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School Partnerships with Private Tutoring Providers: Weighing the Risks and Benefits by Czech School Principals

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ABSTRACT
The paper describes various forms and modes of partnerships and cooperation between mainstream schools and private tutoring providers, and their risks and benefits as perceived by Czech school leaders. Its main findings are drawn from interviews with management representatives of 43 lower-secondary schools. Schools displayed tutors' advertisements, recommended private tutors to students, cooperated with tutors or offered school premises for private tutoring. Some forms and modes of collaboration could be mutually beneficial, whilst others were at the edge of ethical practices. Most principals carefully weighed perceived benefits and risks of such partnerships, but others practiced a laissez-faire school policy.

Introduction

Many schools rely on a range of partnerships with external subjects to carry out their functions, including those from the private sector (Miller, 2018). The international literature widely acknowledges benefits of such school partnerships not only with families (Christenson & Reschly, 2010), but also with broader community organizations (FitzGerald & Quiñones, 2019; Polesel et al., 2017; Sanders, 2006 etc.) in that they may foster student learning and achievements, students' well-being, behavior and attitudes, higher attendance and retention rates and that they enhance students' educational experience (Valli et al., 2014). One type of entity that schools commonly partner with is providers of supplemental education services who offer school-based after-school tutoring programmes that focus on academic as well as non-academic (leisure-time) activities and tutoring. Such activities are usually provided for free to their end users and are designed as tools to level the playing field and help disadvantaged students (e.g., Gardner et al., 2009; Leos-Urbel, 2015; Little et al., 2008). Schools also partner with providers of supplemental education in academic school subjects to provide tutoring for a fee, that is, tutoring paid for by students or their parents – this is commonly called private tutoring (hereafter PT) or shadow education (Bray, 2009). This paper is concerned with the latter case of school partnerships.

Whilst tutoring in non-academic subjects is less likely to clash with school offerings, school partnerships with providers of PT in academic subjects, especially with those operating for profit, may bring corruption risks and potential backwash on schooling (Bray & Zhang, 2018). Although PT might be a flexible tool to remedy problems in understanding the school curriculum and can provide more individualized instructions compared to classroom lessons, it threatens children's well-being if used excessively and, in its paid form, contributes to maintaining or exacerbating social inequalities (Bray, 2009). There are also issues of teacher corruption and unethical practices associated with the provision of shadow education by

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students' schoolteachers (Kobakhidze, 2014), coerced tutoring or the deliberate omission of parts of the curriculum in school lessons to generate a greater demand for additional PT provided by the teacher (Brehm & Silova, 2014). Such partnerships, as noted by Yamato and Zhang (2017, p. 340) may "be promising on the premise that actors in both systems act harmoniously for the common good." However, as they add, "in practice private agendas on both sides might lead to manipulation and negative consequences" and raise ethical or equity-related concerns. These issues associated with school partnerships with PT providers make the topic worthy of investigation, having practical implications for the everyday school life and for principals' decision-making.

So far, the research of such school and PT partnerships has focused on the context either of developing countries with relatively low-quality schooling and low accountability, such as Myanmar, India or Cambodia (Bray et al., 2020, 2019; Ghosh & Bray, 2020), or of those on the other extreme, for example, Korea, Japan or Shanghai – China (Kim & Jung, 2019; Yamato & Zhang, 2017; Zhang & Bray, 2017). The present research thus complements these studies with findings from a context somewhere "in between" these two extremes, that is, the Czech Republic, a post-socialist country in the center of Europe, where students display a largely average level of achievement (e.g., OECD, 2016), where schools' accountability for students' results is relatively low and at the same time schools have considerable autonomy (Dvořák et al., 2014).

Previous studies (e.g., Bray et al., 2020, 2019; Ghosh & Bray, 2020) acknowledged the importance of the principal's leadership in determining a school's policies toward the PT phenomenon, to enhance its positive aspects while avoiding associated issues. Awareness of the possible benefits and risks of partnerships between schools and PT providers is thus important for school principals, who are the main decision makers about such partnerships in most contexts. Therefore, the present study aims to shed light on different kinds of school–PT partnerships and to contribute to an understanding of principals' perceptions of the benefits and risks of such partnerships.

The paper first presents a literature review to show examples of partnerships between schools and providers of fee-based tutoring and their implications; and it presents the research site context. The subsequent section describes the mixed-method research design employed in this study. Next, the study characterizes different forms of partnerships identified by the field research and elaborates on principals' perceptions of benefits and risks associated with such partnerships. It concludes with a discussion of the main findings and their implications.

Mainstream School Partnerships with Shadow Education Providers

A range of typologies covering the partnerships of schools with external bodies (e.g., Noam & Rosenbaum Tillinger, 2004; Valli et al., 2016) were considered for framing and structuring the findings of the study. However, they were found to be too general or with a different focus, so the present study uses the typology of Bray and Zhang (2018), which – as far as the authors of this study are aware – is the only existing typology of school partnerships with shadow education providers. For analytical reasons, Bray and Zhang (2018, p. 4) distinguished three different forms of such partnerships according to the degree of cooperation between the school and the PT provider:

(1) Passive (public schooling and private supplements complement each other but are not coordinated);
(2) Moderate (e.g., public teachers may recommend tutors to students and their families, and perhaps even monitor the activities of the tutors and liaise with the families);
(3) Active (public schools and private supplementary education providers collaborate in specific programmes).

This paper is mainly concerned with the second and third forms of collaboration, which will be further elaborated in subsequent sections. Passive partnerships are left aside in this paper, because schools and providers are not directly linked in such a case and often not even aware of each other, thus they are less interesting for school principals and school staff.

