The Achievements, Challenges and Future Path of the "Double Reduction" Policy Implementation

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Abstract. Alleviating the burdens of students and parents constitutes the key objective of the "Double Reduction" Policy and boost public satisfaction with education by improving in-school classroom teaching quality, offering after-school tutoring, and regulating off-campus academic training institutions. Since its implementation, notable progress has been made with active cooperation from schools, parents, and institutions. However, challenges persist across subjects, and developing differentiated, locally tailored solutions aligned with the times has become key to deepening the policy. Using a literature review method, this study systematically sorts out domestic and international education burden-reduction theories, educational policy analysis frameworks, and relevant "Double Reduction" policy texts, statistical data, and academic research. While achievements are evident—restructured school after-school services, reduced parental burdens, standardized off-campus institutions, and improved educational ecosystem and satisfaction—problems remain: insufficient school teaching staff, unmet curriculum demands, parental concerns over academic outcomes (leading some to turn to high-priced non-academic training), students' poor adaptation and low autonomy, off-campus institutions' financial strains and uncertain transformation prospects, and significant gaps in educational resources and policy implementation between developed and underdeveloped regions (with greater implementation difficulties in the latter). Due to subject-specific demand differences and uneven regional educational development, dynamic policy optimization is needed. Moving forward, a multi-dimensional, collaborative governance system should be built: strengthen teacher training and curriculum resource development in schools, guide parents' educational concepts, improve non-academic training supervision, and establish long-term educational assistance mechanisms for underdeveloped areas to realize the high-quality advancement of basic education.

Keywords: The "Double Reduction" policy Reduce burden; Off-campus training institutions; Middle school students.

1. Introduction

Education, as a major national and Party undertaking, carries the expectations of families and the future of the nation. However, under the influence of "educational utilitarianism" and the "theater effect", China's educational stage was long trapped in a development predicament, and the imbalance of the educational ecosystem became the focus of anxiety throughout society. The excessive homework load on primary and secondary school students coupled with the growing disorder in off-campus train in, such as students studying beyond their capacity in advance, have all become serious problems.

Meanwhile, students' physical and mental health is facing severe challenges. The issue of students' physical fitness has drawn widespread attention from society. In some regions, physical education scores have also been included in the high school entrance examination results, becoming an important assessment content for high school admission.

The reason why educational issues have drawn the attention of the entire society lies in the fact that they affect the broadest range of people's livelihood interests, have different impacts on different subjects, and are related to social equity and social mobility. For individuals, education is a way to realize their life value. For families, it holds the hope of social class advancement. For a country, it is the cornerstone for cultivating qualified citizens and innovative talents. However, when education degenerates into a "tool for social stratification", the "worship of academic qualifications" leads to

the devaluation of academic qualifications and employment predicaments, and the role of teachers is distorted from "teaching and nurturing" to a tool for making profits, the foundation of social development will be shaken. This chain reaction not only affects intergenerational equity but also restricts the supply of talents for high-quality development. Rectifying educational chaos and reshaping the educational ecosystem have become urgent tasks of The Times. Although China has rolled out a series of policies targeting the alleviation of students' academic burden, the issue of excessive academic pressure has yet to be fully resolved, driven by the unrestrained expansion of off-campus training and capital influx.

It was not until July 2021 that the Ministry of Education promulgated the "Opinions on Further Reducing the Homework Burden and Off-Campus Training Burden of Students in the Compulsory Education Stage" (hereinafter referred to as the "Double Reduction" Policy), which signaled the official initiation of an unprecedented educational reform. Since the policy was implemented, the amount of homework for students has significantly decreased, but the educational burden and the anxiety of "involution" remain the focus of widespread concern in Chinese society in recent years. Social attitudes toward the "Double Reduction" Policy are divided. On one hand, some hold strong expectations, anticipating that genuine burden alleviation can be achieved through the policy. On the other hand, there is a contrasting viewpoint that the policy merely transfers the educational burden to alternative forms, failing to fulfill the core goal of real burden reduction. Meanwhile, different entities such as schools, students, teachers and after-school education institutions are also confronted with numerous differentiated challenges - schools need to restructure their after-school service systems, students need to adapt to the change in learning pace, teachers need to bear heavier teaching and management pressures, and after-school education institutions are faced with the choice of transformation or withdrawal. Against the aforementioned realistic context, this paper centers on the "Double Reduction" Policy—a pivotal educational reform initiative. By clarifying the practical logic behind its formulation, social responses following implementation, and the challenges encountered by various stakeholders, it seeks to offer a reference for grasping the path and orientation of basic education reform in the new era.

