How China's Double Reduction Policy Reduces the Burden on Students: An Example of Double Reduction Policy Texts in 28 Chinese Provinces (Autonomous Regions and Municipalities)

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Abstract

Re-formulation of the double-minus policy by local governments is an important part of promoting a high-quality education system for compulsory education and fostering educational equity. This study aims to quantitatively analyze the action measures taken by the governments of 28 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government) in China to reformulate the central double-minus policy. The study used the content analysis method and NVivo12 qualitative analysis software to analyze the 28 double-reduced policy texts in three dimensions, policy tools, policy subjects, and areas of student burden reduction. The study found that in terms of policy tools, it is mainly based on environment-based policy instruments as measures, supply-based policy instruments as safeguards, and demand-based policy instruments as supplements. In the dimension of policy subjects, the participation of families, communities, and the media needs to be improved. In-school load-shedding is better than out-of-school load-shedding. Therefore, in the future, it is important to further link up multiple policy bodies, increase the input of policy tools and collaborate to promote both in-school and out-of-school load reduction to promote the implementation of the double-reducing policy.

Keywords

Double Reduction Policy, Local Response, Policy Reformulation, Policy Text, Policy Suggestion

1. Introduction

On 24 July 2021, the Chinese Government issued Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework for Students in Compulsory Education and the Burden of Out-of-School Training (hereinafter referred to as the Double Reduction Policy). The Double Reduction Policy is a concentrated manifestation of the modernization of China's governance system and governance capacity in the field of education and is of great significance in promoting students' physical fitness, physical and mental health, and all-around development. Since the implementation of the double-reducing policy, and with the vigorous promotion of the Chinese Government, the burden of homework and out-of-school training on primary and secondary school students nationwide has been significantly reduced, with remarkable results. Public information from the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China shows that: 92.7 percent of schools have carried out cultural, artistic, and sports activities, 88.3 percent have carried out reading activities, and 87.3 percent have carried out activities in science and popularisation of science, interest groups, and clubs; the attractiveness of after-school services has been significantly enhanced; the proportion of students voluntarily taking part in after-school services has risen from 49.1 percent in the previous semester to 91.9 percent at present, which is a strong incentive for students' learning has returned to the campus; 21,000 schools have actively explored the development of summer hosting services, and 3,026,000 students have participated in summer hosting. However, the double-reduced policy still faces problems such as uneven coverage of resource allocation (Zhang & Zhang, 2022), deviations in the implementation of the management system, and difficulties in the entry of forces outside the school in the process of implementation (Liu, 2022), which makes it difficult for the double-reduced policy to sustainably promote the physical and mental health and all-round development of students. The reason for this is, to a large extent, the poor spillover effect of the double-reduced policy due to the lack of implementation by local governments. Therefore, it is necessary to explore and analyze the double-minus policy reformulated by local governments, to provide theoretical references for local governments to take action.

2. Literature Review and Questions Raised

Policy reformulation is a relatively new public policy theory formed by Chinese scholars based on studying the policy transfer theory of the United States and the United Kingdom, which mainly refers to the fact that local governments will refine and improve the policy according to the local actual situation when implementing the higher-level policy, and select and design the policy tools that are suitable for it, to make the higher-level policy more operable in the specific geographical environment (Zhou & Lin, 2017). From the development history of policy transfer theory, the representative scholars of policy transfer research, David Dolowitz, and David Marsh, put forward the concept

of policy transfer in 1996, and constructed Why transfer? Who is transferring? What is transferred? Where is it happening? What is the extent of the transfer? What are the constraints on shifting? How is diversion demonstrated? How does transfer lead to policy failure? The analytical framework of provides an analytical framework for subsequent policy transfer research (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000). To improve the understanding of the phenomenon of policy transfer and to establish a multi-level and multi-disciplinary approach to policy transfer analysis, Evans, and Davies constructed a three-dimensional analytical model of policy transfer at the global, international, and transnational levels along with the macro-level and inter-organizational levels (Evans & Davies, 1999). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Wolman, Page argued that policy transfer is fundamentally a learning process of transferring information (communication, processing, evaluation, application, etc.) and conceptualized policy transfer as a communication and information framework that includes an information network including producers, senders, facilitators, and receivers of information (Wolman & Page, 2002). Overall, different scholars have different perceptions and views on policy transfer, while the framework for analyzing policy transfer proposed by Horowitz and Marsh remains the most influential to date.

