



Value Theory and Optimization Pathways of “Double Reduction” Policy Implementation

Yuan Meng

Faculty of Educational Science, Jilin Normal University, Siping, Jilin, China.

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Corresponding author: Yuan Meng, Faculty of Educational Science, Jilin Normal University, Siping, Jilin, China.

Abstract

“Double Reduction” is an important measure to reduce burden on students, relieve education anxiety and reshape the education ecology. Under the ideology of the mean doctrine, “degree” and “quantity” must be ascertained during the execution of the “Double Reduction” policy, setting healthy competition, overall coordination, changes in time and harmonious symbiosis as the baseline, adhering to the “mean” and “original”, and finally achieve the state of “harmony”. Faced with dilemmas such as excessive competition, the game of interest, and education anxiety, the mean doctrine must be followed as the guide to return to the essence of education with measures including well-executed “addition and subtraction”, improvement of education quality, balanced “degree” of competition, promotion of family, school and community integration, grasping the essence of policies and reshaping the education ecology. This could resolve the conundrum of policy implementation and reconstruct the education ecology of high-quality development.

Keywords

The Mean Doctrine, “Double Reduction” policy, scrutiny, competition, moderation

“Burden reduction” is an important topic in the educational field of China. The “Double Reduction” policy innovatively manages on-campus workload and off-campus tuition workload as a whole, forming a two-pronged “burden reduction” ideology, representing the innovation in governance of the Chinese Communist Party and China on the issue of “burden reduction” for students. (Ma Kaijian, Wang Guangming, Fang Fang, Zhang Ran, Ai Qiaozhen, & Li Tingzhou, 2021). The research on the topic of “Double Reduction” policy focuses on the constraints, important point of force, possible problems and effective ways of implementation. Various problems will inevitably be encountered during the implementation of the policy, with complex and diverse causes behind such problems. The mean doctrine is one of the essence of the Chinese culture, and also an important principle and method of the Confucian spiritual cultivation and ethical practice. The mean thinking is of great value to the promotion and implementation of the “Double Reduction” policy, and the “Mean Doctrine” must be followed to solve the possible problems during policy implementation.

1. The essential connotation of the “Double Reduction” policy

The double reduction policy caused a violent shock in basic education, followed by a change in the education ecology. Though “Double Reduction” is named after burden reduction, it is much more than the aforementioned. The logical starting point is definitely past reducing academic workload. In the perspective of education and community, workload reduction concerns the development of people and country, and is the basic and long-term interest of both students and the country (Chu, Hongqi, 2022). Wide-spread excessive tuition directly undermines academic evaluation, hinders the

fairness of education, and affects the teaching time, contents and value orientation of schools. This is contrary to the education policy of “Insisting on moral education and cultivating people”. From the perspective of the “Double Reduction” policy, reducing academic and co-curricular workload is merely a mean rather than the goal. The education ecology can only be truly reshaped by fundamentally reducing educational anxiety.

“The Doctrine of the Mean” begins by pointing out: “Mean is the nature of everyone; harmony is the principle followed by everyone” (Zhu, Xi, 2011). “Mean” is the “nature”, the result of “nature” is harmony. Only by adhering to the principles of “mean” and “nature” can we achieve the state of “harmony”, and everything can flourish. The doctrine of the mean requires people to fit in, suit the trend and be appropriate. General Secretary Xi pointed out “The rich philosophical thoughts, humanistic spirit, educational thoughts and moral concepts of China’s fine traditional culture can provide useful inspiration for people to understand and transform the world, governance and moral construction” (Xi, 2014). The views of “quantity theory”, “degree theory” and the “mean theory” contained in the doctrine of the mean can provide people with a brand-new way of viewing the relationship between human, nature, society and the country from the perspective of thought, cognition and value construction. It also provides a means of thinking based on the doctrine of the mean to guide the realization of a goal.

2. The value theory of the implementation of the “Double Reduction” policy

2.1 Healthy competition

The practice of “Double Reduction” policy under the mean doctrine requires control over the “degree” of competition. “Involution” and “lying flat” are representation of “excessive” and “lacking” competition. Understanding the screening and cultivating function of education is the prerequisite of controlling the “degree” of competition. The signaling function and screening function of education are described in the economics of education, which holds that the economic function of education is to distinguish people of different abilities, so as to match them in the job market. Should the screening function of education completely disappear, the operation of society will also fail. The original intention of the “Double Reduction” policy is to delay the screening function of education to reduce the burden of students and alleviate involution caused by educational anxiety but does not deny the screening function of education. The so-called screening, in fact, contains two meanings: Firstly, education level is a signal of personal ability, higher education level represents higher labor productivity; Secondly, a higher level of education is a passport for individuals to enter the upper professional class. (Sun, Baicai & Zhao, Hongbin, 2007). The execution of “Double Reduction” policy focuses on the cultivating function of education and avoids “over-competition” but does not completely ignore the screening function of education. As compared to avoiding competition through “lying flat”, encouraging competition incurs many benefits including promoting mobility, reducing stratification, perhaps at the cost of “involution”. Mike Spencer believes that as long as the screening function of education is not denied, over-education may become certainty, and there must be a distinction between different abilities so as to obtain effective education signals and adapt to the needs of the labor market. Therefore, under the mean doctrine, the practice of “Double Reduction” policy requires a “degree” of competition in order to balance the screening function of education and the “harmony” of education and avoid the misunderstanding of “excessive” and “lacking”.

