

Study on the Unintended Consequences of China's "Double Reduction" Policy and its Reorientation

Jingxiang Xu *

School of Public Administration, Guangxi University, Nanning, Guangxi, 530004, China

* Corresponding author Email: a2222310249@st.gxu.edu.cn

Abstract: In the process of China's educational development, the problem of excessive academic burden on students in compulsory education has existed for a long time, and has become the focus of widespread social concern. In order to reverse this situation, the policy of "double reduction" has been formally put into practice, and has achieved remarkable results in many aspects. However, in the process of implementing the policy, some unintended consequences have been gradually revealed, which to a certain extent have affected the full realization of the policy objectives and created new challenges for the education ecology. This study aims to comprehensively analyze the unintended consequences of the "Double Reduction" on different subjects from three perspectives: micro, meso, and macro, and to propose reasonable policy shifts based on them, so as to help schools, families, and the society better cope with the changes brought by the "Double Reduction" policy, and to promote the development of the compulsory education policy. Promote the comprehensive and healthy development of students in compulsory education, promote the fairness and quality of education, and build a more favorable education ecology.

Keywords: "Double-reduction"; Unintended Consequences; Policy Shift.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

The problem of excessive academic burden on primary and secondary school students has long plagued the healthy development of basic education in China. Based on this, in July 2021, the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the General Office of the State Council issued the Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework for Students in Compulsory Education and the Burden of Out-of-School Training (hereinafter referred to as the "Double Reduction" policy), which extends the scope of "burden reduction" to include both in-school and out-of-school paths. (hereinafter referred to as the "double reduction" policy), the scope of "reducing the burden" has been expanded to two paths: in-school and out-of-school, and the main bodies involved have been expanded to include the government, schools, society, training institutions and families, which means that the governance of the burden of students' academic work at the stage of compulsory education has entered into a new stage in history [1].

However, as the education reform continues to deepen, in the complex and changing environment of education reality, the "double-reducing" policy inevitably produces some unintended consequences at the social, school and family levels, which not only affects the achievement of the expected goals of the policy, but also triggers widespread concern and discussion among all sectors of the society on the effectiveness of the policy implementation. This topic in-depth investigation of these unintended consequences of the mechanism, forms of expression and their impact on the scope of the policy dynamic adjustment and steering to provide a scientific basis, so that the "Double Reduction" policy can be better adapted to the needs of the development of education, in reducing the burden on students at the same time, to ensure that the quality of education is steadily improved, and to

promote the sustainable and healthy development of the education system.

1.2. Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the unintended consequences of the implementation of the "double-decrease" policy, to explore the unintended consequences of the "Double reduction" policy at the level of different stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, schools, education and training institutions, etc.) and society, and to analyze the differences and connections of the unintended consequences among different groups.

In the theoretical sense, based on American sociologist Merton's functionalism, social policies may have both positive and negative functions, both apparent and potential functions [2]. The expected positive functions of China's "Double reduction" policy are to reduce the burden on students, to promote educational equity, and to promote the all-round development of students, etc. However, in the process of policy implementation, there are some unanticipated potential negative functions, through the study of these unintended consequences, it helps to more deeply understand the actual impact of the "Double reduction" policy, and provides a theoretical basis for the adjustment and transformation of the policy.

In practical significance, on the one hand, this study can help people better understand the unintended consequences of the "Double reduction" policy, and discover various unforeseen problems in the implementation of the policy in a timely manner, so as to provide a basis for the adjustment and improvement of the subsequent policy; on the other hand, this study can put forward countermeasure suggestions for the subsequent optimization of the "Double reduction" policy, so as to achieve the goals of promoting the comprehensive development of students, guiding parents to establish a correct concept of education, and promoting the healthy development of the education market.

1.3. Synthesis of Relevant Studies

1.3.1. Research on Policy Objectives

The agenda of educational policy making has been a key topic of discussion among scholars at home and abroad. Some scholars have taken Singapore and Finland as examples to analyze the degree of stakeholder participation in the development of education policy in the two countries, emphasizing the importance of stakeholder participation in the development of education policy [3]. The introduction of China's "Double reduction" policy has triggered extensive changes in the field of education, and many scholars have studied the policy from different angles. Some scholars have applied John W. Kingdon's multi-source flow theoretical model framework, combined with the local characteristics of China's education policy to reduce the burden, and proposed an improved multi-source flow model to describe and analyze the agenda of the "Double reduction" policy [4].

