

The Impact and Future of the Implementation of ‘Double Reduction’ policy

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Abstract. In July 2021, China introduced the ‘double reduction’ program, which aims to reduce the academic load for K-12 level (primary and secondary) students while also standardizing off-campus schools. Numerous investigations and research were carried out in China following the establishment of the ‘double reduction’ policy. These studies mainly focus on the people’s concerns and the impact of the policy. In this paper, four impacts were discussed including: 1) School education becomes the main part of Chinese education. 2) Parents’ anxieties are increased. 3) Educational training institutions are confronted with decruitment and transformation. 4) Private tutoring exacerbates educational imbalances. Then suggestions such as allocating educational resources equally for the government, setting rational expectations to their children for parents and focusing on the comprehensive development of students for schools are indicated in the end.

Keywords: ‘Double reduction’ policy; Burden; Impact; Suggestion.

1. Introduction

In recent times, ‘parents’ anxiety’, ‘consolidation of social class’, ‘higher expenditure on education’ and ‘students’ mental and physical burden’ have become serious issues in Chinese education [1-2]. The overburden of K-12 level students in basic education has also drawn intensive attention from society. ‘Burden reduction’ in K-12 level education has gradually been associated with the implementation of ‘quality-oriented education’ since the 1990s, which came up in 2000 and aimed at cultivating the ‘whole person in Chinese education. At that time, a series of measures, including ‘reports and rankings cancellation’ and ‘primary school students excluded from admission exams’ were conducted in order to reflect ‘burden reduction’ as a ‘baton’ for developing students’ quality [3].

Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Off-Campus Training for Students in Compulsory Education (the ‘Double Reduction’ Policy) was published by China in 2021. It calls for standardizing off-campus training institutes and lowering the number of homework students is given [4]. The goal of the policy is to decapitalize the current educational system, rebuild and control it, provide a safe and egalitarian learning environment, and enhance students’ overall growth and well-being [4-5].

China is hardly the only country experiencing this strain. The weight of student learning appears to be universal. In order to support their children’s general development, Ishizuka notes that parents in industrialized nations also spend money and effort on ‘early care, children interest training, and extracurricular tuition.’ [6]. to change this situation, many countries made efforts. Korea implemented policies, such as ‘High School Equalization Policy’ and ‘Elite education, to eliminate the emergence of shadow education. However, this campaign made no difference in the status quo of students’ heavy academic pressure and the huge tutoring industry in Korea. Similarly, Japan also published Yutori education to reduce students’ burden, but the attempt ultimately failed [7]. The same situation also occurred in developing countries such as Turkey [4]. In order to ensure the success of the ‘double reduction’ policy, this essay tries to conclude the value essence of the policy, show its impact on society and provide suggestions for further implementation, which may provide a novel and imitable idea for global education involution.

2. Three Value Essences of ‘Double Reduction’ Policy

The fundamental problems of ‘whom to cultivate,’ ‘how to cultivate,’ and ‘for whom to cultivate’ are all addressed by the ‘double reduction’ program. From a policy narrative standpoint, Xue and Li’s research demonstrates the ‘double reduction’ policy. They name three fundamental principles of the policy: ‘student-centered education’ (the foundational principle of operating schools), ‘quality-oriented education’ (the guiding principle of operating schools), and ‘home and school cooperative education’ (the dominant principle of operating schools) [8].

The policy makes the case that education should prioritize students, address their problems, and protect their right to rest, which is acknowledged as the fundamental tenet of operating schools. The government claims that in order to decrease the academic pressure on kids, schools and instructors should put in place effective limitations on the quantity and length of student work [8]. By changing their roles, from traditional implementers of educational policy to main implementers with certain initiatives in the policy, schools can independently design and select the content of after-school activities to meet the different and personalized learning demands of students. Meanwhile, off-campus training should be regulated and family education expenditure will reduce. According to the document, the quality of school education will be effectively and obviously promoted, after-school activities will be based on students’ needs, homework will be more reasonable and scientific, and off-campus institutions will be standardized by 2023.

