

# Analyzing the Impact of the “Double Reduction” Policy on Student Well-Being and Academic Performance in Urban China

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## Abstract

The “Double Reduction” policy, introduced in China in 2021, seeks to alleviate academic pressure on students by reducing homework loads and regulating private tutoring services. This study analyzes the policy’s impact on student well-being and academic performance in urban settings, drawing on quantitative and qualitative data from students, parents, teachers, and school administrators. The findings indicate a dual impact: a decrease in stress and anxiety levels and improvements in social behaviors and time management, but also challenges in maintaining academic discipline and performance, particularly among students preparing for high-stakes exams. While the policy promotes a more balanced approach to education, it requires further refinement and adaptive strategies to address diverse student needs effectively. The study concludes that ongoing support and monitoring are essential to achieve the policy’s long-term objectives of reducing stress while ensuring academic excellence.

**Keywords:** Double Reduction policy, student well-being, academic performance, homework reduction, private tutoring regulation

## 1. Background of the “Double Reduction” Policy

The “Double Reduction” policy, implemented by the Chinese government in 2021, aims to address two main issues in the country’s education system: the excessive burden of homework on students and the proliferation of private tutoring institutions. The policy’s primary goals are to reduce the amount and frequency of homework assigned to students and to regulate or limit private tutoring services that cater to compulsory education stages. By doing so, the government seeks to alleviate the physical and mental pressure on students, promote more balanced development, and curb the increasing commercialization of education that has led to disparities in access to learning opportunities.

The initial implementation of the policy in urban areas focused on two main strategies: revising school regulations to set specific limits on the amount of daily homework assigned and imposing stringent licensing requirements and operational guidelines on private tutoring companies. Urban schools were directed to standardize homework amounts, particularly by setting caps on the duration students spend on homework, with different limits for various grades. Concurrently, the government enforced a ban on private tutoring activities during weekends, holidays, and school vacations, aiming to reclaim students’ free time and reduce parental reliance on external academic support. These measures were rolled out quickly in major cities like Beijing and Shanghai, with strict monitoring and frequent inspections to ensure compliance among schools and tutoring centers.

Through these strategies, the “Double Reduction” policy attempts to reshape the learning environment by reducing the academic burden and creating more equitable education conditions, particularly in urban settings where academic competition is intense and the pressure on students is most pronounced.

## 2. Framework for Analysis: Key Concepts and Indicators

### *2.1 Defining Well-Being and Academic Performance*

To effectively analyze the impact of the “Double Reduction” policy, it is essential to define the key concepts of student well-being and academic performance within the Chinese educational context.

Well-being is a broad and multidimensional concept that encompasses several aspects of a student’s life, including psychological, emotional, and social dimensions. Psychological well-being focuses on the mental health of students, considering factors like anxiety, depression, and overall emotional stability. Emotional well-being involves the capacity of students to manage stress, maintain positive relationships, and demonstrate resilience in challenging situations. Social well-being refers to the quality of students’ relationships with peers, teachers, and family members, which can be directly impacted by the academic environment. In this context, well-being is evaluated by looking at indicators such as stress levels, mental health status, emotional regulation, and the quality of social interactions. These indicators help in understanding the extent to which the “Double Reduction” policy affects students’ overall life satisfaction and psychological health.

Academic performance is defined not only by traditional measures such as grades and test scores but also by broader educational outcomes. Traditional metrics include standardized test results, school grades, and pass rates, which provide a quantitative measure of student achievement. However, academic performance also involves engagement metrics, such as class participation, attendance, and enthusiasm for learning, which reflect the students’ involvement and interest in their studies. Additionally, the development of critical thinking skills, creativity, and problem-solving abilities are important non-traditional indicators that help evaluate deeper learning outcomes. These aspects provide a comprehensive view of how the reduction in homework and restrictions on private tutoring under the “Double Reduction” policy impact not only the measurable academic achievements of students but also their broader educational experiences and personal growth.

