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English language teachers' conceptualizations of one-to-one private tutoring: An international phenomenographic study[*]

ABSTRACT. Private English tutoring, understood as the paid English teaching service offered to students to supplement their learning of English at school or prepare them for an examination in English, has become a popular out-of-school learning activity. In order to obtain deeper insights into its intricacies, the need arises to examine the experience of one of its pivotal

stakeholders – the private tutors. This article is based on a phenomenographic study with a view to investigating the conceptions of private tutoring held by 15 English teachers from three countries (Poland, Portugal, and Turkey) who offer private teaching services in English in their local contexts. The findings suggest that there are at least three conceptions according to which private tutoring can be experienced by the participants: as a source of income, as helping, and as professional development. The study also poses the question if there is space for formal training of private tutors and calls for further research into English private tutoring.

KEYWORDS: English private tutoring, language teachers, teachers' conceptualizations, phenomenography.

1. INTRODUCTION

Although it is impossible to investigate all contexts in which teachers work, it seems possible to become aware of the popular contexts which have an impact on teachers' ways of seeing, thinking and doing. One language teaching context which has not received sufficient attention in the TESOL literature is private tutoring defined here as the paid lessons received by students in order to supplement their learning of academic subjects outside school hours. This paucity of research by no means implies that the scale of the phenomenon is insignificant. Offering private lessons has recently become a popular out-of-school learning investment, especially with regard to English considered a global language.

In order to partially address this gap, the present article describes a phenomenographic study of the experience of tutors who offer private English classes in Poland, Portugal and Turkey. As any phenomenographic research project reveals a variation in what and how people understand an investigated phenomenon, in this article we aim at exploring qualitatively different ways in which offering private English lessons, called here *English private tutoring* (EPT), can be experienced and perceived by those who do it – private English tutors. This study seems important in that it (1) reveals the motivations of private tutors which can be more complex than people usually believe, and (2) poses further questions that may be worth investigating in the future EPT research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Although the unprecedented growth of private tutoring has become visible, its scholarly discussion is scant. The most cited researcher in the literature related to private tutoring is Bray (1999; 2003; 2007) who regards private tuition as shadow education:

First, private supplementary tutoring only exists because mainstream education exists; second, as the size and shape of the mainstream system change, so do the size and shape of supplementary tutoring; third, in almost all societies much more public attention focuses on the mainstream than on its shadow; and fourth, the features of the shadow system are much less distinct than those of the mainstream system (Bray 1999: 17).

Bray (1999) also provides reasons why this supplementary education is called 'shadow'. He offers three explanations: teachers' reluctance to reveal their private tutoring due to disclosing unofficial incomes, students' unwillingness to reveal the amount of the tutoring they receive for fear of unfair competition among their peers and, in some contexts, parents' uncertainty about their child's regular school teachers' responses on hearing about their pupils' extra private lessons.

Stevenson and Baker (1992) provide other reasons for considering private tutoring as shadow education. According to them, private tutoring shows parallelism to mainstream schools. As the content of formal education changes, the content of shadow education varies. The shadow education may, therefore, provide information about educational changes, although its effects on formal education can be criticized (Bray 2007; Campani 2013), for example through considering private lessons as 'parasitic on schooling' (Dawson 2010).

Shadow education can also be considered as a response to failing schools (Bray 1999), parents' lack of time for children (Tansel & Bircan 2004), or teachers' inadequate salaries (Bray 1999). It can also be effective as it eliminates possible encounters with 'false' construction of knowledge (Bloom 1984; Cohen, Kulik & Kulik 1982). Thanks to motivational and cognitive benefits, private lessons enable learners to be more confident in the learning process (Lepper & Chabay 1988), solve problems with a push of the tutor (Merrill, Reiser, Ranney & Trafton 1992) or prevent students from the costs of learning on their own (Merrill, Reiser, Merrill & Landes 1995). Fox (1991), in line with this argument, asserts that tutors bring out a 'safety net' for their tutees. Finally, private lessons can be attributed a 'symbiotic' relationship (Mori & Baker 2010), as schools provide a need for students' extra learning, which is satisfied during private language sessions and which contributes to making students learn more.

Most scholars investigating private tutoring focus on contextual demands. Private tutoring is situated with relation to social justice issues, such as equity (Jokić, Soldo & Ristić Dedić 2013), stratification (Hartmann 2013; Kassotakis & Verdis 2013), fairness (Buhagiar & Chetcuti 2013), equitable opportunities (Putkiewicz 2005; Tansel 2013) or side-effects of curriculum reforms (Altinyelken 2013). Interestingly, a private tutoring session may

become a telltale of corruption activities (Bray 2003; Rumyantseva 2005). The countries where private tutoring has become 'vast enterprise' are South-East Asian countries (Chung 2013) and post-socialist (Stastny 2016) and Southern European countries (Bray, Mazawi & Sultana 2013).

