

The Promotion and Obstacles of the Double Reduction Policy for Educational Equity

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Abstract:

China's Double Reduction policy advances educational equity by reducing student workload and regulating extracurricular tutoring. The policy's original intent is laudable, and some progress has been made in balancing educational resources and reducing the financial burden on families. Furthermore, this policy seeks to achieve a better study-life balance by reducing the academic burden so that students will have more time to develop their all-around qualities. However, its implementation has faced several challenges, including inconsistent policy implementation, regional disparities in education resources, chronic parental anxiety about education, and social pressure. These issues undermine the effectiveness of the policy. In this context, this essay comprehensively analyses the present state of the Double Reduction policy, identifies the primary challenges, and proposes corresponding recommendations for improvement. These recommendations include establishing a sound long-term evaluation mechanism, increasing investment in rural education, guiding parents to manage educational expectations, and strengthening the vocational training system. Continuously optimizing and improving the implementation of the policy, will ultimately promote balanced education in China and help students grow more holistically.

Keywords: Double Reduction policy; educational equity; policy implementation

1. Introduction

Equity in education is not only an important component of social equity but also an essential safeguard for achieving social stability and harmony. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) believes that educational equity ensures that every student may reach their full educational potential, regardless of their background. Governments should prioritize equity and inclusion by providing equal learning opportunities for students, which enables them to develop and acquire essential knowledge and skills. This further allows outcomes to be independent of their economic and social backgrounds and ensures that they have equitable access to higher education certificates and then achieve success [1]. Several measures have been implemented by the Chinese government in recent years to promote equity in education, with the Double Reduction policy garnering the most attention because of its broader scope and intense reforms [2]. This policy strives to address major educational and social issues, such as the phenomenon of educational involution, by lowering the amount of burdensome homework and raising the standard of instruction and after-school tutoring [2,3]. However, despite the policy's original intent to

promote educational equity, the effects may have multiple and complex implications. For example, One of the main challenges to educational equity in China has been the uneven allocation of educational resources between urban and rural communities [4]. By analyzing the details of the policy known as Double Reduction and its problems in the implementation process, this essay explores its dual role in promoting educational equity and puts forward corresponding suggestions for implementing the policy.

2. Basic Introduction of Double Reduction Policy

2.1 Core Content

Xinhua News Agency points out that the main essence of the Double Reduction policy includes three points [5]. First, less homework burden should be given to kids by rigorously limiting the quantity of homework assigned. For example, Pupils in grades 1 and 2 should not be given written assignments by their schools. Written tasks for grades 3 through 6 should not take longer than 60 minutes. The allotted time for junior high school students is 90 minutes. The second is regulating after-school training facilities. Limit the amount of training facilities and the

fees they charge, and prohibit subject-based instruction on weekends, public holidays, and summer and winter break. Third, strengthening the standard of in-school instruction, offering free after-school programs, and boosting children's extracurricular involvement are ways to enhance in-school education.

2.2 Core Values

Furthermore, according to the study by Xue and Li, China's Double Reduction policy implies three core values: student-centered education (concentrating on kids' overall growth), quality-based education (emphasizing deep learning and critical thinking), and home-school cooperation (encouraging parents to take a more active role in their kids' education) [2]. Three components represent this Double Reduction policy values: it is in line with the international trend of lessening the burden of basic education, and it helps to ensure children's happy growth and effectively promotes their mental health [6]. Finland, for example, adheres to the three principles of education: giving children ample choices, interest-based specialty development, and letting children know why they are learning. Their students are not academically demanding but have many and varied subjects that require quick switching of minds. This maximizes talent and stimulates enthusiasm for learning [6]. The study by Xue and Li also discusses the wider implications of the policy, arguing that it attempts to promote a more equal and long-lasting educational system in addition to lessening the strains that students face in the classroom today [2]. As recommended by Murphy and Johnson, the Chinese Ministry of Education has continued to reform education by adopting a more holistic approach so that the global economy and society's changing requirements can be met via the educational system [7]. In short, one essential tactical strategy for modernizing the basic education framework is the Double Reduction policy, which is a civil sector. This policy reduces both the strain of teaching and learning, as well as the burden on families. It aims to comprehensively address many of the issues that have arisen in the education sector recently, such as the scale of education, the solidification of social classes, parental anxiety about education, expensive expenditures on education, and physical and emotional loads on children.

