

A Study of Junior High School Students' Motivations and Learning Effects of English Tutoring in Zhaoqing Zhixing Tutorial School

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Abstract: Nowadays, English has become a universal language and an efficient tool for international communication. In China, English is one of the three most important subjects of the nine-year compulsory education; also, it occupies a significant position in extra-tutoring of tutorial schools. In the meanwhile, parents and students pay more and more attention to English instruction after class. This article tries to explore English tutoring in Zhaoqing Zhixing Tutorial School in terms of junior high school students' motivations, the most effective ways and learning effects by the means of questionnaire survey and interview. According to the research result, most of students go to English tutorial school for improving their academic grade, and the majority of students regard synchronous tutorship and learning methods' analysis as the most effective ways. In addition to this, more than 90% of the students thought attending English tutorial school is to some extent helpful.

Keywords: Motivations, effective ways, learning Effects, Zhaoqing Zhixing Tutorial School, English Tutoring, junior high school students

1. Introduction

As tutorial schools flourish around the world, numerous scholars and researchers tried to explore and explain this phenomenon. During the researcher's internship of Guangdong Zhaoqing Middle School and Zhaoqing Zhixing Tutorial School, the discovery of those junior high school students' zeal for and dependence on outside class English tutoring were rather impressive, which encouraged the researcher to conceive the idea to explore the motivations and learning effects of English tutoring in Zhaoqing Zhixing Tutorial School. In addition to this, the researcher chose junior high school students as survey subjects for they are compulsory education students and they are facing the pressure of High School Entrance Examination. This study targets junior high school students' motivations and learning effects in Zhaoqing Zhixing tutorial school. While most tutorial school related studies (e.g. Xiong & Hu, 2022) [9] pay attention to tutorial schools from a macroscopic view, this study is unique in two respects. Firstly, it attempts to focus on students' motivations and discuss what the most effective ways are to ensure the learning effect in tutorial schools from students' perspective. The research result can provide a reference for students and parents to select tutorial schools. Also, it can offer a wind vane for tutorial schools. Moreover, by probing into English tutoring in a different mode, this study also tries to explore students' learning effects after attending tutorial schools, which is also a characteristic perspective.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Motivation

Motivation is an inner drive to behave or act in a certain manner. It can be defined as the purpose for or psychological cause of an action (Schater & Daniel, 2011) [8]. The term in educational field is conceptualized as either intrinsic or extrinsic (Gonida & Lemos, 2019) [5]. Intrinsic motivation presents when students are internally motivated to do things and extrinsic motivation occurs when students are compelled to do something for factors external to them, such like reward or good grades (Ryan & Deci, 2020) [7]. It is the motivation to improve academic level that facilitates students to attend outside school tutoring. As a result, in this study, one main purpose is to find out junior high school students' primary motivations of attending Zhaoqing Zhixing tutorial school.

2.2 Historical overview

With an increasing awareness of the importance of tutorial schools, more and more Chinese scholars try to do research on tutorial schools in terms of subjects, types and teaching methods. For example, Li Tao (2000)^[6] classified instruction after class in tutorial schools into seven types: to help students in puzzling questions; to make up lessons for students; to give talent students individual tutoring; to give academically poor students extra instruction; to help students in learning method; to educate students in terms of learning attitude and learning habit; and to organize some practical activities. These varieties are comprehensive, but which type is preferred by students is still a question requiring further exploration. Also, other researchers like Eng, R. (2019)^[3], Zhang, W., & Bray, M. (2021)^[10] and Guo et al. (2020)^[4] are interested in how to apply appropriate teaching methods or the changing trend of tutorial industry in China. However, few researches reported students' motivations and learning effects, either.

3. Methodology

3.1 Settings

This research studies Chinese junior high school—level learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) in tutorial school setting. This is an attempt to realize junior high school EFL learners' motivations of attending English tutorial school and their learning effects after their exposure to English tutoring. The researcher firstly conducted questionnaires in order to comprehend and present students' motivations, preferred pedagogical methods and learning effects in a numeric way. After that, 10 students were chosen for semi-constructed interviews to help interpret and complement the quantitative methods.

