

Implementation Impact, Challenges and Countermeasures of the ‘Double Reduction’ Policy in Yongzhou City

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Abstract: ‘Double Reduction’ refers to “Reducing the homework burden and off campus training burden on students in the nine-year compulsory education stage”. This study is conducted two years after the implementation of the ‘Double Reduction’ policy, targeting multiple subjects such as teachers, students, and parents in some middle schools in Yongzhou City. The results showed that the effectiveness of the policy was widely recognized by them. Students in grades 8 to 9 had reduced homework time and exam times, as well as reduced off campus training. However, the burden on teachers and parents’ anxiety about their children’s learning did not significantly reduce, and the continued role of the policy still faces challenges. Therefore, this study proposes measures such as gradually abolishing the compulsory diversion policy for the middle school entrance examination, increasing the construction of vocational universities, compulsory mobility of high school teachers, and gradually popularizing 12 years of compulsory education, in order to truly achieve the effect of the “Double Reduction” policy, provide a basis for education management departments to formulate policies.

Keywords: Double Reduction, Impact, Challenges, Countermeasures

1. Introduction

In July 2021, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and The General Office of the State Council issued the Opinions on Further Reducing the Homework Burden and Off-campus Training Burden of Students in Compulsory Education . ‘Double Reduction’ refers to ‘reducing the burden of heavy homework and off-campus training for students in compulsory education’. For a long time, primary and secondary school students in China have been plagued by excessive homework, long study time and short rest time, which has affected their physical and mental health and seriously disrupted the normal order of school education and teaching. The wording of the policy, dubbed ‘the strictest order to reduce the burden in history,’ is intended to completely change the historical problem of heavy learning burden for students in the nine-year compulsory education period. Two years after the implementation of the policy, what is the current status of student learning burden? How does the parents’ anxiety change? Has the teachers’ burden been significantly reduced?

The existing research shows that after the implementation of the ‘Double Reduction’ policy, the governance of off-campus training institutions has achieved remarkable results, and the number of offline discipline training institutions and online schools has been greatly reduced. After school services are set up in primary and secondary schools, and the amount and length of homework of primary and secondary school students are significantly reduced^[1]. However, after-school services increase teachers’ workload and work hours significantly^[2]; The after-school service content is single^[3]; Parents’ anxiety is still at a high level^[4]; Extracurricular non-subject tutoring is increasingly popular; It is still common for schools to evaluate teachers and students based on scores.

2. Statement of the Problems

In order to make the ‘Double Reduction’ policy play a continuous role in the basic education ecology, this study will focus on finding the impact and challenges of the policy :

(1)What is the impact of the implementation of ‘Double Reduction’ on students, parents, and teacher respondents in terms of

- 1) Homework Time by grade
- 2) Students participation in after-school training or tutoring time
- 3) Students' psychological anxiety
- 4) Parents' educational input and anxiety

(2) Is there a significant difference in the student, parents, and teachers respondents' assessments of the impact of 'Double Reduction' policy?

(3) To what extent are the students, parents, and teacher respondents encountered the following challenges

- 1) Homework time limits
- 2) Teachers' burden
- 3) Reduced examination

(4) Based on the results of the study, what action plan can be formulated to deal with the challenges brought by the implementation of the 'Double Reduction' policy?

3. Sampling

Data collection for this study will be conducted in Yongzhou City, Hunan Province, China. In the selection of respondents, 100 students from grades 8-9, 30 teachers and 30 parents were selected by random sampling.

The respondents were composed of teachers (20.7%), parents (20.7%), and students (58.6%). The teachers are mostly 21-30 years old (30%) and 41-50 years old (40%). Majority of them are intermediate teachers (60%) with over 20 years of experience (56.7%). In terms of subject taught, the combined English and Chinese language teachers make up the majority (60%). Almost all of the teacher respondents (90%) are lecturers.

Most of the parent respondents are 41-50 years old (53.3%). In terms of educational background, those who graduated junior high school (40%) and college graduates (20%) is the biggest group. Almost of them are employed (96.7%) with the biggest group working in public institution (40%) and private enterprises (20%). Half the parent respondents reported a monthly income 2,000 -4,000 yuan.

The student respondents are mostly 14 years old (67.1%), and in the ninth grade (51.8%) with the ideal to enter a key high school (74.1%). Most of them are living with their mother or both parents (90.6%). Most of them (74.1%) think that they are the top 20 in the class.