Moderate Partnerships

Some schoolteachers perceive PT as an appropriate way to improve students' academic performance or understanding of the school curriculum, and thus may give general advice (in a good faith) to parents or students to use it as a tool to remedy learning problems (e.g., Kubánová, 2006). Schoolteachers may also react simply to parents who ask them to provide information about appropriate PT for their child. As Kobakhidze (2014, p. 466) observed, "'Does my child need private tutoring?' is a very common question that parents often ask teachers." However, in the Georgian context to which Kobakhidze referred, indicating a specific tutor may be related to unethical or problematic practices such as "forced tutoring," because the schoolteachers who provide PT might seek personal profit with their students (Kobakhidze, 2014; also reported, e.g., in Egypt, by Sieverding et al., 2019).

While some students and parents view teachers' recommendations as an effective way to find a good tutor, some teachers make students attend their or their friends' tutoring classes by treating the tutees with special privileges (Zhang, 2014), or alternatively, artificially create demand for such tutoring by lowering student grades, distorting the official curriculum and neglecting their teaching duties in regular school instruction, and sometimes even blackmailing their students (Silova & Kazimzade, 2006, p. 133). In some countries, it is not uncommon for teachers to establish referral systems with colleagues, from either the same or other schools, meaning that the same subject teachers exchange private students by recommending each other (e.g., Kobakhidze, 2014). This is often practised by teachers who try to avoid the conflict of interest that would be created by tutoring their own students. Some schoolteachers may receive financial kickbacks for referral of tutees to tutors or tutoring companies (e.g., in Shanghai, China, Zhang & Bray, 2017).

Although such practices may be regulated (centrally or locally), these regulations may be ineffective if they are not generally accepted by teachers (Bray et al., 2020; Ghosh & Bray, 2020). At the school level, principals play a crucial role in setting (and enforcing) a school's policies toward the encouragement (or discouragement) of private supplementary tutoring, which they may do in various ways, for example, through discussions with staff, students and parents, and by harnessing peer pressure among teachers to minimize corruption (Bray et al., 2020).

Active Partnerships

Whilst PT companies may sometimes denigrate mainstream schools in order to expand their own markets (Bray & Kobakhidze, 2015), in some contexts, public schools forge different kinds of active partnerships with PT providers in various areas, as illustrated by the following examples.

By partnering with schools, PT providers seek to attract more customers. For example, in Malaysia, popular tutors or tutoring centers may give free lectures in the school premises (even for extended periods) to share tips on how to prepare for examinations. This brings extra attention to private tutors' services and is usually welcomed by parents and students (Kenayathulla & Ubbudari, 2017). In Japan, the Ministry of Education promotes cooperation between schools and supplementary institutions (Isashiki, 2017 as cited in Bray & Zhang, 2018). Some private tutoring centers (so-called *mirai-juku*) operate within mainstream school facilities and provide lessons integrated into the official schedule at discounted rates (Yamato & Zhang, 2017). This boosts the legitimacy of shadow education and generates public and political acceptance of juku, which makes shadow education a formal part of mass schooling (Entrich, 2018). In India, Ghosh and Bray (2020) reported about schools partnered with companies which provided entrance examination preparatory courses (some local governments decided to ban such partnerships due to the risk of coercion). Schools and teachers also facilitated the exchange of information about PT, encouraged student absenteeism due to private tutoring and misused school hours for tutoring promotion, and nurtured the demand for private tutoring.

School-tutoring partnerships exist also in Shanghai, as documented by Zhang and Bray (2017). Parts of the PT industry fall under central policy regulations, and schools and their personnel are prohibited from providing tutoring, from requiring students to take extra lessons, from providing tutoring in collaboration with tutoring enterprises, from providing buildings and facilities for tutoring or from giving student information to tutoring enterprises. In the context of abolished entrance examinations, some Shanghai schools entrust tutoring companies and/or groups of in-service and retired teachers to establish classes to track, train, assess, and select high-performing students for admission. In this way, schools seek to admit the best candidates and increase the success of their high-performing students in entrance examinations to elite institutions at the next stage of the education system. Conversely, for tutoring providers, such partnerships bring an influx of customers and improve their legitimacy and reputations. However, such partnerships partially undermine the government's efforts to ensure equal education opportunities within mainstream schooling and to reduce the study burden on students.

Context of the Research Site

General Overview

The Czech Republic was formerly a part of Czechoslovakia, which emerged after the First World War and existed until 1939, when it was occupied by Nazi Germany until 1945. After the WWII, a communist regime was established in 1948. Like other Central European post-socialist countries, the Czech Republic transitioned from a totalitarian regime and centrally planned state-controlled economy (1948–1989) to a democratic governance with restored private ownership and a market economy. The changes since 1990s have had a substantial impact on education policy and on the whole education sector, which was previously under the exclusive control of central, ideological and political power. The transformation process concerned the management and administration, structure, aims, and content of education. Rigid state control was replaced with decentralization and extensive school autonomy unparalleled in many Western European countries (see e.g., Hornat, 2019 for more details). An important part of the educational transformation was the establishment of private and denominational schools, which receive a state contribution and are allowed to charge tuition fees, and the possibility for mainstream schools to offer extended fee-based services, such as meals or extra-curricular activities (The Education Act, 2004).

