

# *Schools and Teachers under the “Double Reduction” Policy: Challenges and Strategies*

Zhilan Liang<sup>1, †</sup>, Jiamin Xu<sup>2, †</sup>, Runtong Zhang<sup>3, a, \*, †</sup>, and Zhaoxun Zheng<sup>4, †</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hunan University, Lushan Road (S), Yuelu District, Changsha, China

<sup>2</sup> The Affiliated High School of Hangzhou Normal University, Zhenhua Road, Hangzhou, China

<sup>3</sup> University of Nottingham, University Blvd, Nottingham, United Kingdom

<sup>4</sup> DePauw University, 313 S Locust St, Greencastle, IN, United States

a. alyrz25@nottingham.ac.uk

\*corresponding author

<sup>†</sup>These authors contributed equally.

**Abstract:** The “double reduction” policy is of great significance to improving the quality of school education and relieving the pressure of students at the compulsory education level. But problems can not be avoided when a new policy is implemented. Primary and junior high schools have found it difficult to meet the increasing personalized needs of students based on their interests and academic standards when most students no longer reach for off-campus training programs, and they should make more effort in enhancing home-school co-operation. Teachers, as the main performers of the policy, are struggling with surging workload since they should pay more attention to involving in extracurricular activities; they also have to change previous mode of assigning homework and properly assign homework and enhance efficient teaching according to the requirement of “double reduction”. In order that the “double reduction” policy should be effective, countermeasures should be proposed so that these problems will not have a negative influence on the policy in a long run: for schools, various off-campus activities should be provided for students which are in keep with their academic proficiency as well as interests; schools should also find ways to communicate smoothly with parents in order to share information and exchange ideas and avoid conflicts. The measures that can solve teachers’ trouble when implementing the policy are: higher pay and a guarantee of good living standards can be incentives for teachers to rise to increasing pressure at work while training for them on assigning homework in accordance with the requirements of “double reduction” and designing teaching procedures appropriately are also necessary. It is expected that these measures can promote the implementation of “double reduction” and turn these so-called challenges into opportunities, improving the quality of school education as well as teachers’ teaching proficiency, and reducing the pressure on students and parents.

**Keywords:** “Double reduction” policy, School education, Teachers, Solving methods

## 1. Introduction

The Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Off-Campus Training for Compulsory Education Students (hereinafter referred to as “double reduction”) were jointly released

on July 24, 2021 by the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council. It strives to improve the overall quality of school education, lessen excessive study loads, safeguard children's health, and lessen the stress and worry of parents by reducing the amount of time and effort spent on schoolwork as well as the weight of off-campus or after-school training programmes.

According to the statistics of China Education Tracking Survey (CEPS), by 2021 before the policy was released, 48.1 percent of primary and junior high school students participated in curriculum-based off-campus tutoring courses. The average time for first-grade students to complete written homework assigned by the school was 0.3 hours; it was 1.1 hours for sophomores, 1.3 hours for juniors, 1.5 hours for seniors, 1.5 hours for fifth-graders, 1.5 hours for sixth-graders, 1.6 hours for seventh-graders, 2.1 hours for eighth-graders, and 2.2 hours for ninth-graders on average. Heavy homework and off-campus training programs burdens has taken up much of students' time on sports, entertainment and even sleep, thus adversely affecting the development of students' physical and mental health.

Therefore, the implementation of "double reduction" no doubt benefit students and further their parents. According to the statistic released by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (MOE), by the end of 2021 the amount of offline after-school training programs has been reduced to 83.8%, while online ones to 84.1%. The number of students who completed written assignment within the prescribed time increased from 46 % to more than 90 %. By the end of January of 2022, Fees charged by off-campus training institutions have fallen by an average of 40 %.

