



The Transformation of Teaching Strategy and Teacher Competency Cultivation in Public Primary Schools Under the Double Reduction of Education (“*shuang jian*”)

— Based on interview

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Abstract. Since the promulgation of the Double Reduction, new requirements have been placed on both schools and teachers. The improvement of schools and the degree of teachers' adaptation vary from region to region. This paper is based on interviews with nine elementary school teachers, one educational department staff in Jiujiang City, Jiangxi Province. It analyzes the teachers' understanding of the policy; new requirements imposed on them; and difficulties they are faced with. The analysis found that teachers' understanding of the policy was comprehensive. They are facing requirements for homework assignments, teaching, and student cultivation. Teachers are confronted with various difficulties—how to foster students while fewer assessments and examinations are adopted; how to help senior teachers to follow the trend of Double Reduction. Measures are taken to resolve those challenges. For example, find solutions in practice; receive specific guidance from the education department; improve teaching competency by reading pedagogical books or attending lectures of experienced teachers.

Keywords: Double Reduction, Teacher Competency, Elementary School, Homework, Teaching Strategy.

1 Introduction

Education is the cornerstone of national revitalization and social flight, and the modernization of basic education governance is related to the fundamental interests of the people, the quality of talent training, and the cause of socialist modernization. The introduction of the Double Reduction is the meaning and value of building a high-quality basic education governance system. The comprehensive and solid promotion of the implementation of the "Double Reduction" is an urgent and priority task to accelerate the high-quality development of basic education [3]. With the introduction of the Double Reduction and its implementation in various regions, the effectiveness and the parts that are improved to be less effective are gradually emerging with practice.

In the new era, reform of the education system should be deepened; improve the implementation mechanism of moral education; reverse the unscientific education evaluation orientation; and fully stimulate the vitality of the development of education. Teachers, as the main body of education and teaching, should accurately grasp the new situation and new tasks facing the development of education. Therefore, it is necessary to accelerate the transformation of the teaching force in the new era, to find the focus of the construction of the "teaching force", and to build an effective teacher training mechanism [9]. The teaching force refers to the whole faculty who take the responsibility for educating students, whether they are experienced teachers or inexperienced teachers, achieving an effective teaching-learning process. To achieve an effective teaching-learning process, there is no denying that the way towards it is through ceaseless teaching practice. Moreover, fostering the teaching competency of teachers, revolutionizing classroom teaching, and converting teaching methods also play irreplaceable roles in achieving the goal of achieving effective education. In China, at the critical stage of quality education, teaching-learning effectiveness is supposed to be guaranteed in order to revolutionize the core notion of K12 education, combining home-school cooperation and social force.

It is well known that, in addition to the professional "theoretical knowledge" and standardized basic skills acquired through academic education, teachers need to acquire sufficient "practical knowledge" through in-service teaching practice. The so-called "practical knowledge" of teachers refers to the "theories" and knowledge that teachers actually use and express in their educational and teaching practice, which is a "theory of teachers' personal practice". This knowledge comes from both the accumulation and understanding of teachers' own personal experience (direct experience) and the exchange and sharing of knowledge among peers (indirect experience) [5]. As a result, an alternative path to teacher development, in-service practice reflection, has emerged. There are two main models of in-service practice reflection training for elementary school teachers in China, namely, the "old-led-new" model and the practice-oriented continuing education model [8].

However, under the Double Reduction, the retraining of in-service teachers cannot continue to follow the model that existed before the introduction of the Double Reduction but must be adapted, changed, and innovated. During the interviews, the teachers mentioned that some senior teachers did not understand and could not adapt to the Double Reduction. This has led to a situation where the traditional "old-led-new" model of in-service teacher training cannot be continued.

The propose of this paper is to better align the in-service teacher training model with the Double Reduction to the greatest extent possible, to summarize observations on the current state of elementary education under the existing policy based on previous scholars, and to provide a constructive basis for educators and education policy makers to help education move toward higher and better development.

In this paper, interviews were conducted. The participants of this interview were 10 person who worked in Jiujiang, Jiangxi, China, with 1 person from within the education system; 9 serving teachers and management staff in elementary school who taught subjects covering Chinese, mathematics, and English.

