

Brief Analysis of the “Double Reduction” Policy and Some Reflections

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Abstract: With the rapid development of modern society, people are under more and more pressure and their anxiety has increased. For parents, the anxiety is especially severe in terms of their children's education. At the same time, according to the latest census statistics for 2021, the current population of China totals 1.41 billion people (*The Seventh National Census Bulletin (No. 8)*, 2021). On 11 May, the State Council Information Office held a press conference. At the conference, Ning Jizhe, Director of the National Bureau of Statistics, mentioned that “compared to 2010, China's population grew by 5.38%, with an average annual growth rate of 0.53%, compared to an average annual growth rate of 0.57% from 2000 to 2010” (*Main Data of the Seventh National Population Census Press Conference to answer reporters*, 2021). This figure shows that China's population has continued to grow at a low rate for 10 years. At the end of May 2021, China officially launched the “three-child” policy to encourage child birth. In this complex set of contexts, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued the “Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Off-Campus Training on Students at the Compulsory Education Stage” on July 24, 2021, which is also known as the “Double Reduction” policy.

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, China's population has been growing at a low rate, and the Chinese government has enacted a “three-child” policy to encourage fertility. After the enactment of the “three-child” policy, the “Double Reduction” policy enacted. On July 24, 2021, the “Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Off-Campus Training on Students at the Compulsory Education Stage” (also known as “Double Reduction” policy) was issued by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council.

But the education of children is something that parents need to think about immediately after the birth of a child. In this modern, competitive and stressful society, people are under great pressure and anxiety is also high. This is especially true for parents who are also very anxious about the education of their children.

On September 23, 2021, China Youth Daily published an article about the relationship between the “Double Reduction” policy and parents' education anxiety. The article mentioned that the Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League and the Social Research Center of China Youth Daily conducted a survey entitled “Attitudes of parents of students in compulsory education nationwide towards the 'Double Reduction' policy”, and also the sources of parents' anxiety. A total of 511,043 parents participated in the survey. According to the survey results show in this article, 73.2% of the parents surveyed said that it is difficult for them to tutor their children well, 53.1% of the parents surveyed believe that the industrialization of extracurricular training and capital marketing have created too much anxiety of ‘falling behind if you don't make up for it’, 48.7% of the parents surveyed feel that they are afraid of not being able to give their children the best education resources due to income constraints. 48.2% of the parents interviewed think it is because of the secondary school entrance examination mechanism and the 1:1 streaming of general high schools and vocational schools, and they are worried that their children will be positioned by ‘occupation’ at an early stage. Other factors include: it is too common to rush to the compulsory education stage and have to be carried forward (44.0%), the pressure to choose schools, the serious imbalance of educational resources in the region (36.6%), the low quality of classroom teaching, and

the fact that both people cannot learn and others ‘cannot get enough’ (35.2%)” (*Will the "Double Reduction" increase parents' education anxiety? After the implementation of the "double reduction" 72.7% of parents surveyed said that education anxiety has been alleviated, A higher percentage of middle-income groups have reduced their anxiety, 2021*). This shows that the reasons for parents' anxiety are also very complex.

Then, what exactly does the “Double Reduction” policy mean? What are the implications of the “Double Reduction” policy? Can the “Double Reduction” policy actually alleviate the anxiety of parents mentioned above? What impact will the “Double Reduction” policy have on quality education? In this paper, I will try to explore these questions.

2. What Is The “Double Reduction” Policy?

According to the document "The Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Off-Campus Training for Compulsory Education Students" issued by the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council, the “Double Reduction” Policy aims to “The quality of school education and teaching and service levels are further improved, homework assignments are more scientific and reasonable, school after-school services basically meet the needs of students, students learn better back on campus, and the training behavior of out-of-school training institutions is fully regulated. The excessive homework burden of students and the burden of off-campus training, family education expenses and the corresponding energy burden of parents are effectively reduced within one year and significantly effective within three years, and the people's satisfaction with education is significantly increased.” (*General Office of the CPC Central Committee and General Office of the State Council issued the Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Off-Campus Training for Compulsory Education Students, 2021*).

Because of the word limit constraints of the present paper, I will mention some contents of the “Double Reduction” policy, more details can be found in the "The Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Off-Campus Training for Compulsory Education Students" document on the Chinese government website. The “Double Reduction” policy is focused on students in China's nine-year compulsory education system.

