant amounts in order to boost their children’s chances of scoring highly on tests. Paying for private tutoring is likely to be one key means through which parents might offer support.

‘Shadow education’ and selective schooling – the Korean case

How might we explore possible causal links between selective schooling and private tutoring? As indicated above, here Korea constitutes a fascinating ‘extreme case’ (Gerring, 2008). The country has some of the highest levels of private spending on ‘shadow education’ in the world, in recent years reaching 2.79 per cent of the national GDP and 80 per cent of the level of public spending on education in Korea (Kim and Lee, 2010; Bray and Lykins, 2012; Ku et al, 2016). Far from being seen as a source of national pride, Korean governments have for decades viewed private tutoring as being

‘the enemy of the public school system’ (Chung, 2002). Waldow et al (2014) highlight Korean mainstream media reports of an education system in ‘crisis’. Parents make major financial sacrifices in order to pay for private tutoring, with more than four in ten families viewing themselves as ‘edupoor’ (Kim, 2016). Children spend vast amounts of time annually in the country’s more than 100,000 private cram schools (*‘hagwons’*) outside their daily lives in public schools (Byun, 2014). Pressure on families to engage in shadow education in Korea is often said to drive not only low fertility rates among adults (see e.g. World Bank, 2018) but also substantial stress and depression – even high suicide rates – among young people in Korea (Kim, 2016).

Choosing an ‘extreme’ country case for exploration – one that is ‘prototypical or paradigmatic of some phenomen[on] of interest’ (Gerring, 2008: 653) – is a useful methodology for generating hypotheses about possible factors *causing* high levels of a particular dependent variable (in this instance private tutoring) in a society. In Korea, growing private tutoring over several decades has been so marked that governments themselves have become strongly attuned to observing in detail relationships between tutoring expenditures on one hand and particular societal trends and government policy reforms on the other. Large numbers of diverse policy measures have been introduced over time which have aimed to reduce families’ spending on private tutoring. These have included regulatory curfews and fee caps for *hagwons* (Kim and Park, 2010; Kim and Chang, 2010) in addition to publicly-financed initiatives such as After School Programmes (Lubienski and Lee, 2013) and a national Educational Broadcasting System (Bae et al, 2010). During the 1980s, Korea even officially banned commercial private tutoring, though this ban was relaxed during the 1990s and formally declared unconstitutional in 2000.

Particularly prominent policy debates, however, have focused on the possible impacts of Korean *high school entrance exams* on private tutoring expenditures. During the early 1960s in Korea, schooling beyond elementary level was neither compulsory nor universally available, and competition for places in middle and high schools was on the basis of challenging entrance exams. During the late 1960s/ early 1970s, governments moved towards universalising middle and high school education, expanding numbers of school places dramatically. As part of these reforms, however, governments also sought to ensure that universalised education would become ‘equalised’ education, with schooling hierarchies minimised, middle and high school entrance exams abolished and students allocated to schools on the basis of random lotteries (MEST, 2016; KEDI, 2011). Under the 1974 ‘High School Equalisation Policy’ (HSEP), general public high schools in Korea and even *fully private high schools* became prohibited from selecting students academically. Reasons stemmed from growing concerns that students were facing strong pressures to perform well in school entrance exams and to access the most desirable institutions possible within what had become established hierarchies of reputation among schools in existence. Such pressures were believed even during the mid-20th Century to be leading to families spending substantial amounts on tutoring.

Since the 1970s, however, an important deviation from equalisation reforms has also become established in the form of newer autonomous schools which have been permitted to operate *outside of HSEP rules*, selecting students academically.^{iv} Special Purpose High Schools (SPHSs) today are selective schools specialising in different subject areas, making up approximately 6% of all Korean high schools (Sung, 2011). Particularly noteworthy for their tough entrance exams have been Korea’s science high schools, first established in 1982, and foreign language and ‘international’ high schools, established during the 1990s (Lee, 2013: 346). In the late 2000s, President Lee Myung-bak gave additional schools new autonomy to select students (MEST, 2008; 2010; KEDI, 2011; 2016a; Oh, 2011; Lee and Kim, 2016). Private high schools regained autonomy ‘to decide freely on the selection of students for admission’ (MEST, 2008: 10) and autonomous public high schools were established in 2009, with ‘unnecessary regulations’ removed (Lee, 2013: 342) and powers to select students.