Table 1. Participants' names and workplaces (Self-Drawn)

No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Name	Tang	Deng	Wang	Fan	Huang	Jiang	Tan	Wan	Wei	Xu
Workplace	Jiujiang Lianxi District Government	Jiujiang Dongfeng Elementary School	Jiujiang Dongfeng Elementary School	Jiujiang Yongxiu County Sanjiao Primary school	Jiujiang Nanshan School	Jiujiang Bingxin Elementary School	Jiujiang Lianxi District Yikang School	Jiujiang De'an County First Elementary School	Jiujiang Lianxi District First Elementary School	Jiujiang Lianxi District Second Elementary School

As the basic stage of K12 education, elementary school education has a huge impact on students, influencing their learning ability and study habits and even establishing children's outlook on life, worldview and values. Therefore, this paper focuses on investigating teaching and learning at the elementary school level under the Double Reduction.

Jiujiang, Jiangxi is the city that this paper investigates, Jiangxi province is located in the middle-east of China. In 2019, there are 45,000 graduate students; 1.135 million students in general higher education; 218,000 students in adult higher education; 1.055 million students in general high school; 386,000 students in secondary vocational education; 2.201 million students in junior high school; 4.114 million students in general elementary school; 38,000 students in special education; and 1.658 million children in kindergarten. There are 10,187 private schools of all kinds, with 1.896 million students enrolled in all kinds of private schools [4].

Jiangxi Provincial People's Government issued the Notice on the 14th Five-Year Plan for the Development of Education Undertakings of Jiangxi Province "One of the pillars of human civilization that has endured the longest is the quest for opportunity equality. In the writings of numerous classical philosophers, including Confucius, Plato, and Aristotle, the concept of educational equality may be found. For instance, Confucius, China's greatest philosopher and educator, advocated an egalitarian view of education more than two thousand years ago in his famous statement that "in teaching, there should be no distinction of classes" [1].

The interviewees of this paper are three parties: the official education system, elementary school management, and primary school teachers. The interview questions cover four main dimensions: understanding and interpretation of the Double Reduction; new demands on elementary school teachers and management after the introduction of the Double Reduction; difficulties and challenges encountered by elementary school teachers in the teaching process; and what efforts and changes elementary school teachers and elementary school management have made to cope with the difficulties brought about by the Double Reduction.

2 Teachers' understanding of the Double Reduction of education

2.1 The Double Reduction aims to release the burden of students

From the interviewees' answers to the question "Please briefly discuss the Double Reduction in your opinion", generally speaking, teachers, as well as school administrators, their understanding of the Double Reduction is relatively comprehensive.

First and foremost—reducing the extra learning burden of students. The Double Reduction aims to both substantially reduce the amount of homework and duration of finishing it. Especially for primary and secondary students, easing the strain of excessive homework on these pupils. Currently, exam-oriented education and "sea of homework" lead to the fact that students' homework burden is increasingly heavy [11]. Too much homework, though, can be detrimental to both elementary and secondary pupils. According to a questionnaire survey of more than 10,000 fifth-grade elementary school students in Beijing, those who finished their homework in under an hour received higher grades than those who finished it in more than an hour. Additionally, as homework time increased, students' academic performance gradually declined, meaning that the longer the homework time, the lower the grades of students [10]. It is believed that, the longer students do the homework, the lower the student's achievement. Therefore, it is better to eliminate "sea of homework" and let students receive scientific and reasonable homework practice to improve students' learning efficiency and learning quality. Through interviews, it is can be learned that before the Double Reduction was enacted, there were more repetitive assignments for students. On the example of Chinese subjects repetitive copying homework is more, teacher Xu said in the interview:

"Of course, the homework should be reduced, and then to eliminate those ineffective, mechanical, copying type, repeated training of such homework, so that homework, moderate and appropriate amount, help children to improve their overall ability. So the amount of homework must be reduced."

