The Cram School Issues:

To Go or Not to Go
Abstract

When we ask seniors where they go after school, instead of their home, the answer is usually going to cram schools. We are curious about why they do so; therefore, we decide to conduct this survey to understand the reasons why they prefer to going to cram schools. A questionnaire survey is used as the method; there are totally 118 participants taking this questionnaire. The most important reasons for going to cram school are that the students want to reinforce their learning attitude under cram school’s supervision, and the advantage of going to cram schools is that they acquire sufficient studying materials and more knowledge of textbooks in cram schools. Also, we find that the disadvantage—expensive tuition—keeps them from studying there. And we also investigate why the students do not go to cram schools as well as their viewpoints of teaching methods effect used in schools and cram schools. The other findings are presented in the study. Via this study, we hope to give directions to the students who are planning to join cram schools and to help them get familiar with the advantages and the disadvantages of going to cram schools.

Keywords: Cram school, advantages and disadvantages of going to cram school, teaching methods
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I. Introduction

I.1. Motivation of the Study

Have you ever studied in cram schools? Some people may think that going to cram schools is useful for students while others just take it as wasting money and time to go there. For those inclining to going to cram schools, they choose to go there after school to improve their schoolwork instead of hanging out with their friends. Oppositely, some people choose not to go to cram schools for they may be short of time to rest and unable to enjoy their dinner happily after the livelong hours spent in regular schools. Actually, exhausting study and eating in a hurry may cause an ineffective result to both their learning and health. Furthermore, because of going home late the preceding night, they may sometimes doze off with fatigue in class during the daytime. Despite the defects mentioned above, cram schools are still popular with students. Hence, we would like to know the reasons for and against going to cram schools; also, we wonder when the first cram school originated in China and why cram schools still exist well to this day. For that reason, we conduct this study to search for the answers to the research questions proposed below.

I.2. Background of the Study

Cram schools have been existing for a long time. The ancient cram schools could be grouped into three kinds. One was Kuan hsuen (官學), where students had to pass an exam and then could be admitted to attend Kuan hsuen. The major task of Kuan hsuen was to conduct the examination instead of educating. Another one was Suz shu (私塾), which could be seen widespread. Usually, people learned writing and reading there. The other was Shu yuan (書院), it not only passed on classical religious texts but also emphasized academic discussions. Besides, Shu yuan played an important role on heuristics. From the information we have gathered, we also found that the first cram school in China was established by Confucius.

I.3. Purpose of the Study

Why do students go to cram schools? Do their parents command them to do so? Or do they really yearn to improve their homework? Or are there any other factors? What can we learn from cram schools? Are the teaching methods used in cram schools better than those used in regular schools? Do cram schools really reinforce students’ schoolwork? To explore these questions is the purpose of proceeding this study. Moreover, our findings may contribute to those who still hesitate to go to cram
school, or who do not know for sure whether cram schools can help them or not. In the present study, we will survey on a group of comprehensive high school students in southern Taiwan to further investigate how students view on going to cram schools. We also hope that students can understand more about cram schools and decide if they need to go to cram schools by themselves.

I.4. Background of Cram School

Kuan hsuen (官學) was a kind of official schools established by the government in ancient China. The main intention was to cultivate officials. For this reason, it limited the total amount of students. Students had to pass the exam and would be selected to attend Kuan husen. The major task of the official schools was to conduct the examination instead of education.

In addition to Kuan husen, Suz shu (私塾)—called home schools with private tutors—was a kind of folk school. Suz shu could be founded by the private or the people who formed a partnership with someone else. The parlors of their houses were usually served as the classrooms. The desks and the chairs were prepared by the students themselves. Children could attend the school at the age of seven. Usually, people learned writing and reading there. The restriction on attending Suz shu was less than that on Kuan husen; as a result, Suz shu was more common than Kuan husen.

Another school system was Shu yuan (書院), an academy of classical learning. It originated from the Tang Dynasty. Shu yuan was often set up by famous scholars. It not only passed on classical religious texts but also put emphasis on academic discussions. Besides, Shu yuan placed importance on heuristics. In Shu yuan, the relationship between teachers and students was closer than that in Kuan hsuen or Suz shu. Teachers encouraged students to improve themselves through discussions with the others.

