

Research on the Impact of China's 'Double-Reduction' Policy on Urban and Rural Education

Boya Liu^{1,a,*}

¹Department of Chinese Language and Literature, Xi'an International Studies University, Xi'an, Shaanxi, 710128, China

a. byby003725@163.com

*corresponding author

Abstract: The Chinese government has implemented several education reform policies in recent years, including the 'Double-Reduction' policy. This policy aims to reduce the academic burden on students and the excessive competition from out-of-school training organizations. However, the disparity between urban and rural education in China has been a highly controversial topic, and the implementation of the 'Double-Reduction' policy has brought about different impacts on students in different regions. This paper provides an in-depth analysis of the impact of the 'Double-Reduction' policy on different regions and populations, and explores the current challenges of China's education reform from four perspectives: academic pressures, educational resources, educational quality, and students' opportunities for future development. Achieving equity in education through the 'Double-Reduction' policy requires comprehensive consideration of the urban-rural education gap, and increased investment in and support for rural education resources while reducing the schoolwork burden on students. The implementation of the policy and the fulfilment of educational equity are ensured under a monitoring and evaluation mechanism.

Keywords: China's Double-Reduction policy, education reform, education equity, urban education, rural education

1. Introduction

In recent years, the Chinese government has been committed to reforming the education system, and one of the key initiatives is the 'Double-Reduction' policy proposed in 2021, which aims to effectively reduce the excessive burden of homework and out-of-school training for students in compulsory education [1].

However, as China's development of compulsory education is unbalanced, with a large gap between urban and rural education, the implementation of this policy has had different impacts in urban and rural areas. In urban areas, the implementation of the 'Double-Reduction' policy has confronted parents and students with changes in educational concepts and academic burdens, which have a direct impact on students' attitudes toward learning and academic development. At the same time, while urban education resources are relatively adequate, there is also an imbalance in their distribution, which affects the quality of education and future development opportunities for urban students. Students in rural areas face different challenges, and as rural students cannot access the equivalent quality educational resources as urban students, extracurricular tutoring in 'shadow

education' is the main way for rural students to access better educational resources. The promulgation of the 'Double-Reduction' policy limited rural students' access to educational resources, which has limited their academic development [2]. After the promulgation of the 'Double-Reduction' policy, the access of rural students to educational resources has been restricted to a certain extent, which has constrained their academic development.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore the impact of the 'double-minus' policy on the academic pressure of urban and rural students, the balance of educational resources, the quality of education, and the opportunities for future development of rural and urban students by means of qualitative analysis of the research method, and puts forward relevant recommendations in response to the current problems, so as to promote the balanced development of rural and urban education.

2. 'Double-Reduction' policy

At present, China's education generally belongs to the examination-based education, which is a basic consensus. In China, the concept of 'knowledge changes destiny' is deeply rooted in people's hearts. Due to the long-term structural imbalance of quality education resources, the concept of 'knowledge changes fate' has been alienated into 'exams change fate' and 'scores determine fate'. After the implementation of the 'Double-Reduction' policy, the concept of exam-oriented education with one-sided emphasis on the rate of advancement is still deeply rooted [3-4]. This educational model, which emphasizes students' memorization and application of knowledge, to some extent neglects the development of creative thinking, critical thinking, and practical skills. It can lead to the waste of educational resources and students' mental health issues. Students face tremendous competition pressure and are often forced to memorize a large amount of knowledge without deep understanding and practical application skills. Additionally, due to the emphasis on exam-oriented education, creativity may be suppressed, which affects long-term development.

In recent years, the Chinese education sector has recognized the limitations of this model and has taken a series of measures to promote educational reform, focusing more on cultivating students' comprehensive literacy and innovation abilities. These measures include introducing the new 'Double-Reduction' policies, reducing examination pressure, and encouraging schools to carry out diverse teaching activities. The implementation of the 'Double Reduction' policy has to some extent alleviated students' academic burden.

However, a complete change in the exam-oriented education model requires continuous effort and in-depth reforms. In the exploration of reducing students' burdens, researchers in the direction of Chinese education have summarized the principle, such as 'addressing the root causes, combining soft and hard approaches, reducing and increasing burdens together, and combining internal and external efforts' [5]. In addition, they proposed strategies to advance the reform of the education model, such as 'optimizing the process, blocking excessive learning burdens at the source, individualized burden-bearing based on individual differences, and integrating efforts from families and schools' [6]. Meanwhile, some scholars have also suggested setting up interest regulation levers by starting with the internal mechanism that affects students' time allocation [7].

3. Impact of the 'Double-Reduction' policy on urban and rural education

This section mainly discusses the impact of the 'Double-Reduction' policy on students' academic pressure, equity of educational resources, educational quality, and future development opportunities for urban and rural students.

In urban areas, the 'Double-Reduction' policy is expected to alleviate students' academic pressure, promote quality education and individual development, but it may also intensify competition pressure. In rural areas, the policy may reduce academic burdens and improve educational equity, but issues

such as insufficient educational resources still need to be addressed. Overall, the policy has a positive impact on the future development opportunities of urban and rural students, but attention should be paid to resource allocation and individual efforts.

3.1. Impact on academic pressure for urban and rural students

The policy emphasizes the need for schools to demonstrate the time and quality of after-school services, make full use of priority resources, and develop implementation plans for after-school services [8]. After-class learning is an effective supplement to classroom learning. It has strong autonomy and pertinence. It can fully highlight the personalities of students and play an immeasurable role in students' studies and lives [9].