The re-formulation of central policy documents by local governments is a key process to promote the implementation of policies and transform them into visible productivity. From the dimension of policy diffusion, as the transfer of documents of the local government to implement the spirit of the central policy documents, will inevitably be following the actual local situation will be refined into a more operational policy document to implement the spirit of the central policy documents, the local government will certainly refine them into more operational policy documents according to the local actual situation (He & Kong, 2011). The double-decrease policy put forward the implementation of the policy path of each region and each department to implement the actual situation. The provincial (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government formulate the central double-de- crease policy implies that the government formulates the central document when the allocation of resources, value orientation, and policy direction. Based on this, this study analyses the action measures taken by the governments of 28 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government) to reformulate the central double-decrease policy from the perspective of policy reformulation.

3. Methodology

Content analysis is a research technique that describes the content of communication messages objectively, systematically, and quantitatively (Krippendorff, 1989). As a research method that combines qualitative and quantitative, content analysis can transform message contents with communication attributes, such as words,

symbols, information, policies, etc., into digital forms that can be processed by computer algorithms, and based on which, it can summarize the laws and logics among the contents of the communication messages, and then dig into the deep-rooted causes of the policies, or the behavioral patterns, values, etc., of the people through these laws and logics. Therefore, the use of content analysis to analyze provincial and municipal double-decrease policies helps to reveal the characteristics and internal logic of provincial double-decrease policies in different spatial and temporal dimensions.

Firstly, the study conducted a double-reduced policy search on the official websites of the people's governments and education departments of provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government), and a total of 28 provincial (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government) governments' publicly released double-reduced policies about their provinces were retrieved (no double-reduced policies were made public for the time being for the provinces of Ningxia, Tibet, and Hubei).

Second, when the provincial government then formulates a double reduction policy, it should not only consider who will implement it and what means will be used but also the extent to which policy issues in different areas are being governed. On this basis, the study constructed a three-dimensional framework of policy tools, policy subjects, and areas of student load reduction. Among them, policy tools are the specific means and ways that people use to solve a social problem or achieve a certain policy goal (Rothwell & Zegveld, 1985), which can be classified into supply-type policy tools (scientific and technological support, talent cultivation, site construction, financial input, information services, organizational management), environment-type policy tools (target planning, regulation, and control, recognition and incentive, strategic measures), demand-based policy tools (promotion and demonstration, sports procurement, service outsourcing) 3 basic policy tools and 13 sub-policy tools. Policy subjects refer to individuals, groups, or organizations that are directly or indirectly involved in policy formulation, implementation, evaluation, and monitoring. According to the working principles of adhering to the government-led and multi-party linkage, strengthening government co-ordination, implementing departmental responsibilities, giving play to the main role of schools, improving safeguard policies, and clarifying the collaborative responsibilities of families, schools, and communities as put forward in the double-reducing, it can be classified into 7 main bodies of the government, schools, teachers, families, communities, the media, and training organizations. The area of burden reduction for students can be divided into two main areas: burden reduction in school and burden reduction outside school. Reducing the burden in school is mainly about reducing the burden of homework on students and that which extends to their families, organizing active participation of students in after-school services, and making scientific use of after-school time to carry out after-school activities such as physical exercise, reading, and arts and crafts. Reducing the

burden outside school mainly involves regulating the training burden imposed by discipline-based training institutions on students' academics, and guaranteeing the time for students to participate in cultural and sports activities daily, on weekends, during holidays, and during winter and summer breaks, and so on.

Again, identifying units of analysis is a necessary step in coding and categorizing the content of policy texts, which can be words, symbols, themes, etc., or independent phrases, sentences, or paragraphs. The study used the specific entries of the double-decrease policies of the 28 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government) retrieved as the unit of content analysis, coded in the form of policy number-policy entries, and statistically processed with the help of the qualitative analysis software QSR NVivo12 to categorize and quantify the textual content.

