

A Study on the Promotion of Quality Education in Primary and Secondary Schools in China under the "Double Reduction" Policy

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Abstract: With the promulgation and implementation of China's "double reduction" policy, the proposal to reduce the academic burden of primary and secondary school students and the strict approval of subject-based education tutoring institutions has attracted widespread public attention. Some studies have argued that the "double reduction" policy has significant implications for the future development of education in China, shifting from the pursuit of equity in the quality and outcomes of education to equity in the quality of education. This study examines the impact of the "double reduction" policy on education stakeholders from the perspectives of students, parents, teachers, and schools and explores the problems. The study finds that the policy has significantly impacted education in China, improving social attitudes towards education and promoting the development of quality education for students.

Keywords: “Double reduction” policy, academic burden, quality education

1. Introduction

Chinese primary and secondary school students have been subjected to a vast academic burden for decades, forced by the high expectations of their families and schools. These expectations stem from families' and schools' desire for students to enter high-quality universities and move up the social ladder to higher-paying jobs through college entrance exams. The Chinese college entrance examination is a relatively fair competition model in terms of education for all. However, the elimination model of the examination is not conducive to the quality development of the students themselves. It only forces students to be distributed at different societal levels to meet society's needs. Also, the pressure of examinations over the years has caused many students to become depressed and unable to take care of themselves.

In July 2021, the Chinese government issued the "Opinions on Further Reducing the Academic Burden of Students at the Compulsory Education Stage and the Burden of Off-Campus Training," abbreviated the "Double Reduction" policy. The policy signalled the beginning of a new phase in China's education, a shift from the historical legacy of exam-oriented education to quality education. The policy has significantly impacted primary and secondary school students, with more attention being paid to the quality and development of their interests. The introduction of the "double reduction" policy was able to effectively guide the future workforce through quality education,

which has led to a diversion of academic and technical talent and optimised talent allocation [1]. However, the implementation process has also created a series of problems, including anxiety among students' parents and excessive pressure on teachers. This study analyses the impact of the "double reduction" policy on the quality education of primary and secondary students from the perspectives of students, families and the education system. It promotes the implementation of the policy by raising relevant issues and recommendations.

2. The Impact of the “Double Reduction” Policy

2.1. The Impact of the "Double Reduction" Policy on Primary and Secondary School Students

The main impact of the "double reduction" policy on primary and secondary school students is to help them reduce their academic pressure and thus contribute to developing quality education. Nowadays, examination-based education puts much pressure on students, which can do more harm than good to them. Some scholars investigated the relationship between the efficiency of homework and the grades of more than 30,000 fifth-grade students in Beijing [2]. As the time spent on homework increased, students' grades gradually decreased; the longer the time spent on homework, the lower the grades achieved by students. This conclusion shows that the "excessive assignments tactic," primarily used in exam-based education, is of minimal help to students. The "double reduction" policy specifies the length of homework for primary and secondary school students at different stages. The policy prohibits students from studying under load, thus changing teachers' teaching mode and assignments from a mechanistic and repetitive "excessive assignments tactic" to a more tiered and flexible teaching model [3]. By understanding the differences between students and creating different levels of teaching, tutoring, and testing for different groups of students, these students will be able to develop to their full potential.

After-school services promoted by the policy and the reduction of academic pressure on students have led to an increased focus on quality education at school and home, with the development of children's interests and morals becoming a significant trend in the future. Students will have the time and energy to devote to their hobbies and interests, which will help them develop their creativity, leadership, and potential before high school.

2.2. The Impact of the “Double Reduction” Policy on Students’ Families

With the intensification of demographic problems in China, such as population ageing, the government has introduced the two-child and three-child policies accordingly. However, most families felt that childbirth costs were too high, reducing the family's economic standard and sense of well-being, and showed resistance [4]. The "double reduction" policy introduced that the ban on extracurricular tutoring indirectly reduced the financial burden on families for their children's education. Furthermore, the emergence of extracurricular tutoring institutions has led to more families taking care of their children's education, from school to extracurricular tutoring. As a result, communication between parents and children needs to be established by teachers. As parents cannot communicate with their children promptly and effectively, it has become a common problem for many families that children tend to be introverted and unwilling to communicate with their parents.