In ancient China, most of the literates studied in Suz husen rather than in the schools belonging to the government. For instance, Confucius Temple was the first place offered to people to learn manners and knowledge. At that time, there was no official school, so it was said that the first cram school was set up by Confucius. Owing to the different financial situation, there was no regular standard of the tuition. Accordingly, the origin of cram school can date back to the time of Confucius.

I.5. Research Questions

To understand more about the opinions on going or not going to cram schools, the research questions proposed in this study are presented as follows.
RQ1. What are the main purposes for students to go to cram school?
RQ2. What are the main reasons for students not to go to cram school?
RQ3. What are the advantages for students to go to cram schools?
RQ4. What are the disadvantages for students to go to cram schools?
RQ5. How do the teaching methods used in schools and cram schools affect students?

II. Methods

Our study aims to understand comprehensive high school students’ viewpoints for and against going to cram schools. First, the participants are introduced, and then the instruments are presented.

II.1. Participants

There are 118 participants joining this questionnaire survey. They are the senior students of a comprehensive high school in southern Taiwan. They major in different subjects, including Applied English, Information Application, Information Technology, Electronic Technology and Academic Course. Among these participants, their age ranges from 17 to 18. Thirty-nine participants are having courses in cram schools now while 79 participants do not go to cram schools presently.

II.2. Instruments

A quantitative method is mainly used in this study. The instrument is a questionnaire survey used to evaluate the reasons why the students are for and against going to cram schools. There are two parts in the questionnaire containing four questions in total. The questions listed in Part I are used to know the background information about the participants, such as the gender. Then, Part II consists of three questions designed to know the reasons, advantages and disadvantages of going to cram schools; also, the teaching methods used in schools and cram schools are evaluated in the second part.

III. Findings & Discussion

III.1. Results of Data Analysis

According to the results shown in Figure 3.1, two major reasons can be categorized for why the students go to cram schools. Coincidentally, both male and female participants have the same thoughts. One main reason is that six male and seven female students (33.3%) want to reinforce learning attitude under cram
school’s supervision. Another is that six males and seven females (33.3%) want to review the knowledge learnt from first grade to third grade during the senior-high years.

There are three main reasons that some participants do not go to cram school. First, nine (11%) participants have never been to cram school because they consider it to waste of time; they don’t want to spend extra time in cram schools. The second reason is that seven (8%) participants think it is needless to go to cram school for they can study regularly by themselves. Finally, six (7%) participants feel that the tuition fee is too high, and their family have no extra money for them to go to cram schools after school.
Figure 3.3 indicates three main advantages for the participants to go to cram schools. Eleven (21.2%) participants thought that the advantage of going to cram schools is that they acquire sufficient information about studying and more knowledge of textbooks in cram schools. Besides, nine (17.3%) students think the teaching methods that the teachers use in cram schools are more interesting than those in regular schools, and nine students (17.3%) think that the atmosphere there makes them have a stronger desire to study hard.

Figure 3.3 The Advantages of Going to Cram Schools

Figure 3.4 shows three main disadvantages for some participants not to go to cram schools. Firstly, fourteen (23.3%) participants think that the expense, which costs their parents more than ten thousand dollars for each subject in one semester, is a kind of burden for their family. Secondly, fourteen (23.3%) students consider that they may have no leisure time as a result of spending too much time studying in cram schools. Lastly, ten senior students (16.7%) mention that the stressful homework doubles since there are more and more homework and exams in their third grade.

Figure 3.4 The Disadvantages of Going to Cram Schools
Based on the results shown in Figure 3.5, the participants show their opinions on the teaching methods used in school. Although thirty-seven (46%) participants have no opinions on this item, yet twenty-five (31%) students think that they obtain good education in schools.

**Figure 3.5 The Teaching Methods Effect in Schools**

In Figure 3.6, the participants show their opinions on the teaching methods used in cram school. Thirty-one (39%) participants have no opinions on this item. Nevertheless, twenty-six (32%) participants reckon that the teaching methods used in cram schools are good and effective.

