



# Reasons for Parental Anxiety and Suggestions: Under the Double Reduction Policy

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**Abstract.** Following the implementation of China's double reduction policy, students' academic pressure has dramatically decreased, while parents have developed new anxiety. As a result, the purpose of this study is to investigate and explain the roots of parents' new anxiety and offer some suggestions to alleviate it. This dissertation's primary research strategy is a literature review to understand the sources of anxiety from many viewpoints by collecting, identifying, and organising existing literature. Anxiety stems primarily from concerns over children's grades, after-school parental tutoring, and increased parental duties. It is incredibly vital to alleviate these anxieties in a variety of ways.

**Keywords:** Parental anxiety · Double reduction policy

## 1 Introduction

In recent years, there has been a trend in the community for students to be enrolled by their parents for tutoring in key subjects after school. Parents are afraid that if their children do not attend tuition classes, they may not achieve better grades and thus fall behind others, and even will not be able to get into a good university after the college entrance exams. Accordingly, students have to complete school work and these extra lessons, which adds significantly to their academic stress. Besides children, parents are also in a dilemma. On the one hand, they are worried about the stress may causing problems for their children's health; on the other hand, the huge cost of extra classes is also a source of anxiety for parents. To free students from the heavy burden, the Chinese government has implemented a "double reduction policy," which means reducing the academic burden on students while reducing and strictly limiting after-school tutoring classes. Although the anxiety about children's health and cost has been reduced, parents have new anxiety.

## 2 Definition

In July 2021, the Chinese government issued the Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Out-of-School Training (hereinafter referred to as the "Double Reduction" policy) for Students in Compulsory Education, including primary school,

middle school, high school, and out-of-school education and training institutions [1]. Double reductions mean reducing academic stress for students, including length of lessons, after-school work, etc., while reducing the pressure on students to attend after-school tutoring. There are three purposes of the policy [2]. The first is to eliminate the current confusion in education and training and thus promote educational equity. The second is to correct the educational perspective, which consists of four points: correcting the bias in education, the unacceptability of competition, over learning, and over advance learning. The last point emphasizes that students should develop holistically.

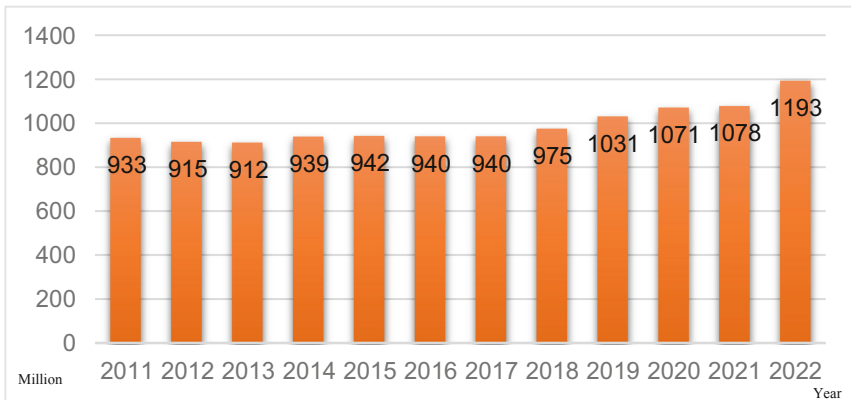
### 3 Anxiety Reasons

Less pressure on students and reduced costs of educational tutoring for children have reduced stress for children and parents. However, the traditional education system has not changed. This huge revolution has created new concerns for parents about their children's education. Parental anxiety is not shaped by a single factor.