2.2 The Double Reduction aims to release the financial burden on families

The other "reduction" in this policy is to reduce the financial burden for students' families. The Double Reduction pays attention to revolutionizing out-of-school training institutes and prohibiting the bundling of education with capital for the reason that some individuals attempt to take charge of the education system by operating capital. Decades in China have witnessed the proliferation of out-of-school training institutions, the size of a dragon, greatly disrupting the "healthy" education ecology. It is hard for authorities to take control of education. Off-campus institutions put more financial strain on families and society by demanding a high price for training and marketing capital, which has an adverse effect on the healthy development of families and society. The requirements point out accurately the rectification of the chaos of out-of-school training, the reduction of subject-based out-of-school training, and the non-profit

characteristics of out-of-school training, with the government taking the lead [2]. Teacher Deng also mentioned it in the interview:

“This naturally can also reduce the family expenditure, reducing some of the economic burden on the family.”

2.3 The Double Reduction aims to bring the dominant position of education back to schools

To help students attain excellent learning skills at school and lessen their dependency on outside-school training, schools should continue to deepen curriculum reform and develop teaching methods. It is necessary to open the full and complete national curriculum, create a rich and diverse school-based curriculum, provide students with a wealth of school-based learning courses and learning resources, and ensure that students learn enough and learn well in school in order to improve the quality of school education. Additionally, it is necessary to expand the quality resources of compulsory education [12]. In the interview, teacher Deng also expressed the similar opinion:

“The real requirement of Double Reduction is that schools should improve the quality of teaching, so that schools could become a primary place for students to learn.”

3 New requirements for in-service teachers after the implementation of the Double Reduction of education

3.1 Requirements on homework

Students' homework burden is one of issues that the Double Reduction directly points to. The document specifies the homework assignment norms, stipulating that no written homework will be assigned in the first and second grades of elementary schools, and that the average time for completing written homework will not exceed 60 minutes in the third to sixth grades of elementary school, and 90 minutes in junior high school. Schools are suggested to promote homework reform by regulating homework sources, designing homework scientifically, arranging homework reasonably, coordinating the total amount of homework, strengthening homework correction, enhancing homework analysis and feedback, and after-school counseling, among other things, under the premise of reducing the total amount of homework and lowering the pressure of examinations in general. The key to this is to reform homework design as well as homework type structure [7].

Teacher Jiang gave her opinion on this:

“The assignments will be a little bit different. For example, last night we cut out the copying assignments, as you said. Some teachers copied the vocabulary five or three times, but now we've changed it to one or two times. I will talk about my experience, like this vocabulary homework copy less, but we have to strengthen the dictation, strengthen the testing, timely discovery of students who did not master the vocabulary, timely supplement. Second, we do face-to-face correction. The homework is too much; we will not be able to correct it within one day. For example, I have three or four homework to assign today. I may only be able to correct two of them; the other one, I

may have to leave it until tomorrow, or I call the competent student to help me. Now there is less homework, teachers can finish the tasks within one day.”

3.2 Requirements on teaching

In terms of the teaching section, it is divided into the in-class instructional component and the after-school service that is unique to the Double Reduction. Overall, teachers in schools and policymakers should be acutely aware of the importance of designing and organizing instruction in strict accordance with the curriculum standards. Teachers should strictly follow the curriculum standards, which are the basic rules for both the teaching and learning process. Teachers should strictly follow the requirements of the curriculum standards; follow the “Four Fundamentals”(fundamental knowledge, basic skills, basic ideas and methods, and preliminary activity-organizing experience); develop students' four abilities (the ability to ask, discover, analyze, and solve problems); develop students' critical thinking; and effectively eliminate the phenomenon of rote memorization after class.

Teacher Tan expressed in the aspect of Curriculum Provision:

“The first point is that we need to make reasonable use of the new curriculum in schools. For example, there is a new course in mathematics called “Educational Classroom”, and it is a new problem for teachers to use this course to improve the core literacy of students. If there is a specific difficulty in the curriculum of each subject, how do we base it on the classroom, improve the effectiveness of classroom teaching, how to scientifically screen the core content of each subject, to delete and trim, and should be taught as much as possible. Because we want to deliver all the knowledge to students, to grasp the key steps of the key links, and then solve the problem.”

