

The Analysis of the Double Reduction Policy Formation in Multiple Streams Framework

Meishan Chen^{1,*}

¹ College of Arts & Science, New York University, New York, 10012, United States

*Corresponding author: mc8977@nyu.edu

Abstract. In 2021, the Chinese government proposed the “Double Reduction” policy, and the process of this policy contains many complicating factors. Due to this policy's significant influence on Chinese education, this article will utilize Kingdon's multiple streams framework to discuss the policy-making process. And this research will help to illustrate and recognize the necessity and rationality of the “Double Reduction” policy. The common sense of study anxiety and the capitalism of education resources formed the problem stream; the suggestions from scholars and entrepreneurs led those problems to be noticed by the governance and put on the policy agenda with good preparation from the previous education reform policies, leading to the policy stream; At the same time, the public sentiment and the government's emphasis on education combined to the political stream. At one particular time, those three streams merge to open the policy window and promote the formation of the “Double Reduction” policy.

Keywords: Double Reduction, Multiple Streams Framework, Education.

1. Introduction

As a civil right, Compulsory education is the foundation of China's development. However, in recent years, a phenomenon has occurred frequently in China's education area, many middle and high school students are overwhelmed with their heavy load of meaningless and repeating school tasks, which occupy most of the students' rest time and sleeping time. Besides, teachers in school are also irresponsible to students, which leads students to have extra study outside school [1]. Because of those phenomena, the government has announced many relative policies to improve it, such as the “10 burden reduction rules for primary school students” and “The announcement of strengthening compulsory school's homework monitor,” which aim to eliminate the un-standard off-school touring. On 21 May 2021, the central committee for deepening overall reform introduced the “The Announcement about ease student's homework burden and excessive off-school tutoring,” which was simplified to “Double Reduction” in the following paragraphs. This policy showed the China government's determination to completely changes the study environment for students.

In the field of Chinese educational research, many scholars have analyzed the “Double Reduction” policy from multiple angles with different research methods. With the comprehensive regulations, Zhang Zhiyong focused on the reconstruction and governance of compulsory education after the “Double Reduction” policy, and he discussed that the implementation of the “Double Reduction” policy should follow the lead of the government, adhere to the public attribute of off-school education, and consist with diversified cooperation [2]. At the same time, Yu Yafeng and Yao Zhen discussed the anxiety of parents and the solution to the “Double Reduction” policy [1]. They believed that the education evaluation mechanism and exam system are the essential reasons to generate study achievement anxiety which is the main expression form of parent anxiety.

At present, scholars mainly focused on the implementation and future development of the “Double Reduction” policy, but few of them analyze the fairness behind the policy's formation. Therefore, based on Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework (MSF), this article will discuss the “Double Reduction” policy's formation process.

2. Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework

The Multiple streams Framework (MSF) was developed by Kingdon in 1995 and first appeared in "Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies" [3]. MSF is widely used to reformulate the policymaking process; formations are mainly involved in MSF, problem stream, policy stream, and political stream. Firstly, the problem stream focuses on policymakers' perception of societal problems and the evaluation process. Systematic data indicators, feedback on the operating projects, and the occurrence of crisis events all probably can be triggers to process the exposure of problems in society. Secondly, the policy stream explains the suggestion for the policy from experts in the decision-making system and the process of policy generation and discussion. The members of the policymaking department include bureaucrats, experts, scholars, Congress, and evaluators. Plenty of alternative solutions and suggestions continually collide and interact, but only a few of them which meet specific criteria can survive. Thirdly, the political stream is the activities that affect the policy problem rise to political agendas, including changing national sentiment, activities of pressure groups, and transition of power. Those three streams flow along different paths and coverage at a specific time, generating the policy window. When the policy window opens, it indicates that the policy problem is noticed, the suggestion is adopted, and the policy agenda is changed. The MSF process is shown in Figure 1 [4].