According to the “The Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Off-Campus Training for Compulsory Education Students" document, it mentions, “.....In terms of reducing the excessive homework burden on students, the following policies have been introduced: (1) Comprehensively reduce the total amount and length of homework to reduce the excessive homework burden on students (e.g. no homework in Year 1 and 2, no more than 60 minutes of written homework in Year 3 and 4 on average, no more than 90 minutes of written homework in junior high school, etc.). (2) Improve the level of after-school services in schools to meet the diverse needs of students..... In terms of reducing the burden of out-of-school training, the following policies have been introduced: (1) Strict approval of institutions. No new subject-based out-of-school training institutions for students in compulsory education will be approved, and existing subject-based training institutions will be unified and registered as non-profit-making institutions. (2) Subject-based training institutions are not allowed to go public and raise funds, and capitalization is strictly prohibited (3) Training institutions are not allowed to poach school teachers with high salaries, etc. In the following sentences.....” (*General Office of the CPC Central Committee and General Office of the State Council issued the Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Off-Campus Training for Compulsory Education Students, 2021*). In the following section, I will talk about the impact of the “Double Reduction” policy.

3. Impact of The “Double Reduction” Policy on Education and Training Institution

3.1 Share Prices of Education and Training Institutions Fall Sharply

The share prices of well-known education brands such as New Oriental, Gaotu and Good Future plummeted, with market value evaporating by up to \$100 billion.

According to a report by Sina Finance, “on July 23rd, the shares of China's education giants were hit hard, with shares of Good Future plunging 70.47%, Gaotu Group falling 63.36% and New Oriental falling 54.22%. The market value of these three companies evaporated by a total of 109.2 billion yuan on Friday”. Apart from these three companies, the shares of many other education groups also plunged on the same day. For example, “51Talk fell by over 43%, Youdao by 42.77%, Jingrui Education by 35.70% and Hongen Education by 21.73%” (*The "double reduction" set off a bloody storm in the education sector, Gaotu, Good Future and other giants have transformed*, 2021).

The plunge in the share prices of these industries shows that the education industry can be said to have suffered a huge shock and heavy losses after the promulgation of the “Double Reduction” policy.

3.2. Closing Down of Education and Training Institutions

As a result of the upheaval in the education sector, some training institutions began to be unable to support themselves, and a number of institutions began to be written off or even closed down. For example, on 22 August 2021, Shanghai Qiwen Education, which had 15 branch campuses in Shanghai, announced its bankruptcy and liquidation, and owed a large amount of tuition fees and teachers' salaries to its students. On August 31, 2021, Giant Education, which had been established for 27 years, closed down due to operational difficulties and was unable to complete the refund of students' tuition fees, etc.

3.3 Impact on education staff in Education and Training Institutions

Education institutions have made significant redundancies, in some cases by the tens of thousands, and many teachers and trainers are facing unemployment. For example: According to a report in the Securities Times, "On the evening of July 31, Gaotu Class's founder Chen Xiangdong issued an internal letter saying that the company had to make layoffs in order to survive. The specific layoff plan is: 13 local centers across the country, to be completed and closed by August 1, leaving only 3 tutor centers in Zhengzhou, Wuhan and Chengdu, each with an average of thousands of people, involving a range of tens of thousands of people, equivalent to 1/3 of Gaotu Class's people will leave" (*Gaotu Class announces layoffs! The education industry is in the midst of a disaster: layoffs, transformation, and business adjustments are coming one after another, where does the future lie? Hot Topics replay*, 2021).

And, as reported by Guangzhou Daily, “the number of jobs posted in the education and training industry fell by 9% and 6.5% in June and July respectively, unlike the platform-wide trend of year-over-year growth in the number of jobs posted in June and July 2021, as shown by the big data from the WisdomLink recruitment platform” (*Report: the number of jobs posted in the education and training industry in July than in March fell by more than 30%*, 2021). In the following section, I will talk about some reflections arising from the “Double Reduction” policy.

4. Reflections Arising From The “Double Reduction” policy

4.1 Potential To Increasing The Gap Between The Rich and The poor

According to a report by Sina Finance, at the 6th China Manufacturing Power Forum on 28 March 2021, Li Yizhong, former Minister of Industry and Information Technology and President of the China Federation of Industrial Economics, attended and delivered a speech. Li states, “the share of China's industry and manufacturing sector in GDP has declined prematurely and too quickly over the years” (*Li Yizhong in China Federation of Industrial Economics: The share of manufacturing in GDP is falling too soon and too fast*, 2021). And he also stated that “China's industrial share has fallen from a peak of 42% in 2006 all the way to 32% in 2019, with the manufacturing sector's share falling from 32.5% to 27.7% in the same period. It is clear from this that manufacturing in China is on a downward trend in terms of GDP” (*Li Yizhong in China Federation of Industrial Economics: The share of manufacturing in GDP is falling too soon and too fast*, 2021).