The survey questionnaire was validated and pilot tested for test reliability. The computed Cronbach alpha for the different sections of the questionnaire for teachers and parents are as follows: homework time (0.762), after school training (0.722), student psychological anxiety (0.755), parental educational anxiety (0.784), challenges - homework (0.761), teachers' burden (0.734), reduced examination (0.788). All the alpha values are acceptable based on the 0.70 and above range standard for reliability. The instrument is reliable for teachers and parents.

The survey instrument was also piloted to students. The result of the Cronbach alpha calculation are as follows: homework time (0.895), after school training (0.712), student psychological anxiety (0.739), parental educational anxiety (0.835), challenges - homework (0.755), teacher burden (0.815), reduced examination (0.788). All the alpha values are acceptable based on the 0.70 and above standard for reliability. The instrument is reliable for the students as well.

4. Results, Interpretation, and Discussions

4.1 Impact of Double Reduction Policy

Table 1 shows how respondents assessed the impact of the Double Reduction policy on students' homework time. For students, the impact was positive, with an overall average of 2.85. The most positive aspect of the policy was that it reduced their physical and mental fatigue. As for parents, they believe that reducing homework does not reduce students' psychological pressure and will make

students get lower grades. Teachers believe that the reduction of homework can reduce students' physical and mental fatigue, and they can complete homework in school, but they do not think that reducing homework time will lower grades and will not improve learning interest.

Table 1. Impact of the Double Reduction Policy in Terms of Homework Time

Items	Students		Parents		Teachers	
	Mean	Int	Mean	Int	Mean	Int
1. Increased students' interest in learning	3.06	PI	2.73	PI	2.27	NI
2. Reduce physical and emotional fatigue	3.12	PI	2.27	NI	3.57	HPI
3. Pay less attention to their lesson which affected the test score	3.11	PI	2.80	PI	1.57	NI
4. With the reduction of homework the student received low mark in tests	2.08	PI	2.87	NI	1.63	PI
5. The students were able to finish majority of their assignments in school	2.88	PI	3.17	PI	3.13	PI
Overall	2.85	PI	2.77	PI	2.43	NI

Legend: Int (Interpretations); 3.51-4.00 (HPI –high positive impact), 2.51-3.50 (PI- positive impact), 1.51-2.50 (NI –negative impact), 1.00-1.50 (HNI-high negative impact)

Table 2 Impact of the Double Reduction Policy on After School Training

Items	Students		Parents		Teachers	
	Mean	Int	Mean	Int	Mean	Int
1. Burden of after school childcare and extra-curricular learning fell on the parents and schools	2.65	PI	2.27	NI	3.37	PI
2. Students are given homework guidance services by their teachers	3.18	PI	3.27	PI	3.53	HPI
3. After-school services reduce the need to participate in off campus training	2.49	NI	2.83	PI	3.53	HPI
4. High-quality educational app provides high-quality resources for primary and secondary school students	2.82	PI	3.50	PI	2.93	PI
5. Offline off campus training institutions that offer curriculum subject programs have been reduced.	2.45	NI	3.10	PI	3.40	PI
Overall	2.72	PI	2.99	PI	3.35	PI

Legend: Int (Interpretations); 3.51-4.00 (HPI –high positive impact), 2.51-3.50 (PI- positive impact), 1.51-2.50 (NI –negative impact), 1.00-1.50 (HNI-high negative impact)

Table 2 shows the impact of the Double Reduction policy on after-school training. The students feel that this has a positive impact, and the students see that their teachers give them homework guidance services and high-quality learning apps. However, students do not see a significant decrease in off-campus training. For parents, the policy has a positive impact on reducing after-school training, but they believe that the burden of homework falls on parents. Teachers also believe that the policy has a positive impact on after-school training, as can be seen from its overall average of 3.35.

Table 3 Impact of the Double Reduction Policy on Students Psychological Anxiety

Items	Students		Parents		Teachers	
	Mean	Int	Mean	Int	Mean	Int
1. Reduced homework became protective against depression	2.99	PI	2.47	NI	3.00	PI
2. The problem of lack of sleep and mental health problem has been slightly relieved after controlling homework amount.	2.52	PI	2.77	PI	3.30	PI
3. Significant increase in participation in extracurricular activities such as sports and labor	3.12	PI	2.80	PI	3.67	PI
4. Significant reduction in students' levels of depression and anxiety	3.01	PI	2.77	NI	3.53	PI
5. Reduce off campus tutoring and increase students' learning motivation	2.41	NI	2.47	PI	2.03	PI
Overall	2.81	PI	2.65	PI	3.11	PI