#### 3.1 Children's Grades

Parents always have high expectations for children. There are two main reasons for the expectation. The first is the belief that education determines the future and that parents want their children to be successful and always have a bright future. In the current Chinese education system, students will be admitted to a general high school or secondary vocational school after passing the secondary school exam, which means that their scores determine their pathway. A high level of education is one of the common expectations parents have for their children. According to the survey, 91.2% of parents want their children to be awarded a bachelor's degree, while 25% and 22.5% want master's and doctoral degrees [1]. In other words, parents generally expect their children to enter a university or college rather than a higher vocational institution. Many people believe that vocational education is a dark path and that there is no other option but to go to work after vocational school [2]. The competition to get into university is getting tougher every year. From 2011 to 2022, the number of students enrolling in the college entrance examinations is increasing yearly, with the largest increase in 2022 [3]. In 2021, there were 4.446 million students enrolled in general undergraduate programs and the undergraduate admission rate was 41.6% [2]. It can be considered that only four out of ten students will be able to enter university and can obtain a bachelor's degree. The competition for students to enter university has become more intense, leading to increased anxiety among parents about this (Fig. 1).

Primary and middle education significantly affects students' education future because these decide whether students can enter a great or famous high school. Parents pay much attention to their children's education, academic achievements, and grades. To improve their children's academic performance, most parents enrol their children in after-school tutoring classes for several major subjects. Before the double reduction policy came into force, the survey showed that 31% of primary school students had never attended extra-curricular classes [3]. That means two third of primary student have attended or was attending off-school tutoring. 32.9% of them have one after-school



**Fig. 1.** Numbers of students

lessons, 17.8% have two lessons, while 6% and 2.2% attend three or more lessons [4]. Based on previous studies, Chinese students have been under too much pressure to take additional after-school lessons in the past.

With the enactment of the double reduction policy, children were released from the heavy burden of homework and extra-curricular tutoring, and their burden was greatly reduced [5]. However, some parents have become anxious about their children's schooling. Tutoring classes are strictly approved under the double reduction policy. Therefore, a great number of tutoring centers have disappeared. For example, in Beijing, Shanghai, and Hangzhou, the number of after-school teaching and tutoring providers reduced ranged from 1,200 to 1,500; Hangzhou had the largest reduction of 70% approximately [6]. In addition, the total amount and duration of homework for students have been reduced across the board as required by the policy. This leads parents to worry that their children will pay less attention to their studies and thus may get lower grades. In the survey of Jingjin News, 50% of parents chose to "find a 'one-to-one' teacher to teach their child privately," while only 30% of parents thought that "the knowledge children get at school is enough" [7]. This shows that although the double reduction policy has changed the situation that "after-school classes are everywhere," the mindset of parents is a difficult problem to overcome. Parents generally believe that children are not doing well and that attending out-of-school training can help improve their grades [2]. From the perspective of these parents, off-school tutoring serves as a comfort to make them feel that their child's grades can be helped. The rapid decline in these services has therefore caused parental anxiety.

### 3.2 Parental Tutoring

Another aspect of parental anxiety derives from the limitations of parents' tutoring and the problems in parental tutoring. Parent tutoring is parents helping their children with homework or adding extensions that go beyond the classroom. Family tutoring is important for children. More than 70% of parents surveyed believe home tutoring is

important for their children's learning, while only 1.19% believe that simply listening to classes and completing homework is sufficient [8].

The limitations of time and capacity are great problems. Parental tutoring means that parents need enough time to tutor their children, be knowledgeable in the subject and have tutoring skills. Research showed that from 2010 to 2018, parents of primary school students spent hours tutoring their children's homework increased from 3.67 to 5.88 h per week; for parents of junior high school students, it went from 1.56 to 3.03 h per week [8]. The amount of time and effort parents put into tutoring their children is enormous. Previously, after-school tutoring classes were the main way to relieve parents of the pressure of tutoring. However, with the implementation of the double reduction policy, the number of after-school centers is rapidly decreasing, which means that more tasks will be taken up by parents, leading to an increase in parental anxiety. Parents spend more hours on help children with their studies with age children, and the difficulty of the tasks grows in parallel. 39.32% of parents felt they did not have time to tutor their children, and 28.19% felt they could not do so [9]. In parental tutoring, parents play the role of teacher. The teaching process may seem simple, but it involves teaching skills, communication, and knowledge that not every parent can do well. Because of lacking patience and problem-solving skills, when problems arise in teaching, parents are more likely to blame the child for the problem, making the child's motivation to learn even lower.

