

**Purposes and Effects on English Language Learning Participants
Following China's Double Reduction Policy: A Critical Discourse
and Stakeholder Analysis**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates China's Double Reduction Policy, exploring its rationales and effects on key stakeholders: students, state and private sector teachers, and parents. The research addressed two central questions: What are the rationales for the DRP according to official policy documents? What are the perceived effects on its main stakeholders?

For the first question, I conducted a critical discourse analysis of policy documents using thematic and lexicogrammatical analysis through NVivo. For the second question, semi-structured interviews with 30 participants representing each stakeholder group examined policy intentions and effects and triangulated with a systematic literature review. Both sets of data were analysed using the same NVivo system to ensure consistency and reliability.

Analysis revealed tensions between the Double Reduction Policy's stated goals of reducing academic burden and deeper value-based objectives, including curbing capitalist influence in education, strengthening national identity, and reasserting state control over private tutoring markets. While some participants accepted the policy's apparent surface-level aims, implementation produced unintended consequences, including a proliferation in black-market tutoring, increased parental anxiety, and significant disruption to private sector teachers' livelihoods. The research demonstrates how, despite being a central directive, power circulates through non-official channels, with interpretations imposed through everyday interactions rather than hierarchically through the governance framework. This study shows the value of combining critical discourse analysis with stakeholder interviews to bridge policy analysis with lived experience.

Findings reveal how education reform attempts to reshape societal behaviours whilst highlighting limitations of top-down approaches that fail to address underlying structural issues such as competitive exam culture. The Double Reduction Policy represents broader nation-building through education, using policy mechanisms to realign societal values with state objectives. The disconnect between official intentions and stakeholder interpretations illustrates complex negotiations between state power and social realities in contemporary China.

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The journey to complete this PhD, though intellectually and personally rewarding, has been a turbulent one, carrying me across continents from East to West China, back to the UK, and through a landscape of profound personal change. It was pursued while working full-time, self-funded, through five relocations to five cities, in two continents, against a backdrop of personal and professional challenges that culminated in a crisis of health and spirit. That this thesis exists is a testament not just to academic inquiry, but to resilience. I am grateful for the constant love and support of my family and friends, and the solace of new horizons that kept me moving forward.

Cymru, cenedl fy nghalon, diolch am y ddraig o fewn. To my three parents, your encouragement and belief was my constant. I thank you for a lifetime of love. To my friends in China, the UK, Palestine and beyond - from every shore your voices and support kept me inspired. To my students who have gleefully championed me and kept me motivated and cheerful, thank you. Finally, I acknowledge the person I was when I started, and the person I have become. We did it!

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work, and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Saunter". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "S".

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1. INTRODUCTION

Known as the "true religion of the people", education in China is characterised by its cultural importance (Smith, 1991, as cited in Yu et al., 2012). Its prominence as the nucleus of life in China leads to long hours and onerous expectations for students. This educational intensity is reflected in the statistics: according to a 2015 report by the China Youth and Children Research Centre, Chinese students reportedly had the highest study hours in the world, with an average of 8.1 to 11 hours of school on weekdays (Li & Yang, 2018). Beyond these school hours, a 2017 report by Afanti estimated three hours of daily homework (Jing, 2015), supplemented by additional evening and weekend classes at tuition centres (Xinhua, 2007). These supplementary classes primarily supported learning in the "Big Three" subjects: Chinese, English, and maths (Qi, 2016).

It was against this backdrop of educational intensity that, during the summer holidays in July 2021, China suddenly introduced and implemented a new policy that would challenge these long-established patterns. Colloquially known as the Double Reduction Policy (shuāng jiǎn zhèng cè 双减政策, henceforth referred to as the DRP), this policy had two ostensibly simple aims: first, to reduce the excessive homework burden on students; and second, to limit the use of after-school tuition centres.

Formally titled 'Opinion on Easing the Burden of Homework and Off-campus Training on Students in Compulsory Education Stage Promulgated by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council' (Government of the People's Republic of China [CPC], 2021. Appendix 1), the policy appeared straightforward on the surface. However, this apparent simplicity belies the complexity of intervening in a system where China's cultural foundations are built on and around education (Gu, 2014; Leng, 2005) - education serves as the axis around which all elements of China as a society and culture revolve. As will be explored in this study, by

targeting two of the most common facets of Chinese citizens' everyday lives - homework and after-school tuition - this seemingly modest policy created far-reaching effects.

The immediate and observable effects were substantial. The policy led to the closure of many after-school tuition or training centres (henceforth referred to as ASTCs), which were part of a billion-RMB industry (Feng, 2021; The Stanford Centre on China's Economy and Institutions, 2023; Wu, B. 2021). Many of these centres catered specifically to English language learners, and their closure resulted in significant job losses and economic shocks. Simultaneously, the policy necessitated a restructuring of state school provisions, directly affecting both teachers and students (Long, 2021; Xi, 2021; Yan, 2022; Ye, 2022). Compounding these effects was the sudden nature of the policy's introduction (Pan, 2022), as responding needed to be instantaneous. The combination of sudden introduction, rapid implementation, and policy severity created critical impacts on stakeholders, who had little time to process and react to the scheme.

These impacts varied across different stakeholder groups. Some teachers have had their professional lives fundamentally altered. Parents have had to create new plans for their children, lost tuition money, or been otherwise impacted economically. Students have benefited from reduced homework but have also experienced disruptions to their learning environment, changes to social events, and the removal of learning opportunities.

However, beyond these immediate and observable effects, there were numerous less-observable impacts related to personal circumstances, opinions, and outcomes. It is these more nuanced effects that form the focused basis of this study's central question: What are the effects on participants in English language learning in the shadow of China's Double Reduction Policy?

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

1.1.1 Problem Statement

The problem addressed by this research stems from a clear cause-and-effect relationship. The cause is the DRP, and the effect comprises the consequences for its primary stakeholders: teachers, students, and families. With the cause identified, this study focuses specifically on understanding these effects through a systematic approach.

To thoroughly understand the policy's effects, this research first explores and describes the context in which the DRP was formed. This context is crucial because the policy is rooted not only in practical aspirations but also in national and historical culture, representing one element of a centuries-long, ongoing tradition. Subsequently, the cause (the DRP) is analysed to comprehend the policy's context, genesis and implementation using Critical Discourse Analysis. This approach examines both the explicit messaging (from the wording of the text to the official message being promoted) and the implicit messages being conveyed, which may reflect underlying value systems rather than purely practical considerations.

Having established the environment in which the policy was administered and defined, and having deconstructed the policy itself, the effects are then explored and presented. These effects manifest as people contending with the fallout from the policy's introduction (be it positive or negative) within their personal contexts. Reported issues have included the overburdening of teachers (Yan, J. 2022), loss of business and/or livelihood for After-School Tuition/Training Centres (henceforth referred to as ASTCs) and online tuition businesses both in and outside China (Ni, 2021; Zhang, W., 2023; Zheng, 2021), loss of work for foreign teachers who specialised in English language teaching, and reduced opportunities for lower-income families to

provide additional support for their children in the competitive education system (Chen, J., 2022).

Crucially, these issues are all direct results of the DRP and are experienced individually, creating diverse and sometimes contradictory outcomes. What may represent a beneficial financial boon for one family may constitute a disastrous loss of income for another teacher. Similarly, one student may have lost access to frequent social events with friends made outside of school, whereas another student may feel freed from excessive classes. Each perspective is valuable and deserves attention.

The core issue at the time of this study's inception was that whilst an educational policy had been released, its potential effects at the micro level had not yet been comprehensively explored.

1.1.2 Gap in Knowledge

As a relatively new policy, the DRP had been subject to limited research at the time this study began. This creates a fundamental challenge in understanding policy implementation: whilst it is essential to examine overarching frameworks and their cultural or political foundations, it is equally crucial to look beyond these macro-level analyses to understand the tangible challenges experienced by those directly affected.

As del Carmen Reyes et al. (2014) note, public policy encompasses the objectives, choices, and initiatives that governments implement for managing political, social, and economic affairs. Given that economic development has been linked to the quality of education available (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2016) and that social issues can be addressed through education policies that shape the early stages of social development (Zhan, 2022), understanding policy impacts becomes crucial. Since social management, by definition, concerns people, it is necessary to gauge not just the intentions,

successes, or failures of a policy at a macro level, but also its impact on people at a micro level.

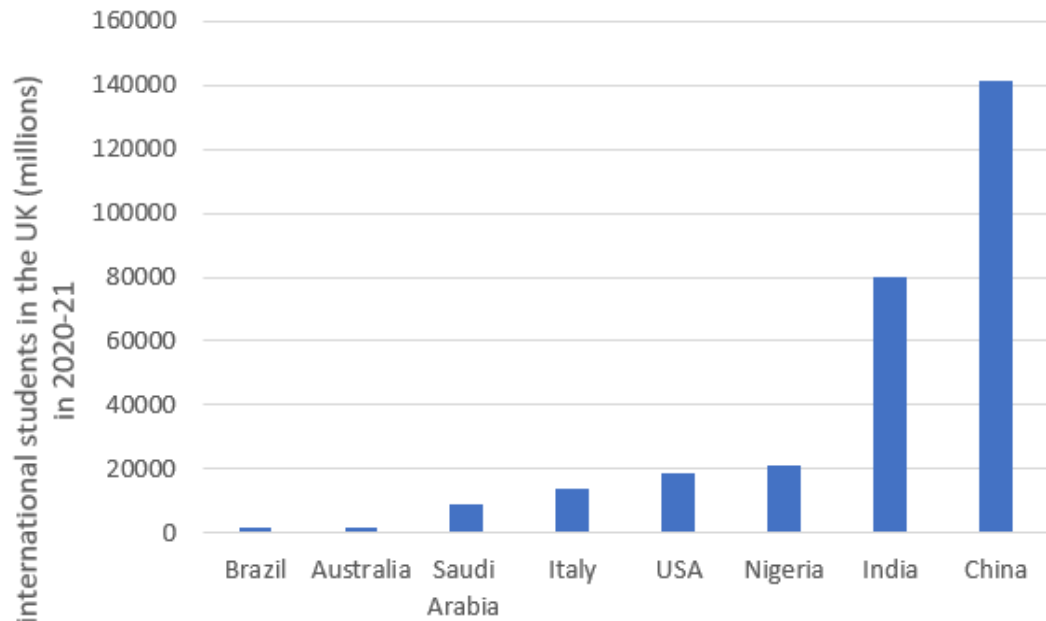
Section 1.2.2 examines the specific nature and extent of these knowledge gaps in greater detail.

1.1.3 Significance of the Research

Building on the identified knowledge gap, this research aims to investigate the perspectives of those involved in English as a foreign language (EFL) learning in China in relation to the policy changes. Unlike previous L2 (second language) research focused on application, neuro- or psycholinguistics, and immediate contexts, this study sought to explore sociocultural influences (Aimin, 2013, p. 162). This focus is particularly timely and significant given China's emergence as a new global leader (Abdullahi & Phiri, 2019, p. 137), the growing percentage of Chinese English speakers attending international universities (Figure 1; Jeffreys, 2020), and their engagement in international business (Hé, 2017, p. 573). Researching the foundational education context in which they learn, during a cultural or political shift, represents a unique opportunity to capture a moment of significant change. By exploring the voices of those directly affected, this study will document the shift in education and social phenomena, contributing to current research in the lesser-explored field of education policy's impact on individuals.

Figure 1

Chart of Top Countries by Region for UK University Student Numbers



Note. Adapted from *International facts and figures 2022* by Universities UK, 2022.

A notable implication of the DRP is the increased exclusion of non-governmental control over English language teaching in and beyond China, which ASTCs previously provided. Given that such a small percentage of Chinese citizens engage in real terms with the English language (less than 1% according to the 2022 EF English Proficiency Index) despite English featuring as a major component of education in China (Qi, 2016), exploring attitudes to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) within this changing context could help illuminate some of the unspoken consequences of the DRP.

This research also raises several critical concerns about the potential marginalisation of English in China and its implications for creating a divide between East and West. The study examines whether these changes will affect international Chinese students wishing to study abroad and limit opportunities for businesses and students seeking to

operate within China. Will the Double Reduction Policy have far-reaching consequences for EFL in China and beyond?

The consequences of not addressing the effects of the DRP on its main stakeholders would be twofold: first, it disregards the millions of individuals directly affected by the policy; and second, it wastes a valuable opportunity to study policy effects using a large and varied population for data collection. This study will be of interest to a diverse audience, including teachers (both Chinese and non-Chinese), learners, school administrators, historians, sociocultural researchers of China, policy researchers and makers, and education researchers.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.2.1 Contextual Setting

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world" (commonly paraphrased from Mandela, 1990, 9:17). Within this proclamation lies the crux of educational policy across the world. In shaping the minds of each new generation, each country entrusts its youth with its future culturally, economically, and politically. Education must not only inform each student practically but also consider the broader context of its role in shaping a country and its current and future place in the international arena. Therefore, all forms of education are inherently political, none more so than English language education in non-English speaking countries.

Having established itself as the global lingua franca stemming from British colonial infiltrations from the 16th to the 20th centuries (Wright, 2006), the English language in non-English-speaking countries often carries with it historical connotations of repression or reminders of periods of national disruption. Described as "sites of cultural

struggle" (Warriner, 2016, p. 4), the English language classroom is more than just a space for learning a new skill. It represents both ideological aspirations and historical colonisation. Despite these sometimes-negative associations, English also carries the responsibility of being a necessary key to accessing the global community.

This duality becomes particularly complex when considering that English serves as the global lingua franca and is used across major communicative domains, including politics, diplomacy, science, and trade (Salomone & Salomone, 2022). However, what is less well understood is how policy and attitude intersect in educational contexts (Wiseman, 2012). While statistical effects of educational policy implementation are measurable, the emotional effects on those involved are less documented. This gap is significant as education has long been used to "define national identity and underlie the political rationale of regimes" (Lall & Vickers, 2009). Language education, therefore, carries the weight of national identity and political significance, meaning that when a country heavily regulates a foreign language within its borders, such as English in China, it conveys messages about the language's validity and implications for its users.

The Chinese Context

One of the most significant arenas of English language education globally is China. Of the estimated 1.5 billion global learners (Cambridge English, n.d.), over 400 million are in China (British Council, 2002). This vast scale means that frequent policy changes throughout history (Qi, 2016) have affected millions of people engaged in EFL in China, including students, parents, business owners, and teachers. The most recent of these changes, the DRP, has had a significant impact both nationally and internationally.

The policy was introduced to alleviate the excessive academic burden on school students by reducing homework, improving state education, and limiting the prolific after-school tutoring market, which primarily serves students from primary to senior

secondary schools (Figure 2). To understand the significance of this intervention, it is essential to examine the educational structure within which it operates.

Figure 2

The Structure of Schooling in China

Age	Grade	Level Description
27	22	PhD programme
26	21	
25	20	
24	19	Master's programme
23	18	
22	17	
21	16	University (bachelor's degree) and Vocational College
20	15	
19	14	
18	13	
17	12	Senior secondary school
16	11	
15	10	
14	9	Junior secondary school
13	8	
12	7	
11	6	Primary school
10	5	
9	4	
8	3	
7	2	
6	1	
5		Pre-school and kindergarten
4		
3		

Note. Chart depicting schooling in China, with the DRP aimed at compulsory education during the Primary and Junior secondary stages (highlighted). Adapted from OECD (2015).

China has, in recent history, maintained two main areas of education: state schools and the private industry, representing Asia's entrenched "shadow education" (Lu, 2020). State education is compulsory for nine years, beginning at the age of six (China Education Centre, 2022). The highly competitive culture of education in China (Feng, 2021) manifests itself in families doing everything possible from an early age to gain a competitive edge. According to research by the China Institute for Educational Finance Research, the average Chinese family spent ¥8,143 annually in 2021 on education, with high school spending reaching ¥16,900 (Investor Insights Asia, 2021). This competitive attitude begins before compulsory education and continues throughout the child's schooling, with the ultimate goal of gaining a place at university and earning a degree to enter the equally competitive job market.

Throughout their school years, they also participate in auxiliary shadow education. Since 2008, compulsory education has been funded by the state. However, it still incurs supplementary fees each semester, such as for teaching and school material fees, after-school services, study trips, food expenses, school uniforms, and basic medical insurance fees (information discussed online in various sources including hatong-shsx, 2022; Kǎoshì Xìnxī Wǎng, 2022; Long & Ching, 2021; Nanjing Local Treasure, 2022; Xinhua, 2008).

The endemic issue of unofficial school charges, where schools levy fees for various requirements (Lou & Ross, 2008; Shilpi, 2013), has undermined the promise of free education, making it more of an aspiration than a reality. This has historically contributed to early school dropouts, particularly among students from rural or migrant families (Xinhua, 2004). Pre-school education is optional and therefore fee-paying, as is high school from the age of 15 (Internations, 2022; Zhou, 2011). Both optional education institutes are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (Ministry of Education).

The competition intensifies at the age of 15 when students compete for placements at high schools via the zhōngkǎo (中考) exam (senior high school entrance

examination), which represents the first instance of students being streamed into desirable high schools, lower strata vocational schools (Gu et al., 2019) or out of education entirely. Within this competitive context, China's private education sector has flourished, offering ample opportunities from pre-school to higher education to support and augment state-provided compulsory education or compete directly with fee-paying private schools (China.org, 2022).

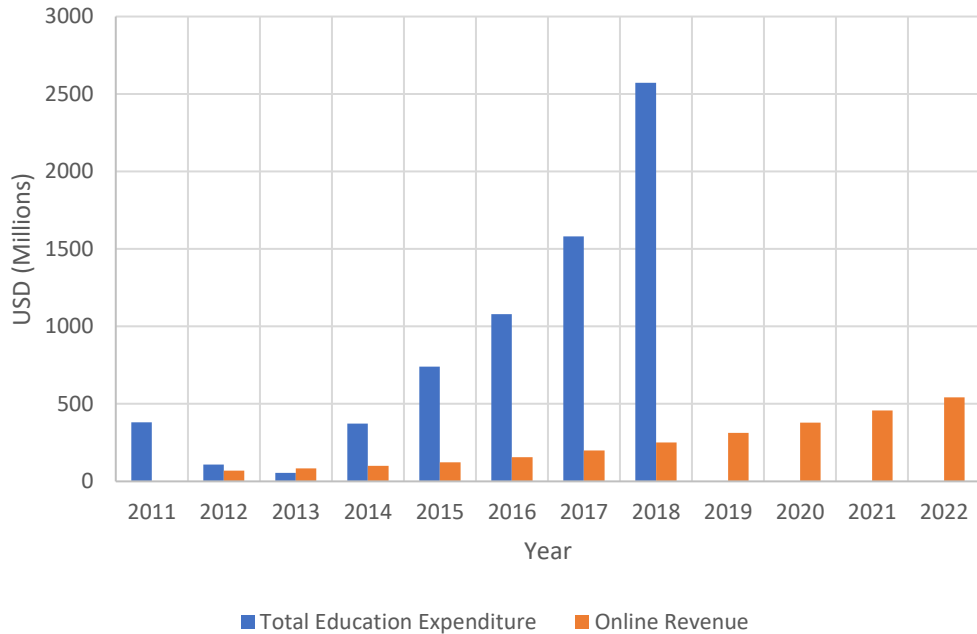
The Rise of Shadow Education

The focus on 'The Big Three' subjects of maths, Chinese and a foreign language (Qi, 2016), tested in the high stakes gāokǎo (高考) college entrance examination, led to significant demand for excellence in these areas. Commercial tutoring evolved from teachers assisting students after school into a multi-billion-RMB industry during the 1980s (Feng, 2021). This evolution began during the Reform and Opening Up period at the end of Máo Zédōng's (毛泽东) reign, when underfunded schools with poorly paid teachers began offering additional tuition to supplement their incomes and improve performance. As government regulations restricted state teachers from private tutoring, commercial operators filled the gap, capitalising on families' increased spending power.

Coupled with China's rapid financial growth as it emerged from the limitations of the Cultural Revolution and into the new millennium, the 21st century has witnessed the exponential growth of the tutoring industry (Figure 4), which has been able to service all demographics, both in-person and online (Feng, 2021).

Figure 3

'Total Investment in China's Education Industry for Each Year 2011-2022'



Note. The graph represents the dramatic growth in total annual investment (in USD millions) flowing into China's education industry: total investment reached \$2.6 billion in 2018, and online education revenue continued expanding. Adapted from Khan, Q. (2019).

As the industry evolved, it expanded its services beyond traditional "shadow education", including hiring staff both domestically and abroad, introducing international curricula, and adopting marketing strategies that sometimes conflicted with Confucian educational values, which focus on balanced, value-driven learning, and government expectations of a structured and orderly context. This rapid growth also prompted increasing regulatory intervention (Zhang, W., 2019). It is within this unique and complex context that the Double Reduction Policy (DRP) was introduced.

The Double Reduction Policy Implementation

In what has since been referred to as the death knell for ASTCs (Baker-Brian, 2021), the Double Reduction Policy publicly addressed the heavy academic burden on Chinese students. Within the Confucian tradition of education as a means to succeed and the competitive culture of progression through educational success, students have been conditioned from early preschool years through compulsory education and beyond to work harder and longer to achieve ascendancy.

The scale of this burden is evident in the statistics: school days are long, typically lasting from 7:30 to 16:00 or 21:00 for older students (Chou & Ching, 2012; Hughes & Chamberlain, 2021; Shi, 2021). According to a report by Afanti Education, a major edutech platform in China, a reported 87.6 per cent of surveyed high school students said they routinely finish their homework after 11 p.m. before getting up by 6 a.m. the following morning (ECNS Wire, 2015; Jing, 2015).

Simultaneously, the ASTC industry responded to market demands and proliferated apparently beyond what was deemed administrable by the government; in response, the DRP was by far the most severe policy implemented to date (Lyu & Lam, 2025). It addressed the heavy workload of students, the financial burden on families who send their children to both public schools and ASTCs, as well as its education reform aims (Xinhua, 2021).

Presented as "opinion" or "guidelines", it nonetheless explicitly banned for-profit ASTCs and placed limitations on the activities that students were permitted to engage in outside of state school, such as engaging in supplementary learning of the "subject-based curricula" provided by anyone other than their state school (see policy document, Appendix 1). Schools were instructed to provide on-site after-school homework tuition, and written homework was banned; education reform was also implemented.

As described by the Government of Canada press release, the policy includes the following key points:

- No new tutoring companies will be approved.
- All existing tutoring companies will convert to non-profit organisations.

Following the new rules, price-setting regulations were issued, requiring local governments to determine price levels with a 10% fluctuation allowed. As non-profit organisations, all income must be reinvested into education-related activities with no return on investments. The regulations establish several key operational constraints. All existing online tutoring companies must undergo review by local authorities, with approved companies added to municipal "whitelists" that permit them to operate under local regulations. Tutoring companies are prohibited from offering curriculum-based classes during national holidays, weekends, or winter and summer breaks, and must use qualified teachers as determined by local regulations. Online classes are limited to 30-minute sessions with 10-minute intervals, operating only between 17:00 and 21:00.

Financial restrictions were particularly stringent, prohibiting tutoring companies from conducting initial public offerings or raising capital through the capital market. Public companies cannot invest in subject-based tutoring companies through stock transactions or asset acquisitions, whilst foreign capital is banned from mergers, acquisitions, trustee arrangements, franchising, or using variable interest entity structures to control such companies.