What are the views of Korean experts and key stakeholders today, both on early efforts to abolish academic selection in Korean general education, and also later re-emergences of that selection, with respect to their possible impacts on families' tutoring expenditures? This paper draws on a project that comprised a broad qualitative exploration of key causes underpinning extensive private tutoring in Korea and in which I sought to view the Korean case through 'foreign eyes' (Phillips and Schweisfurth, 2014: 19; see also Kim, 2014). Western research exploring education in East Asia has been an increasingly popular endeavour in recent years, in large part due to the strong OECD PISA performance of many East Asian countries,^v and East Asian education systems have in turn become key 'reference points' within comparative and international education (Waldow et al, 2014; Sellar and Lingard, 2013a; 2013b; Steiner-Khamsi, 2016; You and Morris, 2016). One sense in which findings in this paper may be considered notable is that they report on Korean expert perspectives on aspects of the Korean education system that are considered *problematic* even in a context of strong national PISA scores.

Data collection and analysis

Semi-structured interviews were carried out in February 2017 with 29 policy experts and key stakeholders in the Korean education system (see Appendix for details). Interviewees included one former Saenuri (conservative) government education minister and one former vice minister, advisers within the Korean Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST), government researchers, National Assembly politicians from the centre-left Minjoo political party, education scholars and representatives from the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education (SMOE), Korea's teacher unions, education NGOs and the tutoring industry itself.

Some interviews were carried out in English by the author alone, though others were carried out with the aid of two Korean interpreters who were also experts in education policy and very familiar with the aims and objectives of the research project.^{vi} In one instance due to a last-minute cancellation it was necessary to collect a respondent's insights via email. In five instances, interviewees were interviewed in groups of two or more. Thematic data analysis of interviews was carried out using NVivo 11. In order to boost accuracy, interview data were triangulated against key government policy documents, literature published by Korean think tanks (much of which is available in English) and against a large body of secondary academic literature on Korean shadow and selective education.

The 1970s equalisation of Korean education

Views among experts and stakeholders are mixed on ways in which the initial 1970s abolition of high school entrance exams in Korea may have affected families' private tutoring expenditures. Interviewees highlighted 'serious problems' (interviewee 5) which existed prior to the 1974 HSEP, citing high pressure on students during this early period to engage in tutoring in order to score well in these competitive exams (interviewees 2, 7, 21 and 25). Serious problems referred to here may relate not only to the fact that, prior to 1974, high school education was highly selective in Korea but also that it was limited in its availability, so scoring well in an entrance exam was ultimately the only chance most young people had of accessing high school at all. However, surveys have additionally shown over time that most people in Korea have continued to support 'equalised' schooling (KEDI, 2001; 2016b) even in a subsequent context of universal provision. Reasons may relate to perceptions that such a notion is associated with lower private tutoring costs.

At the same time, some were also sceptical that HSEP reforms, even after the achievement of universal high school enrolment, could ever truly have reduced families' spending on tutoring. In any society where inequalities exist, banning academic selection at the point of high school entry may

merely *postpone* inevitable competition that students will face, potentially even making this *more intense* (with higher associated tutoring costs) later in their educational careers. Interviewees noted that in Korea, after the HSEP, competition did increase hugely for access to universities – particularly the nation’s top universities (interviewees 6, 7, 8, 9, 19 and 23; see also Kim and Chang, 2010) – through the annual College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) or *Suneung*. One Minjoo politician called this a ‘balloon effect’ and commented that:

‘If all the schools are equal, then the competition for entering university is much stronger and getting worse’ (interviewee 6)

