Kids with tuition fare worse

Analysis of Pisa data throws up surprising results for S’pore parents paying high tuition rates to help their children do well at school

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Back in the 1990s, when I was a secondary school student, only a few of my friends had access to private tuition. Today, however, it is not uncommon for the majority of one’s classmates to have this. Some may even have tuition in several subjects.

In 2011, 73.3 per cent of secondary school students received some form of tuition – defined as receiving out-of-school extra lessons, whether paid for or otherwise. By contrast, only 33.9 per cent received tuition in 1995.

Three questions arise:

1. Why are tuition rates so high and increasing in Singapore?
2. Who are the children that attend tuition?
3. Do these children perform better than their peers who don’t?

To answer the first point, tuition rates tend to be high in countries where high-stakes exams prevail because parents see a need to prepare their children adequately for these assessments.

The growing prevalence of tuition has largely been demand-driven, but part of the increase is likely also due to peer pressure.

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