As for the structure of the tutoring sessions, McArthur, Stasz and Zmuidzinas (1990) used 'microplans' to define the tutoring schema. They observed that tutors acknowledge various incidents that might occur in a tutoring session, and follow a relatively flexible script. They also noted that while following their microplans, the tutors explained to their learners why and what they were doing.

Lesh and Kelly (1997) examined teachers' evolving conceptions of one--to-one tutoring with the help of researchers who observed tutors' strategies. They found that with an increase in tutoring effectiveness, directive and structured strategies (McArthur, Stasz & Zmuidzinas 1990) were abandoned and non-directive and implicit strategies (Fox 1991; Lepper & Chabay 1988), likewise Socratic tutoring, were more often applied.

In contrast to an abundant number of private tutoring studies in general education, offering private English lessons has not been investigated as much as tutoring in other subjects (Kij 2013). One strand of interest to language educators concerns the principles of EPT, which is referred to as one-to-one English teaching. The volumes by Wilberg (1987), Osborne (2005) or Bleistein and Lewis (2015) contain a number of practical recommendations to be used by English tutors during their private English one-to-one classes.

Other studies within this area have concentrated on students' attitudes, motivations, scholastic achievements and their perceptions of private English lessons (Chung 2013; Hamid, Sussex & Khan 2009; Lee 2010; Sandy 2018; Yung 2015; Zhan, Bray, Wang, Lykins & Kwo 2013). Insightful as they are, they illuminate students' foci, but fail to provide knowledge on private tutors' conceptualizations.

Among the studies focusing on private English tutors, a notable exception is Barkhuizen's (2017) research who investigated the construction of an English language private tutor's identity in one-to-one teaching arrangements. Through the employment of his story-based narrative method, Barkhuizen (2017: 61) examined tutors' identities as 'social inclusion tutor identities'. Although he calls for more research on language teachers who teach language in their learners' homes, not much respective response has been offered to date.

Against this literature review backdrop, it seems reasonable to suggest that new research on private English language tutors should be expected so as to help better understand their private tuition practice contexts and advance the knowledge in this field.

3. THE STUDY

3.1. Background

The present study is one part of a larger project focused on investigating English language teachers' professional contexts. Five researchers (3 females and 2 males) from three research teams took part in the study, which was conducted across the three countries: Poland, Portugal and Turkey. The data collection for the study spanned from June 2017 and continued until February 2018. In the following sections, we present the choice of the research method and introduce demographic information about the study participants, the study objective, the data collection, and analysis.

3.2. Method and study objective

In the study, we aim to focus on variation in language tutors' experience of private English lessons. Therefore, we opted for Marton's (1981) phenomenographic method in which the object is not the phenomenon itself, but the relation between the population of the study and the phenomenon. The variations in the ways of experiencing an investigated phenomenon are presented through the categories of that phenomenon (called *categories of description*) which are arranged hierarchically and culminate in an *outcome space*. The outcome space is a set of structured categories presented in the form of a map drawn by a phenomenographic researcher on a range of understandings of the investigated phenomenon. It is worth noting that the categories of description are never exhaustive, yet they are complete for the studied participants. Marton and Booth (1997) argue that their suitability is based on three criteria: standing in close relation to an investigated phenomenon and contributing something distinct about this phenomenon, standing in logical and often hierarchical order to one another, and having as few categories as possible in order to capture the critical variation in the data.

Phenomenography seemed to us the most appropriate method to discover how our investigated phenomenon – offering private English lessons – is understood and experienced by the study participants from Poland, Portugal and Turkey, rather than what EPT is. We chose an interview-based phenomenographic analysis to answer the research question and determine categories of description of the phenomenon of private tutoring as experienced by English language tutors from Poland, Portugal, and Turkey. As qualitatively different ways in which EPT is understood are mainly linked to individuals' experience rather than geographic boundaries, we assumed that

the participants' variation in conceptualizations would not be affected by their nationalities but personal experience. Hence, the single overarching research question that guided our study was: *How do language tutors in Poland, Portugal and Turkey experience their private tutoring in English?*

3.3. Participants

The sample consisted of 15 participants, which is consistent with the phenomenographic practice. There were 6 Polish (PL1, PL2, PL3, PL4, PL5, PL6), five Portuguese (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5) and four Turkish (T1, T2, T3, T4) tutors. The inclusion criteria were two: offering private English lessons and the willingness to take part in the study. All the other demographic information concerning the participants' national background, gender, age, degree (Table 1) was only needed to define 'the vantage point' from which they were talking. In accordance with the phenomenographic option, these were to help understand what the tutors communicated. All the participants were informed of the aim of the study and gave their consent to it.