Government representatives added that another challenging outcome of 1970s equalisation was the fact it led in high schools to new, more mixed-ability provision and to more heterogeneous classroom environments (interviewees 1 and 2; see also Kim and Lee, 2002). This led some parents of high achieving children to become concerned that their children would receive less tailored attention, potentially increasing, rather than reducing, their spending on private tutoring. Particular dissatisfaction was believed to have been created by a banning of academic selection even in privately-funded schools:

‘we originally had public schools and private schools, but after the HSEP we had only one school system. Because even though there were private schools, they didn’t have autonomy ... and then many people complained’ (interviewee 2)

Kim and Lee (2002) note that, in 1980 (six years after the introduction of the HSEP), 30% of all Korean families were engaging in private tutoring. However, seven years earlier in 1973 it has also been noted that as many as 24% of all families were facing debt due to private tutoring (Byun, 2010) and one MEST adviser has argued that ‘equalisation of schooling did not cause an increase in private education’ (interviewee 3). Proving that the 1970s HSEP had causal effects *either increasing or reducing* spending on private tutors has been shown in literature to be very difficult to do. Official statistics do show rising spending on tutoring during the 1970s in Korea, but this was also a time of major economic development in the country, when rising general affluence may have meant more spending on tutoring whether schooling had been equalised or not. During the late-1970s, HSEP was also being implemented *only gradually* across the country,^{vii} and as early as 1980 commercial tutoring was (temporarily) banned, rendering the collection of reliable data on families’ spending after this point very difficult. Recent studies in present day Korea have compared areas where HSEP still operates with areas where it does not. Some have found higher tutoring expenditures in HSEP areas. However, these are also more likely to be *big cities*, rendering them unlike non-HSEP areas in many ways. Byun (2010) has used propensity score matching to compare HSEP/ non-HSEP areas and has actually found lower tutoring expenditures in HSEP areas, at least among families of students in grades 7-9 (aged approximately 12-15).

Meeting students’ diverse needs

Even among more left-wing advocates of traditional 1970s high school equalisation in Korea, critiques did also emerge about this leading to much ‘sameness’ in Korean education. Interviewees from one progressive NGO described overly uniform schooling, narrow in its curricular focus and failing to cater for students’ diverse needs and interests (interviewees 17 and 18). One former head of a private tutoring company, now critical of the tutoring industry and active in left-wing politics in Korea, called for a distinction between ‘equality of opportunity’ and ‘equal curricula’ in public education (interviewee 27) and teaching union representatives (interviewees 13, 15 and 16) highlighted a need for ‘specialisation’. As one NGO spokesperson argued:

'nowadays people don't want to go back to the era of the prestigious high schools and lower high schools – hierarchy – but they do want customised curriculums' (interviewee 18)

This perspective chimes to some degree with a co-existing appetite among more conservative groups in Korea for greater choice and diversity in education. Such groups have argued that a promotion of 'between-school diversity' (or a 'lavish "buffet" of high school types' - Sung, 2011) may specifically reduce parents' demand for private tutoring, given some of the latter may have been a 'natural market response' (Kim, 2004) to narrowly standardised public schooling after the HSEP:

'Government policies to diversify high school types may be an effective way to reduce the number of hours spent in private tutoring for those students who have the highest demand for private tutoring' (Kim and Chang, 2010: 16)

'We [the government] tried to introduce diversity in our school system ... Then through that the students don't have any need for private education' (interviewee 2)

However, even conservative interviewees supporting choice and diversity in education additionally stressed that diversity should always be 'horizontal' – not translating into school stratification (interviewees 1, 2, 3, 10, 11, 13, 14, 17, 18, 27 and 28). Such a view has been summarised by Lee et al (2010: 105):

'Educational programs and services should be diversified in order to address students' diverse needs ... The structure of the educational system should be horizontal and diversified, allowing for an increase in relevance of educational opportunities by promoting equity and excellence simultaneously'