Along with the ‘double reduction’ policy, quality-oriented education is identified as the leading value of running schools. This means that the quality of education will be strengthened by emphasizing ‘aesthetic, physical, labor education, and other types of educational content that is helpful to students’ mental and physical health, and improve the overall development of students. As one of the most important parts of quality-oriented education, the ‘double reduction’ policy put the government in the leading position in the aspects of allocating educational resources, regulating the educational market and highlighting the important role of schools. Besides, the policy encourages schools to take full advantage of off-campus education [8]. For example, schools may organize classes of practice activities outside schools and provide children with chances of carrying out research practice by using public resources such as youth activities centers and children’s palaces.

‘Double reduction’ policy advocates the combination and cooperation of family, school, and society, which reflects the dominant value of running schools. According to the policy, a guidance and research network will be established for parents to ensure the well-being of every student. Parents will realize the significance of family education, re-establish the concept of child-rearing and reach a consensus on the reduction of burdens. Besides, the after-school service, such as after-school tutoring and trusteeship, will be expanded and strengthened. The wealth of educational resources from schools and social organizations will be merged to provide students clubs and community activities that develop their capacity for problem-solving, critical thinking, teamwork, and other skills. The issue of after-school trusteeship and parents’ reliance on off-campus training facilities will be resolved in this instance. Economic strain, educational concern, and tutoring-related family pressure will all be lessened.

3. Impact of ‘Double Reduction’ Policy

The ‘double reduction’ policy is a quite new and hot topic in recent Chinese education and it had a significant influence on the development of education in China. A large number of empirical investigations were carried out in China following the gradual implementation of the ‘double reduction’ program. Some researchers make a comparison between China’s ‘double reduction’ policy and similar reducing educational reform in other countries such as Japan, which may provide useful ideas and available methods for successfully carrying out the ‘double reduction’ policy [7]. Other academics look into the public’s perception based on big data to learn about people’s concerns over the enforcement of the ‘double reduction’ policy. According to Li et al., the public is more aware of initiatives for carrying out the ‘double reduction’ policy, the results, impacts and appraisal of the

application of the policy, as well as new problems and phenomena that result from its use [9]. Similarly, Jia and Peng identify four aspects frequently discussed on the internet including ‘institutional supervision’, ‘industry impact’, ‘policy implement’ and ‘public feedback’ [10]. Through analyzing these topics, the impacts on society are identified in the following aspects.

First, under the policy of ‘double reduction’, the main position of school education is emphasized by the government. This means that school education should not only play the main role of teaching all kinds of subjects and providing a holistic after-school service system but also ensure children’s personalized development after school, which requires high qualities of teachers and increases their work burden [8]. However, there is little attention on teachers. A great number of teachers just carry out the policy mechanically because of the frequent changes in educational policy, rigid teacher evaluation, social pressure from parents and so on [11]. Being at the center of the policy without their own voices, teachers also bear great pressure under the ‘double reduction’ policy and need more attention from the society.

Second, how the policy is put into practice also affects how anxious parents feel. In families with greater socioeconomic position and educational levels, there is often a higher level of parental concern for their children’s education and academic performance expectations. Greater time is spent studying as a result, which puts more mental and physical pressure on kids. In Yu et al.’s research, the results mainly indicated the positive impact on parents’ conception and the importance of fairness in current education [4]. However, a surprising finding revealed that parents’ levels of educational concern increased as they learned more about the ‘double reduction’ program. The uncertainty of educational outcomes can be one reason. This is because education may be a reasonable and repayable way to improve living standards, especially for children from a poor background, thus parents may pour a lot of money and time into their children’s education, expecting to be paid back in the future. However, the ‘double reduction’ policy aims to reduce academic burdens on students and cut students’ learning time, which increases the unpredictability of educational return. Moreover, the large-class classroom teaching and the relatively simple after-school service provided by schools cannot fully satisfy the various needs of students. In this case, parents show more anxiety about their children’s future.

Third, the implementation of the ‘double reduction’ policy strongly affects the educational training industry. According to Wang et al., the reduction rate of offline and online training institutions was respectively about 92% and 87% at the end of 2021, and the conversion rate from profit to non-profit was 100% [3]. On the one hand, the closure of educational institutions makes a huge number of employees to lose their jobs. On the other hand, basic and permanent changes in education companies in the profit-gaining pattern and market scale occurred. Large companies, such as New Oriental, were forced to change their commercial strategy from K-12 education to other types of education including vocational education, university education and family education.