Table 1. Participants' demographics

Teacher (sex)	P1 (F)	P2 (M)	P3 (F)	P4 (F)	P5 (M)	PL1 (F)	PL2 (F)	PL3 (F)	PL4 (F)	PL5 (F)	PL6 (M)	T1 (F)	T2 (M)	T3 (M)	T4 (M)
Age	33	45	33	26	47	38	41	35	24	24	24	28	27	47	44
Degree	PhD	PhD	MA	BA	BA	MA	MA	BA	BA	BA	BA	PhD	MA	BA	BA
Years of EPT experience	6	22	9	6	2	14	6	8	2	1.5	3	8	6.5	20	15

3.4. Data collection

The method of data collection was an in-depth interview based on an opening question. In our interviews the opening question was: *You have given private lessons for some time. Would you tell me about this?* This invited the participants to talk about their experiences of offering private English lessons. In addition, the interviewers had access to an interview plan related to four A. Perception of EPT and its mechanisms, B. Perception of a private learner, C. Perception of a private lesson, D. Perception of the private tutoring occupation. There were questions in each group to be used if the teachers found it difficult to disclose their experiences (see *Appendix*). The interviews assumed the form of conversation in which the researchers had been advised to use auxiliary strategies, such as repeating the last sentence or asking for

clarification, elaboration and confirmation in order to encourage the participant to enlarge upon the topic. The interviews were conducted by four researchers: one for Polish, one for Portuguese, and two for Turkish interviews. The interviewers were always careful not to impose their own interpretation of the EPT, which conformed to the phenomenographic principle of bracketing out the researcher's own opinion. Each interview lasted 1–2 hours and was held in English. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and subjected to the analysis. There was no modification brought to style or errors.

3.5. Data analysis

A phenomenographic analysis is focused on generating the categories of description and indicating similarities and differences between individual conceptions of meanings ascribed to a phenomenon. In this research study, the phenomenon of analysis were ways of conceptualizing EPT. In accordance with a phenomenographic procedure, all transcribed interviews (n = 15) were regarded as 'the whole source of knowledge' and analyzed as one unit of interpretation. The idea underlying the analysis was based on exposing various conceptions of the same phenomenon. The analysis was conducted in accordance with the phenomenographic procedure (Marton 1986) which in our study comprised: reading all the interviews to note initial patterns in the participants' responses (tutors' motivations for EPT were already noticed at this stage), reducing the topics and putting the ideas in order with regard to the senses they communicate (additional understandings of EPT were obtained, e.g. the perception of learner, teaching methods, etc.), looking for similarities and differences in the participants' responses and marking the paragraphs with illustrative excerpts (the senses given by particular participants were identified), grouping the similarities and separating the differences to formulate coherent initial categories of description, reexamining (adding, deleting, modifying) the categories to make sure they adequately represent the data, formulating final categories of description (three outcome spaces).

As a result, three categories of description (outcome spaces) were established, described and interpreted. In addition, one category of relation was created. The relating category was generated later to cover the content of the interviews that was not congruent with the formulated categories of description at first glance but which, on second thoughts, seemed related to the three outcome spaces, offering a more complex insight into the EPT phenomenon. All the obtained categories are discussed in the sections which follow.

3.6. Findings

This section showcases three various understandings of the English private lessons phenomenon which emerged from the analysis (Table 2). Although several features of EPT (forms of delivery, evaluation, influence on tutors' personal lives) are shared by all three categories of description enumerated here, the results – the outcome spaces – are presented under three generated understandings of EPT: *income*, *helping* and *professional development.* In other words, private services in English can be understood by their providers in economic, axiological and developmental terms. It must be noted, however, that individual participants do not belong to only one formulated category. A tutor might exhibit different combinations of the categories of description with one dominant category, and this is why they can be better treated as financial, axiological and professional orientation conceptions so as to minimize the 'uniformity' of the generated categories. What follows is the presentation of the categories with their illustrative quotations.