Legend: Int (Interpretations); 3.51-4.00 (HPI –high positive impact), 2.51-3.50 (PI- positive impact), 1.51-2.50 (NI –negative impact), 1.00-1.50 (HNI-high negative impact)

As shown in Table 3, students believe that the Double Reduction policy has a positive impact on reducing psychological anxiety. This is reflected in their overall average of 2.81, with significant

increases in participation in extra-curricular activities and sports. However, students did not believe that the policy reduced out-of-school tutoring and motivation to learn (item 5), with an average score of 2.81. Parents also felt the policy had a positive impact, with an overall average score of 2.65, but they did not feel it reduced students' psychological stress. Teachers believe that the policy has a positive impact, with an overall average of 3.11. They believe that the policy agrees with all the indicators of students' positive psychological activities.

Table 4 Impact of the Double Reduction Policy on Parental Educational Anxiety

Items	Students		Parents		Teachers	
	Mean	Int	Mean	Int	Mean	Int
1. Parents are afraid that their children will fail in competition for good schools, educational support, and resources	2.45	NI	1.77	NI	1.27	HNI
2. Parents do not have time to accompany their children to complete homework	2.65	PI	2.33	NI	1.67	NI
3. Parents were compelled to pay more money to find private tutors or to take on the burden of tutoring their children themselves	2.35	NI	2.67	PI	3.33	PI
4. Some parents are worried that after homework is reduced, children will become addicted to mobile phones and games	2.64	PI	1.63	NI	1.57	NI
5. Parents are afraid that their children will not be able to attend high school and will be forced to attend vocational schools	1.15	HNI	1.70	NI	1.50	HNI
6. Without participating in extracurricular training, children cannot achieve excellent grades	2.93	PI	1.57	NI	3.60	HPI
Overall	2.36	NI	1.94	NI	2.16	NI

Legend: Int (Interpretations); 3.51-4.00 (HPI –high positive impact), 2.51-3.50 (PI- positive impact), 1.51-2.50 (NI –negative impact), 1.00-1.50 (HNI-high negative impact)

As shown in Table 4, all respondents believe that the dual-reduction policy has a negative impact on parents' educational anxiety. The overall average score of the students was 2.36, indicating that they believed that Double Reduction would increase parents' educational anxiety. Parents worried that their children would not be able to attend high school and would be forced to attend vocational school, with an overall average of 1.94, also indicating that they felt negative effects. They believe that without extracurricular training, children cannot achieve excellent results (item 6). Teachers also believe that the dual reduction program has a negative impact on parents' educational anxiety. This can be seen from their overall average of 2.16. Teachers believe that parents are afraid of their children losing out in the competition for good schools, educational support and resources. However, teachers do not agree that without extracurricular training, children cannot achieve excellent results, as shown in item 6, which has an average of 3.60.

Table 5 Summary of Impacts

Domains	Students		Parents		Teachers	
	Mean	Int	Mean	Int	Mean	Int
Homework Time by Grade	2.85	PI	2.77	PI	2.43	NI
After School Training	2.72	PI	2.99	PI	3.35	PI
Students Psychological Anxiety	2.81	PI	2.65	PI	3.11	PI
Parental Educational Anxiety	2.36	NI	1.94	NI	2.16	NI
Overall	2.69	PI	2.59	PI	2.76	PI

Legend: Int (Interpretations); 3.51-4.00 (HPI –high positive impact), 2.51-3.50 (PI- positive impact), 1.51-2.50 (NI –negative impact), 1.00-1.50 (HNI-high negative impact)

Table 5 shows the overall impact of the Double Reduction program as assessed by students, parent, and teachers. The students overall mean is 2.69 which means that in general, the program has a positive impact for them. The parents have an overall mean of 2.59. This mean indicates that they also see the program as having a positive impact in general. When it comes to the teachers, the program is also seen as having a positive overall impact. This is shown by their composite mean of 2.76.

4.2 Differences in the Assessment of Impact Between Students, Parents, and Teachers Respondents

Table 6 shows the ANOVA results used to determine whether there are significant differences in the assessments of impacts by students, parents, and teachers. For the mean comparisons in terms of

homework time by grade, the computed F is 9.744 and the sig=.000. This means that there is a significant difference in how the students, parents, and teachers rated the impact of Double Reduction program in terms of homework. Similarly, there is also a significant difference in the assessment of impact in terms of after school training. This is shown by F =30.80 and sig =.000. The computed F and sig for students' psychological anxiety, which are 7.618 and .001 respectively also mean that there is a significant difference. A significant difference in parental educational anxiety can also be seen with F=30.16 and sig =.000.