At present, compulsory education lasts 10 years, starting with one year of pre-school education and then generally covering nine years of basic school, which is divided into two levels (primary, years 1–5, and lower secondary, years 6–9). Students can switch to an academic type of secondary school (*multiyear gymnasia*) after 5 or 7 years of basic school. In such cases, it is necessary to pass a centralized, state-organized entrance examination. Passing the entrance examinations is also required when transitioning to upper-secondary programmes that are concluded with a school-leaving examination, and in most cases also when transitioning to universities. The current education system's structure (up to upper-secondary level) is depicted in Figure 1.

According to PISA 2015, Czech schools have the second highest autonomy rating (after Macao) of the 68 countries compared (OECD, 2016, p. 119). This level of autonomy practically makes the principal responsible for the complete running of the school, including its facility management, budget, the hiring and firing of teachers, the overall school vision and marketing, or decisions about partnerships with PT providers.

Private Tutoring in the Czech Context

Historically, PT abounded in the interwar period (1918–1939) at highly selective academic upper-secondary schools (*gymnasia*), where teachers or poor students offered extra tuition to weaker students from more affluent families. In the course of four decades of "socialist schooling" (1948–1989), no private activities were allowed in the field of education; education was an utterly public process that was centrally governed by the state. Teachers were required to provide free tutoring,

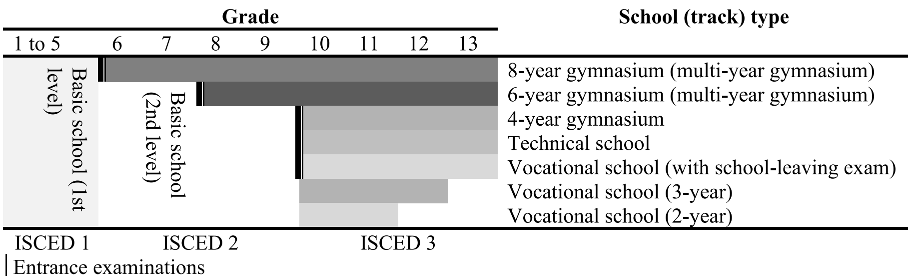

Figure 1. Structure of the Czech education system (simplified). Source: Kostelecký et al. (2018, p. 97), adjusted by the author.

particularly to "working class" students, who were preferably accepted to higher levels of education. In the 1990s, increased returns of investment to education, marketization and a certain degree of internationalization saw the emergence of private tutoring provided by individuals (many of whom were teachers) and of tutoring companies, some of which have grown into large businesses.

No explicit regulations of PT (besides the ones which would apply to any business) exist at the central level (Šťastný, 2016). The provision of PT is considered a form of private enterprise, and like other forms of business it falls under the administration of the Ministry of Industry and Trade. The types of providers include education companies offering one-to-one as well as group tutoring (including exam preparation) and, due to restrictions related to COVID-19, increasingly also on-line tutoring. Individual tutors (schoolteachers, students, professional educators, retirees etc.) also operate on the market (Šťastný, 2016). Besides mathematics and national language, English as a foreign language is a subject very much in demand for PT (Černá, 2020).

Official education policy stresses the school's responsibility for the quality of education provided to all its students and supports inclusion by different measures. Some forms of free tutoring are prevalent in Czech schools and financially supported by special projects of national as well as European provenance (European Social Fund). Public school collaboration with subjects from the private sector is a rather new phenomenon, which had not existed in the Czech environment before the political upheaval of 1989. Partnerships between shadow and mainstream education in the Czech Republic have not yet been addressed by either educational policy or research.

Methods

Research Questions

This study is part of a wider research project, the aims of which were to map and analyze the relationships and links between mainstream and shadow education. By exploring school-level practices related to cooperation with private supplementary tutoring providers in Czech lower secondary schools, the paper aims to answer the following research questions:

(1) What forms of moderate and active partnerships with private tutoring providers do Czech lower-secondary schools enter (and what are their features)?
(2) What benefits and issues (or risks) do principals associate with these forms of partnerships?

This paper focuses primarily on partnerships in which the school (represented by the principal) is one party of a formal or informal, explicit or implicit agreement with the PT provider (private company, individual tutor), as the other party.

Study Design

The project employed a convergent mixed-methods research design (Creswell, 2012). The findings of the study are based mainly on qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with 44 school management representatives (i.e., principals or vice-principals), quantitative data from teacher and student questionnaires are selectively employed to complement or triangulate the qualitative findings.

Sampling Strategy

Teachers, students and principals were chosen in two steps according to a method of stratified random sampling (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p. 100). In the first step, schools were selected. A sampling frame was constructed based on the school registry database of the Ministry of Education (http://rejskol.msmt.cz), which contained eligible lower secondary schools – basic schools (n = 2725) and multi-year gymnasia (n = 312). An additional stratification criterium to the school type (track) was the school size in terms of number of students on the lower secondary level (schools were divided into terciles: small, medium, and large). The principals of the selected schools were asked to participate in the research via e-mail, followed by a phone call if no response was received. Some principals refused to participate (mainly due to time constraints and organizational difficulties); in such cases, a replacement school was randomly selected and approached according to the same criteria. Table 1 shows the final composition of the school sample. Of the 68 schools, which were randomly chosen from each stratum, 43 (32 basic schools and 11 multi-year gymnasia) agreed to participate in the research (63% response rate).

In the second step, respondents were sampled in the selected schools. Data for the study was collected between November 2018 and June 2019. Each sampled school was visited in person by a member/members of the research team on a date agreed with the school principal. During the visits, a paper-pencil student questionnaire was administered to all 9th grade students present in the school on that day, and an in-depth interview was conducted either with the school principal or with persons designated by the principal. Subsequently, an online questionnaire (designed in LimeSurvey) was distributed to eligible teachers (that is, those who regularly taught at least one academic school subject at the lower secondary level) via e-mail. Final quantitative samples consisted of 1280 students and 494 teachers who gave usable responses, with return rates at 88% for the student questionnaire (lack of response was mainly due to the absence of some students on the day of data collection) and 76% for the teacher questionnaire.

