

Evaluating the Impact of Extracurricular English Tutoring on Primary Students' Performance under China's 'Double Reduction' Policy

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Abstract: Since the emergence of the “going abroad fever” in the 1980s, extracurricular English tutoring has flourished in China, with many students attending private lessons to improve their performance. However, the implementation of the “Double Reduction” policy has aimed to relieve academic burden and regulate after-school tutoring. This study examines the impact of extracurricular English tutoring on primary school students' English performance under this policy. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining a questionnaire survey of 102 fourth-grade students at an experimental elementary school in Xi'an with interviews involving three English teachers and three students. The research investigates students' participation in tutoring, changes in academic performance before and after the policy, and their attitudes toward the policy. Results show that most students engaged in tutoring before the policy and benefited from it academically. These findings contribute to understanding how educational reforms affect student outcomes and provide practical implications for improving English education in primary schools without relying on external tutoring.

Keywords: English Extracurricular Tutoring Classes, “Double Reduction” Policy, Learning Effects.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Since the 1980s, China has witnessed a significant “study abroad fever,” which has heightened the national emphasis on English education. This surge in interest laid the foundation for the emergence of large-scale private English tutoring institutions such as New Oriental. For this reason, New Oriental was established as China's first English training institution to be listed in the United States. The parallel expansion of private tutoring institutions and the formal inclusion of English in primary school curricula further reinforced the perception that early English acquisition was essential for academic success. This growing enthusiasm was also reflected in popular media and cultural narratives of the time [1-2].

With the acceleration of China's economic development and globalization, English, as the most widely used language in the world, is constantly affecting daily communication and professional settings. As an increasing number of foreign companies move into entire China and international trade has become increasingly frequent, people gradually realize that English is an essential part of improving their competitiveness, and their enthusiasm for English learning is increasing. For instance, in a public primary school in Xi'an's Beilin District, 70 out of 102 fourth-grade students (approximately 70%) reported participating in extracurricular English tutoring, reflecting the widespread reliance on after-school English instruction among young learners. The proportion of fourth-graders who have attended English tutoring classes reaches almost 70%, which shows a broad audience for extracurricular English tutoring classes. Meanwhile, as of May 2014, New Oriental had set up 56 schools, 31 bookstores, and 703 learning centers in 50 cities across China. Furthermore, as of February 28, 2021, the total number of New Oriental schools and learning centers was 1,625. From

2014 to 2021, there was a considerable increase of 922 schools in 7 years. Since its inception, the New Oriental has accumulated 20 million students [3].

Based on the above data, it is not difficult to see that English extracurricular coaching classes have flourished like mushrooms over the past two decades. Not until July 25, 2021, did the state introduce the “Regulations on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Off-Campus Training for Students in Compulsory Education,” commonly known as the “double reduction” policy.

1.2. Significance and Purpose of the Research

By investigating the effect of extracurricular English tutoring classes on students' English performance, this study will first objectively affirm the role of extracurricular English tutoring classes on students' English performance, interest, and initiative in learning English; second, it will help to further improve the English teaching methods in schools and improve the quality of English teaching in schools, followed by further improvement of English teaching methods, objectively recognizing the role of the “double reduction” policy, and anticipating how students can learn English better if there are no extracurricular tutoring classes in the future.

The purpose of this study is threefold: first, to determine the changes in students' English performance before and after the “double reduction” policy, with and without tutoring classes; second, to investigate the effect of extracurricular subject tutoring on students' English learning, such as the initiative, interest, and necessity of English learning; third, to find out whether the implementation of the “double reduction” policy has achieved the target effect and whether it has any impact on students' English performance.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Research at Home

Several Chinese scholars have argued that extracurricular tutoring can enhance students' English proficiency, motivation, and academic performance. For example, Zeng (2015) noted that tutoring institutions can foster interest in English learning and contribute to improved scores. Similarly, Tong (2017) suggested that such programs, especially those offering thematic instruction and oral practice, can build students' confidence and stimulate their enthusiasm for English. However, other scholars present opposing views. Ma (2018) argued that tutoring may hinder the development of comprehensive English skills and impose additional learning burdens.