Table 6 ANOVA Result on the Impacts of Double Reduction Policy

	Mean Student	Mean Parent	Mean Teacher	F	Sig	Interpretation
Homework Time by Grade	2.85	2.77	2.43	9.744	.000	Significant
After School Training	2.72	2.99	3.35	30.80	.000	Significant
Students Psychological Anxiety	2.81	2.65	3.11	7.618	.001	Significant
Parental Educational Anxiety	2.36	1.94	2.16	30.16	.000	Significant

4.3 Challenges Met After the Implementation of the Double Reduction Policy

Table 7 Challenges Met in Terms of Time Limits of Homework

Items	Students		Parents		Teachers	
	Mean	Int	Mean	Int	Mean	Int
1.Students were not able to develop their homework management skills.	3.11	HE	2.00	SE	1.30	ME
2.The acquisition of factual knowledge was reduced as such increased the concept formation learning	1.33	ME	3.40	HE	3.10	HE
3.With the reduction of homework the student received low mark in tests	2.08	SE	1.40	ME	1.60	SE
4.Understanding of the course material became less	1.33	ME	1.37	ME	1.50	ME
5.Lecture times has been shortened to enable students can't finish their homework.	2.36	SE	1.90	SE	1.30	ME
Overall	2.04	SE	2.01	SE	1.76	SE

Legend: Int (Interpretations); 3.51-4.00 (VHE –To a very high extent), 2.51-3.50 (HE- to a high extent), 1.51-2.50 (SE –to some extent), 1.00-1.50 (ME –to a minimal extent)

Table 7 shows how respondents assessed the challenges with regard to operational time constraints. Students identified themselves as facing these challenges to some extent, with an overall grade point average of 2.04, and limiting homework time may not develop their homework management skills (item 1). Parents are concerned that limiting homework affects a decrease in students' acquisition of factual knowledge (item 2), which is reflected in item 2 with an average of 3.40. Teachers also saw the problem of homework time limit only to a certain extent, with an average of 1.76, and teachers were most concerned about students' reduced acquisition of factual knowledge (item 2).

Table 8 Challenges Met In Terms of Teachers' Burden

Items	Students		Parents		Teachers	
	Mean	Int	Mean	Int	Mean	Int
1.Providing after-school services leads to longer working hours for teachers	3.31	HE	1.80	ME	3.50	HE
2.Teachers' salaries and benefits are not high, and their sense of happiness in life is low	1.33	ME	1.50	ME	3.80	VHE
3.Teachers have to spend more time designing high quality homework that's more effective and engaging than before	3.08	HE	3.37	HE	3.63	VHE
4.They were in the classroom more than 40 hours / week because they have to correct the students Homework face to face	2.91	HE	1.67	SE	3.87	VHE
5.Duties unrelated to teaching were taking up too much of their time as such having no quality time to spend with their own family	2.91	HE	3.47	HE	3.73	VHE
6. Personalized homework would lead to the failure to understand the actual academic level differences between students in the homework feedback and assessment stage	1.20	ME	1.80	SE	1.40	ME
Overall	2.46	SE	2.27	SE	3.32	HE

Legend: Int (Interpretations); 3.51-4.00 (VHE –To a very high extent), 2.51-3.50 (HE- to a high extent), 1.51-2.50 (SE –to some extent), 1.00-1.50 (ME –to a minimal extent)

Table 8 shows that the students consider the additional burden to teachers due to the Double Reduction policy as being troublesome to some extent only. This is shown by the mean of 2.46. What

they consider as a serious challenge for teachers is the longer working hours (item 1). They gave the highest mean (3.31) to this item which means it is challenging for teachers to a high extent. For the parents, they see the teachers' burden to some extent only also as evidenced by the mean of 2.27. What they see as challenging to a high extent for teachers are the duties unrelated to teaching (item 5). The mean of 3.47 for item 5 is the highest given by the parents. The teachers perceived their burden related to the Double Reduction policy as challenging to a high extent. This is shown by the overall mean given by teachers which is 3.32. Staying for more than 40 hours a week (item 4) is challenging to a very high extent for them. They rated item 4 with a mean of 3.87, the highest among the items. They also considered items 2, 3, and 5 as challenging to a very high extent.

