An Investigation on Investments and Returns of English Extracurricular Courses for Junior High School Students—Take the Parents from an English Tutoring Institution in Beijing for Example

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Abstract. In recent years, the fierce educational competition urges more and more parents and students to invest a lot of money, time and energy on extracurricular tutoring institution, among which English tutoring is one of the most vital aspect in nowadays’ primary and secondary extracurricular education. However, whether parents have received returns as they expect is a problem worth focusing on. In this study, the data from parents in an educational tutoring institution is collected and analyzed by quantitative method, to be more specific, questionnaire survey and SPSS. The results found that parents in Beijing generally pay much attention to extracurricular courses and put much investments on both money and energy. Meanwhile, extracurricular courses do help improve students’ performance in both short-term, learning scores, and long-term, like comprehensive abilities, habits, characters and so on. But parents’ degree of satisfaction still needs to be improved.

1 Proposal of the research problem

The competition in education has become increasingly intense recent years. While extracurricular educational institutions have been sprouting in China, the educational industry has also been a raging up growth as well. The Chinese Society of Education released an Investigation Report on the Current Situation of Tutoring Education Industry and Teachers, showing that the tutoring education industry for primary and secondary students has grown into a big market, which has been over 800 billion yuan, containing over 137 million students and 7 to 8.5 million teachers. The hot market is mainly driven by the urgent demand from parents and students. Especially in first-tier cities, extracurricular courses have become normal for primary and junior students. More and more parents and students has turned their attention to extra courses in order to keep their advantages or even exceed others in academic performance and comprehensive abilities, hoping to realize their pursuits through increased investments in money, time and energy outside school. According to the White Papers on Education, a research on extracurricular education released by Sohu Education in 2013, 29.62% of families spend 500 to 1,000 yuan per month; 27.67% spend 1,000 to 1,500 yuan; 21.05% spend 1,500 to 2,000 yuan; 21.65% spend over 2,000 yuan. Even though money is only one of the aspects of investments, the amount of money can still be seen as a hallmark of emphasis from parents towards the extracurricular courses. Among all kinds of out-school tutoring, English tutoring has occupied a considerable proportion. On one hand, English is a main subject in high school entrance examinations and College Entrance Examination, thus it holds an important position in primary and secondary schools’ curriculum. On the other hand, the craze to study abroad stays fervent in recent years. Especially in big cities, due to the scarcity of high-quality education resources in local areas, the greater pressure in domestic education system, further education admission system and other factors, many parents often take studying abroad into consideration as to their children’s further education. It is reported that the proportion of IELTS candidates from junior and senior high schools has been more than 30%, and the number of them has increased rapidly in the past two years, which shows that English also plays an important role in
students’ future career. So, do the investments on extracurricular courses bring returns as parents expected? This research starts from the extracurricular tutoring of English, and tries to explore the answer to this question through data collection and analysis.

At present, there are a lot of researches in this field. From the perspective of research, many studies have explored the situation of extracurricular courses from the point of students. For example, the Master’s Thesis of Wang Ling[1], a master from Inner Mongolia Normal University, is Present Situation and Suggest to Attend Extracurricular Counseling for Middle School Students based on a case study of two middle school in Kun District, Baotou City. It investigated the situation, causes and results of students’ participation in extracurricular courses through questionnaire, and put forward suggestions. The thesis of Song Rui[2] who was a master from Huazhong University of Science and Technology, also adopts questionnaire survey and focused on the situation of English extracurricular tutoring for middle school students in Wuhan. Similarly, there is also Tian Chuyu, Dai Xi and Zhai Yuping did researches on high school students in The High School Affiliated to Renmin University of China. Hu Xiaowen’s[3] Analysis on Status of Tutoring Class in Senior Middle School Students and so on. In addition, there are studies on the effect of extracurricular tutoring on students’ performance, the influence of family capital on extracurricular tutoring activities[4], and the researches on the market situation from the perspective of extracurricular tutoring institutions. In terms of research methods, in addition to the quantitative researches carried out by questionnaire mentioned above, there are also qualitative researches carried out by in-depth interview or both. Take Zhong Wanjuan and Wang Xiaqian for example, they did a research in both quantitative and qualitative method. They passed out questionnaire to 200 primary and secondary students who participated in extracurricular courses in a county in Shandong, while taking several in-depth interviews with 7 students, 7 parents, 6 teachers and 1 principle in order to carry out a full vision of both objective situation and subjective feelings of participants towards extracurricular courses. Peng Xi and Shen Xinyu did a qualitative case study to explore the situation of extracurricular English tutoring of primary school students based on a pupil’s oral narration who participated in extracurricular English tutoring. Apart from scholars from China, many foreign scholars have also paid attention to the problems related to extracurricular tutoring classes. Extracurricular classes are often called Shadow Education abroad, which was first proposed by David Lee Stevenson and David p. Baker. They believed that Shadow Education is an educational activity aimed at improving students’ academic performance outside formal school. Shadow education or cram school is not a formal educational activity, which is one of the reasons why extracurricular tutoring has long been criticized[5]. A large number of foreign studies can be found starting with the key word Shadow Education. For example, scholars from the United States[6], South Korea[7], the Philippines[8] and other countries, discussed relevant issues from multiple perspectives such as evaluation, effects, the force of push and pull and so on.