New rejections of academic selection

The most salient research finding in this project was, however, the clear unanimity with which interviewees of all persuasions viewed re-introductions in recent decades of more *academically selective* forms of 'diverse' high schooling in Korea as contributing to increased tutoring costs for Korean families from the 1990s onwards. Although the 1990s was also the decade in which a previous ban on private tutoring in Korea came to be lifted, interviewees agreed there had been a particular growing pressure during both this decade and the next for students to engage in ever-more extensive tutoring – and at younger ages – in order to pass entrance exams for selective schools such as SPHSs (interviewees 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 13, 17, 18, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29; see also Sung, 2005; 2011):

'With the rise of SPHSs which require students to have higher academic credentials and scores, the rise of private tutoring became really big' (interviewee 18)

'There was a big increase in private tutoring for middle school students, because of very tough questions given by foreign language schools and tough questions given by science high schools ... To prepare for those difficult exams you need private tutors. There's a very clear linkage' (interviewee 1)

One key perspective here was that, although SPHSs had been intended to create centres of excellence in Korea focusing on specific subject areas, in reality the distinctive curricular identity of many was, in the words of one government researcher, 'questionable' (interviewee 4; see also 28 and 29). Specialist characteristics had become overshadowed over time by the fact that schools

were also perceived to be 'elite' – socially and academically selective due to their entrance exams^{viii} - and so they attracted wide ranges of applicants regardless of those applicants' specific interests. Interviewees described resulting stiff competition for places as allowing schools to set very difficult exams, testing students on knowledge stretching far beyond the standard public school curriculum for their age and so rendering private tutoring necessary (interviewees 1, 6 and 27; see also Kang et al, 2007). The particular nature of many entrance exams in SPHSs and other selective schools – ranking students based on their scores in standardised multiple choice tests – was also described as being highly conducive to being helped by classic 'cram' style tutoring offered in Korean *hagwons* (interviewees 6, 8 and 17; see also Sung, 2011). One Minjoo politician highlighted a particular growth of private tutoring in English – an 'English crazy-storm' – that he believed had been produced specifically by recent highly demanding requirements of Korean foreign language schools (interviewee 7).^{ix} Additionally, one scholar argued that, for students entering the country's elite science schools, the need for extensive private tutoring did not even stop when students gained access. Rather, once attending such schools, students were expected to make such fast progress – again going beyond the standard requirements of the country's public school curriculum – that private tutoring was needed in order for them to keep up (interviewee 8). Kim and Shin (2012) show significant positive associations in Korea between a) gradients at which private tutoring expenditures rise as students progress through middle school, and b) whether students are aspiring to enter SPHSs.

Some interviewees believed it was not possible to achieve 'horizontal' diversity in Korean education; instead 'diversification becomes stratification' (interviewees 3, 5, 7, 8, 13, 14, 17, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26 and 27). This was even the perspective of one MEST adviser working under the market-oriented Saenuri government of President Park Geun-hye^x:

'Diversity of education in high school makes hierarchy of high school' (interviewee 3)

Others were more optimistic about the possibility of diversification *without* stratification, though they stressed that school entrance exams must be avoided in order for such a vision to be realised. Within Seoul, a new school type has recently been established called the 'Seoul-style Innovation School', promoting a 'learner centred creative curriculum' (SMOE, 2017: 4). According to representatives from SMOE, approximately 10% of schools in Seoul are now Innovation Schools, though importantly these schools do not have entrance exams and SMOE has also sought actively to promote creation of the schools within the city's more disadvantaged neighbourhoods (interviewees 10, 11 and 12).

Both conservative Saenuri governments and their main opponents – the Minjoo Party^{xi} – have notably pledged in recent years to 'transform' the admissions arrangements of Korean selective schools (interviewee 7). In 2009, foreign language and science SPHSs became formally *prevented* for the first time from administering entrance exams. Applicants to the schools may still today be 'selected', but selection must now be on the basis of students' middle school records only, and within this only on students' test scores in relevant subjects (Lee et al, 2010). Independent private schools in Korea are today still permitted to use entrance exams, but they may not test students in detail on academic subjects – only general 'aptitude for schooling' (interviewee 8). Korean autonomous schools must additionally reserve 20% of places for applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds (Lee, 2013: 347).