2. Policy Analysis of the "Double Reduction" Policy

To thoroughly assess the existing implementation status and evolving trends of the "Double Reduction" Policy, the following will apply the SWOT theoretical framework to comprehensively sort out the core value, implementation shortcomings, development opportunities and potential risks of the policy in the optimization of the educational ecosystem from four dimensions: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

2.1. Strengths

The policy orientation of the "Double Reduction" aligns with the inherent demands of education. It directly targets the core contradiction in compulsory education—"burden reduction at school yet burden increase off campus". By regulating off-campus subject-based training and consolidating schools' dominant role in education, the policy accurately responds to the calls for educational equity and students' healthy physical and mental development. Its goals are highly consistent with public expectations, laying a solid foundation for social recognition.

Initial outcomes of the "Double Reduction" Policy have become apparent. Following its implementation, the unregulated expansion of off-campus subject training institutions has been contained, with over 80% completing transformation or deregistration. The coverage of in-school after-school services has surpassed 95%, effectively bridging the gap in students' after-school time. Parents' educational expenditures and the pressure of accompanying their children with studies have been significantly alleviated, and the overall educational ecosystem has achieved initial optimization.

2.2. Weaknesses

There are shortcomings in the main body's capacity in policy implementation. At the school level, there is a severe shortage of teachers for after-school services — in some schools, the student-to-teacher ratio reaches 1:50. Most of the designed curricula focus on basic supervision and care, making it challenging to meet students' needs for personalized development.

At the teacher level, taking on additional after-school service tasks has led to an increased workload and a prominent phenomenon of job burnout.

The implementation of policies is uneven across regions. Economically developed regions, relying on high-quality educational resources, can rapidly improve the after-school service system and teacher allocation. However, in underdeveloped regions, due to constraints on financial input and teacher reserves, it is difficult to implement policies. Some schools still have the problem of "formalized after-school services", which further exacerbates the regional gap in educational resources.

2.3. Opportunities

The orientation of the "Double Reduction" Policy is highly aligned with the inherent requirements of education. It directly addresses the core contradiction in compulsory education—the phenomenon of "burden reduction at school yet burden increase off campus". By regulating off-campus subject-based training and strengthening schools' dominant position in teaching and education, the policy accurately responds to society's call for educational equity and the need for students' physical and mental health development. Its goals are closely consistent with public expectations, laying a solid foundation for the policy to gain social recognition.

The initial results of the "Double Reduction" Policy have gradually emerged. After its implementation, the unregulated expansion of off-campus subject training institutions has been effectively curbed, with over 80% completing transformation or deregistration. The coverage of in-school after-school services has exceeded 95%, effectively filling the gap in the management of students' after-school time. Parents' educational expenditures have been significantly reduced, and their pressure of accompanying children in studies has been noticeably alleviated, leading to the initial optimization of the overall educational ecosystem.

Policies provide an opportunity for the transformation of social educational concepts. The policy compels parents and society to break away from the educational anxiety of "score-only", gradually focus on the cultivation of students' comprehensive qualities, create space for the standardized development of non-academic training (such as art, physical education, and labor education), and promote the transformation of the education evaluation system towards diversification.

2.4. Threats

There is a risk of "hidden rebound" in the implementation of policies. Some parents, out of concern for their children's academic performance, have turned to hidden training models such as one-on-one private tutoring and private tutors. Such training is unregulated and costly, which may create new educational burdens and undermine the effectiveness of policies.

The uncertainty of the transformation of off-campus institutions. When a large number of subject-based training institutions shift their focus to non-subject-based areas, they encounter problems such as insufficient course development capabilities and fierce market competition. Some institutions may trigger refund disputes due to broken capital chains, which could lead to social conflicts. Meanwhile, the non-academic training market lacks unified standards and there are new irregularities such as chaotic qualifications and false advertising.

The strategic significance of the "Double Reduction" Policy lies in reinforcing the implementation of the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education, actively building a sound educational ecosystem, advancing the development of a high-quality basic education system, and earnestly addressing the concerns of the whole society.

Effectively reducing students' burden during the compulsory education stage is an inherent demand for their healthy development and also an inherent requirement for fulfilling the task of fostering virtue and nurturing talent. For a long time, the unregulated and reckless expansion of off-campus training institutions has exerted an adverse impact on the existing education system and occupied a large amount of students' extracurricular rest time. Even some educational institutions, in order to attract students and maximize their own interests, use unfair competition means to poach high-quality teachers from schools, which has raised doubts throughout society about the teaching staff of schools. With the improvement of economic development levels and the advent of a new era, people have higher expectations for fair and high-quality education. However, students in the compulsory education stage appear to be shouldering a heavier burden, a phenomenon that has attracted widespread attention from the whole society to the issue of "burden reduction". Therefore, the "Double Reduction" Policy focuses on addressing the burden problem of compulsory education students and rectifying after-school tutoring institutions, enabling schools and families to work together to achieve the goal of reducing students' burden.

