Research on Group English Learning Differences among Senior Middle School Students

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Abstract

In one class, there is some and even big differences in examination score among students. For the seek of research, we divided student into three groups (excellent, average and backward). In order to find the reason in leading the differences and find ways to make change on average and backwards, in this article, we take English learning as an example. Through talking with student, investigating and data analysis, we find motivation, self-efficiency, study tactics and class behaviors become the main reason that lead the difference of student's examination score. According to the difference, we take different ways to improve student's examination score and promote their development on other aspect.

Key Words: group difference; self-efficiency, study tactics

Introduction

In one class, some students are very excellent on study and they keep excellent all the time. The reason they keep excellent is the thing that need us to know and used to promote the development of average and backward students' development. Also, some students are always in average group even they study harder, this status effect their development greatly in school and even in their work in society. So in order to promote their development and improve their study, we need to find the reason or problems that limit their development. To those who are always lag behind or be in backward, we must pay enough attention on them and help them to make progress or to have good change. That is not only for the good of the student, class, but also for the good of society. Because if they are always in this status, it will be harmful to themselves, the classes they are in and even the progress of the society. As a second language, English is very good subject to test students' problems. After long study in school, student in grade two in senior middle school is in good stage in self-development. If they can't develop well, that means they truly have some problem in their study or development. Therefore, we select English study in grade two in senior middle school as our research sample.

1. Definition of different groups

1-1. what's excellent student

Here we say excellent student doesn't mean the student is excellent in everything, for example in intelligence, emotion, study, and physical health and so on. It mainly means here excellent in English study. Excellent student doesn't mean gifted student or child. Because among average students there are still some students, who is gifted students. Just as Hong Yu Zhou said in his article: "excellent students are students who is good at study and relatively excellent in intelligent, examination score, morality, and behavior in life and so on."[i](Psychological problems in senior high school students and solving tactics, Hongyu Zhou 2009.)

1-2. what's average student

To average student, because they are normal and reasonable, So there is few people who would like to pay enough attention on this kind of group and fewer researcher would like to research them.

However, I think it is more important to research average student than lag behind or backward and excellent student because they are the main body of the future society and they have great potential, some talent student are also among them. Find the reason of why they are always in average can help us find the problem of most students in motivation, habit, behavior, emotion, studying tactics and so on. So I regard average students as who has good intelligence and normal emotion but his or hers exam score are always lies in between front 35%-75% and seldom change. For this phenomenon, I feel it is necessary to be researched. To the average group, Libo Zhu (Libo Zhu, Discuss on average students' educating tactics, 2011,(41)divided them into three groups: "The first is having good intelligence but not strong in will, not steady in emotion and do not like to find good method in study. The second is not so good in intelligence but good at nonintellectual factors, they study hard but abilities in learning new knowledge is limited. The third are those who are not only not intellectual but also lack of strong motivation in study that makes them impossible to be excellent."ii Therefore, research must find what the reasons of their average are.

1-3 what's backward student

To these who is backward in learning English doesn't mean that their intelligence is low. The reasons that lead them low in English score may be motivation, interesting, knowledge foundation and so on. To this student, we divided them into three groups: the first one is that not very bad in one subject learning, for example in math, physics and so on, but is very poor in learning English. That means these students are ok in intelligence, but is not good at learning English. The second is no subject is good, to these students; the most possible is that they may be poor in intelligence. Therefore, if we want to clear on the reason of their poor examination score, we must make a careful research.

2. Research process

In order to know the reason of group difference on English learning, we use questionnaire, interview, case study, data analysis and so on to carry on the research.

2-1. Selection of research samples

We select 248 students in grade two in eight classes in NanMo senior middle school of HaiAn county in China as research samples, we hand out 248 questionnaires, and 100% were handed in. In order to research in groups, I ask students to fill in their personal information in questionnaire. The student's number of being investigated is as following:

Table 2-1: List of investigation

Item	*category*	*number*	**ratio**
sex	male	129	52.65%
	female	116	47.35%
Art or science	art	88	35.92%
	science	157	64.08%
Student group	Excellent students	19	7.76%
	Average students	113	46.12%
	Backward students	113	46.12%

Table 2-2: The distribution of male and female students

sex	*excellent*	*average*	*backward*	**total**
male	26.32%	43.36%	66.37%	52.65%
female	73.68%	56.64%	33.63%	47.35%

In the questionnaire, there are 69 questions that connect students' study attitude, emotion, self-recognition, study tactics and so on. In addition, I used recess time to make interview with 30 students. I also select six students as (two excellent, two average and two backward students) case study.

2.2. Data analysis

2.2.1. Analysis of learning motivation

From the data of investigation, we can see that most students have strong Instrumental motivation than internal motivation, about 80% students select getting higher score in the College entrance examination, finding a good job in future and for studying abroad as their English learning motivation. Only 29.8% students regard learning English well as their interesting and dream's realization ways. Some student even select being force by parents as the reason of learning English. The more excellent students are, the more selection of internal motivation.