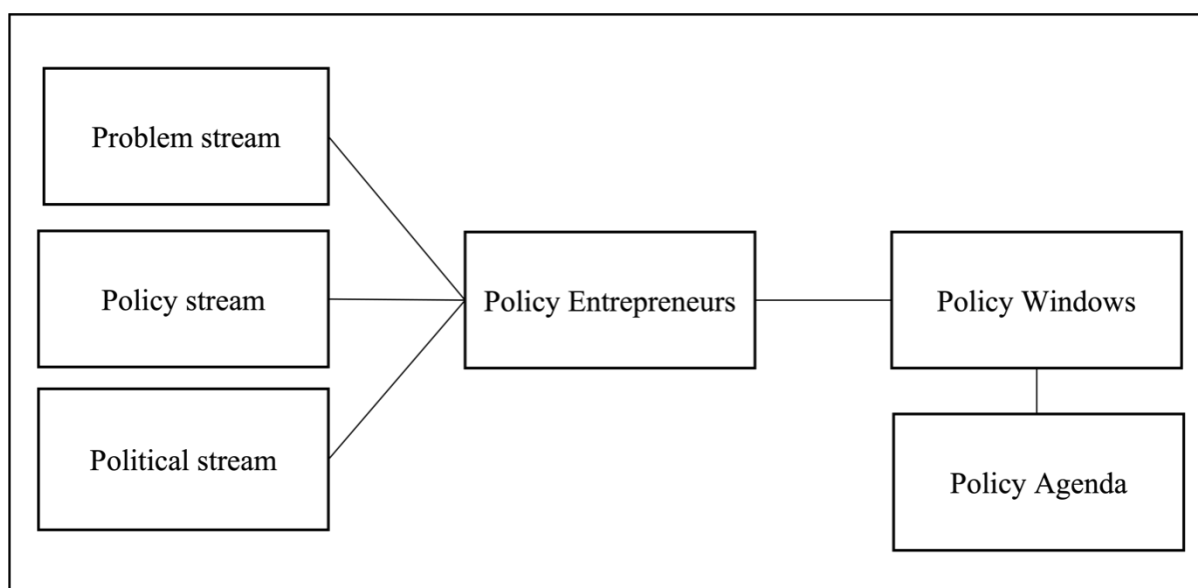


Fig. 1 Multiple streams progress [4]

The MSF has now become the standard model in policy research. At the same time, MSF is widely used to illustrate the process of education policy, such as the national education curriculum policy, the allocation of education funds, and educational reform [4-6]. Therefore, it can be seen that based on the "double reduction" policy with multiple causes and the final result, MSF is well suited to analyze this policy. In July 1955, the Ministry of Education announced China's first burden reduction policy to lighten the study pressure of primary and secondary schools. Over the past 60 years, China government has announced nine mainly burden reduction policies, and relevant policies from each province were announced more hundreds. However, the reality is that in China, students' academic pressure is increased in recent years, and parents' anxiety has become severe. Those previous policies aim to reduce students' stress, which successfully provides a good framework and ideas for the "double reduction" policy's development. In China, there is a high population base of compulsory education, accompanied by a population boom, which leads to competition for high-quality academic resources and employment opportunities. This causal relationship led to a blind mentality for anxious parents who do not want their kids to lose at the start line [1]. Those elements can all be included in

the MSF, from the problem stream, policy stream, political stream, and their coupling conditions to the analysis of the “Double Reduction” policymaking process.

3. Case description

3.1 Background before “Double Reduction”

With market-oriented intervention in China’s educational reform, plenty of private schools and off-school tutoring were built up by market mechanisms and private capital. Under the big interests, the role of off-school tutoring has been distorted. The challenge of compulsory education and its structural contradictions constitute the macro background for the “Double Reduction” policy.

The disorderly competition in off-school education has interfered with public education for a long time. For the past ten years, with various off-school tutoring institutions having prevailed in many cities in China, the chaos of disorderly competition appeared. Some institutions utilize exaggerated propaganda and fictional study material to attract students and parents to enroll in their courses. Also, many private tutors falsified their academic experience and failed qualification tests. Besides, it is hard for a government regulator to investigate those private tutors and institutions, so many students negatively impact their studies, and their mental and physical health will be influenced. According to the research, before the “Double Reduction,” almost 70% of students in first-tier cities in China, such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, attended off-school tutoring classes, meaning those classes became an important part of compulsory education [7]. More than 700,000 tutoring institutions were registered in the market with more than 100,000,000 tutors in the society [8]; however, in the compulsory education system, there were only 210,000 public schools with 102,900,000 teachers [9].

Moreover, private tutoring institutions competed with compulsory schools, depending on the advantage of service efficiency, diversification, and personalized teaching. At the same time, many students got used to off-school tutoring’s teaching style, which mainly focuses on exam techniques causing students hardly ever go to class instead of depending on private tutoring. In addition, some of them could not adapt to regular school’s studying pace and wrote private tutoring homework in class. With more and more students and families joining examination competitions, compulsory schools faster their teaching plans, switching to similar teaching methods. Also, those competitions increase the burden on low-income families because if they did not want their children could not follow the pace, they need to afford tutoring fees. Moreover, many students in rural areas did not have the same opportunities to attend those classes, and public schools in that area also had gaps in teaching quality. Therefore, this lousy circulation between students, off-school tutoring, and public schools became graver in China and hard to improve.