1.3.2. Implementation of Impact Studies

After the gradual implementation of the "Double reduction" policy, scholars have gradually shifted the direction of their research on the policy to the related impact and improvement measures. Some scholars have taken parents of primary and secondary schools in 29 provinces of China as their research subjects to investigate whether parental anxiety has been relieved under the "Double reduction" pattern [5]. Some scholars have also investigated the current status of implementation, satisfaction, influencing factors and outstanding problems of students in Xuchang City, Henan Province, starting from the reaction and impact of the Double reduction on families [6].

1.3.3. Research on Recommendations

On the basis of the unsatisfactory implementation of the "Double reduction" policy, academics have gradually begun to explore related optimization paths. Some scholars have analyzed the online public opinion of the Double reduction policy and proposed that public opinion monitoring and guidance should be carried out throughout the whole process of education policy formulation, release and implementation, so as to improve the scientific nature of policy formulation and reduce the public opinion resistance in the process of implementing the new policy [7]. Other scholars have proposed a six-dimensional optimization path for primary and secondary school physical education teachers, in order to provide reference for primary and secondary school physical education teachers to better carry out their work in the context of "Double reduction" [8].

1.4. Research Methodology and Innovations

This study employs content analysis to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the "Double reduction" policy and its social repercussions by analyzing textual information such as relevant policy documents, news reports, and expert interpretations, and to identify problems and challenges in the process of implementing the policy, and then to explore its unintended consequences. At the same time, by comparing the contents of different time periods, it reveals the changes in the effects of the policy and the shifting trends.

The literature research method is an important foundation of this study. This study collects various types of information, such as policy documents, academic papers, research reports, news reports, statistics, etc., to sort out the viewpoints and methods of the relevant literature and analyze the strengths and shortcomings of the existing studies, so as to provide

references and points of entry for the research.

The interview method helps to gain a deeper understanding of the real ideas and needs of all parties. In this study, a semi-structured interview method was adopted, with the interview subjects mainly targeting students and parents, and the outline of the interview was designed around the core theme of the unintended consequences of the policy and its turnaround, while also allowing for the pursuit of some important emerging content related to the theme, based on the answers of the interviewees.

The innovation of this study is mainly reflected in the research perspective. While previous policy research on Double reduction often focuses on a single subject, this study categorizes multiple subjects, such as students, parents, schools, the market, and society, into macro, meso, and micro levels, and constructs a research framework to comprehensively examine the unintended consequences of the Double reduction policy among different subjects.

2. Unintended Consequences of the "Double Reduction" Policy

2.1. Micro Level - Potential Negative Functions at Student and Parent

2.1.1. Internalization of Competitive Academic Pressures

One of the original purposes of the "Double reduction" policy is to reduce the academic burden and competitive pressure on students, but in the actual implementation process, the competitive pressure on students' studies has not really been eliminated, but has instead shown a tendency to become internalized, with potential negative impacts on students' physical and mental health and all-round development.

Within schools, although the "Double reduction" policy attempts to create a relatively relaxed learning atmosphere through measures such as reducing the amount of homework and the number of examinations, it is undeniable that competition among students will continue to exist for a long time, and has become more intense in some respects. Due to the scarcity of quality educational resources, such as the limited number of enrollment places in key high schools and universities, students are still under tremendous pressure to advance to higher education. As a result, achievement rankings remain an important measure of students' learning outcomes in classes, and students are forced to study hard in order to achieve excellent achievement rankings in their classes and grades, and the pressure of competition has not diminished at all. According to the research, in a class in secondary school A, although the school strictly follows the requirements of the "Double reduction" policy and reduces the amount of written assignments and the number of examinations, the atmosphere of competition among students has become stronger. After each examination, students would compare their results in private, with those with good grades worried about being overtaken and those with slightly lower grades desperately trying to catch up, an invisible competitive pressure that made students feel anxious and exhausted.

In addition, after the implementation of the policy, there is a lack of effective channels for students to channel their competitive academic pressure. In the past, students could make up for their academic deficiencies and enhance their competitiveness by participating in off-campus training. However, now that off-campus training is subject to stringent restrictions, students have lost this traditional channel that can release pressure and enhance their abilities. Although schools

have launched after-school services, there is a lack of professional psychological counseling and effective diversionary measures for the psychological pressure arising from students' academic competition. Some students do not know how to regulate their emotions and state of mind in the face of the pressure of academic competition, leading to the gradual growth of anxiety, depression and other psychological problems.