SPHS selection of students based on middle school records does, of course, still constitute academic selection in Korea, and interviewees noted that this would therefore still mean parents paying for private tutoring (interviewees 5, 17 and 27). Moreover, among independent private schools, Sung (2011) has reported that many have 'resorted to using a narrowly-focused academic oral admissions

exam’, which has again ‘stimulated private-sector education markets to provide expensive tutoring programmes for entrance to these elite high schools’ (p.528). Even while acknowledging that selective education in Korea today is likely to increase tutoring costs for families, one conservative NGO leader did still argue that selective education remains important and valuable (interviewee 19; see also Waldow et al, 2014, here on right wing media discourses on the value of competition in the Korean education system). Other NGO representatives additionally emphasised that support for school entrance exams remains persistent among ‘upper class parents’ (interviewee 22) in Korea wherever ‘they believe their kid can get in’ (interviewee 21). Notably some regions within Korea, such as Jeju island, have retained entrance exams for schools on a widespread basis until very recently – despite Ministry of Education discouragement of these exams – due to local conservative parent support for the exams. At the same time, however, both left-wing and more conservative interviewees did also stress some growing consensus towards abolishing ‘elite’ forms of schooling in Korea (interviewees 1, 13, 17, 18, 20 and 24):

‘It’s not really popular in Korea because we have had much bigger problems with private tutoring compared to the UK, so we all know the problem if we are leaning to that kind of system.’ (interviewee 1)

‘We Koreans have a pretty negative view of those entrance exams ... Since Koreans are spending one fourth of their household income on private education, they even lack the money to prepare for their old age. So regardless of which party, all the politicians agree on the point that that this is a very serious issue in Korea, so they have been focusing on how to reduce the private tutoring costs. Since all these SPHSs and autonomous high schools are increasing that private tuition market they are trying to abolish these high schools altogether, the SPHSs.’ (interviewee 18)

Discussion and conclusions

This paper has analysed the views of Korean education experts and key stakeholders on a longstanding perceived historical relationship between academically selective schooling and high levels of private tutoring in Korea. Selective education has long been reported in much education research to have problematic implications for equity and the key finding in this paper – namely that in Korea it seems to have been one factor driving societal rises in private tutoring (as parents seek to maximise their children’s chances of accessing selective schools) – suggests compounding negative effects for disadvantaged families, because such families will always find themselves less able to afford this tutoring.

It is important to say here that I do not seek to suggest that selective education constitutes the *only* important factor which has historically driven rising private tutoring costs in Korea. Interviewees for this project did highlight numerous other features of Korean society which in their view have over several decades driven demand for shadow education. For example:

- Competitive ‘education fever’ in Korea (see e.g. Lee et al, 2010) refers to a very strong cultural preoccupation with education and with family (particularly mothers’) involvement in children’s education, which can also be found in other Asian societies (see e.g. Jerrim, 2015). It stems in part from Confucianism, particular *Hakbul* traditions in Korea (Oh, 2011) which have historically conferred great credentials onto individuals demonstrating strong self-discipline in order to secure positions in ‘top’ schools and universities (primarily the country’s ‘SKY’ universities – Seoul National University, Korea University and Yonsei University) and the nature of the Korean economy which has in recent decades been driven strongly by human resources (KEDI, 2011). Education fever has furthermore been fuelled in Korea, particularly since the 1997 Asian

financial crisis, by the country's dramatic shift from being a high growth, comparatively egalitarian society with strong government-regulated national wage structures to being one which has over time become characterised by slowed growth, neoliberal deregulation, rising labour market dualism and falling social mobility (Park, 2010; Yujin, 2016). Youth unemployment has grown in Korea and the country today has high proportions of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) (OECD, 2016b). High status, well-paid jobs have long been concentrated in a small number of powerful Korean *chaebols* (conglomerates) – Hyundai, LG, SK, Lotte and Samsung – which dominate the Korean economy and which over time have also shrunk their core workforces, outsourcing and moving jobs abroad (Snyder, 2018). A strong sense of changing social fabric and a growing belief that the 'winner takes all' (Fleckenstein and Lee, 2016) in Korean society was certainly argued by interviewees in this project to have heightened families' anxieties about their children's futures, constituting a further key factor driving engagement in Korea with the shadow education industry.

