

# The Attitude of Chinese Parents Towards The 'Double Reduction' Policy and The Factors Influencing Their Attitude

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**Abstract:** Since China's Ministry of Education announced the 'Double Reduction' policy in July 2022, its impact on China's education system has been a heated topic. Using an online survey (n=381), this dissertation, investigated the attitudes and views of Chinese parents towards the 'Double Reduction' policy. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to quantify the proportions of positive and negative perceptions; logistic regression was used to examine factors associated with positive or negative perceptions. The results of this study show that most Chinese parents support the 'Double Reduction' policy and hope that it will continue (87.6%). The higher the stage of compulsory education of the children, the more likely parents are to support the 'Double Reduction' policy (high school unadjusted OR =2.033, 95% CI=1.119-3,695). Overall, most Chinese parents support the 'Double Reduction' policy, but the existence of exam-oriented education and Chinese parents' lack of confidence in their support ability and their children's own learning ability still affect their attitude towards the 'Double Reduction' policy. Future research and policy formulation should focus on the guidance of family education.

**Keywords:** Double Reduction, Chinese parents, Family education.

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the 'Neijuan' phenomenon among Chinese students. 'Neijuan' is a social phenomenon in which children and parents will participate in fierce but unnecessary competition in the field of education (Li et al., 2022).

In China, youth education has always been an important cultural value and goal, and its history can be traced back to the early imperial system and the rise of Confucianism. Since then, Chinese society has attached great importance to education throughout modern society and the Communist period. At the individual level, higher education in China is seen as a way to improve one's life opportunities and as an important means to escape poverty and develop in economically more developed centres (Liu and Helwig, 2020). Regarding education as a priority of modern economic and social development has led to an extensive university construction plan in China (Jia and Ericson, 2017). To expand university admission opportunities according to the principle of merit-based admission, the Chinese Ministry of Education established the college entrance examination system in 1952 (Liu and Helwig, 2020). The college entrance examination is notoriously difficult (Ash, 2016). It is held every June, and the overall test score is the only determinant of whether students go to university and which university they go to. In order to enter a good university, Chinese students must start preparing for the examination very early. In contrast to the West, where individuals can earn good wages through occupations that do not require university degrees, in China, obtaining a university education is regarded as the main way to escape the low wages of farming or factory work (Liu and Helwig, 2020).

However, this does not mean that all students who wish to go to university and are eligible can do so. Due to the sizeable income gap between urban and rural areas in China, educational opportunities for students from different regions

and family backgrounds vary greatly. For example, students from urban families or high-income families enjoy many advantages, including higher-quality schools, teachers, textbooks and teaching materials, better parenting and access to resources for private tutoring and college preparatory courses (Ericson, 2012; Wang et al., 2011).

Through 'cramming' school education and participating in various off-campus training, Chinese students experience intense academic competitive pressure, which has an enormous negative impact on their physical and mental health. In order to reduce the burden on students caused by excessive homework and off-campus tutoring, China's Ministry of Education issued the 'Double Reduction' policy for compulsory education on 24 July 2021. The policy's impact on students has been a topic of debate since its implementation. The policy lightens the burden on students at the school level, which means that children will have more time to develop other specialities and hobbies and return to family education, which undoubtedly increases the responsibility of parents in children's education. This study investigated the attitudes of Chinese parents towards the 'Double Reduction' policy and the factors associated with their attitudes.

## 2. Literature Review

This chapter examines the existing literature on students' learning in the context of the Chinese education system and the development of the 'Double Reduction' policy. It provides an overview of the literature search, including the databases used and inclusion criteria for the texts involved. The literature used addresses the following topic areas: the cultural context of academic education in China; Chinese education inequality; education pressure in China and its harmfulness; off-campus training institutions in China; the development and impacts of the 'Double Reduction' policy. Although few studies have focused on the 'Double Reduction' policy since it was just enacted, this chapter will provide a

comprehensive summary of the current understanding and the debates between different perspectives in the available literature.

## 2.1. Literature research

Literature was identified using international databases such as International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS), ScienceDirect and Taylor and Francis. Additionally, since the background of this research is based in China, I visited some Chinese academic databases to obtain academic journals and data statistics, including the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, Cncai.cn and CNKI. The key research terms included 'Chinese education', 'academic pressure or stress in China', 'Chinese student health', 'Chinese off-campus or after-school training' and 'double reduction policy'. The University of Bristol Library and Google Scholar were also used to find relevant books and journals. Referencing harvesting, which means using the lists of references included in articles to find other relevant sources (Sayers, 2007), was also used.

## 2.2. Chinese education system

In China, the pressure to pursue high academic achievement is generated in a cultural and social context, as it is related to the perception of education in society and the demand for and availability of educational opportunities (Lin and Chen, 1995).