However, schools and teachers have come under more pressure than ever from the policy, as the changes in the amount and structure of assignments, the increase of after-school service provided by schools and the participation of teachers in them put an emphasize on the importance of in-school education. Thus, as the main force to implement the policy, primary and junior high schools and teachers are required to change their previous administrative and teaching concepts and functions accordingly. This has caused several challenges to schools and teachers. If they can not response to these challenges well, the implementation of the policy could be seriously diluted. Hence, it is essential to identify schools and teachers' problems when carrying out the policy so appropriate measures can be taken to solve or even prevent these problems and guarantee the implementation of "double reduction" policy. Our report focuses on looking into these problems schools and teachers have to solve and some proposed solutions to them.

## **2. Challenges of Schools**

For schools, with the implementation of the "double reduction" policy, there are more emerging issues that need to be addressed. Students have more free time after regular school hours and cannot be assigned too much homework. Accordingly, new challenges arise.

### **2.1.1. How to Meet Students' Personalized Learning Needs**

Although the development of out-of-school training in academic education is gradually becoming distorted, it does meet the individual learning needs of many students. For example, some students are not focused enough in class, but other students have already mastered a certain point of knowledge, which needs to be supplemented outside of class to catch up with the large group. From an objective point of view, students at different levels can at least formally seek targeted instruction in off-campus institutions, and some will even tailor their study plans to each child. The "double reduction" policy's primary goal is to lessen the financial burden of extracurricular activities while also thoroughly regulating their behaviour. This indicates that in the future, for-profit discipline-based training activities will be revised, or maybe banned completely. As a result, students with legitimate "training"

needs, such as various competitions, will not be able to achieve this through out-of-school discipline training. After the implementation of the "double reduction", this demand still exists. Parents of students who are falling behind are still looking for ways to improve, and students with various needs for advancement may also lose the means to do so. For example, there are some children in compulsory education whose parents want their children to study abroad and therefore need to learn foreign languages urgently. This is a time when foreign language courses are a legitimate need and should not be curbed. Therefore, how to fill this gap becomes a big problem.

### **2.1.2. How to Strengthen the Home-School Cooperation**

With the double reduction policy, parents are relatively relieved of some of the burdens, but they need to alter their previous attitudes and focus on other aspects of their children, such as sports and psychology, and respect the laws of education and actively cooperate with the school.

First, it appears that parents are more concerned. The survey's findings demonstrate that parents are unhappy with the "double reduction" policy primarily because "the number of exams has been reduced, and it is impossible to grasp their children's learning situation" (the percentage of respondents who selected this statement: 54.9%), "it does not reduce parents' anxiety" (53.2%), and "there is still a need for extracurricular training" (27.1%). It is obvious that some parents' concern may actually increase as a result of the decrease in the number of exams and training facilities. The factors that contribute to parental anxiety were further examined, and it was discovered that anxious parents had higher educational levels, higher expectations for their children's education, more involvement in extracurricular activities, lower satisfaction with the "double reduction" policy, and lower satisfaction with schools. Anxiety about family education has increased due to the low tolerance rate of only-child education. In today's society, parents have a strong expectation that their children "go to a good university," and this expectation causes them a lot of stress in terms of parenting and education.

Second, there is still a problem with the tension between home and school. Due to the unequal educational resources and deviations in educational philosophies, there are conflicts between home and school regarding the training of students. Many parents believe that the school and teachers are in charge of their children's education when they experience issues at school, but they do not have the skills necessary to teach and care for their children. In a similar vein, teachers feel responsible when they perceive that the parents do not understand or support their work or cooperate with the school, but they do not have the skills necessary to have in-depth conversations with the parents. According to the overlapping spheres of influence theory proposed by Professor Epstein of Hopkins University, the influence of family, school, and community on children's education and development accumulates and overlaps, creating a synergistic influence.

## **3. Challenges of Teachers**

Whether the "double reduction" policy is well implemented depends on teachers, who shoulder the national mission and the important responsibility of cultivating the next generation [1]. The "double reduction" has enhanced the professional standards of teachers, and put up greater requirements for teachers' comprehensive quality and professional abilities. Teachers encounter enormous problems in the process of adopting the double reduction strategy more deeply.

