

THE DOUBLE REDUCTION POLICY & IMPACT ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND PARENTAL REACTIONS IN COMPULSORY EDUCATION IN DONGCHENG DISTRICT, BEIJING, CHINA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the effects of China's Double Reduction Policy (DRP) on student academic achievement and parental reactions in compulsory education within Dongcheng District, Beijing. Drawing on a mixed-methods study that combines survey data (n=320) and semi-structured interviews (n=12) with stakeholders, the research investigates variations in outcomes across socioeconomic groups, teacher preparedness, and school-level implementation. Quantitative analyses (ANOVA, multiple regression) assess changes in achievement and perceived academic readiness, while thematic analysis of interviews explores parental anxiety, adaptation strategies, and informal tutoring markets. Findings indicate heterogeneous impacts: some students report improved well-being and engagement after reduced homework and tutoring, whereas others — particularly those previously reliant on intensive tutoring — express concerns about academic preparedness. Evidence also points to emergent informal markets and unequal capacity across schools to provide in-school remediation, which risks exacerbating socioeconomic disparities. The study concludes that the DRP's equity goals require targeted school support, teacher professional development, and mechanisms to monitor local implementation. The paper contributes district-level empirical evidence to debates on large-scale education reforms and offers policy recommendations to align wellbeing objectives with sustained academic outcomes.

Keywords: Double Reduction Policy, Educational equity, Parental reactions, Student achievement

INTRODUCTION

China's education system has historically emphasized high-stakes examinations, a strong exam-focused culture, and a robust market for private tutoring. In July 2021 the central government introduced the Double Reduction Policy (DRP) to reduce excessive homework and regulate off-campus tutoring for compulsory education, aiming to improve student wellbeing and promote educational equity. Dongcheng District in Beijing is a particularly revealing site for analysis due to its dense urban population, pronounced academic competition, and socioeconomic diversity. This paper uses district-level empirical data to assess how the DRP has reshaped student achievement and parental behaviour, asking: What is the impact of the DRP on student academic outcomes? How do parents react across socioeconomic strata? What implementation challenges and opportunities emerge at the school level?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Existing research frames the DRP discussion across several theoretical lenses. Cognitive Learning Theory highlights how changes to practice and scaffolding affect students' self-regulated learning. Parental Involvement Theory (Epstein, 2001) clarifies the shifting roles parents take in facilitating home learning and school-family partnerships under DRP. Social Reproduction Theory (Bourdieu) helps explain how differential access to compensatory resources (e.g., informal tutoring, extracurricular enrichment) may reproduce social stratification despite regulatory reforms. Policy implementation theory stresses that top-down reforms require local capacity and adaptive governance to avoid implementation gaps and unintended consequences.



METHOD

This mixed-methods study combines quantitative and qualitative techniques. The quantitative component employed structured surveys administered to 320 respondents (students and parents) across multiple schools in Dongcheng. Academic achievement indicators included internal school grades and standardized assessments where available. Statistical analyses included ANOVA to compare group means and multiple regression to investigate the relationship between policy implementation intensity and student outcomes. The qualitative component comprised 12 semi-structured interviews with parents and a small number of teachers to capture perceptions, adaptation behaviors, and emergent market responses. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-step procedure, and the study adhered to standard ethical safeguards.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative results showed heterogeneous effects. Aggregate test scores did not uniformly decline; instead, results varied by prior tutoring reliance, school type, and family socioeconomic status. Students from households that previously depended heavily on private tutoring reported larger perceived declines in exam readiness, while students from lower-income households often reported relief from reduced financial pressure and some gains in wellbeing indicators. Multivariate analyses suggest that school-level supports and teacher capacity significantly moderate academic outcomes: schools that rapidly instituted in-school remediation programs mitigated negative academic effects, whereas under-resourced schools struggled to fill the gap.

Qualitative interviews revealed that parental reactions ranged from relief to high anxiety. Many parents welcomed the reduced homework burden, noting better sleep and increased time for family activities and extracurricular pursuits. Conversely, parents oriented toward high-stakes outcomes sought informal alternatives, such as hiring private tutors under different job titles or purchasing overseas/online instruction, effectively creating a new shadow market that undermines the policy's equity aims. These findings underscore that regulation alone is insufficient to eliminate inequality: complementary investments in school capacity and clearer communication with parents are essential.

CONCLUSION

The Double Reduction Policy has produced mixed outcomes in Dongcheng District. While it successfully reduced certain forms of academic burden and supported student wellbeing for some, it also revealed and in some cases deepened inequities through informal markets and variable school readiness. Policy success therefore depends on pairing regulations with targeted investments in teacher training, school-based remediation, and monitoring systems that can identify local gaps in implementation. Future research should track longitudinal outcomes to assess the DRP's effect on high-stakes exam performance and social mobility over multiple cohorts.

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