But China's policy in recent years has been to emphasise the transformation and upgrading of low- and mid-range manufacturing and to focus more on the development of high-end manufacturing. This

has had some success so far. According to data from China's fourth national economic census, “at the end of 2018, there were 33,573 legal entities of high-tech manufacturing enterprises above the scale, up 24.8% from the end of 2013; the proportion of manufacturing industries above the scale was 9.5%, up 1.7 percentage points from 2013” (*The Fourth National Economic Census Bulletin (No. 6)*, 2019). But this data would mean that the middle and low-end manufacturing industries would be affected to a considerable extent, and some of them would even disappear. The disappearance or even reduce of these low- and medium-end manufacturing industries, which can provide a large number of jobs, will cause a large number of people to lose their jobs and increase the pressure on people's survival. The high-end manufacturing industry, on the other hand, requires a relatively higher level of education and skills for people to enter and adapt.

In such a state, people's anxiety will be more severe. Parents would prefer their children to pass the college entrance exams, get a good university, get a good job and always be one step ahead of others in order to survive in this society. However, if the problem of job opportunities is not solved, coupled with the emergence of the "Double Reduction" policy, a significant number of lower and middle class families will lose the opportunity to catch up with higher class families through remedial education. As a result, the poor will become poorer and the rich will become richer, widening the gap between the rich and the poor.

It is worth noting that China is now aware of the premature decline in manufacturing. Based on the 14th Five-Year Plan that adopted in the Fifth Plenary Session of 19th CPC Central Committee Bulletin in October, 2020, we can see that China is now proposing to "maintain the basic stability of the manufacturing sector and consolidate the foundation of a strong real economy" (*Fifth Plenary Session of 19th CPC Central Committee Bulletin*, 2021). Although China is now aware of the need to continue to maintain a stable manufacturing sector, it will take time to change the status quo.

4.2 Potential To Creating greater educational inequality

South Korea is a good example to see, they have also issued similar policies in order to reduce the burden on students. According to the official website of the Korean Ministry of Education, they have the “Eased Cost Burden for Education” policy: “In order to normalize public education and to reduce students' and parents' financial burden regarding private education, South Korea has enacted the Public Education Normalization Promotion Act. It prohibits teaching students to the test, solely to help students receive a high score on school assessments and university entrance exams, and bans education contents and test items that require preemptive learning beyond regular school teaching. Moreover, to handle rampant private tutoring, which has been a major social problem in South Korea for the last half century, every school is required to be screened by curriculum audit council of regional education office on its curriculum management. The government also aims to relieve students' tuition down to the half of current level. The government attempts to lower interest rate under the average inflation level with extra budget support, particularly for students from lower-income households” (*“Eased Cost Burden for Education”*, from the official website of the Korean Ministry of Education).

Despite this policy was implemented in South Korea at that time, their university admissions system remains unchanged and admissions are still based on scores and rankings, so there is still a demand from Korean parents for the functions of training institutions.

China has similar situation with South Korea. The “Double Reduction” policy came into effect and a large number of out-of-school training institutions were banned, while the phenomenon of 1-to-1 tutoring became popular. Those who could afford it hired tutors from former training institutions or prestigious university students to tutor them at home. Some of these students start working as 'live-in nannies', specialising not in housework but in a variety of subjects. The expectation is that the monthly salary will be very high.

The trend downwards may then be towards a clear skewing of resources. The rich will recruit to themselves as much quality, highly educated talent as possible, while the average person, or even the poor, will have nowhere to go to find better educational resources for their children in a state where there are fewer and fewer training institutions. And many parents are only highly skilled in one area,

but not necessarily in education. The "Double Reduction" policy is intended to reduce the burden and achieve better equity in education. But in the long run, it is likely to lead to greater inequity.

Although the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China has now issued new regulations, any irregularities in subject-based training in the name of counselling, cultural communication, home economics, live-in teachers and crowdfunding private tutors will be investigated and punished in accordance with the law. But it is not yet known whether this phenomenon can be completely banned and, in addition, whether new forms of supplementary training will emerge.

4.3 The quality-oriented education

According to the document of the "Double Reduction" policy, we can see that one of the purposes of the the "Double Reduction" policy is to improve the level of school education. In fact, this also coincides with the quality-oriented education that we often emphasize. What is quality-oriented education? What kind of effect can "Double Reduction" policy cause to quality-oriented education?