Content controls include prohibitions on teaching beyond the compulsory education curriculum, strict oversight of training materials through review and filing systems and bans on foreign teaching materials in compulsory education contexts. Additionally, foreigners located abroad are not permitted to provide online tutoring services, and teachers in the compulsory education system are prohibited from offering paid

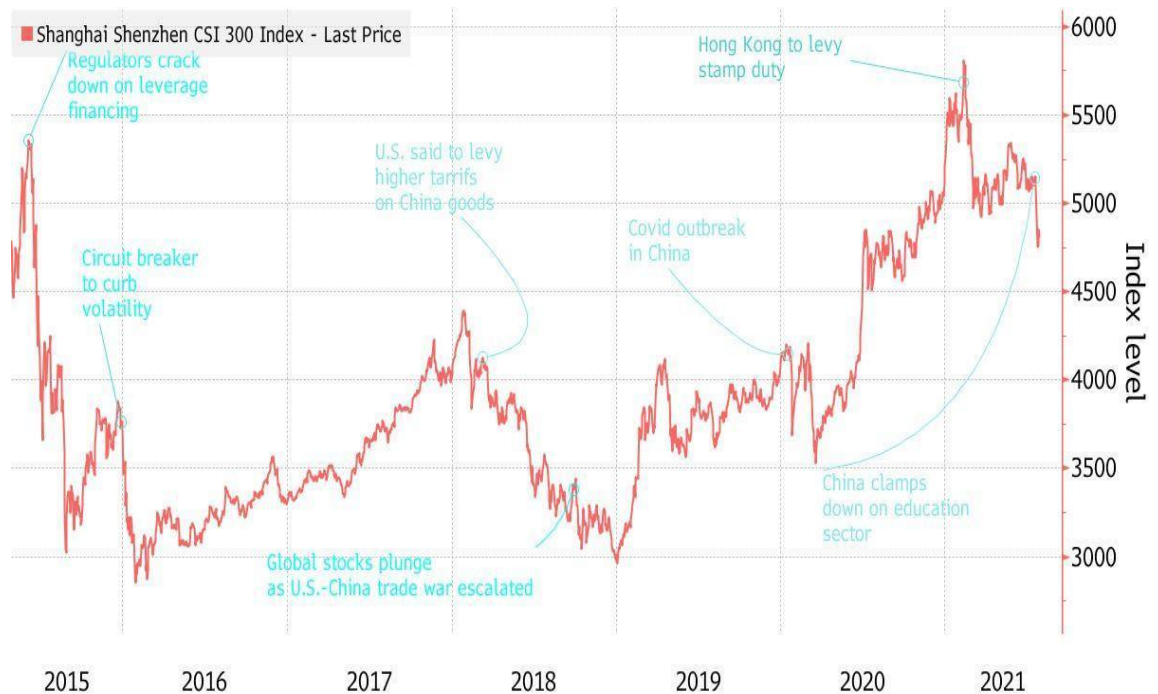
supplementary lessons outside of school; violations may result in the revocation of their teaching qualifications (Government of Canada, 2022).

Market Impact and Wider Consequences

Less "ideological oppression", as often perceived in international discourse (Silver et al., 2020), and more strategic national governance, the DRP resulted in the desquamation of ASTCs specialising in English language education, shocked the industry and cost billions on stock markets (Albert, 2021; Digiteach, n.d.; Lin, 2022; Stevenson, 2021) (e.g. Figure 5). A series of media reports at the time illustrated the severe impact. "The nearly 1 trillion sell-off ignited by Beijing's ban on profits at tutoring companies" (Chan et al., 2021) triggered a dramatic week of financial losses around the globe as valuations dropped and shares were offloaded quickly, causing consternation among employers and employees alike, as the Chinese government stated that the tutoring market has been "severely hijacked by capital" (Chan et al., 2021). "In Hong Kong trading, shares of education companies, including New Oriental Education & Technology, Koolear Technology Holding Scholar Education, and China Best Study Education, plummeted by more than 47% on July 23. In New York trading, shares of TAL Education Group fell by more than 70 per cent while Gaotu Techedu lost 63 per cent of its market value" (Zhou, K. 2021).

Figure 4

'Investors Lose \$1 Trillion in China's Wild Week of Market Shocks'



Note. Shanghai-Shenzhen CSI 300 Index showing the drop following the DRP announcement in June 2021. Data from Bloomberg (2021).

The human cost was equally severe, with fund manager Wu Yuefeng noting that "Making the sector non-profit is just as good as eradicating the industry altogether [making] a listed entity meaningless" (Chang, 2021). The fallout resulted in hundreds of thousands of people being unemployed (Xi, 2021; Ye, 2022). One of the largest companies, New Oriental, reportedly dismissed 60,000 staff (Luo, 2022a), redirected families toward state-managed education, and altered the provisions available in state schools (Pan, 2022).

Stakeholder Impact

The scale of impact extends across multiple stakeholder groups. Besides the after-school tuition or training centres, which were staffed by an estimated 10 million Chinese employees and foreign teachers (CGTN¹, 2021; Cheng & Ye, 2021), there are an estimated 18 million teachers in state education in China (Statista, 2021), of which around 1 million are English teachers (British Council, 2022), comprising of 400,000 foreign teachers across the education sector (AFP, 2021) all of whom will have felt the impact of the DRP.

By limiting permissions for ASTCs, public schools have absorbed the changes by "offering" after-school care through homework supervision and activities. The aim is to ensure that students receive suitable instruction for school subjects, do not receive any written homework to be completed at home, and can enjoy the hours until their parents finish work in a safe, state-approved, and constructive environment (Li, 2021). From an economic perspective, the goal is to prevent families from incurring excessive expenses on ASTCs, thereby mitigating uneven educational opportunities resulting from wealth disparity among students (Chang, 2021; Liu, 2022). In short, according to the policy's rationale, the goal is that less after-school studying will result in happier students, wealthier families, and more opportunities for strengthening social bonds through family time in the evenings.

Intended vs. Unintended Consequences

As this study reveals, there are both spoken and unspoken consequences of the policy, which have manifested as both intended and unintended, yet de facto

¹ CGTN (China Global Television Network), formerly CCTV (China Television) is a state-run media company (Marsh, 2023).

outcomes. Critical Discourse Analysis was employed to identify the differences between spoken and unspoken elements of the policy, and explicit text analysis was used to examine the intended outcomes. To complement the analysis of the intended outcomes, stakeholders were interviewed regarding the unintended but de facto present outcomes that this study aimed to understand. Table 1 summarises the foci on aims and consequences of the DRP, as adopted in this research.

Table 1
Analysing Aims and Consequences of the DRP

Opinions re. The DRP	Intended Aims	Unintended Aims	De Facto Consequences
Top-down (Spoken)	Textual analysis of policy texts	Textual analysis of media	Educational trends in ASTCs and EFL in China
Top-down (Unspoken)	CDA of policy texts	CDA of media	Business trends in ASTCs and EFL in China
Bottom-up	Interviews with stakeholders	Interviews with stakeholders	Educational/ Business trends

The documented unspoken consequences are numerous and complex. Contrary to schools *offering* after-school care, it is more of an enforced provision, meaning public school teachers have had their working days lengthened, significantly impacting their lives and wellbeing. According to the research, "74% of teachers said they had to spend more time designing 'high-quality' homework that's more engaging and effective than before. 47% of them reported being in the classroom for more than 40 hours a week, whereas 60% complained about excessive work outside regular school hours. More than 70% of teachers reported that 'duties unrelated to teaching' were consuming too much of their energy, but they didn't specify the exact responsibilities they wanted to

be relieved of. China's education reform is resulting in overworked teachers" (James, 2022).

Furthermore, children continue to attend restructured ASTCs that now operate under different subject banners (Chen, 2022b; Goh, 2021; Li & Lin, 2022; Wang & Cai, 2022; Yu, 2022) and continue to attend ASTCs (McSpadden & Yan, 2021; Ye, 2022) and then complete homework at home after classes (Shi, 2021), effectively negating the policy's intended outcomes.

Additionally, education in China is not entirely state-sponsored, including after-school services which are not free (see also 2.2.3); therefore, the cost to families has been transferred from ASTCs to schools, albeit at a reduced rate. Combined with the substantial job losses from ASTC closures (Chang, 2021; Qiao, 2021) and the market being driven underground (Bloomberg, 2021; Feng, 2022), the uneven educational opportunities through wealth disparity could be the same if not worse than before (Davidson, 2021) as families seek private tutors to replace the previous classes. Private tutors generally charge more and are unregulated (Pan, 2022; Ye, 2022), unlike the ASTCs, which were able to charge less per head in larger classes and had their costs partially regulated by the education bureau and partially by market forces.

Other consequences include public reporting of people (many of whom are reportedly public school teachers supplementing their salaries) who provide after-school tuition, encouraged by rewards offered to informants (Hatch, 2021; Ni, 2021; Xinhua, 2022; Yan, 2021), which is common practice in China (HPA China, 2021; Liqiang, 2020; Yu & Goh, 2021). These individuals are penalised, sometimes with heavy consequences such as fines or job losses (Yan, 2022). In other circumstances, the closure of regulated ASTCs means that unqualified entrepreneurs can offer after-school tuition to meet market demand (Xue & Tan, 2022).

The tradition of promoting patriotism and national values through the school curriculum, as seen in the adoption of The Patriotic Education Law (zhōnghuá rénmín

gònghéguó àiguó zhǔyì jiàoyù fǎ 中华人民共和国爱国主义教育法) in January 2024 (Ministry of Justice of the People's Republic of China, 2024), has been given greater power through the concentration of limiting extracurricular exposure to unregulated materials in ASTCs and increased exposure through regulated curricula in a controlled environment. Together, these and other intertwined narratives constitute a multifaceted framework of interconnected factors that inform the central inquiries of this research. If education is the most powerful tool in changing the world, then understanding the far-reaching consequences of its policies is vital.

1.2.2 Gaps in Knowledge

There is a significant lack of empirical research on the effects of the DRP on its stakeholders, despite the policy having impacted millions of people (Luo, 2022b; Xi, 2021; Ye, 2022). This gap is particularly concerning given that official discourse has focused predominantly on reporting the policy's success (Global Times, 2021, 2022; Yan, 2021) or attributing blame for any harmful outcomes to teachers' or parents' negligence (Cheng, 2021; Li et al., 2022; Liu, 2022), which is discussed further in the literature review. The lived experiences of those directly affected, particularly participants of English language learning, remain largely undocumented.

This knowledge gap is especially significant for English language education, and raises several critical questions. In China's predominantly non-English context, where most people do not use, need, or encounter English in their daily lives (estimates range from 7.3% to 1% of users as "proficient") (Song, C., 2022), the research examines how one policy change has had such a significant impact and explores what the unspoken foundations and goals underlying this development. The research further investigates the consequences for teachers in both public schools and ASTCs, including implications for foreigners working in China. Furthermore, it is unclear whether the policy signals a

developing anti-Western sentiment, and whether it engenders support for national ideals or produces contrary effects among those most affected by it.

Beyond easing student workload, this dissertation explores whether the policy also reflects broader societal goals, such as shaping educational priorities, fostering national identity, guiding social development, and managing international engagement. Additionally, are there opportunities for other countries to gain any insight into how education policy can shape a broader national narrative.

Research Perspective Considerations

Most recent research on the Double Reduction Policy has been produced by Chinese scholars, as detailed in the literature review. This concentration of authorship may introduce unintentional bias or limit the diversity of perspectives represented in the existing literature. Whether intentional or not, there is an inevitable occurrence of cultural perspective that could shape the objective views of the writers. The few foreign contributors at the time of writing are primarily reporters for newspapers, magazines, or online articles (see 3.2.5), which raises questions about their personal familiarity with China and whether they have cultural, national, or professional biases that could influence their writing.

As a foreign national (Welsh) who has lived in China for over a decade and worked within the industry examined in this research, I bring a perspective shaped by both external distance and lived experience. This position offers the opportunity to present accounts with contextual sensitivity and to interpret findings with an awareness of historical and societal factors that may be overlooked in work produced entirely outside China. At the same time, I remain aware that no analysis is entirely free from bias; my cultural background, professional experience, and personal positioning inevitably inform the lens through which I view and represent this subject.

The research gap this study aims to address is the effect of the DRP on individuals involved in English language education at emotional, financial, professional, or value-based levels.

1.2.2.1 The Significance of Addressing the Gaps in Knowledge

In addressing the gaps in knowledge, two main areas can be explored: the effects of a policy on its stakeholders and a deeper understanding of China's contextual position, including the status of English language learning.

1. The Effects of a Policy on its Stakeholders.

China's educational policies extend beyond purely pedagogical objectives to function as a foundational element of social infrastructure and existing value systems. Compared to their Western counterparts, Chinese students spend more time in structured environments, focusing on learning and socially constructive activities, meaning there is less free time. This structure partly results in lower instances of delinquency, youth crime (Han, 1990; Wong, 1999; Numbeo, 2022), sexually related issues such as teenage pregnancies and violent crimes, and what the Ford Foundation (2006) describes as "major social issues, [such as] gender-based violence and the surge of fundamentalism" (p. 17). Greater emphasis is placed on personal achievements and social advancement through education (Chen et al., 2021; Fang & Feng, 2020; Seah, 2019), and training to become a useful member of society, as outlined in a white paper, "Youth of China in the New Era" (xīn shídài de zhōngguó qīngnián 新时代的中国青年), published in 2022 (The State Council The People's Republic of China, 2022).

In introducing a policy that directly affects the upcoming generations of Chinese citizens, as well as the current body of professionals providing education and guidance

to the new generation, alongside their families, almost the entirety of today and tomorrow has been targeted for reform in the desired style of China's vision. The DRP has easily observable effects, such as job losses, re-routing of careers, and changes to the academic lives of students, who, in the opinion of many, have become trapped in a relentless study regimen (Jiang et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2011, 2012).

The less observable include several interconnected policy goals and consequences. These include the indirect alleviation of financial burdens on families, with a view to increasing the falling birth rate (Chang, 2021;_Chen & Ning, 2024). The policy also appears to aim to eliminate the undesirable influences from outside the country in the form of unregulated curricula or foreign teachers (Cheung, 2020; Yuan, 2021). Additionally, the government's anti-capitalist agenda, seen as detrimental to the "prosperity for all" goals (Xinhua, 2017), particularly the tuition industry, which was described a "a stubborn malady" driven by "disorderly expansion of capital" by President Xí Jìnpíng (习近平) (Chang, 2021, para. 8). The policy has also created as yet undocumented consequences of families that can afford private tuition and those who can't (Yiwen & Boran, 2021). Finally on the teachers whose jobs have altered, from the additional responsibilities for those in state school and the effects on their daily lives and wellbeing, and the unexpected career change or loss for those in the ASTCs (Chen, 2024; Chen, X., 2022; Zhang, 2024).

2. A Deeper Understanding of China's Position on Education, Including on the Status of English Language Learning

Through exploring the effects of the DRP, a picture of education policy and its direct consequences can be painted. Educational standards can only exist in context, be it national or international. In shining a light on the policies and methodologies of various educational systems, countries can learn and benefit from each other's successes and

failures. In gauging the reactions and outcomes of a scheme, the resulting data could benefit future policymakers in their decision processes. Additionally, when faced with sudden or significant educational changes, educators, students, and their families could be better informed about what to expect or the available options for adjustment.

Secondly, his research offers a fresh understanding of China's intentions through its educational policy and national remodelling. Education in China occupies a distinct position as an extension of the political system, where citizens are shaped and conditioned to be profoundly patriotic from an early age. This context is key to understanding the introduction and acceptance of a new education policy. Language education policy, specifically, has served as a vehicle for creating national identity through the development of a common language, influenced by the European post-Enlightenment "one nation - one language" ideology, that views linguistic diversity as problematic (Kirkpatrick & Liddicoat, 2019). More broadly, Lall and Vickers (2009) observe that Asian education systems emerged from post-colonial nation-building, with language policy, imbued with emotional resonance aimed either at bolstering resistance to the encroachments of foreign imperialism or to advance the notion of nationhood (2009, no pagination).

In adjusting its education policy, China appears to be addressing several additional matters, including the declining birth rate, unchecked capitalism, and the rejuvenation of family and national morals (Liu, 2024; Pan, 2022). Additionally, the proliferation of English language tuition, along with its associated materials and often unregulated practices (Fan, 2019; Zhang et al., 2022), has caused growing consternation (Bunel, 2021; Kologrivaya & Shleifer, 2021) regarding its cultural and linguistic influences, leading to the industry-wide clampdown through the DRP (Liu, Y-L., 2022).

As countries on different continents address their own educational policies, examining China's large-scale policy implementation may provide insights for potential

changes in educational conventions or approaches to challenges faced by other countries.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTION(S)

1.3.1 The Research Questions

The research questions that emerge from these concerns are primarily focused on the effects on the various stakeholders, including teachers, students, and parents. To understand each group's situation, it is essential to first grasp their position and opinion regarding China's education system, the DRP, and their place within each context. This leads to the first questions, which frame the participants' emplacement within the context of the DRP.

Table 2

Research Questions and Information Sources

MAIN RESEARCH QUESTIONS	DATA	METHOD
Context and genesis of the policy.	Historical. Political.	Existing literature.
What value-based orientations does the policy reflect?	Policy Text	CDA. Text Analysis.
How do stakeholders perceive the link with the DRP to practical challenges within the education system?	Interviews.	Qualitative methods.

1.3.2 Justification

Understanding the relationship between the policy and its stakeholders is essential, as each group has been affected in distinct ways. As previously outlined, teachers have experienced significant shifts in their professional roles; families have undergone logistical and economic changes (not necessarily negative); and students have reported a mix of both adverse and beneficial outcomes, which are explored in detail in this study.

The research approach is structured around two main dimensions. The first explores what the policy is and what it signifies, both overtly and covertly. Gaining insight into the intentions, messages, and ideological underpinnings of the DRP provides the foundation for the second part: examining the effects of the policy on those involved.

This second part includes an examination of how the policy alters key aspects of EFL education in China. Among the areas of focus are changes in curriculum content, such as replacing international materials with state-sanctioned texts, and the differing impacts on educators across settings. For instance, while public school teachers have seen increases in workload, training centre teachers have faced the complete loss of employment. These impacts, and the broader attitudes toward EFL education in China, merit closer examination.

To further justify this research, additional themes are introduced, which prepare the groundwork for subsequent coding and analysis. These include the policy's alignment with wider sociopolitical goals such as reversing declining birth rates, promoting patriotism, and redefining parental roles in education to support state-defined ideals of merit and citizenship. These sociocultural objectives appear increasingly interwoven with education policy and practice. Moreover, an emerging discourse suggests a growing anti-Western sentiment linked to the government's nationalistic narrative, which may partially motivate the DRP (Liu, 2022). These themes are also discussed in

the literature review and are considered central to understanding the DRP's broader implications.

Collectively, these factors raise questions about how the DRP may be affecting the quality and character of English language education in China and provide further justification for this study.

1.4 WORKING HYPOTHESIS

Before conducting the study, the working hypothesis anticipated that the DRP served broader purposes beyond its stated aims, including boosting birth rates, addressing family values, resolving conflicts between teaching responsibilities and profiteering, controlling narratives, and minimising Western influence. Additionally, I anticipated unintended consequences that were absent from official explanations, including underground tutoring markets, increased educational inequality between socioeconomic classes, and job displacement for qualified professionals in the private sector.

1.5 THESIS OUTLINE

This thesis is structured across eight chapters, guiding the reader through a comprehensive analysis of the effects of the Double Reduction Policy on English language learning participants from contextual, theoretical, and empirical perspectives.

The introduction chapter has established the research problem and highlights the existing knowledge gaps. It outlines the research questions, objectives, and working hypotheses, and concludes with this thesis outline to guide the reader through the

study. The second chapter provides the macro-context necessary to situate the study, detailing China's governance and education systems, with a particular focus on the emergence and characteristics of the DRP. It establishes the historical, political, and policy-related backdrop against which the policy is implemented.

The Literature Review critically examines academic literature relevant to the DRP, analysing pedagogical, political, ideological, practical, and media-related perspectives. It discusses the strengths and limitations of existing research and identifies the conceptual space this study addresses. The methodology chapter presents the research questions and the theoretical and methodological foundations of the study. It details the ontological and epistemological positions, the research design, data collection and analysis methods, ethical considerations, and the pilot and main studies conducted to ensure methodological robustness.

The results are divided into two chapters: one focusing on a critical discourse analysis of the policy text, and the other on empirical evidence from key stakeholders. The critical discourse analysis chapter provides a detailed analysis of the DRP policy documents, employing corpus linguistics and thematic analysis using NVivo. It examines the production, content, and consumption of the texts, revealing the sociocultural and ideological underpinnings embedded in the policy language. The results chapter presents the empirical findings from interviews with key stakeholders, teachers, parents, and students, offering insights into their perspectives on the DRP. In parallel, thematic patterns are analysed to understand the perceived effects, challenges, and long-term implications.

The discussion interprets the findings in the context of the existing literature and theoretical framework. It critically examines how the DRP functions in practice, its alignment with stated goals, and the dissonances observed between policy intent and stakeholder experience. Finally, the concluding chapter synthesises the study's main

findings, articulates its contributions to policy analysis and critical discourse studies, and reflects on limitations and directions for future research.

1.6 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The Double Reduction Policy marks a pivotal juncture in China's educational and sociopolitical landscape, potentially extending far beyond its explicit aims of alleviating student workload and curbing capitalised after-school tutoring. This research will explore how the DRP, through both overt mechanisms and covert sociocultural drivers, has impacted teachers, students, and families involved in English language learning. Crucially, this research will examine how the DRP demonstrates that education policy in China serves as a tool for broader value-based governance, including consolidating national values, recalibrating socioeconomic behaviours, and reasserting control over state education. By prioritising stakeholder perspectives and critically analysing the discourse of the policy text, this study addresses the intended and unintended effects of educational reform. As education continues to evolve in global and local contexts, China's DRP analysis provides a rich source of material to consider the effects on both human impact and strategic intent. To ground this inquiry, the following chapter outlines the broader educational, political, and statistical context in which the Double Reduction Policy emerged and operates.

2. CONTEXT: FACTS, POLICIES, AND STATISTICS

The Context: Facts, Policies, and Statistics chapter provides the foundational framework necessary to understand the Double Reduction Policy within its broader governmental, educational, and historical context. This chapter is structured into three interconnected sections that build upon each other to create a comprehensive understanding of the environment in which the DRP emerged and operates.

The first section, The Chinese Governance System, illustrates how administration is organised in China and demonstrates how education fits within this broader governmental structure. Understanding this governance framework is essential because it reveals the mechanisms through which educational policies are developed, implemented, and enforced across the nation.

Building on this governmental foundation, the second section examines the Chinese Education System through three chronological periods. The General History section establishes the historical context of both China and its education policies, demonstrating the deep cultural roots that continue to influence contemporary educational approaches. The Recent History section describes the tumultuous journey of China's education system during the 20th century, highlighting the dramatic shifts that have shaped current educational structures. Finally, the Current Context section discusses the rapid improvement in state education and the exponential growth of the private education industry in the 21st century, developments that directly precipitated the introduction of the Double Reduction Policy.