Chinese culture has attached great importance to examinations since ancient times, and the competition to enter higher education has been very fierce. The imperial examination has lasted for 2000 years in China, since the Han Dynasty, and it has always been the only way for people to alter their social class (Meng-ying, 2021). The government uses the examination to select officials to govern the country, and scholars who have successfully passed the examination were given titles, power, prestige and land so that their families could benefit and prosper from generation to generation (Lin and Chen, 1995). As a result, intellectuals from low-income families must excel in the examination if they want to improve their family's social status. China's education system, which uses examinations as the only criterion for selection, links high-level education with social status, while school failure is traditionally associated with shame for individuals, families and even the country (Davey et al., 2007). This tradition of pressure to climb the social ladder through education has exerted a great influence on China's cultural values and the education system.

In contemporary China, a university degree is crucial for a person. Chinese compulsory education law stipulates that every child must receive at least nine years of education starting with kindergarten (3–6 years old), primary school (6–12 years old) and middle school (12–18 years old), followed by higher education that only a small number of people can enter (Davey et al., 2007). To enter higher education, Chinese students must take China's university entrance examination, known colloquially in China as the 'Gaokao' (Luo et al., 2020). This examination system has existed since 1952, except during the decade of the Cultural Revolution (education was interrupted and universities were closed during the 1966–1977 political movement) (Unger, 1980). The principle of examination as the main way to enter university continues in the present day, and it has become a key gatekeeper for mobility through higher education in China (Muthana and Sang, 2015). Liu (2013, p. 873) explains

that 'the Gaokao was restored as a key mechanism of structuring higher education opportunities, and academic performance in the Gaokao, instead of political affiliation, became the decisive factor in access to higher education'. Under the education system, which uses examination score as the main evaluation factor, social inertia makes people believe that students with higher scores will be more successful, and both parents and students regard high scores as the basis for going to a good university, finding a good job and having a bright future (Kirkpatrick and Zang, 2011). Therefore, to obtain a decent job and more development opportunities in the future, Chinese students must enter a good university, and to enter a good university, they must study hard for many years to achieve good scores in the Gaokao exam (Orgua, 1987; Lin and Chen, 1995).

## 2.3. Education inequality in China

In the second half of the 20th century, China experienced a rapid expansion of the higher education system, which meant an increase in the total number of educational opportunities (Wu et al., 2020). Amid the expansion and differentiation of higher education, both the job market and graduate schools have raised expectations of 'entry' standards in favour of students from elite institutions. However, individuals' opportunities for entering higher education are still seriously limited by differences in various dimensions against the backdrop of Chinese society (Jia and Ericson, 2017). Chinese culture is a complex entity (Louis, 2008), and the culture is fluid. As Hall and Ames (1995) identify, China's cultural values are always being re-examined, reconfigured and sometimes revitalised. Therefore, due to the limitations of time, resources and knowledge, the existing research on the development of a local cultural analysis model in China and the culture and changes in the equality of children's education are exploratory, which will inevitably lead to a tendency of oversimplification or reductionism.

## 2.4. Chinese academic pressure and the harm of overburdened studies

Since China's long-standing cultural values link education with economic success and social status, students are considered to have a high study burden and experience pressure due to their parents' high expectations and fierce competition with their peers (Lin and Chen, 1995). Preparation for the Gaokao usually begins as early as the first grade of middle school and continues throughout secondary school, and education is mainly designed to prepare students for the examination (Burkhoff, 2015). In most Chinese secondary schools, students have to take regular exams – sometimes every three to five days, sometimes every day – and the scope of examination types is very wide, often including mid-term examination, final examination, citywide unified examination and provincial unified examination (Lin and Chen, 1995). Schools compete with each other based on students' exam scores, and teachers also compete with each other to obtain the highest admission rate in their graduation class (Lin, 1993). In addition to frequent tests, children also face an enormous burden of homework, which leads them to shorten their sleep time to ensure that they complete it. Research indicates that 38% of primary and secondary school students went to bed later than the specified time, and 67% did not get the required amount of sleep time (Li et al., 2022). Additionally, as cultural, political and economic factors create a competitive academic environment, parents have the

responsibility to guide their children to achieve excellent academic results (Quach et al., 2015).

The dual pressures from home and school have caused many Chinese children to experience depression and other forms of mental ill-health. The Gaokao takes place in the later stage of adolescence, while adolescence is a period of particular vulnerability to depression and other forms of mental ill-health, and under the influence of major academic stressors, Chinese adolescents have increased mental health problems (Fu et al., 2021). Hesketh and colleagues (2010) conducted a study on 2,191 Chinese children aged 9–12 from urban and rural areas, and they found that 81% of the children were ‘very worried’ about the exam, 63% were afraid of being punished by the teacher and 73% experienced corporal punishment from their parents for their lax learning. Some large-scale studies have shown that older Chinese adolescents are at higher risk of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts, partly due to the increase in academic pressure from junior high school to senior high school (Cheng et al., 2009; Cui et al., 2011). However, in interviews conducted by Liu and colleagues (2020), some students report generally believing that the Gaokao can serve as a motivational goal and help motivate students to study more effectively than they would in a system without exams, which is consistent with a highly competitive society. The negative effects of academic stress are not limited to individual mental health, but also extend to social relations with peers and attitudes towards authority and society. In general, the most common sources of stress for children in China's compulsory education stage are others' views of themselves, expectations and the social and learning environment.