Finally, considering that the coding of its content by a single researcher may result in a lack of coding reliability, the research team tested the reliability of the text coding. The reliability test was mainly conducted with the help of the calculation formula proposed by Holsti (Holsti, 1969), which consists of two main steps, the first calculates the researcher's agreement to the coding, and the second calculates the reliability of the coding based on the agreement. A in formula (1) represents the degree of agreement between the two researchers on the coding results, M represents the number of codes with which the two researchers fully agree, N1 represents the number of codes with which the first researcher agrees and N2 represents the number of codes with which the second researcher agrees. R in Equation (2) represents the reliability of the coding, where n represents the number of people involved in the coding, and A is the level of agreement calculated in Equation (1). Based on the coding results, the research team calculated that the degree of agreement A of the two researchers was 0.85, and the reliability R was 0.91. It can be seen that the reliability of the coding meets the requirements of Holsti's study which proved that the reliability R is greater than 0.80, which indicates a high degree of consistency of the coding and the condition of objectivity and feasibility of the coding results.

$$A = \frac{2M}{N1 + N2} \tag{1}$$

$$R = n \times \frac{A}{\left\{1 + \left[(n-1) \times A\right]\right\}} \tag{2}$$

4. Results

Using the content analysis method and QSR NVivo12 qualitative analysis software, 28 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government) and then formulated 28 double-reduced policy provisions were defined and statistics, the statistical results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency distribution of the three basic policy instruments in the double-decrease policy in 28 provinces.

Province	Supply-side policy tools	Environment type of policy tools	Demand-based policy instruments	Total
Guangdong	3	14	1	18
Jiangsu	13	14	4	31
Shandong	8	34	6	48
Beijing	15	38	4	57
Shanghai	19	41	6	66
Xinjiang	17	26	4	47
Zhejiang	11	32	2	45
Tianjin	31	37	6	74
Jilin	14	34	4	52
Guangxi	13	34	4	51
Anhui	14	39	4	57
Inner Mongolia	15	38	4	57
Hebei	16	39	5	60
Heilongjiang	20	42	4	66
Yunnan	7	28	3	38
Henan	11	36	5	52
Shaanxi	17	34	5	56
Shanxi	5	15	1	21
Hunan	15	37	3	55
Hainan	11	28	5	44
Jiangxi	15	33	4	52
Chongqing	17	41	4	62
Liaoning	8	15	2	25
Qinghai	12	29	2	43
Fujian	14	30	4	48
Guizhou	10	28	2	40
Sichuan	7	24	3	34
Gansu	14	24	2	40
Total	372	864	103	1339

Table 2 shows the frequency distribution of supply-type policy tools in the Double Reduction policy in 28 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government). Overall, the six supply-based policy tools, namely, site construction, scientific and technological support, personnel training, information services, financial input, and organizational management, have been used to varying degrees, which indicates that the local government has focused on providing a variety of material resources (human, material and fi-

nancial) when promoting the implementation of the Double Reduction policy. From a local point of view, some tools are missing in the double reduction policies of Guangdong, Guangxi, Yunnan, Shanxi, Liaoning, Qinghai, and Sichuan.

Table 2. Frequency distribution of supply-type tools in the double reduction policy in 28 provinces.

Province	Site construction	Technology Support	Talent Development	Information Services	Financial input	Organizational Management	Total
Guangdong	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
Jiangsu	2	1	3	3	3	1	13
Shandong	1	1	1	1	1	3	8
Beijing	1	2	4	2	2	4	15
Shanghai	4	3	3	2	2	5	19
Xinjiang	1	2	2	4	3	5	17
Zhejiang	1	2	1	2	1	4	11
Tianjin	4	5	6	5	6	5	31
Jilin	1	1	4	3	2	3	14
Guangxi	0	2	2	4	2	3	13
Anhui	1	3	2	2	2	4	14
Inner Mongolia	1	2	4	2	1	5	15
Hebei	1	2	1	4	3	5	16
Heilongjiang	1	3	4	4	2	6	20
Yunnan	2	2	2	0	1	0	7
Henan	1	3	2	2	1	2	11
Shaanxi	1	3	3	4	2	4	17
Shanxi	0	2	0	2	0	1	5
Hunan	1	3	2	3	2	4	15
Hainan	1	2	2	1	2	3	11
Jiangxi	1	3	2	3	3	3	15
Chongqing	1	3	2	5	2	4	17
Liaoning	0	1	1	3	1	2	8
Qinghai	1	4	0	3	1	3	12
Fujian	2	3	2	2	1	4	14
Guizhou	1	3	2	2	1	1	10
Sichuan	0	0	0	2	2	3	7
Gansu	1	2	3	3	1	4	14
Total	32	63	60	73	50	94	372

According to Table 3, the 28 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government) double reduction policy environment-based policy tools show a clear polarisation phenomenon, that is, the frequency of strategic measures is the highest at 618 times, followed by regulations and controls 187 times, recognition and incentives 30 times, and target planning

Table 3. Frequency distribution of environmental tools in the double reduction policies of 28 provinces.