2.1.2. Increased Parental Anxiety About Education

Educational anxiety arises in the process of education, pointing to the parents due to the social, school, family and other external environments or personal internal factors of uncertainty about the future of the impact of agitation, worry, anxiety, panic and other emotions [9]. As early as before the implementation of the "Double reduction" policy, there have been related studies showing that the direct internal factor of parents' anxiety is the high educational expectations that do not take into account the actual situation, parents' fear of failing to educate their children and their anxiety are directly proportional to their educational expectations and family investment [10]. As the competition for higher education intensifies, the large amount of time, resources and money spent by parents on education, as well as the gradual modeling of parents' concepts of parenting, have all contributed to the lingering educational worries of parents.

After the full implementation of the policy, through a

questionnaire survey of parents of students in the third grade of primary school B, 83% of the parents interviewed indicated that they had become more sensitive and anxious about their children's academic performance and performance in school, and were concerned that their children would not be able to keep up with the school's teaching progress and that their academic performance would decline in the absence of supplemental out-of-school training (Figure 1); the influence of traditional educational concepts on parents is equally deep-rooted, and under the Confucian cultural values, people associate education with the individual's economic success and the acquisition of social status, and attach great importance to academic achievement, and many parents still believe that their children's future depends entirely on academic achievement and advancement to higher education, a notion that makes them overly concerned about their children's academic performance [11]. In addition, with the development of society and the increasing competition for employment, parents are worried that their children will not be able to gain a foothold in the future competition, and therefore they want their children to have advantages in all aspects. All these factors may cause parents' anxiety to increase rather than decrease in the context of the "Double reduction", leading them to be too strict in their children's education, thus restricting their children's independent development and individual growth.

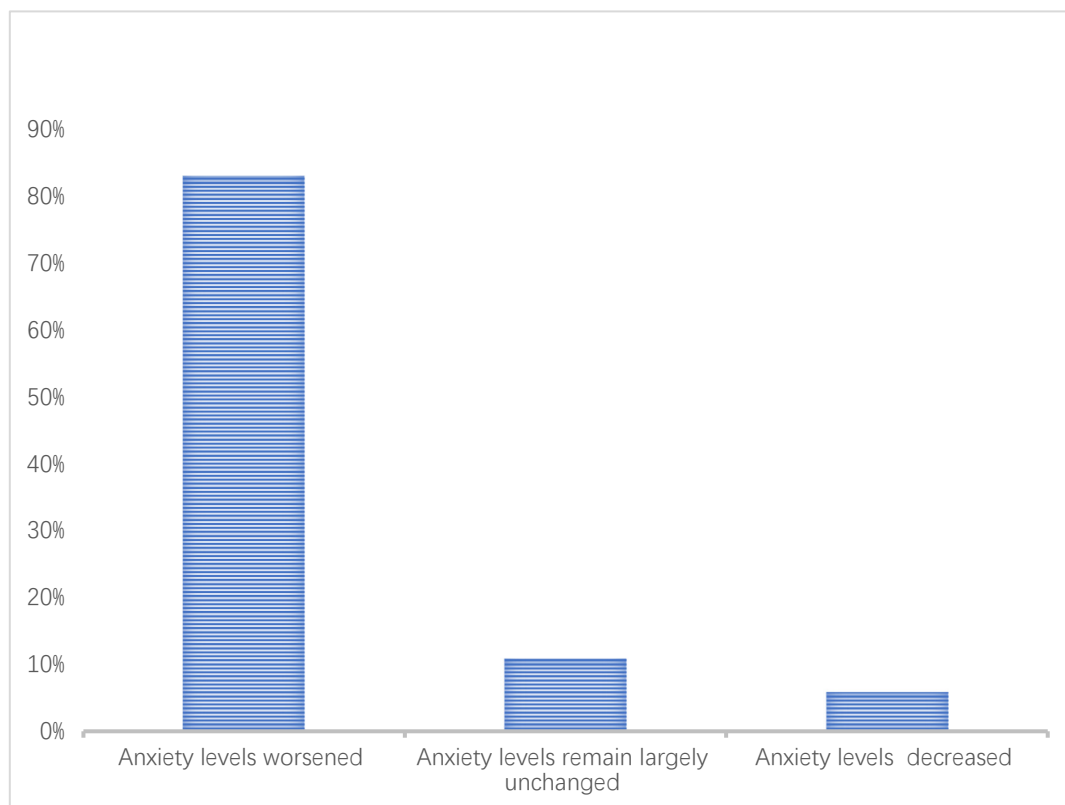


Figure 1. Changes in parental anxiety following the implementation of the "Double reduction" policy