Table 2. The map of ways of experiencing EPT

Identified themes of EPT	Category 1 **EPT as an income** (P1, P2, P3, P4, PL1, PL2, PL3, PL4, PL5, PL6, T1, T2, T3, T4)	Category 2 **EPT as a mission** (P3, P6, PL2, PL6)	Category 3 **EPT as professional- -development** (P1, P4, PL4, T1)
Aims	Language results (P2, P5, PL4, T1, T4).	Addressing students' needs (P1, P3, PL2, PL6, T1)	Addressing tutors' needs (P1, P4, PL5)
Reasons for existence	Parents' expectations (P1, PL1, T1), ineffective education (P2, PL3, PL5, PL6, T1, T2, T3, T4), no interest in languages (P5, T4)	A feature of life (P3)	Popularity of English (PL1)
Tutor's principles	Calculation (PL5), discipline (PL5), good planning (T2), self-efficacy (T3)	Responsibility, (P3, PL3, PL6, T1)	Freedom (PL3), flexibility (T2)
Vision of learner	Exam-taker (P1, P2, P4, T4), familiar school type (PL1, T2)	Learner with individual needs (P1)	ESP learner (P1), a foreigner, adult over 30 (P4, T3)
Place	A study (P2, PL3, T3), learners' home to show parents the starting and ending time (T2)	Learners' home as their natural environment (P1, PL4, T1), a learner's workplace (P4)	Library (P1), café (PL6)
Teaching methods	Complementing school (P1, P2, T1), preparing for exams (PL6)	Not much preparation (P4), no course book (PL2), ready activities for each profile (T2)	ESP texts (P1), extra materials (PL5, T1)
Form of delivery	Skype not convenient (P2, PL6), only face to face (P4, PL1, PL2, PL3, PL4)	Face-to-face, but open to online teaching (P1)	One-to-one and *Skype* (T3)

Identified themes of EPT	Category 1 **EPT as an income** (P1, P2, P3, P4, PL1, PL2, PL3, PL4, PL5, PL6, T1, T2, T3, T4)	Category 2 **EPT as a mission** (P3, P6, PL2, PL6)	Category 3 **EPT as professional--development** (P1, P4, PL4, T1)
Evaluation	Tests without grading (P4), students' answers (T4), school exam results (T1, T2), commercial exams (T1), CEFR (T2)	None (P1, P3)	–
Influence on private life	No time (T1), duties carried by a spouse (T3), no visitors at home (T4), paying money to the daughter to take care of her young sibling (PL1), no dinner, (PL4), own children are neglected (P2), family members' irritation (P2).	Accepting a lesson on Sunday afternoon (P1, P2)	–
Good sides	Good results (P5, PL1), no discipline problems (PL3, PL5), flexible hours (PL6), job perks (PL4)	Rewarding (P1, P2), students' improvement (P3), creativity, better atmosphere than at school (PL6)	Seeing students grow up (P2, P4), self-development through teaching different learners (P6), using English every day (PL4)
Challenges	Professional life clashes with lessons (P2), the unexpected (PL1, PL3, PL6, T1), coming late (PL3, PL6), parents' expectations (PL3, T2, T4), preparation and working hours (PL3, PL6, T1), passive learners (PL3, (PL4), PL5), none (T3)	Problems with teaching grammar or writing (P1, PL4), lack of learners' motivation (P4, PL6), restriction in content (P4), learner's tiredness (P4, PL3, PL6), responsibility for exam results (PL1), keeping a child's attention (T1), learners don't voice expectations (PL6)	Adapting to a learner's style (P1), learners ask about unknown words (PL1)
Relating category: Private tutors' training	Against: background in general didactics is enough (P1, P2, P3), impossible as students are different (PL1, PL2, T3), more competition on the tutoring market (PL4), nobody asks about qualifications (PL6), not everyone can do it (talent, interest, resilience (P2), cannot be taught) (T4) Undecided / emergent: never thought about it (P4); useful, any training is good, exclusion of those with no qualifications (P5) For: developing rapport, trust, learning atmosphere, giving feedback (PL3), knowledge on working with one child (T2), integration of activities, finding materials (T1), qualities of one-to-one teacher (T2)		

3.6.1. EPT as a source of income

Even though some participants also indicated other meanings of their understanding of tutoring, financial benefits came to the fore in all but one interview. For those who viewed EPT primarily as a source of income, the tutoring practice is an ordinary job. They highlighted its temporal dimension expressed by one tutor who deliberately chose a learner's home:

> I never have my sessions at my home. The family should see we are having the class. We started at this time and we finished it at this time. T2

The choice of a place where EPT is offered is significant in this perception of tutoring. Like at a workplace, some teachers invested in the professional equipment:

> I got a grant to start my own business, so I bought an interactive board, an overhead projector, a computer, a table, all necessary equipment. PL3

Other teachers rented or bought a downtown place destined for language tutoring or invested in a home studio downstairs to which lesson-attending customers, like in customer-inviting businesses, had easy access.