**Figure 3.6 The Teaching Methods Effect in Cram Schools**
III.2. Discussion

RQ1. What are the main purposes for students to go to cram school?

There are several possible explanations for this result. One possible explanation for this might be that the comprehensive high school students in southern Taiwan do not have enough self-control ability to manage their time to study. Another is that the students need to build up an interconnected studying system which makes them have more clear directions and stronger desires to study.

RQ2. What are the main reasons for students not to go to cram school?

We may conclude with three points of the reasons why the participants choose not to go to cram schools. First, after a hard-working day at schools, some students think staying at cram schools to study is a waste of time. Second, some students may think that the regular school offers sufficient equipment and good studying environment, so going to cram schools is needless to them. Moreover, the tuition fee is quite high. Paying both the cost of schools and cram schools at the same time is a heavy financial pressure to their parents.

RQ3. What are the advantages for students to go to cram schools?

This result seems to point out that the instruction given in regular schools is less than that in cram schools. That is why the students prefer going to cram schools to learn more knowledge to merely studying in regular schools during the workdays. Besides, it might be implied that the teaching methods that teachers use in regular schools are too dull to elevate students’ spirits and interests in absorbing the knowledge instructed in the textbooks. Moreover, many assorted students coming from different schools study together in cram schools as if there were many competitors contending with one another. So, the motivations for studying are thus aroused under the positive atmosphere of competition.

RQ4. What are the disadvantages for students to go to cram schools?

The disadvantages for students to go to cram schools can be concluded as follows. First, the students may think about the high expense for going to cram schools since their parents have to pay the school tuition as well. Therefore, the daunting extra cost of going to cram schools brings about a considerable load for their parents and discourages them from studying there. In addition, when being cram schools, the students think that they are confined and can do nothing in the free time. Consequently, the more extra homework assigned by cram schools they have, the more stress they suffer. As a result, they find no way to release their pressure.
RQ5. How do the teaching methods used in schools and cram schools affect students?

According to the finding, we find that the teaching methods used in both schools and cram schools are considered beneficial in some measure and futile in a way. Different educational places suit for different kinds of students; thus, students should not be a follower but take a serious consideration for going or not going to cram schools.

IV. Conclusion

The aim of the present study is to explore comprehensive high school students’ viewpoints for or against going to cram schools. As shown in the previous discussion, we reach some significant findings, and they are shortly presented as follows.

1. Some students in southern Taiwan might be too passive to finish their schoolwork, so they need the help from cram schools to reinforce their studying attitude.

2. The three primary advantages of going to cram schools include the sufficient acquisition of how to study and what to learn, appealing teaching methods, and great studying atmosphere. In cram schools, competitors become a big stimulus to study harder. Also, cram schools are helpful places to acquire knowledge and information because it is convenient to obtain well-organized handouts and test questions there.

3. The high tuition, the double work, and the tight schedule all of which finally turn into big pressure, are the three main shortcomings of going to cram schools.

4. Some students may think that they have the initiative to study on their own, so going to cram schools is a waste of time for them. If they have teachers available in regular schools or parents for asking questions about schoolwork, then spending time in cram schools is a sort of needless trifle. Besides, the tuition of schools is a kind of heavy expense for some parents, and the extra cost of cram schools will double stress for these parents.

5. Compared with the opinions on the effect of teaching methods used in school and cram schools, the findings reveal that the students think that the teaching methods and absorbing knowledge are effective in regular schools as well as in cram schools. Studying hard in schools and making good use of time are sufficient enough for studying. Taking notes in detail in class and regularly reviewing it after school are useful ways to get good grades, so they think that spending time in cram schools and extra cost are both needless.

Lastly, these findings might not be transferable to all the students in Taiwan since the current study has only examined the opinions on or against going to cram schools from the comprehensive high school students in southern Taiwan, and with a
small sample size, caution must be applied. In sum, from this present survey, we further understand the advantages and disadvantages of going to cram schools and students’ evaluation of the teaching methods used in schools and cram schools. Thus, it is suggested that most of the students should take the condition around them into more consideration, and then be able to make a wise decision on whether or not they should go to cram schools.

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