Province	Recognition and motivation	Strategic measures	Regulatory control	Target planning	Total
Guangdong	0	9	4	1	14
Jiangsu	1	12	0	1	14
Shandong	1	25	7	1	34
Beijing	1	26	10	1	38
Shanghai	1	31	8	1	41
Xinjiang	1	15	9	1	26
Zhejiang	0	24	7	1	32
Tianjin	4	29	2	2	37
Jilin	2	23	8	1	34
Guangxi	2	22	9	1	34
Anhui	1	27	10	1	39
Inner Mongolia	1	27	9	1	38
Hebei	2	26	10	1	39
Heilongjiang	1	26	14	1	42
Yunnan	0	20	7	1	28
Henan	1	25	9	1	36
Shaanxi	1	24	8	1	34
Shanxi	0	13	1	1	15
Hunan	1	27	8	1	37
Hainan	1	22	4	1	28
Jiangxi	1	23	8	1	33
Chongqing	1	29	10	1	41
Liaoning	3	10	1	1	15
Qinghai	0	25	3	1	29
Fujian	1	20	8	1	30
Guizhou	1	20	6	1	28
Sichuan	0	17	6	1	24
Gansu	1	21	1	1	24
Total	30	618	187	29	864

29 times, which indicates that local governments pay more attention to the effectiveness of strategic measures when formulating the double reduction policy. The frequency of strategic measures is the highest at 618 times, followed by regulations and controls at 187 times, commendations and incentives at 30 times, and target planning at 29 times, which indicates that the local government pays more attention to the effectiveness of strategic measures when formulating the double reduction policy. In terms of the distribution of environmental policy tools, Guangdong, Zhejiang, Yunnan, Shanxi, Qinghai, and Sichuan lack recognition and incentive clauses in their Double Reduction policies, while Jiangsu lacks regulatory clauses in its Double Reduction policies.

According to Table 4, it can be seen that the frequency distribution of demand-based policy tools in the double-decrease policy in 28 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government). From a general point of view, the frequency of service outsourcing, promotion and demonstration, and government purchasing is more balanced among the three sub-policy tools, but the overall frequency of the three sub-policy tools is low. From a local point of view, there is a lack of service outsourcing tools in the double-decrease policy in Shanxi and Guizhou, a lack of promotion and demonstration tools in the double-decrease policy in Guangdong, Yunnan, Hainan, Qinghai, and Gansu, and a lack of promotion and demonstration tools in the double-decrease policy in Guangdong, Zhejiang, Shanxi, Shanxi, Shaanxi, Liaoning and Sichuan. Guangdong, Zhejiang, Shanxi, Shaanxi, Liaoning, and Sichuan lack government purchasing tools in their Double Reduction policies.

According to Figure 1, we can see the statistical results of the policy subjects in the Double Reduction policy in 28 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government). Generally speaking, most provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government) require the participation of seven main bodies: government, schools, teachers, training institutions, families, media, and communities in the implementation of the double-reduced policy. In Guangdong, Jiangsu, Shaanxi, and Liaoning, there are some missing subjects in the double reduction policy.

Figure 2 shows the frequency distribution of the double reduction policies in 28 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government) in the area of student load reduction. In general, the double reduction policies of 28 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government) focus on the simultaneous reduction of loads in school and outside school, which indicates that the simultaneous reduction of loads in school and outside school has been effectively embodied. From a local perspective, the highest frequency in the area of in-school load-shedding is in Tianjin (15 times), followed by Shanghai (12 times), the highest frequency in the area of out-of-school load-shedding is in Chongqing (7 times), followed by Hunan, Shaanxi, Anhui, Shanghai, and Beijing. In addition, the double reduction policy in Guangdong and Sichuan lacks provisions for reducing the burden of out-of-school sports activities.