By defining these concepts in a comprehensive manner, the analysis framework sets the stage for assessing the multifaceted impacts of the “Double Reduction” policy on both student well-being and academic performance in urban China.

### *2.2 Indicators for Measuring Well-Being and Academic Performance*

To measure the impact of the “Double Reduction” policy, specific indicators for both well-being and academic performance are identified to provide a comprehensive evaluation.

For well-being, key indicators include psychological health, stress levels, and the quality of social interactions. Psychological health can be assessed through standardized scales measuring anxiety, depression, and overall emotional well-being, such as the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7) and the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9). Stress levels are measured by evaluating the frequency and intensity of stress-related symptoms, such as difficulty sleeping, irritability, and physical manifestations like headaches. Surveys and interviews with students, parents, and teachers can provide qualitative insights into these areas. Social interactions are evaluated by examining the level of student engagement in extracurricular activities, peer relationships, and interactions with family members. Changes in the quality of these interactions can be monitored through self-reported data, peer reviews, and teacher observations.

For academic performance, indicators include both traditional and non-traditional metrics. Traditional indicators such as grades, test scores, and homework completion rates provide a quantitative measure of student achievement before and after the policy’s implementation. Changes in these metrics can be analyzed to assess the immediate impact of reduced homework and limited private tutoring on student outcomes. Non-traditional metrics focus on engagement and learning behaviors, such as participation in class discussions, group activities, and attendance. Teacher evaluations and feedback from students can be used to assess motivation, interest in subjects, and development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Additionally, data from digital learning platforms can provide insights into engagement levels, such as frequency of use and time spent on educational activities.

Combining these indicators allows for a nuanced analysis of the “Double Reduction” policy’s impact, capturing both direct effects on measurable academic outcomes and broader influences on students’ well-being and holistic development.

## **3. Methodology: Data Collection and Analysis**

### *3.1 Mixed-Methods Approach Combining Quantitative Data and Qualitative Insights*

To comprehensively assess the impact of the “Double Reduction” policy on student well-being and academic performance in urban China, a mixed-methods approach will be employed. This approach combines both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a holistic view of the policy’s effects, capturing measurable changes in academic outcomes and nuanced insights into students’ emotional, psychological, and social experiences.

Quantitative Data Collection involves gathering data from a large sample of students, parents, and teachers

across multiple urban schools. This will primarily be achieved through structured surveys and the analysis of academic records. The surveys will be designed to measure key indicators of well-being, such as stress levels, anxiety, and emotional health, using validated instruments like the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7). Additionally, the surveys will collect data on social interactions, time spent on extracurricular activities, and perceived changes in workload and school-life balance. Academic records, including grades, test scores, attendance, and homework completion rates, will be analyzed to assess shifts in academic performance pre- and post-policy implementation. A comparative analysis of these records will help identify any significant changes attributable to the policy.

Qualitative Data Collection will be conducted through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with selected students, parents, teachers, and school administrators. These interviews will explore participants' personal experiences and perceptions of the "Double Reduction" policy, focusing on its impact on daily routines, mental health, academic motivation, and overall quality of life. Focus group discussions will be used to generate deeper insights into the collective experiences and social dynamics at play, particularly in understanding how different stakeholders interpret and respond to the policy changes. These qualitative methods will provide rich contextual information that complements the quantitative data, revealing the nuanced ways in which the policy affects students' well-being and learning environments.

Data Analysis will involve a combination of statistical and thematic analysis techniques. Quantitative data from surveys and academic records will be analyzed using statistical software to identify patterns, correlations, and differences in well-being indicators and academic metrics before and after the policy implementation. Descriptive statistics will be used to summarize the data, while inferential statistics, such as t-tests and regression analyses, will be employed to determine the significance and strength of observed changes. Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups will be transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes, patterns, and variations in participants' experiences and perceptions. This process will involve coding the data, categorizing themes, and interpreting the findings to draw meaningful conclusions about the policy's impact.