According to the definition that given by Baidu Baike, quality-oriented education refers to "an education mode that aims to improve the quality of all aspects of the educated. It attaches importance to human ideological and moral quality, ability cultivation, personality development, physical health and mental health education" (*Quality-oriented Education (Education Model)*, Baidu Baike). It can be seen that the "Double Reduction" policy has been making efforts to promote quality education. For example, while the document of the "Double Reduction" policy emphasizes the reduction of homework in school, it also emphasizes the development of after-school activities that enrich after-school activities and try to promote the multi-faceted development of students, such as science, sports, arts, labor, reading, interest groups and clubs, etc.

However, apart from specific regulations on the completion time of homework, the document does not mention how the rest of the measures should be assessed and what criteria should be used for evaluation. So if just depends on the document of "Double Reduction" policy, it is hard to have a specific judgment on if the "Double Reduction" policy have a positive effect on quality-oriented education and thus promote the quality of the population .

On September 24, 2021, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China released another document titled "National Compulsory Education Quality Monitoring Program (Revised Version 2021)". In this document, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China proposes that, "Based on the division of school segments in the compulsory education curriculum standards (or guidance outline) and considering the stage characteristics of students' cognitive and learning ability development, the monitoring targets fourth and eighth grade students in the compulsory education stage, and specific criteria and evaluation mechanisms are developed" (*Notice of the Ministry of Education on the Issuance of the National Compulsory Education Quality Monitoring Program (Revised Version 2021)*, 2021). In this document, specific methods of monitoring, measurement criteria and evaluation mechanisms are also set out, allowing a better view of student development. Nevertheless, the impact of the "Double Reduction" policy on quality-oriented education still needs to be observed in the long term.

5. Conclusion and Implication for Future Research

In conclusion, the implementation of the "Double Reduction" policy has been an earthquake for the education industry. The share prices of education and training institutions fall sharply and some education and training institutions closed down are good proof. For reducing parental anxiety, the "Double Reduction" policy can reduce some of those anxieties, but not all.

First, the "Double Reduction" policy implies that parents will have to take on many functions that previously could be shared by training providers, such as tutoring homework and continuing to work on understanding the content of the lessons, etc. For parents who think they don't have enough ability to tutor their children well, they need to improve their abilities more, but there are not many avenues for improving parental abilities in society now. And they need to better balance work and family,

especially their children's education. In a society that is now so competitive, this is obviously not an easy task. As a result, anxiety may rise rather than fall for this group of parents.

In addition, for parents who feel anxious because of income constraints, the “Double Reduction” policy can go some way to alleviating their financial pressure because they can spend less on tutorials. Like Brendan Ahern, Krane, Shares chief investment officer, said in “CNBC Television”’s Youtube channel, “I would argue more it's more geared to providing relief to Chinese families, that this move, as painful as it's been for investors both publicly as well as in the private space, it's been shared by social media in china, that parents are saying thank you to the government for relieving them from having to pay very high percentages of their income to have to deal with after school tutoring” (Why China cracked down on its tutoring programs[Video], 2021).

Also, China's society is now developing rapidly, competition is under pressure and the population is increasing. However, the pressure of employment and the pressure to survive has caused a great deal of anxiety among parents. Parents are trying hard to raising their children from all the aspects they can think of, Because parent always hope their children will not be left behind, or even go further than other people's children to adapt to the competitive society. In order to achieve this goal, parents have been making their children keep learning various skills while making their children work hard to improve their academic performance.

Moreover, if the problem of job opportunities is not addressed, and only rely on the "Double Reduction" policy, social competition will remain fierce and elimination will be rapid. The anxiety of parents will remain because they are worried that their children will be among those eliminated. Moreover, since ancient times, Chinese people always believe that "Officialdom is the natural outlet for good scholars" and they not only want their children to not be eliminated, but they also want their children to be in jobs with high social status. The excessive competition in employment can easily lead to parents becoming very utilitarian in educating their children. This is not only not conducive to reducing parental anxiety, but also runs the risk of being detrimental to quality-oriented education and improvement of population quality.

Finally, the question of how the “Double Reduction” policy will affect the impact of improving the quality of the population still needs to be observed for a longer period of time. Because the “Double Reduction” policy is a new policy that just enacted in July 2021, my paper is somewhat lacking in sources. And, the analysis I conducted may change differently in the future. This is a long-term project. Let us stay tuned to see what will happen in the future.

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