Under the advent of the "double reduction" policy, families need to devote more time to parent-child communication and companionship and focus on developing their children's behaviour and moral character. Parents are the initiating teachers for their children, as they influence the development of their children's outlook during the pre-school years. Parents have more time to participate in their children's development, accompanying them in their learning and practice and forming compatible communication channels, which reduces the adverse effects on their children's

development. The leading policy has also influenced parents' views on education, which are less focused on grades and more on the physical and mental health and quality development of students, and away from the vicious comparison mentality between students and parents.

2.3. The Impact of the “Double Reduction” Policy on School Teaching

The "double reduction" policy also has a considerable impact on the way teachers teach. The policy focuses on reducing the academic burden of primary and secondary school students. In contrast, the excessive pressure of examinations and the excessive workload of students is directly related to the teaching evaluation system [5]. In transitioning from test-based education to quality and test-based education, teachers should improve the ability of teaching mode and homework design. Teachers should set separate plans and targets for outstanding, intermediate, and poor students to achieve a stratified education mode in the class. In the interactive teaching model, for example, the teacher keeps track of each student's learning progress through observation and forms a learning community between students at different levels, using cooperative group learning to make the most of the learning model in which students help each other. Through differentiation between students and a sense of cooperation, a collective force is formed that facilitates the coordinated development of each student. At the same time, teachers should improve their ability to design homework assignments and give full play to their role as a significant form of classroom assessment in testing teaching effectiveness, accurately analysing learning conditions, and improving teaching methods. With the limited length of homework required by the policy, teachers should transform the 'sea of questions' into an appropriate amount of graded, flexible, and personalised homework.

In addition, the policy requires schools to develop quality education-related activities and clubs after school, focus on the overall improvement of students and abandon the traditional 'achievement-based' concept of the rush. Teachers are required to take responsibility for designing student activities after school, with a precise focus on each student. Each student will be able to explore their interests and strengthen their strengths in the after-school service as a common goal for teachers, schools, and the government.

3. Problems in the “Double Reduction” Policy for Promoting Quality Education

3.1. The Contradiction between Equity and Efficiency in Education

With the development of the economy and the increasing investment in education, China has developed a large scale of compulsory education. The existing educational resources have solved the problem of the difficulty of schooling for school-age children, but the equity and efficiency of education have always been controversial and contradictory. The introduction of the "double reduction" policy has narrowed the gap in the allocation of educational resources between urban and rural areas. It has ensured equity in education to a great extent [6]. However, the reduction in the efficiency of education has become a primary concern behind the "double reduction" policy.

Students and families have gradually adapted to the benefits of after-school tutoring due to the output of educational tutoring. Before the introduction of the policy, most students had not learned a scientific approach to learning and could not adapt to the current stage of self-learning. They had to make up for what they could not understand in class and handle exams through teachers' summaries in educational institutions. Without the help of extra-curricular tutorials, students need to develop their self-learning skills. Teaching students how to summarise knowledge scientifically and improve classroom efficiency has become a common problem for both students and teachers. For high-achieving students, the loss of extra-curricular tutoring means no opportunities for more in-depth knowledge, such as competitions and research projects. The classroom content is insufficient for them, and they have to learn higher-level subjects on their own, which puts a giant amount of

pressure on them. The emergence of after-school tutoring has helped schools to complete differentiated teaching services, and the link between the two has effectively contributed to the efficiency of education.

The sanctioning of educational institutions has led to the need for schools to complete a tiered education model within the system. Transitioning from a test-based to a diversified education has required a long period and a considerable investment of resources. Therefore, the "double reduction" policy does not meet the efficiency of education while pursuing education equity, thus causing a severe blow to the efficiency of education and leading to a decline or stagnation in the overall efficiency of education.

3.2. Anxiety for Students' Families under the "Double Reduction" Policy

Implementing the "double reduction" policy has dealt a serious blow to exam-based education, and with the policy, quality education has gradually emerged. For families, quality education costs much more than exam-based education. Educational institutions, having lost the huge benefits of extra-curricular coaching, are bound to respond to the national policy of speculating on quality education to balance supply and demand in the market and raise the cost of quality education. Under quality education, students can develop their interests outside the classroom, such as art and sports, which also puts a considerable financial burden on families.