2.2. Meso Level - Potential Negative Functions at the School and Teaching Market

2.2.1. Teaching Irrationality Constrains Schools from Reducing Burdens

The "Double reduction" policy clearly sets out the objectives of further improving the quality of school education and teaching and the level of service, making homework assignments more scientific and reasonable,

providing after-school services that basically meet the needs of students, and returning student learning to the school campus in a better way, i.e., to "reduce the burden" while at the same time "improving quality". This also means that the cooperation between schools and families needs to be closer and more frequent [12]. However, after the introduction of the "Double reduction" policy, students' learning time has been reduced. Therefore, the classroom teaching in schools must improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching to ensure

that students can complete their homework efficiently, have fewer difficulties in after-school services, and have enough time to develop their personalities after school. However, China's current form of teaching organization still follows the traditional classroom teaching system, the teacher in the teaching of the dominant position, the students are in a passive position. Most of the time, teachers still take the method of forced indoctrination, this traditional teaching method is likely to lead to a decline in students' interest in learning, the classroom teaching effect is not good, the students' ability to acquire knowledge is low. In addition, it is easy to lead to an increase in the number of student problems in after-school services, increasing the burden of after-school service teachers and putting the after-school service "to improve quality and efficiency" in a difficult situation.

2.2.2. Invisible Variants of Subject-Based Training

The survey found that "one-to-one private tutoring" is one of the common forms of invisible variations of discipline-based training. Some in-service teachers or people with subject matter expertise, through acquaintances, online platforms and other channels, to door-to-door tutoring way to carry out discipline-based training. This form of training is highly covert and difficult to control. In addition, illegal training in the name of "high-end home economics" and "live-in teachers" also occurs from time to time. Some organizations or individuals provide discipline-based training to students in the name of providing domestic help. When recruiting domestic helpers, they require them to have the ability to teach relevant subjects, and when they move into students' homes, they not only undertake household chores, but also make use of their spare time to provide subject tutoring for students. From the perspective of educational equity, these hidden training methods enable families with superior economic conditions to provide more learning opportunities for their children, further widening the education gap between students from different families, violating the original intent of the "Double reduction" policy to promote educational equity, and increasing the difficulty of supervision also makes the implementation of the policy much less effective.

2.3. Macro Level - Potential Negative Functioning at the Societal

2.3.1. Emerging Issues in the Allocation of Resources for Education

First, competition for quality education resources will become more intense. After the implementation of the "Double reduction", parents' demand for comprehensive quality training for their children has increased, and the competition for quality education resources may become more intense. The limited number of enrolment places in high-quality schools and places for special education activities has led to increased competition among parents for these resources for their children, which may give rise to some social conflicts. In addition, the gap between urban and rural education resources may widen further. Urban areas are already better than rural areas in terms of the richness and diversity of educational resources, and after the implementation of the "Double reduction" policy, children in urban areas will have more opportunities to participate in a variety of cultural, artistic, scientific and technological activities, and come into contact with a wider range of knowledge and information. In contrast, in rural areas, children's after-school lives may remain relatively

monotonous due to the relative lack of resources, which may further widen the gap between urban and rural education in terms of comprehensive quality development.

2.3.2. The Job Market Has Taken Some Hits

It goes without saying that the implementation of the "Double reduction" policy has led to a drastic reduction in the scale of the off-campus training industry, and a large number of education and training organizations have closed down or transformed, resulting in the unemployment of many employees in the education and training industry. These people need to look for employment opportunities again, and a considerable number of them will face the pressure of career transition, which will bring certain unstable factors to the employment market. At the same time, the development of education-related industries will also be affected: the upstream and downstream related industries of the off-campus training industry, such as the publication of teaching materials, the manufacturing of education and training facilities, and online education platforms, have also been impacted to varying degrees, resulting in a slowdown in the development of these industries, which will in turn affect the employment and incomes of the relevant practitioners.

3. Double Reduction Policy Steering Strategy

3.1. Policy Improvement and Refinement

3.1.1. Refinement of Policy Details

Clearly defining the criteria for stealth training is a matter of urgency. The relevant departments should issue specific identification methods to clearly define the invisible training behaviors carried out in the name of "one-on-one" tutoring, live-in teachers, and high-end housekeeping. Provide that any paid tutoring in the disciplines carried out in residents' homes and hidden places, and not in line with the policy requirements of the form of training, all belong to the category of invisible training. The main body of the determination of stealth training is clearly defined, and a multi departmental coordinated determination mechanism is established; education, market supervision, public security and other departments should strengthen their cooperation in determining, investigating and dealing with stealth training behaviors.