Table 4. Frequency distribution of demand-based tools in the double reduction policies of 28 provinces.

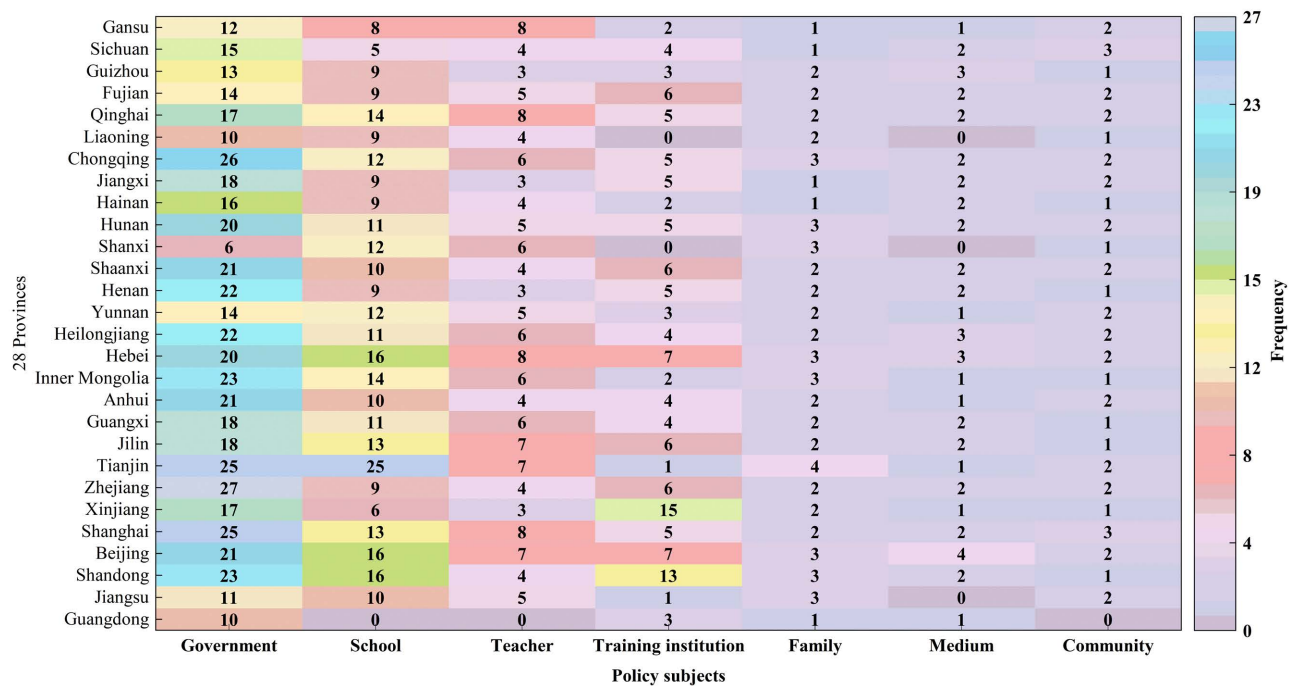| Province	Outsourcing of services	Promotional demonstrations	Government Procurement	Total
Guangdong	1	0	0	1
Jiangsu	1	1	2	4
Shandong	2	3	1	6
Beijing	1	2	1	4
Shanghai	3	1	2	6
Xinjiang	2	1	1	4
Zhejiang	1	1	0	2
Tianjin	1	2	3	6
Jilin	2	1	1	4
Guangxi	2	1	1	4
Anhui	2	1	1	4
Inner Mongolia	1	2	1	4
Hebei	3	1	1	5
Heilongjiang	1	2	1	4
Yunnan	2	0	1	3
Henan	2	2	1	5
Shaanxi	2	3	0	5
Shanxi	0	1	0	1
Hunan	2	0	1	3
Hainan	2	2	1	5
Jiangxi	2	1	1	4
Chongqing	2	1	1	4
Liaoning	1	1	0	2
Qinghai	1	0	1	2
Fujian	2	1	1	4
Guizhou	0	1	1	2
Sichuan	1	2	0	3
Gansu	1	0	1	2
Total	43	34	26	103