The "double reduction" policy puts students under less academic pressure. They have more time after school, so how to use their time outside of school scientifically will become a new challenge for students and families. According to the 47th Statistical Report on China's Internet Development released by China Internet Network Information Center, as of December 2020, the rate of Internet addiction among primary and secondary school students is about 10% [3]. Parents need to spend more time and energy on preventing and overcoming Internet addiction and gaming addiction and transforming family education quickly. The transition from a "custodial" education to a companion and supervised education model also places greater demands on parents' perceptions of education and time management experience. At the same time, parents need to balance work and home education. While working to maintain the family's primary financial situation, it is essential to export good educational ideas to the children and to guide them to develop the right outlook and character. So, the "double reduction" policy raises the demands on families, including their financial and educational capacity, and puts enormous pressure on them.

3.3. Excessive Teaching Expectations for Teachers

Under the "double reduction" policy, the government's high expectations of schools have increased teacher responsibilities. In order to ensure complete coverage of the two hours of after-school services for primary and secondary school students, the government requires teachers to participate in the after-school services and to plan the services scientifically and rationally. Teachers are not only required to complete basic class content and student assessments but also to devote considerable time and effort to developing a variety of interest groups and clubs and to make the after-school service more interesting and effective in meeting the needs of students at different stages. Such an arrangement has increased the burden on teachers to a certain extent and reduced their free time, leading to a certain impact on their emotions of working [7].

Additionally, the transformation of the education model has increased the professionalism and innovation required of teachers to improve classroom efficiency while reducing the academic burden on students. Teachers must reconfigure the classroom assessment system and develop differentiated teaching objectives and content to complete students' education stratification. Teachers need to overcome the challenge of transforming the 'excessive assignments tactic' into a

creative and fundamental form of work. At the same time, the public has placed the burden of reducing students' workloads squarely on teachers, who are the focal point of educational reform. The sanctions imposed on out-of-school training providers have also shifted the pressure of after-school coaching towards teachers, putting them under pressure to take on more responsibilities and strict requirements and somewhat diminishing the autonomy of teachers. Thus, the overly high teachers' expectations by government, society, and schools have led to a lack of autonomy and a failure to achieve basic self-fulfillment in their work, with serious implications for their physical and mental development.

4. Suggestions for Promoting the “Double Reduction” Policy for Quality Education

4.1. Ensuring Fair Distribution of Education Resources

The changes in education that the "double reduction" policy has led to are not instantaneous but are always in the process of development, with various problems being identified and solved during practice. The first and foremost is the equitable distribution of educational resources and the need to protect the educational resources of disadvantaged groups. A survey group from Educational Governance at Central China Normal University investigated students' satisfaction with after-school services in some areas of China and found that boarders and left-behind children were less satisfied with after-school services [3]. The development of after-school services and the regulation of extra-curricular tutoring institutions are aimed at narrowing the education gap between urban and rural areas, thereby pursuing equity in education. The government should give resources to developing rural education and provide financial support for after-school services to ensure that schools can operate the content of after-school services properly [8].

Secondly, it should improve the "two-way" mobility mechanism for teachers in urban and rural compulsory education by sending rural teachers to urban schools to learn about teaching methods and models. Then, bring in the best urban teachers to improve the outdated rural education system and popularise diverse and innovative approaches to education, thus accelerating the development of educational reform. For schools, extra care needs to be given to vulnerable groups such as children left behind and children of migrant workers, especially after-school services. In the interests of principle and justice, these disadvantaged groups should be exempted from the cost of after-school tuition so that students are not prevented from participating in after-school services because of the cost implications. Ensuring that students with financial difficulties can effectively bridge the education gap through the opportunity of after-school services, enjoy the benefits of quality education on an equal footing and actively develop their own interests. Ensuring that educational resources are distributed equitably between rural and urban areas and between students in different circumstances and that all students can enjoy the basic demands of quality education can play a significant and influential role in the development of educational reform.

4.2. Improving the Teaching Standards of Public School

The "double reduction" policy advocates providing students with a tiered, personalised, and diversified education. The challenge of systematically re-establishing the assessment and related systems by the schools is enormous. The school clusters can be used as a platform for inter-school exchanges and cooperation, allowing for the flow of quality educational resources [1, 3]. The development of school clusters can lead to the union between urban and rural areas and make up for the relatively backward education system and model of rural education. Quality education in rural areas can also be more developed, and unique after-school services can be set up with innovative regional characteristics. Therefore, inter-school joint schooling can contribute more comprehensively and effectively to improving teaching quality and spreading quality education.