Consequently, parents' inability to teach and children's reluctance to learn can lead to feelings of powerlessness and frustration in homework help and deepen parents' anxiety [10]. Parents' anxiety is exacerbated by the dual pressures of time and lack of capacity. For example, a parent completes a day's work, yet she needs to spend another three hours tutoring her child's homework, coupled with the overwhelming content of the tutoring. These can easily leave a parent feeling drained and anxious. A study of 20,000 parents revealed that 90% of parents had had emotional breakdowns due to homework tutoring [11]. Many parents have the pressure of tutoring children.

### 3.3 Increased Parents' Responsibility

One function of the double reduction is to reduce the number of irresponsible parents and students who do not want to learn or are poor learners so that everyone can naturally choose their rightful place and career in a natural learning process. For the responsibilities of family and school education, the government's comments suggest that parents should be "guided to establish a scientific concept of child-rearing, reasonably determine their children's growth expectations, and work towards a consensus on reducing the burden," etc. [12]. All of these places quite a lot of responsibility for education on parents. In the past, some parents thought they paid money and sent children to after-school tutoring centers. They followed up with the crowd and thought it was better for their children to attend tutorial classes than not. As long as they put their money into it, they have done their responsibility [13]. Education for children should base on family and school. The vast number of tutorial classes has led some students and parents to believe that there are opportunities to make up and improve studies even if they do not take their studies seriously at school, which was also unfair to students who did not attend additional classes and parents who could not afford that. For instance, a student

from a disadvantaged family is very serious and hard-working in their study. Still, his results are not as good as those of students from wealthy families who regularly attend tutorials. Tutoring classes thus seriously compromise education equity but release parents from the pressure of accompanying their children and educating them at home. In the marketization of education, parents see spending on their children's education as an investment, and the consumption of out-of-school training or tutoring services becomes an important part of family education methods [14]. However, with the reduction of tutorial classes, parents have to take more responsibility for children and education.

The disappearance of tuition classes makes parents suddenly very nervous. In one interview, many parents said that the double reduction policy had reduced their children's academic pressure and created much extra time after school. Still, they did not know how to arrange this extra time [15]. When children are freed from heavy extra-curricular tutoring, whether home education has taken the initiative to fill in the gaps or come up with a workable educational design becomes a new question for parents. In contrast to the gradual relaxation of the children, parents' anxiety symptoms increased significantly after the "double reduction," with studies showing an increase of around 12.8% [16]. Previously, parents may complain that children are too tired because they must attend additional classes after school and on weekends. Still, when children get free from tutoring classes, parents get worried about how to arrange children's time. In other words, as parents do not have a systematic approach to their children's education, tutorials class as an alternative for family education assistants that alleviate this anxiety. Therefore, in the absence of tutorial classes, parents' educational responsibilities increase, leading to increased anxiety.

### 3.4 Single Education Assessment Method

A large part of the cause of parental anxiety is how educational assessments are conducted. A student's score is now considered the most important part of judging whether a student is good or not in the current Chinese education system. Therefore, it causes parents to be nervous about their children's grades and be more anxious after the double reduction policy. If grades are not the main factor in judging children, then parental pressure will be reduced accordingly, resulting in a more relaxed and harmonious atmosphere for home education [17]. This requires that educational assessments should be diverse. The contradiction between essential-qualities-oriented schooling and examination-based education is a classic problem in front of the Chinese education system [18]. Although, since the 1980s, quality education has gradually been emphasized in China, there are still many problems with essential-qualities-oriented schooling assessment: the function of it is vaguely positioned, and the technology related to the implementation of essential-qualities-oriented schooling is underdeveloped, etc. [19]. Therefore, education assessment still uses a single evaluation mode, and the score is the only criterion for selecting talents. Students' exam score is still the focus in school.