2.2. Research Abroad

Compared to research conducted in China, international studies on extracurricular tutoring have placed greater emphasis on conceptual frameworks and empirical analyses of its content and effects [1]. A foundational contribution to this field is the term "shadow education," coined by Stevenson and Baker (1992, p. 1640), which defines extracurricular tutoring as supplementary educational activities aimed at enhancing students' performance in mainstream curricula [10]. This concept has been widely adopted in subsequent studies to explore the role of tutoring in diverse educational contexts. For instance, Ha and Park (2020) conducted a longitudinal study in South Korea, analyzing data from 1,200 middle school students to examine the correlation between private tutoring participation and academic achievement [9]. Their findings indicated that structured after-school programs significantly improved students' standardized test scores in English and mathematics. Similarly, Tse (2014) compared the academic outcomes of 500 Hong Kong students enrolled in English tutoring classes with a control group, revealing that tutored students demonstrated higher proficiency in writing and speaking tasks [11].

International research generally acknowledges that extracurricular tutoring positively impacts English learning outcomes, particularly through individualized pedagogical approaches. Small-group or one-on-one tutoring sessions, as observed in studies from Japan and the United States (e.g., Dawson, 2018), enable tailored instruction that addresses learners' specific needs. Such formats not only foster engagement but also create immersive language environments conducive to skill development. Additionally, tutoring programs have been shown to enhance critical thinking and establish consistent listening-speaking practice habits (Lee & Smith, 2019).

However, scholars also caution against potential drawbacks. Excessive reliance on tutoring may increase students' cognitive load, reduce classroom participation efficiency, and perpetuate inequities due to non-professional teaching practices (Bray, 2021) [3]. These concerns highlight the need for balanced integration of tutoring within formal education systems. In addition, English subject tutoring can also improve students' thinking skills and help them develop good English listening and speaking habits. Therefore, in order to better understand the impact of extracurricular tutoring on students' English performance in the context of the "double reduction" policy, we will conduct a more in-depth study based on practical research and literature [4].

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Respondents

According to the purpose of this study, a questionnaire survey was conducted among Grade 4 students in a public primary school in the Beilin District of Xi'an, and interviews were conducted with three English teachers serving and three students currently studying in this school. In this study, 110 questionnaires were distributed; 104 were recovered, and the recovery rate was 94.55%. There were 102 valid questionnaires, with an effective response rate of 98.08%.

3.2. Research Methodology

3.2.1. Literature Research Method

The most common research method used in thesis writing is the literature method. The literature review method is mainly based on the purpose of this research, collecting and screening relevant papers in CNKI and other paper platforms to understand the current status and results of research in related fields. Understanding the research status and related achievements can fully facilitate the understanding of the subject to be studied. By inputting keywords such as "English tutoring", "after-school tutoring", "the effect of after-school tutoring on achievement", "after-school programs", and other keywords in CNKI and other paper platforms, we were able to find a number of papers that were required. At the same time, the study of the content of these papers and questionnaire survey in some of the design, thinking, and reference for writing their own questionnaire has laid a good foundation for the current thesis writing.

3.2.2. Questionnaire Method

A questionnaire survey is a survey method commonly used in social life. It asks questions in writing, distributes questionnaires to respondents, collects and sorts out questionnaire data, analyzes the data according to the collected data, and draws relevant conclusions [5].

In this study, the fourth-grade students of an experimental primary school in the Beilin District of Xi'an City are selected as the subjects of the questionnaire survey, and a questionnaire survey entitled "A questionnaire survey on the analysis of effects of extracurricular class tutoring on students' English performance under the 'double reduction' policy" is issued to the subjects.

There were 15 questions in the questionnaire, which were mainly investigated from the following aspects: the situation of students' participation in English tutorial classes (specific questions include whether you have participated in English extracurricular tutoring classes, how many English extracurricular tutorial classes you have participated in before, whether you have participated in English tutorial classes after the implementation of the "double reduction" policy, and how many; as the "double reduction" policy continues to be implemented, do you think you will continue to attend extracurricular English classes in the future?), the reasons for attending extracurricular English classes (specific questions include why you choose to attend extracurricular English classes), etc.