### **3.1.1. Teachers Should Improve Efficient Teaching**

Teachers are the subject matter in traditional teaching methods, and "filling the classroom" is a frequent occurrence. The ultimate goal of the national "double reduction" policy is to reduce the burden of schooling, while further improving the quality of school education and service, which

ultimately depends on a more efficient classroom teaching model [2]. Lv Yugang, director of the Department of Basic Education of the Ministry of Education, made the following statement at a press conference held on August 30, 2021: "The classroom is the main front of school education and teaching work, and schools should take improving the quality of classroom teaching as the core task, and effectively improve the quality of students." [3] Following the double reduction policy, the Ministry of Education placed a strong emphasis on the idea that students should be the centre of attention and that they are capable of fully understanding material and making deductions from a single instance in a classroom setting. Then this requires teachers to reform the traditional classroom methods, and also reform and innovate the method of lesson preparation, classroom content and questioning methods. Undoubtedly, this presents a challenge for educators.

### **3.1.2. Teachers Should Arrange and Develop Homework Reasonably after Class**

For each grade, the national "double reduction" strategy contains more detailed guidelines for homework. It is obviously important to "ensure that there is no homework assignment in the first and second grades of primary school," as written assignments typically take no more than 90 minutes to complete, for instance [4]. When a questionnaire survey was conducted at X Primary School in Chongqing City, Guangxi, the results showed that 71.01% of the students believed that the teachers failed to give assignments that met all levels. In the exchange of representatives, I learned that teachers with senior qualifications like to leave homework that is unified and easy to understand, so that they can revise by themselves, and young teachers like to leave homework that is creative but cannot take into account the actual ability of students. How should teachers strategize how to design homework and how much time to leave for it so that students can fully absorb information without finding it tedious or burdensome? This is a significant difficulty for teachers.

### **3.1.3. Teachers Should Reduce Heavy Work Burden**

Under the "double reduction" policy, teachers should spend extra time and energy on after-school tutoring for students. The time that could have been freely arranged is divided, and the time for teachers to prepare classes, perform scientific research, and even rest is substantially decreased. In addition to extended working hours, the implementation of after-school delay services will also expose teachers to the risk of increased workloads. Teachers and parents from 10 primary and secondary schools in some Jiangsu Province cities and towns were chosen by Lu et al. as the research subjects (4 in cities and 6 in towns; 5 in middle schools and 5 in primary schools) [5]. There are 417 valid data for teachers and 602 valid data for parents of primary and secondary schools. Only 28.78% of teachers reported that the school used a flexible working system, which represented an increase in teachers' workload. Teachers' emotions will also be affected to some extent [6-7].

## **4. Suggestions**

### **4.1. Schools**

As previously mentioned, schools need to face to new situations and try to deal with a bunch of new challenges [8-9]. After our brainstorming, we drew from online papers and journals to come up with recommendations for improving the situation that are relatively feasible for today.

1) Promote students' personalized and comprehensive development by meeting family needs and changing family education concepts.

On the one hand, it is essential to meet the needs of different families, so that children can learn enough knowledge while being able to master and utilize it. The real demands of different types of families are obviously diverse. While reducing the academic burden, schools should also respect the

real needs of different families and meet the developmental needs of their children to promote their diversified growth.

2) Each role in the home-school cooperation has to play its own role.

For parents, they need to adapt and update our educational philosophy so that our children can grow up healthy and happily. Parents also need to constantly promote themselves and lead by good examples. They need to learn to accompany and plan their children's future wisely.

As teachers, they need to work harder to improve the quality of the classroom and put in time and energy to satisfy students. Only by making students learn well, parents will feel at ease and avoid misunderstandings.

As schools, it is more important to fully consider the students' situation and try to cooperate with parents and teachers to identify and solve potential problems in a timely manner.

## 4.2. Teachers

There are some suggestions for teachers [10-11]:

1) School classroom should focus on basic information and abilities to help kids create a firm foundation and lay foundation for their long-term development. In addition, the classroom after "double reduction" should require teachers to teach students all the knowledge that should be taught, explain them thoroughly, and help students move from memory to understanding. For instance, in primary schools, teachers should organise the classroom teaching material and connections based on understanding the subject matter for six years and eliminate redundant, unnecessary material.