3.2 Participants of the study

3.2.1 Survey subjects

The participants in the research were 100 junior high school students of Zhaoqing Zhixing Education Center. 50 of them were boys and the other 50 were girls. The age ranged from 12 to 17, with the average being 15. They were from different schools of Zhaoqing and selected randomly from the student lists. Among all the survey subjects, 26 of them were grade seven students, 35 of them were grade eight students, and the other 39 were grade nine students. In terms of the schools, 33 of them were from Guangdong Zhaoqing Middle School, 27 of them were from Zhaoqing No.5 Middle School, 22 of them came from Zhaoqing Dizhi Middle School, and the other 18 were Zhaoqing Tianjiabin Middle School students. During the investigation, the questionnaire was administered before the class time and the response rate was 100%. According to the teaching schedule, all the subjects had been exposed to extra English tutoring in Zhaoqing Zhixing Tutorial School for more than one semester. Therefore, their responses are available in the questionnaire as well as the following interview.

3.2.2 Interview subjects

Ten of the 100 subjects were chosen for semi-constructed interviews. In selecting interview informants, following Patton's "maximum variation sampling" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 200)^[2], the researcher made maximum variation in subjects' gender, grades, schools and English proficiency. Before choosing these ten students, the researcher tabulated the background information on all the survey subjects based on the questionnaire. The result (Table 1) was the ten selected students who were representatives of the 100 survey subjects.

Table 1 Background of interview subjects

Name	Gender	Grade	School	English proficiency
Zhong Jing	Female	8	Zhaoqing No.5 Middle School	Good
Liao Linlin	Female	9	Zhaoqing Tianjiabin Middle School	Poor
Zhang Nan	Male	9	Zhaoqing Middle School	Not so good
Wang Zhen	Male	7	Zhaoqing Dizhi Middle School	Average
Chen Chong	Male	8	Zhaoqing No.5 Middle School	Average
Zou Ying	Female	9	Zhaoqing Tianjiabin Middle School	Good
Tang Jingru	Female	9	Zhaoqing Middle School	Excellent
Yin Yue	Female	7	Zhaoqing No.5 Middle School	Good
Huang Weiwen	Male	8	Zhaoqing Dizhi Middle School	Good
Meng Fanpei	Male	8	Zhaoqing Middle School	Average

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire is composed of three parts. Part A consists of the subjects' personal details (i.e. sex, age, school and grade). Part B comprises eight multiple choice questions, which were designed to investigate those students' opinions and experience of English tutoring in terms of motivation, teaching methods and learning effect. These questions involve students' original motivations to attend English tutorial school (question 1); students' own opinions on the benefits of attending English tutorial school (question 2); their most concerned points of choosing English tutorial school (question 3); their opinions of ensuring the learning effect in terms of class scale, teaching method and time (question 4, 5 and 6). In part C, the subjects were instructed to freely express their personal opinions on English tutoring and tutorial schools.

3.3.2 Interview

After doing the questionnaire, the researcher conducted an interview with ten selected students. A typical qualitative research interview has been described as a 'conversation with a purpose' (Burgess, 1984) [1]. As a result, the interview was conducted to help the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of those junior high school students' perceptions of English tutoring and English tutorial school. In this semi-constructed interview, the researcher gave the interviewees several prepared and predetermined questions and made sure that the questions were clear, precise and motivating while formulating the questions. During the interview, the researcher mainly asked the students why they chose certain options in the questionnaire and each interview lasted half an hour or so. All the conversations were conducted in the students' native language (Chinese) in order to confirm that the subjects were able to express their thoughts and suggestions clearly.

4. Results

After analyzing and integrating the data, the researcher made a bar figure for each questionnaire question (see figure 1 to figure 8) in order to show the quantity clearly. In addition to this, the researcher sorted out interviewees' answers in accordance with different research questions.

4.1 Research question 1: What are the motivations for students to seek extra English tutoring in tutorial schools?

The recorded main motivations of attending tutorial schools can be seen in figure 1. Also, the reported most important benefit of attending English tutorial school and students' most concerned point in terms of choosing an English tutorial school are shown in figure 2 and figure 3, respectively.