In addition, improving the monitoring mechanism for policy implementation is equally crucial. A sound monitoring system for policy implementation has been established, and inspection of the implementation of the "Double reduction" policy by local governments and relevant departments have been strengthened. Supervision teams have been set up to regularly inspect the implementation of the policy in various places, and to identify and correct deviations and problems in the implementation of the policy in a timely manner. A reporting and reward system has been established to encourage the public to report irregular training practices and poor policy implementation, and certain rewards are given for substantiated reports, giving full play to the role of social supervision.

3.1.2. Dynamic Adjustment and Optimization

The establishment of a mechanism for tracking and evaluating the effects of policy implementation is the basis for realizing dynamic adjustment. The education sector should organize regular assessments of the effects of the implementation of the "Double reduction" policy, using

questionnaires, field visits and data analysis to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the policy's implementation on the academic burden of students, the educational anxiety of parents, the regulation of the training market, and the quality of school education. Third-party evaluations can be conducted by commissioning relevant research organizations to ensure that the results are objective and fair.

Timely adjustment of policy content based on evaluation results is the key to dynamic adjustment. Local governments should take into account the actual situation, consider urban-rural and inter-school differences, and implement the Double reduction policy according to local conditions, so as to avoid the problem of one-size-fits-all policy implementation. Schools should be given more autonomy in the implementation of the Double reduction policy, be allowed to design the content of after-school services, and be supported to carry out characteristic teaching reforms in accordance with the actual situation [13].

3.2. Changes in the Concept of Education

3.2.1. Promoting Reform of the Education Evaluation System

The traditional education evaluation system, in which scores are the only criterion, pays too much attention to students' academic performance and ignores their comprehensive quality and personality development, leading to a serious tendency towards utilitarianism and test-taking in education. In order to change this situation, it is necessary to establish a diversified educational evaluation system to comprehensively, objectively and scientifically evaluate the development of students.

In terms of the content of evaluation, emphasis should be placed on the comprehensive quality evaluation of students. In addition to academic achievements, attention should be paid to students' performance in moral development, physical and mental health, artistic literacy, social practice and so on. In terms of moral development, students' moral character, behavioral habits and sense of social responsibility are evaluated; in terms of physical and mental health, attention is paid to students' mental health, physical exercise habits, etc.; in terms of artistic literacy, students' interests and abilities in music, art, dance and other artistic fields are assessed; and in terms of social practice, students' experiences and achievements in participating in volunteer services and social practice activities are examined.

Evaluation methods should also be diversified, and a combination of process evaluation and outcome evaluation can be used. Process evaluation focuses on students' performance in the learning process, such as classroom participation, completion of homework, learning attitude, innovative thinking and so on. Outcome-based evaluation focuses on students' learning outcomes, such as test scores, work presentation, project completion, etc., and provides a comprehensive evaluation of students' learning outcomes. By combining process evaluation with outcome evaluation, it can provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' learning and avoid the one-sidedness of evaluating students purely on the basis of examination results.

3.2.2. Adherence to a Combination of Publicity and Communication

Schools, as the main venue for education, should play an active role in publicizing the policy and promoting home-school cooperation more frequently and in a more mature

manner. This can be done by holding parent-teacher conferences, organizing special lectures, inviting education experts to give parents an in-depth explanation of the "Double reduction" policy, and analyzing the positive impact of the policy on students' growth and education development. Schools can also publicize the "Double reduction" policy to students in the form of thematic class meetings, so that students can understand the content and purpose of the policy, and be guided to set up a correct concept of learning and rationalize their after-school time. On the part of the government, new media platforms can be utilized to publicize the policy. Through new media platforms such as the official website, WeChat and Weibo, relevant information on the "Double reduction" policy, interpretive articles and case studies are released, so as to enable parents and the community to better understand the policy in an easy-to-understand language and in a vivid and imaginative form.

3.3. Optimizing the Allocation of Educational Resources

3.3.1. Narrowing The Gap in Funding and Equipment Conditions

At present, the basic balanced results of compulsory education should be further consolidated, public financial investment in compulsory education should continue to be increased, and compulsory education should always be made a priority for safeguarding, with an emphasis on tilting towards schools in rural and remote areas; the central government's transfer of financial resources to education in central and western, remote and impoverished areas should be further increased, so as to promote a balanced allocation of funding for compulsory education. At the same time, it is promoting the standardization of primary and secondary schools, comprehensively improving the conditions of schools in impoverished areas, and narrowing the gap between urban and rural areas and between schools in terms of conditions of schooling. Each region should also take into account the actual situation and draw up lower and upper limits for the indicators for standardized construction of compulsory education schools, and strictly ensure that the standards are higher than the lower bottom line.

