

A Review of “Double Reduction” Policy and “Family Educational Anxiety”: relationship and the distraction of Policy

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Abstract. Educational burden and educational anxiety have been obsessed with Chinese families for an extended period. The Central Committee of Central China has further announced the “Double Reduction” policy to reduce the pressure on new generations and Chinese families. The policy has an unprecedented impact on all educational institutions, both public and outside tutoring institutions. Even though the policy is determined to relieve student pressure, the pressure remains. The ignorance of family education and the relationship between the policy and the inherent mindset of parents are essential factors dragging the policy down. The paper is dedicated to reviewing the existing contributions and analyzing how family factors are conducive to the policy. Focusing on the undergoing policy circumstances, lost sight of family education, and parental mindset of children’s life and grades.

Keywords: “Double Reduction” Policy; Family Education; Family Educational Responsibilities; Chinese students.

1. Introduction

The Central Government has dedicated to solve the “Reducing pressure” on students for decades, from 1955 to the present. However, the primary objective was never achieved because of the underperformance of the education department and outdated ideology, even though there are multiple “Reduction” policies aimed at curing the educational issue [1]. Since July 24, 2021, the Central Committee of Central China State Council has introduced “Opinions on further reducing compulsory education stage’s burden of homework and off-Campus Training intuitions” (“Double Reduction” Policy), an adjustment of Grade one to Grade 12. The policy reaches a wide range of educational areas, including students, in-campus teachers, tutoring institution staff, and parents. The target is to relieve pressure and alleviate the burden of homework and overwhelming out-campus stress during the compulsory education stage. The inherent mindset of Chinese culture, “who succeeds in learning leads to a greater future, “is rooted in most families. The national college entrance examination is a severe education system that tends to filter most students. Due to no fundamental adjustments to the excessive pressure of competitive national exams nor the talent selection model, most faculty, tutoring institutions, and parents still seek short-term benefits on students, believing that better grades are the only way to accomplish class jumps and solidify current classes [1]. The policy initially aimed to reduce the pressure; however, as a result of deep concerns about the uncertainty of children’s future careers, parental anxiety remained after the policy was published; the anxiety shifted to how to maintain or better the grades without tutoring institutions and sufficient educational resources [2]. After implementing the policy, under the regulations that enforced the legal regulations and supervision, the majority of students benefited, gained more leisure time to allocate and discovered self-interests. Meanwhile, the parents are also liberated from being physically and mentally exhausted by constantly sending kids to tutoring institutions and supervising kids to stay up late to do their homework. Despite the advantages of the policy, the number of parents and tutoring institutions still uphold “whenever there are policies, there are always countermeasures” to escape supervision and continue to add extracurricular to their children. The type of underground behaviours leads to a collective influence on families who follow the regulations, concerning those who participate in underground tutoring surpassing their children, resulting in growing “group anxiety.” Emerged the mindset of “since other children are tutoring, mine cannot fall behind,” even though some families

might not be financially sufficient or mentally capable of supporting their children, they have no choice but to push on, resulting in more ecological and mental pressures [2]. The policy is limited by the parents pursuing infinite progress “off the radar,” even adding more psychological stress to the educational system. Therefore, significant internal factors have limited the promotion of burden reduction and implementation of the policy. As long as the parental anxiety about education and continuous excessive competition in the educational stage, the pressure on children will not be reduced. The article provides a broad analysis of the current limitation of the “Double Reduction” policy based on related peer-reviewed articles from the policy implemented to the present, discovering the inseparable relationship between the limitation and the family elements.

2. Method

This paper researched and collected scholarly articles from China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), Baidu Scholar, and Google Scholar. Set keywords “Double reduction” policy, “family education,” “Double Reduction & family education,” “and “family education & Grades” combined as the key elements to start searching related articles. Due to the Baidu Scholar's lack of sources, and most of the sources are identical to the CNKI, this paper did not use any of the resources from Baidu Scholar. All the keywords are searched under the Peking University database section, the core journals of Peking University. The “Double reduction” policy significantly influences the future of new generations, with numerous articles in CNKI(PKU). There are a total of 919 articles searching for the “Double reduction” policy in CNKI(PKU), broadly researching and discussing the findings of the policy's ongoing circumstances and the policy's future hardness. Under the keywords “family education,” CNKI(PKU) exhibited 5247 articles related to the words. However, only 157 sources are displayed by combining “Double reduction” policy and “family education” as simultaneous search keywords. Also, when using “family education” and “Grades” as search terms, only 272 related articles were found. Noticeably, over three years of policy published, the research is lacking in focusing on family education as an imperative factor for educational anxiety.

