



# A Discussion of the Long-term Implementation of the "Double Reduction" Policy Dilemma and its Countermeasures

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**Abstract.** The "double reduction" policy has achieved remarkable results since its implementation. However, the management of the academic burden in the compulsory education stage is a long-term project. The key to achieving the "double reduction" policy goal lies in the long-term implementation of the policy. Based on the analysis from the perspective of the policy implementation network, this research found that the dilemma of long-term implementation of the "double reduction" policy is as follows: Policy path dependence in the network environment, short-term conflicts between national and individual development needs, utilitarian and short-sighted educational culture; The policy configuration represented by the government is not reasonable enough; The production network cooperation relationship represented by schools, off-campus training institutions and social organizations is weak, and the supply efficiency of educational resources is low.

Faced with the above dilemmas, this paper tries to argue that it is necessary to build a government-led, multi-participation policy collaborative innovation mechanism; to build a coordination mechanism for supervising administrative law enforcement under strict supervision and the rule of law; to create a value-led and demand-oriented whole-process policy communication mechanism; and to optimize the supply of public education resources through multiple cooperation and mutual compensation.

**Keywords:** "Double reduction" policy, long-term implementation, policy implementation network, dilemma, countermeasures

## 1 Introduction

Since the implementation of the "Double Reduction" policy, students' academic burden on and off campus has been reduced, and students' learning anxiety and family education anxiety have also been greatly reduced after the "double reduction"[1]. However, it must be clearly recognized that the "double reduction" policy is not pursuing short-term effects. From the perspective of goal priority, "double reduction" is a means within the major strategic layout of basic education reform in the new era. "Building a high-

quality education system" is the fundamental goal of academic burden governance [2]. From the perspective of objective reality, since the founding of China, various departments of the state have implemented a number of policies aimed at the problem of students' overburden. However, it turns out that, on the one hand, the policy is increasingly superimposed and refined, and on the other hand, the monster named "academic burden" is hard to shake.

Much research has been conducted to find out why the problem of academic burden is still difficult to solve under the vigorous promotion of government departments. Some scholars pointed out that the past work of reducing the burden showed the characteristics of a large number of policies, high density, but short policy life cycles, resulting in "fatigue" and "boredom" of policy implementation. It can be seen that burden reduction is a long-term project, and the key to achieving the policy goal of "double reduction" lies in the long-term implementation of the policy. Hence, what kind of implementation dilemma does the long-term implementation of the "double reduction" policy face and how it can be improved are the key issues that need to be studied. This article tries to study what kind of implementation dilemma the long-term implementation of the "double reduction" policy faces and how it can be improved from the perspective of policy network implementation.

## **2 The short-term effort of the "Double Reduction" policy**

On July 24, 2021, the "Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Students' Homework and Off-campus Training in Compulsory Education" were issued by the General Office of the State Council, which is also known as the "Double Reduction" policy. In order to ensure that the new policy can be implemented systematically and effectively, the Ministry of Education then intensively issued more than 20 supporting documents, covering after-school services, training institution registration, the definition of the scope of subject training, and the investigation and punishment of disguised illegal training [3].

Since the implementation of the "double reduction" policy, it has achieved immediate results in a relatively short period of time. In terms of school burden reduction, a survey shows that since the "double reduction" policy has been introduced, the amount of homework for primary and secondary school students across the country has been greatly reduced, the difficulty of homework has been greatly reduced, and students' self-management ability and independent development space have been improved [4]. In terms of off-campus burden reduction, according to the statistics, offline and online off-campus training institutions have been reduced by 83.8% and 84.1%, respectively [5]. As a result, students' academic burden on and off campus has been reduced, and students' learning anxiety and family education anxiety have also been greatly reduced after the "double reduction."

### **3 The evaluation of the long-term effect of the "Double Reduction" policy**

#### **3.1 Policy implementation network theory**

Policy implementation network theory originates from the construction and development of the concept of "policy network" in academic circles. The "policy network" emphasizes the diversity of participants in the process of policy implementation, the complexity of the relationship between participants, and the two-way interaction between participants and policy structures. Based on the concept of "policy network", American scholar O'Toole[6] put forward the theory of "policy implementation network" to understand and reveal the interactive relationship, relationship structure, and dynamic changes of relationship in the process of policy implementation. The proposal of the policy implementation network theory breaks the "top-down" and "bottom-up" linear analysis paths of traditional policy science, emphasizing that the effective implementation of public policies cannot rely solely on the bureaucratic system with the government as the main body, but also needs to pay attention to the complex environment of policy implementation and the consultation and cooperation among multiple organizations and participants.

#### **3.2 Analysis on the implementation network and dilemma of the long-term implementation of the "double reduction" policy**

**3.2.1 Network environment and execution Dilemma.** The dilemma of the long-term implementation of the "double reduction" policy under the influence of the network environment can be understood from three dimensions: politics, the economy, and culture.