3. Main Achievements of the Implementation of the "Double Reduction" Policy

Since the implementation of the "Double Reduction" Policy, remarkable achievements have been attained in multiple aspects, including the quality of classroom teaching and after-school services, the alleviation of students' learning pressure and burden, as well as the regulation of after-school tutoring institutions. Specifically, the chaos in off-campus training institutions has been effectively addressed. A survey conducted in 10 provinces at the end of 2021 showed that over 70% of students had not participated in subject training, and 80% felt that the amount of homework had decreased. A 2022 survey by the Institute of Education and Social Development at Beijing Normal University revealed that 83.5% of students did not participate in off-campus subject-based training, while 63.3% had no involvement in non-subject training. A comparison of the period one year before and after the implementation of the "Double Reduction" Policy shows a significant decline in the participation rate of primary and secondary school students in off-campus subject-based training， while the participation rate in non-subject-based training has not changed significantly [1].

Second, the main role of schools in education has been further strengthened. As the main role of teachers in the main battlefield of education, they can reduce students' burden after class and achieve the goal of reducing the burden by comprehensively setting teaching goals, innovating courses, improving teaching quality and enhancing classroom efficiency. The total amount of students' homework has been controlled, repetitive and mechanical homework has decreased, teachers have gradually developed the awareness of homework control, and their ability to effectively manage homework time has been enhanced. The difficulty of homework has been effectively reduced, enhancing students' ability to manage their homework independently. The sense of rejection and anxiety towards homework among students, teachers and parents has been alleviated to a certain extent [2]. Research conducted by the Institute of Basic Education Reform and Development of East China Normal University indicates that after the implementation of the "Double Reduction" Policy, the volume of students' homework has decreased, while teachers have faced increased burden and difficulty in homework design. While the expenditure on off-campus training for families has decreased, the academic anxiety of children has only been partially alleviated [3]. With the reduction of students' academic burden, teachers have more time and space to pay attention to students' individual development and emotional needs, thereby promoting the personalization and differentiation of education and teaching [4]. Third, the collaborative education function between schools and communities has been significantly enhanced. In terms of collaboration between schools and social organizations or institutions, the frequency of conducting collaborative education is relatively high. Over 80% of teachers indicated that their schools have cooperated with social organizations or institutions to carry out collaborative education activities. The main forms of

activities include science and technology popularization activities (57.96%) and study Tours (53.23%) [5].

4. Challenges and Predicaments Faced in the Deepening Implementation of the "Double Reduction" Policy

4.1. The Increased Burden on Teachers

Policy, in addition to regular classroom teaching, after-school tutoring has been extended to 9 p.m. or even later, significantly increasing teachers' teaching burden. "Burden reduction is not a zero-sum game. It should not mean 'burden relief' for students and parents at the cost of overburdening teachers" [6]. Meanwhile, to improve teaching quality, teachers have adopted a variety of methods. In some regions, the lack of clear, scientific and comprehensive implementation rules has made it difficult to enforce the policy, resulting in the pressure being simply shifted to teachers.

The "Double Reduction" Policy stipulates: "After-school services shall generally be provided by the school's own teachers, but retired teachers, qualified social professionals or volunteers may also be employed to deliver them." Eligible non-academic off-campus training institutions may also be appropriately introduced to participate in after-school services. However, there are no clear implementation details regarding how schools should recruit retired teachers, or how to verify the qualifications of off-campus training institutions, social professionals or volunteers.

The Policy also specifies that teachers' performance in after-school services should serve as an important reference for professional title evaluation and appointment, commendations and rewards, as well as performance-based pay.

This policy, to a certain extent, has stimulated the enthusiasm of teachers, but it has also increased their burden to a greater extent, causing physical and mental exhaustion among them and leading to a sense of occupational fatigue. Some schools have also paid attention to the intensity of teachers' communication, but have not taken into account issues such as teachers' rest time.

4.2. Issues of Educational Equity and Insufficient Supply of Educational Resources

The "Double Reduction" Policy aims to promote the all-round development and healthy growth of every student, while further enhancing the public welfare nature of education to safeguard its fairness. However, China's economic development is unbalanced and there are also huge differences in the quality of education. At the student level, having extended classes after regular classes is not conducive to meeting children's individualized needs and is not beneficial to the growth and cultivation of top-notch talents. At the parental level, children from families with different backgrounds have access to varied after-school tutoring opportunities. Some parents blindly follow the trend and use personal connections to hire tutors for their children, leading to the prevalence of private tutoring and posing a threat to social equity. At the school level, significant gaps exist in overall educational quality and teachers' instructional competence between schools in different regions, and even among those within the same region. The measures implemented have failed to narrow this gap; instead, they may even widen it. At the regional level, disparities in educational development across regions are difficult to address. Additionally, some regions lack clear policy details and a certain degree of flexibility in implementation, which may further exacerbate the imbalance in educational levels among regions—particularly between urban and rural areas.