Secondly, the training and assessment of existing teacher resources aim to improve their subject knowledge and professional competence. Under the 'double reduction' policy, teachers can update their professional knowledge, develop innovative and diverse teaching concepts, and deliver the target knowledge in a 45-minute classroom. It is more effective for students to absorb and is both exciting and professional. At the same time, schools are encouraged to introduce healthy competition for teachers and raise awareness of the need to compete. Teachers are regularly assessed on their teaching strategies and professionalism through promotion opportunities and incentives such as salary packages to improve their teaching standards and competencies.

Finally, students are guided in their learning to stimulate their initiative and potential for learning. By enabling students to do basic pre-study before class and summarise after class so they can independently construct a knowledge framework and digest old and new knowledge, students can maximise their learning ability and reduce teachers' teaching pressure.

4.3. Establish an Educational Model of Home-school Cooperation

The rapid development of information technology has provided more channels for people to collect information. The implementation and monitoring of the "double reduction" policy have also received widespread attention from the public [9]. Reducing students' academic burden is not the sole responsibility of schools and teachers but also requires parents' participation and active cooperation and the establishment of an educational platform for home-school cooperation. Home-school cooperation can effectively unite parents, schools, and educators in making decisions about differentiated teaching and learning goals for students and arrangements related to after-school service. The aim is to pool the resources of the participants in order to create a collaborative, interconnected, and meaningful educational environment [10]. With government departments' financial and technical support, schools should organise project teams to compile and analyse statistics on the individual and overall situation of teachers and students across the school and then plan the teaching objectives and staff transfers for the teacher teams in phases. It is followed by the weekly entry of student performance, homework completion, teacher evaluations of students, and after-school service completion into the platform, making it easier for parents and teachers to refer to students' situations. Teachers can then make more accurate and scientific adjustments to their teaching, classroom management and after-school service management based on the platform's weekly and monthly reports of the distribution of grades and the performance of the whole class. At the same time, teachers can guide parents on the platform with the teaching objectives and direction of their students based on the individual student's circumstances.

The parent's role is to provide feedback on the student's learning habits and other strengths in quality education, which helps the teachers differentiate the students' teaching and management. In addition, parents are fully involved in their students' learning lives, and communication with the school and teachers effectively reduces family anxiety about their children's education. Thus, the home-school model of education reduces the pressure of policy on schools, teachers, and parents and achieves common goals and solutions for students through a collaborative model.

5. Conclusions

The "double reduction" policy has significantly impacted the promotion of education in China. The main impact has been to change teachers' and parents' perceptions of their children's education from the traditional 'marks-only' approach to the policy's focus on the all-around development of students. Teachers, families, and schools are influenced by the 'marks-only' judge students only by their grades and deny their achievements in other areas. Their high expectations of students lead to psychological problems and low self-esteem, while character development and moral qualities are

often overlooked. The 'double reduction' policy is, therefore, a shock to society, schools and parents, as it allows them to move away from the traditional concept of education and focus on students from multiple perspectives so that they can develop holistically without being bound to grades and scores.

On the other hand, implementing the "double reduction" policy has been accompanied by inefficiencies in education, increasing pressure on teachers and concerns from parents. Transitioning from test-based education to joint development of test-based and quality education is inevitable. As discussed in this study, the government should address the problems induced by its policies to achieve a fair distribution of educational resources and narrow the gap between test-based education and quality education in urban and rural areas. Secondly, it should improve the standard of education in public schools and enhance the training of teachers' resources so that they can cope more easily with the changes in education. Finally, the establishment of a home-school education model in the region, in conjunction with schools and parents, will alleviate the concerns and pressures of parents and teachers.

In the long term, the "double reduction" policy takes the protection of students' rights and interests as its basic principle. The policy enables students to reduce their academic burden while pursuing their all-around development and meeting the future demand for human resources in all sectors of society. At the same time, the "double reduction" policy responds to the globalisation of education and develops the possibility of quality education based on the test. It will improve the basic qualities of the individual student, enabling him or her to develop physically and mentally and to have the time and energy to develop their interests. In the future, with the spread of quality education and the gradual change in society's perception of education, parents and teachers will be able to teach students more scientifically and healthily, focusing on the diversified development of students.

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