This historical progression was selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of China's evolving cultural stance on education and to trace the linear journey of policy development and educational tradition through the years (Zhang, Y. et al., 2023). This historical context cannot be separated from the recent manifestation of educational

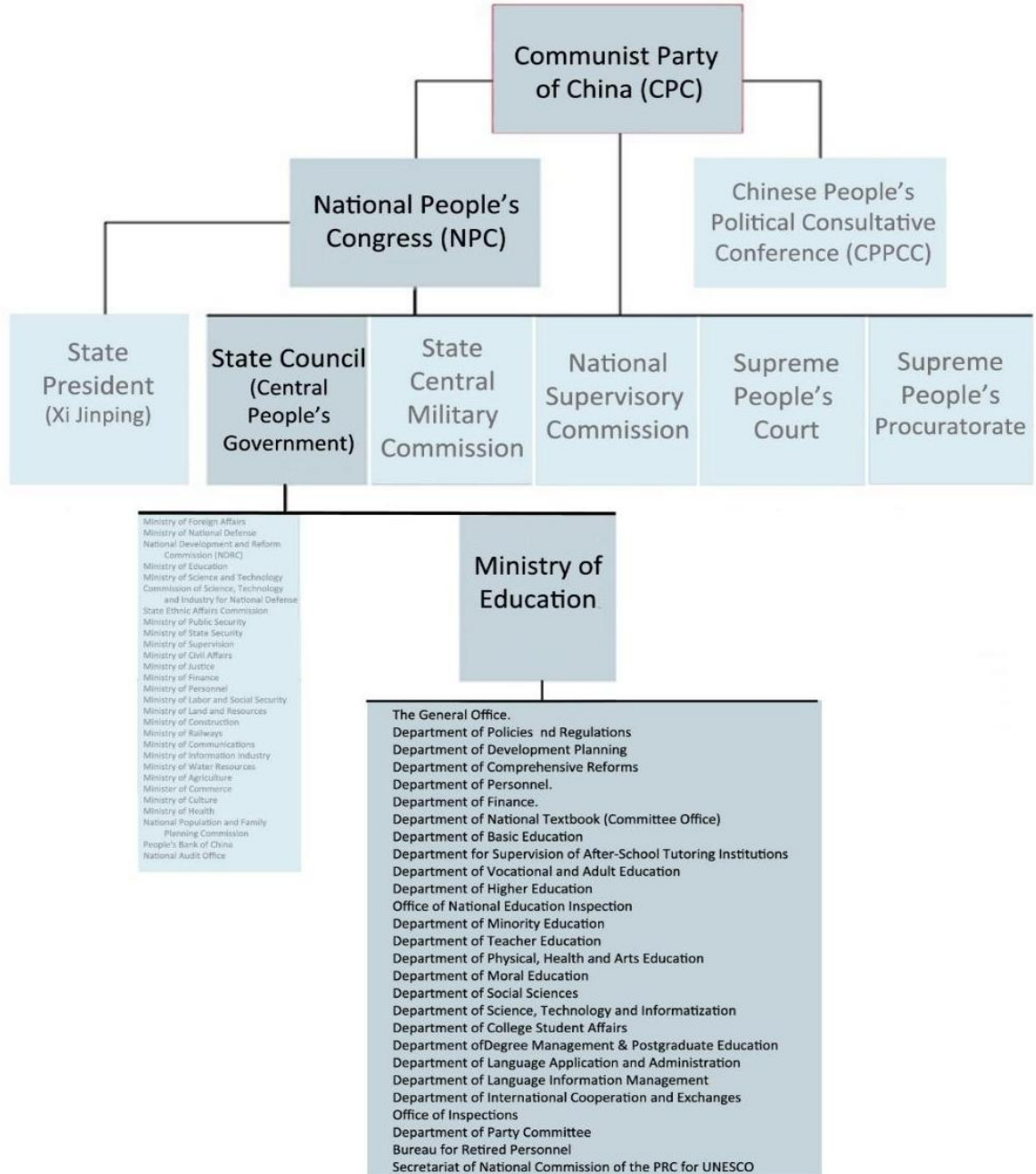
policy reform represented by the DRP, as contemporary policies build upon centuries of academic philosophy and practice.

The third section examines the genesis of the DRP itself, analysing its contents and documenting its effects to date. This analysis forms the immediate backdrop against which stakeholder responses and policy impacts can be understood, setting the stage for the detailed investigation that follows in subsequent chapters.

2.1 THE CHINESE GOVERNANCE SYSTEM

Figure 5

The Governance Structure of China



Note. Adapted from Lawrence & Lee (2021) and National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China (2023).

The People's Republic of China is led by the Communist Party of China (CPC) (Zhōngguó Gòngchǎndǎng 中国共产党), which is overseen by the Politburo. Under its jurisdiction are three main bodies, as seen in Figure 6: the Central Military Commission, the National People's Congress (also known as parliament), and the State Council (also known as the government). The State Council is the executive body and governs all aspects of state administration, including education. Under the world's largest political party, the world's largest education system is managed by the Ministry of Education, which operates within this hierarchical structure.

Policy Development in Context

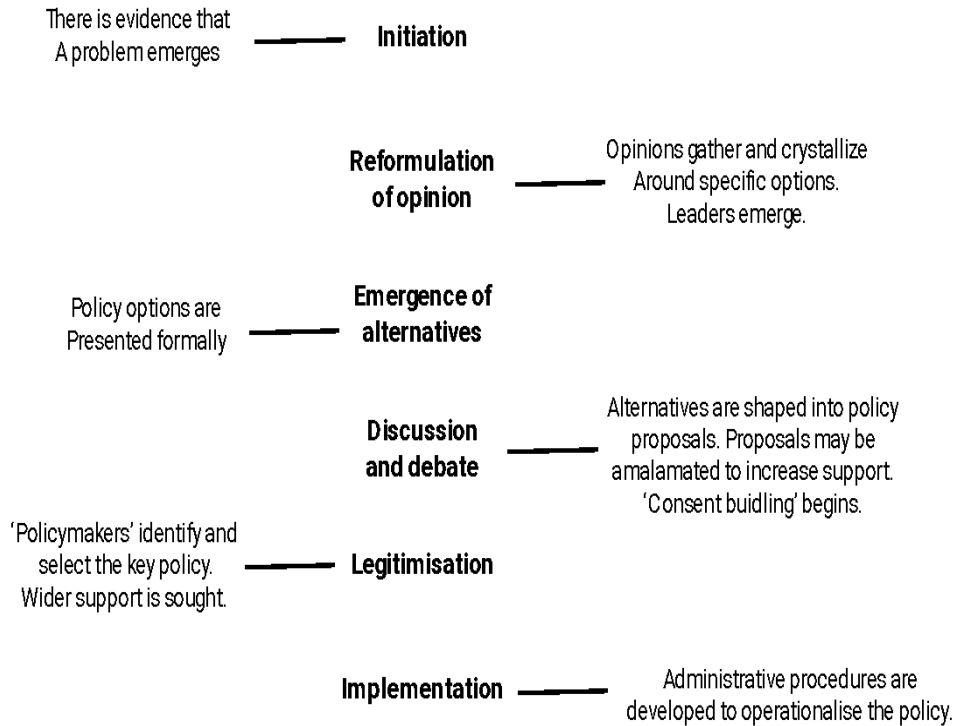
Education policy can only be fully understood when viewed in its sociohistorical context. Policies can be viewed as part of a systematic series of events and, therefore, should be considered part of a process within a specific environment. Described as "authoritative allocation of values" (Kogan, 1975, in Bell & Stevenson, 2006, p. 15), four values have been identified as fundamental to education policy: educational, social, economic, and institutional (Bell & Stevenson, 2006). Some of the current research on education policy in China reflects the practical direction the country is taking, while other research leans into theoretical hypotheses on value allocation within this system.

Typically, policies emerge by following a general linear pattern, as seen in Figure 7.

Figure 6

Linear Model of Policy Development

Policy and Education



Note. Adapted from Jennings (1970), as cited in Bell & Stevenson (2006, p. 16).

Whilst deviations occur in different contexts, this basic sequence is generally consistent across most governance systems. However, China operates a distinctive policy process known as "from point to surface" (yóu diǎn dào miàn 由点到面), whereby policy experimentation is conducted locally before being implemented nationally (Han & Mills, 2021; Heilmann & Perry, 2011). This approach originated during the early days of the communist revolution and was solidified during the Reform

and Opening-up period, when former Premier Dèng Xiǎopíng's (邓小平) mantra of "crossing the river by feeling the stones" became the accepted means of implementing policies according to local conditions (Han & Mills, 2021, p. 219).

This experimental approach challenges common external perceptions of Chinese governance. Wong (2018) highlights how China's grassroots policy growth, from local city planning to major events like the Cultural Revolution, is often misunderstood by foreign observers who view the nation as a centrally controlled monolith. In reality, the 23 provinces are economically decentralised and have a certain amount of autonomy under top-down, politically centralised Beijing government (Han & Mills, 2021). China's experimental policymaking suggests either adaptive governance across vast, diverse regions or a trial-and-error approach requiring constant adjustments by citizens. What differs between the standard linear model of policymaking and the experimental model policymaking lies primarily in the nature of responses and implementation processes.

The idea that actors have individual agency in the development of and reaction to policies is expected and seen as "creative social action, not robotic reactivity" (Ball, 1994, in Bell & Stevenson, 2006, p. 18); however, dependent on the structural factors, varying degrees of constraints are inevitable (Cheng & Wei, 2021). This tension between individual agency and structural constraints becomes particularly relevant when examining responses to major policy changes. In the specific case of the DRP, this study investigates stakeholder responses to understand how one of the most recent and significant policy experiments was received across different groups. By examining these responses, we can gain a deeper understanding not only of the immediate effects of the policy but also of the broader dynamics by which educational policy operates within China's unique governmental and social context.

2.2 THE CHINESE EDUCATION SYSTEM

2.2.1 General History

Education in China from its inception to the 21st century can be divided broadly into five categories: The pre-imperial era, the imperial era, the Máo era, the Reform and Opening-up era and the modern era, each of which played a part in the education landscape of today, leading to the introduction of the Double Reduction Policy.

Widely believed to be one of the oldest education systems in the world (Leverage Edu, 2022; Shieh, 2023; Surowski, 2000), its origins date back to the Han Dynasty (206 BCE - 220 CE), when classical education and entrance examinations enabled privileged classes to compete for government positions (O'Sullivan & Cheng, 2022; Wang, 2012). Confucianism shaped both education and moral thought for the next two millennia, until Máo's Cultural Revolution sought to dismantle these values and replace them with communist principles (Chandra, 1987). Education after Máo was depoliticised and restored to merit-based pragmatism (Feng, 2021), foundations which remain.

The contemporary education system streams students through two major exams: the zhōngkǎo (中考, high school entrance exam) and the gāokǎo (高考, college entrance exam) (Zhang, 2020). This examination-based structure has its roots in the ancient Confucian-based civil service examination model (Deng, 2011). Zhū Xī (朱熹, 1130–1200) profoundly shaped the curriculum through his educational texts, reinforcing Confucian orthodoxy and instilling a culture of meritocracy that endured for centuries (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Lin, 2021).

During the pre-imperial era (1046-221 BCE), state schools primarily served noble families, while village schools catered to the wealthy, excluding most of the population (Feng, 2021; Zhao, 2022). Under the Qin Dynasty, Legalism, a Chinese philosophical

tradition that advocated for governance through clear laws, strict enforcement, and a structured system of rewards and punishments to ensure social order, briefly replaced Confucianism (Mark, 2016; Mark, 2020). The imperial era (221 BCE - 1911 AD) reinstated Confucianism as state philosophy, formalising education through private tutors and community schools (Feng, 2021; Liu, 2012). By opening examinations to low-income candidates, education became a vehicle for mobility, cultivating capable officials and fostering cultural prosperity (Song, 2021). Throughout this extended period, only those who passed the demanding examinations could advance, and in some instances, emperors selected these successful candidates to help manage imperial affairs (Song, 2021). This system made educational progression a genuine opportunity for individuals to improve their personal and family circumstances, thereby cementing the stringently competitive nature of Chinese schooling. During this long historical period, the foundations of the Chinese education system and its policies began to take shape, forming the blueprint for modern-day educational standards and traditions.

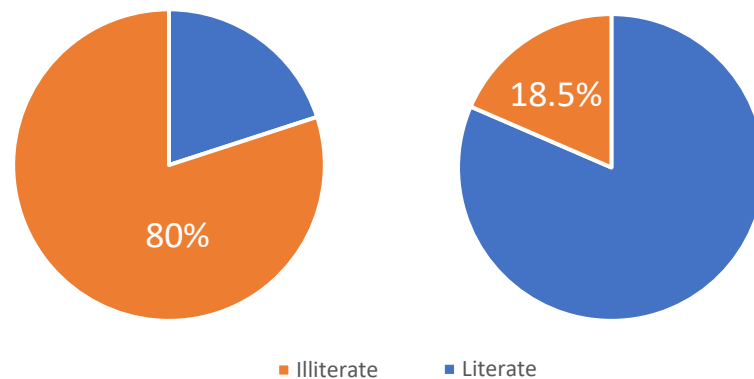
2.2.2 Recent History

From 1911, with the demise of imperial rule, to the mid-20th century when Máo Zédōng established the People's Republic of China, education remained largely elitist (Feng, 2021). However, tensions between Western reformist ideas and traditional Chinese thought shaped educational debates around "'Western cultural values' versus 'essential Chinese values', 'Western utilitarianism' versus 'Confucian ethics', and 'Christianity' versus 'Confucianism'" (Deng, 2011, p. 562). The abolition of the civil service examination system in 1905 and the adoption of Western models marked a significant turning point (Deng, 2011). Máo opposed hierarchy in education and promoted social equality, viewing schools as tools to mobilise the masses (Hu, 2005).

Nevertheless, deep inequalities persisted, however, with women excluded from education until the late 19th century (Lee, 1995; Liu & Carpenter, 2005). By 1949, around 80% of the population was illiterate (Chandra, 1987; Ross, 2005; Zhang & Minxia, 2006) (Figure 8).

Figure 7

Illiteracy Rate in 1949 and 1978



Note. Showing the effects of the first period of nation-shaping education policy from the founding of the People's Republic of China to the aftermath of the death of Chairman Máo. Adapted from Fuxing, L. (2019).

Influenced by Soviet Marxism and opposing Western ideals, Máo transformed education into a means of spreading Marxist-Leninist values and mobilising workers and peasants (Pepper, 2000; Walder, 2015, as cited in Feng, 2021). Labour-study programmes replaced Confucian exams, aiming to create egalitarian, productive citizens (Deng, 2011; Jung & Chen, 2019). Upon taking power in 1949, the Communist Party set three primary goals: reducing illiteracy, preparing a workforce for industry and agriculture, and re-educating the masses politically (Chen, 2023). These reforms,

influenced by Soviet models, incorporated political education into curricula (Chen, 2023), foreshadowing the seemingly patriotic drive of the DRP.

The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) disrupted education as schools closed, foreign language teaching was banned, and youth were mobilised against tradition (Kasturi, 2020; Heaslet, 1972). The Ministry of Education lost authority to local committees of workers, peasants, soldiers and politically reliable teachers (Tao et al., 2006), effectively dismantling the system. A generation of students missed formal schooling, with long-term effects: in 1977, only 5% of the 5.7 million who took the gāokǎo gained university admission, compared with around 70% today (Kasturi, 2020). Yet literacy rose sharply: from 80% illiteracy in 1949 to near-universal youth literacy by 2015 (Heflin, 2021), described as "perhaps the single greatest education effort in human history" (Peterson, 1997, p. 3).

Following Máo's death, the 1978 Reform and Opening-up period shifted China towards a market economy, expanding education through decentralisation and compulsory schooling (Preen, 2009; Xiong et al., 2022). Zhou and Hou (1999) argue that the bureaucratic practices of the socialist state, particularly the radical policies of the Cultural Revolution, led to the downward mobility of middle-class children, resulting in significant intergenerational status disparities. With memories of forced rural living and limited educational prospects, the generation of Chinese who are now parents of working-age citizens, in turn, the parents of today's school-age children, approach educational opportunities with exceptional seriousness and actively participate in the intense culture of competition (Zhou & Hou, 1999).

This high-pressure environment echoes the centuries-old Confucian and imperial examination traditions, where education determined social stratification (Chandra, 1978). The combined memories of the Cultural Revolution, coupled with newfound prosperity, have led to increased competition, a heavy workload, and overburdened students - precisely the issues that the recent Double Reduction policy aims to

alleviate. Today's education system, operating within the political-economic framework described as "Socialism with Chinese characteristics", continues to balance planning and market forces while reflecting national identity. The DRP specifically aims to address the overburden and competition rooted in these historical and cultural dynamics by easing students' workload and curbing excessive extracurricular demands (CGTN, n.d.; Feng, 2021).

2.2.3 Current Context: China's Education in the 21st Century

State education

In the 21st century, China has the largest education system in the world, calculated in 2016 at approximately 260 million students and over 15 million teachers in about 514,000 schools (OECD, 2016, p. 9). The rapid development of China has been partly attributed to its education policies implemented since the Reform and Opening Up period, which have been guided by four key themes: equality, ensuring all citizens have access to education; quality, enhancing the productivity of individuals and society; efficiency, positioning education as a national mission; and rejuvenation, aiming for both national renewal and global influence (Li & Li, 2019). By 2025, an estimated 20% of Chinese adults aged 25 - 64 will hold a tertiary qualification, rising to over 30% among younger adults (25 - 34), with bachelor's degree holders accounting for approximately 10–12% of the population (Altbach, 2009; Kc et al., 2010; Woetzel et al., 2021). Forecasts predict a steady increase in graduates, with a projected growth from 15.522 million in 2024 to 17.121 million in 2028 (ReportLinker, 2025). In 2020, the Ministry of Education (Figure 9) reported the following statistics:

Figure 8*Major Educational Achievements in China in 2020*

2020	Institutes	Students enrolled	Enrolment rate	Teachers	High School	Bachelor's	Master's / PhD
Pre-school	291,700	48,182,600	85.2%	2,913,400			
Compulsory education	210,800	156 million	95.2%	10,293,900			
Upper secondary	24,400	41,278,000	91.2%	unspecified			
Higher education	2,738	41,830,000	54.5%	unspecified			
Special education	2,244	880,800	unspecified	66,200			
Attainment (25–64-year-olds)					37%	8%	1%
OECD average					83%	19%	14%

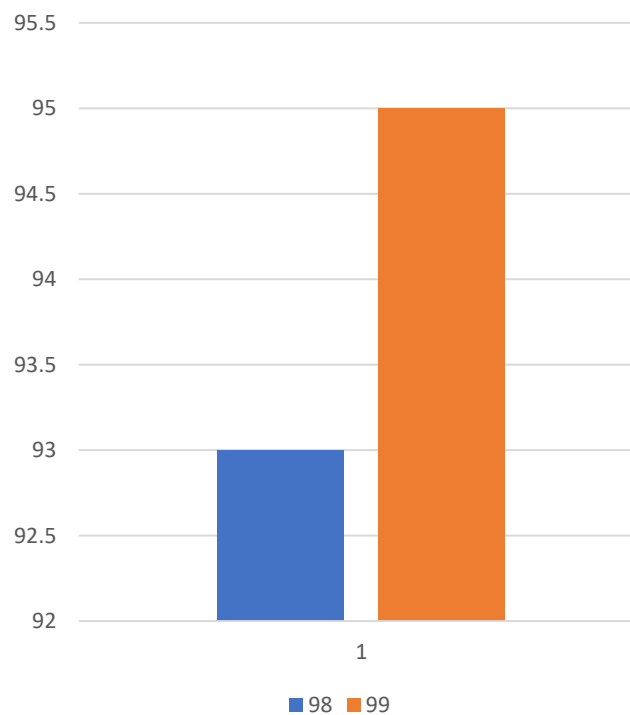
Note. showing figures for education participation in 2020. Data adapted from Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China 2020, in Education in China: A snapshot. OECD (2022).

The figures demonstrate high rates of participation in both compulsory and non-compulsory education. However, when compared to data from the OECD, China still appears to have some way to go to achieve the levels of education required to become a major leader in the knowledge-based labour market. To achieve these goals, education policy must continue to evolve, including addressing the exam-oriented learning mode and reducing the gap between rural and urban resources. Specifically, China operates a system of assigning documentation based on the city of household registration for each citizen, known as the Hùkǒu zhìdù (户口制度) (Wu, 2011). This system essentially categorises people as rural or urban, thereby determining which public services and opportunities are available to them, including where they can work, attend school, marry, or purchase property (Afridi et al., 2015). This mechanism, in

place since 1958 but based on an ancient system, serves to control "internal migration, the management of social protection, and the preservation of social stability" (Boquen, 2023). For education, this means that as the population grows, migrant workers travel to cities for employment, and rural areas are underpopulated and underdeveloped. For example, it was estimated that the average number of years of schooling in 2005 was eight for rural students and twelve for urban students (Ngok, 2007; Zhang et al., 2015) (Figure 10).

Figure 9

Average Enrolment and Graduation Rates of Junior High, Senior High, and College/University Students in 2010–2012, Rural and Urban



Note. showing disparity between the average number of years of schooling of urban and rural students. Adapted from Zhang, D., Li, X., & Xue, J., (2015)

The urban-rural educational divide is well-documented and represents one of the primary challenges facing policymakers and education reformers (e.g., Ngok, 2017; Sun, 2022; Ye et al., 2019), particularly in terms of the excessive workload placed on students. The Basic Education Curriculum Reform at the beginning of the millennium was significant because it addressed the need to shift education philosophy from being exam-oriented to more "holistic" (Dello-Iacovo, 2009; Yang, 2020). Wang (2014) identifies five key lessons from China's education reform process, including evidence-based policy-making, provision of professional support for teachers, learning from international experiences, experimentation with new approaches, and balancing centralisation with decentralisation.

Although reforms have been implemented to evolve the education system, the competitive exam-oriented culture remains. In the space of a century, China has developed an education system that started with 80% illiteracy, to Shanghai being named as one of the top performers in 2009 and 2014's PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) tests (Dello-Iacovo, 2009; Wang, 2014), and over 40 million people being enrolled in higher education in 2020 (British Council, 2021), through a series of radical nationwide policies. However, this relentless drive for academic excellence also led to the development of an intensive study culture and an expansive shadow education sector, as families sought additional support to maintain competitive advantages.

Shadow education

Complementing the public school system is the "shadow education" industry. Shadow education began with private tutoring at home and after-school support in the mid-20th century and later evolved into after-school tuition focusing on core subjects. By the turn of the 21st century, it had become a multi-billion RMB industry (Lin, 2022; Wu, 2021). Bolstered by China's 'Reform and Opening-Up' (改革开放) and the shift to a

market economy, the combined elements of newfound wealth, low teacher salaries, competitive schooling, and later the introduction of the internet created an environment ripe for industrialised education (Feng, 2021; Yu & Zhang, 2022). The industry reached its peak during the first two decades of the new millennium as international investors fuelled the exponential growth both within China and online (Feng, 2021) following the legalisation of private education through the introduction of "The People's Republic of China's Private Education Promotion Law" (Yu & Zhang, 2022). This very law would create the behemoth industry that the DRP would later attempt to regulate.