2) Schools should establish a homework assignment system and training mechanism while communicating policies. This is to help each teacher genuinely understand the requirements of the double reduction policy and learn how to assign homework forms that have no previous experience. In addition to systematic training, the school can also aid teachers to develop the objective-oriented system according to the semester teaching objectives of each discipline, that is, to ensure that every homework is in service of the overall teaching objectives.

3) Improve the working treatment of teachers, and help teachers to better cope with difficulties in life. It is incumbent on school authorities to improve teachers' welfare. Schools can look into local living standards and ensure that teachers receive benefits by increasing pay or providing housing and living expenses. In addition to direct salary increases, schools can also lessen the intensity of teachers' work by adopting a more scientific approach of dividing work. For example, when allocating the total amount of work, the school should give the actual working hours of each teacher according to the nature of after-school services and other factors.

## 5. Conclusions

Dutch educator Gert Biesta proposed "The Weakness of Education", namely the participation of both education receiver and educators being at risk. While reducing the academic pressure on students, "double reduction" inevitably bring challenges to schools and teachers: for primary and junior high schools, personalized needs of students which are based on their interests and academic standards increase, home-school co-operation become more important; on the other hand, teachers should deal with the surge in workload, assign homework and enhance efficient teaching according to the requirement of "double reduction". Methods should be taken to cope with these problems: schools should provide sufficient various off-campus activities for students, provide rich home-school communication forms; teachers deserve salary increase and a guarantee of good living standards, receive training on how to assign homework and design teaching procedures appropriately. The measures are expected to facilitate the implementation of "double reduction" and turn these challenges into opportunity to enhance the quality of school education.



## References

- [1] Gong Hehua. (2021). "Double reduction" boosts the high-quality development of compulsory education. *China National Education* (11), 7-8. doi: 10.16855/j.cnki.zgmzjy.2021.11.003.
- [2] Jia Yin & Wang Ligang. (2021). Research on the countermeasures for improving the quality of school education after the "double reduction" policy. *Teacher Education Forum* (10), 17-20.
- [3] Liang, Kaili, et al. "Implementation of "double reduction" and governance of out-of-school training institutions." *China Distance Education* .04(2022):27-35. doi:10.13541/j.cnki.chinade.2022.04.006.
- [4] Li Guanghai, Li HailongBlocking and relieving the implementation of "double reduction" policy from the perspective of game theory [J]*Modern education management*, 2022 (06): 10-19DOI:10.16697/j.1674-5485.2
- [5] Li Ronghua Tian Youyi, Three Challenges Facing Schools in the Context of "Double Reduction", October 15, 2021
- [6] Lu Fang, Zhang Li, Zhai Youhua, Fu Shuying & Liu Hailun. (2022). The implementation, existing problems and countermeasures of the "double reduction" in primary and secondary schools: an empirical analysis based on Jiangsu Province. *Journal of Tianjin Normal University (Basic Education Edition)* (04), 25-30. doi: 10.16826/j.cnki.1009-7228.2022.04.005.
- [7] Lu Lili, Exploration on the development and integration of school-based resources of school moral education under the background of "double reduction" [J]*Heilongjiang Education (education and teaching)*, 2022 (07): 21-23.
- [8] Ouyang Guangmin, Zhang jiangkunRealistic Dilemma and reconstruction strategy of school space under the "double reduction" policy [J]*Educational science research*, 2022 (07): 18-25
- [9] Yang Qing. (2021). Research on homework improvement in primary and secondary schools under the background of "double reduction". *Chinese Journal of Education* (12), 6-10.
- [10] Yao Jia & Wan Xin. (2022). Focus on "double reduction" to improve the effectiveness of high school classrooms. *Minsheng Weekly* (02), 72-75.
- [11] Zhang Weiping, Fu Weidong, Li Wei, et alCan after-school service in primary and middle schools promote education equity: an analysis based on the survey data of 32 counties (districts) in 6 provinces (autonomous regions) in the East, central and western regions [J]*China audio visual education*, 2021 (11): 16-23.