3.2 “Double Reduction” policy

The “Double Reduction” policy continued the principle of student burden-reducing policies of the past decades and aimed to reduce student homework and off-school tutoring pressure. This policy is not just for reducing the burden but an effective strategy to reform new compulsory education, which exceeds any previous educational policy’s coverage and effort. Also, the ministry of education builds up an off-school supervision department to monitor [10]. The “Double Reduction” policy refers to the contradiction of educational competition, social class solidification, family education burden, and student pressure. Furthermore, it repositions future development of China’s compulsory education, school position, academic resource, and after-school tutoring, which purpose is to reform the compulsory education system’s return to the public.

4. Case analysis

4.1 Problem stream

4.1.1 Indicator data

The voice of burden reduction has existed among students and parents for a long time. The utilitarianism phenomenon typically happens in China's schools; despite students can reduce their burden in school, they still have to go to the after-school study program. According to a data survey of a school in Beijing, it was found that no more than 10% of students say that they did not do homework on lunch breaks or during class breaks. More than 90% of students have to do homework after school, and only 5.7% of the students can finish their homework in school. Also, the survey shows that only 15.6% of students complete the task in less than 30 minutes, 31% of students will spend 31-60 minutes, 40% of students will spend 1-3 hours, and 6.5% of students need to spend more than 3 hours to finish homework. Those data show that students have a heavy study burden on schoolwork. Besides, in the survey, 27.7% of students will attend after-school tutor courses [11]. Many students need additional study from parents and still need to participate in academic tutor courses and specialty training classes on weekends.

According to the survey, the long study hours and extra courses adversely affect students' mental and physical health. Based on the sleeping survey, 51% of high school students' sleep time is less than 8 hours, 53% of middle school students sleep less than 9 hours, and 31% of primary school student sleep later than 10 pm. Those indicator data gradually become a widely discussed topic and arouse the attention of policy maker [12].

4.1.2 Capitalization of educational resources

However, with more and more capital entering the education market in recent years, educational resources have become disorganized and wasteful. Plenty of advertisements pressure students and parents, and many expensive tutoring institutions are established. Because of the high pay for after-school classes, many teachers would instead teach in those expensive institutions than pay attention in public schools. The limitation of market-based resource allocation has gradually emerged. In China, the National College Entrance Examination should be a suitable platform for studying hard and intelligent students [13]; however, when the competition for education resource become intensified, unfairness appears. When high-quality education resource concentrates on the wealthy, there are fewer opportunities for people at the bottom to get ahead, which deviates from the original intention of the National College Entrance Examination.

4.2 Policy stream

4.2.1 The collision of the external view of the policy

Based on Kingdon's research, the policy community comprises government officials, scholars, experts, or interest groups, which provide different suggestions and opinions to the policymaking process. Policymakers have the power to decide policy alternatives based on selected criteria, such as technical feasibility and consistency of values [3]. When society takes the student burden issue seriously, policymakers simultaneously focused on this issue. Firstly, the scholars pointed out with the consciousness of academia that off-school tutoring negatively impacted students, accompanied by irregular and unreasonable phenomena. The government must build a supervisor and evaluation system to switch those tutoring institutions to standardized ones [14]. Secondly, many tutoring institutions also revealed the internal reality of this industry to society. Although their starting point was to safeguard self-interest and lacked theoretical proof, those institutions provided many practical ideas and suggestions for the government. Their suggestions mainly focused on raising entry barriers to industry and the standardized connection between capital and development [15]. However, their advice didn't achieve their wish due to avoiding industrial monopoly and promoting healthy growth. Finally, the National People's Congress (NPC) deputies and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) members proposed student burden-reducing issues that the

government officials noticed and put on the political agenda and actively promoted policy formation to achieve the “Double Reduction” policy’s implementation. The political suggestions from multiple positions through discussion and debate combined into the final policy.

4.2.2 The exploration of the policy decision process

China’s government recently announced some preparatory policies for student burden reduction, showing the attitude and requirements change. But not all the suggestions will be taken, which should be considered for feasibility and inner values. In 2018, before the Two Sessions, the ministry of education and the other four departments announced the “The Announcement about Reducing Students’ Burden Afterschool and Standardized Tutoring Institutions Activity” policy, which indicated the determination to rectify off-school tutoring institutions [16]. In 2019, in the “Suggestion of General Office of the State Council about deepening reform education and improve compulsory education’s quality” policy, the government proposed many burden-reducing requirements for public schools and standardization of teaching methods [17]. Under the regulation of those policies, the “Double Reduction” policy gained good preparation.