Prior to this, shadow education had served as supplementary support for traditional schooling, focusing on traditional subjects. As the Reform and Opening-up policies of the late 20th century reinstated English as an international tool for national rejuvenation and modernisation, an influx of overseas people arrived to teach "authentic" English and apply Western pedagogy (Feng, 2020). The scale of the finance invested in Chinese tutoring later saw major companies listed on Chinese, American and other stock markets (Lin, 2022), opening Chinese education to forces beyond state control.

With the capitalisation of education, companies diverged further from mainstream learning and diversified in terms of content, what subjects were offered, who was teaching, and from where. Foreign teachers from both within, and outside China were now part of Chinese students' everyday education, creating an environment in which the Chinese tutoring market became globalised and, consequently, even further out of reach of the state, which had historically maintained strict control over schooling. The emergence of online tutoring further altered the landscape, creating a visible chasm of financial disparity as families invested in a multitude of classes from various providers, pushing their spending upward and increasing competitive educational opportunities for their offspring (Liu et al., 2022).

To appreciate the scale and impact of the shadow education industry in the 21st century, it is reported that within the first twenty years, 137 million students or up to 73% of Chinese students, were enrolled in an approximate additional 1-2 daily hours of private tutoring, taught by between 8-11 million teachers in over 200,000 institutions (Zhan, 2022; Zhu, 2022). The industry was worth between 4 billion and 2 trillion RMB (Luo, 2022; Zhan, 2022; Zhang & Chen, 2022). National average salaries are approximately 90,000 RMB (approximately £11,000) (National Bureau of Statistics China, 2021; Sun, 2020), while family expenditure of 7 - 15% is devoted to private tutoring (Lu et al., 2022; Qian & Smyth, 2011, Zhang & Xie, 2016) with the average cost per student at 12,000 RMB (Chau, Cheng & Fang, 2021). In short, despite its evident popularity and the firm belief that additional tutoring is necessary for academic success, the industry was in danger of hegemonising state education and pushing families into financial hardship.

Much like the antecedent system of education that segues into a teaching career, competition is fierce among its stratified opportunities. Reportedly, in 2022, more than 30,000 graduates applied for 1,000 teaching jobs in Shenzhen (Zou, 2022). There is also age discrimination, whereby, according to the law, applications for civil service jobs, including teaching, are only considered from applicants under the age of 35 (National Civil Service Administration, Article 18:2, 2020; Huang, 2023). The strict requirements are one feature of the choices teachers make when deciding to join state schools or ASTCs.

Despite the stringent requirements, state school teaching positions offer stability, benefits and are seen in China as a respectable career (Han & Han, 2018), as demonstrated by a common idiom describing respecting the teacher and their principles (zūn shī zhòng dào 尊师重道), which are highly emphasised moral and ethical norms (Zheng, 2011; Hui, 2005) and enshrined in law in The Education Law of the People's Republic of China (Zhōnghuá rénmin gònghéguó jiàoyù fǎ 中华人民共和国教

育法) (Ministry of Education, 2021), which stipulates that "Teachers shall be respected in the whole society" (Ministry of Education, 2009 & 2021; Appendix 2, Article 4).

In contrast, ASTCs often offer higher salaries, more flexible working conditions, and do not require the national teachers' examination for their local instructors. This is not to suggest that ASTC teachers are unqualified, as many possess degrees in other areas and hold teaching qualifications (Tianfu & Hongyuan, 2022). Many are state teachers supplementing their income, while others are drawn to the flexible working patterns, daily English use in language schools, or simply higher earning potential (Weng, 2022). What both groups share is that together they provide the totality of core competencies and holistic education desired by families, working in a highly revered occupation. Despite the vital service they provide and their venerated place in society, a substantial amount of responsibility for students' academic burdens has been placed upon them. However, ASTC teachers are not afforded the same rights, benefits, or respect as state teachers (Li, 2022a; Weng, 2022; Yao, 2022), and as such, were in a much more precarious position when the DRP was announced. As reported in the press, many were given short notice (Cheng & Ye, 2021; Weng, 2022), forced out of their jobs or chose to leave (Ni, 2021). The total number of estimated job losses varies, but ranges from tens of thousands (Ni & Zhu, 2021) to millions (Wang, Luo, et al., 2022; Ye, 2021).

The three teaching subgroups (Chinese ASTC, foreign ASTC, and foreign online) were each affected differently, and first-person accounts from both Chinese teachers and foreign online teachers are present (Ye, 2021). However, there appears to be little written on the effects of foreign ASTC and foreign state-school teachers. According to media reports, the biggest impact on ASTC businesses was on those providing English language education, as most of the stock market shocks were related to English language tutoring providers (Ye, 2021; Yu, 2021a; Zhu et al., 2021). This would also have an impact on both foreign and Chinese English teachers, implying a relatively greater impact for foreigners who commonly work as English teachers. Exact figures are difficult to locate, however estimates range from a total of 845,697 foreigners living in

China (Ren, 2021a), China's Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs (SAFEA) estimates 400,000 are teachers (AFP, 2021; Cadell, 2019; Pan, 2019), of which only 17,693 work in higher education (Ren, 2021b), with the remainder presumably in ASTCs, kindergartens and compulsory education, where most of the students targeted in the DRP study. This indicates that a large proportion of teachers affected by the DRP are involved in English language education; however, the literature analysed for this review does not reflect this aspect and focuses primarily on finances, shortcomings in state education, the ASTC industry, and the DRP itself.

The literature suggests that whether the text is pro- or anti-teacher in sentiment, discussing ASTC, state schools, online, Chinese, or foreign, the outcome remains the same. The DRP heavily impacted teachers in two ways: one was observable in terms of financial or occupational changes, and the other was the less observable but explicitly written blaming culture directed at teaching professionals. It is clear that teachers are both affected by the DRP and targeted as a major factor in its apparent necessity.

2.2.4 Current Research on Education Policy in China

Lall and Vickers (2009) describe Chinese education policy as an instrument of nation-building, where patriotic education reinforces the idea that raising the quality of the population is essential for a strong, modern, and united state. Similar patriotic framing is present in Li and Li's (2019) depiction of China's transformation from a learner in the 20th century to a "re-rising leader of international experience of educational excellence" (p. 198). Han (2021) identifies "Strengthen Moral Education for Cultivating People" (lì dé shù rén 立德树人) as a central Party directive, embedding the cultivation of socialist citizens as the fundamental task of education.

Zhu (2019) relays Xi Jinping's oft-repeated goal of the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" (wěi dà fù xīng 伟大复兴), highlighting the role of education in achieving national modernisation, while Li and Li (2019) trace the use of education policy throughout history to bolster China's global standing. The state's collective mission is exemplified by Education Minister Zhōu Jì's (周济) frequently quoted proclamation, "to rejuvenate the country through science and education and to make the nation strong by cultivating talent" (Zhou 2006: 71, in Vickers 2009, p. 57). Li (2017) suggests three rationales motivating policy development are "modernisation theory, human capital theory, and a postcolonial catch-up mentality" (p. 134), whereby education is seen as the "foundational infrastructure for opening up and reform", meaning that by investing in human capital, economic growth and societal development will naturally follow (p. 135).

While often perceived as a top-down system, Han and Mills (2020) argue that Chinese policymaking also incorporates bottom-up contributions through "engaging in local PE (policy experimentation) projects" (p. 221). Han (2021) further describes how provincial autonomy enables state-sanctioned initiatives to be piloted regionally before being rolled out nationally, although this process is not always uniform. Gao and Tyson (2022) note that central control over finance, personnel, and administration limits true autonomy. Schubert and Alpermann (2019) contrast this with EU multilevel governance, finding that "Fragmented Authoritarianism" inadequately captures the current "top-level design" (p. 201).

Fan and Zhang (2020) detail the 2010 - 2020 national education reform plan, "Outline of the National Plan for Medium- and Long-term Education Reform and Development 2010–2020" (Guójiā zhōng cháng qī jiàoyù gǎigé hé fāzhǎn guīhuà gāngyào 国家中长期教育改革和发展规划纲要 2010 - 2020年), aimed at creating a more autonomous system whereby the CPC outlined its goal of creating a more autonomous education system: "The essence of education governance is to build a modern school system that

operates in compliance with the law, with autonomy, and under democratic supervision and engages other stakeholders in the society" (p. 55). Gao and Tyson (2022) outline the stated goals of separating politics from schools, streamlining administrative approvals, and legally protecting institutional autonomy; however, they observe that party-affiliated schools ultimately remain subordinate to the state.

At the school level, Cheng and Wei (2021) view teachers as de facto policy implementers, whose agency manifests in micro-level accommodation and resistance, while Mok et al. (2020) discuss limits to academic autonomy and cases of corruption through relationships, known as *guānxi* (关系), a system of mutual obligation, entrenched in Chinese culture for millennia, whereby a social network results in favours or services for personal, familial, social, business or political gain, and are acknowledged as ingrained traditions in the polity, including educational structures (p. 204; Harding, 2013; Lin, 2011). The goal of autonomy within limits in education is counter to the DRP, which displayed heteronomous powers over the private sector.

Understanding how educational institutions react to policies, there is no straightforward explanation of the situation in China. Zhang (2019) emphasises the complex interplay of structure and agency in policy enactment, with outcomes shaped by multilevel governance dynamics and regional interpretation. Multiple authors (Li, 2017; Li & Li, 2019; Li & Xue, 2022) have noted the scarcity of empirical research on education policy, which is further compounded by political sensitivities and self-censorship. Concerns about research quality include discouragement of unfavourable findings, methodological weaknesses, and political oversight (Enago Academy, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2019). Horta and Li (2023), Wang et al. (2019), Jin (2022), Li (2020), and Mallapaty (2020) describe how doctoral candidates face intense "publish-or-perish" pressure, sometimes incentivised through financial rewards, potentially undermining rigour. Li (2017) and Wang and Weldon (2006) caution that such pressures, combined with the expectation of political alignment, can result in work that falls short of international standards. Tian et al. (2016) advocate publishing in reputable

international journals to enhance quality but also criticise domestic editorial systems for political oversight.

Heilmann and Perry (2011) and Zhu and Xiao (2021) describe how an "experimentation under hierarchy" strategy for historical reforms and policy introductions has been the norm in China, however, the apparent unexpected introduction of the DRP is contrary to this trend. This divergence suggests that the DRP was introduced with a sense of urgency or strong central mandate, bypassing the usual gradual experimentation process to achieve rapid implementation and impact. Such a departure highlights the exceptional nature of the policy within China's typical reform framework.

Li (2017) charts the "sometimes benign and sometimes malignant to educational development" (p. 137), seen when education was all but eradicated during the Cultural Revolution or in its current state of overworked students and ultra-competitive system. He leads us to contemplate that the trajectory of education policy has always followed the same goal, further explored by Kennewell et al. in Bell and Stevenson, (2006) who consider policy determination - how policy evolved and why - which gives us an insight into the aspired coda of steering the country toward betterment as imagined in the vision of the ruling Party.

Understanding how educational institutions react to policies offers no straightforward explanation of the situation in China. Zhang (2019) suggests that, partly due to regional interpretations and partly due to the nature of policy, which ordinarily is not perspicuous but communicates a context in which to translate recommendations, results are "shaped by interplays between structure and agency, and by multilevel dynamics" (p. 27). Additionally, there is said to be a dearth of empirical research on policy in China, specifically in the field of education, which is consistent with the contentious observations of academic output in higher education, where Li (2017) claims that "Chinese policy communities cater to the needs of the central government".

Li and Li (2019) concur that there are concerns about the quality of research available on education policy in China, as unfavourable information is "discouraged", and the methods used are questionable (p. 201). Li (2017) reported that empirical policy studies are few in number; Li and Xue (2022) state they are low in profile, while Enago Academy (2021) and Human Rights Watch (2019) claim that they are carefully monitored for content. It is suspected that two forces influence researchers in China; the first, as described by Horta and Li (2023) and Wang et al. (2019), is that any person wishing to gain a doctoral degree *must* publish, and secondly, as Li (2017) highlights, the pressure to conform to the rigid requirements of publicly supporting the Party and the country in official capacities. It is reported by Horta and Li (2023), Jin (2022), Li (2020) and Mallapaty (2020) that higher education students were previously offered financial rewards for publication within institute-supported journals in an ongoing 'publish-or-perish' system, raising questions on how this may affect the quality of work. Li (2017) and Wang and Weldon (2006) propose that the differing motivations of fulfilling academic requirements versus freely undertaking research can result in output falling below international standards in terms of rigour, critical thinking, and technical aspects, such as academic language or empirically supported results. Meanwhile, Tian et al. (2016) suggest that high-quality research should be submitted to well-known international journals to enhance the profile of Chinese research, thereby creating a divide between quantity and quality. They also criticise the editorial system in academic journals, which appoints non-academic editors through "an editorial office, which is usually a government-affiliated unit or is overseen by a higher-level government institution" (p. 2), leading to concerns about the quality control of work being published. These combined factors present a clear challenge in reviewing the literature, as the majority of texts are written by Chinese scholars for Chinese universities, whose motivations for producing articles may be a potential cause for concern if there is a financial incentive or pressure related to graduation.

The literature available at the time of writing allows us to trace the evolution of education policy and to position the DRP as the most recent chapter in this narrative. The nature, origins, and implications of this body of research, including its scope, biases, and limitations, are explored in greater depth in the literature review, which provides a critical foundation for understanding how the DRP has been framed and studied.

2.2.5 Policy and Practice in Chinese Education: How they Relate

"Policy must be seen as a dialectic process in which all those affected by the policy will be involved in shaping its development. Policy development is therefore both a continuous and a contested process in which those with competing values and differential access to power seek to form and shape policy in their own interests" (Bell & Stevenson, 2006, Introduction 2). China has historically and continues to implement ambitious education policies driven by societal and economic motivations but openly focused on promoting support for the incumbent leadership and its objectives. Under the current Communist Party, education is a state-run decentralised entity whereby provincial authorities administer higher education. At the same time, County-level governments govern school education (Bell & Stevenson, 2006) but work together under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education to realise "the great renewal of the Chinese nation: the prosperity of the country, the rejuvenation of the nation, and happiness of the people" (Li, 2017, p. 135). Xi's "Chinese Dream" is characterised by national identity, Confucian values, and economic development (Singh, 2022).

Education policies in the 21st century have been overseen by the Ministry of Education, which drafts laws and policies that the National People's Congress approves before the State Council enacts them (OECD, 2016). Education is the means through which national development occurs, and as such, it is given great importance, not only

in terms of practicalities but also in steering the country's moral and cultural goals. The Ministry of Education implements policies, regulations, and laws that are often large-scale and target areas in need of reform or pilot schemes to modernise certain aspects of China's education infrastructure, economy, or social systems (OECD, 2016). The department, which is also responsible for the national curriculum, ensures that subjects for "all-round development" are implemented, which include courses such as morality and life, Chinese, mathematics, foreign languages (predominantly English), science, history, society and Chinese geography, PE, and predominantly Chinese art. (OECD, 2016, p. 23). China's historical and ongoing efforts to foster allegiance to the country and the party are deployed through primary channels, including the media, campaigns, and, most influentially, education in all its forms. As evidenced, educational policies and laws throughout China's history, and continuing today through the formulation of new policies, such as the DRP, are fundamentally interfused with national and cultural steering.

Guided by standardisation, diversification, decentralisation, and marketisation, reforms in the 1990s and early 2000s established a commercialised education market alongside a major campaign to raise education levels for millions of citizens. This education market, which flourished over the following two decades, has since been criticised and challenged by the current government. The emergence of the massive education industry could be seen as an obstacle to realising the long-term plans of overall modernisation by 2035 (National Education Congress and of China's Education Modernization 2035 plan – Ministry of Education, 2019; Zhu, 2019), which lays the foundation for the ultimate aim of China being declared a fully developed nation by 2049 (China Daily, 2019). To pave the way for its long-term goals through education, policies would need to eliminate unwanted distractions and strengthen the core values attached to the mission. Since his appointment in 2012, Xí has openly focused on "national rejuvenation", concentrating efforts on rallying support for the party and the country. Emphasising his pursuit of "Common Prosperity", he oversaw the curtailing of

excessive personal wealth through "triumphing over capitalism" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Tanzania, 2017; Wei, 2021), focusing on technology, real estate, entertainment, and after-school tutoring (Wei, 2021), and an overhaul of the national curriculum which reduced the prominence of English in favour of political study (Yang, 2021). "Re-centralisation" (Schubert & Alpermann, 2019) involved over 100 regulatory actions, government directives, and policy changes within a year (Wei, 2021), all part of the Chinese method of long-term planning toward becoming a "modern socialist power" (Xí, 2022, 0:37).

Since the start of the millennium, frequent education policies have been introduced (Appendix 3 - Educational policy trends in China since the 2000s), each as part of the larger tapestry of efforts to improve the circumstances of its citizens, in order to achieve the broader goals of nation-building (Li, 2017). From decentralisation in 1978, the introduction in 1980, followed by the 2015 revocation of the one-child policy, the 2019 Education Modernisation 2035 Plan, and most recently, the Double Reduction policy, each policy and law illustrates successive governments' ability to visualise the grand scheme. However, these policy implementations have consistently been characterised by abrupt announcements that leave citizens unprepared, requiring swift adaptation and creating significant disruption. This pattern of sudden implementation is particularly evident in the case of the DRP.

What must be understood is that public support of the government is strong (Che, 2020; Harsha, 2020; Wang, 2010), despite hardships caused by periodic moments of change. The philosophical idea of struggle (fèn dòu 奋斗) is deeply embedded in Chinese culture and has been used as a rallying cry to mobilise the Chinese people to achieve success for the nation (Fumian, 2021). The base unit in the West is the individual, whereas in China, it is the family (Freedman, 1961; Scroope & Evason, 2016), and this extends to the larger "family" of the Chinese nation. As China continues to shape its future, it is emphasised that Western minds should not assume that Western systems are superior (Bloomberg, 2023). Mitter & Johnson (2021) suggest China views

capitalism and Western democracy as individualistic, which has led to the accumulation of power concentrated in the hands of the few to the benefit of none, with additional social issues across various countries, such as civil and religious wars, social problems such as crime, drugs and racial issues, and cost of living hardships are seen as proof that Western systems are unsuitable for the modern age and in contrast to the current stability guaranteed in China. Building on the governance framework described above, China's education policies serve broader societal objectives that extend far beyond the classroom. These policies encourage collective values, promote equitable wealth distribution through the "Common Prosperity" initiative, facilitate organised social management, and foster social stability through patriotic commitment grounded in shared principles.

Rather than the "fragmented authoritarianism" characterised by haphazard top-down implementation that Western observers often describe, China's approach reflects a deliberate strategy that maintains the re-centralised authority mentioned earlier while preserving sufficient local autonomy to ensure steady leadership towards collective national goals. This governance model directly connects education policies to both classroom practice and broader social outcomes.

The tightening of education regulations represents a powerful tool in China's mission to cultivate its citizens according to its long-term national vision. These policies are inextricably woven into a pursuit that spans two millennia of educational evolution, encompassing the struggle between Confucianism and Western ideologies, imperial and communist missions, 21st-century expansion and capitalisation, and goals for the next fifty years. All of this aims to foster a powerful sense of Chinese identity amongst citizens. It is within this comprehensive historical and policy context that the Double Reduction policy appeared.

2.3 THE DOUBLE REDUCTION POLICY

2.3.1 Genesis and Content

The genesis of the DRP appeared from an established educational environment that seemed to have reached a crisis point. In non-academic texts, Chan (2016), Wei (2014) and Wickham (n.d.) explain that, on average, Chinese students attend school classes from 8 am to 5 pm, with 1.5 - 2 hours for lunch and sleeping, while self-study from 7:30 am is common, as is attending classes until 9 pm in high school. Grigg (2016) claims that students spend up to 77 hours per week studying. Cai (2017) further illustrates the challenging context by stating that, despite the national standard for classes to contain 45 students, class sizes are approximately 50 students to one teacher; however, there are instances of some classes having over 100 students. The school system is highly populated and therefore competitive. This leads to families employing whichever means necessary to help their children achieve. In the meritocratic structure, success in education leads to success in life. In this environment, ASTCs flourished, and the intensity of study among students increased. The DRP was a natural evolution of education policy, designed to address the existing climate, ease pressure on students, and fulfil part of the long-term goals, as noted by Li & Li (2019).

The apparent purpose of the DRP was to ease pressure on students and families while still advancing key educational aspirations and values. According to Li (2017), four core themes underpin this initiative: ensuring equality of education for every citizen, promoting quality in terms of both individual development and social productivity, prioritising efficiency as a practical national objective, and fostering national rejuvenation aimed at strengthening nation-building and enhancing global status (p. 136). Key objectives included improving the state education system, alleviating student burdens by limiting extracurricular work and homework, easing financial pressures on

families through regulating ASTCs, holding schools responsible for enhancing the student experience, and achieving the overarching objective of productive nation-building. These form the basis of the DRP and its text. A detailed analysis of the document is provided in Section 4.2.1. Double Reduction Policy, and Chapter 6. Results.

2.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has situated the DRP within the broader historical, political, and educational landscape of China. It has shown how education policy in China is deeply intertwined with the nation's sociopolitical ideologies and long-term strategic goals. Additionally, the ways in which historical legacies, such as Confucian traditions, revolutionary reforms, decentralisation, and marketisation, have influenced current educational structures and priorities have been outlined.

The emergence of the DRP was not an isolated event but the result of a century-long evolution of educational thought and systemic pressures, including academic overburden, financial inequity, and value-based imperatives. By understanding the contextual foundations of governance frameworks, education trajectories, and the rise of shadow education, we gain a clearer understanding of why the DRP was introduced, how past and present dynamics have shaped it, and why its implications extend far beyond simple policy reform. This contextual grounding provides the necessary backdrop for the critical analysis and literature review in the next chapter.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The review is organised thematically to summarise and critically evaluate the available information and is then grouped by author origin. At the time of writing, the DRP policy and related research were still developing. Reviewed documents focus on the DRP and education policy in China, covering the period from 2021 to 2024 for DRP literature and 2007, and 2017 - 2022 for broader education policies, to provide context. Later documents were excluded due to repetition and data saturation. The review includes materials on the DRP, general education policy, English language learning, and immediate impacts. Most DRP studies have addressed policy goals and the causes of student burden, with fewer examining the effects on key stakeholders - teachers, students, parents, and ASTCs -highlighting a research gap that this study explores.

Literature was sourced from university libraries, academic journals, and search engines such as Google Scholar, Elsevier, JSTOR, and Taylor & Francis. Access to Chinese databases was limited; CKNI was closed to foreigners during the research, though I briefly accessed it through a temporary academic affiliation. Keyword searches included terms like "Double Reduction", "policy", "2021", "China", "burden", "after-school", and "homework", yielding fewer than 100 English-language academic results. The review comprises 70 DRP-related documents, three theses, one dissertation, four reports, and 62 journal articles, all of which focus on the DRP and English language education. An additional 25 documents on Chinese education policy were analysed for context. Documents were reviewed for thematic content, author stance, methods, and author nationality to consider positionality. Studies unrelated to the research focus were excluded.