In Google Scholar, “Double Reduction Policy” has over 3340 related articles from 2021 to the present, 62,300 entries under the term “China Family Education,” 17,100 findings through “Family Education & Grades,” and 1,470 results under the terms “China family education and “double reduction,” Noticeably, the articles from Google Scholar and CNKI(PKU) have a similar overall direction; general ideas point in the same direction. Accordingly, this paper is based on the total number of cited or downloaded articles, the author's reliability, background and reputation, and the publication date as the criterion for acquiring the initial articles. After a general reading of the abstract, introduction, and conclusion, a total of 35 articles regarding family education and the core idea of the policy were selected. Subsequently, after reading the full texts, the selection was filtered into 15 papers that were related to this paper's central idea. The flowchart of literature screening is shown in Fig.1.

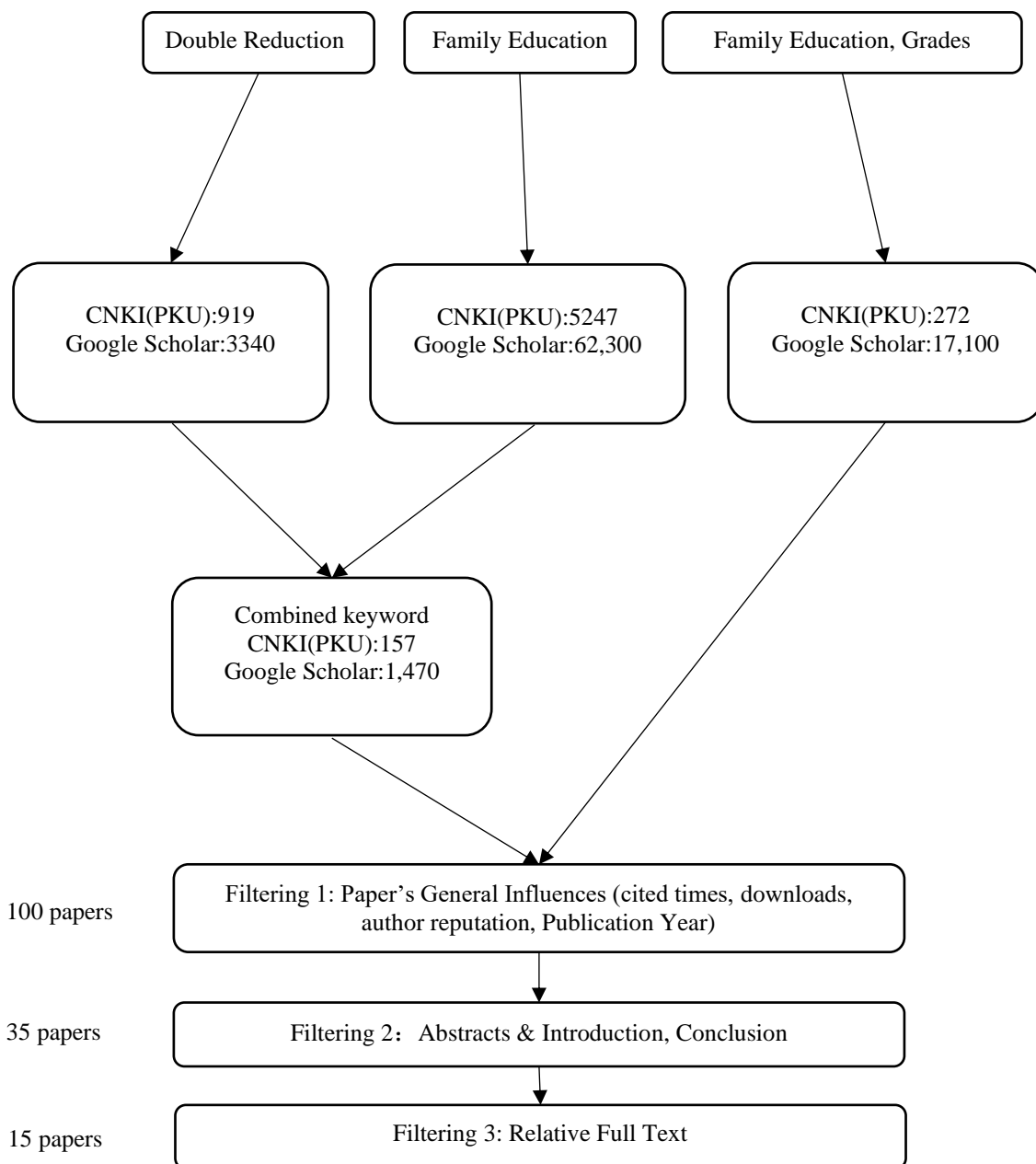


Fig.1 Literature screening process

3. Findings

The “reducing pressure” is a complicated problem that has obsessed Chinese families and the government for a long time. Over 40 years, the central committed has introduced 35 policies aimed at relieving pressure [3]. The limited educational resources, the desire for class-jumping, and the shirking responsibilities of Chinese parents always slowed the policy process. The core findings of the 15 papers revealed essential factors: the reason for the unsuccessful implementation of the policy, the superficial understanding of family education, and the imperative of family education to the children’s performance.

3.1. The reason for failing to implement the policy

The hardness of implementing the policy is a complicated process from the central to the province, narrowing down to individuals; the process contains challenges between the publisher and the executor. The local governments are encountering difficulties in initiating the policy relatively

financially compared to human resources. The transmission and implementation of the policy from the central government to local government executors and policy-makers might cause a degree of misunderstanding, especially since there are certain degrees of conflicts between collective interest and private interest [4]. Due to private interests, the policy was strictly measured in the implementation process even though it was meant to be flexible, ignoring unpredictable human factors. A common phenomenon during the implementation was that schools started to vary the “name” of the actions, continuously enforcing overwhelming homework, avoiding supervision to ensure the students were keeping the average grades index because it was their political interest, and pretending to follow the regulations. On the contrary, the opposite of still implementing excessive educational burden is that some schools implement stringent rules, forcing no tutoring to be allowed. The policy implementors did not consider that many students require tutoring to understand the materials and some students do not need excessive homework to practice their knowledge. The misimplementing led to a certain degree of misunderstanding between the students/parents and the faculty, leading to parents avoiding the regulations to fulfill their demands.

