

Research on English Curriculum Reform of New Oriental under the “Double Reduction” Policy

Xiaojun Ding, Ziyang Li

Nanjing University of Science and Technology, Zijin College, Nanjing, China, 210023

Abstract: The “double reduction” policy is a major initiative in China’s education reform in 2021, which has caused a great impact on today’s English tutoring institutions. As a leading enterprise in the English tutoring industry, New Oriental actively responded to the policy, made rational decisions in a timely manner, and constantly explored feasible solutions. This paper sets New Oriental as an example to study its course reform under the “double reduction” policy with in-depth investigations into the English curriculum system of three tutoring brands: POPKIDS English, junior high school section of the U-can Secondary School and Lexue Oriental. According to the research, it is found that the reformed Lexue Oriental is superior to the conventional curricula in terms of its curriculum structure, curriculum objective and learning mode, which serves as a successful example of flexible transformation under the “double reduction” policy. It is hoped that this paper can provide other English tutoring institutions several suggestions on the reform of curriculum system, transformation direction and development prospects in the future.

Keywords: English curriculum reform; New Oriental; “double reduction”

1. Introduction

Since entering the new era, the government has put forward higher requirements for the of education, especially during the nine-year compulsory education. However, with the popularity of off-campus tutoring nowadays, there are obvious problems in the off-campus training industry due to poor management and unreasonable charges among some tutoring institutions. Additionally, an increasing number of parents are more likely to sign up for off-campus tutoring classes for their in order to allow children to be taught beyond the syllabus and ahead of their peers, making children burdened with heavy pressure^[1]. In order to rectify the disorders in educational institutions and ensure healthy physical and mental growth of children, China government issued The Opinions on Further Easing the Burden of Excessive Homework and Off-campus Tutoring for Students Undergoing Compulsory Education (hereinafter referred to as The Opinions) in July 2021, with the purpose of the burden of excessive homework and off-campus tutoring for students undergoing compulsory education (hereinafter referred to as “double reduction”)^[2].

Confronted with such sudden policy changes, some English tutoring institutions such as Wall Street English, Hampson English, SK Royal Children’s English are withdrawing from the market orderly. Nonetheless, other English tutoring institutions are seeking alternative ways to survive, such as offering quality education courses, including calligraphy, sports, programming and so on^[3]. Under the background of “double reduction” policy, this paper aims to conduct a comprehensive analysis and research on the reform measures of English curriculum reform from New Oriental. It is hoped that transformation ideas from New Oriental will also be of great inspiration to the future development strategies of other English tutoring institutions.

2. Current Situation of Tutoring Institutions

With the deepening of reform and opening up, China’s educational cause has achieved rapid and tremendous development. However, due to the imbalance of domestic economic development, the development of education also presents a relatively unbalanced state, especially public education can fully meet people’s personalized needs for education. Therefore, in this context, tutoring institutions gained important development opportunities since the beginning of this century^[4].

According to the 2020 China Online English Education Market Report of Chinese Academy of

Sciences, the number of children's English training market users was 26.5 million, with 5.8 million online users, and the online market penetration rate has reached 22%^[5]. At the same time, the rapid increase in the number of postgraduate entrance exams caused by the increase of employment pressure, the need for English learning caused by the improvement of population quality and work anxiety, the demand for talents with international quality promoted by economic globalization have all brought impetus to the adult English training market. According to a report on China's Adult English Training Market in 2020 by IResearch, the market size of adult English training was 95.3 billion yuan in 2019 and shrank by 37.6 percent to 59.5 billion yuan in 2020. Meanwhile, China's online education users reached a new peak of 342 million yuan in 2020 amid the impact of COVID-19^[6].

However, the implementation of "double reduction" policy has dealt a severe blow to off-campus training institutions, including English training institutions. Confronted with such sudden policy changes, real and concrete changes are taking place in the tutoring industry, which has formed two extremes in sharp contrast. On the one hand, tutoring institutions have to adjust their business and lay off staff for off-campus training in disciplines that are strictly prohibited by the policy. On the other hand, the new educational infrastructure and quality-oriented education advocated by the state are welcoming many new participants^[7]. As a matter of fact, the policy of "double reduction" is not to make off-campus educational institutions disappear completely, but to standardize and strictly manage them, with the fundamental goal of education balance. In a sense, "double reduction" creates conditions for quality-oriented education and promotes the enthusiasm of off-campus training institutions to participate.

3. Analysis on English Curriculum Reform of New Oriental

3.1. Curriculum Reforms of New Oriental Curriculum

New Oriental Education & Technology Group, formerly known as Beijing New Oriental School, was founded in the 1990s. After years of development, New Oriental had grown into an international education and training company. The company regarded language training as the key point of brand building. The development system includes short-term language training system and instruction system, etc. Its business scope covered education and training, education services, education product research and development, etc. As of May 31, 2021, New Oriental had 122 schools, 1,547 training centers and more than 54,200 teachers in 108 cities^[8].