The review identifies two key issues: limited availability of firsthand accounts of the DRP's impact on stakeholders and a lack of research from non-Chinese academics. Only a small portion of the 70 DRP-related documents reviewed used rigorous empirical methods, highlighting notable methodological weaknesses. It is organised thematically, separating empirical findings from opinion-based discussions and noting methodological limitations where relevant.

This chapter examines the existing academic literature surrounding the Double Reduction Policy through a comprehensive review and analysis. The chapter begins with an introduction that establishes the framework for reviewing current research on the DRP, followed by a detailed literature review that surveys and critically examines the scholarly work in this area. I then provide a discussion that synthesises the findings from the literature review, identifying key themes, gaps, and debates within the existing research. The chapter concludes with a summary of the literature review's contributions and implications for this study.

3.1.1 Consideration of Nationality and Academic Affiliation in Academic Literature

Upon examining the available literature on the DRP, it became immediately clear that the majority of research has been conducted in China and authored by Chinese scholars. This is notable as its introduction in 2021 was a matter of international interest, as seen in the (predominantly non-Chinese) media reports, but at the time of writing, it was not widely researched outside of China. In the following, I discuss the implications of this national bias in the body of literature. Table 3 shows the nationalities (ascertained by searching online for profiles) and locations (according to affiliated universities).

Table 3*Nationalities and Locations of DRP Literature*

Country/Region	Location Count	Nationality Count
Canada	1	0
China	53	66
Czech Republic	1	0
Hong Kong	2	0
Korea	1	0
Malaysia	1	0
Macao	1	0
New Zealand	1	0
Thailand	1	0
United Kingdom (UK)	2	1 (British)
United States (USA)	6	1 (Asian American)
Unknown	7	—

Note. The "Location Count" refers to the country or region where the research was conducted or published. The "Nationality Count" refers to the identified national background of the authors.

This geographical concentration has significant implications. Chinese authors contributing to academic research through Chinese institutes have likely experienced the very education system being discussed, making them products of it. For instance, Kong (2022), when discussing how teachers can support the DRP, wrote, "...we students can consciously pay attention to their own real-life feelings..." p. 33), showing that he is writing from a personal perspective of a student aiming to support the system, as opposed to an observer. If the authors experienced the pressures, burdens, and expectations that the DRP set out to address, their collective stance could create a subjective narrative on the policy, as it is weighted toward one viewpoint - that of the burdened student.

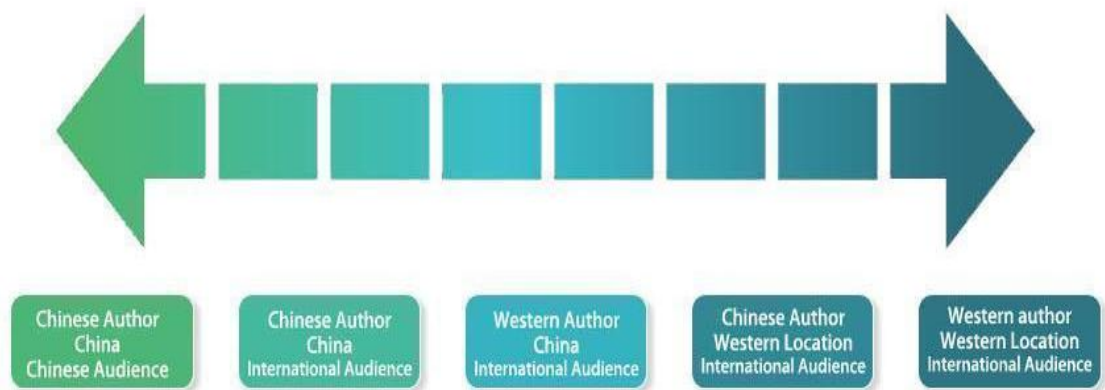
The 70 documents selected for this literature review were considered through the lens of two broad fields: English language literature and Chinese language literature, and then further categorised into four main groups:

- Chinese authors in China (53)
- Chinese authors overseas (11)
- Foreign authors in China (2)
- Foreign authors overseas (1)

These categories are relevant, as will be discussed, because each appears to address a specific audience - either international (English-language texts) or Chinese (Chinese-language texts). An apparent spectrum of perspectives emerged (see Figure 11), with value-based concerns prioritised by Chinese authors within China, while practical concerns were emphasised more by non-Chinese authors abroad.

Figure 10

Nationality and Location Combinations of the Reviewed Literature



Note. Literature on the DRP is categorised by author nationality and location. Differences are inferred from language, journal, geography, and academic context. Box order emphasises geographic relevance: domestic Chinese literature is prioritised, as the policy primarily concerns China.

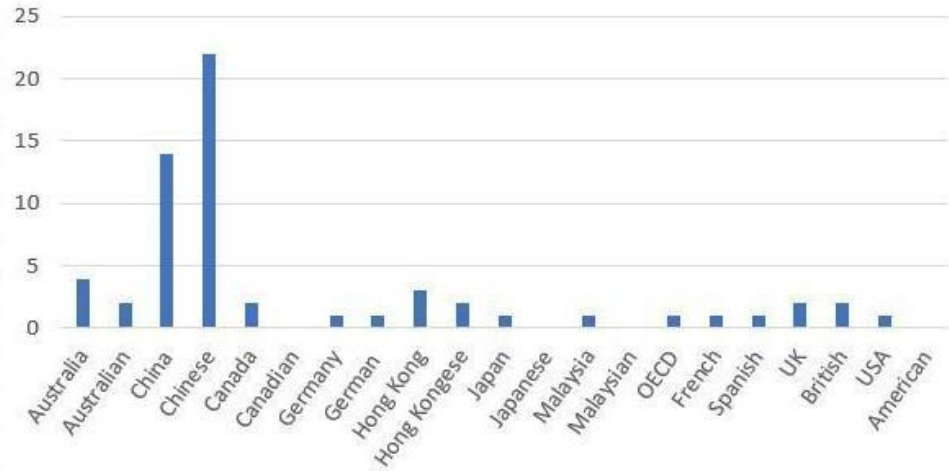
Chinese authors in China were categorised based on the language of their publications, with Chinese-language publications assumed to target domestic audiences and English-language publications targeting international ones. When Chinese authors published through Western universities or publications, they were classified as 'Chinese overseas', as their temporary study abroad status or use of overseas publications made their affiliations unclear. Ultimately, Chinese authors in China, regardless of their intended audience, were assumed to operate under the same constraints discussed in section 2.1.4 or to be predisposed to producing works consistent with their contexts.

The governmental stance analysis revealed striking patterns. Of 53 documents expressing positions on government policy, 50 demonstrated pro-government stances, all by Chinese authors, with all but eleven published in Chinese outlets. Only three expressed anti-government positions, produced through American, New Zealand, and Chinese universities. This geographical bias raises questions about the motivations behind domestic academic productions.

Similar patterns emerged in the broader education policy literature. The majority of documents found were authored by Chinese scholars and published by Chinese institutes. Twenty-four documents on Chinese education policy were selected for contextual review, with the majority of these also authored by Chinese scholars and published by Chinese institutes (Figure 12).

Figure 11

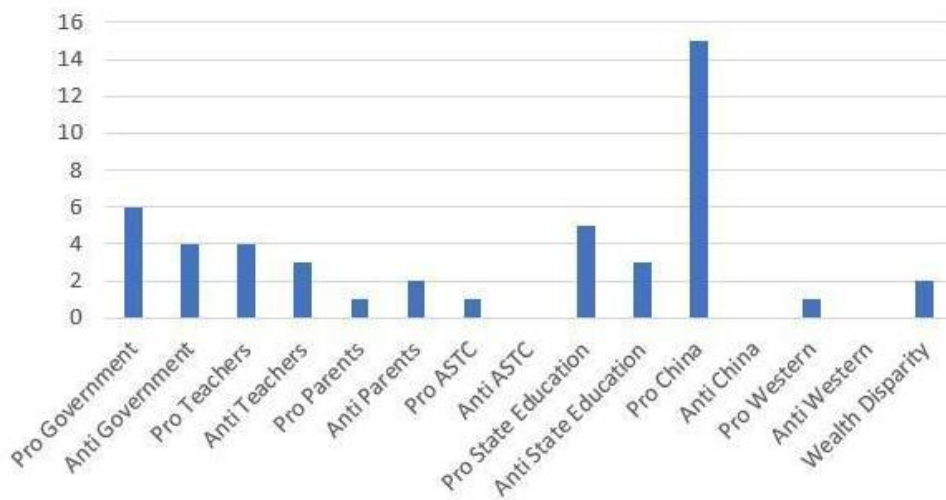
Nationalities and Publication Locations of Research on Education Policy in China



Using NVivo to code these documents (discussed in more depth in 4.2.2.1) revealed pronounced nationalistic tones that could indicate conflicts of interest or non-objectivity (Figure 13).

Figure 12

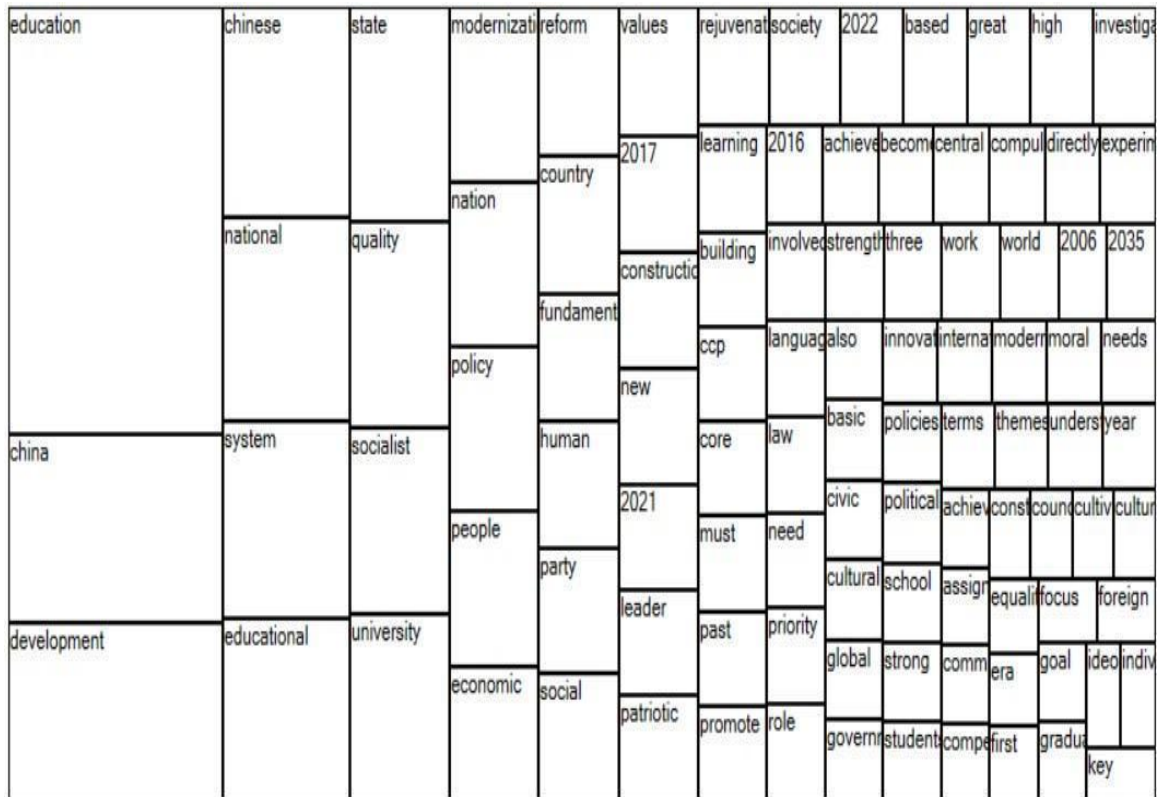
Themes in Chinese Education Policy Literature



No research offered critical perspectives on China, and national unity themes were frequently cited when describing civic and value-based educational goals (Figure 14).

Figure 13

Most Frequently Used Words in Chinese Education Policy Research



Note. Tree map created through analysis conducted using NVivo

The literature on the DRP can thus be understood through distinct standpoints presenting perspectives on clearly identified elements. A translator was employed to provide translations of selected documents, and this framework of themes helps explain both the current research landscape and the position of this study within it.

3.1.2 Academic Freedom of Chinese Academic Research in Social Sciences

While deciphering the policy and specifically its effects on its primary stakeholders in the area of English language learning, 70 relevant documents were initially identified. These documents, both theoretical and empirical in nature, include theses, journal articles, and research, focusing on education policy in China in general and the DRP specifically. Due to the topic being relatively new and originating in China, there was limited academic material available at the time of writing. Additional material and supporting context were found in news reports, contemporary editorials, and media articles, which are considered and discussed separately, as they are non-academic but deemed relevant. Each of the documents was selected if it primarily addressed the subject of the DRP, the context surrounding the DRP, or its effects, or if it referenced English language learning in China in relation to the DRP. Texts not related to the DRP's inception, consequences, or context in English language learning, such as those focusing on sports or science education, were excluded. Fewer journal articles written in Chinese were used due to the difficulty in accessing the material (see above and Hu, 2007; Jia, 2019; Trinkle et al., 2022), language limitations, and concerns about veracity resulting from institutional practices and requirements (Wang & Weldon, 2006), which are discussed in Section 2.1.4.

According to the 2023 Academic Freedom Index (Kinzelbach et al., 2023), China is placed in the bottom 3% of the global share of 179 countries assessed (p. 3). An absence of stated methodologies in the domestic Chinese language articles raises concerns about validity and reliability of data (e.g., Liang et al., 2022; Ma et al., 2021; Ma & Zheng, 2022; Xie, 2021; Yang & Chen, 2021; Yu & Yao, 2022; Zhou & Qi, 2022 are works not describing any clear methodology).

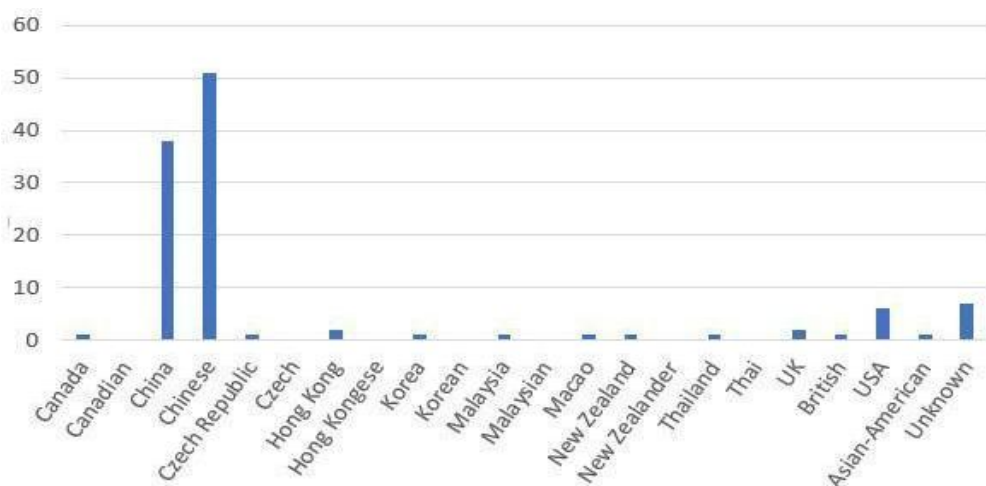
3.2 CURRENT RESEARCH ON THE DOUBLE REDUCTION POLICY

3.2.1 The China Context

Education in China is a vast field, and this is reflected in the abundance of available research. Current research on education policy in China, within the scope of this study, focuses on the country's historical foundations and future goals, both of which serve as guiding frameworks that inform policy and contribute to broader strategic objectives. Policy and support are disseminated through media, the government's record of programs, schemes and implemented actions, publicly available policy documents and academic literature. From these, we can ascertain what level of support there is for the most recent major policy.

Figure 14

Nationalities and Publication Locations of Research on the Double Reduction Policy



Note. Academic literature indicates that the majority of authors originate in China, with additional Chinese authors overseas contributing to the body of information.

As discussed in 3.2.2, a policy stance in research can also be understood by looking at the authors and their publication locations. Of the 24 documents analysed, 20 had Chinese authors, and 14 were published in mainland China (Figure 15), contributing to the existing imbalance in the criticality of current research on education policy in China.

Additionally, it is important to note the basis on which works are included and evaluated here. Much of the published writing on this topic is argumentative or opinion-driven rather than grounded in empirical research. While such contributions can be valuable for shaping debate, they are not always supported by systematic evidence or explicit methodology. For this reason, this review gives greater weight to empirical studies and makes a clear distinction between works that present data-driven findings and those that offer theoretical or normative arguments only. Where non-empirical pieces are cited, their reliance (or lack thereof) on prior evidence is made explicit.

Relatedly, in reporting on empirical work, this review highlights not only the findings but also whether the research methods are described in sufficient detail to assess the strength of the evidence. Reservations about the robustness or transparency of findings are noted at the point of discussion.

Regardless of the availability and quality of research, author and location, and accusations of an opaque system suffering from various faults, we can clearly observe the timeline of education policy, particularly its most recent chapter, the DRP.

3.2.2 Perceptions of the DRP

Much of the literature on the DRP examines how it is perceived by those working and learning within China's education system. While some writers view the DRP as a necessary step to alleviate the academic pressure on students, others highlight its

unintended consequences for teachers' workloads, the education market, and broader issues of equity. The works reviewed here include both domestic and overseas perspectives, shaped by the authors' professional roles, personal experiences, and the political or economic contexts in which they write.

Texts were classified as pro- or anti-DRP based on the authors' use of language and terminology, including how outcomes, conclusions, and effects were framed; positive or supportive wording and evaluative terms placed an article in the pro-DRP group, while negative, cautionary, or critical language placed it in the anti-DRP group. Each classification was justified with reference to this linguistic evidence, with overall summaries presented within each section.

Domestic Chinese Authors - Pro-DRP

The support for the DRP is evidenced in numerous studies by Chinese authors in China. Kang et al. (2022), using a questionnaire survey with principals, teachers, students, and parents in 3564 schools, claim to have sourced opinions from a valid sample of 1,689,000, reporting that "96.8% of principals, 92.8% of teachers, 90.5% of parents, and 96.0% of students" (p. 78) supported the DRP. However, two considerations should be noted. The first is that current teachers and principals employed by the state were questioned and are therefore more likely to express support for the DRP. Secondly, as students are the primary beneficiaries, it can be anticipated that they will likely respond positively to the idea of less homework, without necessarily understanding the broader implications of the policy.

Considering that previous or current Chinese students have written the majority of the available academic literature, it is possible that they are in favour of the DRP, having experienced the arduous Chinese education journey and/or being more likely to take a positive stance for political or nationalistic reasons (see section 3.2.2). A pro-DRP

opinion was expressed in discussions concerning views on the long hours and large volumes of homework for students by Jin and Sun (2021), who used an anonymous quantitative questionnaire followed up by an online-distributed qualitative questionnaire, Kong (2022), using "multi-source analysis theory" and Q. Cheng (2021), with no methods stated. They commonly cited excessive workload as problematic, describing the stresses faced by students who spend long hours at school. The vice president for student affairs and information at Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University stated that the gāokǎo is "a marathon, requiring students to undergo 12 years of study" (Finamore, 2019, para. 15). These papers all focus on the difficulties faced by students.

Liu & Dong (2022), Ma et al. (2021), Ma & Zheng (2022), H. Zhou (2021) and Zhou & Qi (2022), despite lacking explicit research methodologies, frame the DRP as a positive step toward easing student burdens. They employ familiar value-based framing such as implementing the party's education policy, cultivating people with virtue and talents for the party and nation, and building a diversified curriculum, while citing Xí Jìnpíng, Máo Zédōng, Vasily Sukhomlinsky, and Marxist principles, and advocating measures like regulating off-campus training to prevent commodification and improving both quality and efficiency in education. Xie (2021) adopted purposeful sampling, using a tuition centre as a case study, analysing teachers' values and beliefs through a Critical Discourse Analysis of their classroom discourse and how "hidden ideologies behind teachers' discourse... acts against social ideology" (pp. 13-14), to present a negative impression of ASTCs. Other traducers of the system, such as Jin and Sun (2021), in a quantitative questionnaire of 300 participants, J. Liu (2022) conducting a literature review, and T. Liu (2022), through qualitative interviews, cite not the methods which have placed China at the top of league tables in recent years, such as the OECD PISA (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2018) but the intensity and workload experienced through high volumes of homework and continuous testing.

In terms of empirical data, only two papers state the use of primary sources: Liang et al. (2022), who conducted interviews with 20 people engaged in the teaching profession (p. 28), and a study that is unusual in that it supports ASTCs, unlike the majority of its peers. Besides these two documents, all other Chinese-language texts selected for this review did not state any evidential data. On the contrary, the documents offer more supportive opinions, advice, and ideological proclamations in favour of the DRP, rather than critical research and prioritise student welfare over expected support for the state. Most of the documents adopt a consistent tone, presenting their perspectives through the framework of national values and offering advice and recommendations to support and advance the DRP.

Many documents discuss excessive homework and ASTC classes, directly criticising state education. For example, T. Liu (2022), reviewing a series of historical burden-reducing policies, suggests teachers should strictly implement the curriculum, improve pedagogical practices, and assign responsible quantities of homework (p. 238), while Yang (2021), using undeclared methodology and providing a narrative style opinion piece, claims that through improving homework practices, teachers will "improve themselves and achieve professional development" ["改进作业的过程也是教师提升自我、实现专业发展的过程"] (p. 9). Similarly, Jin and Sun (2022), who employed quantitative methods to survey parents about their private tuition arrangements, state that the issues faced by students are created by excessive homework (p. 772) and "education mania in East Asia" (p. 775). Thus, the literature indicates an understanding that issues stem from state education; however, the root cause, as mentioned in teaching practices in both state and private education, is not the systems that shape, lead, constrain, and employ them. The authors may be writing from an emic perspective of those who have been through the system, which could result in a lack of objective perspective or insight into its benefits, particularly as support for the system is inculcated via teaching as a matter of law, as stipulated in the "Teachers Law of the People's Republic of China", Articles 1, 4, 8, 19 & 22 (Ministry of Education of the

People's Republic of China, 1993), and the "Law of the People's Republic of China on Protection of Minors" (National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 2020) which states "The State, society, schools and families shall conduct education to minors in ideals, morality, science, culture, rule of law, national security, health, hard-working spirit, as well as in patriotism, collectivism and socialism with Chinese characteristic" (Appendix 4, Article 5), or could be seen as a valuable insight into the sentiment of the primary group concentrated on by the policy, the students.

Regardless of motivation or subjectivity, the pro-DRP literature, represented by authors such as Li and Lin (2022), who used the theory of human nature hypothesis to analyse "the internal incentives of the variation training behaviour of teaching and training institutions" (p. 73), and Yin and Lai (2021), who conducted a case analysis of policies issued by the Beijing Municipal Government (p. 1530), applaud the government's efforts to reduce the burdens on China's students.