4. Analysis of Research Results

4.1. Questionnaire Results and Analysis

4.1.1. The Situation of Participation in English Extracurricular Classes

From Table 1, we can see that 70 out of 102 students in

grade 4 participated in English extracurricular tutoring classes, accounting for 68.63% of the total number of students in the grade. It can be seen that there are many students who have participated in English extracurricular tutoring classes [6]. According to Table 2, of the 70 students who attended the English extracurricular classes, more than half attended one

English tutoring class, while the remaining few attended two English tutoring classes, and very few attended three or more English tutoring classes. [7]. This shows that the “double reduction” policy has a significant impact on student participation in extracurricular classes.

Table 1. Have you ever attended the English extracurricular tutoring classes?

	Number of people	Valid Percent
Yes	70	68.63%
No	32	31.37%
Total	102	100.00%

Table 2. How many English tutoring classes have you attended in the past?

	Number of people	Valid Percent
Never attended	32	31.37%
One	52	50.98%
Two	16	15.69%
Three and more	2	1.96%
Total	102	100.00%

4.1.2. The Impact of Extra-curricular English Tutoring Classes on Students' English Learning

Extra-curricular English classes have been effective in improving the performance of most students. We can see that 53 out of 70 students who attended the English extracurricular tutoring class think that the English extracurricular tutoring class increases students' interest in English learning, accounting for about 75.71% of all students who have attended the English extracurricular tutoring class. Only 13 of them believed that the extracurricular English classes had no effect on their interest in English learning, and four of them

decreased their interest in English learning after taking the extracurricular English classes, accounting for 18.57% and 5.71% of the total number of students who have taken the extracurricular English classes, respectively. The total number of these two cases was 24.28%, which is a small percentage. Therefore, in general, extracurricular English classes have served to increase students' interest in English learning [8].

Combined with the results in Figure 1 again, it can be seen that students think that the main factors that currently affect their English performance improvement are the quality of completing homework and reviewing after class.

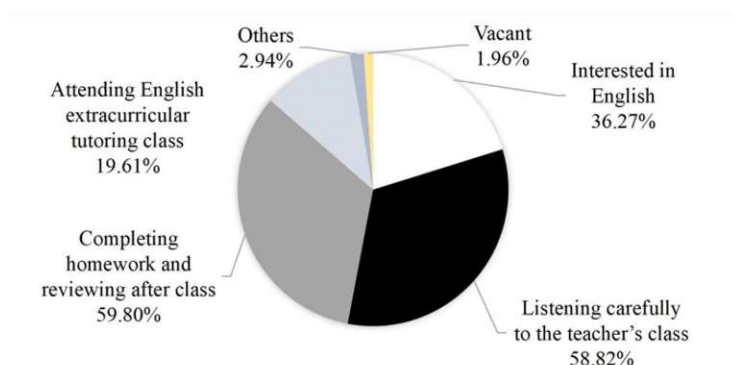


Figure 1. What is the main reason, at present, for your improvement in English performance? (Multiple-choice question)

4.1.3. Students' Views on the “Double Reduction” Policy

The number of students (66.66%) reaches 68 who believe that the “double reduction” policy has played a role in reducing the burden on students. In other words, more than half of the students believed that the “double reduction” policy had a role in reducing the burden on students. Only 31 (30.39%) people think the “double reduction” policy has a

modest effect. Nevertheless, for 102 people, no one considers that the “double reduction” policy has not played a role in reducing the burden. Therefore, from the students' answers, the implementation of the “double reduction” policy achieved the purpose of reducing students' learning burden.

5. Conclusion

Based on the above findings, we can draw the following conclusions. First, extra-curricular English tutoring classes do have a certain effect on the improvement of English performance, but there is no positive correlation. By comparing the English scores of students who did not attend extracurricular English classes after the “double reduction” policy, we find that some of the students’ English scores can also increase, but most of them are still in the range of increasing and maintaining no change. Third, the students’ English grades were closely related to their subjective awareness. Fourth, the “double reduction” policy has a significant effect on reducing the burden of learning. Most students believe that the “double reduction” policy has indeed reduced their burden. Their most intuitive understanding of the “double reduction” policy is the addition of after-school services and the fact that the amount of homework is now less than before. The students’ learning tasks were also attenuated. Fifth, the implementation of the “double reduction” policy will also increase students’ frequency of asking teachers for help and their ability to learn independently.

Finally, we can also find that as the “double reduction” policy continues to be implemented, the number of people involved in extracurricular English classes will gradually decrease, extracurricular classes will slowly disappear, and education will slowly return to its original proper track.

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