Regarding after-school programs, the General Office of the State Council released the Opinions on Regulating the Development of Out-of-School Training Institutions in 2018. The proposal was that, in order to address the “three-and-a-half hours after school” problem, localities should strengthen the role of primary and secondary schools as the main channels in after-school programs. The “Double Reduction” Policy, which mandates “to ensure the time of after-school services, improve the quality of after-school services, expand the channels of after-school services, and do a better job of free-of-charge online learning,” further strengthens the status of “school after-school services” in education in order to lessen the burden. After-school services should be based on students individually, embracing differentiation and meeting students' diverse learning habits and development needs such as “homework, practice, support for weaknesses and talents”.

Tang, who works in Educational Department, said:

“The after-school service is a new requirement for teachers to provide after-school services and to promote the all-round development of students in the midst of the heavy teaching load. In the after-school service, in addition to homework help for students, training in sports, music, art, and other related areas should be provided, so that students can develop in all aspects of moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labour work.”

3.3 Requirements on cultivating full-scale competency of students

For a comparatively long period of time, students in China have been faced with “double pressure” —the overload homework burden and off-campus training programs, leading to the fact that there is no more extra time for children to develop their habits or talents. On the contrary, overwhelming academic anxiety has been placed on them, even if they are teenagers.

Therefore, in the long run, the Double Reduction is conducive to reducing unnecessary burdens and promoting students' all-round development. With the reduction of unnecessary stress, the rest of students' time can be used in a very reasonable way for their overall self-improvement, according to Xu:

“The Double Reduction actually reflects a series of requirements for the educational ecology, which inevitably requires children to have sufficient sleep, sufficient exercise, and more colorful courses for the development of children's bodies and minds. Our school's practice in this area includes reading courses, traditional culture courses, and calligraphy classes. Because of the limited number of courses that are currently offered, we are also experimenting more with after-school services to develop more courses. For example, table soccer, ice skating, and various ball sports. We may have been doing this before the Double Reduction, but after the Double Reduction, the development and management of these courses and the follow-up of these courses has become more important. However, after the Double Reduction, the development and management of these programs and the subsequent adjustments have become more demanding.”

4 Challenges encountered by teachers in the teaching process

4.1 Evaluating and cultivating students while less homework and examination is required

The Double Reduction has been implemented, and schools are supposed to focus on “reducing the burden” and “improving quality” to achieve joint growth in education quality and efficiency. According to scholarly research, in the late 1970s, Japan proposed a “relaxed education” reform in order to reverse the tendency of the “duck-and-fill” traditional system in education, which required “lowering the level of complexity of homework, easing the load on pupils, lowering the study material by 30%, and lowering class time by 10%”. The issue with “Relaxed Education” is that it overly eases students' academic burdens, which has resulted in a little drop in the standard of basic education.

Teacher Wei expressed:

“Especially for Chinese homework, the amount of homework required has been reduced all of a sudden. For example, in the third grade, where I teach now, the homework for all three subjects combined cannot exceed one hour. For language learning, reading, and writing, many teachers may face some new problems: how to efficiently assign homework. We also held many meetings, teachers were also thinking of many ways, and then the teaching office also proposed a new way, is to give each subject

homework time for compression, let's say half an hour for language, 20 minutes for math, and 10 minutes for English, which helps teachers to accurately This helps teachers to find the important and difficult points of the lesson and assign targeted homework or step-by-step homework. For children who have a strong ability to absorb knowledge, only reading assignments or a few questions are required, while children with poor foundations are more likely to have word requirements. So it took us a week or two to find a better way to follow the line. Of course, the process of assigning homework was smoother at a later stage."

4.2 Full-scale guidance and support for teachers remain not enough

In the interview, teachers mentioned a high frequency of difficulties because, first, a comprehensive home-school communication mechanism has not been established. Second, parents do not understand the Double Reduction well enough, so they often question teachers. Teacher Deng said:

"Parents actually carry a lot of pressure. They do not know how well their children learn, what degree of learning, because there are no scores to use as evaluation criteria. They may also have some misunderstanding of the teacher, because teachers assign less homework and do not test, so they will certainly regard the teacher as not responsible. When faced with teacher changes because our school sometimes has job adjustments every semester or every year, parents can't understand. In fact, all teachers will face the policy of reducing the amount of homework; they compared to the previous big gap, so it is also necessary for parents to have a buffer of time to be able to understand the Double Reduction."