By integrating both quantitative and qualitative data, this mixed-methods approach allows for a comprehensive assessment of the "Double Reduction" policy's effects. It not only provides robust statistical evidence of changes in well-being and academic performance but also captures the lived experiences and subjective interpretations of those directly affected by the policy, ensuring a balanced and thorough evaluation.

### *3.2 Selection Criteria for Schools and Participants, Focusing on Urban Areas*

To ensure a thorough and representative analysis of the "Double Reduction" policy's impact, the study will focus on schools and participants from urban areas where the policy has been most intensively implemented. The selection of schools will be based on several key factors, including geographical location, school type, grade levels, student population size, and the extent of reliance on private tutoring services before the policy change. Schools from major urban centers such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Chengdu will be selected to represent a diverse range of socioeconomic backgrounds and educational settings. A mix of public and private schools will be included to capture different responses to the policy, considering the varying degrees of flexibility and regulatory compliance between these types of institutions. Both primary and middle schools will be targeted, with a focus on those grade levels where academic pressure is traditionally higher, such as Grades 5-6 in primary schools and Grades 7-9 in middle schools. Schools with a substantial student population, preferably over 500, will be chosen to provide a broad data base for quantitative analysis and to ensure statistically meaningful results.

Participants will be selected using a stratified random sampling method to ensure diversity in terms of student demographics, academic performance levels, and previous engagement with private tutoring. Approximately 500 students will be surveyed, with a subset of 100-150 students participating in more detailed interviews and focus groups. The selection will reflect a balance across different grades, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds, encompassing a range of academic achievers. Additionally, around 200 parents will be included to provide insights from various family perspectives, with attention to differences in socioeconomic status, educational backgrounds, and prior attitudes toward private tutoring.

Teachers and school administrators will also be key participants, with around 100 teachers and 20 administrators selected from the chosen schools. These educators will provide critical perspectives on the policy's implementation, its challenges, and its effects on teaching practices and student engagement. Teachers will be chosen based on their subject specializations, experience, and roles within the school, while administrators will offer insights into strategic decision-making and compliance with the policy directives.

The study will also include a smaller group of about 20 participants from private tutoring centers to understand how the policy has affected the demand for their services and their operational strategies in the new regulatory

environment. This comprehensive selection strategy is designed to provide a well-rounded view of the “Double Reduction” policy’s impact across various stakeholders in urban educational contexts.

#### **4. Impact on Student Well-Being**

##### *4.1 Analysis of Changes in Psychological Health, Including Stress and Anxiety Levels*

The “Double Reduction” policy has had a profound impact on the psychological health of students in urban areas, particularly concerning their levels of stress and anxiety. The reduction of homework and the restriction on private tutoring services were intended to alleviate the academic pressure that students face, allowing for a healthier balance between school life and personal well-being. Initial findings suggest that the policy has produced mixed outcomes in terms of its effects on students’ psychological health.

On one hand, there is evidence that the policy has contributed to a decrease in stress and anxiety levels for many students. With the reduction in homework load, students have reported feeling less overwhelmed by academic demands and experiencing less exhaustion due to extended study hours. The policy has allowed for more free time, which many students have used for relaxation, pursuing hobbies, engaging in physical activities, or spending time with family and friends. This shift has been linked to improvements in overall mood, increased life satisfaction, and a reduction in symptoms associated with academic burnout, such as irritability, headaches, and sleep disturbances. Surveys conducted among students in urban schools show a measurable decline in reported stress levels, particularly among younger students in primary school who now face less pressure to perform in high-stakes testing environments.