Under the macro system, educational resources in China are limited, and the shortage of high-quality education leads to a student filtering model. As a consequence of insufficient educational resources, the government nominated “important” schools and mediocre schools, which are typically “important” and established in central regions, to accelerate economic growth. The national entrance exam splits students into colleges (Technical institutes, society commonly unrecognized) and universities, making the quality education resources exceedingly precious, triggering educational anxiety, worsened by the traditional bias of Chinese parents toward colleges and the simplistic belief that only university degrees guaranteed a promising future [5].

Meanwhile, overly strict enforcement with unprecedented strength and subject-based tutoring are prohibited under no circumstances; most institutions are closed. Massive teacher resources are influx into the unemployment market. On the other hand, in situations where most tutoring institutions are closed, maximizing the parents’ demand for tutoring resources, despair demands that unemployed tutors start to provide services by organizing “tutoring alike” activities [6]. Undoubtedly, many students require extra assistance to “digest” their knowledge. Consequently, the action fostered mutual supply and demand for tutoring services and students, resulting in underground tutoring services to avoid enforcers [7]. Therefore, the commonly superficial implementing process contradicted the policy’s purpose, allowing the “Reduction” to stay on the surface rather than truly cure the main issue. Most parents are concerned about their children’s future, worrying that their children face a lack of value in society, gradually leading to group anxiety and dropping into the over-tutoring trap.

3.2. Parental mindset: lack of understanding of the primary purpose of “Double Reduction.”

Over thousands of years, the inherited mindset of taking tests has profoundly impacted Chinese families. “Double Reduction” meant to shift the parental understanding to a more comprehensive way of educating children rather than only studying. However, utilitarianism beliefs became the most prevalent mindset among Chinese families, stating that only studying at a good university can help them reach a higher socioeconomic position and become better people by accomplishing higher educational degrees. The mistake of the actual meaning of examination into the grades represents a person's value negatively impacts how Chinese parents educate their children.