Domestic Chinese Authors – Anti-DRP

Eleven documents expressed an anti-DRP stance. The literature expressing an anti-DRP stance contained one document from a joint Sino-British collaboration, three documents from the USA and the remainder in China, all but two of which have Chinese authors; however the anti-DRP literature from domestic authors takes a broader view of the policy focusing on, for example, the consequences that may arise from a lack of support for its implementation. For example, in research closely aligned with mine, Yue et al. (2023) note that the occupational anxiety of teachers caused by the DRP has not been thoroughly investigated (p. 1). They adopted a grounded theory framework to conduct interviews with 15 in-service state teachers, which were then analysed using open, axial, and selective coding to explore occupational anxiety regarding students' learning effectiveness and multiple role conflicts (p. 12) caused by

the DRP. They concluded that without multi-stakeholder support, the DRP would not be successful.

Liu et al. (2022) analysed data from 69 cities, measuring monthly topic-related internet searches to gauge public interest in and awareness of the DRP (p. 10). They raise the question of whether wealthier students will continue to excel in state education, while lower-income students risk falling behind (p. 4), creating a more pronounced wealth disparity. They employed a quantitative, observational, secondary data analysis methodology through web crawling to extract search volumes, sales, inquiries, and user information from online platforms. One of the goals of the DRP was to alleviate the financial burden on families (Appendix 1, Sections 3:12, 4:15) who were spending a large percentage of their income on ASTCs (see 2.1.3 Current Context: China's Education in the 21st Century - Shadow Education). By creating an even larger divide between affluent and disadvantaged families who cannot afford the same quantity or level of additional tuition, the literature suggests that doubt would be cast over the policy's implementation and its broader goals, which are examined below (3.2.2).

Analysing the Chinese mainland literature, the anti-DRP authors' viewpoint on the policy and its aftermath is commonly from the ASTC capital perspective, unlike the pro-DRP authors, whose viewpoint is primarily from the state education and student perspectives. Yin and Lai (2021), in a case study of the reaction to the DRP by one of the largest ASTC companies, New Oriental Education, discuss how basic education needs to evolve from competitive exam-centred pedagogy. They suggest that the existing curriculum conflicts with the objectives of the DRP, aiming to reach "the ultimate goal of quality education that our country has always wanted to achieve" (p. 1532). Jin and Sun (2021) reiterate this by stating, "The education system is the real cause to fuel education mania" (p. 773) and fuse together pedagogical and parental influences on student welfare. This perspective is reiterated by Zhang and Chen (2022, p. 1070) and Yuan (2022, p. 758), who reference the enormous capital and market size

of ASTCs, which hold responsibility for student welfare. Zhan (2022) discusses the negative impact of the DRP on China's education technology companies, arguing that, to benefit students caught in the competitive system, it should ultimately lead to more capital being diverted to vocational and quality education (p. 17).

Overseas Chinese Authors - Pro-DRP

Overseas Chinese authors tend to criticise the teachers and parents without directly criticising the education system. J. Yan (2022) presented purported opinions of overseas authors. However, it does not provide any methodological details regarding data collection or analysis, and concludes that they support the DRP, with caveats, as a means to address student welfare. The paper examines three of the stakeholder groups central to this research and is written largely from the student's perspective. J. Yan (2022) portrays Chinese students' mental health as being in crisis, citing a regional study that found over a third displayed psychological issues. She attributes these problems partly to outdated teaching and parenting approaches, urging a collective effort among schools, teachers, parents, and students to fulfil the aims of DRP. Although she acknowledges issues like parental anxiety due to unresolved educational competition, her overall stance supports the DRP as a necessary corrective to systemic failings. As no methodological information is given, the article may only reflect personal opinion. Similarly, Chen (2022) highlights teachers as primary sources of student stress, arguing that the DRP improves education by shifting focus from teacher performance to greater student engagement.

Liu and Bray (2022) argue that the education system has evolved into an entity that makes supporting student welfare difficult. Using mixed-methods survey and interview data from a sample of 7485 students and follow-up interviews with parents over two

years, concur that throughout the nine years of compulsory schooling, intensive teaching of knowledge, which students are expected to passively absorb through rote learning, memorisation, focused repetition, and practice furnishes each one with the skills and information required to pass the major exams. However, the "contextual forces" (p. 893) attached to the value of education perpetuated by parents meant that established patterns are not easy to break, "even when the strong state decided to confront the strong market" (p. 894).

While the pro-DRP literature from the Chinese diaspora echoes that of the domestic literature in endorsing the motivations to alleviate student burdens and prioritise children's welfare at the forefront of policy action, it also does not critically analyse any extraneous contextual drivers in depth. Zhang's (2021) report for UNESCO, using empirical qualitative interviews, case studies and international "professional interactions" (p. 15), claims that "partnerships with research institutions such as universities and think tanks were strengthened for policy evaluation and refinement" (p. 61). This close alignment between academic institutions and government bodies may help to explain the scarcity of critical or more objective voices in the literature.

Overseas Chinese Authors - Anti-DRP

The anti-DRP literature from this group of overseas Chinese authors also takes a broader view of the policy via its impact. Pan (2022), who used semi-structured interviews with participants recruited through snowball sampling, and Weng (2022), who conducted semi-structured interviews and coding analysis of the transcripts, are among those who cite the collapse of the ASTC industry, along with related issues such as job losses, financial shocks in the stock market, and falling birth rates. These accounts also highlight the impact on those who rely on the education industry for their livelihoods, including after-school teachers and tutors, small business owners,

administrative staff, and shareholders. The authors convey a sense of sudden and ruthless change that has left many in financially precarious situations.

Pan (2022) argues that, despite financial challenges, the demand for auxiliary education is unlikely to diminish. They predict that a black market will emerge, creating further problems because underground teachers operating as independent traders will be able to charge higher fees. Pan further warns that this could exclude lower-income families or, more troublingly, push them further into overspending, and concludes that proposed solutions, such as the DRP, may achieve the opposite of their intended effect, instead to entrench inequality and reducing educational accessibility (paras. 9-10).

Pan's (2022) article, "Double Reduction: China's Flawed Attempt at Mitigating its Academic Competition and Costs," cites falling birth rates and what she describes as government distrust of corporations, including big tech and private education, as likely motivations behind the policy (p. 2). Pan also discusses the DRP's failure to address entrenched academic competition (p. 3), which she argues results in ongoing pressures for students. She goes on to critically question the Chinese government's claim that the DRP was intended to improve student well-being, contending that it may, in fact, worsen inequality and limit access to education.

Liu and Bray (2022) similarly point to deep-rooted cultural pressures within Chinese families to seek social advantage through education, noting that although the DRP aimed to reduce academic burdens, many parents perceived it as a threat to their children's prospects and resisted accordingly, ultimately reinforcing student stress. Weng (2022) diverges from the dominant anti-ASTC mainland narrative, which is largely anti-ASTC, by supporting ASTCs. This suggests that many now prioritise holistic student development over purely academic outcomes. This challenges the usual portrayal of ASTCs as a major cause of stress and highlights how critiques from overseas Chinese authors tend to be less personalised and more analytical, aligning with the broader body of anti-DRP literature.

In analysing the available academic texts by Chinese authors in China that describe the implementation of the DRP, the overriding impression is its positive repercussions for students, which implies the main goal of the policy - to alleviate the burden of excessive work on students - is welcomed. What the texts frequently do not analyse are any potential motivations beyond student welfare, such as increased nationalism, anti-Western bias, support for the Party, or national issues like family and moral education and greater control over capitalism. Of the literature analysed that displayed positive impressions of the policy, around 60% used secondary sources for data collection, while only 30% used primary sources. This reveals gaps in the research: few studies have been conducted by non-Chinese authors, there is limited primary source research, and, more importantly, a potential bias in the information presented, as the majority of studies have been written by existing or former participants in the system.

Thus, we observe a difference between the emic perspectives of Chinese authors and the etic view of overseas authors. The Chinese literature tends to highlight the burdens faced by students and frame the DRP as a positive step toward reducing those pressures. In contrast, overseas authors often emphasise the broader economic and structural impacts of the policy. An additional perspective is the anti-DRP literature, which considers the economic hardships, primarily a concern for adults. In contrast, the pro-DRP literature with themes of overbearing parents and teachers could be interpreted primarily as a concern for younger people. This highlights the concern for the welfare of students as a primary focal point for supporters of the policy, who appear to be (mostly recent) beneficiaries of it.

The predominantly positive stance throughout the literature places student welfare at its core, as demonstrated by frequent narratives from the student perspective (e.g., Bie, 2022; Q. Cheng, 2021; Jin & Sun, 2022; Kong, 2022; Z. Li et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022; Xu, 2021).

Further themes include pedagogy, market influences, and a coordinated effort to reinforce shared national values (e.g., Liu & Dong, 2022; Ma & Zheng, 2022; Yang & Chen, 2021; Yang et al., 2023; Z. Yu, 2022). What the anti-DRP literature provides is a window into a more critical questioning, beyond the official party lines, of what has brought us to the situation that required the implementation of the DRP.

In collating the pro- and anti-DRP standpoints, the policy emerges as sitting at the intersection of student welfare and quality education. Pro-DRP literature, which is more often produced by mainland Chinese authors, tends to frame the policy as a necessary intervention to reduce academic burdens and improve student well-being. Anti-DRP literature, more frequently found in overseas publications, is more likely to highlight systemic and structural issues such as entrenched competition, economic inequalities, and market disruption that the policy fails to address. Without tackling the competitive nature of the education system, there is a risk that the aim of improving student welfare will not be achieved.

Parental Aspect

The 33 documents that discussed parents were fairly evenly distributed between those that presented a critical stance (18) and those that presented a sympathetic stance (15). Documents were categorised based on their expressed stance toward the DRP, government policies, ASTCs, and state education, as identified through thematic coding of their arguments and tone. Eleven of the 18 critical documents also presented a pro-DRP stance, 15 a pro-government stance, 12 an anti-ASTC stance and five an anti-state-education stance. Fourteen of the sympathetic documents displayed a pro-DRP stance, ten a pro-government stance, 12 an anti-ASTC stance and two an anti-state education stance. These numbers suggest an overall more nationalistic stance from the authors discussing parental engagement. The strength of feeling conveyed in the

literature potentially betrays some of the authors' personal experiences, again raising questions about their impartiality, but illustrating an important element of the surrounding factors of the DRP.

The critical documents are often built around apparent personal experience and carry an experiential tone. In several cases, the language is highly charged and strongly critical of what is perceived as overbearing or irresponsible parental behaviour. For example, Jin and Sun (2022) portray many parents as fundamentally unfit for the parental role, using accusatory phrasing to underline their point. Cheng (2021), drawing on an unstated methodology, describes parents as neglecting involvement in their children's lives due to work commitments, while Yue et al. (2023), employing a grounded theory approach with in-depth interviews of 45 in-service primary and junior high school teachers, depict parents as obsessively focused on comparative performance, caring more about their children surpassing peers than achieving genuine learning. Such rhetoric foregrounds parental disengagement or competitiveness as significant drivers of student stress within the DRP context.

These strong opinions highlight a significant element in the DRP landscape, which is addressed in 26 documents (e.g., Overseas: Liu & Bray, 2022; Weng, 2022; Xue & Tan, 2022. Mainland, English language: Jin & Sun, 2022; Z. Yu, 2022; Yu & Zhang, 2022; Zhang, 2022; Zhong, 2023. Mainland, Chinese language: Y. Li, 2021a; Ma & Zheng, 2022; Zhou & Qi, 2022; X. Zhou, 2021). A recurring theme across these works is the anxiety felt by parents, which translates into increased pressure on students and has, since the introduction of the DRP, driven many families to seek private or underground after-school tuition. Y. Li (2021), using qualitative interviews, reports first-hand accounts of ASTCs continuing to operate despite the policy restrictions (p. 23). Jin and Sun (2021) give examples of parents sourcing one-on-one tutors (p. 775). Li and Lin (2022), using the theory of the human nature hypothesis, which posits that policies must account for diverse human behaviours, such as economic (selfish), social (fairness) or cultural (values) (p. 73), analyse ASTC behaviour as a barrier to DRP

success, describing how previously academic ASTCs exploit loopholes and rebrand as alternative service providers (p. 75), possibly highlighting an economic motivation, appealing to cultural motivations of customers. X. Zhou (2021) adds that advertisements for live-in "domestic workers" at unusually high salaries have become common, indicating covert forms of tutoring.

Taken together, these studies agree that the DRP is undermined by covert parental engagement in students' extracurricular study, that wealth disparities are being exacerbated, and that student burdens are therefore not being alleviated. These examples reveal the stress experienced by families and highlight the friction between the triumvirate of parent, teacher, and student, whereby each group are motivated by different factors - parents by family success, teachers by professional and state obligations, and students by workload. Chen et al. (2022), using a quantitative sampling questionnaire of 3,298 participants, report widespread parental anxiety linked to the desire for children to succeed in a competitive system. Kang et al. (2022) and Xu (2021), writing from the perspective of Marxist educational theory, identify this same pattern of anxiety, tracing it to the entrenched belief in high exam scores as the traditional route to success. J. Liu (2022) and T. Liu (2022) argue that parents should receive targeted education on how to support their children more effectively, advocating for the "updating of parenting concepts" (p. 623) and the creation of harmonious, stress-free home environments that extend beyond simple instructions to complete homework.

Critical voices among overseas Chinese authors often convey a tone of personal experience. For example, Song (2022), in a qualitative review of Chinese education policy, references an unexplained study and argues that some parents undervalue education, prioritising leisure over homework supervision and placing sole responsibility for learning on teachers. This perspective, while critical, lacks methodological transparency, blurring the line between personal opinion and research.

J. Yan (2022) continues the discussion seen in the mainland literature of students being under pressure from their families, while Weng (2022) and Yao (2022), through literature reviews, both discuss the heavy involvement of parents in their child's education, revealing parental anxiety as a potentially significant factor beyond state education in student burdens. Zhang's (2021) Global Education Monitoring Report for UNESCO discusses how some parents are willing to infringe upon regulations to allow their children to study late into the evening. While many berate the pressure applied from within the home, little is written on what factors contribute to this trend, whether from being raised as the generation of parents educated during the Máo years, or the first post-Máo generation, for whom education still had an element of exclusivity as the key to survival and success in a competitive environment. A consensus that parents are responsible for a significant portion of the burdens faced by students is evident from the texts, highlighting the difficulty in ensuring the success of education reforms when cultural mindset is a major factor in the underlying problem.

In contrast to pro-government perspectives, sympathetic studies shift attention to the challenges faced by parents, with Tan et al. (2021), and Liu et al. (2022), using qualitative online search engine data to measure public opinion toward the DRP, reflecting a range of opinions that acknowledge the unavoidably competitive environment in which parents are raising their children. Such competition fosters characteristics common among the parents of overburdened Chinese students, including anxiety-driven pressure (p. 352). The secondary analysis, therefore, indicates that views are mostly sympathetic.

Using quantitative methods, Liu et al. (2022) explored public understanding of the DRP through an internet keyword analysis conducted over nineteen months, during which they reported a 15.3% increase in references to one-on-one tutoring (p. 16), suggesting substantial growth in private tutoring; and Yu et al. (2022) using variable data collection and analysis of questionnaires from 271 parents of students of primary and secondary schools, which were analysed for off-campus training participation,

build on this by connecting a decline in mental health for some parents. In total, 49 documents alluded to parental anxiety and mental health issues associated with educational pressure, without explicitly stating the facts. Mental health remains a relatively taboo subject in China and is more commonly alluded to in terms of pressure, physical symptoms and stometisation, or the notion of "face" (Chen et al., 2025; Huang et al., 2019). Yin and Lai (2021) examine the associated costs and wealth disparities in the education system, thereby amplifying the pressures felt by parents (p. 1532) in China and other countries. Yu et al. (2022) illustrate how the uneven preference for white-collar jobs over skilled labour jobs, driven by over-investment in academic skills to the detriment of practical skills in schools has led to an oversaturation both in the job market and in the competition for quality schools (p. 3), again driven by parents, who commonly purchase property within desired districts for their children to be eligible to attend desirable schools (Xu & Wu, 2022, p. 435; Zhou, 2023, p. 116).

Following the introduction of an additional law, the "Family Education Law" (家庭教育促进法) (National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 2021), to support the DRP reforms, stating that "The law bans parents from placing an excessive academic burden on their children, stating the guardians of minors should appropriately organise children's time for study, rest, recreation and physical exercise" (Ministry of Education, 2021). Simultaneously, there are acknowledgements that the exam-driven system poses a significant challenge; however, the two arguments do not appear to be correlated in discussions, revealing a schism between critics of the system and the silent support of its individual components. In agreement with their mainland counterparts, the discussion among overseas authors positions parents as a key factor in student burdens. A gap is identified as with much of the Chinese-language literature on the DRP, Liu and Dong (2022) present a qualitative policy analysis rather than original empirical findings, elaborating on the taboo topic of mental health, which is described as insidiously spreading from schools, to students, to parents, and into society, fuelling the common refrain "fear of losing at the starting line" (e.g., Liu & Bray,

2022). These authors may present a sympathetic view toward sometimes excessive parental engagement, but do not delve deeply into the emerging argument that parents could be accused of being the main drivers of student burdens, through a) pressure to succeed in school and b) driving the demand for ASTCs. Collectively, the texts discussing parental engagement fail to delve deeply enough to consider the parents' combination of ambition and being captives of the competitive system as a root cause, despite some alluding to this in their analyses.

Interpreting the literature, it is evident that parental anxiety is identified as one of the primary issues addressed by the DRP, within broader and more complex contexts, reflecting a pragmatic view of the problems that led to the policy's introduction. By presenting a more objective interpretation of parental engagement in relation to the DRP, the sympathetic literature collectively serves as a catalyst for broader considerations of the DRP, both as an independent policy and as part of a larger network of reforms addressing various social issues in China. Viewing these texts together clarifies one of the DRP's covert intentions: to refocus families on spending quality time together rather than on capital-driven after-school activities, thereby promoting moral and idealistic social goals.

Across the literature, the prevailing tone is predominantly positive, with student welfare positioned at the centre and often presented from the student's perspective (e.g., Bie, 2022; Q. Cheng, 2021; Jin & Sun, 2022; Kong, 2022; Z. Li et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022; Xu, 2021). Surrounding themes include pedagogy, market influences, and the promotion of shared national values (e.g., Liu & Dong, 2022; Ma & Zheng, 2022; Yang & Chen, 2021; Yang et al., 2023; Z. Yu, 2022). This pro-DRP stance, largely from Chinese authors, reflects an emic perspective rooted in lived experience within the education system and emphasises the reduction of student burdens. In contrast, anti-DRP literature, more commonly found among overseas authors, adopts an etic viewpoint that focuses on broader economic and systemic consequences, such as market

disruption, inequality, and the persistence of competitive pressures. Together, these contrasting perspectives reveal a tension between immediate student-focused benefits and broader structural challenges that the policy may leave unresolved. What the anti-DRP literature provides is a window into a more critical questioning beyond the official party lines, of what has brought us to the situation that required the implementation of the DRP.

3.2.3 Political Considerations

The entity responsible for the context being discussed is the Chinese Government, led by its Chairman, who ultimately defines the moral and practical directions of the country. As an irreligious country, some argue that Communism fulfils the role through "prescribed universal belief in one vision" (McFarland, 1998; Niebuhr, 1931) and relies on support for success. The 'proletariat religion' is instilled in young people from a young age through official channels, such as education, and support for the party and the system is strong, with reportedly 95% of Chinese citizens professing satisfaction with the Beijing government (Mitter & Johnson, 2021). Having lived in China myself since 2013, I have personally witnessed improved living conditions and increased nationalism. Although it is challenging to ascertain internal beliefs, Chinese citizens generally express positive views on the country's government and its policies, as noted by both domestic and non-Chinese academics (Cunningham et al., 2020; Roberts, 2021). The combination of genuine support, lifelong inculcation, and a well-documented suppression of criticism from the public (The Congressional-Executive Commission on China, n.d.) provides the lens through which to view and analyse the selected literature on the DRP. As discussed, many of the authors who support the DRP also directly or indirectly align with a pro-government stance. The potential biases, be they intentional or not, have been considered, as have the anti-government texts.

Government Support and Alignment in the Literature

Pro-government literature tends to express support for the DRP while deflecting attention away from the shortcomings of the state education system, directing criticism instead toward parents, teachers, or ASTCs. This aligns with broader cultural norms in China, where sensitive issues are often addressed indirectly to preserve harmony and avoid open confrontation with authority. In this case, criticism is deflected onto parents and teachers, while the education system itself remains largely untouched.

Kong (2022), and Xue and Li (2022), in their qualitative text analysis of the DRP and reference to a survey without any identifying information, typify how support for the government is expressed by promotive language. Examples include "solving/alleviating problems," "cooperation," and "strengthen moral (161 uses of the word 'moral') education." Similarly, Q. Cheng (2021) utilises common phrases such as "promote an all-round development" and "to implement the educational policy of the party and the state". Overt support by Li and Lin (2022) is shown with language consistent with official frameworks, such as: "Guided by the thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era, the DRP is the most powerful evidence that it represents the interests of the people of all ethnic groups in the country" (p. 74). In total, twenty-one of the pro-government texts simultaneously support the DRP, 38 are anti-ASTC, and 14 are critical of parents. The positivity toward the government is felt throughout the selected texts and unmistakably displays support for the DRP and the apparent overdue alleviation of burdens on Chinese students.

The generally positive views on the country's government are evident in the promotional language deployed in academic papers by Chinese authors. Song (2022) claims that "the Chinese government not only simply reduces after-school classes but also emphasises the importance of education at school" (p. 800). Support is also demonstrated by J. Yan (2022), who lauds the potential benefits and successes of the

scheme, sometimes without empirical evidence. Further support is provided by Yu (2022), who discusses the DRP by evaluating the policy through a combination of official documents and semi-structured interviews. They illustrate how the DRP is part of a decades-old mission, but a clear gap exists in current research, which, according to Yu, mainly focuses on "educational equity... financial aspects... pedagogy of tutoring..." but less English research focuses on education policy (p. 17). Their paper, which explores shadow education policy, aligns with my research and poses the same question of implications from a stakeholder viewpoint. While sharing similar interests, their focus on shadow education leads to a critical stance (pp. 32-33), examining contextual factors such as the one-child policy, which concentrates parental investment, middle-class aspirations for advantage (p. 32), and the financial burden on lower-income families (p. 33). However, the paper overlooks how parents both sustain and are shaped by the system that fuels their anxiety. Its detailed account of China's education policy history ultimately supports government efforts to refine the educational ecosystem (p. 57). A report by the Ministry of Education is cited, stating that "over 90 % of students indicated that the learning burden was reduced" (p. 62), but it is not clearly referenced, making verification difficult. Despite the overall positivity, the author also acknowledges, in line with the wider literature, that the exam system remains unchanged (p. 87) and therefore poses a threat to the success of the policy. This alludes to several political considerations, including wealth inequality, birth rates, and the emergence of new classes, which create social disparity, and hints at issues within the education system, while maintaining a supportive tone also seen in academic literature produced within China.