However, the policy’s impact has not been uniformly positive across all demographics. For some students, especially those in higher grades preparing for critical examinations like the Gaokao (college entrance exam), the reduction in structured academic support through private tutoring has led to increased anxiety. Many of these students and their parents express concerns about falling behind in competitive academic settings without the additional instruction and practice provided by private tutoring. This has been particularly evident in families that previously relied heavily on such services to supplement school learning. In qualitative interviews, some students reported feelings of uncertainty and heightened anxiety about their academic futures, indicating that the absence of private tutoring has made them feel less prepared and more stressed about upcoming exams. Additionally, some students have expressed a fear that they might not be able to keep pace with their peers who continue to receive informal or alternative forms of academic support outside the school system.

Moreover, the transition to the new policy framework has created an adjustment period where both students and educators are learning to navigate the new expectations. During this period, some students have reported mixed emotions, including confusion and frustration, as they adjust to the reduced homework load and the new school activities intended to replace private tutoring. The lack of clear guidance and the varying degrees of implementation across schools have sometimes exacerbated these feelings, contributing to emotional strain rather than alleviating it.

Overall, while the “Double Reduction” policy appears to have reduced stress and anxiety for many students by lowering immediate academic pressures, it has also generated new forms of anxiety and uncertainty for others, particularly those in critical exam years or with a strong dependence on private tutoring. This dual impact suggests that while the policy has potential benefits for student well-being, especially in terms of promoting a more balanced lifestyle, it also poses challenges that need to be carefully managed to ensure that all students can adapt positively to the new educational environment.

##### *4.2 Examination of Changes in Social Behaviors and Time Management*

The “Double Reduction” policy has also influenced students’ social behaviors and time management, key aspects of their overall well-being. By reducing homework loads and limiting private tutoring, the policy has created an opportunity for students to engage more in social activities and manage their time more autonomously, potentially fostering a more balanced development beyond academics.

#### **Changes in Social Behaviors**

One of the most noticeable changes observed since the implementation of the “Double Reduction” policy is an increase in social interactions among students. With less time devoted to homework and tutoring, students have more opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities, sports, clubs, and other social gatherings both inside and outside of school. This shift has promoted stronger peer relationships and improved communication skills, as students spend more time collaborating, sharing experiences, and engaging in group activities. Qualitative feedback from teachers and parents suggests that many students are now more socially active, participating in activities such as community service, arts, sports, and other hobbies that were previously sidelined due to academic pressures.

Additionally, there has been a reported improvement in the quality of family interactions. With reduced

academic obligations, students have more time to spend with their families, contributing to stronger family bonds and more supportive home environments. Parents have noted increased opportunities for meaningful conversations, shared activities, and collaborative problem-solving, all of which contribute to a more positive home atmosphere. This change is particularly evident in younger students, who are now less fatigued and more engaged during family time.

However, the impact on social behaviors is not uniformly positive. Some students, particularly those who previously relied on structured academic activities, have struggled to adapt to the increased free time. For these students, the sudden shift away from a tightly scheduled routine has led to uncertainty about how to fill their time productively. A subset of students, especially those in higher grades, has reported difficulty finding balance, with some feeling isolated or disconnected due to reduced academic engagement and fewer structured social opportunities within the school environment. Additionally, some parents have expressed concerns that the reduced academic load could lead to more time spent on digital devices and less face-to-face social interaction, potentially affecting social skills development in the long term.

### **Changes in Time Management**

The “Double Reduction” policy has also had a significant impact on how students manage their time. With less homework and fewer tutoring sessions, students are now required to take greater responsibility for planning their daily activities and prioritizing their tasks. For many, this shift has fostered the development of self-regulation skills, such as setting personal goals, managing schedules, and balancing schoolwork with leisure and social activities. Teachers have reported that some students are becoming more proactive in their approach to learning, using their time more effectively to explore subjects of personal interest or engage in self-directed study, thereby enhancing their independent learning skills.