Figure 1 shows that the majority of students incline to pay most attention to improving their academic grade. More specifically, more than 60% of the students consider improving their academic grade as the most important motivation of attending tutorial school while 21% of students are motivated by the promise of improving their English proficiency. After that, the motivations of enriching time and meeting parents' wishes account for the third and fourth largest proportion, just 5% and 3% respectively. Then, the motives of following the trend and others make up only 2% and 1% of the total. This result is probably connected to the test-driven system and the importance of the examinations such as High School Entrance Exam and The National College Entrance Examination in China.

According to figure 2, 47 students chose the improvement of academic grade as the most important benefit of attending English tutorial school, constituting nearly 50% of the total. 23 of the survey subjects selected the improvement of English proficiency while 22 of them chose the improvement of study efficiency as the most significant advantage, representing nearly the same proportion. After that, only 6 out of 100 students regard the sound arrangement and supervision of after school time as the most obvious plus point while the remaining two students chose others. This result is coherent with the former one, which also indicates the significance of the examinations in China.

As can be seen in the figure 3, the majority of students (67) were concerned about teaching methods and ideas most, and 19 survey subjects focused on the level of the teachers. The fame and brand account for 7% of the total, and geography location makes up 5%. Then, the remaining two students regarded the price as the most concerned point. It is manifest from this result that the teaching methods

and ideas are most important from students' point of view.

Questionnaire question 1. Why do you attend English tutorial school?(see Figure 1)

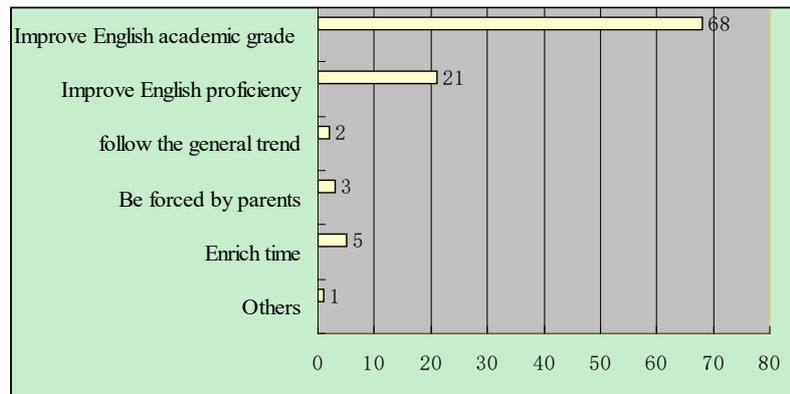


Figure 1: Comparison of the students' answers to questionnaire question 1

Questionnaire question 2. What do you think is the most important benefit of attending English tutorial school? (see Figure 2)

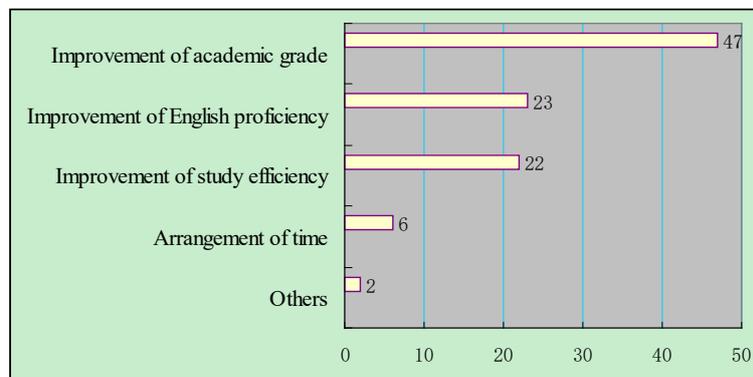


Figure 2: Comparison of the students' answers to questionnaire question 2

Questionnaire question 3. In terms of choosing an English tutorial school, what is your most concerned point?(see Figure 3)