## **2.5. The off-campus training institution and its impact**

Due to the fierce academic competition in China, an increasing number of parents arrange additional courses to improve their children's academic performance, which has led to the gradual development of off-campus training institutions. However, many training institutions in China have no academic qualifications, and some engage in illegal practices such as false publicity and arbitrary fees, which violates the public interest attribute of education and threatens the normal educational ecology of China (Li, J. et al., 2022).

Moreover, off-campus tutoring schools also increase children's academic burden and families' financial burden. Since many after-school tutoring institutions in China are promoting intense academic competition and emphasising exam-oriented education to attract students and parents to sign up, more and more students are taking these courses to avoid falling behind others in the school's general exams or the Gaokao (Zhu, X., 2020).

## **2.6. The ‘Double Reduction’ policy and its current impacts in China**

On 24 July 2021, the General Office of the Central Committee of China's Communist Party and the General Office of the State Council jointly released the ‘Double Reduction’ policy, intended to further reduce the burden of homework and off-campus training for compulsory education students. In reference to off-campus training institutions, the policy can be roughly divided into three areas of focus: putting forward new requirements for the approval of institutions, further standardising the training content and

training methods and strengthening the standardisation of the operation of training institutions (Li, J. et al., 2022). Additionally, due to the policy's requirement that off-campus subject-based training cannot occur during China's national holidays, rest days or winter and summer vacations, many families must cancel training courses because children need to complete school tasks on weekdays, which leaves no time to attend extra training courses. Thus, children have a reduced academic burden and more rest time. Overall, the reform of off-campus training institutions under the ‘Double Reduction’ policy means children's weekends are not full of stressful academic training, instead providing many new opportunities for their all-round development.

However, as the ‘Double Reduction’ policy rectifies off-campus training institutions, school education returns to the dominant position in Chinese education, which is both an opportunity and a challenge. Li and Tian (2021) argue that off-campus training is useful in meeting the individual learning needs of different students because students of all levels can go to off-campus training agencies for targeted tutoring. For example, children who fall behind in school can attend off-campus training to make up for what they have not understood in class, while the students with better grades can gain more advanced knowledge through participating in off-campus activities such as the mathematical Olympiad. Therefore, the biggest challenges facing schools at present are undoubtedly how to fill the gap left by off-campus training and how to establish a differentiated schoolwork system to meet the learning needs of different students.

The government has also carried out reforms relevant to public schools. These include requiring schools to provide after-school services when the formal courses are over, in which teachers are required to guide students in completing written homework assigned by the school and are prohibited from any course-based courses (Li, J. et al., 2022). Additionally, the school should support clubs, sports and art and social activities. The reform of school services has had a great impact on student development, as students can now complete school assignments in time with the support of teachers and can also participate in various school activities. It is worth noting that since the school's after-school service allows children to finish their homework at school, they can spend more time with their families when at home (Li, J et al., 2022), while parents also do not have to rush their commuting time to pick up their children from school.

However, since the ‘Double Reduction’ policy was introduced, some limitations have emerged. First, the ‘Double Reduction’ policy increases parents' responsibility for children's education. According to Li and colleagues (2022), as children reduce their academic burden and have more free time, it is more important for parents to guide their children and arrange their time properly. However, parents' backgrounds are diverse and complex, and studies indicate that parents' educational level and family environment will affect their views on whether they have enough skills and knowledge to participate in different aspects of parental involvement (PI) in children's education (Green et al. 2007; Hornby, G. and Lafaele, R., 2011). For example, parents without a university degree may feel inferior to teachers they know are more qualified in some ways, so they may be unwilling to cooperate closely with teachers. Additionally, busy parents may be too tired at the end of the day to arrange after-school activities for their children at home (Hornby, G.

and Lafaele, R., 2011). The ‘Double Reduction’ policy requires increasing attention on family education, and another challenge that must be faced in the future concerns evaluating how parents carry out family education scientifically.

## 2.7. Major research gaps

Since the ‘Double Reduction’ policy was officially launched in July 2021, there are limited publications discussing this policy (Guo, 2022; Eryong, Xue and Li, J., 2022; Li, J., 2022; Song, M., 2022), and no empirical studies have been done to investigate the views and attitudes of different groups towards this policy. What attitude do Chinese parents who previously experienced long-term educational anxiety hold towards the policy? Do they realise that the significance of education is to help children grow up healthily instead of blindly pursuing academic performance, or do they feel more anxious because their children can’t continue to participate in various training to improve their performance? In addition, because family backgrounds are diverse, what factors may also be associated with individuals’ attitudes toward the ‘Double Reduction’ policy?