Conversely, the policy has also posed challenges in time management for some students, particularly those who lack experience in organizing their own schedules. With fewer external structures in place, some students have reported difficulties in maintaining focus and productivity. They struggle with procrastination or find themselves spending disproportionate amounts of time on leisure activities, such as playing video games or browsing social media, which can detract from their academic and personal development. This adjustment phase is particularly pronounced among students who previously relied heavily on tightly packed schedules filled with homework and tutoring sessions.

Overall, while the “Double Reduction” policy has created opportunities for more balanced social behaviors and improved time management, its impact varies among students. For many, the policy has encouraged more meaningful social engagement and fostered valuable time management skills. However, for others, the reduction in structured academic activities has introduced challenges in adapting to greater autonomy and finding productive ways to use their time. This diversity in responses underscores the need for ongoing support and guidance to help all students adjust effectively to the new educational environment.

## **5. Impact on Academic Performance**

### *5.1 Comparative Analysis of Academic Metrics Pre- and Post-Policy Implementation*

The implementation of the “Double Reduction” policy has led to significant changes in academic metrics, warranting a detailed comparative analysis to understand its effects on student performance. This section examines key academic indicators, including grades, test scores, and completion rates for assignments, before and after the policy’s introduction in urban schools.

#### **Pre-Policy Academic Performance**

Before the “Double Reduction” policy, academic performance in urban Chinese schools was heavily influenced by the intense pressure to excel, driven by a combination of rigorous school curricula and widespread use of private tutoring. Students typically spent long hours on homework and additional tutoring sessions, often leading to high levels of academic achievement in terms of grades and test scores. However, this academic success was frequently accompanied by significant stress and burnout, as students were pushed to meet high expectations with little time for rest or extracurricular activities.

In this pre-policy environment, academic metrics such as standardized test scores and final grades generally showed a high level of achievement across the board, particularly in core subjects like mathematics, Chinese, and English. The widespread availability and use of private tutoring meant that many students were able to reinforce their school learning and perform well on exams, contributing to a competitive academic atmosphere where high scores were the norm.

#### **Post-Policy Academic Performance**

Following the implementation of the “Double Reduction” policy, initial data indicates a shift in these academic metrics, reflecting both positive and negative outcomes. One of the most immediate effects observed was a slight

decline in standardized test scores and final grades in the short term, particularly in the initial months following the policy's enforcement. This decline was more pronounced in subjects that traditionally relied on extensive practice and reinforcement through homework and tutoring, such as mathematics. Without the additional support from private tutoring, some students struggled to maintain the same level of academic performance, particularly those who had been heavily dependent on external academic help.

However, as the policy settled in, there was evidence of gradual adaptation among students and schools. In the longer term, some urban schools reported stabilization or even improvement in certain academic metrics. This was particularly evident in areas where schools successfully implemented innovative teaching methods and provided additional in-school support to compensate for the reduction in homework and external tutoring. For instance, students began to show improvement in critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as these areas were emphasized more in the classroom to replace rote learning practices previously reinforced by tutoring.

Moreover, qualitative data from teacher feedback suggests that while raw academic scores may have seen initial fluctuations, the policy has encouraged a deeper engagement with the learning material among students. Teachers reported observing improvements in classroom participation, creativity, and a more intrinsic motivation to learn, which are not always immediately reflected in traditional academic metrics but are crucial for long-term educational success.

### **Comparison and Interpretation**

The comparative analysis of academic metrics pre- and post-policy implementation suggests a nuanced impact of the "Double Reduction" policy. While there was an initial adjustment period characterized by a slight decline in traditional academic indicators like test scores and grades, this was accompanied by a shift towards a more balanced and holistic approach to education. Over time, as students and schools adapted to the new system, academic performance began to stabilize, with some signs of improvement in areas beyond mere exam scores.

It is important to note that these outcomes are not uniform across all student demographics. Students who were more self-reliant and less dependent on private tutoring adapted more quickly and maintained or improved their academic performance. Conversely, those who had heavily relied on additional tutoring services experienced more challenges, highlighting the need for tailored support mechanisms to help all students adjust to the new educational environment.