Based on the above existing studies, it can be known that most of the studies have analyzed the advantages and disadvantages of extracurricular tutoring courses from the perspective of both students and the market, but few studies have been conducted from the perspective of parents. At the same time, there are very few researches pay specific attention to the effect of extracurricular tutorial classes, especially the relationship between investments and returns. In this study, attending the extracurricular course is seen as an educational investment of parents and as to the effect on students and parents’ subjective satisfaction are the returns forms of this investments. The starting points of this paper are investments and returns of extracurricular courses, the relationship between them and the influencing factors of parents’ satisfaction.

2 Research methods

In terms of research methods, this paper mainly adopts quantitative research methods. Firstly, a random sampling survey was conducted on the parents of students in an English tutoring institution in Beijing. A total of 91 questionnaires were distributed, 91 were collected and 43 were valid. Secondly, after getting the data, the next step was to analyze data by SPSS software, such as
frequency analysis, description analysis, correlation analysis and regression analysis, etc., in order to explore the investments, returns and the relationship between them from parents’ perspective, and try to carry out conclusions according to the analysis result and put forward constructive suggestions towards existing problems in English extracurricular courses for junior high students.

3 Research analysis

We mainly investigated and introduce the investments and returns of junior high school students from four aspects:

1) Family background. This includes parents’ gender, age, education background, occupation, annual household income, and student’s gender, age, grade, and also the influence of the factors listed above towards the results of taking part in English extracurricular courses and parents’ satisfaction degree.

2) Parents’ investments in extracurricular courses. The investments include money and energy investments. What we focus on is the relationship among the investments, and parents’ expectation and satisfaction degree.

3) The returns of extracurricular courses, including the criteria towards students' English learning like scores, learning habits, learning confidence and learning ability, etc.. Through relevant analysis, we try to find out the factors influencing students’ learning effect in English extracurricular classes from the aspects 1) and 2).

4) Influence factors and correlation between investments and returns. Combined with the previous investments and returns, and referring to the parents’ answers to the questions about the purpose, reason and satisfaction degree of participating in English extracurricular tutoring classes in the questionnaire, this paper explores the factors of parents’ investments and returns in students’ English learning and the relationship between them through relevant analysis.

3.1 Family background

According to the survey data, 48.8% of parents are male and 51.1% are female. The average age is between 36 and 40 years old, with bachelor's degree accounting for 30.2% of the respondents. The average annual household income is between 300,000 and 500,000 yuan. The occupational distribution of parents is shown in Fig.1:

| Occupation | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------|-----------|------------|
| Government Offices | 8 | 18.6% |
| Professionals | 5 | 11.6% |
| Office Clerk | 9 | 20.9% |
| Service Personnel | 7 | 16.3% |
| Secondary Industry Personnel | 5 | 11.6% |
| Freelancer | 6 | 14.0% |
| Other | 3 | 7.0% |

Figure 1. Parents’ Occupation.

The basic information of the surveyed families is as follows: in terms of the number of children, 46.5% of the families have only one child, 37.2% of the families have two children, and 16.3% of the families have more than two children. In terms of gender, 44.2% of the students are male and 55.8% are female. In terms of age, 23.3% of the children are under 12 years old, 9.3% are 12 years old, 32.6% are 13 years old, 7% are 14 years old, and the remaining 27.9% are over 14 years old. In terms of grade, 39.5% of the students are in first grade, 37.2% are in second grade, and 23.3% are in third grade.