## 2.8. Study aims and research objectives

This study aims to investigate the thoughts of Chinese parents about the ‘Double Reduction’ policy and identify factors that may influence parental perceptions and children’s experiences.

Specific research objectives included:

1. To investigate parental thoughts (attitudes and perceived impacts) about the implementation of the ‘Double Reduction’ policy on children’s learning experience.

2. To investigate whether parental thoughts about the ‘Double Reduction’ policy vary by children’s educational stage and family (parental) socioeconomic status (education level and employment status).

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Research design and methods

Research design refers to the framework used to collect and analyse data (Bryman, 2012), and research designs are supported by assumptions made by researchers (Creswell, 2014). Research can follow a quantitative, qualitative or mixed-method approach. Qualitative research aims to examine the motivation of behaviours that constitute social reality, and it tends to produce more detailed, non-numerical data (Creswell, 2009). Quantitative research can be used to test the researcher’s theory by analysing the relationships that exist in the data collected (Punch, 2005). This study uses a predominantly quantitative design to explore the research questions. The advantage of a quantitative method is the lack of ambiguity, which allows for the calculation of useful statistics, and it can provide valuable insights into the ordering of realistic and materialised discourse (Savelle, 2018; Punch, 2013). However, the lack of detail means that purely quantitative data can rarely explain why observed effects occur (Gilbert, 2008). To try to combat this drawback, open-ended questions were included in the online questionnaire for this study to obtain qualitative data to explore Chinese parents’ broader views on the ‘Double Reduction’ policy (Bryman, 2004).

### 3.2. Sampling

The study used purposive non-probabilistic sampling to select participants. Considering the research aims of this study, parents of children in compulsory education in China are the sample targets. Although the study recruited participants on a public online platform, it specified that only those who meet the requirements of ‘being the parent of children receiving compulsory education in China’ could participate in the study.

The use of non-probabilistic sampling methods may cause researchers to develop a degree of bias that leads to doubts about sample representativeness and inability to identify sampling errors that can affect the extent to which the statistical values of the sample are applicable to the population (Babbie, 2013). However, parents of children in compulsory education had recent experience of the impact of the ‘Double Reduction’ policy on their children; this enabled them to explain how they viewed the ‘Double Reduction’ policy, as well as its relative strengths and weakness. Another benefit of using this sample is that although this study concerns policies related to children’s education, it investigates parents’ thoughts rather than studying the children themselves, thus reducing difficulties obtaining informed consent or various guarantees for minors, eliminating a potential source of delay or complication (Summer, 2006).

### 3.3. Recruitment of study participants

The chosen research instrument in this study is an online questionnaire. The website link and the Quick Response (QR) code of the questionnaire were put on an electronic poster to attract participants’ attention and recruit them to fill in the questionnaire. This electronic poster contains information and pictures related to the ‘Double Reduction’ policy (see Appendix 1), and it was delivered to participants through Chinese social networking platforms (Weibo, WeChat and QQ). Participants were able to voluntarily forward the poster to others they knew who were eligible to participate in the questionnaire. The consent form was attached to the first page of the questionnaire, and participants needed to provide consent to begin filling out the questionnaire. A factor which may lower validity is the accuracy of self-reported answers to questions on subjective topics, such as ‘To what extent do you agree that the child/children have become less stressed about learning since the implementation of the “Double Reduction” policy?’ This may be because in these subject areas, the report’s answers may not truly reflect reality (Stephenson et al., 2004). This may affect the measurement validity of the study (Bryman, 2008). To solve this problem, the questionnaire was completed anonymously, and the respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire in as private an environment as possible (Joinson, 1999).

### 3.4. Questionnaire design

The questionnaire consists of four parts, including 48 closed questions and 1 open question. The closed questions and rating scales obtain an overview of parents’ thoughts about the ‘Double Reduction’ policy. They were answered using a combination of categorical responses and a Likert scale. For each question in the Likert scale, a statement about the ‘Double Reduction’ policy was given, and respondents were asked to classify their opinions on the statement into one of the following four categories: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3), and strongly agree (4). In contrast to

the closed questions, the open-ended question allows parents to express their personal feelings, experiences and knowledge related to the 'Double Reduction' policy in more detail. The open-ended question required text-based responses and enhanced the study by allowing participants to express themselves in a more personalised way and avoiding any forced use of the researchers' language. Additionally, the open-ended questions allowed participants to express a wider variety of answers, including ones that researchers might not have thought of (Knight, 2002).