> I have a small office and people come in and they work with me. My place downstairs. P2

Those teachers often restricted their private lessons to preparing students for passing examinations or end-of-term tests. They believed they did it for financial reasons primarily.

> For money. This is the only reason. The adults want to pass the yds exam popular in Turkey for promotion in companies. The 12th grade students want private courses to pass the prep school exam. T3

> Ninety percent of the cases, you have a student who needs to pass the subject. P2

> I think most people work because of money. PL6

Some of them were so preoccupied with finances that they charged each student the same amount of money irrespective of how many individuals attended one private lesson.

> I had a question from one parent if we can do lessons with two students, but the other parent disagreed. They have to pay for it, and it'd be the same money whether or not they would be alone or not. PL5

To ease their job and maximize effects, tutors tended to accept only one, familiar to them, 'kind' of learner. That was usually a learner whose motivational profile the teachers knew from their regular school job.

> I prefer students of secondary school, the ones that I teach in the state school. I can teach them in the same way and get tired less. PL1

> I usually accept mid school students because I teach at middle school. I can understand everything about them. T2

Some even categorized their learners into their own particular types, which suggests how much experience they have in teaching English to such students.

> Generally, there are two types of learners: the ones who have a very good grasp of vocabulary and no knowledge of grammar whatsoever; and those who actually study the grammar, who know the rules, but then they don't understand the word they're reading. P2

Thanks to accepting the 'kind' of learners that they knew from their regular school classes, tutors could use the same teaching activities with their private students that were taught to their regular school students. It can be argued that, in this way, they could successfully reduce the challenges generated by their private learners ["It's easier" (T3), "more mechanical to me" (T4)] and, therefore, better deal with their and their parents' expectations, accept more learners for private lessons, and benefit financially.

The principles which tutors followed were maintaining discipline, preparing interesting lessons and promoting their own self-efficacy. The following phrases were taken directly from the participants' narratives:

> I'm a little militaristic. I have to be. There's too much relaxing nowadays, on the students' part. You have to pull the reins a bit to get some work done. P5

> I'm a very good teacher. I'm very good at English. Most of my students pass the exams and that's why they prefer me. T3

Despite viewing private tutoring as a job and even referring to its perks, some participants realized a low status of a tutor, if compared to other professions. Quotations illustrating these two aspects are as follows:

> I have parents who give me dinner, chocolates. I remember one mother told me: 'Oh, you have another lesson after me, I'll drive you. I get tea, coffee. PL4

> I feel like people don't see me as a professional as much as if it was a doctor's appointment, or an appointment with a lawyer. Because they feel like "Okay, it's something extra, I can cancel whenever", and that's something that's frustrating. P1

3.6.2. EPT as helping

Although not indifferent to financial aspects, participants also looked beyond them and perceive private tutoring in English as offering help. One Turkish tutor said:

I don't ask for a lot of money to see that the students who'll be working with me should have high level of income. I only check if they need help and if they are interested. T1

Tutors who embraced private lessons with a helping conviction felt the need to identify their aims as primarily learner-centered. Learners were positioned as individuals who succeeded through extra time, effort and modifications in teaching. They evoked tutors' pity as injured parties due to their unjust treatment or lack of learning opportunity. This is what teachers said:

People sought me, knowing I had a degree in that area, asking me for help. I'm not much in the habit of saying no. And they were people I know quite well. Because our teacher in Arraiolos had been the same teacher for years, and I knew perfectly what her skills were, and the children there were desperate. P3

I live in a small village and there are no language schools. Parents are stuck, that's why they often come and ask me if I could give them [their children] some lessons. I feel sorry for those children. I had a girl and I worked with her all holiday. She used to come twice a week. With a weak learner, I fell it's my responsibility to help. PL2

I used to give some lessons even for free because of my family members. I didn't feel comfortable to take money from them. PL6

Such tutors focused on their learners' individual needs. They situated their teaching in terms of contribution to learners' improvement, be it shyness, lack of knowledge or ability to manage problems, as the following examples illustrate:

My private lessons are obviously oriented towards the students' needs. My student is the center of my lesson. P2

In a large group, they don't have a one-to-one contact with the teacher. They feel shy because they may not have such a high command of the language and therefore don't participate as much and being one-on-one with them, they feel more comfortable working with me, or anyone else. P1

At school there's always one person, black sheep, who doesn't understand. PL6

I won't go there just to do their homework. I go and try to make them autonomous. Because that's what I did. If I didn't understand, I grabbed a grammar book, 'Let's see what's going on here'. P3

A tutor in this category accepted a learner's home as a learning venue to see, as the following excerpt shows, a learner "in their surrounding environment". Such an approach potentially better utilized the 'affordances'

(Gibson 1979) or 'attractors' (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008) that are offered in the learner's milieu or address the needs that the ambience lacks.