After the "double reduction" policy was issued, New Oriental took lots of measures to respond to national policies, especially the reforms of its English curriculum. On the one hand, past K9 training business, both offline and online, has been completely stopped. On the other hand, its original business such as university business, overseas business, overseas consulting, etc., was still in relatively smooth and stable development. There are three key directions for New Oriental to explore in the future under the "double reduction" policy: quality-oriented education, university business and overseas study^[9]. As the K12 curriculum system, especially K9 curriculum system, suffered the most direct impact under the "double reduction" policy. Therefore, this paper will focus on analyzing the changes in the K9 English curriculum system of New Oriental under the "double reduction" policy.

3.2. K9 English Curriculum System

K9, an educational term, is the abbreviation of kindergarten through twelve grade, where "k" stands for kindergarten and "9" stands for grade nine, which refers to the phase that students experience from pre-school education to junior high school education, and is now commonly used to refer to basic education. As an effective supplement to school education and home tutoring, K9 extracurricular training is one of the most powerful educational demands in the past few years^[10]. Whereas, with the requirement of regulating tutoring institutions according to the "double reduction" policy in order to ease the burden of excessive homework and off-campus tutoring for students undergoing compulsory education, New Oriental instantly issued a notice on the organizational restructuring of the group's training school business department, which canceled the POPKIDS education, junior high school section of the U-can Secondary School education and other K9 related business departments, and established the youth department. The youth department is mainly responsible for non-disciplinary tutoring courses geared towards students undergoing K9 (including pre-school education) stage^[11].

Before the implementation of the "double reduction" policy, K9 education served as the core business of New Oriental, which approximately accounted for 50% to 60% of the total revenue of New

Oriental in each fiscal year for the fiscal years ended May 31, 2020 and 2021^[12]. That is to say, the “double reduction” policy has a direct impact on New Oriental’s K9 English curriculum system. Below are the comparison of POPKIDS, U-can Secondary School education and the newly launched course Lexue Oriental, which aims at analyzing the variations on English curriculum reform under the “double reduction” policy.

3.2.1. Curriculum System of POPKIDS English Education

The former children English training brand, POPKIDS English, was established in 2004 and committed to providing one-stop education services for children from 3 to 12 years old. POPKIDS (POP) is the abbreviation of “Play Our Play”, which means learning and playing at the same time, always providing children with high-quality global educational resources, allowing children to learn easily and cultivate correct values, and providing parents with professional and scientific families education and guidance. POPKIDS English has designed a series of featured courses in three stages. Through entrance tests and professional consultation, it make scientific learning plans for students so as to better improve their English level. The whole curriculum system is divided into three stages, namely POPTOTS Picture Book Reading, POPKIDS Outstanding Student Training and Juvenile New Concept English (JNCE)^[13]. The whole curriculum system is shown in the table 1:

Table 1: Curriculum System of POPKIDS English Education

Target Age	Curriculum Structure	Curriculum Objective
3-6 years old	POPTOTS Picture Book Reading	Improve English reading ability Cultivate knowledge and language ability far beyond peers
6-12 years old	POPKIDS Outstanding Student Training	Meet the needs of domestic examinations Complete primary school learning tasks 1-2 years ahead of schedule
8-12 years old	Juvenile New Concept English	Improve the comprehensive ability of English listening, speaking, reading and writing; Meet the needs of domestic examinations

3.2.2. Curriculum System of U-can Secondary School English Education

The former teenagers English training brand, junior high school section of U-can Secondary School, focused on secondary education including primary school graduates to junior high school graduates, aiming to provide first-class extracurricular training for students aged 13 to 15. Based on the “new curriculum standard”, U-can Secondary School focuses on breaking through the high school entrance examination, in order to achieve the purpose of stimulating interest, imparting knowledge, guiding methods, thus improving student’s English performance and ability. U-can Secondary School provides a variety of training courses for the majority of junior high school students, including small class, big class, personalized course and Coolcamp course, to satisfy different demands among students^[14]. The curriculum system of U-can Secondary School is illuminated in the table 2:

Table 2: Curriculum System of U-can Secondary School English Education

Curriculum Structure	Curriculum Objective
Small Class	Complete learning objectives with difficulty appropriate to student’s English learning level
Big Class	Master test-taking skills and build confidence before the test
Personalized Course	Accurately locate students’ learning needs and teach in accordance with their English level
Coolcamp	Cultivate international talents with tough will, wise mind, fluent English speaking and strong physique

3.2.3. Curriculum System of Lexue Oriental

The newly registered band, Lexue Oriental, is a non-profit unit of New Oriental launching non-profit subject business, which means that New Oriental would continue to conduct curriculum-based training in primary and junior high schools. On January 26, 2022, Lexue Oriental announced that it would provide free live courses for compulsory education subjects in primary and junior high schools across the country, which was also the first online non-profit institution with free admissions in China. Based on the idea “does not study above student’s level and is not advanced”, the curriculum system of Lexue Oriental takes into account the different learning levels and needs of both urban students and rural students, and applies a variety of scientific and technological means in

teaching^[15].