Figure 1. Frequency distribution of double reduction policy subjects in 28 provinces.
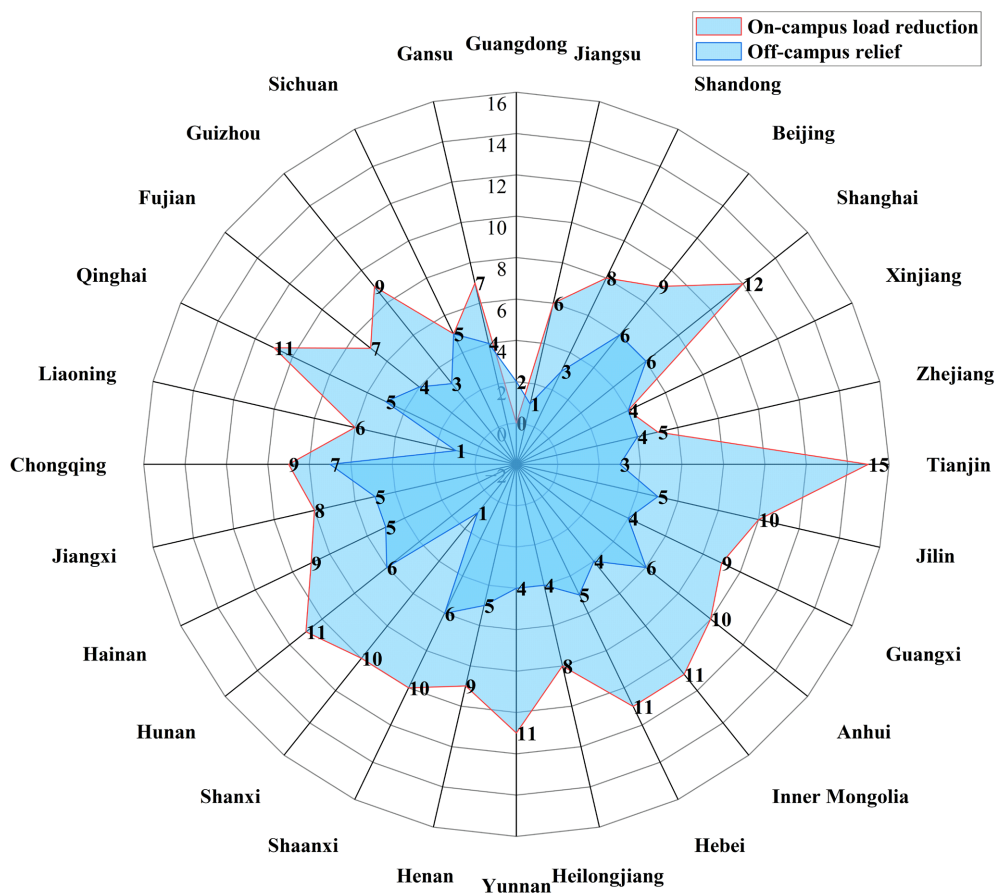