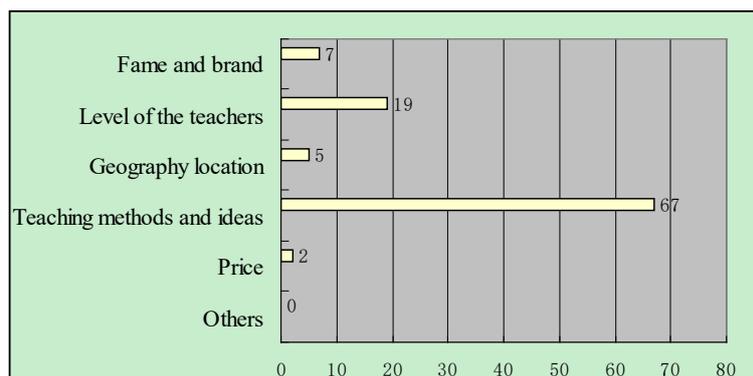


Figure 3: Comparison of the students' answers to questionnaire question 3

Based on the research question and these three questionnaire questions, the researcher read through the transcripts of interviews and integrating the related data, finding out that the following comments were typical when students were talking about motivation, benefit and concerned point.

1) "Actually, we are Chinese students learning English in China. We all know that English is a universal language and an efficient tool for international communication, but in regular schools we don't actually learn it for communication. We have to get a good grade in those important examinations which may decide our future. I think I could practice my real English proficiency in university, but now,

I seek outside school tutoring just for a good academic grade.” (Meng Fanpei)

2) “I don’t have excellent academic grade in school, but I really want to be admitted to a key high school, so I came here. I like learning English in this tutorial school, because the teachers here can motivate my interest and help me to improve my academic grade. In regular school, teachers cannot pay attention to all of us, but I got enough guidance and concern here.” (Yin Yue)

3) “I think English is too hard for me, and I have difficulties in learning English grammar. I don’t want to let my parents down, so I have to seek help here. Some of my classmates came here and their academic grades improved, and I also want to improve mine.” (Zhang Nan)

The survey results suggest that the main motivation for those survey subjects to attend tutorial schools is to improve their English academic grade, and the primary reason may be the test-driven system. In addition to this, a tutorial school’s teaching methods and ideas are their most concerned points. As well as this, though more than 10 students ticked the choices of being forced by parents, following the general trend or enriching the after-school time, after further exploration, the researcher found out that the primary motivations of these students are still to improve academic grades.

4.2 Research question 2: What are the most effective ways to ensure the learning effect in tutorial schools from students’ perspective?

The reported favored class scale, class time and teaching method are manifested in figure 4, figure 5 and figure 6. To be more specific, as can be seen from the figure 4, 35 students regarded analyzing learning methods in order to boost learning efficiency and cultivate sound study habit as the most effective way to conduct English tutoring, representing the largest proportion. 31 of the survey subjects thought that synchronous tutorship would be effective while 17 of the students wanted to be taught on techniques on answering questions in order to improve test-taking Skills. Expanding extracurricular knowledge in order to develop an interest in English learning, locating and making up the deficiencies were regarded as the most effective way to do the English tutoring by 10 and 5 students respectively. In consideration of these survey subjects’ motivation of attending tutorial school, synchronous tutorship which keeps up with the regular school curriculum is directly helpful for improving their academic grades. Besides, analyzing learning methods will be a benefit to boost students’ learning efficiency and cultivate sound study habit, which can improve academic grades indirectly yet effectively. According to figure 5, most of the survey subjects (71%) thought 40 minutes would be the most befitting time for ensuring the learning effect, which probably had something to do with the formal school time (mostly around 40 minutes). 15 students selected 35 minutes, which is closed to but a little less than the regular school class time. 9 students chose 30 minutes while 3 selected 45 minutes, and the remaining 2 chose others. According to figure 6, it can be seen that middle scale’s class and small scale’s class are favored by those junior high school students. To be more specific, 38 survey subjects thought a 10 to 20 people class is the best scale to ensure the learning effect while 37 students regarded a less than 10 people class is better. Then, 17 students preferred one-to-one tutoring, representing the third largest proportion, and only 7 survey subjects preferred big scale class. This result gave the researcher a deep impression. In China, most of the regular schools employ the big class teaching system, which goes against educating students in accordance with their own aptitude.