- Another important factor worth noting has been the nature of Korean public schooling. Korean government spending on schools as a proportion of GDP (3.5% in 2015) is not particularly low compared with that in other OECD countries (OECD, 2018). However, concerns have long been raised in Korean public education regarding the presence of a strongly standardised and overloaded national school curriculum and also regarding heavy reliances on teaching and assessment methods including rote-memorisation and multiple choice testing. Critics have argued that teachers' scope for encouraging creativity in such contexts becomes compromised, as does their capacity to give students personalised attention, arguably fueling perceptions of public education as offering only poor quality and so driving demand for tutoring 'outside the state' (Dang and Rogers, 2008). Notably in 2017, public spending made up just two-thirds (68 per cent) of total spending on education institutions in Korea, compared with an OECD average of 85 per cent (OECD, 2017). Rote memorization and multiple choice testing additionally constitute pedagogical approaches (as mentioned above regarding school entrance exams) which are highly conducive to students' scores being boosted by 'cram' style teaching in Korean *hagwons*. Interviewees for this project spoke about consequent reforms to Korean national education which have been being implemented since 2015 and which seek to reduce curricular content, experiment with more diverse forms of assessment and promote student-centred classroom activities. A Free Semester Programme was notably introduced in Korean middle schools in 2013 as part of promoting 'Happy Education'. During Free Semesters students are freed from taking exams and alternatively given opportunities to explore, for example, arts, physical activities and possible future careers (KICE, 2017).

At the same time, Korean interviewees for this project did still emphasise the particularly salient finding that rising numbers of elite selective schools in Korea have in recent decades played an important role in driving rising private tutoring costs for families. Early 'equalisation' reforms during the 1970s are viewed as having led to problems of excessive uniformity in Korean schooling. Interviewees for this project also highlighted that, in any unequal society, competition between children within education systems will always be inevitable, be that at the point of entering high school, or later, at the point of students entering university. However, hierarchies of high schooling which have been exacerbated in Korea by the establishment of elite selective schools such as SPHSs have nevertheless been perceived strongly by stakeholders and experts as leading to families deeming extra tutoring necessary, particularly where strong demand for certain schools has fuelled increasingly difficult entrance arrangements and where highly demanding study regimes exist once students have accessed elite schools.

Korea is of course a distinct country with its own socio-political, socio-cultural and socio-economic particularities. A single country case study as explored in this paper cannot afford us the ability to

look into a crystal ball and make predictions about other equally distinct countries where private tutoring is currently on the rise but to date remains modest. At the same time, such an 'extreme' case study as presented above *can* offer rich insights into *possible* factors which may drive private tutoring in societies generally. Ball and Nikita (2014) describe, for example, parental anxiety over children's educational futures and in turn their competitive positioning within ever more uncertain labour markets – as we see in Korea – as being increasingly a constitutive part *globally* of what it is to be middle class (see also Kornrich and Fursternberg, 2013; Cooper, 2014; Park et al, 2016). To borrow again from Ball (2010):

'The drive for guaranteed success and advantage over others within changing economic and labour market conditions and increased regional and global competition for work is related to anxieties within middle class families about social reproduction, or what American writer Ehrenreich (1989) calls the 'fear of falling' ... Given the extent to which middle class families rely on qualifications and other forms of symbolic capital to address and assuage these fears, education in all of its forms becomes an even greater focus of activity and investment and is ever more thoroughly commodified.' (p.160).