> We can work with their surrounding environment, with what they have in their bedrooms and that's something I enjoy. If we're going to be discussing a certain topic, especially with younger students, we'll go around their house, and they can tell me 'This is this, this is that'. P1

Although teachers conceptualizing EPT as helping complain, as some interviews showed, about their own problems with teaching certain language aspects [grammar (P1)], writing (PL4), students' demotivation (P4, PL6), or difficulties with maintaining a child's attention (P4, PL3, PL6), they found it rewarding to help.

3.6.3. EPT as professional development

The understanding of private tutoring can also be viewed in terms of needs fulfillment. Such a focus derives from tutors' need for professional development that is found in a tutoring situation. This may assume a form of learning from a learner, learning with a learner, or learning because of a learner. The first situation can take place when a learner is interested in a discipline unfamiliar to a tutor and shares this knowledge through, for example, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) activities. The second situation can happen when a tutor teaches a new kind of learner who can offer more teaching challenges and, thereby, contribute to developing the tutor's teaching expertise, whereas the third one is related to a tutor's stance, according to which he or she can view the process of teaching as a learning lesson. The illustrative examples of all these learning situations were provided by the participants.

> I tutored young adults from different fields, sometimes I have no clue about aviation or mechanics, and since I want them to talk, I learn so much about so many things, from fashion to interior design, to mechanics, to tourism. I'm also learning. P1

> I accepted a five-year-old boy because I'd never tried it, I wanted to see what it was like. P4

> That situation with the kid with Asperger's was interesting, because it made me more alert. He could go into his own world, and I had to pull him back, and that ended up being challenging. I had to update my knowledge on students with special needs. Now, a favorite student. P5

Private tutoring can also contribute to a teacher's sense of self-efficacy or self-worth. Thanks to tutoring they had a chance to teach able students, prepare them for language contests or have a say in what they teach. The following examples give evidence to this aspect of their profession:

> During my one-to-one tutoring I'm a better teacher. I'm not that good in the state school because there are weaker students, I can't prepare them for some contests, because they don't want to learn. PL1

> There is no curriculum, so I decide what I want to teach. I don't take just one book, and I don't do everything. I use a few books and I take what I think is right. P3

3.6.4. Training private tutors as a relating category

After analyzing the generated variation in EPT conceptualizations, we came to the conclusion that the respondents' answers to the question about private tutors' training were worth investigating. In order to ease the reception of the material, the relating category was divided into three groups which matched the generated three conceptions of EPT, as seen in our phenomenographic map (Table 2). The variations in answering this question were: there is no need for training private English tutors, private English tutors should be formally trained, the respondents are undecided whether or not the training of private English tutors should be introduced. This relating category provides further insights into the participants' understandings of the EPT phenomenon.

The first response concerning the lack of necessity of providing tutors with formal training was provided more frequently than either the conviction of the necessity of private tutors' training or their undecidedness in this respect. Teachers have problems with articulating a need for such a kind of professional training, perhaps due to the lack of such practices. Their arguments concern students, themselves and other stakeholders. The argument about students provided by teachers represents their belief in the impossibility of such courses, which stems from the idiosyncrasy of students' individual needs. Addressing all needs of private students would miss the point as that would imply an excessive number of cases. This is what they said:

> I couldn't find a reason why they should be because in the same way we could ask the question: 'Should we be formally trained to be teachers when we go to individual lessons, to, for example, ill students?' PL1

Although it could be assumed that difficulty with responding to tutees' individual needs is a significant argument, the participants also put forward other reasons related to themselves. They clearly stated that they could successfully handle private tutoring without such a course, as they argued:

> You can't teach anyone to give private lessons. You learn it in time, especially while you teach. T3

> I don't think everyone can give private lessons because this needs a special talent, you can't give this at school. T4

Another argument relates to the competition on the tutoring market. One participant maintained that official training of tutors could 'authorize' tutoring, encourage potential tutors to deliver private lessons and, in all likelihood, decrease the possibilities of earning money:

> I don't want to compete. If we have some classes or studies connected with tutoring, people would think 'Oh, it's a good way to earn a lot of money, I would do that'. Now if we don't have it, people think 'I don't know if it's good or not, I don't know'. And then I'm coming. PL4

Finally, one participant expressed his belief in the lack of need in education for tutors because no stakeholders are interested in that:

> I've never been asked about my qualifications so theoretically I could be a math teacher and I could give English lessons if I were good at it. PL6

Yet, a few participants gave a thought to the issue of providing private tutors with formal training. For example, one teacher pointed to the importance of learning how to develop rapport, build trust, create a pleasant and learning-conducive atmosphere or give feedback:

> Maybe one aspect could be discussed, that establishing a rapport is important if there's a good contact between the teacher and the pupil. The teacher should make the pupil feel self-confident, make the pupil trust him. It's also important to create a good atmosphere to learn. PL3

Independently of each other, two Turkish participants complained about their ignorance related to planning lessons for one child, looking for effective materials for one person or developing teacher qualities that would be effective while working in one-to-one private lessons.

> I feel the necessity of knowing how to deal with a situation because we've always been trained how to manage the classroom. But for private lessons, no

one said anything, we're just going by ourselves, and it would help us a lot, if we had the training. T1

Teachers should have some kind of training to be a tutor. This program needs a system and if they aren't aware of this system they cannot be successful. T2

As it is important in phenomenography to acknowledge the viewpoints of all the participants, an emergent opinion about this issue is worth presenting. In the course of an interview, as more thought was devoted to thinking about the issue, one interviewee changed his opinion:

I don't know. I think it could be important. It wouldn't be unreasonable. Why not? Yes, of course. I'm sure there're people who do it and don't really have the skills to do it. That may be a problem and it creates a problem to someone who already has problems, it could happen. 'Let's help this kid, let's pay this gentleman', and he makes things worse. It could happen. P5

4. DISCUSSION

In popular understanding, the primary aim of private tutoring from a tutor's point of view is earning extra money. Results from this study are in line with such thinking, as the category of EPT as a source of income has received the most recognition. A majority of tutors in this group prepared private learners for language examinations, both school-related and commercial. It can be said that all the participants have acquired one skill – following a set of ready-made materials related to an examination in question and / or successful teaching of examination techniques. This makes them popular on the tutoring market and may contribute to their sense of self-confidence about their expertise. The last point merits special attention, as it may not matter much whether or not they are truly expert teachers. What may carry weight is what others (learners and their parents) say about them, and what effects their discourse has on the tutors' teaching practices. It is interesting that tutors are not asked about formal teaching qualifications by their customers. Since they are popular with learners and parents who are willing to pay fees for tuition, the participants may believe they are good tutors who explain what they are doing and why they are doing certain activities during lessons, which corroborates McArthur et al.'s (1990) study. In other words, quantity of work may be thought equal to the quality of work, which, in turn, influences their self-esteem and the construction of their tutor-as-active-entrepreneur identities.

In EPT as an income category, tutoring is treated as a full-time business. The ownership of a professional workplace, an important job attribute,

somewhat denotes the truthfulness of such thinking in practice, whereas talking about job perks (being offered refreshments or car lifts) gives evidence to it in a participant's discourse. The tutors in this category may understand themselves as the agents of their biographies; yet, their tutors' lives in which their practices are measured, assessed and evaluated as 'outputs' with reference to their students' effective preparation for an examination, may, in fact, make them 'docile' neoliberal subjects (Chun 2016; Walkerdine & Bansel 2010).

Although less popular, the perception of EPT as helping has still found empirical support in this phenomenographic study. Teachers who represent this point of view believe in their capacity of teaching learners beyond the language skills or using language skills to 'improve' a person, be it through successfully addressing students' individual needs or helping them acquire important life competencies, such as autonomy (P3). This teaching stance or belief system reveals the teachers' views about the role private tutoring can play, about their understanding of who a student is, and emotional attitudes regarding others. When a Polish teacher says "It is my responsibility to help" (PL2), a Portuguese teacher claims "[children] are so desperate" (P4), or a Turkish teacher confesses "I don't ask for a lot of money… I only check if they need help" (T1), it is clear that, despite financial rewards, they undertake English teaching for social action.

An equally interesting perception of EPT through the lens of a teacher could be the conception of teachers' professional growth. It is interesting in the sense that offering private lessons to another person is usually understood as a tutee's development. Although the participants acknowledge financial reasons for their resorting to tutoring, their words about tutoring as learning seem significant. Analyses of the interview transcripts demonstrate that teaching English may benefit tutors professionally. They are provided with opportunities to revise grammar (PL4), learn vocabulary (P1), or acquire new life skills, such as assertiveness (PL4), when they have to explain language acquisition aspects to learners' parents.