Part 1: Thoughts about the 'Double Reduction' policy. This section adopted a four-point Likert scale (ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree') to ask for parents' perspectives about the 'Double Reduction' policy

Part 2: Children's learning before the implementation of the 'Double Reduction' policy. This section focuses on children's learning before the introduction of the 'Double Reduction' policy with ten questions. These questions were used to investigate the frequency and content of children's study before the introduction of the 'Double Reduction' policy.

Part 3: Children's learning after the implementation of the 'Double Reduction' policy. This section concerns children's learning after the introduction of the "Double Reduction" policy with 5 questions. These questions were used to investigate the changes in the frequency and content of children's learning after the introduction of the 'Double Reduction' policy, including the children's own academic performance.

Part 4: Background information. This section has 14 questions to collect demographic information about participants and their children. Questions include participants' ages, qualifications, occupations, degrees, number of children and the children's ages.

Questionnaires provide an inexpensive way to obtain quantitative data from large samples which can then be analysed effectively using computer software such as the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) (Gilbert et al., 2008). Questionnaire surveys have the advantages of low cost in time and money, quick and easy access to information from participants, lack of interviewer bias and respondents' anonymity. However, one drawback of questionnaires is that they seek answers only by asking questions, and since the questions are pre-set, there is no room for further discussion of any topic or specific issue with the respondents. Additionally, a potential threat to the validity of this paper comes from the fact that no researcher was present when the questionnaire was completed. This means that if any respondent misunderstands one of the questions, they cannot clarify the meaning with a researcher (Davies and Brember, 1993). To solve this problem, the questions in the questionnaire were designed to be as clear as possible and a small number of questions were included to ensure that participants did not lose concentration during the process (Davies and Brember, 1993).

### 3.5. Pilot study

A pilot study is a small predictive test of the study material performed in preparation for a study (Baker, 1994). For example, pilot tests can examine whether the categories in the closed questions in the questionnaire are mutually exclusive and exhaustive, whether the wording and layout of the questionnaire are clear (Gilbert and Stoneman, 2016), and whether there are any unfeasible, unnecessary, repetitive or

misleading questions (Seale, 2004). Therefore, it was important to conduct a pilot test of this study. Pilot study participants were identified (n=4) through the use of purposive-convenience sampling, and they were not included in the sampling framework for subsequent studies. The pilot test participants all met the sample requirements of this study, and they were all parents of children currently in compulsory education. I contacted the participants of the pilot test through WeChat, and they were asked first to read and sign the consent agreement and then to complete the online questionnaire. All participants reported that the information sheet and consent form were understandable and that they were satisfied with the information provided. For the questionnaire, all participants indicated that the questions were appropriate and comprehensive.

## 3.6. Data Analysis

### 3.6.1. Quantitative analysis

In this study, IBM SPSS 26.0 software was used to analyse the quantitative data. This included descriptive statistical analysis and logistic regression analysis.

#### 3.6.1.1 Descriptive statistical analysis

First, descriptive statistical analysis was performed to calculate the frequency of the sample's characteristics. In this study, the background information of the sample is a categorical variable, and the frequency can tell how many people are involved in each response (Pallant, J., 2011).

#### 3.6.1.2 Logistic regression

Second, logistic regression was used to test models to predict categorical outcomes with different categories. Logistic regression allows the study to evaluate the effect of a set of independent variables on predicting or explaining categorical dependent variables (Pallant, J., 2011). In this study, the attitude of the participants to the 'Double Reduction' policy was used as the categorical dependent variable (the responses from questions 1 to 19 in the questionnaire were categorised as agree/disagree). The set of explanatory variables in this study included the gender of the children, the compulsory education stage of the children, the pressure on the children related to off-campus tutoring, the time taken by the children to finish homework assigned by their schoolteachers, the education level of the parents, the occupation of the parents and the age of the parents.

### 3.6.2. Qualitative analysis

Although most of the data obtained in this study are quantitative, the single open-ended question in the questionnaire does produce some qualitative data, which cannot be statistically analysed due to its non-numerical composition. The data obtained in the qualitative research will play a role in supporting the data obtained in the quantitative research, as theme is sometimes used to describe an integrating, relational idea from the data (Bazeley, P., 2009). It is often used to describe elements that are identified from text, and this usually refers to the approach that researchers take when they talk about identifying topics in data as their analytical method (Bazeley, P., 2009). This qualitative data was analysed thematically and inductively.

## 3.7. Ethical Considerations

All necessary ethical issues associated with the study, including informed consent, confidentiality and possible harm to participants and investigators, must be considered before the study is conducted. This study ensures that no harm

is caused to participants, researchers or the public throughout the whole project. I refer to guidelines on ethical considerations in social research published by the British Sociological Association (2002) and the Social Research Association (2003). These guidelines warn of possible harm to participants when conducting research and urge researchers to consider participants' welfare at all stages of the research process (Bryman, 2008). To ensure that the research is ethical, I have submitted to the School for Policy Studies ethics committee at the University of Bristol an application form for Ethical Approval (see Appendix \*). This application provides information about the research including research objectives, research methods, expected participants and possible problems during the research process and their solutions.