1) Political network dilemma: path dependence obstructs path updates

Political networks are an important force influencing the long-term implementation of the "double reduction" policy. The formulation and implementation of the "double reduction" policy is the fundamental task of the Party Central Committee to build a high-quality education system, to achieve moral education, and to return education to its original aspiration. The long-term implementation of the "double reduction" policy has strong administrative support and a stable political environment. However, the political network supports and hinders the long-term implementation of the "double reduction" policy. In the governance of academic burden in the past few decades, the cognition and action of burden reduction have formed a certain policy path, and participants at all levels have inertia in both thinking and action in the work of burden reduction [7]. This path dependence on traditional policy cognition and action will still be a huge barrier to cognition update, institutional innovation and initiative creation under this background.

2) The economic network dilemma: the long-term demands of national development conflict with the short-term demands of individual development

The impact of the economic network on the long-term implementation of the "double reduction" policy is manifested at the national and individual levels. At the national

level, one of the important missions of developing education is to serve social and economic development. The "14th Five-Year Plan" pointed out that the improvement of population quality should be placed in an important position, the population structure should be optimized, and the level of human capital and the overall development ability of people should be improved [1]. The "double reduction" policy is an important part of this strategy. At the individual level, with the development of China's society and economy, the main contradiction in the field of education has shifted to the contradiction between the people's growing demand for high-quality education and the insufficient and imbalanced development [8]. Besides, a large number of middle-class families hope to invest in education to give their children a place in higher education and job competition [9]. Although the long-term implementation of the "double reduction" policy is in line with the long-term planning for social and economic development, it still contradicts the educational needs of some families in the short term.

3) Cultural network dilemma: utilitarian and short-sighted educational culture destroys the social atmosphere of educating people

As far as cultural networks are concerned, as the cult of efficiency and competition in modern market discourse sweeps the field of public education. The traditional educational belief of "learning and becoming an official" merged with the diploma fanaticism and performanceism under neoliberalism, forming educational concepts and behaviors characterized by short-sightedness and utilitarianism [10]. This distorted view of education and educational behavior is manifested in the continuous amplification of family education anxiety in the family. Families continue to seek additional out-of-school educational services, increasing their children's academic burden. In schools, it is manifested as the pursuit of "only grades" and the test-oriented teaching with "question-taking tactics" as the basic feature.

**3.2.2 Action subject and execution dilemma.** There are many shareholders in the "double reduction" policy, and different types of shareholders take different policy actions due to their roles, positions and interests in the network, which leads to different dilemmas in the implementation of the policy network. At present, there is a lack of reasonable configuration in the use of policy tools [11]. On the one hand, the choice of policy tools relies too heavily on imperative tools. On the other hand, the use of policy tools is under-considered. Although propaganda-style persuasion can attract attention in a short period of time, it cannot raise the public's awareness of the educational concept behind the "double reduction". Propaganda-style persuasion often only emphasizes the positive effects, while refraining from talking about the short-term negative effects that policies may bring. There is a big gap between the public's life and policy practice in the short term, which may cause disgust and mistrust.

**3.2.3 The cooperative relationship within the producer network is weak, and the supply and allocation efficiency of educational resources is not high.** The supply and balanced allocation of high-quality compulsory education resources is a guarantee for the long-term implementation of the "double reduction" policy, and the producer network is the main provider of educational resources in the "double reduction" policy

implementation network. The main actors of China's compulsory education resource producer network include: local primary and secondary schools, off-campus training institutions, local colleges and universities, museums, youth palaces, youth activity centers, community family guidance centers, family education guidance service points, research and practice education bases etc. According to the social attributes, the above-mentioned action subjects can be further divided into three main subjects: school, market and society. After the reform of education marketization, schools and the market have become the main providers of compulsory education resources. However, under the current management system, the two are in a competitive relationship in terms of interests and resources, making it difficult to cooperate. The disorderly expansion of the after-school education market has even tended to replace schools as the main front of education in recent years. After the implementation of the "double reduction" policy, the output channels of market education resources were quickly reduced, the vicious competition of the market against schools was curbed, and the main position of school education was defended. However, the "double reduction" policy has also caused the withdrawal of a large number of market players and the surge of pressure on school education, which has made the supply of high-quality education that is already short and unbalanced even worse.

#### **4 Discussion- countermeasures for long-term implementation of the "double reduction" policy**

The long-term implementation of the "Double Reduction" policy is a network process, involving complex interests, power and values within and among the government, schools, off-campus training institutions, and families. In response to the long-term implementation of the "double reduction" network dilemma, it is still necessary to start from the network thinking of policy implementation, promote policy innovation, improve institutional guarantees, and seek multi-party cooperation to improve resource supply and distribution.