For semi-structured interviews with school management, an interview scheme was prepared. The initial interview scheme contained six broader themes that were discussed with the school management: relationships between PT and the school, fulfillment of students' educational needs, entrance examinations, cooperation and collaboration with PT providers, and provision of PT by schoolteachers. These selected themes were based on an initial review of the literature and corresponded with the overall research objectives. Each category contained a number of related subtopics. During the fieldwork, new themes emerged that had not been identified in the literature review (e.g., school students working as private tutors on teacher recommendations). These themes were incorporated into the interview scheme and elaborated in consequent interviews.

Table 1. School sample composition.

	Basic schools	Multi-year gymnasia	**Total**
Small	10	3	13
Medium	10	4	14
Large	12	4	16
Total	32	11	**43**

Source: field research.

Apart from extensive field notes, the final qualitative dataset (see the Supplemental material) contained 40 interview transcripts taken with the sample of 39 principals, 5 vice-principals and 3 ordinary teachers during the school visits, who were from diverse schools of different sizes (in terms of students) located in different regions of the Czech Republic (both urban and rural areas). In four schools, principals also invited other personnel (vice-principals or core-subject schoolteachers) who they felt would contribute valuably in the matter. In such cases, the interviews were conducted in groups. In three schools, principals did not wish to participate in the interview, instead suggesting to be replaced by the vice-principal. Three principals declined to have the interview audiotaped, but researchers made detailed notes and summed up the interview immediately after its conclusion. One principal declined to be interviewed in person, instead responding by e-mail. As school principals in the Czech Republic are also obliged to teach regularly, they also referred to their own experience as teachers in certain interviews. Each audiotaped interview was transcribed word-by-word shortly after its realization. During the interview, the structure was used rather as support for the interviewer, and questions were not asked in the order specified in the interview scheme but adjusted according to the context of the interview (atmosphere, thematic linkage etc.).

Data Analysis

Data obtained through the questionnaires were analyzed in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) programme and Microsoft Excel. For the purpose of this paper, only basic descriptive statistics (percentages, means) are presented.

Qualitative data from interviews with school principals were coded and analyzed following the guidelines of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Researchers familiarized themselves with the dataset during the period of quantitative data collection. Shortly after the realization, each audiotaped interview was transcribed and read before the initial coding of the material was performed. The codes were then grouped according to both initial themes that were established before data collection started (deductive approach) and themes that emerged from the consequent analysis (inductive approach). The identified themes were further reviewed to assure they complied with the criterium of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Patton, 2014). Data coding and analysis was performed by the first author of the paper with the aid of MaxQDA 2018 software. The Findings section is structured around the themes which emerged in relation to the first research questions. The interviewees' accounts, which are used throughout the text as supporting evidence, were forward-translated from Czech by a bilingual interpreter.

Findings

This section is organized according to the identified forms of partnerships, beginning with moderate ones (tutoring advertisements in school premises and recommendations to take PT) and concluding with active ones (schools working together with private tutors and PT in school premises).

Tutor Advertising in School Premises

The theme of tutor advertising emerged after schools were actually visited by researchers, as these advertisements were observed in the school premises. The schools differed vastly in their approach to displaying such advertisements. Whilst PT advertising was completely absent in some schools, especially those in rural areas, other schools, especially in the capital and other large cities, had noticeboards and other designated places full of advertisements (see Figure 2). The advertisements were for PT provided by both individuals and companies and offered remedial as well as enrichment courses, mostly in English, mathematics or Czech language, including entrance examination preparation. The interviews followed up on these in-school observations and queried principals on the reasons behind their decision.

Figure 2. Example of tutoring advertisements in one of the visited schools. Source: field research.

Principals of the sampled schools, especially those located in larger cities, reported that they receive many demands from PT providers to advertise their services. The absence of such advertisements in the premises of some visited schools was related to principal's reluctance to permit them, with some even issuing an informal ban on the advertising of PT (and other private services) in the school premises. They believed that by publishing the advertisement, the school legitimizes the tutoring provider. Especially in cases when they did not know the provider and the quality of the service, the interviewed principals were hesitant to do so. *"When it's displayed in our school, it makes the parents half think 'they recommend him.' But I don't know them. I can recommend the city's Children's House, which I cooperate with, but not an unknown organization."*

Another approach was more neutral, that is, the school allowed display of advertisements and *"acts as the distributor"* of this information but did not take any further actions: *"after that of course it's up to the wishes of the child, or possibly the decision of their parent."* This implies that the schools (principals) distance themselves from any responsibility regarding the potential consequences and may also show indifference concerning the legitimizing of PT providers: *"Practically anyone can hang it up here, if they ask [. . .] but we don't cooperate with them."* No school principal in the sample indicated that their school would proactively request promotional materials from PT providers, unless perhaps they already had established contacts with them.

Advertisements may be posted in the school premises by schoolteachers who also work for a tutoring company. One principal admitted that these teachers probably recruit students for language courses even during lessons, but was rather indifferent toward the practice: "*. . . so I have three English teachers here and two of them teach at [PT company], so they [. . .] recruit students here themselves no doubt, I don't inquire about that . . .* "[1] This example implies the misuse of a teacher's role, position and power (Zhang, 2014), as has been identified in other (not only) post-socialist countries as well, though in different ways (e.g., Kobakhidze, 2014; Popa & Acedo, 2006).