3.2.1 Parental anxiety

Throughout the history of “Reduction,” parents’ anxiety was never diminished as the directly affected group, during the educational process, parents are always passive; despite how much class their children participate in, the test has to be the children do, even escalating parental anxiety [8]. With mental and economic sacrifices for their children, they feel more frustrated when the “grades” are still unsatisfactory, which escalates the anxiety and emotional frustration. The uncontrollable situation always leads to frustration for parents striving to make their children study, but they still fail, which worsens the problem, and they even enroll in more tutoring classes for their children. Parents’

understanding of education gradually shifted to “competition” and “better person,” fostering irrational educational ambitions about their children. Some mothers believe they are the educational investors, and their children are the invested target; the final result and their preferences and contributions are tight together [8]. The utilitarianism mindset intensifies their educational anxiety and puts more pressure on their children.

3.2.2 Impractical educational expectation escalated anxiety

Since 1977, the return of the National Entrance Examination has aggravated the belief of “only grades, only degrees,” which has caused exam-based educational ideology in most families [9]. Impractical educational expectations from parents and children and utilitarian values are the direct reasons for education anxiety. Most anxiety is metered through the idea that “my children cannot lose on the starting line,” leading parents to hire expensive tutors for pre-courses and extracurriculars at all costs [9]. This type of mindset mistakes the actual value of education. The purpose of education initiates all educational activities; value-orientated education purpose emphasizes the intrinsic value of education, achieving socialization and self-actualization; in the contracts, “instrumental-orientated” education aims for short-term advantage and interim purpose. Overestimating the value of grades, degrees, and rankings only expands the tutoring institutions, leads to more inequality of educational resources, and creates more anxiety [9]. The “Double Reduction” policy is meant to fundamentally push the entire society to return to a practical way to educate children, shift focus to mental and physical health, and respect the different possibilities for children’s growth: local education department, principals, teachers, and parents, did not adequately transform their mindset [10]. People always find excellent or bad occupations; everyone is pursuing “better” jobs, escalating educational competition. Consequently, parent upholds negative attitudes toward education achievement, believing an unsatisfactory university will lead to the entire failure of their children’s future and eventually an unsatisfactory life. The higher class tend to receive most of the high-quality resources, and parents, especially middle-class parents, eagerly desire “upper class” status, causing the average or lower class’s impractical expectation of a higher reputation, which affects their children’s future path [11]. The impractical expectation triggers even higher frustration and sentimental feelings in parents, intensifying the pressure on children and mentally escalating the pressure [12]. Many parents also mistrust that higher education will lead to higher income, particularly lower-income families, which brings education to the next level of importance; parents are prone to pay more attention to their children’s performance but generally cannot emotionally accept the consequences, even added pressure [12].

3.3. The Overreliance on outside-family Education

The “Double Reduction” policy also revealed that current families over-rely on outside-family institutions to educate their children. Parents tend to play spectator roles in their children’s educational process, with low involvement in discovering their children’s life goals and interests. With minimal participation in their children’s path, they fail to counsel them to explore the desirable way of life. The essence of over-pressure on children originated from the satisfaction of educational performance. The research found that actively participating in children’s pursuits, restoring the necessary responsibilities from outside to family education, and navigating the correct worldviews in the study will effectively advance the desire and the effectiveness of children’s grades [13]. Parental involvement and communication of children’s behaviours have a noticeable positive influence; the more frequently they are involved, the better their grades [14]. Even the involvement of parents will not directly affect children’s grades; however, as a mediator, the involvement of parents can subsequently affect the recognition ability and collaterally affect the ability to learn [15]. The “Double Reduction” policy is a wake-up call for parents, and parents can no longer push all the educating responsibility to the faculties, attempting to redirect children’s long-term comprehensive growth and alleviate mental and physical stress from the bottom. Certain parents should reform the arbitral belief about participation in educating children, understand the significance of their children’s growth, and establish the correct educational environment in the inner family [15].