3.2 Parents’ investments in extracurricular courses

From monetary aspect, the surveyed parents spend an average of 10-20,000 yuan on all
extracurricular tutoring courses for their children every semester, with the minimum spending of less than 5,000 yuan and the maximum spending of more than 30,000 yuan. More than 65% of parents choose Cultural, Test-preparation and Interest-oriented courses when choosing extracurricular tutoring classes for their children. 39.5% of the parents have signed up for more than two extracurricular English courses, 34.9% have signed up for one, and 25.6% have signed up for two. In the 7 categories of English extracurricular classes (Grammar, Reading, Vocabulary, Writing, Speaking, Listening and Purely exam-oriented), parents chose equally in each category. Among them, Grammar, Reading and Pure exam-oriented courses each account for 44.2%. Writing courses were the least chosen, followed by listening courses, accounting for 27.9% and 30.2% respectively. According to this, parents of junior high school students generally attach great importance to their children's English learning, and parents choose at least three of the seven types listed above, indicating that parents also want their children to achieve all-round development in English listening, speaking, reading and writing.

From energy aspect, there are two main standards: the time consumed by parents to help their children with English learning and the time consumed by parents to pick up their children. In terms of tutoring, 74.4% of parents choose to tutor their children in English learning, 20.9% of parents do twice or three times a week, and 7% of parents do more than five times a week. Parents who help their children with English study spend an average of 45-50 minutes each time, and parents who help their children for 45min-1 hour each time account for the largest proportion. On the other hand, 60.5% of parents pick up their children, taking an average time of 45 minutes to 1 hour per one-way and picking up their children twice a week on average. This data is helpful to further explore the relationship between parents' energy spent, their children's English learning effect and parents' satisfaction with extracurricular tutoring.

3.3 The returns of extracurricular courses

In this study, there are 6 criteria to judge and measure the returns: whether there is improvement in students' English Score, Learning ability, Learning habits, Learning character, Learning interest and Learning methods after taking extracurricular English courses.

In terms of academic performance, 32.6% of parents think that their children's English scores have improved slightly after attending English extracurricular tutoring classes, 20.9% of parents think their children's English scores have improved significantly, and 20.9% of parents think their children's English scores have not changed. In terms of learning habits, 60.5% of parents think that their children have improved, and their children's progress in Concentration, Consciousness, Planning and Independence in learning habits is recognized by more than 48% of parents, among which 63.4% parents choose Independence, as shown in Fig.2:

| Learning Habits | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------|-----------|------------|
| Concentration  | 25        | 61.0%      |
| Self-Conscious | 23        | 56.1%      |
| Planning       | 20        | 48.8%      |
| Independence   | 26        | 63.4%      |
| Other          | 1         | 2.4%       |

Figure 2. Learning Habits.

In terms of learning interest, 62.8% of the parents think their children's interest in English learning has increased, 18.6% of parents think their children's interest in English learning has not changed, 11.6% of parents think their children's interest in English learning has decreased, and 7% of parents think their children's interest in English learning has decreased significantly. In terms of learning confidence, 60.5% of parents believe that their children's confidence in English learning has increased. The learning ability is shown in Fig.3.:
The above six aspects are ranked from high to low (full score: 5), and the results are shown in Fig.4:

![Figure 4. Ranking.](image)

As it can be seen from the figure above, parents interviewed believe that the most obvious improvement in their children’s English learning after attending extracurricular English courses is their English scores, followed by their application ability and learning habits, then followed by their character and interest in learning, and finally, their English learning methods.