Questionnaire question 4. What do you think is the most effective way to do the English tutoring?(see Figure 4)

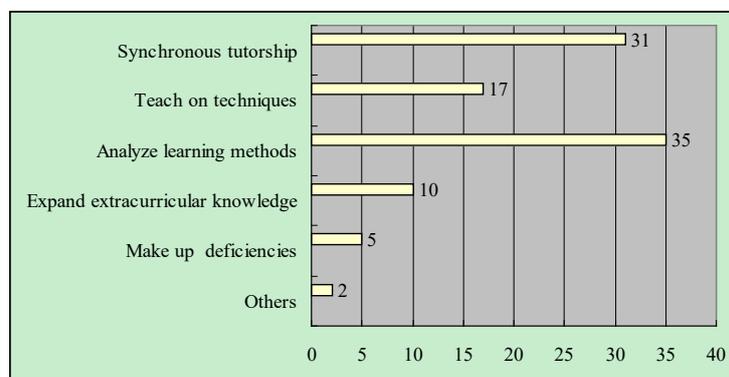


Figure 4: Comparison of the students’ answers to questionnaire question 4

Questionnaire question 5. What do you think is the most befitting time for ensuring the learning effect?(see Figure 5)

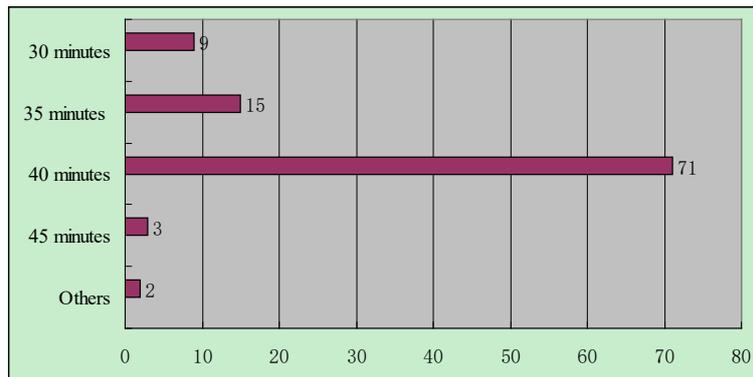


Figure 5: Comparison of the students' answers to questionnaire question 5

Questionnaire question 6. What kind of class scale do you think is the best to ensure the learning effect? (see Figure 6)

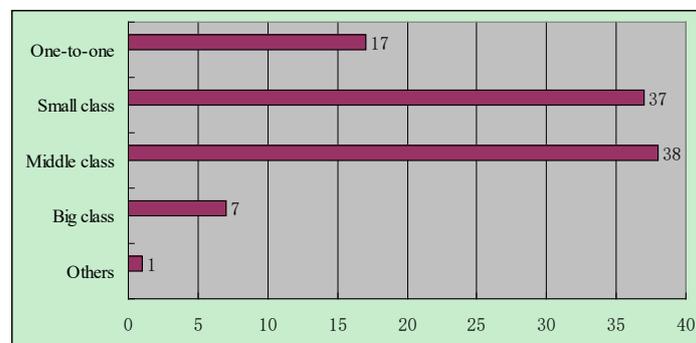


Figure 6: Comparison of the students' answers to questionnaire question 6

In accordance with the questionnaire results mentioned above, students prefer small class scale. In terms of the research question that what are the most effective ways to ensure the learning effect in tutorial schools from students' perspective, what surprised the researcher even more after reading through the interview transcript was the students' responses to the teaching methods in regular schools. The following responses are typical.