2.3 Positive Influences

Governments across the nation have carried out bolstering regulations and execution strategies by the situation since the policy's release [2]. This has contributed to the advancement of educational equity. First, the policy has reduced educational disparities by equalizing resources for kids from diverse economic backgrounds. For instance,

students from diverse economic situations now have gained more equal educational opportunities because of improved in-school instruction and free after-school programs [8]. Second, the policy has significantly decreased the financial strain on families. By restricting the high cost of the exorbitant expense of training outside of the classroom, the strain on education spending, especially for families with low and moderate incomes, has been alleviated, making education expenditure more equitable [9]. Besides, studies have shown that implementing this policy not only improved communication between parents and schools but also effectively relieved students' academic stress by significantly lowering the amount of assignments they had to do [8,10]. More importantly, the policy's adoption has significantly improved Chinese students' general mental health by lowering their levels of anxiety and sadness [11].

3. Four Challenges in Policy Implementation

However, the problems encountered during the implementation of this policy have raised some doubts about educational equity.

Firstly, poor implementation of the policy is a major problem. The actual effect of the policy relies on the concrete implementation by local governments and schools. If these implementation links are not in place or the understanding of the policy is not deep enough, the policy may be significantly less successful and fail to truly reduce inequality [10]. According to Ni, there is still plenty of space for improvement with the existing Double Reduction policy, particularly about the quality and effectiveness of policy execution [12]. The execution of this policy should be given great importance by local government education departments, who should also modify the policy's requirements, rework the standards for school evaluation, and enhance the incentives and sanctions associated with it [13].

The second factor is regional differences in education. The goal of critical policy analysis (CPA) is to expose the privilege, oppression, and power dynamics that underlie policy choices. From the perspective of CPA, students from low-income families, with parents who are less educated, or from rural and ethnic minority backgrounds, may face academic disadvantages due to reduced homework and unaffordable tutoring services [14]. Besides, their educational resources are relatively scarce. At the same time, some affluent families are turning to high-cost "one-to-one" private tutoring or shadow education to make up for the lack of out-of-school training, thus exacerbating educational inequality and further widening the urban-ru-

ral gap [15]. In addition, Yang et al. showed that regarding awareness, recognition, and practice, urban and rural places differ significantly from one another [16]. Teachers in urban primary and secondary schools are more aware of, recognize, and implement the Double Reduction policy about student arrival and departure hours, extracurricular activities, and homework management than teachers in rural regions [6].

Then it is due to parents' anxiety about education [17]. The Double Reduction policy's adoption has significantly lessened the educational load on students, but parents' worries related to their kids' education persist, which not only adds to their financial pressure but also puts a greater mental burden on both parents and students [18]. The policy's goal is to progressively cut capital spending on elementary and secondary education. However, according to Yu et al., parental educational anxiety mediates the evolutionary path of educational internalization in response to the reaction of the Double Reduction policy [3]. One of the main causes of educational anxiety is the significant discrepancy between parents' expectations and their children's actual achievement or potential [19]. People can rise beyond socioeconomic strata in large part because of education. Parents seek for more and better educational materials and continuously tinker with the market for after-school training in response to education anxiety and status anxiety, rather than concentrating on the extent of education provided. In an attempt to make their kids' education more competitive, this fundamentally creates inequality of educational opportunities and hinders the implementation of policies.

The final possible challenge is that the wider society still values academics too highly. Chen and Lin's study shows that under the pressure of entrance exams, most parents tend to invest in education to get their children into prestigious universities rather than to reduce their academic burden [20]. This shows the contradiction between social practices and policy values. Some studies have shown that this further raises teachers' anxiety and negatively affects their work and life [21]. The reason behind this may be the increased workload and work pressure on primary school teachers, as well as what appears to be a mechanical inequality in the distribution of teaching hours for the subject [22].

To sum up, although the Double Reduction policy was initially intended to eliminate educational inequality and schooling burden, it still faces several challenges in its actual implementation. Because of flaws in the way the policy is being implemented at the local level and school levels, its effects are not fully realized. In addition, regional disparities in education have exacerbated educational inequalities between students from varied socio-economic

roots and those from urban and rural areas, and affluent families have further widened the gap in educational resources by turning to high-cost private tutoring. Parents' educational anxiety not only adds to the financial and emotional burden but also leads them to over-see quality educational resources, hindering the effective implementation of policies. At the same time, the contradiction between the social environment's over-emphasis on academics and the policy's goals has discounted the effects of load-shedding and negatively affected teachers' work and psychological state. These factors work together to limit the Double Reduction policy's full execution.

4. Recommendations for Policy Implementation

While the Double Reduction policy has somewhat eased the load on parents and children and improved educational parity, there have been issues with its implementation, thus it is not a perfect solution. To better achieve the policy objectives, the following measures are recommended.