Critical Voices and Their Limitations

Critical voices challenging government policy are notably scarce. One exception is Zhang and Chen (2022), who critically compare Japanese and Chinese policies using a

qualitative framework and an unspecified survey. They critique the ban on ASTCs instead of regulating them, highlight increased educational inequality based on wealth, and point out flaws in policy implementation and management (p. 1069). While acknowledging the shadow education industry's growth and associated anxiety, they also reveal issues like state teachers lowering classroom quality to drive students to private tutoring, tied to low salaries. They conclude that shadow education remains China's biggest educational problem and that, despite some policy relief, suggest that the government's performance falls short of expectations and lags behind that of Japan. This paper stands out for its direct critique of governance, but shares with others a lack of methodological clarity, which is further discussed in Section 3.3.

Anti-government sentiment is primarily found beyond academic texts in news and media reports, as opposed to journal articles, and is predominantly published outside of China. The alternative and opposing media views are discussed separately in section 3.2.5.

Centralising State Education

Central to the pro-government positioning evident in the literature is the re-centring of state education over the private sector. Of the 70 documents analysed, 48 discussed or alluded to state education. Nineteen expressed an anti-state education stance, while 29 expressed a pro-state education stance. Twenty-seven of these also held a pro-DRP stance, while two held an anti-ASTC or unspecified stance. Similar profiles populate these texts - Chinese researchers in China are the majority (36).

The first sections of the DRP address the need to improve state education and reduce the amount of homework set (Appendix 1, Sections 3-8). Therefore, it is a matter of record that state education is in need of reform, with many people spending a

significant amount of time at school (see 2.3.1 Genesis and Content), the quality of that time is a concern, which is one of the main focuses of the DRP and is addressed in the academic literature.

Pro-state education documents often portray the system as one that should be supported for the collective good. Zhang et al. (2022) use quantitative methods and demographic analysis to highlight the benefits of the DRP, including improved quality, equitable access, and diversified education and training within a fairer public system. Similarly, Guo (2022), Li et al. (2022), Weng (2022), and Yuan (2022) argue that schools, rather than ASTCs, should be the primary institutions delivering education. The shift of ASTC classes to after-school services within state schools also receives support. Yao (2022) advocates this transition, viewing schools not merely as places for academic learning but as spaces for personal development where students can build character and form sound values. This perspective frames ASTCs as not only financially burdensome but also morally and philosophically detrimental. Q. Cheng (2021) and Guo (2022) are among those presenting a typical pro-state education standpoint in the English language literature, criticising ASTCs, stating that they are responsible for disrupting students' development by providing education that conflicts with state education, engaging in illegal or immoral behaviours, adding to the workload, and causing additional stress.

A recurring theme in the literature is the issue of learning English in state education, with Guo (2022) presenting an argument seen in many papers that students have spent years learning English but have low to no proficiency in the language, which "prove[s] that blindly using high-intensity exercise training has little effect on some students" (p. 149), and instead has a negative impact. This line of argument neatly highlights the discrepant stance by avoiding criticism of the ineffective state education that is primarily responsible for their learning, while turning the spotlight onto the private market that the government is targeting. Z. Liu (2022) stresses, through qualitative interviews, the goal of recentring education from ASTCs back to state schools (p. 3035),

further demonstrating that state education has acknowledged flaws that culminated in the situation leading to the DRP. The issue cited by the majority of authors is one of excessive and "utilitarian" (a term commonly deployed meaning mechanical and serving no purpose other than to pass exams) homework, but what emerges from the papers that are clearly in favour of compulsory education is that the problems assigned to ASTCs seem to originate in state schools, highlighting an issue within the literature that is supportive of state education - that the authors may be displaying a lack of objectivity through either personal (intentional or otherwise) bias, or through a potential prerequisite to present a supportive argument in favour of the DRP. As discussed in 1.2.1 and 2.1.3, there has been a long-standing relationship between state schools and ASTCs, which has been mutually beneficial. The complexity of what education each offers, and which teachers are working in each (or both), may have caused an imbalance in the quality of each. Specifically, a seeming loss of quality in state education, as resources (family finances, teachers themselves, time spent on homework, etc.) are funnelled toward the more bespoke offering of private tuition. This is summarised by Z. Liu (2022), who describes the DRP as "the rectification of the chaos of out-of-school training" (p. 3034).

The Chinese literature demonstrates greater uniformity: of the 15 documents reviewed, 13 adopt a pro-state education stance. This consistency is accompanied by a recurring pattern of deflection, with criticism directed at ASTCs rather than addressing the issues in state education directly. Ma and Zheng (2022) in their report for the Education Development Research Centre, discuss the imbalance caused by ASTCs, weakening the "education ecology" ("最终达到重塑基础教育良好生态") (p. 79), while simultaneously admitting that "the heavy burden of coursework is not new" ("说明课业负担重不是新问题") (p. 80), pointing to the repeated contradiction of assigning blame for problems, which according to Liu and Dong (2022) date from 1955 with the issue of the first "burden reduction order" and another by Máo in 1964 ("1955年，教育部发布中华人民共和国第一个“减负令”《关于减轻中小学生学习过重负担的指

示》。1964年，毛泽东同志就北京某中学校长关于减轻学生负担的信件作出") (p. 91), on the recent proliferation of the education industry.

Among the 18 documents that have been categorised as anti-state education, there are no direct criticisms of the state education, but concentrate more on the culture surrounding the competitive nature of the funnelled focus on the journey to the ultimate exam - the *gāokǎo* - which according to Ergenc (2019), "has seen the entire secondary education system redesigned to focus solely on preparing for the university entrance exam" (para. 2). Chen et al. (2022), Li, Liu, et al. (2022) through qualitative literature analysis, Lin (2021) through qualitative interviews, and Qu (2022) through quantitative Bibliometric Analysis all discuss the problematic nature of exam-oriented education.

Kong (2022), Li, Li, et al. (2022) and Li & Lin (2022) all refer to a commonly recurring term, "utilitarian" to describe state education which appears to prioritise exam performance and short-term academic results. Yu et al. (2022) expand on this critique, labelling the system's escalating competition and diminishing returns as "involution" (p. 1). This term, borrowed from anthropology, refers to a situation where increased effort and resources such as excessive homework, additional tutoring, and exam-driven learning led to stagnant or declining outcomes rather than increased capabilities. In a literature review on involution in education and related policies, C. Li (2021) notes in a review of educational involution, the concept became widely discussed in 2020 (p. 1884), particularly leading up to the introduction of the DRP. The critique of this rigid, high-pressure system where students and parents invest more time and money into education without proportional gains, is a frequent theme in DRP-related literature and the most prominent criticism of China's state education model.

The Chinese-language literature on the DRP is marked by overt political alignment and a tendency to frame education in moral or nationalistic terms rather than through empirical analysis. Of the 15 documents reviewed, 13 were supportive of state

education and reflected the political considerations embedded in the DRP. Zhou and Qi (2022) typify this approach, displaying both nationalistic support and a rejection of the education industry without stating either explicitly, through quoting a speech by Xi Jìnpíng that emphasises returning education to state schools and its original intention of "building morality and cultivating people" ("双减" 政策围绕立德树人根本任务, 树立健康第一的教育理念, 让义务教育回归立德树人的初心") (p. 69). The vague institutional register is also evident, for example, in Yang and Chen (2021) who describe the DRP as breaking with "one-sided education and one-sided development" and requiring a "comprehensive education" that cultivates "harmonious and unified people" (p. 36). Similar formulations appear elsewhere, such as the claim that the policy's purpose is to "implement the fundamental task of cultivating virtue and promoting students' all-round development and healthy growth" (p. 2). Coupled with the absence of explicit research methodologies, such formulations render this body of literature opaque, functioning more as value-based checklists than as objective considerations of the DRP.

Like their mainland counterparts, Chinese overseas authors, such as Song (2022) and Yao (2022), expressed positive views toward the government's role in education in a literature review of nine articles on the DRP's impact on quality-oriented education (QOE). Song (2022) argued that parents' lack of support for state education teachers hinders the DRP's success, emphasising that under government guidance, education is a shared responsibility between parents and schools. Zhang (2021) agreed, noting that government actions, such as prohibiting state teachers from tutoring in 2015, aimed to delegitimise non-state tutoring and restore authority to state schools. These policies, culminating in the DRP, reflect the national government's strong commitment to regulating education and reinforcing the central role of state schools.

Discrediting ASTCs as Political Strategy

The systematic criticism of ASTCs across the literature reveals a coordinated political narrative that serves to legitimise the DRP. The available literature was analysed for information and opinions on ASTCs and the DRP. Four of the 70 documents explicitly expressed pro-ASTC opinions, while 39 expressed anti-ASTC opinions. Thirty-six anti-ASTC authors are Chinese; the remaining were unknown but have common Chinese names. The documents mainly originated from China, with one each from the UK, the USA, and Thailand and two from Hong Kong. Of the four documents expressing pro-ASTC views, one author was British and four were Chinese (co-authored). This again illustrates a lack of diversity in the available literature.

The majority opinion, determined by analysing the literature and collating explicit statements on ASTCs, was opposed to shadow education. Additionally, among the documents asserting an anti-ASTC stance were further unsubstantiated accusations, which invite us to question the credibility of the available literature.

Economic and Moral Criticisms

The literature favouring the DRP was commonly coupled with anti-ASTC views, with 35 documents correlating the two views, which might be expected as the policy specifically stated a reduction in students' work by limiting homework and after-school tuition. The majority of authors supporting an anti-ASTC view are Chinese. Guo (2022) condemns the "unhealthy customs" associated with ASTCs, which also disrupt the "stable development" provided by schools (p. 149), while promoting a "brilliant future under the impact of the double reduction policy" (p. 151). T. Liu (2022) echoes many by exalting the "return" to the original essence of education, achieved through the DRP, which acts as a "correction on the road of education development" (p. 239).

Mainland authors, such as Yu et al. (2022), accuse ASTCs of operating criminally through "off-campus training institutions making off with the money" (p. 2). Xue and Li (2022) continue with equally damning accusations of promoting questionable morals with the need to "prevent vulgar, illegal, piracy and infringement of training content, to create a clean atmosphere" (p. 2), while Yu (2022) concludes that the presence of ASTCs is "impact[ing] the moral education goal" (p. 33), conflicting with cultural and societal aspirations. These claims, all of which are from published articles, lack supporting evidence and appear to reflect the authors' opinions.

Among Chinese language literature, Xie (2021), using a case study to analyse classroom discourse of teachers to identify evidence of burden-inducing language for "profit-making purposes", more explicitly berates ASTCs with accusations of "anxiety trafficking" ("教育焦虑现象在很大程度上与校外培训机构的焦虑贩卖有关") (p. 13). Damning indictments of advance teaching prior to inspections (p. 15) and teachers "immorally" commercialising education by promoting business (p. 14), however these arguments are not balanced with activities in state schools from which some ASTC teachers originate, as previously discussed (see 2.1.3), thus presenting a biased argument in favour of state education and the DRP. Additionally, there is a sense that the researcher has approached the study with a clear preconceived opinion (ASTC teachers are "selling anxiety" (p. 13)), which they have attempted to support by building a theory and then collecting evidence to support it, which differs from the aims of this research which uses Constructivist Grounded Theory to generate a theory and reveal the particulars from the participants' viewpoint.

Quality and Disruption Claims

Fu et al. (2023), Kang et al. (2022), L. Li (2022), Li, Liu, et al. (2022), T. Liu (2022), Yang and Wang (2022), Wang, Luo, et al. (2022), Yu (2022), Yu and Zhang (2022), Yuan (2022), and Zhang and Chen (2022), are among those who cite ASTC classes as the major cause of excessive student workload, exhaustion, and depressive effects such as poor mental health. Yu and Zhang (2022), using the Chinese academic database CNKI to conduct a literature review, expand on the issue by raising concerns that shadow education is "detrimental to social development" and "prevents them from developing a sound personality", which results in "estrangement from their families" (p. 1587). They go on to cite Peng (2007), who suggests that "shadow education introduces social competition into children's lives at an early age and encourages them to view the world through a utilitarian lens, which runs counter to the principle of healthy child development" (p. 1587).

Jin and Sun (2021), L. Li (2022), Z. Liu (2022), Zhang (2022), Zhang and Chen (2022), using a comparative survey, all cite ASTC classes as disruptive to state education. Jin and Sun (2021) support this claim through quantitative questionnaires and data analysis, stating that students lose interest in the slower pace of state classes because they are taught at a more advanced pace in ASTCs (p. 772). Zhang (2022), who states that their "study seeks to document the difficulties encountered during the earliest stages of implementing the Double Reduction strategy" (p. 457) but does not specify how, goes further by stating, "after-school training programs should not be used as battlegrounds for examination-based education" (p. 459), which reflects the previous issue of not addressing the fact that state education is the original driver of examination-based education, not the ASTCs that evolved much later, as discussed in the both the Introduction and Context chapters.

Another frequent claim, including those by Kong (2022), Yin and Lai (2021), and Zhang (2022), which document the early-stage DRP implementation and offer recommendations, is that ASTCs employ poorly qualified teachers. Kong (2022), who employs multi-source theory, which analyses issues from several standpoints (in this case, problem origin, policy origin, and political origin, p. 29), to analyse the DRP, states that "students are employed... enterprises are worried that they cannot recruit suitable talents" (p. 31). Zhang (2022) alleges "low-quality tutoring" (p. 56), while Yin and Lai (2021), through a case study of a well-known ASTC, discuss both "school teachers giving extra lessons" (p. 1531) while considering the low-quality of ASTCs and "doubt whether their abilities are as good" (p. 1532), which is contradictory, as the assumption that state teachers are better than ASTC teachers is prevalent. However, here they are demonstrating how they are sometimes the same.

Counter-Perspectives and Balanced Views

Among Chinese authors overseas, Zhang (2019) counters criticisms by noting that most sizable ASTCs were closely monitored by the Ministry of Education and complied with provincial and national regulations (p. 33). Between both the critical and supportive presentations, the overriding theme among the anti-ASTC literature is that the industry is largely to blame for the excessive burdens on students, family finances and the smooth operation of state education.

In her conceptual article, S. Wu (2021) conducts a comparative study of educational policies in Korea, the United States, and China, and considers how the ASTC industry became so ingrained, acknowledging that its scale had reached a point deemed beyond control (p. 2686). She takes a pragmatic stance by describing how parents drive the industry with their own aspirations for their children, and that ASTCs provide broader

employment opportunities (p. 2688). She also highlights the falling birth rate, partly attributed to the cost of raising children, and the weaknesses in state education that prompted families to seek out ASTC support (pp. 2692-3). Her sympathetic view toward ASTCs and the decisive action taken by the government provide a balanced and nuanced perspective on the situation, which is lacking in the majority of anti-ASTC documents. Similarly, Liu and Bray (2022) discuss the circumstances that led to the proliferation of academic-based ASTCs, including initial government support (p. 879). Citing the emergence of neoliberal tendencies in China, they also suggest that, following the one-child policy, families were accustomed to devoting all their resources to a single child, making it inevitable to pressure them to perform at the highest educational level (p. 881). They suggest the combined forces of previous policies, deficiencies in state education, and the growth of capitalism following the Reform and Opening Up period provided the perfect conditions for the ASTC industry to flourish, with the blessing of both the public and the state.

What appears to be a near-blanket condemnation of ASTCs also highlights the collective desire to "return" education to its original home within the state system, along with the restoration of perceived moral and social influence. Control of state education, therefore, is inseparable from the decimation of the ASTC industry.

Beyond immediate educational concerns, the literature reveals broader political objectives of the DRP related to demographic and economic challenges facing the Chinese government.

Birth Rates

It appears to be widely accepted that the government is attempting to create a more favourable environment by lowering the cost of education and encouraging families to have more children. This is discussed within the ten documents (Overseas - Chen et al., 2022; Liu & Bray, 2022; Pan, 2022; S. Wu, 2021; Yan, 2022; Yu 2022; Zhong, 2023. Mainland - Li et al., 2022; Yang & Chen, 2021; Yuan, 2022) that included the falling birth rate in their assessments of the DRP and the almost simultaneous introduction of the "Three-Child Policy" in May 2021 (Tatum, 2021).

The most direct reference comes from Yuan (2022), who argues that "education fever" is a significant obstacle to increased fertility intentions (p. 757). Through qualitative interviews, she deduces that there are three main societal anxieties - housing, healthcare, and education - which the DRP addresses indirectly. By levelling and reducing the cost of education, housing, which is made desirable by proximity to good schools, becomes more affordable, which consequently releases strain on family expenses, making the prospect of additional children more appealing, thus progressing toward the successful implementation of the three-child policy (p. 758). Li, Li, et al. (2022) support this theory by stating that upon China's birth rate dropping to an all-time low of 1.3, the three-child policy was introduced, with the apparent "need to implement supporting measures", one of which is a reduction in education costs, introduced through "complementary" policies (p. 714). T. Liu (2022) characterised the declining birth rate as "a wake-up call for the nation," which swiftly resulted in measures to reduce the cost of raising children (p. 242). Yang and Chen (2021), again with no stated methods or discernible empirical data, equate birth rates with the ASTC industry, and claim it has "become a stubborn disease restricting the sustainable development of my country's economy and society" ("成为制约我国经济社会健康可持续发展的顽疾") (p. 39).

The literature shows that, even beyond the items within the DRP, the public appears to accept that broader social matters are being addressed through the policy, none larger than fertility rates and the future of China.

Wealth Disparity

According to the literature, which cites 38 documents referring to wealth disparity, an apparent unintended consequence of implementing the DRP is a more pronounced imbalance between higher- and lower-income families. In their goal to eliminate excessive family spending by imposing restrictive regulations on ASTCs, demand for tuition was not stemmed, and it drove the industry underground, creating an environment in which private tuition could flourish at unregulated prices. This section considers two viewpoints that emerged from the literature; one is the anxiety caused to parents by the pressure to invest in their children to avoid "losing at the starting line" (Liu & Bray, 2022, p. 886). The second is the anxiety caused by parents, who potentially reveal themselves to be one of the main drivers of educational pressure.

Forty-eight documents included parental anxiety caused by pressure as an element of importance in relation to the DRP. T. Liu (2022) encapsulates the national sentiment by stating that "most families in China suffer from 'education anxiety'" (p. 239), reinforced by Chen et al. (2022) in their paper "Parents Educational Anxiety Under the 'Double Reduction' Policy Based on the Family and Students' Personal Factors", which claims that of three countries researched, Chinese parents had the highest levels of anxiety at 86.52% (p. 2070). Zhang and Chen (2022) expand on this figure by describing how 68% of parents have anxiety while only 6% do not (p. 1071).

Twenty-five documents included anxiety caused by parental pressure as an element of importance in relation to the DRP; however, it was only through collating the

literature that parents as a driver of pressure emerged as a possible theory. As seen, in implementing the DRP, the academic education industry collapsed, leaving a vacuum without addressing the root cause of exam-driven competition, which inevitably led to parents seeking out alternative solutions in the form of private tuition, circumventing the new rules, leading to the possibility that the DRP will not succeed in addressing the issue of social inequality. Zhou and Qi (2022) describe how parents immediately sought private tutoring for academic subjects, such as English, driving the industry underground (p. 72). They claim that classes in ASTCs, which previously cost around ¥150-300 (approximately £15-35), later cost ¥400-600 (approximately £45-70), with one-on-one classes costing as much as ¥1000 (approximately £110) (p. 72).

The overseas authors such as Pan (2022) more explicitly state that the black market has created a situation that will "solidify the upper class's status and influence in Chinese society" (para. 10). Zhong (2023) in her Cornell policy review asks if the DRP will be responsible for furthering economic class divisions (p. 8), while Guo (2022) says it exacerbates social inequity (p. 149). The result of wealth disparity is that parents from the lower end of the socioeconomic scale may need to take on more responsibility in providing educational support to their children at home. At the same time, other families struggle to meet the costs and those at the upper end of the scale drive prices up and utilise the best available resources for their children. In any of the three situations, it is not difficult to presume that the pressure felt by each of the three groups - students, parents, and teachers - (excluded, struggling, and excessive spending) all creates additional pressure.

3.2.4 Cultural and Value-Based Considerations

Of the 70 documents, 39 include typical national rhetoric as part of their discussion.

Three main viewpoints emerge within the discussions of the DRP: 1. National rejuvenation and modernisation; 2. Upholding traditional morals and values, and 3. Future-proofing education.

Brown (2017) suggests that "ideology" should be viewed as a neutral term that exists everywhere social behaviour occurs (p. 798). Its function is to map the experienced world through "action-oriented sets of beliefs" that are intrinsic to hierarchical systems such as political, economic, and social - a tool to operationalise and achieve key objectives (p. 798). China's "ideology" is difficult to pinpoint as it encompasses a wide scope of political, spiritual, and social models however, the term "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" (Xīn shídài Zhōngguó tèsè shèhuìzhǔyì "新时代中国特色社会主义思想"), re-introduced by Chairman Xí in 2017 (CCTV, 2017, 0:09), best describes a fluid socialist market economy that adapts with each new era - a further example of China's strategy of "crossing the river by feeling the stones". This foundational framework, rooted in socialist principles, is frequently referenced in the literature and provides additional context to the academic body of work on the DRP.

National Rejuvenation and Modernisation

Ideas regarding national rejuvenation align with the framework set out by Xí. This is emphasised by mainland voices, such as Z. Liu (2022), who reiterates that education is the cornerstone of national rejuvenation and the path to socialist modernisation (p. 3031). Zhou (2022) goes on to argue that a "powerful, modern socialist state" (p. 1) is in the hands of the children, and therefore, investing in education through strategies such as the DRP is a positive step. Zhan (2022) employed quantitative stock performance analysis to evaluate the impact on Chinese education technology corporations, aligning with Zhou (2022) in that decisive education policies, such as the DRP, are crucial for ensuring success in future economic and political systems and

maintaining social stability (p. 6). Yu et al. (2022) expand on these points by arguing for a classless system, where all individuals have equal opportunities to transcend their personal circumstances and achieve meritocratically, ultimately contributing positively to society (p. 2). In agreement with Lin (2021), they also refer to the DRP as a conduit for a "good education ecology" (p. 3).

Overseas researcher B. Wu (2021), through qualitative analysis of the policy, representative ASTC companies' statistics and recent news, mirrors the previous stance by Z. Liu (2022) and expands by quoting Xi's goal to implement common prosperity to achieve "Chinese-style modernization" (p. 551), of which the DRP is a key step, through attempting to eliminate capitalist competition and the industrialisation of education.

From these examples, it is evident that education is closely linked with prevailing cultural values and national objectives.

Upholding Traditional Morals and Values

T. Liu (2022), in a historical review of policy, draws on tradition when discussing the DRP, firstly by referring to it ethereally as "the guiding spirit of the policy" (p. 241) and by paying homage to previous generations by recommending that current students can "follow their elders to understand the hardships of social work, so that they can have a more correct understanding of life" (p. 242). This is indicative of the significant influence of tradition on how education is perceived in China. Yu (2022) references Confucian tradition (p. 9, p. 29) when describing how the DRP represents a turning point in Chinese education, toward modernisation.