### 3.4 Influence factors and correlation between investments and returns

The First is the analysis on factors that affect investments. In terms of financial investments, we first discussed the correlation between parents’ gender, age, education background, annual household income, occupation, the number of children in the family, child’s gender and grade, respectively, and the expenses of extracurricular courses. The results showed that parents' gender, age, educational background, annual household income and occupation are not correlated with expenditure, while the number of children, gender, grade and expenditure are positively correlated. Parents’ and students’ basic situation and energy input (the frequency and time of parents’ tutor and pick-ups) results of correlation analysis is similar to monetary input. The parents’ gender, age, education, family income, and occupation are not correlated with the devoted energy. And the number of children in the family, the child’s gender, grade are related with energy input, which has a significant positive correlation.
|                        | WILL YOU HELP YOUR CHILD WITH LEARNING IN ENGLISH |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| **YOUR GENDER**        | CO RELATDN                                      |
|                        | CO EFFICENT 0.072                              |
|                        | POSSBILITY 0.621                               |
| **YOUR AGE**           | CO RELATDN                                      |
|                        | CO EFFICENT 0.19                               |
|                        | POSSBILITY 0.187                               |
| **YOUR EDUCATION BACKGROUND** | CO RELATDN                                      |
|                        | CO EFFICENT 0.159                              |
|                        | POSSBILITY 0.27                                |
| **YOUR ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME** | CO RELATDN                                      |
|                        | CO EFFICENT 0.108                              |
|                        | POSSBILITY 0.455                               |
| **YOUR OCCUPATION**    | CO RELATDN                                      |
|                        | CO EFFICENT -0.083                             |
|                        | POSSBILITY 0.565                               |
| **NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN THE FAMILY** | CO RELATDN                                      |
|                        | CO EFFICENT 0.967**                            |
|                        | POSSBILITY 0                                   |
| **CHILD'S GENDER**     | CO RELATDN                                      |
|                        | CO EFFICENT 0.744**                            |
|                        | POSSBILITY 0                                   |
| **CHILD'S GRADE**      | CO RELATDN                                      |
|                        | CO EFFICENT 0.968**                            |
|                        | POSSBILITY 0                                   |
| **TOTAL COST ON STUDENT'S EXTRACURRICULAR COURSES PER TERM** | CO RELATDN                                      |
|                        | CO EFFICENT 0.924**                            |
|                        | POSSBILITY 0                                   |
| **IS THERE STRENGTH IN ENGLISH LEARNING HABIT AFTER EXTRACURRICULAR COURSES** | CO RELATDN                                      |
|                        | CO EFFICENT 0.970**                            |
|                        | POSSBILITY 0                                   |

* p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01

Figure 5. Parents’ Assistance’s Effects Towards Elements.
In conclusion, parents' investments in their children's English extracurricular tutoring classes is positively affected by the number of children in the family, the children’s gender, age, grade and other factors, and the improvement of students' English learning habits is also positively correlated with parents' investments.

Secondly, is the analysis on factors that affect returns? There are two kinds of returns according to the research: short-term research, refers to the changes in students’ scores after taking part in the extracurricular courses, and long-term research. In regard to short-term returns, it is possible to analyze the correlation between students’ gender, age, grade, the number of English classes attended per term, the monetary and energy expenditure of parents and the changes in students’ scores after taking part in the extracurricular courses. Through correlation analysis, it is found that all the above factors are positively correlated with the change of students' English scores after attending English tutoring classes, the specific correlation coefficient values and possibility values are listed in Fig.7. below:

| Factor                                      | Correlation Coefficient | Possibility  |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| Your Gender                                 | 0.057                   | 0.695        |
| Your Age                                    | 0.226                   | 0.114        |
| Your Education Background                   | 0.249                   | 0.082        |
| Your Annual Household Income                | 0.094                   | 0.516        |
| Your Occupation                             | -0.066                  | 0.647        |
| Number of Children in the Family            | 0.903**                 |              |
| Child's Gender                              | 0.717**                 |              |
| Child's Grade                               | 0.901**                 |              |
| Will You Help Your Child With Learning In English | 0.924**             |              |
| Will You Pick Up Your Child From Extracurricular Courses | 0.905**             |              |
| Is There Strengthening In English Learning Habit After Extracurricular Courses | 0.927**             |              |

Figure 6. Monetary Costs’ Effects Towards Elements.

* p < 0.05 ** p < 0.01
The long-term returns refer to the improvement of students' comprehensive English scores, learning methods, application abilities, learning interest, learning habits and learning characters. Regarding long-term returns, we can also analyze the relationship between students' gender, age, grade, the number of English classes attended per term, the monetary and energy expenditure of parents in extra-curricular English classes. Correlation test results are shown in Fig.8.