4.3. The Academic Burden Exists in Another Form

The "Double Reduction" policy requires schools to offer a wide variety of other types of extracurricular interest groups and club activities, and encourages students to engage in sports, cultural and artistic activities beyond academic studies. This is a good phenomenon, as students can experience different things. However, it is obvious that the academic pressure on students is transferred to other subjects in another way. At present, programs such as "music, physical education

and art" offered by off-campus institutions are very popular, which indirectly increases students' academic burden. Students have different talents. It is required that students develop comprehensively, but it does not mean that they should be excellent in all aspects. Many parents are concerned that "music, physical education and art" might be included in the college admission criteria or comprehensive quality assessment, as this would further increase the burden on students and the financial burden on parents.

5. Suggestions for Policy Implementation

5.1. Strengthen the Governance Role of the Government

The "Double Reduction" policy is an important people-oriented project led and coordinated by the government. To achieve better results, it is necessary to enhance the government's governance efficiency and strengthen the full accountability relationship in government governance. The government should clarify the specific powers and responsibilities of each department and give full play to their key roles in the implementation of the "Double Reduction" policy. The government should also intensify accountability to ensure that each department performs its duties and offers suggestions. The country has focused on rectifying off-campus training and introduced a series of policies to reduce the burden. These policies emphasize not only strengthening internal school management but also explicitly regulating on-campus training to create a healthy educational ecosystem. They also address parents' educational anxiety by advocating for the establishment of correct educational concepts. The reduction burden policy has evolved from an initial short-term special action to rectify chaos to long-term institutional construction and standardized management, achieving a combination of on-campus and off-campus, as well as online and offline [7].

5.2. Highlight the Role of Internal School Governance

The effective implementation of the "Double Reduction" Policy hinges on giving full play to schools' leading role in education. As noted, "Teachers' teaching practices, students' learning processes, and the interactive relationship between them constitute the direct causes and inherent logic behind the emergence of academic burdens" [8]. Therefore, schools should take proactive initiatives and assume a proactive stance in implementing the "Double Reduction" Policy. By advancing in-depth teaching reforms, they should formulate detailed policies for policy implementation based on their own characteristics. For teachers, timely financial subsidies should be provided, and they should be trained for after-school extended courses. On the one hand, efforts should be made to significantly improve the quality of education and teaching. To this end, localities should implement education quality improvement projects, establish and improve teaching guidance mechanisms, optimize teaching methods, and enhance teaching efficiency, gradually forming distinctive teaching models [9].

5.3. Adapt Measures to Local Conditions Based on Local Circumstances

In the initial stage of implementing the "Double Reduction" policy, it is particularly important to adapt to local conditions and pay special attention to localization, ensuring that the policy is integrated with specific realities. It is necessary to handle the relationship between the government and schools properly and establish a long-term dialogue mechanism. Schools should also manage the relationship between teachers and parents, mobilize parents' enthusiasm and initiative to participate in the "Double Reduction" policy, and enhance mutual understanding and adaptation. Finally, there is the relationship between society and schools. The government should encourage high-quality social resources to participate in after-school extended tutoring in schools to maximize the implementation effect of the "Double Reduction" policy. During the promotion of the reduction policy, special attention should be paid to "locality", so that high-quality policy top-level design can have in-depth dialogue with specific educational circumstances, and ultimately "seek the self-consistency of local reduction policy tools, policy culture, space and audience" [10].

6. Conclusion

This study, through a systematic review of high-quality research results on the "double Reduction" policy, holds significant value for multiple entities: it provides empirical references for policymakers to optimize detailed rules, promote balanced teaching staff and teacher incentive systems, and facilitate the policy's upgrade towards "refinement". Clarify the direction of resource allocation and quality improvement for primary and secondary school educators, and alleviate the non-teaching burden on teachers. Help parents and the public rationally view the value of policies, alleviate educational anxiety, and build a collaborative consensus among families, schools and communities. It also builds a framework for educational researchers to sort out their achievements and promotes the development of related research in a practical direction. Meanwhile, as a literature review, this study is limited by the coverage of existing literature, and the presentation and demonstration of the implementation details and long-term effects of policies in underdeveloped areas and rural schools are not comprehensive enough. Future research can further strengthen the exploration of regional differentiation, focus on the implementation paths of policies in underdeveloped areas, conduct long-term tracking studies on student growth to verify the sustainability of policies, and also conduct in-depth exploration in specific fields such as the governance of hidden training and the regulation of non-academic training. Moreover, a policy implementation guarantee network can be constructed from the perspective of home-school-community collaboration. Promote the "Double Reduction" policy to truly achieve the reconstruction of the educational ecosystem.

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