1) "In our school, the English teachers can just sit there and explain us the words, phrases and grammatical rules during the whole class. What we have to do is to take notes and recite them. I think it is useful and necessary for enhancing our academic grades, but we feel painful while learning English. I want the teachers in tutorial school can help us analyze learning methods in order to boost learning efficiency."(Liao Linlin)

2) "Actually, in our school, most of the classes have more than 40 students. We have only one teacher who has to teach us in accordance with his teaching plan, but he cannot pay attention to each of us. However, we have different problems when dealing with English. Sometimes I just cannot catch up with the teaching progress. So, I came here to seek synchronous tutorship which is keeping up with the regular school curriculum."(Meng Fanpei)

3) "English is my poor subject, but it is quite important, I have to learn it well. I came here to improve my academic grade in regular schools, so I want to boost my learning efficiency and maximize my learning effectiveness."(Wang Zhen)

The majority of the students pointed out their dissatisfaction toward regular schools' teaching method and class scale. As a result, those junior high school students' motivations of attending tutorial schools and their comments toward effective teaching ways both have a connection with the disadvantage of regular schools. First of all, for a long time, in China, foreign language teaching in junior high schools attaches great importance to direct-viewing pedagogical method, centering teachers and textbooks and treating students as passive receptacles of predigested ideas. Apparently, this model of teaching goes against developing student's interest and enthusiasm. Inversely, it extinguishes their

creativity, and worst still, imposes restrictions on students' oral communication in English for not setting real communicative surroundings. In addition to this, due to the big class teaching system, some students cannot catch up with the teaching plan while some others feel they have extra energy. This goes against educating students in accordance with their own aptitude.

4.3 Research question 3: What are students' opinions toward the learning effects of extra tutoring in English tutorial school?

The researcher of this study tried to investigate the connection between "Choosing Education" and academic grades, but it is from the students' perspective. The findings can be seen in the following figures.

According to figure 7, the academic grade of those survey subjects are mostly good and average. Specifically, 52% of the students had good academic grade while 23 of them had average score, occupying more than 70% of the total. Then, 11 over 100 students had excellent academic grade, and 8 survey subjects regarded their academic grade as poor. The remaining 6 students had not so good score. Figure 8 manifests that more than 90% of the survey subjects thought attending English tutorial school is to some extent helpful. More precisely, 53% of the students believed attending English tutorial school has some help, occupying the largest proportion while 23% of the students believed it helps a lot. After that, 18 survey subjects thought outside school English tutoring helps a little, but not obvious. Then, 6 students thought attending English tutorial school has no help at all. Generally speaking, most of the students think studying in English tutorial school is helpful.

Questionnaire question 7. What is your English average academic grade now?(see Figure 7)

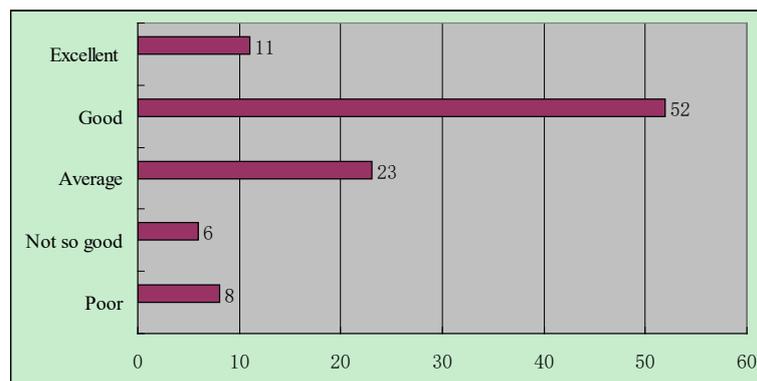


Figure 7: Comparison of the students' answers to questionnaire question 7

Questionnaire question 8. Do you think attending English tutorial school is helpful for improving your English proficiency?(see Figure 8)

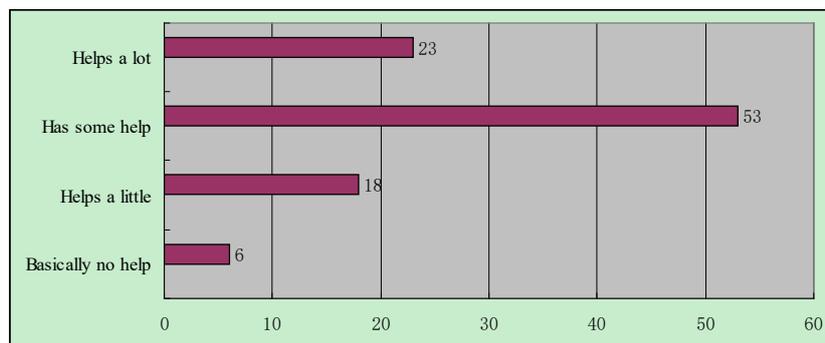


Figure 8: Comparison of the students' answers to questionnaire question 8

In terms of students' perspectives toward the helpfulness of extra tutoring in tutorial schools, the researcher also found some typical responses during the interviews.