![Figure 8. Elements Affect Long-term Returns.](image_url)

As can be seen from the Fig.8. above, all six aspects of long-term returns are significantly correlated with the factor tested, which suggests that the extracurricular courses will also do some positive effect on students’ long-term and comprehensive improvement.

Last but not least is the realization of parents’ expectation, which can also be seen as the satisfaction degree towards the returns of extracurricular courses. Parents’ expectation can be examined from three aspects: the reasons and purpose for taking part in English extracurricular courses and the realization of parents’ expectation. In terms of reasons for signing up extracurricular courses for children, 69.8% of the parents think that the overall educational environment is the reason, 60.5% of the parents showed that their children signed up voluntarily, 55.8% of the parents are recommended by acquaintances. As to the purpose of signing up extra classes for children, 55.8% of the parents aimed to improve children's English ability, 53.5% each of the parents aimed to cultivate children's good habits in English learning and improve English scores at school, 48.8% of the parents aimed for pure test preparing in order to reduce English test pressure, and 27.9% of parents were to cultivate children's interest in English. Finally, in terms of
the realization of the expectation, 46.5% of parents are very satisfied, 27.9% of parents think it is ok, 14% of parents are not satisfied, and 11.6% of parents are not satisfied. So, what factors affected the realization of parents’ expectations? We can explore this through correlation analysis between parents’ gender, age, education background, occupation, investments (including the monetary expenditure, the number of English classes attended, the tutoring and commuting time and energy spent on their children) , the returns of extra courses (including the changes in scores, habits, interest after extracurricular courses), and the realization of their expectation. The values are shown in Fig.9. below. The results show that there is no correlation between parents’ gender, educational background, occupation and realization of expectation, but there is a significant negative correlation between parents’ age and the realization of their expectations.

|                       | Correlation Coefficient | Possibility |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| Please Rate Your Realization Towards Expectation | 0.089 | 0.554 |
| Your Gender           |                         |             |
| Your Age              | -0.363**                | 0.012 |
| Your Education Background |                     | 0.079 | 0.598 |
| Your Occupation       |                         |             |
| Total Cost On Student's Extracurricular Courses Per Term | 0.652** | 0.298 |
| How many English Classes Will Be Taken Per Term | 0.929** | 0.0 |
| Will You Help Your Child With Learning In English | 0.951** | 0.0 |
| Will You Pick Up Your Child From Extracurricular Courses | 0.956** | 0.0 |
| Is There Promotion After Extracurricular Courses | 0.922** | 0.0 |
| Is There Strengthening In English Learning Habit After Extracurricular Courses | 0.960** | 0.0 |
| Is There Strengthening In English Learning Interest After Extracurricular Courses | 0.954** | 0.0 |

Figure 9. Elements affect Expectation Realization.

4. Conclusions

According to the analysis all above, the conclusions above can be drawn:

1) Most investigated parents have invested much to their children’s extracurricular courses in sense of both capital and energy, no matter what status of gender, age, education background and annul household income are in. The mainly correlated factors are the children’s gender, age and grade. Also, the educational environment and the demand for children’s short-term and long-term development are also two factors that should be taken into account. Therefore, we can give the conclusion that junior high students’ parents generally pay much attention to their children’s extracurricular tutoring, and mainly consider the educational situation and demand.
2) From the aspects of returns, most parents think their children’s grades, applying abilities, learning habits and learning characters in English can be promoted through taking part in extracurricular courses. For example, the most obviously promoted aspects are learning habits like independence, concentration and self-consciousness and also learning abilities like examination skills, applying skills, perseverance, frustration resistance and so on.

3) Parents’ investments in money, time and energy are generally positively correlated with short-term returns, the children’s scores improvement, and the five aspects of long-term returns, including comprehensive scores, abilities, learning methods, habits and characters. This means that parents’ increased investments may have a positive effect on their children’s short-term achievement and long-term improvement.

The conclusions above can tell that the extracurricular courses have nonnegligible importance for families and parents, not only because of the considerable cost of money and energy, but also because of the actual improvement towards students’ improvement from all aspects. But the parents’ satisfaction is not so high as expected before the research, this means that there are still some ways to build a better extracurricular tutoring institution, maybe by solving the problems like ruling the extracurricular tutoring market with regulations, promoting the effect of the extra courses and so on. However, due to the limited researched object and research depth, these problems cannot be solved in this study, but this can still provide some ideas for further research directions.

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