2.2 Overall coordination

Under the mean doctrine, the practice of “Double Reduction” policy requires it to be based on the overall situation, comprehensively analyze the hidden motive. The overall coordination treats both symptoms and root causes, turning linear thinking to systematic thinking. China’s work on reducing academic workload has been advancing constantly but has primarily been focused on the reduction of class hours, homework and examinations as well as the control of curriculum difficulty due to the limitations of linear thinking and was never freed from the vicious cycle of “treating headache from the head, foot ache from the foot”. Workload reduction in the new era under the guidance of systematic thinking connects workload reduction with academic evaluation, education development and social governance. From regulation of homework time and restriction of tuition in schools to weakening entrance examinations and implementation of education balance policies, they all curb the transmission chain academic burden to a certain extent (Long, Baoxin, 2021). Controlling the amount of homework, increasing co-curricular services, improving education quality and rectification of off-campus training institutions are important measures of “Double Reduction” policy, but is not sufficient in treating the symptoms. Only by treating both the symptoms and the root cause can the series of problems regarding workload reduction be resolved. To treat the root cause means paying attention to the key issues in the field of education. “Double Reduction” needs to solve the key issues in the field of education, such as the driving force affecting the development of education, the allocation and equity of educational resources, and the relationship between cur-

ricular and co-curricular education. The overall coordination of the “Double Reduction” policy practice especially emphasizes “strengthening source governance, systematic governance, and comprehensive governance”. If the root cause of the problem cannot be caught, even with the short-term effect of the “Double Reduction” policy, future more disguised tuition activities will still be rampant and produce new problems with the corresponding educational environment, which will certainly impact the original education ecology.

2.3 Changes to time and harmony

The principle of time and harmony is important for the implementation of the “Double Reduction” policy, it means that the practice of the policy can be equal and timely. *Quan*, equity, originally refers to wood as mentioned in “*Shuowen Jiezi*”, “*Quan*, xanthoxylum, abnormal”, abnormal refers to “changes”. “Harmony” refers to “appropriate”, “equal and timely” means that the state of things could be adjusted to subjective and objective conditions, environment, time, places and other timely changes and suit the changes and achieve “harmony”. “Those who study together may not learn together; Those who learn the ways together may not uphold the ways together, those who uphold the ways together may not be able to adapt together” (Yang, Bojun, 2017). Therefore, “adaptation” is the highest level of difficulty in practice, which is also the important and difficult point of the “Double Reduction” policy. Mencius commented that Confucius “Fast once you can, retreat once you can, stay persistent once you can, quick and decisive, this is Confucius.” (Yang Bojun, 2008) Timely adjustment of our own role, to find our own positioning is also an important aspect of exercising time and harmony. Therefore, to follow the “change in time and harmony” in the practice of “Double Reduction” policy, we must be fully familiar with the internal and external environment and motivations, so as to evaluate the situation, constantly adapt to the situation flexibly and abide by the mean doctrine.

2.4 Coexistence of harmony

The reducing of academic workload involves the participation of multiple stakeholders, which is closely related to the multi-level goal, multi-dimensional content and multi-angle measures. According to the interest demands and influence of each relevant body, the stakeholders of academic workload reduction can be divided into core stakeholders, main stakeholders, important stakeholders and secondary stakeholders. (Jia Wei, Deng Jianzhong, & Cai Qiyong, 2021). The excessive academic burden brings about a chain of negative effects on students, families, society and education itself. (Ni Yahong, Ma Tingyu, & Zhao Fuchun, 2018). Based on the common core interests, stakeholders form “interest alliances”, but in the game of interest, there are multiple different interests among all stakeholders, and they respond with different focus on the policy. Faced with the implementation of “Double Reduction” policy, different stakeholders care most about their own interests, followed by overall interests, and tend to choose the most acceptable development goals under the direction of interests. All stakeholders have their own needs and angles, forming complex and volatile relations and interest correlations among each other. In case of conflicts or poor communication, they tend to ask others to make concessions to guard their own interests, leading to a vicious cycle of deadlocks and becoming an important hindering factor in the implementation of “Double Reduction” policy. There are homogeneity and different interests among stakeholders in the implementation of “Double Reduction” policy, and the mean doctrine requires managing conflicting interests and finds the “middle” ground to balance the “degree” of interests. The promotion of “Double Reduction” requires harmonious and diversified partnerships, focusing on the establishment of mutual trust partnerships between the government, schools, off-campus training institutions, families, etc. (Zhu, Yiming, 2021) to achieve harmonious symbiosis among stakeholders and thus form a joint force to promote implementation.

