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“NOT DARE STOP”:

Students' Reaction Towards Double Reduction Policy

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STUDENTS' REACTION TOWARDS DOUBLE REDUCTION POLICY



A nervous student under constant stress. Photo by Yifei Liu

To reduce students' academic burdens and alleviate parents' ever-growing spending on tutoring classes, on July 24, 2021, the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council jointly issued "the double reduction policy." The policy mainly includes two parts: Reducing students' homework in the compulsory education stage and setting strict restrictions on the operation of tutoring classes. Since then, the off-campus training institutions, which had created a booming industry worth an estimated \$120 billion, have been shut down forever by the Chinese government. Nowadays, one year after the policy was introduced, how are students in Beijing being affected by the policy?

How about the efficiency of the policy?

9 pm, after a tiring day at school, Xiao Hua arrived home. Though he hasn't finished his homework, an online lesson will begin soon. He opened his computer, clicked on the link, and then released a heavy sigh. As the senior high school entrance examination approaches, the difficulty of quizzes is increasing. This year, to win the fierce competition of entering an excellent high school, his mother signed him up for four cram schools secretly, even though the government has strictly prohibited off-campus training institutions within a year. Better than anyone, Xiao Hua and his family know that if they want to stand out among thousands of candidates, they cannot and dare not stop taking the extra lessons.

"I think we rarely talk about this openly since 'the Double Reduction Policy' was implemented," Xiao Hua responded when we talked about cram schools. "Cram classes are ostensibly banned, but no one dares to stop taking them. It's our tacit secret."

"While the amount of homework descended significantly, the exams became harder. For example, there are fewer physics classes at my school, only two a week, but the quizzes are more difficult. We were also forced to join evening study sessions, and teachers gave us extra tests secretly after classes." A fifteen-year-old boy told us despondingly.

"The competition became fiercer since cram schools were shut down. I have to spend more time absorbing the knowledge by myself, which is not as effective as revising the knowledge with my extra tutor." According to our questionnaire survey around Beijing: Since extra tutorial classes have been outlawed, 28.03% of students reported that the amount of practice in school wasn't enough for them to handle exams, and 25.76% of students' scores declined after the Double Reduction Policy was put into effect. The average academic stress rises from 3.04 to 4.83 (out of 5), and the average intensity of competition increases from 3.59 to 4.27 (out of 5). The number of students who spend more than five hours reviewing and finishing homework has risen by 6.06%.

"Vicious competition has not diminished; it only has changed from obviously to secretly. The recent senior high entrance examination shows that the government is making the exam easier. Moreover, the score difference between students with good academic performance is minimal. We must make sure we can make absolutely no mistakes in that

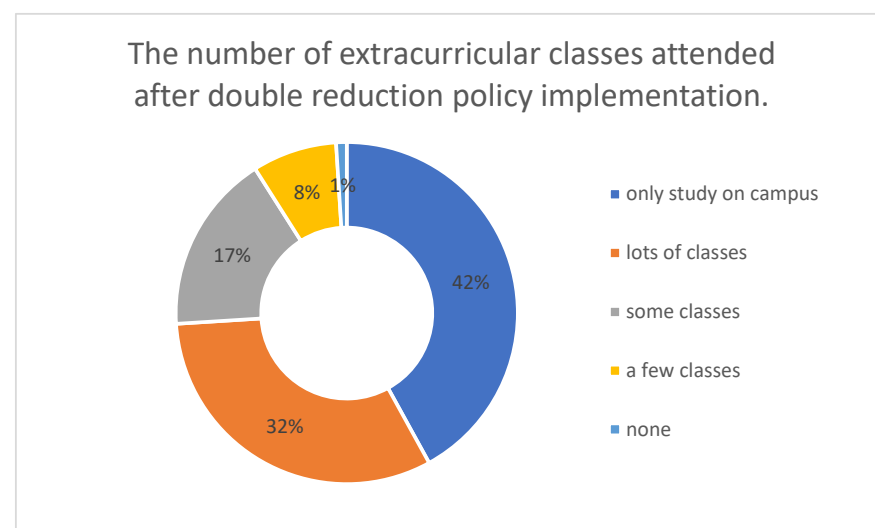
examination." according to our data, 71.97% of students still take a tutorial class, and 69.7% of students responded that they would continue attending extracurricular classes if needed.

"Cram school industry still exists around me secretly, and I continue to join extracurricular classes. I spent a lot of time downloading all kinds of software to join online classes and traveled to remote places to join offline classes." Data show that 75.76% of students believed that secretly taking extra tutorial classes require more time, money, and energy and exerts more pressure on them.