The study was voluntary, and participants in the study signed a consent form before filling out the online questionnaire. All data disclosed by participants will be kept confidential, and all data and information collected during the whole research process will be saved on the University of Bristol's OneDrive. At no point were any data stored on USB drives or public computers. The final report of this study does not contain personal name records associated with participants or other potentially personally identifiable data.

It is also important to ensure the safety of researchers. The study was conducted online, so there was no risk to researchers' physical safety from visiting participants face-to-face. The researcher's name, email address and university are disclosed in the questionnaire distributed to the participants; however, if the researcher receives a malicious email with the risk of harm, the researcher will immediately report it to the University of Bristol to ensure safety.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Quantitative results**

#### **4.1.1. Participants' characteristics**

Online questionnaire was completed by 381 parents whose children are in compulsory education in China. The majority of participants were 30-39 years old, and the sex composition of the participants' first children was contributed relatively evenly in this study; The education levels of participants are very diverse, with the majority occupation college, so are their occupations; Most parents have one or two children; few of them have three (Appendix 2).

#### **4.1.2. Participants' attitudes towards the 'Double Reduction' policy**

In the first part of the questionnaire, participants indicated their attitudes (ranging from strongly agree, agree, disagree to strongly disagree) towards the statement related to the 'Double Reduction' policy. Appendix 3 shows that most participants agree that the 'Double Reduction' policy can alleviate the current situation in China where students are determined only by academic performance (27.8% strongly agree; 58% agree) and promote equal education (41.2% strongly agree; 42.8% agree), as well as reduce the academic gap among students from different background (27.6% strongly agree; 46.8% agree). Additionally, the majority of participants agreed that the 'Double Reduction' policy can effectively promote the all-round development of children (41.4% strongly agree; 47.2% agree) and promote good health (26.8% strongly agree; agree 63.9%) and mental health development (40.2% strongly agree; 49.6% agree). In terms

of families and parents, most participants agree that the 'Double Reduction' policy can reduce the burden of family education expenses (41.1% strongly agree; 45% agree), relieve the pressure of parents' commuting to pick up their children from school (24.9% strongly agree; 61.9% agree) and parents' education anxiety (41.1% strongly agree; 41.5% agree). For the statement that The 'Double Reductions' policy is not suitable for students who are about to enter high school or college entrance examination', although most of the participants expressed their opposition (29.4% disagree; 34.4% strongly disagree), there are still a certain number of participants think that the policy is really not applicable to students facing the entrance examinations (6.6% strongly agree; 29.7% agree). Participants generally believe that under the 'Double Reduction' policy, individual students' academic performance depends on students' self-discipline (31.5% strongly agree; 57.5% agree) and parents' guidance ability (39.5% strongly agree; 49.7% agree). Finally, although most participants support the policy and hope it would continue (40.9% strongly agree; 46.7% agree), some participants would consider still arranging extra tutoring courses for their children in the future (6.3% strongly agree; 28.1% agree).

#### **4.1.3. The association between parents' education and occupation, and their attitudes toward the 'Double Reduction' policy**

The study did not find that parental education level and current occupation are significantly associated with their attitudes towards the 'Double Reduction' policy, as whether the parents have a undergraduate degree or above and whether the parents are in professional/managerial occupations have no statistically significant effect on their attitudes to the 'Double Reduction' policy (Appendix 4).

#### **4.1.4. The association of child's feeling of pressure and the time it takes for a child to finish the homework, and parents' attitudes towards the 'Double Reduction' policy**

The study did not find that child's perceived pressure from off-campus training institutions and the time it takes for a child to finish the homework are significantly associated with parents' attitudes towards the 'Double Reduction' policy (Appendix 5).

#### **4.1.5. The association of parents' attitudes toward the 'Double Reduction' policy with child's education stage and child's gender**

Univariate analysis showed that compared with primary school students, parents of high school students were more inclined to agree with the 'Double Reduction' policy (unadjusted OR=2.033, 95%CI: 1.119-3.695) (Appendix 6). Multivariate analysis showed that parents of junior high school students were more likely to agree with the 'Double Reduction' policy than parents of primary school students (adjusted OR=1.866, 95%CI: 1.021-3.311), which means that parents of junior high school students were nearly 2 times more likely to hold a positive attitude toward the 'Double Reduction' policy than parents of primary school students are. However, this study did not find that child's gender is significantly associated with parents' attitudes towards the 'Double Reduction' policy.

## **4.2. Qualitative results**

This section reports free-text responses to the one open-ended question from the questionnaire. Participants were asked to express their supplementary views on the 'Double

Reduction' policy. 56 participants provided a free-text response, and there were three main themes continually emerging in their answers: 1) all-round development, 2) reduction of child's pressure, 3) the conflict between college entrance examination and the 'Double Reduction' policy, and 4) the importance of family education.