Table 9 Challenges Met In Terms Reducing the Number of Examinations

Items	Students		Parents		Teachers	
	Mean	Int	Mean	Int	Mean	Int
1.End of semester exams was focused on basic knowledge which does not draw students creativity	1.25	ME	1.80	SE	3.70	VHE
2.Reducing the number of examinations would affect students' academic performance	1.34	ME	3.27	HE	1.73	SE
3.Schools rarely evaluate students' physical, artistic, and moral performance	3.81	VHE	3.00	HE	3.60	VHE
4. Exams will not be a way measuring if students have learned	3.16	HE	2.53	HE	3.40	HE
5.Without examination academic progress can't be tracked by parents	1.55	SE	3.53	VHE	1.63	SE
6.Without exam rankings the students will not be able to cope with tough challenges of life.	2.76	HE	3.43	HE	3.47	HE
Overall	2.46	SE	2.93	HE	2.92	HE

Legend: Int (Interpretations); 3.51-4.00 (VHE –To a very high extent), 2.51-3.50 (HE- to a high extent), 1.51-2.50 (SE –to some extent), 1.00-1.50 (ME –to a minimal extent)

As shown in table 9, the students consider the reduced number of examinations as challenging to some extent only. The overall mean of 2.46 attests to this. What they consider as challenging to a very high extent is seldom use of physical, artistic, and moral performance in student evaluation (item 3). They gave this the highest mean of 3.81. For the parents, the reduced number of examinations is challenging to a high extent as shown in the overall mean of 2.93. The thought of having no examination (item 5) is problematic for them to a very high extent. They rated item 5 with 3.53, the highest among the indicators. For the teachers, the reduction of the number of examinations is challenging to a high extent also. What they are worried most is the end of semester exams being reduced to basic knowledge only (item 1). They gave item 1 a mean of 3.70, the highest in the data set which indicates that it is challenging to a very high extent.

5. Summary of Findings

The Double Reduction policy is assessed by the respondents as having a positive overall impact. For the student and parent respondents, its negative impact is on parental anxiety only. For the teachers, the negative impacts are on homework time and parental educational anxiety.

The assessments of students, parents, and teachers with regards to the impact of the Double Reduction policy are significantly different in all its domains (homework time, after school training, student psychological anxiety, and parental educational anxiety)

The student and parent respondents see the overall challenges met due to the 'Double Reduction' policy to some extent only. The teachers consider the challenges to a high extent. Both parents and teachers consider the reduction of number of exams as challenging to a high extent. The teacher respondents also consider teacher burden as challenging to a high extent.

6. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are presented:

- (1)The government should abolish the existing policy of compulsory enrollment of 50% of students

into vocational schools after the high school entrance examination, so that the majority of students can choose high school or vocational schools according to their own preferences.

(2)After students enter vocational schools, the government's employment policies should be tilted towards them, including improving the quality of teaching staff in vocational schools, expanding the majors and channels for vocational school students to enter universities, building high-quality higher vocational colleges, and improving the employment benefits of vocational college graduates.

(3)In terms of student evaluation, education leadership departments should not use scores as the sole criterion for student evaluation, but should conduct comprehensive evaluations based on various qualities such as morality, labor, and sports.

(4)In order to alleviate parents' educational anxiety, it is necessary to further ensure educational fairness within the region, ensure that the funding and teacher level of each high school are close to the same, and ensure that excellent teacher resources in the region flow regularly.

(5)Strengthen the communication and cooperation between families and schools in order to reduce conflicts between them. Teachers should regularly hold parent meetings to increase parents' understanding of their children and teachers' work, in order to avoid unnecessary public opinion crises for teachers.

(6)Schools should continuously increase the application of various learning resources, so that students can study under the supervision of their parents during holidays, which can accelerate students' learning.

7. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher came up with the following conclusions:

(1)The Double Reduction policy has both positive and negative impacts.Overall, the positive impacts outweigh the negative impacts.

(2) The students, parents, and teachers have different outlooks on the impacts of the Double Reduction policy. This difference is anchored by the various roles they play in the educational process. Students are concerned about their grades and aspirations for further education, while teachers are concerned about changes in their work burden and personal work feelings. Parents are both concerned about their children's mental health and worry about their failure in high school entrance exams, which is an extremely contradictory aspect.

(3) The students, parents, and teachers differ in recognizing the extent to which the Double Reduction policy creates a problem for them. Being at the center of all the changes related to the policy, the teachers need support as they consider the challenge affecting them to a high extent.

(4) The recognition of the problems brought by the Double Reduction policy goes hand in hand with the perception of its positive impacts, especially those worried about their failure in the competition for further education.

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