4.1 Conduct Long-Term Evaluation

First, it is crucial to establish a long-term mechanism for evaluating policy effects, which will help to adjust policy responses promptly to ensure their fairness and effectiveness [17]. Such a mechanism would further encourage a positive feedback loop in the educational environment and support the continuous growth of compulsory education in China. This can be achieved by promoting outcomes assessment, bolstering process assessment, investigating value-added assessment, and enhancing integrated assessment. In addition, it promotes the elimination of inherent social phenomena such as credentialism, hierarchism, and diplomas. The holistic and coordinated development of kids can be supported by using big data techniques for comprehensive student tracking and assessment [3]. Specific practices include, first, the establishment of a special assessment agency or department responsible for regularly monitoring and analyzing the effects of implementing education policies. Second, the use of big data tools for comprehensive tracking and evaluation of students, and the establishment of a dynamic feedback system to ensure that assessment results reflect the current state of education in real-time and that problems are identified and adjustments are made promptly. In addition, third-party independent assessment can be introduced to ensure the fairness and objectivity of the assessment process. Through these actions, it may assist in fostering students' comprehensive and coordinated growth, in addition, to helping eliminate inherent social phenomena such as credentialism, hierarchism, and diplomas, and promote the overall progress of the education system [3].

4.2 Improve the Quality of Rural Education

Second, there is a need to increase investment in education resources in rural and remote areas to guarantee that students in these regions have equal chances at education [17]. Specific measures include improving educational facilities and quality, conducting training programs for rural teachers to enhance teaching standards, and establishing a sound incentive mechanism for teachers to draw in and keep qualified educators. Furthermore, it's also necessary to develop an entirely novel ecosystem of lifelong learning for elementary and secondary school teachers, encourage collaboration among schools, the government, educators, and parents, and increase backing for the policy known as "Double Reduction" to enhance teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and ability to take action on the policy [20]. Prioritizing rural primary and secondary education is key to achieving these goals [16]. In addition, schools should further understand deeply the Double Reduction policy's concept and pattern. Following the starting point of teaching without discrimination, following the psychological laws of students' growth, and not letting examinations become the baton of learning and assessment. To cultivate students into wise people, efforts should be made to respect students' differences, strengthen home-school cooperation, and enhance parents' talent development [6].

4.3 Be More Open-Minded

Thirdly, parents must be guided to look at tutoring rationally and help students master the correct learning methods [23]. Yu et al. found that educational anxiety has a substantial mediating role in parents' views of educational involution and their understanding of the Double Reduction policy [3]. Specifically, Parents' views of educational fairness are stronger when they have a deeper comprehension of the Double Reduction policy. Therefore, guardians should correctly understand the significance of the state's Double Reduction policy, and actively cooperate with the school to implement the work of burden reduction, and the family, school, and society jointly help to promote the implementation of the Double Reduction policy [13]. Ren and Zhao's study pointed out that equitable access to educational resources and dynamic feedback mechanisms are crucial for reducing parental anxiety [17]. The study by Chen et al. further emphasizes that fostering a scientific understanding of education among parents and teachers and promoting realistic expectations can help reduce anxiety and better align policies with national education goals [20].

4.4 Establish a More Diversified Vocational Service System

Fourth, key initiatives include reversing preconceptions

to increase possibilities for completing conventional tests and guaranteeing laborers good pay and social standing [23]. In Germany, for example, they place almost equal importance on traditional education and vocational education and training [24]. Germany has also created the Dual System of Education, which allows students to complete their academic studies and obtain real-world work experience at the same time. It does this by combining classroom instruction with on-the-job training. This further ensures that students enter the labor market with the necessary practical work skills. This model is regarded as one of the main contributors to German education's success and provides valuable education and training experience for other countries. Therefore, countries can draw on this model and consider integrating academic learning and vocational training more closely in their education reforms, to cultivate students' practical skills in response to the needs of the future labour market. In this way, not only can students' employability be improved, but vocational education may also be more socially recognized, and society's emphasis on vocationally skilled personnel can be promoted, thus better facilitating economic development and social progress.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Double Reduction policy is a noteworthy endeavor by the Chinese government to promote educational equity. It endeavors to enhance the standard of education and mitigate educational disparities by minimizing the workload for students and enforcing regulations on after-school training establishments. While this policy has initially demonstrated positive impacts, such as equalizing educational resources and reducing economic burdens, it still faces many challenges in actual implementation. Such issues as the lack of execution, the imbalance between urban and rural educational resources, and the community's and parents' anxiety about schooling have all affected the effectiveness of the policy and even exacerbated inequality in some respects. To better achieve the policy objectives, it is recommended that a long-term evaluation mechanism be carried out, that investment in rural education be increased, that parents and teachers be fostered with the right concepts of education, and that a diversified vocational service system be established. The implementation of these measures will help to truly realize educational equity and promote harmonious and stable social development. In addition, further research is needed to examine how different actors interpret and react to the policy, prompting stakeholders inside and outside the education system (e.g. schools, families, the government, and training institutions) to work together to achieve full

implementation and optimization of the policy.

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