4.3 Political streams

4.3.1 Public sentiment

In the information age, the internet has become one of the significant elements of public sentiment. People have multi-methods to connect with society and the government, such as the government hotline, complaint website, and official email, which can observe people’s difficulties and collect advice from the public. In recent years, many students and parents have been victims of those unregulated tutoring institutions, and they used those platforms to complain and help other families prevent it. People wish to have a practical policy for protecting their rights, and the “Double Reduction” policy can achieve it. However, public sentiment is not always accurate. Many media will exaggerate the news phenomenon to attract people, and some people have a herd mentality toward the news [18]. Thus, when the policymakers made the decision, they will figure out which was the most needed national. After the “Double Reduction” policy was announced, we can see the reflection of the policy on public opinion, which not only standardized the off-school tutoring market, but also protected the rights of students, parents, teachers, and schools.

4.3.2 China’s political environment

Since China is a socialist country, Compulsory education is always one of the most critical parts of national welfare, and the government has always attached great importance to it. To allocate resources relatively equally and avoid social class solidification, when capitalization influences too much of the education system, it is necessary for the government to intervene. With the promulgation of each year's education policies, the policies' strength also intensified. The “Double Reduce” policy is the outcome of the combination of people’s needs and the government's long-term development plan.

4.4 Policy windows

The policy window is the best opportunity for the statements of policy entrepreneurs to get attention. The opening of the policy window indicates that some social problems are showing the potential probability of becoming a political topic, which also provides a good chance for policy establishment and is a critical part of making decisions [19]. Before the policy windows open, the problem streams, policy streams, and political streams are independently developed. Still, those streams combine to open the policy windows at a particular time.

The “Double Reduction” policy window is relevant to the population problem. Starting on January 2016, China implemented the universal two-child policy to solve the aging population; however, after five years in 2021, the ten years population growth rate of the seventh national population census was 0.53%, compared to the same statistic in 2010, the average growth rate decreases 0.04% [20]. Those numbers showed that the universal two-child policy did not achieve its goal, and China’s aging

population problem became more serious. The education problem was one of the culprits behind this result. Under the evaluation mechanism and college entrance examination in China, the traditional relationship between family and school is hard to change. Many off-school tutoring institutions created an atmosphere of anxiety for the parents and students, which leads people to spend a lot of money and time on education because they don't want their children to fall behind. Thus, the fertility desire of the age group would be negatively influenced by this, and the policy windows open. The "Double Reduction" policy, as a supporting policy for the three-child policy, aimed to reduce the education cost, avoid vicious competition, and balance students' pressure. In the progress of China's educational reform, building a new social consensus and charitable education system is the most effective way to promote social equity and a virtuous academic circle.

5. Discussion

5.1 The limitation of the "Double Reduction" policy

Some new contradictions appeared based on the construction adjustment from the "Double Reduction" policy to the public compulsory education system. When the function of subject tutoring returns to school, the quality gap between schools becomes an important incentive for the gap in students' academic achievement; the off-school tutoring changes to home-tutoring, which is the key phenomenon of the gap between different classes; these changes also make the regional tutoring industry become to one of the essential elements that influence student's grades. Those structural contradictions lead to a new challenge to education equality, the gap between good and bad schools, city and rural, poor and rich widening.

Although the "Double Reduction" policy prohibits off-school tutoring classes, the demand for students will not decrease. On the contrary, due to the pressure of examination, the off-school tutoring class transforms into a private tutor at home. Because of good secrecy, some wealthier families hired private tutors as housekeepers. Also, some highly educated families, especially teachers, form a group to teach each other's students and hire teachers. However, those opportunities are not affordable for most low-income families. Behind this phenomenon is the transfer of tutoring class students from ordinary families to middle and upper-class families, which will exaggerate the advantages of partial students, aggravating class culture. Guaranteeing the fairness of education is the fundamental principle of compulsory education, and it is also the premise for sharing educational recourse and opportunities with society. Without an equality guarantee, the education system will distort into a regenerative mechanism of social inequality, and the "Double Reduction" target is hard to achieve.

5.2 The suggestion for the "Double Reduction" policy

With the fixed supply and demand relationship in the tutoring market, if the government wants to change this situation, it should focus on in-class, after-class, and off-school to provide equal educational resources for different areas, families, and school students. Weak schools can have more academic resources in class, such as a co-teaching system for teachers' exchange and online courses. After class, the school can cooperate with a third party to provide a personalized approach for students with different tutors on the official co-teaching system list. Thirdly, regulations on private tutoring should be standardized. The government can establish an official platform for tutors' information, which can build up transparent charging standards and monitor private tutors' classes. Also, the government can encourage social welfare and teacher's non-profit organizations that provide free tutoring services for rural areas or low-income families.