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The current “Double Reduction” study commonly concentrates on the policy’s aspects, addressing the difficulties and future sights. On the road to “Reduction,” a long-complicated pathway for the younger generations, researchers commonly have a comprehensive recognition as the decision-makers and executors, stating how the enforcers' inability to balance the private interest and public interest results in the hardness to implement the policy. However, there is still a lack of exploring the deep states of why most families are falling into the society involution trap, constantly striving to be the best. Inadequate analysis of the family environment and how the government navigate parents to a healthy, open-minded family environment. This paper is dedicated only to the searched articles, unable to cover the difference between region differences and characteristic diversity. It lacks a long-term analysis of long-term analyze the policy’s influence.

After analyzing the current studies and articles about “Double Reduction,” the purpose of reduction has undoubtedly moderated the educational involution. The policy alleviated some degree of pressure and had a positive influence on the student’s undergoing anxiety. It has shown effectiveness in reducing the burden of homework and excessive extra curriculum, and parents are forced to involution. However, at the involution's essence, policy enforcers have not yet accomplished a human-centered way of implementing the policy. Institutions and parents are commonly shifted to the underground service, increasing the regulating pressures and decision-enforcers. The root causes embedded in parents cannot liberated from educational anxiety and parents' unwillingness to accept the benefits of policy. Meanwhile, the policy’s core appears to target students; it emphasizes the actions of parents. Parents should shift outdated educational methods to more children-comprehensive-growth ways. Discovering their personality, navigating to their potential, and fostering a positive family environment that alleviates both parent's and children’s anxiety. They tend only to see the policy's limitations and cannot alter their focus on family education. Most parents did not take the responsibility of educating and exploring the best for their own children, rather than following the trends. Understanding individuals vary from others and respecting their children’s distinctiveness. The definition of “success” is determined by the children themselves rather than the society or the parent.

The effectiveness of the “Double Reduction” policy is not optimistic. Under pressure from policy executors, short-term effectiveness can be guaranteed. However, in the long term, with the weaker supervising power, the underground phenomenon will potentially accelerate the policy's failure. Therefore, the policy should be revised to be more flexible and more appropriate for the implementor, students, and parents. Eliminated the irrational beliefs that “grades are everything” diminished the anxiety and pressure’s root.

5. Recommendations

Reducing the educational burden is partially about reducing educational pressure, focusing on children’s mental and physical well-being, and shifting parental mindsets. The education process is slow progress; children need time to explore their interests, and parents facilitate their realization of their potential. The original purpose of education is to help students to comprehend the world, understand themselves, and find their way to accomplish their unique life. The examination is also essential. However, it cannot be the measurement of how “better” children are. It's more about the healthy, comprehensive development of children. The development might encounter failure, frustration, and discouragement, but these are all imperative elements of children’s complete journey. Despite the fact that educational resources are limited and require competition, it is possible to motivate students with good guidance from society and parents, given the above recommendations, to further reduce the students’ burden.

Implementors are supposed to continuously adjust the policy and regulations in detail, focusing on the practical implementation of the policy.

The implementing process is overly strict and misunderstands “reducing pressure.” The policy enforcers should clarify the policy’s true meaning and enable the students to return to a more comprehensive development. Proactively allocate educational resources and strive to allow students to receive satisfactory grades in the faculty without assistance from extracurricular activities. Meanwhile, evaluate the needs of tutoring resources in different regions and enable students who genuinely need assistance to receive the help rather than “underground” service. Reducing pressure is the main objective of the policy, implementing the service to communication and establishing councillor service for students to talk. Priority to spreading the correct mindset to society, especially parents, to understand grades and children’s lives.

Parents should establish positive communication and guidance regarding their children's cognitive path and mental health.

Parents are key influencers on the level of children’s stress. They must deeply understand the meaning of reducing the pressure of the “double reduction” policy; it is not intended to limit educational resources and cause children more educational anxiety. Parents should adapt to the new way of educating children and facilitate their time to assist children. They should help children understand the importance of having a promising education career and guide them to learn by themselves. Avoid delivering the message that grades are the determining factor in their lives. Even though some children might not be able to achieve high educational success, parents should emotionally accept the fact, discover their children's interests, and find a different path for them.

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