1) "I think learning English here is helpful. I don't hate English, but I don't know how to learn it well. In our school, I can hardly catch up with teachers' regular teaching plan, and our teachers will not give me special instruction. After all, we have more than 40 people in one class. However, the teachers

in tutorial school can pay attention to each of us, and they can give us synchronous tutorship and help us analyze the effective learning methods.” (Chen Chong)

2) “English is not like math; we cannot learn it well by just reciting rules and doing exercise. We have to learn it through understanding, and teachers in tutorial school help me to know this. After attending this class, I make improvement, and I feel happy. The teacher gave me enough attention.” (Liao Linlin)

3) “I do well in English in regular school, actually. However, I still want to make more progress, so I came here. I studied hard and I did numerous exercises before, but now, I think I acquire some more effective and efficient methods. That’s helpful.” (Tang Jingru)

In conclusion, students thought outside school tutoring is helpful in two respects. Firstly, they can get enough attention here, and teachers here can help them locate and make up their deficiencies, so they can keep up with the regular school curriculum. More importantly, they are taught on techniques on answering questions in order to improve test-taking skills. Also, they acquire effective and efficient learning methods in order to boost learning efficiency and cultivate sound study habit. Actually, these students’ comments also confirmed the former research question, demonstrating that students regarded synchronous tutorship and learning methods analysis as the most effective way to do the English tutoring.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Research Summary

This research aims at answering three research questions. Firstly, what are the motivations for students to seek extra English tutoring in tutorial schools? According to the questionnaire and the interview, most of the students are prone to pay most attention to improving their academic grade, and that is probably have some connection with the test-driven system in China. Secondly, what are the most effective ways to ensure the learning effect in tutorial schools from students’ perspective? Based on the result of questionnaire and the interview, students prefer synchronous tutorship which can directly help for improving students’ academic grades. In addition to this, analyzing learning methods are also students’ favorite teaching content. Moreover, during the interview, some students pointed out their dissatisfaction toward regular schools’ teaching method and class scale. Thirdly, what are students’ opinions toward the learning effects of extra tutoring in English tutorial school? According to the questionnaire result, more than 90% of the students thought attending English tutorial school is to some extent helpful. After further exploration in the interview, the researcher found out that students thought outside school tutoring is helpful in two respects: getting enough attention and acquiring effective and efficient learning methods. In conclusion, this research found out that most of the students attend tutorial school for improving academic grades. As well as this, the results of this research have confirmed the findings from earlier studies, demonstrating that attending tutorial school has positive effect on students’ academic grades.

5.2 Limitations of the Current Study and Suggestions for Further Study

Due to the time and capacity constraints, there are a number of limitations to this research. First of all, it is small-scale research which surveyed only 100 junior high school students. However, in order to ensure the validity, reliability, and representativeness, a larger participant pool would be much more desirable. In addition to this, the questionnaire and interview are not flawless. Due to the time limit, the researcher cannot do more in-depth interviews and sent out more kinds of questionnaires.

During the research, though some students ticked one motivation in the questionnaire, after in-depth interview, the researcher found out that another motivation was the primary one. As a result, investigating students’ motivations needs more in-depth conversations. In terms of learning effect, it is manifested that the English academic grade is influenced by various factors. As a result, judging whether extracurricular English tutoring has positive effect on it is not so easy. One of the common views is that supplementary tutoring can definitely enhance academic level. Some people indicate that tutoring can explain the improvement of academic grade from the perspective of knowledge acquisition. But another point of view states that outside school tutoring does not correlate significantly with academic level, or to say the correlation differs from person to person. Therefore, to study tutoring influence on academic level, researchers should further explore many factors involving teaching

methods, motivations of both teachers and students, class scale etc.

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