Recommendations to Take Private Tutoring

Recommending PT to students may be initiated by parents, or it may be done spontaneously and proactively by teachers. In the questionnaire survey, about 42% of teachers (of the total n = 467 who responded to the item) reported, that they were approached at least once during the current school year by parents of their students with the request for information on tutoring appropriate for their child. Furthermore, roughly one in three teachers have spontaneously recommended remedial PT to their students (or parents) at least once in the corresponding academic year without

being approached by the parents first. Recommendations to take PT may be done either directly to the student, or to parents during ad hoc or regular parents-teacher meeting sessions, *"if the student refuses and the teacher considers it quite good for him to have the extra lessons."*

Discouraging students from taking PT was very rare among teachers (only 3% of teachers reported doing so at least once in the current school year). One principal (teacher) admitted that sometimes, instead of recommending and praising those who take tutoring, she tries to dissuade students from using PT, basing her argument mainly on the costs incurred to the family:

> I see it mostly from the other side – hey, you don't pay attention, and look how much it costs your parents. (laughter) How much the parents spend on tutoring. The children actually know the cost, so I try to show them that, right? If you paid attention, look how much your parents would save.

For the most part, however, principals in our sample reported neither recommending nor dissuading students from taking PT.

Private vs. Fee-free Tutoring

Private supplementary tutoring as a suitable solution was generally recommended in two model situations. In the first situation, schools sometimes recommended PT to ambitious families whose children would like to apply for selective upper-secondary schools. Principals reckoned that the entrance examinations for such schools were difficult, and they were well aware of the existence of various preparatory courses for these exams. One reported that students were informed of the existence of such courses by the school counselor.

In the second situation, the student has problems with understanding the subject matter, cannot keep up with the pace of instructions, and yet school-based remedial measures are not suitable (for reasons explained below). In most Czech basic schools, students may take free, school-based remedial lessons. This applies to students with special needs (such as dyslexics, dysortographics etc.) or students who had long absences,[2] transitioned from different schools, or generally students who are "endangered by education failure" (*žáci ohrožení školním neúspěchem*). In the student sample, 21% (out of N = 1280) had taken such free, school-based lessons in the corresponding school year. Teachers are usually also available to students for free consultations. Some principals consider these arrangements to be sufficient, negating any need for PT:

> . . . we know about some people [private tutors], but we don't recommend them simply because our teachers have consultation hours, so they assume that the student will come there prepared, that he'll arrange the consultation ahead of time, they'll go through the subject matter, and that should simply replace any tutoring.

However, if free remedial school-based tutoring is found to be unsuitable for some low-achieving students, PT is recommended to families.

> We address that with consultations here of course, but besides that we do recommend, if it doesn't work, then try to find yourself some tutoring.

According to the principals, this may be due to the schoolteacher's teaching style not suiting the particular student, or because of interpersonal relationships between the two.

> . . . in short, the student has an aversion to the teacher, which can happen, and actually it's a problem because he just doesn't want to . . . and so that can be why he doesn't take the extra [school] lessons. Right?

In larger schools, another teacher of the same school subject could be assigned to tutor the student for free, but such replacements may not always be available or can even be impossible (e.g., in small schools with only one teacher of the subject). External tutors may then be considered a more appropriate solution, as they are believed to be able to introduce teaching strategies more suitable to the student. The fact that PT takes place outside the school with a different tutor and/or is paid by parents was believed to positively affect a student's motivation and learning gains.

. . . when it [remedial free tutoring]'s done by the same teacher who teaches the child during the school year . . . then the child has the same approach as to the lessons that are mandatory, because it's exactly the same to him. [. . .] in this sense the private lessons have a much better effect, that it's much easier for them to motivate the students.

Another problem with fee-free tutoring in Czech schools is that it is usually available only in some subjects. In one high-demand language-oriented basic school (that is, with more time devoted to foreign language instruction), students who transferred from a different primary school to the lower secondary level of that school were sometimes less adept at the foreign languages compared to students who had attended the language-oriented basic school since the primary level. The school policy is then to recommend to parents to pay for PT to even out the initial skills and competences of the low-achieving students. As explained by the school's principal:

That's the most common question of parents who enrol their children here in the sixth year – how to cope with the second foreign language. So we recommend that they arrange to take private lessons, for at least the basics of the language. [. . .] But we don't have any idea of how many hours they take, how often the teacher visits them and how much they pay. [. . .] We don't have any preferred people or agencies, nothing of the sort, so it's up to the parents to find them.

Indicating a Specific Tutor

A specific tutor may sometimes be indicated for PT. Principals reported that if specific tutors are recommended to the families, they are people who are (or were) somehow bound to the school – for example, former (retired) teachers who maintain relations with the school, graduated students or even current students in higher grades.

In one school located in a remote region, the principal had a list of private tutors who were recommended to students, either directly or on demand by parents. According to the principal, it would otherwise be very difficult for parents to find an appropriate private tutor in the locality, and this service was perceived as a benefit for parents.

. . . it really is provided by those few teacher-pensioners here, and I don't know if they'd find anyone over the internet at all.

In some schools, however, indicating a specific tutor was considered beyond the school's responsibility or role, as *"the school has no one to recommend"* or *"Well, I'd really regard that as very much above-standard for the school, I must say."*

Schools and Teachers Working Together with Private Tutors

One of the advantages of recommending a specific tutor, as mentioned by principals, is that further cooperation might be developed in favor of the tutored student: *" . . . when I recommend it, I know about it, and then we can communicate about it."* During consultations, teachers may share various types of information with private tutors about the student's personality, attitudes, learning needs, or requirements of the school curriculum.