"While extracurricular classes were forbidden and the amount of schoolwork descended, a lot of knowledge cannot be thoroughly learned; thus, I am very anxious about my senior high school examination." 40.91% of students claimed that the policy made them more stressed, and 78.03% of students suffered from anxiety.

"In my opinion, the double reduction policy didn't decrease the students' academic burden but evoked more anxiety. Under the pressure of selective exams, the policy can neither reduce students' workload nor completely stop the operation of all cram schools. If I had a chance to make the decision, I would probably keep extracurricular classes legal because the double reduction policy just made the game more complex." The boy told us at last.

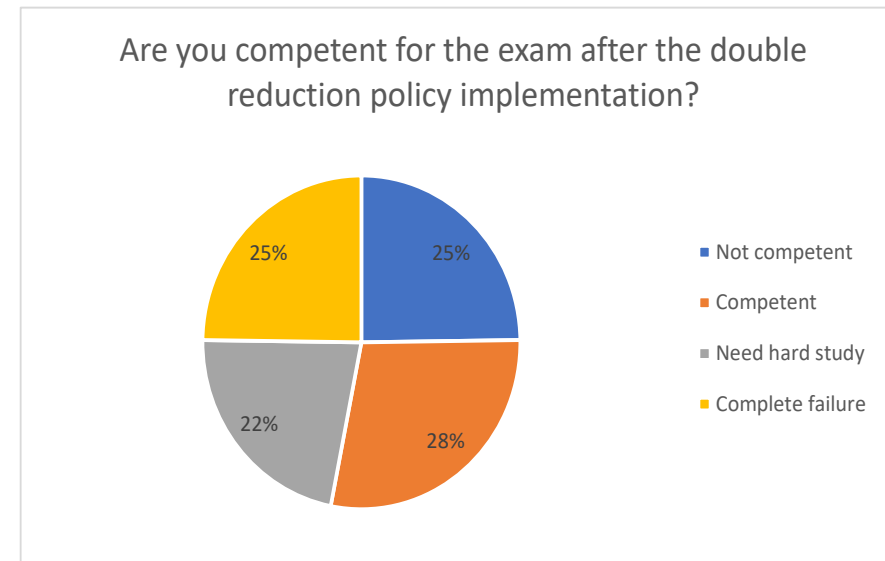
The root causes



The reason why the Double-Reduction policy failed to address the above issue lies in that fact that high school and college education are examination-driven. In China, the test score is the decisive indicator for admission to higher education. The aspiration of standing out among the thousands of candidates promoted the rise of cram study sessions.

Under the social trend, more and more people join the training classes for fear of being overtaken by their peers, and vicious competitions begin. Though it limits after-school tutoring institutions but does not address the anxiety among students and parents: being left behind in the competition with their peers in the high school and college entrance exams. "Remedial classes are not allowed, grades drop, we fail in exams... Does the government want us all to be workers in the future?" Three junior school students said in an interview. Even parents said: "The high school and college entrance exams are so important that we can't afford to fail."

Adjust your attitude



Faced with growing anxiety and vicious competition, what is a possible way out? To find out the answer, we interviewed Y, a middle school teacher. In the interview, he said, "The goal and direction of the double reduction policy are actually correct, and after-school classes do cause unnecessary anxiety. But some parents are too nervous about the high school and college entrance exams to enroll their children in many remedial classes, which I do not agree with." In his point of view, "As long as you work hard in school, your effort will eventually pay off."

Indeed, parents and children are too anxious about the results of the high school and college entrance exams. To alleviate the situation, we should promote the idea that scores are not everything among parents and students. Children who improve their grades through remedial classes may learn to solve examination problems very well but often fail to learn how to adapt to society. "Such people are like nerds, who may be admitted to a good university but may not go far away. On the contrary, only by studying hard and developing in an all-round way in life can we go further in our future life. Often, those who keep their feet on the ground in the study reach higher achievements." Said Y, "This is true of some of the students I have taught. They never signed up for extra classes and may not score high, but they still excelled." As a Chinese saying goes, gold always shines. Parents should not pay too much attention to the score of a test. Instead, leading children to develop comprehensively is much more critical.

Of course, these are only ideal forecasts, and we know the vicious competition still prevails. However, we firmly believe that the education system needs to undergo constant reform. Dealing with vicious competition and alleviating anxiety is a constant battle, and the Double-Reduction policy is only a superficial beginning.

