

# ***The Impact and Implications of the "Double Reduction" Policy on Shadow Education under the Perspective of Educational Equity***

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**Abstract:** Shadow education, also known as private tutoring or supplementary education, has attracted increasing research attention in the past two decades. In an effort to promote equity in education, the Chinese government has implemented a "Double reduction" policy to normalize tutoring institution and moderate the strained atmosphere caused by the educational race. However, This policy may exacerbate rather than reduce educational inequality. So far, studies have systematically reviewed the literature on the impact of shadow education from the perspective of educational inequality is relatively scarce. Therefore, based on literature search method and interviews with 5 parents, this paper provide a comprehensive overview of the implications of the "Double reduction" policy on shadow education and summarizes the implications for future practice and research. Research has found that the policy has triggered new educational equity pitfalls, including a surge in covert tutoring, and an increase in anxiety among some families, in the context of the "scores-only" theory in the college entrance examination.

**Keywords:** shadow education, double reduction, education fairness, tutoring institution, private tutoring

## **1. Introduction**

The concept of "shadow education" was first proposed by Stevenson and Bakert, which aims to describe the phenomenon of tutorials to help Japanese high school students enter universities smoothly and improve their academic performance [1]. Then, Bailey defined "shadow education" for the first time as supplementary teaching activities outside of normal schooling with the aim of improving student performance[2]. In recent years, shadow education has been expanding worldwide, driven by the process of globalization. As early as the mid-1990s, study revealed that in 41 countries, an average of 4 out of 10 eighth-grade students participated in some form of supplemental education on a weekly basis, with the aim of meeting educational standards and maximizing educational prospects [3]. Method like One-on-one tutoring, sophistic cram-school, distance learning, and other supplemental education methods fall under the category of shadow education [4]. Although this concept was introduced into China as late as 2007, "tutorial education", that is, tutoring and tutorial for students in compulsory education in their cultural courses or arts outside formal education, has long been a phenomenon of concern to domestic academic [5].

While the pursuit of equitable distribution of resources is paramount in China's educational environment and system, the proliferation of shadow education places enormous demands and challenges on the financial capacity of families, a phenomenon that has the potential to exacerbate disparities in the access to and distribution of educational resources. Particularly for families with limited capital [6], additional education expenditures increase families' daily expenses and can deter them from accessing quality education resources, which in turn exacerbates educational and social anxiety and perpetuates educational inequity.

In response to these concerns, the Chinese government has strategically formulated the "double reduction" policy aimed at reducing the excessive burden of homework and out-of-school tutoring on students in compulsory education. Tutoring institutions have long been considered one of the major causes of parental and social anxiety, and strengthening the regulation of tutoring institutions will standardize the tutoring industry to a certain extent, thus easing the tensions caused by educational competitions and creating an environment conducive to the comprehensive, balanced, and individualized development of students [7]. Year 2024 is the "Double Reduction" policy implementation of the third year through this period of education policy implementation, the basic ecology of Chinese education has undergone qualitative changes, but also gradually exposed new problems in the process of policy implementation.

This study employs a purposive sampling method to investigate the implications of the "double reduction" policy on shadow education through interviews with five junior middle school parents of different income levels in Ningbo. Based on the findings, this paper expects to provide data analysis and intellectual support to government departments in formulating education policies, so that corresponding feasible improvement measures can be proposed. It can also assist in creating a favorable educational ecosystem and realizing educational equity in extracurricular tutoring at the compulsory education level, thereby alleviating parents' educational anxiety and promoting the healthy growth of adolescents.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Data collection**

In selecting the participants, the students' academic performance, school adjustment status, parents' occupation and other factors were considered, and four pre-interviewees were selected for pre-interviews. At the end of the pre-interviews, the outline was revised based on the results of the interviews, and the final five effective interviewees were identified. All five interviewees were mothers of the students.

The interview questions were set with reference to Wu et al. and An & Yang studies on descriptions of parents' involvement in their children's education [8-9]. The interview was divided into two parts, with the first part covering the social capital of the interviewer. The second part explored the impact of the "double reduction" policy on extracurricular tutoring. During the interview, the interviewer asked appropriated follow-up questions based on the respondents' answers to obtain more in-depth and detailed information.