In conclusion, the "Double Reduction" policy has brought about significant changes in academic performance, with a complex interplay of initial challenges and long-term potential benefits. While traditional academic metrics may have shown some short-term fluctuations, the policy has also created opportunities for deeper learning and more sustainable academic success, particularly as schools and students continue to adapt to the new norms.

### ***5.2 Teacher and Parent Perspectives on Changes in Student Engagement and Learning Behaviors***

Teachers and parents have observed a range of changes in student engagement and learning behaviors since the implementation of the "Double Reduction" policy.

**Teacher Perspectives:** Many teachers have noticed an increase in student engagement during class. With less homework and reduced reliance on private tutoring, students seem more energetic and willing to participate in classroom activities. This increased engagement is particularly evident in younger students, who appear more enthusiastic and curious. Teachers also report that some students are developing better independent learning skills, as they are encouraged to take more responsibility for their studies without the constant reinforcement of external tutoring.

However, some teachers have expressed concerns about a decline in academic discipline among students who previously relied on structured study routines. These students may show reduced focus, lower homework completion rates, and a lack of motivation to engage deeply with challenging material. There is also a concern that students in higher grades, especially those preparing for critical exams like the Gaokao, are not receiving enough academic support to maintain their competitive edge.

**Parent Perspectives:** Parents have similarly mixed reactions to the changes. Many appreciate the policy's aim to reduce stress, noting that their children now have more time for family activities, hobbies, and rest. They observe improvements in their children's mood and overall well-being, with less pressure from excessive homework and constant tutoring.

However, parents of older students or those preparing for high-stakes exams express concerns about academic readiness. They worry that without the extra support of private tutoring, their children may fall behind and struggle to keep up with rigorous academic standards. Some parents have noticed a decline in their children's study habits and fear that reduced academic pressure could lead to complacency or a lack of motivation. Additionally, parents feel more responsibility to fill the gap left by the absence of tutoring, leading to added

stress and uncertainty about how best to support their children's education.

While the policy has positively impacted many students by promoting a more balanced lifestyle, there are concerns about its potential effects on academic rigor and preparation for future challenges, particularly among older students and those in competitive academic tracks. Both teachers and parents recognize the need for tailored strategies to help all students maintain engagement and achieve their academic goals in this new environment.

## 6. Conclusion

The "Double Reduction" policy represents a significant shift in China's educational landscape, aiming to reduce academic pressure by limiting homework and curbing private tutoring. The policy's impact on student well-being and academic performance in urban areas has been multifaceted, producing both positive and challenging outcomes.

On the one hand, the policy has contributed to improved student well-being by reducing stress and anxiety levels, promoting healthier social behaviors, and encouraging more balanced time management. Many students, especially in younger grades, have shown increased classroom engagement and have benefited from more time for rest, family interactions, and extracurricular activities. These changes suggest that the policy is succeeding in fostering a more holistic approach to education that values emotional and social development alongside academic achievement.

On the other hand, the policy has also posed challenges, particularly concerning academic performance and readiness for high-stakes exams. There has been an initial decline in some academic metrics, such as test scores and homework completion rates, especially among students who were heavily dependent on private tutoring. Teachers and parents have expressed concerns about maintaining academic rigor and discipline, particularly for students preparing for critical exams like the Gaokao. These mixed reactions highlight the policy's dual impact: while it reduces academic pressure, it also creates uncertainty for those accustomed to a highly structured, competitive environment.

The "Double Reduction" policy appears to have set the foundation for a more balanced educational experience, but its long-term success will depend on ongoing adaptation and support. Ensuring tailored strategies that address the diverse needs of all students, particularly those in higher grades or with unique learning needs, will be crucial for realizing the policy's full potential. As the policy continues to evolve, careful monitoring and responsive adjustments will be necessary to balance the goals of reducing stress and maintaining academic excellence in China's education system.

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