In such contemporary context not just in Korea but across much of the world, given fresh evidence in this paper of a relationship between private tutoring and selective education, wherever policy makers today are concerned about inequalities and intergenerational social mobility as most purport to be, they surely have yet further cause to consider how far their school systems are intensifying competition among children through selective practices.

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Appendix – Interviewees

1. Former (Saenuri) Minister of Education
2. Former (Saenuri) Vice Minister of Education
3. MEST Policy Adviser
4. Government Researcher A
5. Government Researcher B
6. National Assembly (Minjoo) Politician (Education Committee Member)
7. National Assembly (Minjoo) Politician (Private Education Task Force Member) – *data collected via email*
8. Scholar/ ex-Government Education Researcher
9. SMOE Representative A
10. SMOE Representative B
11. SMOE Representative C
12. SMOE Representative D
13. Teacher Union 1 – Spokesperson
14. Teacher Union 2 – Spokesperson A
15. Teacher Union 2 – Spokesperson B
16. Teacher Union 2 – Spokesperson C
17. Education NGO 1 - Spokesperson A
18. Education NGO 1 - Spokesperson B
19. Head of NGO 2/ MEST Adviser
20. Head of NGO 3
21. Spokesperson A - NGO 3
22. Spokesperson B - NGO 3
23. Spokesperson C - NGO 3
24. Spokesperson A - NGO 4
25. Spokesperson B - NGO 4
26. Spokesperson C - NGO 4
27. Former head of private tutoring company
28. Current head of private tutoring company
29. Current teacher in a Seoul *hagwon*

Interviwed as a group

Spokesperson

Interviwed as a group

Interviwed as a group

Interviwed as a group

Interviwed as a group

ⁱ Many others have also written about this expansion. There are too many to document all here, but see e.g.: Baker and LeTendre, 2005; Aurini et al, 2013; Koinzer, 2013; Bray, 2011; 2017; Bray and Lykins, 2012.

ⁱⁱ For example, Japanese tutoring company Kumon, founded in 1955, today educates over four million students in 50 countries and regions (<http://www.kumon.co.uk/about-us/index.htm>). English and Maths tuition company Kip McGrath, founded in NSW Australia in 1976, today has more than 560 centres globally (<https://www.kipmcgrath.co.uk/about-us>).

ⁱⁱⁱ Research findings on the effectiveness of private tutoring as a means of improving student outcomes are, it must be noted, variable, largely owing to the huge variety of types and gradations of quality making up the tutoring market worldwide. At the same time, positive effects of high quality tutoring on student outcomes are regularly found. See e.g. Stevenson and Baker (1992); Baker et al, 2001; Mischo and Haag (2002); Buchmann (2002); Byun and Park (2011); Lee et al (2014); Chanfreau et al (2015b); Ku et al (2016), Choi and Kim (2016).

^{iv} Notably HSEP also only ever equalised Korean *general* high schools. Separate vocational schools have additionally long existed, enrolling those ‘from the lower end of achievement distribution’ (Kim, 2004) and today educating around a quarter of all high school students (KEDI, 2011), though different school tracks are currently being phased out in Korea as part of promoting ‘integrative learning’ (UNESCO, 2017).

^v In the 2015 PISA survey of 72 countries (OECD, 2016a), the top-ranked states for Maths were Singapore (#1), Hong Kong, China (#2), Macao, China (#3), Chinese Taipei (#4), Japan (#5), Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Guangdong, China (#6) and South Korea (#7).

^{vi} Both had also received private tutoring and worked as private tutors in Korea.

^{vii} Due to local education governance arrangements (KEDI, 2011), even today not all regions follow the HSEP.

^{viii} Also due to their fees – in Korea all students pay modest high school fees (KEDI, 2011) but teaching union representatives highlighted that some autonomous schools charge markedly higher fees.

^{ix} Though globalisation more broadly has also produced rising demand for foreign – particularly English – language training (Park et al, 2016).

^x The (impeached) Korean president during February 2017 fieldwork.

^{xi} In May 2017 the Minjoo candidate Moon Jae-In was elected President of South Korea.