Yet, the professional growth conception is not only interesting in the sense of who is learning. Equally puzzling is to consider who the teacher educator is and where teacher education is held. In the third conception of tutoring, students (ESP learners, learners considered challenging cases) may be positioned as teacher educators. As long as their English tutors acknowledge how much they have learnt from such students, this strand may open up the new perspective on thinking to what extent this unconventional teacher educator (the student) contributes to tutors' learning. Likewise, the place of teacher learning is worth highlighting. It is not learning in a university classroom, during an in-service course, or while attending

a workshop. This is a place where the process of EPT conducted by a teacher is simultaneously the process of this teacher's learning, including the development of teaching skills.

That said, it is not clear why the participants conceptualize EPT in terms of the three orientations which have emerged. According to the Douglas Fir Group's (2016: 20) ecological framework, what happens [in a tutoring session] (meso level) can be influenced by the participants' cognitive processes (micro level), and the wider social context (macro level) in which they function. Understanding these particular "social-local worlds" may provide a key to a tutor's conception of EPT. It can also be claimed that the generated conceptions of private tutors mirror the divisions of teachers who enter the teaching profession for extrinsic, altruistic, and intrinsic reasons (Kyriacou & Coulthard 2000). Extrinsic reasons, which are related to obtaining satisfaction from external rewards, may resemble thinking of tutoring as a source of income. Altruistic motivations, which are related to satisfaction from engaging in social justice activities, such as supporting children to succeed academically, can be compared to the helping category, whereas intrinsic reasons, related to deriving satisfaction from inherent aspects of teaching, can be placed alongside the outcome category of professional development. Although the participants exhibiting these variations come from different countries, it cannot be said equivocally that their perception results from their life experiences, socialization processes or teacher training practices. This is why further research could focus on this aspect, as a conception of tutoring determines teachers' practices and work engagement.

The present study contributes to an issue that may merit further empirical confirmation: formal training provided to private tutors. Training tutors could make those who treat it in financial aspects think beyond remuneration. Then, there could be more competition on the market, as one teacher said, that might exclude unqualified tutors whose only goal is earning money. For those who perceive EPT as a mission, tutoring courses could offer a more balanced viewpoint. After attending them, a tutor might still treat EPT as a kind of social action, yet remembering that students' outcomes are expected within a concrete period of time. Using each professional situation as an opportunity to develop, the group focused on professional development could welcome a tutoring course.

Overall, the fact that the private teachers from the three dissimilar countries are not unanimous about this aspect may be used as the basis for its expansion. Further investigation, perhaps also using ethnographic approaches, may clarify whether the introduction of courses to those who intend to become private tutors may impact their teaching results.

5. CONCLUSION

There may be voices of criticism that the study ignores the voices of students or their parents who could certainly have provided findings from a wider perspective. However true such objections might be, they should not decrease the significance of this study but rather treat it as a call for more research around private tutoring. Moreover, as Koenen, Dochy & Berghmans (2015) maintain, in qualitative research, to which phenomenography belongs, transferability, not generalizability, is important.

The present study has trialed phenomenography as a research strategy for exploring teachers' variation in their understandings of EPT. A theoretical contribution of this study is the identification of three conceptualizations (outcome spaces) of EPT: as an income, as providing help and as professional development. This study also poses new questions concerning the venues of teacher learning and who counts as teacher educator, as well as unveils the issue of validity of offering formal training to private tutors – the category of relation that appeared in the study.

We are hopeful that this line of research will be continued and EPT will constitute a significant research agenda in language teacher education. Possible further research in this field may involve a lot of time, given that studying EPT is still in its infancy (Yung 2019). Yet, engaging in researching EPT contexts might advance both new directions of research in teacher education and in the practice of language teacher education.

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Appendix
English Private Tutoring Survey

A. Perception of EPT and its mechanisms. (Why do people offer private English lessons?, Why do learners attend them?, Should there be private lessons?, Where should they be held?, etc.);

B. Perception of a private English learner (Who is your favourite private learner in terms of age, gender, language proficiency, needs? Why?, Do you accept all learners?, etc.);

C. Perception of a private English lesson (How do you plan a lesson?, What teaching aids do you use?, How long are your lessons and language courses? How often are they held?, What are the greatest challenges?, etc.);

D. Perception of the tutoring occupation (What impact does EPT have on your private life?, Should there be formal preparation for this job?, etc.).