3. Optimization pathways of “Double Reduction” policy

3.1 Returning to the essence of education, mastering “addition and subtraction”

Education is a social activity to cultivate people, with people as the starting and landing point. The process of education is also the process of human generation, realized in the interaction of people. Education has the function of individual growth and group screening.

Through dissecting the implementation of the “double reduction” policy, it can be found that the ecological imbalance of basic education is the gradual accumulation of problems, and off-campus tuition burden is “behind the wheel” of the quantitative change to the qualitative change of problems. However, the real internal cause of the problem lies in the orientation of educational purposes, the development stage of basic education and the standard function of education have been delayed, resulting in the phenomenon of putting the cart before the horse. “Double Reduction” is not only “subtraction”, but also “addition”. If the “degree” of “Double Reduction” cannot be found and the problem cannot be fundamentally solved, the effect of “double reduction” can only be temporary and cannot completely eradicate the ex-

cessive burden on students.

3.2 Improving education quality and balancing the “degree” of competition

Educational competition is inevitable, and the possession of high-quality educational resources conflicts with the needs of the people (Ma, Luting & Zheng, Xuewen, 2022), which is the deep-seated reason for the competition but also an important breakthrough to promote the implementation of “Double Reduction” policy. To balance the “Degree” of competition and fundamentally reduce the burden on students, it is necessary to effectively improve the quality of education, promote the diversification and characteristic construction of schools, meet people's demand for high-quality educational resources, cut off the demand between students and off-campus training institutions - the supply chain, and curb the development momentum of off-campus tuition. On one hand, “Double Reduction” policy shall be well implemented to reduce the academic burden of students and rectify off-campus tuition institutions. In order to alleviate the anxiety of choosing schools, “specialties” should overpower “prominent” schools, promote the high-level and high-quality development of schools, narrow the gap between schools, provide diversified school choice options, meet the diversified needs of students, and promote education equity. On graduation anxieties, we must further reform examination and evaluation systems, avoid “examinations that decide a life’s fate”, and instead focus on the comprehensive development of students, adhere to the fundamental task of moral education, alleviate educational anxiety, and avoid excessive competition.

3.3 Promote the unity of families, schools and communities for a concerted effort

Excessive competition in education has brought burden and anxiety to students, parents, schools and even society. Capital has flooded the market, and the education market has become increasingly profit-seeking, which has seriously damaged the original education ecology. Each subject deals differently with anxiety brought about by educational competition based on their own interests. Due to conflict of interests, synergy and consistency are gradually lost. “Double Reduction” is a systematic project of comprehensive management, involving many stakeholders such as students, parents, schools and society. Each stakeholder has independent values, and forms a relationship structure and interest alliance, generating centripetal and centrifugal forces in the game of interest.

A good education ecology is the harmonious coexistence of “family, school and community”, which requires systematic thinking in the implementation of the “Double Reduction” policy, logically reconstructing and then establishing the “family, school and community” cooperative education mechanism (Government portal of Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2021). The establishment of a coordinated education mechanism of “family, school and community” requires attention to each other’s interests, harmonize the value orientation of the three taking rational value as guidance. With curriculum education as the core as well as family education and social education as important building blocks, a community of interests can be built to form a joint educational force to promote the growth of students.

3.4 Understanding the essence of policies and reshaping the education ecology

The “Double Reduction” policy plays a “boosting” and “supportive” role in repairing and reshaping the education ecosystem. “Breaking and then re-establishing” is an important principle in promoting the implementation of the “Double Reduction” policy. In the initial stage of the implementation, efforts such as reducing the amount of homework, reducing academic workload and rectifying off-campus tuition institutions are made focused on removing obstacles that cause overloading on students. This stage focuses on “breaking” to provide conditions for reshaping the education ecology. After breaking through the barrier of excessive student workload, the focus is shifted to the “re-establishing” stage to consolidate the results of the “breaking” stage to form a long-term mechanism to shield students from overloading, reshape the education ecology and achieve the state of “harmony”. These stages are based on the prediction of the policy itself and the inevitable implementation of the policy. Reshaping the education ecosystem is a process of internal and external conflict and development of the education system. The intervention of such policies is objective and supportive. It is necessary to give full play to the initiative of education subjects, understand the essence of the “Double Reduction” policy and practice the mean doctrine in the “breaking and then re-establishing” process to ensure the adaptability and positive impetus of the policy.

It is necessary to give full play to the initiative of education subjects, grasp the essence of the "double reduction" policy, practice the mean thinking methodology in the process of "breaking first and then standing up", and ensure the adaptability and positive impetus of the policy.

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