The data obtained in the qualitative research supported the data obtained in the quantitative research, as the majority of participants expressed support for the 'Double Reduction' policy, and believed that the policy could help children to reduce their academic pressure and help them develop in an all-round way

#### **4.2.1. All-round development**

The 'Double Reduction' can help students with different interests develop their confidence and value.

(Participant no.290. Father)

I feel satisfied that it can promote students' all-round development and relieve some homework pressure.

(Participant no. 429. Mother)

#### **4.2.2. Reduction of child's pressure**

The 'Double Reduction' policy can reduce stress in children.

(Participant no.348. Mother)

The 'Double Reduction' policy effectively curbed the blind capital expansion of off-campus training, standardized the market environment of basic education, and freed more children from excessive education. The 'Double Reduction' policy reduces the extra burden of compulsory education and enforces parents and students to actively think and plan for their children's education. In the short term, a few parents may have anxiety, but in the long run, it will make students return to the classroom, teachers return to pay attention to lesson preparation and in-school education, parents re-understand parental responsibility, and change the evil trend of exchanging money for knowledge.

(Participant no.5. Father)

#### **4.2.3. The conflict between college entrance examination and the 'Double Reduction' policy.**

The 'Double Reduction' policy is indeed conducive to the physical and mental health of children, allowing children to have more time to develop their own interests and hobbies, cultivate the ability of independent thinking, and give play to the creativity of each child. At the same time, it can also ensure the necessary sleep time for children's physical development and have more time to exercise, providing the society with all aspects of talent. However, if there is no supporting talent training system, only the college entrance examination results can eventually obtain better educational resources, and the benefits of the 'Double reduction' policy cannot achieve the results.

(Participant no.4. Mother)

As long as the college entrance exam exists, the 'Double Reduction' policy will not apply.

(Participant no.279. Mother)

#### **4.2.4. The importance of family education**

The problem behind the 'Double Reduction' policy is that the quality of parents in each family is different. After the implementation of the 'Double Reduction' policy, the children of intellectuals can be taught at home by their parents. Children in families with lower levels of knowledge have to

rely on themselves to learn.

(Participant no.11. Father)

The 'Double Reduction' policy does not seem to play a prominent role. Fourth grade pupils have to do more than a dozen homework in less than 20 days' holiday, including basic winter vacation homework, sports homework, manual homework, reading homework, reading homework, etc. even if parents do it themselves, it will take more than a dozen days to finish it carelessly. Now almost all parents are Post-70s and post-80s, with a low level of education, and different teaching materials and texts. Many after-school homework cannot be tutored. Can you believe that the ternary equation appears in the homework of children in Volume 2 of grade 3? Parents still calculate the decimal point? Teachers often assign a lot of homework, but they don't explain it publicly. Arrange a little in class. After going home, there are various assignments assigned by teachers of various subjects in the parent group, such as endorsement punch in, reading punch in, and homework punch in. Some teachers even ask their children to take photos and send them to the group after they finish their homework. Parents also have their own things to do, including old and young, car loans, housing loans, interpersonal relationships, and life pressure. They really can't spare those four or five hours to tutor their homework. I hope relevant departments pay attention to it. I feel that the 'Double Reduction' policy has not been implemented in place. I hope it can be improved.

(Participant no.431. Older sister)

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1. Parents' attitudes toward the 'Double Reduction' policy**

This study found that most of the participants support the 'Double Reduction' policy. Both the quantitative and qualitative study findings showed that participants generally agree that the 'Double Reduction' policy has a positive effect on promoting children's physical and mental health, promoting children's all-round development, promoting education equality in China and reducing parents' educational anxiety. These attitudes and beliefs mainly stem from the fact that Chinese education has historically focused only on academic achievement rather than all-round development. Additionally, many participants agree that the success of the 'Double Reduction' policy largely depends on students' self-control and parents' guidance, and some participants also expressed similar views in the qualitative data. The qualitative findings showed that after the implementation of the 'Double Reduction' policy, while the children of those with academic backgrounds can receive education from their parents at home, some children of families with less educational experience can only learn independently.

### **5.2. The factors that influence parents' attitudes towards the 'Double Reduction' policy**

Children's educational stage is the main factor affecting parents' attitudes towards the 'Double Reduction' policy in this study. In the quantitative results, the higher the stage of children's compulsory education, the more parents support the 'Double Reduction' policy; children's gender, age, time spent on school homework, pressure related to off-campus training courses and parents' education level and occupation

have no significant correlation with parents' attitudes towards the 'Double Reduction' policy. There was a difference between the unadjusted and adjusted analyses because in the univariate analysis, all explanatory variables are included in the model, which may be affected by confounding factors, and adjusted ORs are used to control for confounding factors.