In addition, private tutoring is obviously a new issue arising from the execution of the ‘double reduction’ policy. Although restricted by the initiatives, off-campus training institutions do not completely eliminate from the market. All kinds of implicit channels are surging, such as one-to-one tutors, live-in nannies and group-funded teachers (usually a group of students hire famous teachers to teach) [8-11]. This not only puts more financial strain on parents but also destroys the educational system, and makes the problem of educational inequality worse. This leads to a situation where the educational divide between various groups will be widened. On the one hand, recognition of the educational difference between various income groups will be more obvious. Advantaged students with rich or well-educated families can not only afford the high cost of one-to-one tutoring, but also have the access to high-quality education resources, which puts poor students at a disadvantage in academic competition. On the other hand, the educational difference between households with one child and those with more than one child will also be widened by this new phenomenon [8]. Families with many children may spend a larger percentage of their income on tutoring than families with just one child, which increases their educational costs. Meanwhile, the only child may obtain various tutors or educational resources, and has his or her advantage in the exam competition [8].

4. Suggestions for Implementation of ‘Double Reduction’ Policy

‘Double reduction’ policy reconstructs the functions of schools and educational institutions outside schools and families. Factors such as how school carries out the policy efficiently and effectively, how to manage off-campus training scientifically, and how society react to the policy, will directly affect the enforcement of the ‘double reduction’ policy. After discussing and summarizing the impact of the policy, suggestions will be provided in this part.

For government, they should carry out the policy conscientiously and allocate educational resources rationally [12]. Off-campus training institutions’ management and supervision must be improved, and their behaviors must be regulated. On the one hand, policies should be implemented to help off-campus training institutions to transform actively and positively. For example, sufficient support and guidance can be provided to educational companies in order to establish a number of non-profit and scientific training institutions, which make up for the gap in school education. On the other hand, local governments should specify certain conditions for running off-campus training institutions, establish a long-term management system, and conduct normal and classified governance for existing off-campus education. The government should also balance its educational resource allocation. For instance, improving the teacher management system and promoting the norm of frequent teacher rotation are two ways to create fairness in education.

Parents should alter educational paradigms and set realistic expectations for their kids. Because parents’ expectations are occasionally excessively subjective and emotional, Chen et al. discover that there is typically a big difference between the children’s educational levels and their parents’ expectations. As a result, it is important for parents to have a scientific view of education [12]. First, parents should thoroughly comprehend the ‘double reduction’ concept and put more emphasis on their children’s overall development than on their academic performance. Second, they should realize the individuality of every child and avoid the occurrence of blind comparison and conformity [11]. Appropriate educational expectations should be set up according to students’ characteristics and actual academic level, in order to tap children’s various potentials.

Schools should strengthen their main position in Chinese education [12]. First of all, school education should put emphasis on improving students’ personalities, aesthetic abilities and labor abilities. Second, teachers should renew the traditional teaching approaches and put students at the central subjects of the class. They should also put more emphasis on the cultivation and development of students’ personalities, creativity and independent thinking ability in class. Third, it is important to enrich the types of evaluation and build multiple evaluation systems, such as portfolio evaluation, to promote students’ all-around development. Besides, after-school services should be enriched, and the pattern of the service system should be innovated to meet the diversified learning needs of students.

5. Summary

In conclusion, the ‘double reduction’ strategy is an important development for China’s education reform. This article primarily analyzes the benefits of the ‘double reduction’ strategy and addresses its effects as well as any new problems that result from its implementation. There are additional recommendations for governments, educational institutions, and parents to help assure the success of the ‘double reduction’ approach. Governments should first create standards for managing off-campus training and distributing educational funds fairly. Second, school education should be the main part of the education, which focus on shaping children’s healthy personality, retaining students’ individuality, and developing their comprehensive abilities such as problem-solving ability and critical thinking ability. After-class service should also be included in school education. Third, parents should change educational concepts and establish reasonable expectations for their children. Moreover, schools, teachers, parents, and society should cooperate with each other to build a good ecological environment for K-12 education. It is obvious that the ‘double reduction’ policy has a long way to go. Although the enforcement of the ‘double reduction’ policy may not have prompted changes on Chinese education, efforts should be made continuously.

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