### **2.2. Result**

The interview consisted of five questions: the first question was the basic information of the interviewer (including the type of job, annual income, and education level). The second question was the interviewer's attitude toward the double-minus policy (whether or not he/she supported the double-minus policy). The third question was whether or not the interviewer's children were receiving shadow education. The fourth question was about the channels for obtaining information and

resources about shadow education. And the fifth question was about the personal opinion. The specific answers are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: overview of the interview result

Interviewer No.	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
1	Doctor; 50W Docter	Yes	Yes	One-to-one tutoring by school teachers	Save the time of pick-up and drop-off
2	Teacher; 20W; Master	No	Yes	Parents tutoring; Inviting colleagues to tutor	Increased the workload of teachers; It is necessary to extend teachers' tutoring time in school
3	Entrepreneur; 1000W; High school	Yes	Yes	Educational institutions	Little influence; Mmore efficient; Less stressed
4	Migrant worker; 20W; Middle school	No	No	None	
5	Civil service; 20W; Master	No	Yes	Educational institutions; Small classes counseling	Teaching quality cannot be guaranteed; Risk of closure

### 3. Analysis

#### 3.1. Current situation

Interview results show that parents with high incomes or corresponding social capital indicated in interviews that the policy had a minor impact on them, and they could still support their children in attending extracurricular tutoring by hiring private tutors or transferring to underground tutoring sessions to evade policy supervision. However, for other parents lacking social capital, after the regulation of shadow education, they lacked channels to seek private tutoring or underground tutoring, leading to a situation where academic tutoring shifted from overt to non-existent.

Meanwhile, a knock-on effect of this policy is the rise of small training institutions. After the "double reduction" policy, institutions engaged in academic training for compulsory education have exited the market en masse, forcing their teachers to leave but not completely withdraw from the education and training market. Instead, they quietly transitioned into the "underground" sector after the national crackdown, evolving into "one-on-one tutoring", "study tours", or "unlicensed small classes", continuing illegal training and academic instruction in ways that evade administrative supervision [10]. In fact, due to the unstable teacher qualifications, unsatisfactory teaching environment, outdated teaching facilities, and so on, small-scale underground education and training institutions may face such problems as sudden closure of the institutions, difficulties in making refunds, poor learning experience of students, and so on, which in a certain sense have further jeopardized public interest. Nevertheless, based on the academic requirements of the children, parents are compelled to send their children to small institutions. From the information obtained by parents, the quality of teaching in small institutions is far inferior to that in large institutions. Therefore, when

the education authorities implement the governance of off-site academic training institutions under the "double reduction" policy, it suffers from incomplete governance and a lack of effective supervision.

In addition, the competition faced by students has not been weakened by the "double reduction" policy on the governance of out-of-school training institutions. Without the educational reinforcement provided to students by shadow education, parents are concerned that their children's academic performance may be affected. This is especially true in Zhejiang, China, a province with a deep educational tradition and an exceptionally high level of competition in various selective examinations. Therefore, when public services cannot meet the needs of the masses, people would seek similar alternatives to increase the quality of the services concerned. Consequently, the "double reduction" policy's "one-size-fits-all" approach to the governance of out-of-school training is difficult to align with the current educational environment, and has instead exacerbating the emergence of alternative training forms, such as "one-on-one" private tutoring and "underground organizations", and this phenomenon of unregulated out-of-school training will continue to exist.

Parents hope that their children can enhance the academic ability through access to quality educational resources, so as to be victorious in the fierce competition. By increasing investment in education, they allow their children to enroll in a variety of off-campus training programs to improve academic performance and cultivate specialties. This invariably increases the burden of children's studies while also increasing the financial burden of families. Parents desire education equity, but they are also anxious about education reforms aimed at realizing education equity, especially those families lacking the relevant resources.

In short, the "double reduction" makes little difference to affluent students, who can opt for private tutoring as an alternative. However, for students from less affluent families who often lack access to quality education resources, the implementation of the "double reduction" policy could put them at a disadvantage in the fierce competition in education.

### 3.2. Reasons for the need for tutoring

In traditional Chinese education, many parents tend to project their unfulfilled aspirations onto their children, strongly hoping that their children will achieve what they could not. As a result, they place great expectations on their children to attain high achievements. Current education policies overlook students' needs for relational justice and stakes fairness, leaving them feeling restricted in their choices and increasingly pressured [11]. After the implementation of the "double reduction" policy, the workload for students during their learning process suddenly decreased. However, the ultimate goal remains the college entrance examination. The college entrance examination, based on the score as the only criterion, the higher the score could enter the better the school. Therefore, there is a conflict between the "double reduction" policy and the current policy on advancing to higher education, leading to the continued existence of academic tutoring. In the current educational environment, individuals with higher academic qualifications tend to secure better careers, higher remuneration, and a higher social status. The existence of social class solidification and the aspiration to break through class barriers through education have triggered anxiety among parents. Intense competition has not altered the public's demand for academic after-school tutoring.