Reviewing the aims of the double reduction policy, one is to reduce children's homework pressure. The other is to reduce the number of tutoring classes for the main subjects. Parents may be concerned that students have fewer academic tasks, that there is no help from tutorials, and that parents have limited ability to tutor their children, yet the way education is evaluated has not changed. It seems like the double reduction policy and the

college entrance examination are at odds with each other. On the one hand, the policy has reduced the burden on students, while on the other hand, the long-standing test-based education has distorted the college entrance examination into a “score-determining” one. Although the education reform started long ago, the score is still the top priority of the assessment [20], which has led to new anxiety among parents in general.

## **4 Suggestions**

The source of parental anxiety comes not only from the subjective expectations of parents but also from the objective presence around them. Parents’ expectations for children, increased free time for children, and increased time and opportunities for family education all have direct impacts on parental anxiety. To reduce anxiety, changes in parents, schools, and assessments may have an effective effect. Here are some suggestions.

### **4.1 Parents Transforming Educational Thinking**

Parents as the subject of anxiety and their change of mind are conducive to alleviating anxiety. Parents are children’s first teachers, so they are responsible for their children’s character and psychological and spiritual well-being. Because parents are key persons for children’s education, they should better understand the purpose of education and establish reasonable expectations for children. Parents who are overly concerned about their children’s grades and set high goals can cause excessive pressure on study children, which causes children to have a bad emotional problem. A child with good grades but psychological problems is not what parents expect. Parents should pay attention to children’s personal development rather than merely focusing on scores. Each child has a different developmental pathway, so it seems more effective to establish reasonable expectations and goals based on the child’s current level of development. Parents must acknowledge that the goal of education is the development of the whole person rather than being study machines.

### **4.2 Diversity Approaches for Educational Assessment**

Reasonable and diverse approaches to educational assessment play an important role in alleviating parents’ educational anxiety. Utilitarian education (i.e., education focusing only on achievement) is unhealthy for students and parents because it ignores student development. The double reduction policy aims to benefit the physical and mental development of students, but the phenomenon of assessing students based on marks only in senior secondary education has not changed. Therefore, how establishing a set of effective multiple assessment methods is still a problem that needs to be solved. As essential quality-oriented schooling encompasses many aspects such as personality, psychology, and mental health, how to assess the overall quality of students is also a current challenge that will need to be discussed in the future.

### 4.3 Schools' Responsibility

Both schools and homes are key places in the education of children, and they both aim to improve the development of students. One of the aims of the double reduction policy is to return responsibility for education to schools and parents. It is, therefore, necessary to build a good relationship between parents and schools, which is an effective way to release parental anxiety. Schools can provide home education guidance to help parents with problems with their education. Parents should make a conscious effort to learn about home education and seek help from the school as and when needed. In addition, schools should improve the quality of schooling and homework content. Schools and teachers should carefully select the content of homework, do a good job designing and censoring the types of questions, increase the number of creative and reflective questions, and reduce the number of mechanistic and rote questions [21]. After-school extended hours services such as painting, sports, and homework help also help to relieve parents of the stress of tutoring and picking up their children.

## 5 Conclusion

In summary, this study presents three views of parents' anxiety after implementing the double reduction policy by examining available literature. First, regarding children's grades, the main reason is that Chinese parents typically believe that education determines one's future. As competition for college admissions grows each year, they are concerned that their children's grades will suffer if they do not receive additional after-school tutoring. Another source of anxiety is the limitations and issues associated with parental tutoring. If parents do not have the ability or teaching skills to tutor their children's homework, it is simple for them to grow concerned. Because parents must devote more time and attention to their children's schoolwork, they are burdened with additional duties, contributing to parental anxiety.

Three approaches can help parents relax. Parents should have a better understanding of the objective of education and the policy of double reduction; for educational assessment, there should be a variety of techniques to evaluate students instead of focusing only on scores. Finally, schools should assist parents who require assistance by assigning suitable homework to their students.

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