Simply, for one, I'll give them an overview of the child, how things work in my class. Then, say, we discuss, I don't know, what needs to be practised, what subject matter needs to be practised, so we discuss that together too.

As shown in Table 2, 60% of the sampled teachers reported to be aware that their students were taking private lessons.[3] About one third of them is also in contact with their private tutor, and about half (48%) of teachers within this group actively consulted with the private tutor about students' progress and needs in relation to school curriculum. This finding suggests that almost one in ten lower-secondary Czech teachers of academic school subjects (9%) is actively involved in cooperation with private tutors.

Table 2. Teacher-tutor cooperation.

	N	% of total	% of cat. 1	% of cat. 2
Total	494			
. . . is aware of at least one of their students who takes private tutoring (cat. 1)	294	60		
. . . and at least in one such case the teacher knows or is in contact with the private tutor* (cat. 2)	93	19	32	
. . . with whom the teacher consulted students' needs in relation to school curriculum when the student started taking tutoring	45	9	15	48
. . . who continuously consults the progress of the tutored student	34	7	12	37

*Cases where schoolteacher admitted to be privately tutoring their own students have been excluded.
Source: field research.

Notably, in one multi-year gymnasium, the school's own senior students were reported to be recommended as private tutors by their schoolteachers not only to the school's students, but also to external clients in cases when schoolteachers were asked to tutor these clients but could not comply for various reasons. According to the principal, such students must be proficient in the subject matter and must be responsible; teaching competencies were considered less important in the initial phase because these selected students received advice from the school staff on how to tutor, what to do during the tutoring lessons or even how to set prices:

> Because I know what the person [interested in tutoring] wants, what he's aiming for, why he's studying. So I'm able to advise him [the student] – look, I'd do it like this, I'd structure the lesson like this. [. . .] and I always say – if you don't know something, come and ask me, I'll tell you. [. . .] she was a wealthy lady, so I said – but ask a good price for it, don't undersell it. Well, and [. . .] they were both content.

Private Tutoring in School Premises

Sometimes, schools also rent rooms to PT providers. This practice has the advantage of generating additional income for the school from rent, leading to increased investments elsewhere. However, the principals who did so paid little attention to the quality or price of the tutoring service.[4] They merely required the provider to abide by the general rules of rent. However, the nature of the PT services seemed to be important to principals. For example, if the school offered its own extra lessons in the subject (e.g., in a foreign language), principals were reluctant to rent rooms to tutoring companies, which they regarded more as competitors to the school's courses.

> When a language agency says they want to have something here, we say – we have our own courses. Our own language courses, so I don't know why some agency should nab children who can attend the school courses. And mainly, you know, I can't control how the agency behaves.

On the other hand, two exceptions were encountered in the course of the fieldwork. Two foreign language-oriented basic schools in the sample maintained extensive, long-term cooperation with a tutoring company. In the first case, the company provided tutorial lessons in the foreign language in the school but was not considered a "competitor" because the additional extra tutoring provided by the school had a different curricular focus (the tutoring company prepared for the international Cambridge exam). On top of that, the school contracted many other services. The tutoring company:

- provided a native language speaker who acted as an external teacher in the schools' foreign language lessons;
- provided courses of further professional development to schoolteachers (approved and certified by the Ministry of Education);
- organized cultural events for the school staff;

- participated in language competitions for students organized by the school, financially contributed to pay for the awards and had a programme aimed at promoting foreign languages (and the company itself) during the event.

This intense cooperation developed over time, as the school was initially merely offered professional development courses for selected teachers. As the principal was satisfied with the quality of the provided service, the school continued and extended the cooperation to other domains. The principal considered the relationship *"mutually beneficial,"* as it provided further education opportunities to schoolchildren; the benefits for the company lay in a reduced rent and the opportunity to reach the potential customers on the spot.

Another specific case of comprehensive collaboration with private tutors was encountered in one private basic school, where various forms of collaboration (as mentioned above) were mixed together. The school cooperated with its graduate students and provided them (free of charge) with rooms in which they could privately tutor the school's students after school hours. Also, schoolteachers voluntarily participated in this system (but usually did not provide tutoring to their own students). Neither organizational matters nor price arrangements were overseen or influenced by the principal in any way, and they were left for the teachers/tutors and parents to negotiate. According to the principal, this arrangement was established to convey parents' wishes: *" . . . it's simpler for them to pay someone here, to put it bluntly, and not have to worry about it at home."* These parents were from a higher class[5] and thus did not have any difficulty in paying for additional tutoring; furthermore, as the principal claimed, tutoring in the school building was advantageous to them from a logistical and organizational point of view (meaningfully spent time in a safe environment that did not require parents to transport their children to other locations). Being aware that the parents of the schoolchildren were affluent, the principal expressed no concern for the affordability of the offered PT, which she regarded mainly as a service for the student and parent community.