2.2.2. Attribution of not ideal Achievement

Table 2-3: attribution of not ideal Achievement

Attribution of not ideal Achievement **Cross tabulation**

			Unideal achievement attribution			
			Not dilligent Learning	Due to parents Or teacher	Hard to learn	Total
Group	Excellent	Count	15	3	1	19
		Expected Count	15.7	1.1	2.3	19.0
		% within	78.9%	15.8%	5.3%	100.0%
	Average	Count	90	8	14	112
		Expected Count	92.3	6.4	13.3	112.0
		% within	80.4%	7.1%	12.5%	100.0%
	backward	Count	96	3	14	113
		Expected Count	93.1	6.5	13.4	113.0
		% within	85%	2.7%	12.4%	100.0%
Total		Count	201	14	29	244
		Expected Count	201.0	14.0	29.0	244.0
		% within	82.4%	5.7%	11.9%	100.0%

Table: 2-3 Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.538 [a]	4	.162
Likelihood Ratio	6.074	4	.194
Linear-by-Linear Association	.070	1	.791
N of Valid Cases	244		

a. 2 cells (22.2%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.09.

From the show of table 2-3. Students of the three groups all attribute their not ideal achievements to not study hard enough. all think they will make progress after even hard study. The ratio that excellent group selects the reason due to teacher and parents are bigger than other two groups. While lower than average and backward in selecting "English knowledge is too difficult to learn."

2.2.3. Self-evaluation on learning ability

On the evaluation of their learning abilities, 57.9% excellent group student select good, 36.8% select ok, no excellent student select very good or very bad. 6.2% average student and 2.7% backward students select very good or very bad. About 50% average and backward students select average. Finding by Chi square test table :2-4), Different groups' self-evaluation on their learning abilities has Significant difference (sig<0.05).

Table 2-4: Self–evaluation on learning ability

Learning ability self-evaluation Cross tabulation

| | | | Learning ability self-evaluation | | | | Total |
			Very good	good	average	bad	
Group	Excellent	Count	0	11	7	1	19
		Expected Count	.8	3.9	10.4	4.0	19.0
		% within	.0%	57.9%	36.8%	5.3%	100.0%
	Average	Count	7	31	62	13	113
		Expected Count	4.6	23.1	61.8	23.5	113.0
		% within	6.2%	27.4%	54.9%	11.5%	100.0%
	Backward	Count	3	8	65	37	113
		Expected Count	4.6	23.1	61.8	23.5	113.0
		% within	2.7%	7.1%	57.5%	32.7%	100.0%
Total		Count	10	50	134	51	245
		Expected Count	10.0	50.0	134.0	51.0	245.0
		% within	4.1%	20.4%	54.7%	20.8%	100.0%

Table:2-4 Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	44.138 [a]	6	.000
Likelihood Ratio	44.368	6	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	29.590	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	245		

a. 5 cells (41.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .78.

2.2.4. English learning effort

Effort is an important factor in determining students' English academic performance. 42.1% of the top students are very diligent in learning English, and no backward students think he is. Top students mainly choose the two items "very hard" and "hard". 64.60% of the secondary students choose "general", 78.9% of backward students select the item "general", and almost no student select the Item "no effort".

Table 2-5: English learning effort statistics

Group: English learning effort **Crosstabulation**

			English learning effort				
			Very hard	Hard	general	Not at all	Total
group	Excellent	Count	8	7	4	0	19
		Expected Count	1.2	4.0	13.3	.5	19.0
		% within	42.1%	36.8%	21.1%	.0%	100.0%
	Averge	Count	8	28	73	4	113
		Expected Count	7.4	24.0	78.9	2.8	113.0
		% within	7.1%	24.8%	64.6%	3.5%	100.0%
	backward	Count	0	17	94	2	113
		Expected Count	7.4	24.0	78.9	2.8	113.0
		% within	.0%	15.0%	83.2%	1.8%	100.0%
Total		Count	16	52	171	6	245
		Expected Count	16.0	52.0	171.0	6.0	245.0
		% within	6.5%	21.2%	69.8%	2.4%	100.0%

Table:2-5 Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	60.175 [a]	6	.000
Likelihood Ratio	49.564	6	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	37.651	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	245		

a. 5 cells (41.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .47.

2.2.5. Task difficulty statistics

Task difficulty is a kind of external, stable and controllable factors. Many students, especially boys always complain that English is too difficult and those who often complain are the ones who has difficulty in learning English, While the ones who has good English performance does not think so. That can be clearly reflected in the following table. These who select "very easy" are most top students, while average and backward students seldom select this item. 2/3 of the secondary students choose "general", and half of backward students choose "difficult". That will fall into bad recycle, the more difficult they think learning English is, the less confidence they have in learning English well.