The family is the first educational place for children to grow up. If the work of reducing the burden is not supported by family education, it will be difficult to effectively implement the Double Reduction [6].

Secondly, in the study, we found the problem of left-behind children. In De'an County, Jiujiang City, teacher Wan mentioned that:

"Some of the primary school students in our county are stay-at-home children, with only their grandparents to supervise them, and for those children, they have almost no one at home to supervise their studies. Before the Double Reduction, their performance in school may have been a little worse than other children, but the previous school teachers will help them. The situation now doesn't allow teachers to assign too much homework nor put too much pressure on children. Child's performance will be worse, not that worse, but certainly not as good as before. Because you can assign exercises before the introduction of the policy, teachers will get to know what knowledge they have not mastered, and can immediately help them to check the gaps. If this problem is not solved, the loopholes will get bigger and bigger."

Third, for some schools that are small-scale, they do not yet have the ability to organize training that targets the Double Reduction for teachers. Mr. Huang, the management teacher of Nanshan School, confessed that:

"There is no special course for teachers to improve their teaching ability in our school, and there is no systematic training for all teachers, but only fragmented training and guidance from superior authorities."

“There are 47.2% of teachers that are involved in the survey admitted that ‘pet lesson’ has put too much stress on them; teachers who confessed that frequent research of the curriculum is a burden for them occupied 45.3%; overall, the percentage of teachers who held the opinion that the teaching competency evaluating system leads to a drastic increase in workload is 44.3%.”

Teacher Deng made a similar point that it is more important to improve the efficiency of teachers and provide them with proven guidance as opposed to listening to the guidelines and meeting the inspections of the education department.

“There are more assessments of teachers' work and more inspections. At the community level, we can understand that authorities need to check whether schools are implementing the Double Reduction in a solid manner. But for the schools, there are inspections and there will be inspection preparation. Relatively speaking, the workload is invariably increased a lot, and the focus of work is to meet the inspection. In fact, inspections are not bad, but too frequent inspections do disrupt the school's work schedule and relatively distract the teachers' energy, but this contradiction has always existed, and it is not just which party can coordinate.”

4.3 Senior teachers can't keep up with the “trend”

To the author's surprise, an interview with administrators at Nanshan School revealed this phenomenon—the inability of senior teachers to adapt to the Double Reduction. *“For middle-aged and senior teachers, it is difficult for them to convert their notions, preferring their own inherent teaching and homework patterns and always confirming that ‘more is better’ when assigning homework. It takes a longer time to change. The introduction of the Double Reduction is a considerable challenge for all teachers, especially middle-aged and senior teachers. The change of ideas, the abandonment of traditional teaching methods, and the improvement of their own business skills all take a long time and can be a long way to go.”*

5 Teachers' measures in the face of the Double Reduction of education

5.1 Practice in the classroom

One of the questions in the interview was “Will the reduction of homework and the reduction of exams lead to a lack of ways to assess students' learning, thus preventing teachers and parents from being informed of students' learning in a timely manner, and how can such a problem be solved? In this regard, teacher Wei answered:

“The test is just one approach. In fact, we usually have some tests, but these tests are not in the form of test papers, but in the form of quizzes or exercises, some new assessment of the child, or the form of breakthroughs or after-class quizzes, not necessarily in the form of test paper assessment. Teachers, usually on the homework or class, on some of the questions and answers, can understand the child on this lesson or this knowledge point. We can get some anti-lock and then target again from the homework experience whether we have eaten or not. At first, teachers may feel that the test papers

come more intuitive and systematic, but as, we follow the rhythm of the school and the general direction of the Double Reduction, we gradually find our own teaching rhythm, and the children can also keep up.”

So it can be concluded that practice is the only criterion to test the truth. Assuming that the Double Reduction is promulgated without specific regulations to guide teachers on how to reduce homework and exams, the only thing teachers can do is to throw themselves into practice to find out how students learn with less homework and fewer exams, and to find out if there are loopholes in students' learning when homework and exams are missing. It is the duty of excellent teachers to find hidden holes and fill them.

5.2 Follow the guidance of school and administration

According to the interview, after the policy guidelines for the Double Reduction were issued, each district and government held several conferences to convey the spirit of the central government and took measures to train in-service teachers. The following is the elaboration of Mr. Tang of the educational department.