6. Conclusion

Firstly, this article utilizes Kingdon's multiple streams framework to analyze the "Double Reduction" policy, which mainly focuses on the reasons and mechanisms behind the three streams: The distorted market of education by off-school tutoring leading a problem stream; the scholars,

entrepreneurs, NPC deputies, and CPPCC members provide suggestions and reach consensus in interactive communication leading a policy stream; the public sentiment and distinct Chinese socialism lead to a political stream. Those streams combined after the seventh national population census promoted policy windows opening that pushed the “Double Reduction” policy exposure. Thus, those outcomes proved that the multiple streams framework has good explanatory and applicability for analyzing policy in China.

References

- [1] YU Yafeng, YAO Zhen. Parent’s Anxiety and its Resolution under the Background of “Double Reduction” Policy [J]. *Journal of Xinjiang Normal University*, 2022, 43(4): 39-49.
- [2] Zhang Zhiyong. The Reform and Governance of Public Education System under the “Double Reduction” [J]. *Chinese Education Journal*, 2021, 20-16.
- [3] Kingdon, J.W. *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies* [M]. Second edition. New York: Longman, 2003.
- [4] Chow, A. Understanding policy change: Multiple streams and national education curriculum policy in Hong Kong [J]. *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*, 2014, 4(2), 49.
- [5] Kemper, G. A. Allocating faculty in the budgeting process [J]. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 1985, (52), 31–45.
- [6] Boasiako, A., & Asare, B. The multiple streams framework and the 1996 and 2007 educational reforms in Ghana [J]. *Advances in Research*, 2015, 5(3), 1–15.
- [7] The Chinese Society of Education. The Investigation Report of the Chinese Education Tutoring Industry and Teachers of Tutoring Institutions [OL], 2016. <https://freewechat.com/a/Mjm5MjY3NTI1NQ==/2656186779/1>
- [8] Zhao Dongshan. K12 Tutoring Institutions are Dead! Where is the Future of 7000,000 Teachers, and 10,000,000 Employees [OL]? *Chinese Entrepreneur*, 2021. <https://tech.ifeng.com/c/88BrQCfKFNS>
- [9] Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China. The Statistic Report of the Chinese Education Industry’s Development in 2020 [OL]. 2021. http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_sjzl/sjzl_fztjgb/202108/t20210827_555004.html
- [10] Zhu Yiming. The “Double Reduction”: Cognitive Renewal, System Innovation, and Reform Action [J]. *Nanjing Society Science*, 2021,11.
- [11] Wang Dong, Wang Huanan. The Reflection on Blind Spot and Negative effect of the Burden Reduction Policy—The Research Based on the Current Situation of Beijing’s Middle and Primary School Students’ Study Burden [J]. *Shanghai Education Research*, 2017(03): 30-33.
- [12] Feng Feng. The Empirical Research of Middle and Primary School Students’ Study Burden Reduction—Make the Middle and Primary School Students in City N as an Example [J]. *Culture Innovation Comparative Research*, 2021(09) :27-32.
- [13] Luo Shasha. The Interpretation of “Double Reduction” on Compulsory Education—Based on the Aspect of Multiple Streams Framework [J]. *Education Exploration*, 2022(05):12-15.
- [14] Li Qinggang. Private Tutoring Institutions: Position and Supervision [J]. *Education Journal*, 2016(03): 24-27.
- [15] The Eighth National Tutoring Education Development Meeting. Shanghai Association For Non-Government Education [OL], 2019. <http://www.shmbjy.org/item-detail.aspx?NewsID=10290>.
- [16] The Outline of China Mid and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan for 2010-2020 [OL]. Xinhua News Agency, 2010. http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2010-07/29/content_1667143.htm.
- [17] The Suggestion for Deepen Education Reform and Comprehensive Improve Compulsory Education from the General Office of the State Council [OL]. Xinhua News Agency, 2019. http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2019-07/08/content_5407361.htm
- [18] Wilding, D., Fray, P., Molitorisz, S. & McKewon, E. *The Impact of Digital Platforms on News and Journalistic Content* [J]. University of Technology Sydney, NSW, 2018.

- [19] Huang Junhui, Xu Ziqiang. The Analysis of Policy Agenda for “The Safety Regulations of School Bus” —Based on the Aspect of Multiple Streams Framework [J]. *Education and Economy*, 2016(05):3-11.
- [20] Ning Jizhe. The Main Statistic Report of the Seventh National Population Census [OL]. National Bureau of Statistics, 2021. http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/202105/t20210510_1817176.html