

# Stratification in Extended Education Participation and its Implications for Education Inequality

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**Abstract:** This study identified subgroups of elementary students based on similar patterns of participation in four different types of extended education in Korea. The study also investigated relationships between student patterns of extended education participation and their various demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, including residential location, parental education, and family income level. To achieve these aims, the study used latent profile analysis and logistic regression on a dataset of 18,186 students from 786 elementary schools provided by Statistics Korea. Results reveal five distinctive subgroups of students in terms of extended education participation: afterschool academic program users, shadow education users, moderate afterschool academic program users, ordinary users, and talent development seekers. Results also show that student socioeconomic and demographic characteristics are strongly associated with their classification into the above-mentioned subgroups. These findings signal the possibility that “educational stratification” based on student socioeconomic background may be occurring in the area of extended education.

**Keywords:** extended education, participation, stratification, educational equality

## Introduction

Korea is well known for its people’s “education fever” (Seth, 2002): parents are willing to make great sacrifices to ensure their children’s success in education and life. Over the past five decades, this culture has intensified with the strong public belief that education is one of the most effective investments for individual “upward mobility” from one social level to another, and contributes to the reproduction of family socioeconomic status.

In reality, parents’ desire for their children’s education leads to incessant efforts to provide increased access to better education opportunities for their children. Given the greatly equalized and standardized regular curricular activities under the strictly mandated national curriculum framework, Korean parents seek alternative routes to differentiate educational opportunities and experiences of their children from those of their peers through “out-of-school time.” This is demonstrated by the ever-increasing participation rate in private supplementary tutoring, also known as “shadow education” (Bray, 1999). Most parents believe that attending “*hakwon* (for-profit private tutoring institutions)” will help their children prepare for tests and therefore achieve higher scores, paving the way for their children’s

admission to prestigious universities. Regardless of whether such private tutoring indeed enhances student learning, private supplementary tutoring is a dominant culture in Korean education. Furthermore, private tutoring is becoming increasingly normative and institutionalized in other East Asian countries, as well (Bae & Jeon, 2013; Bae & Kanefuji, 2018; Bray, 2013). From a public policy perspective, however, one serious problem concerning the widespread and increasing shadow education is that the accessibility and affordability of private tutoring services considerably differ across students from different socioeconomic classes and regions. Because the financial costs of private tutoring are relatively high, only students from wealthier families can afford to take part in such educational opportunities. Due to the lack of private tutors, students in rural areas have much more limited access to private tutoring compared to their peers in urban areas. In this regard, the ever-increasing participation in private tutoring is considered as a factor exacerbating educational equality in Korea.

A countermeasure to such problems has been presented in the form of school-based afterschool programs, defined as “a set of student-centered learning and development activities which are school-based operations but a not a part of the regular curriculum” (Ministry of Education and Science and Technology, 2012). These programs are generally run by school teachers or education professionals hired by schools, and are mostly implemented within school premises after regular school hours. More importantly, these afterschool programs are much more affordable than profit-seeking private tutoring services. Accordingly, school-based afterschool programs have become an alternative educational arrangement for students from lower income families and rural areas who have limited access to expensive private tutoring. In other words, school-based afterschool programs can be viewed as an education policy that promotes education equality in Korea.

As explained above, private supplementary tutoring and afterschool programs are the two main pillars of extended education in Korea. These two types of programs and activities are implemented with a variety of purposes. Private supplementary tutoring is provided by for-profit education services that are designed to increase students’ test performance. With the ever-intensifying competition among students, the private tutoring market in academic subjects has been continuously growing. The cost of private tutoring varies based on its performance in raising scores and/or sending students to prestigious universities. Meanwhile, afterschool programs for academic subjects are relatively cheaper and usually provided for students who cannot afford expensive private tutoring, as well as those who are left behind.

With the growing perception regarding the importance of extended education participation in students’ growth and development, an increasing number of talent development programs and activities are also provided after school hours at a variety of places. Some programs are offered by profit-seeking vendors, while others are provided as one of the school-based afterschool programs. Costs differ based on the quality of programs and activities.

With various extended education programs, Korean students are able to choose which programs to attend after school. While there has been little research to directly compare the quality of provided programs, anecdotal evidence and market rules suggest that the costs of programs are directly proportional to their quality. It is also assumed that socioeconomic status—for instance, family income level and residential location of students—greatly in-