“After the prevalence of the Double Reduction, our district has taken a great number of measures to retrain in-service teachers. For example, we train teachers on weekends or holidays in the following ways: centralized training and online training. In particular, the centralized training we have carried out this semester includes classroom teacher training, business principal training, safety training, drowning prevention training, and mental health training; such training allows our teachers to use their vacation time to recharge and upgrade, so that in the future implementation of the Double Reduction is more comprehensive, more thorough, more implementation, and more universal.”

From the teacher's aspect, teacher Wei had this to say.

“Since the implementation of the Double Reduction, the school has given us many opportunities to learn and exchange experiences, including communication with other schools. Our school has conducted several large events and invited national lecturers or authorities to help teachers get through the confusion stage and to help them find the appropriate position for themselves.”

Starting from a more specific point of view, teacher Deng answered the guidance provided by his school for teachers.

“We work in several ways at the school. One is to improve the quality of teaching in the classroom, and the second is to optimize the ability of teachers to arrange homework assignments. So we provide these several segments of learning. One is training, which due to the epidemic, we do not have many opportunities to go out for training. We will make full use of the network learning resources, such as: live training on the network for teaching materials, as well as the network of some experts or teaching predecessors of quality lessons. The purpose of this is multi-faceted, the first being to give teachers a better understanding of the teaching materials. The second is to provide teachers with better teaching skills and more diverse teaching methods.”

Another point that teacher Deng mentioned impressed the author is that:

“We also provide teachers with “optimized homework” or “special homework”, or “homework that students like”. We made a publicity page so that teachers would have a platform to showcase their work, such as the card games in the lower grades, the number reading game, and the Rubik's cube game in the middle grades, and the math

thinking map in the upper grades. It also allows parents to understand what the teachers are doing under the Double Reduction and what ways they can reduce the students' learning burden without reducing their interest in learning or the quality of learning."

5.3 Acquire positive experience by themselves

Self-directed learning is a very important part of life-long learning, and when the author asked "if there were ways you would take to improve your teaching", the teachers' answers were "of course." teacher Tan said:

"I will definitely read more books about teaching. For example, we have special teachers' demonstration courses in mathematics. I will read more books about them. For example, if I feel that I have a deficiency in lesson planning or in class, I will make up for my own deficiency."

Teacher Wang said:

"In fact, before the Double Reduction, I had also been in the habit of improving myself, because the teaching ideas, in fact, have been changing every year because we have been going through the reform, and the students in each class are different, so usually I will order some magazines, but also look at the Internet. If I need to teach a certain class, or if I need to write a paper on something, I will also take more specific measures. For example, if I need to study writing or oral communication, or if I need to face the Double Reduction, I will look for more specific information about it, as I believe every teacher does."

6 Conclusion

By the analysis of participants, this paper finds that in Jiujiang City, Jiangxi Province (a third-tier city), elementary school teachers and school administrators generally fully understand the Double Reduction and affirm the need for teachers to improve teaching skills and transform their teaching strategies. In terms of implementation, the schools have introduced new requirements for teachers to "reduce the quantity and improve the quality" and "develop special courses" in terms of assignments and curriculum arrangements. While teachers are actively responding to the new requirements and changes, there are also obstacles that cannot be ignored—the overwhelming inspection from the educational department; how to keep track of students' learning and monitor them in a reasonable and comprehensive manner while reducing the amount of homework; how to give more "direct" and "critical" advice from the education department and school leaders; how veteran teachers can adapt to new policies. Therefore, teachers should start from practice, combined with guidance, and gain and share their experience on their own, and then put it into teaching.

This paper is a reference for studying the teaching practices of the Double Reduction in elementary schools in third-tier cities in China, suggesting that it is necessary to improve teachers' teaching competency and adopt advanced teaching methods under the requirements of the new policy. It gives researchers in the field of education a factual basis and inspiration on the implementation of the Double Reduction in less

developed areas and the improvement of in-service teachers' competency. Researchers could conduct in-depth research on the issue of stay-at-home children in less developed areas under the policy to achieve "Education Equity".

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