Moreover, parents' anxiety about their children's academic performance also contributes to their cost in shadow education. A survey study on the educational anxiety status of 35,162 parents revealed that the proportion of parents experiencing educational anxiety was 66.8%, indicating a relatively high level of anxiety, and that mothers were more prone to educational anxiety than fathers [12]. Luo et al. suggested that in the early stages of implementing the "double reduction" policy, parents' educational anxiety shifted from general anxiety to specific anxiety, with economic anxiety decreasing, parenting anxiety increasing, and examination anxiety coexisting with growth anxiety

[13]. Defense mechanisms are methods employed by the ego to cope with threats and stress in order to reduce or avoid anxiety. Under the "double reduction" policy, families' choice of shadow education during the compulsory education stage reflects parents' defense against educational anxiety. In defense against these kind of educational anxiety, parents will still resort to various means to provide extra-curricular tutoring for their children.

## **4. Countermeasures**

### **4.1. For parents**

In some highly competitive regions or provinces like Zhejiang, there will be more selective tests and pressure, and the amount of information obtained by students in the school may not make students stand out in the fierce competition. Parents may worry that their children will take training courses to gain additional knowledge because this situation will affect the educational outcomes.

The "double reduction" policy is the absence of rankings, reduced homework, and decreased tutoring. The parents believe that the most direct consequence of the "double reduction" policy is a decline in their children's academic performance, thus making a perception that drives them to continuously invest in shadow education. But as an important component of the "double reduction" policy. Parents should shift from traditional educational ideologies, transitioning from material investments focused solely on grades to spiritual investments promoting comprehensive development, and place increasing emphasis on their children's physical and mental well-being. Encouraging their children to participate in sports and social activities, thereby cultivating more comprehensive and healthy qualities [14]. For example, parents can maintain close communication with schools, understand the school's teaching plans and homework arrangements, and cooperate with the school to jointly do a good job in educating their children.

### **4.2. For schools**

As the center of education, schools need to strengthen teaching management, improve teaching quality, so that children can learn something. For example, we should establish a sound teaching management system, pay attention to teacher training and assessment, formulate scientific teaching evaluation standards, and implement a classroom teaching quality evaluation system to ensure steady improvement of teaching quality. It does not adhere to traditional teaching forms, and actively explores new teaching modes and methods, such as inverted classroom and mixed teaching, so as to adapt to the needs of the development of The Times and improve teaching effects. Carry out the teaching policy of five education simultaneously, and pay attention to cultivating students' various abilities.

For students with poor academic performance, appropriate extracurricular tutoring is conducive to improving their academic performance and narrowing the gap with other students. Therefore, it is of great significance to reasonably extend students' school time and provide necessary after-school tutoring for disadvantaged students to narrow the gap in students' academic achievement and reduce the degree of inequality in educational opportunities.

### **4.3. For government**

Regulating extracurricular tutoring institutions may not be sufficient to curb parents' demand for shadow education. To address the "crazy" trend of shadow education at its root, on the one hand, the government should improve policy content, such as adjusting the relevant content for governing educational training institutions, enhancing the accuracy of policy interpretation, and establishing a supporting education policy system. More importantly, there should be a gradual shift in the

orientation of education evaluation. When education evaluation is geared towards examinations, it strengthens the relationship between parental involvement and shadow education. If education evaluation focuses more on students' literacy and abilities, it may weaken the relationship between parental involvement and academic shadow education. Of course, it is difficult to change the format of the college entrance examination at this stage, but innovations can be made in the examination content by reducing the assessment of single knowledge points and adopting diverse examination forms such as open-ended and situational questions to encourage students to exercise innovative thinking and practical abilities. And Government could establish a teaching resource library nationwide, so that teaching resources can be shared globally, provide students with more standardized professional educational knowledge, and enable students in less developed areas to obtain high-quality educational resources, so as to alleviate the regional education gap.

## 5. Conclusion

The purpose of "double reduction" policy is to reduce educational costs, alleviate family burdens, ensure that all students can receive basic compulsory education, and achieve educational equity. Under the premise of complying with policy requirements, academic tutoring should focus on cultivating students' learning abilities and critical thinking skills, helping them improve their academic literacy. This requires concerted efforts from parents, schools, the government, and all sectors of society to form a unified force and create a better environment for children's healthy growth. This paper analyzes the results of the implementation of the "double reduction" policy through interviews with five parents. Some parents expressed support for the formulation and implementation of the "double reduction" policy, believing that it has alleviated social anxiety to a certain extent and combated the monopolization of resources by large tutoring organizations. It still could not fully solve the real problems encountered in realizing education equity, such as parents' anxiety and students' heart problems.

However, due to the small sample size and the limited representativeness of the interviewees, who were mainly concentrated in cities in the eastern coastal region, the conclusions are not applicable to the whole country. Therefore, the sample collection will be expanded in the follow-up study to discuss the topic in further depth.

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