Table 2-6: Task difficulty statistics

Opinion on English learning difficulty Crosstabulation

			Î think learning English is			
			Very easy	General	Difficult	Total
Group	Excellent	Count	7	9	3	19
		Expected Count	2.0	10.2	6.8	19.0
		% within	36.8%	47.4%	15.8%	100.0%
	Average	Count	11	76	26	113
		Expected Count	12.0	60.4	40.6	113.0
		% within	9.7%	67.3%	23.0%	100.0%
	Backward	Count	8	46	59	113
		Expected Count	12.0	60.4	40.6	113.0
		% within	7.1%	40.7%	52.2%	100.0%
Total		Count	26	131	88	245
		Expected Count	26.0	131.0	88.0	245.0
		% within	10.6%	53.5%	35.9%	100.0%

Table 2-6 Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	37.059 [a]	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	32.701	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	25.204	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	245		

a. 1 cells (11.1%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.02.

2.3. Self-efficiency difference

Self-efficacy affects or determines the choice of behavior, persistence, and effort in insisting behavior. In order to reflect the students' sense of self-efficacy better in English learning, we design 6,8,13, 25, 26, 31,32 th questions in the questionnaire survey. Self efficacy was also involved in the interview. When asked "can you learn English well?" regardless of their English achievement is good or not, they all feel that they can, but the none of their answer is not so strong. When asked, "Do you have confidence in learning English well?" average and backward students almost have no positive answer. Only 70% top students answer "Yes." To the question "Can you remember English words, phrases, and sentence patterns in a large amount and use it flexibly?", most average and backward students can't give positive answer. The statistic detail can be seen in the following table's-7

Table 2-7: Self efficacy statistics

I can learn English Cross tabulation

| | | | I can learn English | | | |
			Very well	General	bad	Total
Group	excellent	Count	11	7	1	19
		Expected Count	1.6	9.6	7.8	19.0
		% within	57.9%	36.8%	5.3%	100.0%
	Average	Count	8	82	23	113
		Expected Count	9.7	57.2	46.1	113.0
		% within	7.1%	72.6%	20.4%	100.0%
	backward	Count	2	35	76	113
		Expected Count	9.7	57.2	46.1	113.0
		% within	1.8%	31.0%	67.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	21	124	100	245
		Expected Count	21.0	124.0	100.0	245.0
		% within	8.6%	50.6%	40.8%	100.0%

Table:2-7 Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	117.233 [a]	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	92.735	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	76.749	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	245		

a. 1 cells (11.1%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.63.

2.4. Classroom behavior and study tactics analysis

2.4.1. Classroom behavior analysis

Question 6 and 7 in Questionnaire mainly investigate students' participation and thinking in English class. The three groups of excellent, average, and backward students show a decreasing trend. To 6. "In the English classroom, I usually __." 68.4% of the top students chose A. Have a good grasp of the answer after careful thinking. While only 38.9% backward students select this item. More than 70% of the top students can pay attention and think actively on what the teacher is teaching. This statistic is much higher than 42.5% of average student and 16.17% of backward students. In addition, top students have some good habits that average or backward students don't have in English class learning.

2.4.2. Study tactics analysis

Good learning habits and study tactics can promote student's study efficiency, For example preview, recall, Knowledge filtering, knowledge construction and so on. In order to know whether there is some difference in learning tactics between the three groups, We designed an investigation on some study tactics, such as Cognitive strategies, memory strategies, compensation strategies, meta-cognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies and so on, the difference can be seen in table 2-8:

Table 2-8: statistical table of learning strategies

	habit	memory	cognitive	compensation	Meta-cognitive	emotion	social
Total	3.21	2.98	3.19	3.38	2.81	3.03	2.81
excellent	3.77	3.16	3.53	3.68	3.34	3.49	3.23
average	3.29	3.03	3.2	3.39	2.88	3.09	2.9
backward	3.01	2.8	2.9	3.29	2.57	2.77	2.64

The level of strategy use of senior middle school students in Grade 2 is generally not high, among which meta-cognitive strategies and social strategies are the lowest, the use of compensation strategies and affective strategies are relatively high. Excellent group can usually use cognitive strategies and compensation strategies well. Average group strategy using level lies between the excellent and backward group can reach the average level of overall student; Backward group learning strategy level is generally low, only compensation strategies close to the overall average. That means promote the tactic using level of all students is great significant in improving student's learning efficiency.

3. Tactics in improving different groups study efficiency

In china, student in senior high school are not too bad in learning English, because they have been winners in getting into senior high school. We must admit that every student has shortcoming in studying English, excellent students also have. So if teacher help every student find their shortcomings and overcome them. Then the student will have repaid progress in studying efficiency. For example some excellent student should not repeating on doing the exercises they already Known, they should save time in expanding their English knowledge and pay more attention on the problem they may have. To average students, they truly have some problem on writing well on paper, on repeating the mistakes they already have and can't remember the mistakes they have made during their doing homework and can't grasp the knowledge well on the text books. To those backward students, they have problem on all aspects; Teacher must help them to solve their problem one by one. May one big problem's solving can make them get repaid progress in study. For example, Learn how to grasp the basic knowledge efficiently and learn to find and remember problem by memorizing, recalling. All in all, the best teaching is to find the problem of different groups and ask, help them how to solve it.