Contrast to POPKIDS and junior high school section of U-can Secondary School, two totally separate English training brands for kids and juveniles, the newly launched brand covering kids education and juvenile education together, allows their students to enjoy a more systematic and comprehensive English learning curriculum on a one-stop learning platform. There are four types of curricula from Lexue Oriental: basic class, target class, special class and New Concept English courses for Juvenile. The curriculum objectives of these four courses are listed in the table 3:

Table 3: Curriculum Objective of Lexue Oriental English Education[16]

Curriculum Structure		Curriculum Objective
Basic Class		Develop good learning habits and lay a solid foundation for learning
Target Class		Improve English listening, speaking, reading and writing skills
Special Class	Phonics	Cultivate interest in English learning, learn to spell new words, and accumulate vocabulary
	Grammar 1	Strengthen basic grammar knowledge that learned in school
	Grammar 2	Use basic grammar knowledge that learned in school flexibly
	Vocabulary	Master the meaning of words and the usage of key words
	Grammar (for junior high school students)	Master the basic usage of grammatical tenses, improve reading ability and English writing quality
New Concept English for Juvenile		Improve English listening, speaking, reading and writing skills

3.3. Contrasts of Different Curriculum Systems

3.3.1. Curriculum Structure

After investigation, it is found that Lexue Oriental's curriculum structure is well planned, which offers students personalized curriculum services with more detailed and targeted course classifications. On the one hand, Lexue Oriental copies POPKIDS English curriculum's phonics course and Juvenile New Concept English course, optimizes the previous curricula on this basis, and creates the special grammar and vocabulary class from the phonics curriculum, so as to comprehensively improve the English ability of students undergoing K9 stage. On the other hand, different from small class and big class in the English curriculum of U-can Secondary School, Lexue Oriental creates a more complete and reasonable curriculum differentiation: basic class and target class. By distinguishing the difficulty of the courses and taking into account the differences in teaching materials in different regions, it better caters to the needs of students with different English levels with high-quality teaching services.

3.3.2. Curriculum Objective

In terms of curriculum objectives, the biggest discrepancy from the past is de-emphasizing on advanced learning concept or how to improve test-taking skills. For example, POPKIDS Outstanding Student Training made primary school learning 1-2 years ahead of schedule and U-can Secondary School Personalized Course emphasized test-taking skills. However, adhering to the educational concept of "Happy Learning Every Day", Lexue Oriental disassembles knowledge modules and integrates learning methods through an excellent team of teachers, so as to pass on the joy of learning to the majority of students. Based on the view that students do not study above their levels and curriculum should not be not advanced, Lexue Oriental effectively reduces the academic burden for students undergoing compulsory education and guides children to find out the happiness of learning.

3.3.3. Learning Mode

It is worth noting that Lexue Oriental is an online education unit that provides free live courses based on the Internet platform, which is largely different from the off-line learning mode form POPKIDS and U-can Secondary School. By this means, even students living in remote or impoverished areas can enjoy free high-quality teaching resources and English courses through the platform of Lexue Oriental. Online courses also provide students with more free time and place choices, and the playback will be automatically generated after each course ends. It is convenient for students to review the contents they have learned by watching those playbacks unlimited times within the validity period.

4. Suggestions on English Tutoring Institutions

As a leading enterprise in English tutoring industry, the transformation and development strategies of New Oriental under the “double reduction” policy are valuable reference for other English tutoring institutions. The following suggestions are put forward for other English education institutions that are still in the transition period:

4.1. Constantly optimize the curriculum structure

English learning is a gradual process, so scientific principles should be applied to the design of English curriculum, and more personalized curricula according to the characteristics of different ages of students are supposed to be considered.

4.2. Adjust curriculum objectives in time

Since the implementation of the “double reduction” policy, China has taken easing students’ academic burden as a key project of education reform. Therefore, it is necessary to cultivate students’ interest in learning English, advocate the concept of happy learning, and comprehensively improve students’ English capacities.

4.3. Carry out non-profit online platform for English teaching

Other English tutoring institutions can follow the pace of Lexue Oriental, providing high-quality educational resources for students undergoing K9 English education across the country through the online platform to better promote educational equity.

5. Conclusion

The implementation of the “double reduction” policy is not only a significant adjustment to China’s educational pattern, but also a great alteration in the concept of education. As for English tutoring industry, the requirement of the “double reduction” policy lies in the comprehensive standardization of off-campus tutoring. By making the investigation into the curriculum reform from New Oriental, it is found that the reformed Lexue Oriental is superior to the other two courses in terms of its curriculum structure, curriculum objective and learning mode, which serves as a successful example of flexible transformation under the “double reduction” policy. It is hoped other English tutoring institutions can learn from New Oriental’s success, making the off-campus training industry sound development.

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