3.3.2. Narrowing the Gap in Teacher Conditions

Increasing training for teachers in rural areas, organizing regular professional training, academic seminars and teaching observation activities for teachers, and improving their teaching standards and professionalism. In response to the teaching requirements under the "Double reduction" policy, training in homework design, classroom teaching innovation, and after-school service organization has been carried out to enable teachers to better adapt to the new educational situation; recruitment and training of rural teachers specializing in music, physical education, and aesthetics has been increased in an effort to make up for the vacancies of teachers in some of the curricula. Strong efforts have been made to raise the salaries of rural teachers, improve the working environment in rural schools, and attract outstanding talent to teach in rural schools through policy favoritism.

4. Conclusion and Outlook

4.1. Summary of the Study

This study conducts an in-depth discussion on the unintended consequences of the "Double reduction" policy and its steering, and discusses them from three perspectives:

micro, meso, and macro, respectively, revealing the potential negative functions of the Double reduction under a number of subjects, such as the internalization of the pressure of academic competition and the increase of parental educational anxiety, etc., and addressing a series of steering strategies for A series of steering strategies are proposed to address these problems, such as refining the policy details, clarifying the definition criteria of invisible training, standardizing non-disciplinary training, and improving the monitoring mechanism of policy implementation; establishing a tracking and evaluation mechanism for the implementation effect of the policy, dynamically adjusting and optimizing the policy according to the results of the evaluation in a timely manner, and focusing on the coordination and cooperation with other education policies, try to form operational policy recommendations to promote the fair and high-quality development of education, alleviate educational anxiety, and realize the optimal allocation of educational resources.

4.2. Research Shortcomings and Outlook

This study has achieved some results in exploring the unintended consequences of the "Double reduction" policy and its steering process, but there are still some shortcomings.

Regarding the study sample, due to time and resource constraints, the cases and survey respondents selected for this study mainly focus on some regions and schools, and the coverage of the sample is not broad enough, which may not be able to comprehensively reflect the problems and differences in the implementation of the "Double reduction" policy in different regions and types of schools. Future studies may further expand the sample to cover more regions, including areas with different levels of economic development in the east, central and west, as well as schools at different levels, such as cities, counties and townships, so as to make the results of the study more general and representative.

In terms of research depth, this study has not gone far enough in exploring certain factors. For example, regarding the constraints of the traditional concept of education evaluation, although its impact on the implementation of the "Double reduction" policy is recognized, the study is not systematic and in-depth enough in terms of the specific paths and methods of how to fundamentally change this concept and promote the reform of the education evaluation system. Future research could use more in-depth theoretical analysis and empirical research methods to provide a basis for developing more effective strategies for changing educational perceptions.

In terms of research methodology, although this study used a variety of methods such as literature research method, content analysis method, questionnaire survey method and interview method, there is still room for improvement in the integration and synergy of methods. Future research can further strengthen the mutual validation and supplementation between different research methods to improve the reliability and validity of the research results. On the basis of the questionnaire survey, it can be combined with big data analysis to obtain more comprehensive and accurate information, and conduct a more in-depth quantitative analysis of the effects and unintended consequences of the implementation of the "Double reduction" policy. At the same time, the combination of case studies and theoretical studies should be strengthened, so that theoretical views of a general

nature can be refined through in-depth analysis of typical cases, providing more solid theoretical support for the improvement and implementation of the policy.

Looking ahead, research on the "Double reduction" policy can be carried out in the following directions. The first is to pay attention to the relationship between the "Double reduction" policy and educational equity, and to conduct in-depth studies on the impact of the implementation of the policy on the quality of education received by students from different regions and family backgrounds, as well as on how to further promote the realization of educational equity through policy adjustments. Second, to study the long-term impact of the "Double reduction" policy on students' physical and mental health and all-round development, and to assess the impact of the policy on students' interest in learning, motivation to learn, mental health, overall quality, etc. through long-term tracking surveys, with a view to providing a scientific basis for the continuous optimization of the education policy. Thirdly, we will explore the effective mode of collaborative parenting among families, schools and society in the context of the "Double reduction" policy, and study how to strengthen communication and cooperation among families, schools and society to form a synergy in education and jointly promote the growth and development of students.

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