In urban areas, where there is a large middle-class population, parents often enroll their children in various subject tutoring classes to enhance their academic performance, resulting in greater academic pressure for students. The policy of reducing homework and exams may help alleviate the academic burden for urban students, allowing them more time to participate in after-school services. Parents may also shift their focus to non-academic training to achieve a balanced reduction and increase, dedicating more time to cultivating students' interests and overall development, thereby improving their quality of life and mental well-being. In contrast, in rural areas, where parents are often occupied with livelihoods, they may have less time to focus on their children's education. Students in rural areas may rely more on their natural talents and self-motivation for learning and face challenges due to insufficient educational resources. The policy implementation may have a positive impact on their academic development by reducing their academic burden and relatively lowering academic pressure. However, they may face other challenges, such as uncertain employment prospects due to a lack of educational resources.

3.2. Impact on equity of educational resources for urban and rural areas

Currently, there is still a significant disparity in educational resources between urban and rural areas in China, mainly manifested in two aspects: the overall shortage of educational resource allocation and imbalanced distribution structure [10].

Urban areas have relatively abundant educational resources, including high-quality schools, teaching staff, and educational facilities. However, due to the concentration of educational resource allocation, urban schools may be more inclined to attract excellent students, resulting in uneven resource distribution. In contrast, rural areas have relatively limited educational resources, with issues such as poor school conditions and insufficient teaching staff hindering the improvement of educational quality.

Li and Li indicated that the development of rural education is a continuum. As the result of the new layout of the 'Double-Reduction' approach, new changes will emerge in the 'old problems' and 'new problems' will appear at the same time, thus creating new and comprehensive problems in the development of rural education under the 'Double-Reduction' layout. The new layout of 'Double-Reduction' will lead to new changes in 'old problems' and 'new problems' will appear at the same time, thus forming new comprehensive problems in the development of rural education under the layout of 'Double-Reduction'. There are three problems in rural education compared with urban education: rural education shows 'urban-centrism' under the dual structure of urban and rural areas, the development of rural education deconstructs the power of social education in the separation between rural education and rural life, and the development of schools is 'constrained' by the alienation of rural culture[11].

3.3. Impact on educational quality for urban and rural areas

The impact of the 'Double-Reduction' policy on educational quality varies depending on the location. In urban areas, reducing academic pressure can help schools focus more on quality education and individual development, thereby improving educational quality. However, in rural areas, educational quality is limited by resource scarcity and inadequate educational conditions, requiring increased government investment and support to enhance the level of education[10].

The construction of educational bases in urban areas receives more investment compared to rural areas. To bridge this gap, the government should increase financial investment in rural education. In terms of teaching staff reserves, rural areas face challenges such as insufficient and low-quality teachers compared to urban areas. Addressing the imbalance in the subject structure of rural teachers and promoting their professional development can improve the quality of rural teachers. In terms of the growth-oriented development strategy of 'small-class, small-school' models, local governments and rural schools should fully utilize their autonomy, combine local characteristics with the spirit of the 'Double-Reduction' policy, and strive to create unique features for each school, promoting the flourishing development of rural 'small schools.'

3.4. Impact on future development opportunities for urban and rural students

The 'Double-Reduction' policy has both positive and challenging impacts on the future development opportunities of urban and rural students, depending on the implementation of the policy, distribution of educational resources, and individual efforts and abilities of students.

In urban areas, students have more opportunities for diversified development, such as participating in extracurricular activities and interest cultivation, which can enhance their comprehensive qualities and innovation abilities, laying a solid foundation for future career development. However, striking a balance between exam-oriented education and comprehensive development can be challenging.

In rural areas, the increase in equal opportunities and improvement in educational fairness can provide rural students with more chances to participate in extracurricular activities and interest cultivation, offering them fairer development opportunities. However, due to the lack of extracurricular resources, rural students may face challenges in receiving balanced cultivation and development. Additionally, the focus on comprehensive qualities may require rural students to exert more effort to enhance their abilities and competitiveness in future career development.

4. Discussion

The urban-rural education gap has always been a major challenge in the field of education in China. Urban areas have access to more abundant educational resources, including teaching staff, teaching facilities, and educational funding, while rural areas face issues such as resource shortages and a lack of qualified teachers, resulting in unequal educational opportunities between urban and rural students. This inequality directly affects the achievement of educational fairness.

In this context, the 'Double-Reduction' policy is seen as an important measure to alleviate students' academic burdens and narrow the urban-rural education gap. By reducing academic pressure and canceling extracurricular training, the policy aims to provide students with more space for autonomous development and interest cultivation, which is expected to play a positive role in improving educational fairness. However, for rural areas, the implementation of the 'Double-Reduction' policy also presents certain challenges. Due to the inherent lack of educational resources in rural schools, solely focusing on reducing academic pressure may further widen the knowledge gap between rural and urban students, exacerbating the urban-rural education gap and hindering the achievement of educational fairness.

Therefore, to achieve true educational fairness, the urban-rural education gap and the relationship between the 'Double-Reduction' policy need to be comprehensively considered. The government should increase investment and support for educational resources in rural areas while reducing students' academic burdens, ensuring that rural schools have equal access to educational resources and development opportunities as urban schools. Additionally, monitoring and evaluation of educational fairness should be strengthened to ensure that policy implementation truly promotes educational fairness, providing equal educational opportunities for every student and achieving comprehensive development goals.

5. Conclusion

Urban-rural education in China has always been a topic of concern and controversy. Due to the influence of the times, the concept of exam-oriented education is still difficult to change rapidly. However, the educational reforms carried out by the government can greatly contribute to solving educational issues, creating a relatively fair educational environment, and promoting coordinated development and synchronous growth of urban and rural education.

This article mainly analyzes the differences in urban and rural education under the background of China's 'Double-Reduction' policy. Some of the references used are published within the past three years, so the analysis may not provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of education in China. However, in future educational research, more in-depth studies and investigations will be conducted.

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