One school reported that it rented rooms to schoolteachers for PT. The principal argued that teachers had poor salaries and that this was an opportunity to enable them to secure additional income. The price of the rent was set to the lowest possible level (as mandated by legal regulations and school directives, that is, roughly 2.3 USD per hour). Even so, the principal admitted that *" . . . they sometimes do tutoring in the school without complying with the obligatory fifty crowns per hour, and I pretend not to notice."* In another school, although they did not have any such arrangement, the principal would be in favor of it if parents agreed: *"If the parents wanted, we'd have some of our teachers here, it's no problem to designate a place, an exact time, so the kids can attend."*

Final remark will be made about principals in village schools or schools in remote areas, who expressed an interest in working with language agencies or other providers of tuition or various leisure-time activities. These schools were usually smaller in terms of student population, and the families were less motivated to invest in PT, and principals reported that the demand from parents and students was insufficient. Consequently, these local conditions meant that their school was not interesting enough for the providers to maintain the cooperation. As an example, one village-school principal described an agreement with a private tutor of English who commuted from a nearby city:

> . . . it ended because it was always . . . it depended on how many of the children applied. [. . .] she, because she counted in all the various travel expenses and so on, so she always divided it up according to the number of students who applied. The more children were interested, the lower the price of the course. [. . .] the number of children dropped from some 15, 20 all the way to 5 or so, who would be willing to attend, but that would be utter nonsense for her to travel here. It wouldn't be worth it to her.

Discussion

Czech lower secondary schools forge both moderate and active partnerships with PT providers of different kinds, and these partnerships are neither initiated nor supported by the government, unlike in other contexts such as *mirai juku* in Japan (Yamato & Zhang, 2017), pilot voucher schemes in

Australia (Doherty & Dooley, 2018) or schemes associated with the No Child Left Behind program in the USA, in which PT was offered to selected students at public expense (Bray, 2009, pp. 40–41). Rather, they are unofficial and informal, or at least not officially supervised by the central government/ministry of education. Partnerships seem to be initiated mostly from a bottom-up direction, which is possible in part due to the large degree of autonomy enjoyed by Czech principals.

Table 3 shows an overview of the different forms of partnerships identified during the fieldwork. The findings suggest that Czech principals carefully weigh the possible benefits and potentially negative consequences of partnership with a PT, also with regard to the school's "image" among parents. Thus, the question if principals regard private tutors as an "invasive species" in the educational ecosystem (Bray & Kobakhidze, 2015) is strongly dependent on the context and nature of the partnerships. On one hand, principals were careful to ensure that partnerships they engaged in did not interfere with the school's other interests (such as the "leeching" of students from the extra lessons of academic subjects provided by the school, in which case PT companies are seen as a competitor). On the other hand, principals felt that in some forms of partnership the benefits overweighed the risks (such as language agencies operating in the school premises, which offer native language speakers that the school itself would not be able to hire), including those solicited by parents (such as after-school PT arrangements).

Principals may perceive these types of partnerships as advantageous because if the responsibility for students' achievement becomes shared, and if the PT enhances the students' achievement, it can even be presented as the school's merit. Schools may in some sense feel assisted or supported by private tutors in their endeavor to educate students. Some principals admitted the limitations of the mainstream schooling in delivering quality education, and PT was seen as an appropriate answer to this challenge.

By recommending PT, either to ambitious students planning to apply to selective secondary schools, or to low achievers where other channels of assistance within the school's structure were unavailable or incompatible, principals in fact admitted the inability of their school to satisfy the educational needs of every student; cooperation with PT providers was considered a suitable solution. Some partnerships were results of decisions to address the school's failure to meet students' educational needs due to missing or inadequate resources and after mobilizing available ones was

Table 3. Overview of benefits and risks associated with different form of partnerships.

	Benefits	Risks or issues
Tutor advertising	• No specific benefits for the school were mentioned by principals.	• Schools "legitimize" PT providers and partly accept responsibility for the quality of their services. • Advertisements posted by schoolteachers of the same school that help them recruit students to their private lessons or courses are ethically disputable.
Recommendations to take PT	• PT is suitable when schools do not have sufficient resources to meet students' individual learning needs. • In areas with a low supply of tutors, schools can help families interested in PT by liaising them with PT providers.	• Recommendations initiated by teachers may be perceived as inappropriate pressure on families and may also be motivated by hidden agendas (e.g., coerced tutoring, financial kickbacks).
Schools and teachers working together with private tutors	• The effectiveness of PT may be enhanced by the exchange of information between teacher and tutor.	• Encouraging senior students to tutor their younger peers in exchange for a fee instead of organizing free (peer) help is questionable.
Private tutoring in school premises	• Renting facilities to PT providers brings additional income to schools. • PT providers can also arrange a number of additional services for schools. • Students do not have to commute to receive PT.	• When unregulated and unsupervised, schools may legitimize PT that is unethical (e.g., coerced) and may exacerbate inequalities (e.g., unaffordable to most families) • Some PT offerings may interfere with schools' interests (e.g., compete with schools' offers of extracurricular activities).

found ineffective.[6] School leaders then framed some forms of cooperation as a special service for parents (e.g., liaising families with private tutors in remote areas where PT services are less available).

Doherty and Dooley (2018) observed that some Australian schools regularly hosted tutoring advertisements in their official communications with parents. They argued that such behavior leads to a tacit endorsement of PT as they represent a "nudge" strategy, that is, indirectly suggesting to parents that subsidizing their child's school achievement with PT is a "responsible decision." The effect of PT advertisements in school premises may be similar in the Czech context, as may directly recommending PT to students or to parents during parent meetings. As a result, the legitimization of the supplementation of the school's own work by private tutors may be perceived negatively by parents and in the long run can undermine the school's credibility and cause dissatisfaction with schooling (see also Ghosh & Bray, 2020 for a similar account). However, more research is needed to understand the parental perspective and perception of such school and PT partnerships.