### 5.3. Findings in relation to previous literature

Although this is the first research to study the views of Chinese parents on the 'Double Reduction' policy and the factors influencing them, the outcomes of this study can still be discussed and compared with previous research. In this study, I found that children's compulsory education stage is the main factor affecting whether parents support the 'Double Reduction' policy. In China, the Gaokao examination is usually regarded as the most important examination for all Chinese students, so when students enter high school, they usually face greater learning pressure than younger students. A stratified random sample of 9,015 students from 100 junior middle schools in Beijing, Hangzhou, Wuhan and Urumqi who completed the Global School Student Health Survey found that older adolescents in China are at higher risk of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts, in part due to an increase in academic pressure from middle to high school (Cheng et al., 2009). Since the implementation of the 'Double Reduction' policy, children in the K12 education stage have experienced greatly reduced academic pressure, especially for those in high school, which is of great benefit to their physical and mental health. Therefore, parents of children in high school are more likely to support the 'Double Reduction' policy, followed by parents of children in junior high school, due to the reduction in academic pressure on their children.

Similar to the findings of previous research (Li, J. et al., 2022; Guo, Y., 2022; Eryong, Xue and Li, J., 2022; Song, M., 2022), most participants believe that the 'Double Reduction' policy can alleviate parents' anxiety about their children's education, including by reducing family education expenditure and lessening the burden of picking up and dropping off children from school. In the qualitative results, one participant said that before the implementation of the 'Double Reduction' policy, children had large amounts of homework to complete, and the homework was difficult; even some parents could not complete it. After-school services required by the 'Double Reduction' policy can help students finish their homework before they go home, thus avoiding situations in which parents are unable to help their struggling children with schoolwork (Li, J. et al., 2022).

However, contrary to previous research (Li, J. et al., 2022), most of the participants in this study did not believe that parents would find it difficult to manage their children's free time properly after the implementation of the policy. In the quantitative results, only a small number of participants think that the implementation of the 'Double Reduction' policy makes it difficult for parents to reasonably control their children's spare time.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that in the qualitative results, some participants said that the implementation of the 'Double Reduction' policy 'treats the symptoms rather than the root cause' in alleviating the academic pressure on children. Some participants said that the intensity of academic competition in China has not been improved because children still face pressure from the high school and university entrance examinations, and the standards of these tests will not be

adjusted because of the 'Double Reduction' policy; therefore, these participants were not optimistic about the potential effects of the policy. In other words, if China's exam-oriented system does not change, even if the 'Double Reduction' policy is implemented, the pressure of high competitive intensity will still exist. Therefore, how to solve this problem still needs further adjustment and consideration by the Ministry of Education of China so as to completely achieve educational equality and reduce the academic pressure on children.

### 5.4. Implications for future research and policy

The 'Double Reduction' is undoubtedly one of the most popular and influential education reform measures in contemporary China. The research results show that most Chinese parents – especially parents of high school students – are very supportive of the implementation of the 'Double Reduction' policy. China's exam-oriented education and distorted academic competition are considered important contributors to this support. However, although the policy does reduce much academic pressure on students, they still have to face various entrance exams, and fierce academic competition still exists. Therefore, future research should focus on children's own attitudes towards the 'Double Reduction' policy and how to more effectively help children to reduce academic pressure and achieve happy and healthy all-round development. In addition, the 'Double Reduction' policy also brings more responsibility to family education. According to Li and colleagues (2022), more emphasis on family education requires parents to shoulder more responsibilities as they need to spend more time guiding and accompanying their children, which is a challenge for families. Therefore, it is also important to provide parents with clear guidance. In 2001, the Quebec Ministry of Education published the document 'School I care!', which clearly emphasised the roles of the governing board and of parents in relation to school and hoped that parents could communicate with them through letters or other means. This demonstrates that the Quebec Ministry of Education attaches importance to the role of parents (Deslandes, R. and Lemieux, A., 2005; MELS, 2009). In this case, parents will know their specific responsibilities and understand what they should do.

## 6. Conclusion

This dissertation has addressed the research objectives and aims defined in the methodology chapter, which focus on Chinese parents' views on the 'Double Reduction' policy and the factors influencing their attitudes. This dissertation also suggests opportunities for further research, such as research on children's own attitudes towards the 'Double Reduction' policy and their influence due to the policy. As this dissertation is part of an undergraduate degree, and due to lack of time and resources, the main limitations of this study are the number of samples, the evenness of samples and the lack of more in-depth face-to-face interview research. This study found that most parents support the implementation of the 'Double Reduction' policy, and the higher their children's compulsory education stage, the more they support the policy. In addition, parental guidance and children's self-control are considered to be important factors for the success of the policy. Therefore, in order to maximise the popularisation of the positive effects of the 'Double Reduction' policy, China's Ministry of Education should pay more attention to family education and formulate corresponding guidance documents

for parents and children.

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