Figure 2. Frequency distribution of students' burden reduction fields under the double reduction policy in 28 provinces.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In terms of policy tools, the 28 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government) have adopted a policy of double-decrease that is dominated by environmental policy tools, guaranteed by supply-type policy tools, and supplemented by demand-type policy tools, there are three main reasons for this phenomenon. First, the government's policy toolbox contains not only supply-type policy tools based on human, material, financial, and other material resources but also hidden institutional tools (laws, regulations, mechanisms, etc.), which can effectively mitigate the effectiveness of the latter. The effect of the latter can effectively alleviate the burden of financial expenditure brought about by the government's over-investment in material resources, which makes the government favor the selection and application of strategic measures and regulations, and controls in the environmental policy tools when promoting the implementation of the double reduction policy, and the vigorous application of strategic measures, in particular, has, to a considerable extent, become a cure for the government's In particular, the strong application of strategic measures has, to a certain extent, become a cure for the government's anxiety about material resource scarcity. At the same time, to avoid the symbolic and selective implementation of strategic measures, which are more discretionary in promoting the implementation of the Double Reduction policy, the government has emphasized the linkage between the deployment of strategic measures and the corrective effect of regulations and controls. For example, Shanghai's Double Reduction policy proposes that special supervision should be carried out and that districts, departments, schools, and those responsible for failing to implement responsibilities and measures should be held accountable following the law. Secondly, the government needs a minimum of human, financial, material, and other material resources to support the governance of public issues, but the material resources owned by the government at a certain time and within the scope of the obvious finiteness, and subject to strict institutional constraints, if too much investment in material resources, will inevitably increase the burden of government financial expenditure. Thirdly, because the choice of policy tools is affected by factors such as policy objectives, tool characteristics, resource scarcity, etc., the government often selects and allocates tools based on traditional experience and habits, and this logic of tool selection and allocation may be appropriate in the short term, but cannot adapt to the ever-changing environment (Peters & van Nispen, 2007). While service outsourcing and government purchasing among demand-based policy tools are generally one of the more popular policy tools in China in recent years, service outsourcing and government purchasing in the double-decrease policy have been less frequently used in general (Xu, Zhang, & Ming, 2019; Huang, 2015). In fact, as a system, each policy tool has its unique function and should be considered in an integrated manner and utilized in a balanced and effective manner to give full play to the advantages and functions of each policy tool. This is not only conducive to accelerating the systematic construction of the double-decrease policy tools and the

implementation of the double-decrease policy but also conducive to accelerating the benign governance of the ecological environment of compulsory education. Therefore, in the coming period, we need to further optimize the structure of policy tools, to effectively play the joint effect of policy tools.

In terms of policy subjects, the double reduction policy as a form of public action, can not be separated from the social pluralism of the main body of the promotion of the role played by a wide range of participation. From the viewpoint of the implementation subjects of provincial and municipal double reduction policies, the implementation subjects of most provincial and municipal double reduction policies involve the government, schools, teachers, training organizations, families, media, and community subjects. It can be seen that a concerted governance pattern led by the Government and involving multiple parties has been initially formed, which will, to a certain extent, alleviate the financial expenditure burden arising from the Government's implementation of the double-decrease policy. However, there are a few provinces and municipalities where the main body of the Double Reduction policy is missing (Guangdong, Jiangsu, Shanxi, and Liaoning), which is mainly because most of the documents that these governments have reformulated are based on some of the contents of the central government's Double Reduction policy, resulting in the lack of the main body of the Double Reduction policy. This is mainly because most of these governmental documents have been reformulated from parts of the central government's double reduction policy, resulting in a lack of corresponding discourse in their texts.

In the area of student load reduction, quantitative statistics show that local governments focus on both in-school and out-of-school load reduction when formulating the Double Reduction policy. From the governance effect of the Double Reduction policy on off-campus training institutions, the number of discipline-based training institutions has been greatly reduced over the past year since the implementation of the Double Reduction policy, with the proportion of offline institutions reduced by 95.6% and the proportion of online institutions reduced by 87.1%. It can be seen that, under the vigorous promotion of the party committees and governments at all levels, the Double Reduction policy has achieved remarkable results in the field of burden reduction for students outside school, but the Double Reduction policy in the governance of off-campus training institutions is still faced with the training institutions to carry out the home-based home-based home-based training institutions. This in turn hinders the further accumulation of the effectiveness of the double reduction policy in combating out-of-school training. Therefore, reducing the burden on students outside of school remains a key area of focus in the implementation of the double reduction policy in the coming period.

As a matter of fact, despite the fact that the double-minus policies formulated by provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government) combine local realities with the requirements of the overall central double-minus policy, the implementation of the double-minus still faces chal-

lenges such as structural imbalance of policy tools, insufficient synergy of policy bodies, and incomplete reduction of the burden of work in and outside of schools. Urging the implementation of the policy of double reduction, the government can proceed from the following aspects: first, strengthen the management of students' homework; second, improve after-school service level; third, standardize the training behavior of off-campus training institutions; fourth, enhance the quality of education and teaching; fifth, reinforce organizational guarantees. In order to effectively reduce the excessive burden of homework and out-of-school training for students from the practical level, the double-reducing needs to further solve the problems in policy tools, policy subjects, and the field of in-school and out-of-school burden reduction in the coming period of time, so as to realise the goal of constructing a good ecology of education and promoting the all-round development and healthy growth of students.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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