In our sample, school leaders in the 43 schools demonstrated varied approaches toward partnering with PT providers and the phenomenon of PT itself, ranging from ignoring the issue to monitoring it, regulating it, or encouraging certain forms or types of PT and partnerships and/or discouraging others. In this respect, the school's (implicit or explicit) policies toward the phenomenon were similar to those that Bray (2009) identified at the level of countries (see also Bray & Kwo, 2014). Ghosh and Bray (2020) emphasized the need for implementing policies at the institutional (school) level to tackle the potentially negative impact of private tutoring. In the situation, when explicit policies or regulations of PT (and of school partnerships with commercial providers of this service) do not exist, such as in the Czech Republic (Šťastný, 2016), this need appears to be even more imminent.

Although some principals in our sample explicitly articulated their stance and expectations from partnering with private tutoring providers (though not always formally in writing), many of them did not consider private tutoring to be an important topic worth any additional effort from their side. However, as school leaders are considered key players in the process of promoting equal educational opportunities in education (Gümüş et al., 2021) and should act in the best interest of all students (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007), it is alarming that some principals in the sample adopted a laissez-faire approach despite their demonstrated awareness of its potential backwash on school instruction or equity in education.

Recognizing the potential adverse effects of PT, ignoring the phenomenon is thus not an approach to be recommended (Bray, 2009; Bray & Kwo, 2014). Rather, school partnerships with shadow education providers should only be established and operated with careful planning, monitoring and evaluation (Bray & Zhang, 2018), and school leaders should put forth measures and policies to prevent potentially adverse effects, while communicating these policies explicitly to students, parents, teachers and PT providers to assure a shared understanding of fair practices.

For example, principals may monitor the prices and the quality of PT offered by school partners and promote transparency in fees that are charged, and perhaps also regulate the maximum price that can be charged per hour by PT providers. As shown in our study, schools in the sample engaged in partnerships with providers whose tutoring was associated with financial costs, and thus may be inaccessible to some families. In an extreme case, allowing expensive PT at a school that already displays large disparities in the socioeconomic background of its student population might exacerbate the situation of disadvantaged students within the school collective, as the attendance of such high-cost school-based PT might symbolically reflect the social status of the student and make socio-economic differences among students even more visible.[7]

Thus, an important implication of the study for school leaders is that it should be evaluated to what extent the services of PT providers it partners with are financially accessible to the school's students. Ideally, additional learning opportunities in schools should also be available for free, or disadvantaged students should be eligible, for example, for a fee waiver or discount for participation in PT provided

in cooperation with the school. Such offerings could be similar to some forms of "mirai-juku" in Japan, that is, educational aid to disadvantaged children subsidized by public funds and provided by for-profit companies in collaboration with Japanese schools (Yamato & Zhang, 2017).

A further recommendation for school leaders is to address ethical issues (which this study helped to uncover) in discussions with schoolteachers and other community members, and to ensure that paid extra lessons are indeed an optional extra and not essential for the completion of the core curriculum (Bray et al., 2019). Monitoring the impact of school-PT partnerships on student achievement (and achievement gaps), attitudes and other non-cognitive outcomes (e.g., through student questionnaires or tests) is desirable to evaluate the meaningfulness of the partnership.

One of the limitations of the present research originates from the sample selection. Although the school sample was variable in terms of different school sizes, owners (both public and private) or locations (rural as well as urban areas), the sample construction did not follow the qualitative logic required to achieve theoretical saturation (Fuchs & Ness, 2015). Thus, some forms of partnerships may have been left uncharted. Also, principals may have been reluctant to disclose any more "unofficial" partnerships they may have been operating.

To conclude, the study was conducted in an education system that endows principals with high autonomy in all school operations. The analysis of the Czech case revealed patterns that might be relevant for policymakers as well as for school leaders who potentially decide about such partnerships. Of course, these decisions will be influenced by the overall context, which may differ from the analyzed one (for example, in some other education systems, principals may not have autonomy over decision-making on partnering with PT providers). Although the Czech case cannot provide an exact parallel to the United States, Australia or France, patterns identified in this research add to the overall understanding of the complex issue of school partnerships with PT providers (and with external partners in general).

At the same time, as the investigation has provided initial insights into this relatively new topic, future research in this subdomain of shadow education could, for example, focus on such partnerships in a long-term perspective, exploring various ways such partnerships are initiated and terminated, and unveiling the power relations and dynamics of interactions between the school actors (teachers, principal), partnering PT providers, students using their services and also their parents. Such investigation could bring more insights into their attitudes, perspectives and perception of such partnerships, and contribute to our understanding of their pros and cons.

Notes

1. In the teacher questionnaire, two English language teachers in that particular school did acknowledge that they recommended PT to students 2–5 times per year, one of them even 6–20 times, thus confirming the principal's words.
2. A specific case was reported by one principal who found that parents invested in private tutoring because of the long-term absence of the school's teachers of Czech language and mathematics.
3. This result may be interpreted in a several ways – teachers may report not being aware of the fact either because their students may not be taking private tutoring, or because they do not know their students well or are not interested in the topic etc.
4. This may be exemplified by the following remark of one principal: *"No, absolutely not, I'm not interested in that."*
5. The school had the highest aggregated average level of parental education attainment of all the 43 sampled schools, and 100% of 9th grade students reported having experience with private tutoring during the lower secondary level.
6. For example, remedial private tutoring recommended on the grounds that particular students did not get on well with the schoolteacher and their teaching approach, with no other schoolteacher available to help the students learn the required curriculum for free.
7. For example, the case of one private school with all students of wealthy parents, which offered school-organized paid after-school tutoring, contrasted with another school with more disadvantaged students, where the principal did not even consider any partnerships with PT providers. However, in some schools partnered with PT providers, principals did not report any actions to monitor the availability of their PT, despite having a considerably heterogeneous student population (at least in the 9th grade, where we administered the questionnaires).

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