##### **4.1 A collaborative innovation mechanism with government leadership and multiple participation for burden reduction policies needs to be established**

The problem of the academic burden in compulsory education has profound social roots [12]. On the one hand, the long-term implementation of the "double reduction" policy needs to bear in mind the historical mission of building a high-quality education system and a good education ecology. On the other hand, attention should be continually paid to new problems in the implementation of policies, policies should be adjusted in stages, and policy vitality should be constantly stimulated. Through dynamic policy collaborative innovation, "double reduction" policy can get rid of path dependence, break the life cycle, and timely respond to the new problems and difficulties in the process of policy implementation.

The second is to adhere to the professional network as the core of policy innovation, strengthen the forward-looking, scientific and rational design of burden reduction policy, so as to provide professional advice for local burden reduction policy innovation, and avoid the quality risk of local policy implementation. Considering the scattered characteristics of professional network members, local governments can explore the establishment of special burden reduction policy innovation working groups, widely invite experts and scholars from scientific research institutions and colleges and universities in the province to participate in the group.

#### **4.2 A collaborative mechanism between burden reduction supervision and administrative law enforcement needs to be built**

The heavy academic burden of students in the compulsory education stage is not only an educational problem and a social problem, but also a legal problem. The "Compulsory Education Law" stipulates that education work should conform to the laws of education and the characteristics of students' physical and mental development, ensure students' extracurricular activities time, and promote students' all-round development. The newly revised Law on the Protection of Minors stipulates that schools shall not occupy statutory holidays to organize collective supplementary classes for minor students in the compulsory education stage to increase their learning burden. It can be seen that the implementation of the "double reduction" policy is to correct educational violations within the framework of national laws and regulations. Under the background of comprehensively promoting the rule of law in education, the active and correct use of legal thinking and legal means to lead and ensure the implementation of the "double reduction" policy is not only a realistic need for the long-term implementation of the "double reduction" policy, but also an important part of the spirit of ruling the country according to law. Hence, party committees and government departments at all levels should legislate scientifically, improve the educational legal system for burden reduction work, make the supervision of "double reduction" legal to follow, and raise the prohibitive content into legal provisions.

#### **4.3 Value oriented and demand oriented to build a whole process policy communication mechanism**

The governance of the academic burden in compulsory education is not a "one-man show" of government departments. Therefore, uniting various actors and building a policy consensus is the basis for the long-term implementation of the "double reduction" policy. Policy consensus includes both interests and values, and value consensus can promote long-term policy more than interest consensus [13]. By building a whole-process policy communication mechanism to guide the values of actors in the policy implementation and policy evaluation of the "double reduction" policy, cultivate the value rationality of the target group, and enhance the understanding and recognition of the policy. First of all, in the stage of setting an agenda and formulating policy-supporting plans, government departments can establish an open policy dialogue mechanism

to collect opinions on academic burden and its governance from experts, scholars, principals, teachers, parents, students and outside guidance institutions through forums, field research, questionnaires and other forms, so as to understand the value tendency and interest appeal of all parties, ensure that policies and programs can fully reflect the will of the people, protect the target groups' right to know and participate, and fundamentally overcome and correct the short-sighted and utilitarian social climate and educational culture.

#### **4.4 Diversified cooperation and mutual compensation of interests to optimize the supply of public educational resources**

An objective reason for the academic burden of compulsory education is the insufficient supply of high-quality basic education resources and the uneven distribution of regional education resources. The prosperity of the off-campus training market has increased the volume of high-quality basic education resources to a certain extent. However, due to the lack of regulation and guidance, the off-campus training market developed disorderly, allowing capital to pursue profits and undermining the public welfare of education. In this context, the gap between the poor and the rich, and between urban and rural areas in the distribution of high-quality educational resources has further widened, exacerbating educational inequality. The implementation of the "double reduction" policy has effectively broken the pattern of the out-of-control education market, and a new supply order of educational resources needs to be established urgently. Government departments should take the "double reduction" policy as an opportunity, adhere to the public welfare nature of basic education, define the boundary between school education and out-of-school education, activate social education resources, reconstruct the role relationship between the three, and adjust the supply pattern of public education services, so as to promote the development of balanced and high-quality development of compulsory education.

## **5 Conclusion**

Since its implementation, the "double reduction" policy has achieved remarkable short-term results in the reduction of students' academic burden on and off campus, and students' learning anxiety and family education anxiety. However, based on the analysis from the perspective of policy implementation network, it is found that the long-term implementation of the "double reduction" policy has dilemmas. For example, there are short-term conflicts between national and individual development needs; The policy configuration represented by the government is not reasonable enough; and the production network cooperation relationship represented by various parties is weak.

In view of the above dilemmas, countermeasures for the long-term implementation of the "double reduction" policy are proposed. First of all, it is necessary to build a government-led, multi-participation policy collaborative innovation mechanism; Besides, a coordination mechanism for supervising administrative law enforcement under strict supervision and rule of law need to be built; and a value-led and demand-oriented

whole-process policy communication mechanism should be created; Finally, the supply of public education resources should be optimized through multiple cooperation and mutual compensation. However, due to personal limitations in the theories of policy implementation network, the above countermeasures need to be further tested in the process of long run implementation of the "double reduction" policy.

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