The Chinese-language documents closely reflect themes commonly found in national discourse. Ma and Zheng (2022) summarise the connection between core national principles and education policy by describing education as the foundation for national

development - the "starting point" that determines future economic, political, moral, social developments and living standards, and "characterised by its fundamentality" ("基础教育的阶段特征在于其基础性") (p. 85). Zhou and Qi (2022) further clarify through quoting Xí Jìnpíng that the DRP has the "fundamental task" of cultivating society through returning education to its original morality-driven intention ("双减" 政策聚焦立德树人) (p. 69). "Cultivating people/virtue/morality" is a phrase repeated often throughout the Chinese-language literature. For example, H. Zhou (2021) uses the term 24 times in their paper "The implementation of the 'double reduction' policy should return to the original intention of cultivating virtue and cultivating people" ("双减" 政策落地应回归立德树人初心), which is just one page long, illustrating an intensity of rhetoric often used within Chinese language academic papers, produced by and for a domestic audience. Several other Chinese-language documents employ similar rhetoric to emphasise the significance of national values underlying the intentions of the DRP (e.g., Liang et al. (2022) 12 times, Ma and Zheng (2022) 17 times, Qing (2021) six times, Yu and Yang (2022) six times, Yu and Yao (2022) seven times), leading to us to consider the intentions of these papers as either valid pieces of research or as organs of the official state-mandated message. What is clear is the unity of opinion that upholds the DRP as a positive course of action, both for national progress and for the well-being of students.

Future-Proofing Education

"The China Education Modernization 2035" policy, issued in 2019, sets forth the plan for reform and development (Zhu, 2019) and forms the backdrop to the discussion on future-proofing education in the DRP literature. L. Li (2022) discusses the required participation of society as a whole in supporting the DRP to build and modernise education (p. 994). Zhou (2022) expands on this by describing the ideals of a future education system that is community-supported and promotes a shift away from

utilitarian learning toward educational environments that include natural resources, emotional development support, and mentally stimulating, individualised opportunities (p. 5). They argue that to prepare and implement an education system suitable for the next decades, the management of education now, through policies such as the DRP, should assist children in gaining a "perceptual understanding" of life, which is vital for their future as contributors to the working society (p. 7). Li, Liu, et al. (2022) more specifically argues that the overhaul of the DRP will contribute to improving scientific literacy, research qualities and utilise education as a mode of "intergenerational transmission" (p. 1212), which could mean the continuation of knowledge building from one generation to the next, which currently appears to be redundant as energy is spent on immediate results, as discussed in previous sections.

The following provides examples of three major viewpoints present in the literature, all of which fall under the category of value-based considerations related to China's development and its citizens. An additional and substantial component to consider is the opinion on the Western/Capitalist presence within the realm of the DRP.

Capitalist Influence in Education

A pertinent viewpoint that emerged in the literature analysis is the discussion of the presence of capitalism and, to a lesser degree, Western influence in education, noted in 44 documents and explicitly addressed in ten. These two topics are considered together in Chinese discourse because capitalism is viewed as a Western import (Brook & Blue, 2022, p. 111), making critiques of capitalist practices in education simultaneously critiques of Western influence. This framing is significant given that China's economic system itself defies simple categorisation, operating as a hybrid socialist market economy that incorporates both capitalist and socialist elements (Liu, 2013; Peck & Zhang, 2013).

Chinese and overseas Chinese authors alike reflect strong opposition to neoliberalism, describing capitalist influences in education as contradictory to China's socialist governance traditions (Yang et al., 2023, pp. 1–2) and contrary to the public interest (Li, Li, et al., 2022, p. 714). Concerns are voiced that education is being commodified for personal gain, with some describing coercion, manipulation, and extortion that lead to excessive parental spending (S. Wu, 2021, p. 2687; Yao, 2022, p. 1134). Zhang et al. (2022) more directly accuse capitalism of "invading," "monopolising," and "subverting" China's education system (p. 1), while Xue and Li (2022) reiterate calls for supporting "quality education" in state schools through the restriction of market interference (p. 3). Feng (2021, p. 94), through analysis of literature and publicly available data, alongside Z. Liu (2022, p. 2), highlights the prevalence of such concerns in discussions on ASTCs.

Chinese-language sources echo this critique, with ten of the 15 documents condemning the capitalisation of education. Commonly repeated expressions include "disorderly expansion" ("无序扩张"), as discussed by Ma and Zheng (2022, p. 81) and Liang et al. (2022, p. 27), and disapproval of the "flow of capital" ("资本流向"), noted by Zhou (2021, p. 96) and Zhou and Qi (2022, p. 71).

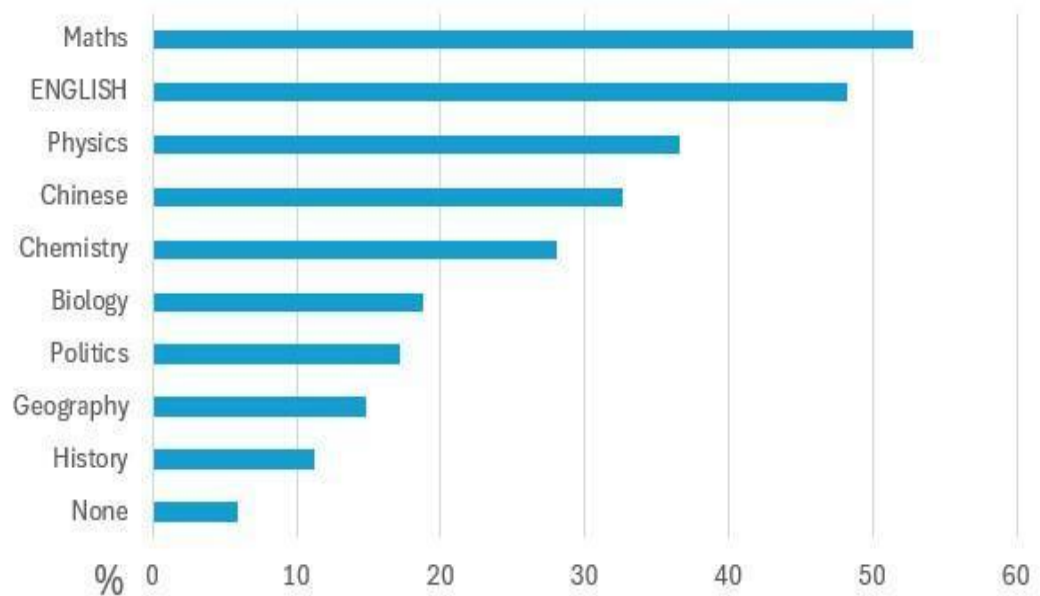
All ten documents oppose the presence of capital in the educational arena, so this can be seen as a direct criticism of the ASTC industry. Again, what these specific documents have in common is not only their message, which supports the DRP and opposes after-school tuition, generally aligning with the English-language research, but also does so without any discernible empirical evidence or stated research methods. The collective antipathy toward the capitalised ASTC industry, expressed through frequent accusations of illegal and immoral behaviours, appears to be largely grounded in emotion rather than evidentiary data.

Anti-Western Sentiment

As capitalism (in its specific Western form) is viewed as a Western import, associations are drawn when discussing the ASTC industry, which, until the DRP, catered to the most in-demand core subjects, including English (Figure 16). This naturally leads to discussions on the place and influence of a foreign language within a cultural context.

Figure 15

"The Distribution of Types of Extracurricular Tutoring Subjects for Children"



Note. Graph depicting classes parents prefer to send children to, after the introduction of the DRP and the continuing importance of English, despite no longer being permitted as an ASTC subject. From Jin, X., & Sun, Y. (2022), in 2021 International Conference on Education, Language and Art (ICELA 2021) Atlantis Press. p. 774.

Yang et al. (2023) address both capitalisation and Western ideology, describing how the domination of education reforms by Neoliberal English-speaking countries manifests as the shadow education industry, which they view as diametrically opposed to China's socialist values (pp. 1-3). Guo (2022) supports this perspective, stating that "foreign capital shall not control or participate in curriculum-based training institutions" (p. 148; Appendix 1, Section 4:13). Similarly, Tan et al. (2021), while discussing necessary education reforms, cite Liang Qichao (1900), emphasising China's competitive advantage over Europe. In context, this is less anti-Western rhetoric and more a reflection of the traditional communist value of "struggle" (Wright, 1953), presenting healthy competition as a virtue.

At the more assertive end of the spectrum, Xue and Li (2022) consider foreign influences in ASTCs dangerous, outlining DRP-aligned regulations that prohibit overseas courses and hiring foreign nationals abroad to ensure education returns to a socialist direction (p. 2; Appendix 1, Section 4:14). Wang, Luo et al. (2022) similarly argue that successful education reform in China requires a focus on Chinese characteristics (p. 64). Yang et al. (2023) affirm this, referencing the DRP's limitation on foreign-published textbooks (p. 7; Appendix 1, Section 4:14). Collectively, these examples reveal both the authors' positions and the DRP's directive to strictly regulate the increasingly difficult-to-control ASTC industry.

English language education represents a particularly significant dimension of the DRP's approach to Western influence. The policy explicitly defines parameters for non-Chinese capital, staff, curricula, and values in both private and state schools, effectively repositioning responsibility for English education within state control. This shift is notable given English tuition's recognised importance for national and global academic success (Yu & Zhang, 2022, p. 1584), suggesting that the DRP aims not to eliminate English education but to control how it is delivered and by whom.

Some authors interpret this control as a deliberate effort to mitigate Western cultural influence. J. Liu (2022) suggests that the DRP was necessary to protect Eastern culture from Western cultural influence (p. 625), though this conclusion is based on literature review rather than empirical evidence. However, empirical research reveals more complex outcomes. Lin (2021) provides qualitative evidence from interviews at an English ASTC, illustrating how the DRP has shifted English pedagogy from test-oriented to skills-based learning, including drama, debate, and public speaking (pp. 33 - 34). Yet despite the policy's restrictions, Yu (2022) notes that English tuition persists, albeit through significantly reduced ASTC numbers (pp. 86, 90). L. Li (2022) identifies ongoing deficiencies in state school English education and suggests that the DRP's outcomes remain uneven, placing additional responsibilities on already burdened teachers.

Overseas perspectives further illustrate the DRP's complexities regarding English language education. B. Wu (2021) notes that English education pivots to alternative activities, such as reading and opera, highlighting both the policy's equality goals and its potential to exacerbate inequalities (pp. 550-551, 87). Liu and Bray (2022) draw on parental interviews, comparing the DRP to South Korea's failed initiative, where shadow education persisted underground due to continued market demand (p. 894). Weng (2022), in a study closely aligned with this research, conducted interviews with eight EFL teachers, showing that English tuition remains in demand even as the DRP shifts its focus from test-oriented to essential-quality-oriented education (pp. 181-182; Appendix 1, Section 4:13). The persistence of demand for English education suggests families continue to value English proficiency despite regulatory restrictions.

These discussions reflect the difficulty in determining the DRP's primary aims regarding English language education. If the policy seeks to limit English education as part of broader cultural reassertion or to reduce Western influence, the continued demand represents a significant challenge to this objective. Conversely, if the DRP is driven mainly by the desire to reduce student workload and academic pressure, the shift from test-preparation to skills-based English learning could indicate progress. This

ambiguity complicates understanding the policy's balance between cultural, educational, and social objectives.

Managing teachers (both public school and ASTC)

Besides students, the primary group affected by the DRP, and therefore the most important to consider, is teachers, both state and private. As a conduit between government policies and student experiences, teachers are inevitably scrutinised closely from both angles. Teachers are clearly divided into two subcategories - those within state education and those within private ASTC education. Within the analysed texts, 30 documents discussed teachers and featured prominently in the more explicitly expressed opinions on the DRP. The subcategories present are teachers in state education, teachers in the private sector, and those who are in both. For this reason, all teachers are discussed together here. The main criticisms identified were conflicting priorities and inefficient pedagogy, or a lack of qualifications. Sympathetic views considered the challenging contexts in which teachers work and the burdens they carry.

Anti-teacher themed texts, which in some way critiqued teachers, explored the conflicting priorities of teachers in various forms. Lin (2021) accuses teachers of taking advantage of their positions to "seek personal gains" (p. 33) through private tutoring, thereby creating a moral conflict. Yu (2022) agrees with condemning the "chaos and corruption" (p. 35) caused by teachers pursuing two modes of income, which leads to poor performance, as supported by Zhang (2022), who states, "Participation of in-service teachers in off-campus tutoring jeopardises educational equity and quality" (p. 458). Li also discusses morality, Liu, et al. (2022), who consider teachers as "omniscient" (p. 1210), T. Liu (2022) states that teachers have "uneven ethics" and "low morals" (p. 240), and Xu (2021), who exalts that teachers need to "enthusiastically

devote themselves" and "must uphold the spirit of love and dedication" (p. 284). These examples highlight the revered position of teachers and, consequently, the expectations placed upon them. This includes what appears to be advice, which is given by many of the authors, regarding the attitudes of teachers. Xu (2021) provides typical examples, suggesting that teachers "need to correct the professional attitude" (p. 284), a point reiterated by T. Liu (2022) with the call to "establish better norms of teachers' ethics" (p. 238).

Overseas authors, including Wu (2021), Yang et al. (2023), and Zhang (2021), all of whom employ a conceptual framework, discuss the effects of teachers' actions. S. Wu repeats mainland arguments that "mainstream teachers may omit part of the curriculum left to their private tutoring session as signs of extortion" (p. 2687), which is echoed by Zhang, who describes the "potentially exploitative environment" (p. 4) created by teachers leveraging earning opportunities. Yang et al. concur that the two parallel systems, also described in slightly anti-capitalist terms as "mainstream public education policies and the supplementary neoliberal education policies, result not only in added burdens for students and families but also for teachers, who may find themselves in a disadvantageous position in their career development" (p. 10).

The most common criticism concerns pedagogy. Chen (2022), Kong (2022), Li, Liu, et al. (2022), Liu (2022c), Qu (2022), Xu (2021), and Xue and Tan (2022), using mixed methods statistical data and interviews, all lament the utilitarian method of instruction, and suggest ways to improve for the benefit of students. Chen (2022), Song (2022), and T. Liu (2022) are among those whose focal point is state teachers and the excessive workload placed upon them. Frequently cited was the excessive and utilitarian homework, which was one of the primary targets of the DRP (Appendix 1, sections 7-9). Homework is set by teachers, often on a daily basis, and with a tight timeframe (Jiang, 2018, p. 8). What is unclear is the extent to which the authors understand the teachers' perspectives and the constraints or directives they face. Nonetheless, the general consensus is that state classroom teaching does not meet students' creative or

emotional needs.

Pedagogical concern is also directed at ASTC teachers, who appear to be the recipients of the harshest criticism from Chinese authors both within the mainland and beyond its borders. In their English language paper, Zhang and Chen (2022) question the quality of teachers in ASTCs due to lax regulation (p. 1074), while Xie's (2021) Chinese paper for domestic reading titled "How Off-campus Training Institutions Carry Out Educational Anxiety Trafficking After the "Double Reduction" Policy?" suggests that ASTC teachers deploy guileful tactics to deceive parents or inspectors into believing they are providing quality teaching ("Advanced teaching is one of the most commonly used teaching strategies of off-campus training" ["变相超前教学，加大思维难度"] p. 15), which some could argue, is a tactic that has been used in all teaching contexts as long as teaching has existed, and not necessarily peculiar to ASTC teachers, making the assessment unbalanced.

The opinions among the overseas Chinese authors are similar. Weng (2022) notes that ASTC teachers are "far less respected" (p. 181) and suggests that they may lie about qualifications and deceive customers (p. 181) due to their dual roles as both educators and salespeople, although no empirical evidence is provided to support these claims. These views are echoed by many, including Yang et al. (2023), who further refer to them as "underdogs" (p. 2). What is contradictory is that many of these authors have also stated that in-service state teachers work at ASTCs, meaning they are fully qualified, which leads us to question the motivation behind the claims. Additionally, Weng (2022), who had previously raised concerns about deceitful behaviours regarding qualifications, deduced that ASTC teachers had "years of experience, full qualifications, and at least one degree related to education and foreign languages" (p. 186). These contradictions are worthy of note, as they provide a window into the attitudes toward different members of the teaching society, as well as the practices of researchers, leading us to scrutinise their motivations more closely.

Overall, what is seen in the texts presenting an anti-teacher stance is the majority of authors are Chinese (14 mainland documents vs four overseas documents, all of whom are believed to be Chinese authors) and appear to be discussing the experiences of *being taught*, which are in some ways separate from the matter of the DRP and have an atmosphere of exorcising personal grievances. There seem to be very few papers discussing the issue from the perspective of *teaching*. By not placing teachers within the larger infrastructure of the education system and national culture and instead isolating them as the source of the problem, important factors such as state education systems, parental anxieties, and cultural peer pressure are excluded. Furthermore, this approach does not question the teachers' opinions or viewpoints on the matter.

Pro-teacher-themed texts take a more sympathetic view, highlighting the pressures faced by both ASTC and state school teachers. Domestic papers, including Q. Cheng (2021) and T. Liu (2022), acknowledge the burdens on state teachers from enrolment indicators, evaluations, inspections, parental expectations, and personal pressures (Cheng, p. 189). Mainland authors such as Z. Liu (2022), Xu (2021), Yin and Lai (2021), and Feng (2021) further discuss the additional responsibilities introduced by the DRP, including longer working days to provide after-school services and the challenge of supplementing low state salaries, which is an increasingly complex task post-DRP.

ASTC teachers were among the most affected, facing uncertainty, career disruption, and mass unemployment. Jia and Peng (2022), Lu et al. (2023), and Xu (2021) document these pressures, highlighting the financial and professional impact of the policy. Overseas literature echoes these concerns: Weng (2022) includes foreign teachers in China, Chinese ASTC teachers, and online teachers from other countries, noting job loss and additional burdens for state school teachers. S. Wu (2021) and Zhang (2021) also note the difficulties teachers face in supplementing their incomes, while Yang et al. (2023) and Zhang (2021) emphasise that many ASTC staff are pushed out of well-paid, unrecognised positions, requiring them to seek alternative careers (Zhang & Bray, 2017 in Yang et al., 2023, p. 2; p. 9).

In pedagogical terms, the sympathetic tone continues among the mainland authors. Chen et al. (2022) and Z. Liu (2022) discuss how the majority of teachers are keen to provide the best education they can and to improve where necessary, which is an alternative viewpoint to the picture painted by the detractors, who appear to be producing works that place a substantial amount of responsibility for student pressures on the shoulders of teachers. This could also indicate that the available literature is being written by current or former students (i.e., those in or recently graduated from post-compulsory education), rather than in-service educators or academic researchers. While some articles presented a more balanced view, such as Qu (2022) and Yin and Lai (2021), who acknowledge that teachers are in a difficult position - between state requirements, parent expectations and cultural conditioning - some discussions, such as those by Chen (2022) and Kong (2022), firmly blame teachers for the issues faced by students. What is surprising about this element is that teachers are highly respected in Chinese culture (He, 2021) and is even written into law (Appendix 2, Article 4), however they have not been spared the castigation of some, such as in T. Liu (2022), who uses strong terms to claim, "some schools and teachers shirk their responsibilities and let parents help children study, correct homework and so on" (p. 239).

The sympathetic discussion is also shared by overseas Chinese authors, such as Yang et al. (2023) and Xue and Tan (2022), who, through empirical data collection, "reveal the burdens of teachers" (p. 183) who believe that state classrooms are overpopulated, creating difficulties for teachers and students alike, so are compelled to provide breadth and depth extended learning through ASTCs or private tutoring, which the DRP is disassembling. Conversely, J. Yan (2022) agrees with the more critical papers from the mainland by claiming "the change of teachers' mentality, the improvement of their professional quality ... [the need to] keep up with the times and make efforts for educational reform..." (p. 394). These examples illustrate the weight of responsibility that teachers bear for the success or failure of the DRP, the profession, and students, but often omit the system within which they operate.

Assigning blame to the teachers for the burdens upon students excludes three other critical contextual factors:

The first is the education system, which has fostered its intensely competitive nature by focusing on scores and compelled parents to support their child's education externally; the accepted pedagogical methods, discussed by Yu and Zhang (2022) of passive learning and large class numbers that Feng (2021) and Yan (2019) highlight are supplemented with active learning, and more individual attention at tuition centres. Additionally, as noted by Xue and Li (2022) and Yu et al. (2022), some state teachers seek additional income sources due to low salaries or state classroom constraints. Furthermore, ASTC and state teachers' lives are influenced by state education's role as the determiner of social standing. This creates a complex environment where teachers in all contexts attempt to carve out an amenable situation, all under the scrutiny of the state, society, parents, and their peers.

The second is the state, which is ultimately responsible for every student's education. Xu (2021) and Yu (2022) lead us to consider that the situation of students being overburdened did not occur in a vacuum: as seen, the timeline of events leading to the DRP saw the state use education for national, political, and cultural promotion, where teachers are merely civil servants, carrying out the responsibilities set out by the state.

The third element is the family. By perpetuating sociocultural traditions, they too are responsible for the pressures placed on students, as discussed earlier in Section 3.2.2.

3.2.5 Practical Considerations

Alongside political and cultural considerations, practical concerns primarily focus on the impacts on families, logistical challenges, and changes to teachers' working

conditions. The literature also identifies the effective implementation of the policy itself as a significant practical consideration.

Childcare and Parental Work

One of the DRP's main objectives was to reduce parents' financial and homework burdens, which in China are deeply intertwined with daily family life. Unlike their Western counterparts, Chinese parents are highly involved in homework (Gan & Bilige, 2019; Ng & Wei, 2020, p. 62), which had become excessive (Zhang, 2019, p. 821). Z. Liu (2022) notes that the family is the first educational environment, so practicalities must be considered for the DRP to succeed (p. 3038). To address this, the DRP instructs schools to avoid assigning homework to parents (Appendix 1, Section 2.4) and adjust after-school activity times to match parents' work schedules (Appendix 1, Section 3.9), aiming to ensure homework is completed at school, relieve parents from involvement in tuition, and allow them to collect children without disrupting work.

However, many argue these measures have had a limited impact. Kang et al. (2022) report increased anxiety after tuition removal (p. 77), a finding echoed by Xu (2021, p. 282), Yin and Lai (2021, p. 1532), and X. Zhou (2021, p. 97), which leads parents to continue tutoring. Yin and Lai note that parents feel ill-equipped compared to ASTC teachers (p. 1532) but persist in using familiar techniques, often pushing homework later into the evening and reducing time for household tasks (Liu et al., 2022, p. 19).

Overseas authors support these findings. Chen et al. (2022) describe parental educational anxiety as typical (p. 2067), Pan (2022) notes high pressures (para.10), and others highlight parents' limited capacity to teach foreign languages, particularly English (Song, 2022, p. 801; Liu & Bray, p. 888). This demonstrates a DRP "backfire" due to ingrained cultural practices.

Grandparents, who often handle childcare logistics, are notably absent from most discussions, although Z. Liu (2022) mentions their limited effectiveness as tutors (p. 3038). Family education, as discussed in 23 documents, emphasises coaching parents to reduce pressure and increase quality family time (J. Liu, 2022, p. 623; Chen et al., 2022, p. 208; Li & Lin, 2022, p. 76), highlighting another practical challenge in implementing the DRP.

Family education is discussed at length within 23 documents, 20 of which were from the mainland. J. Liu (2022) describes family education as a form of guidance and education on parenting concepts and methods, including educational skills (p. 623). Chen et al. (2022, p. 208) and Li and Lin (2022, p. 76) are among those agreeing that parents should be coached on how to cultivate a less pressured environment through family activities, educational play and quality time, as opposed to excessive homework activities, again leading to practical issues for parents as they navigate a new set of expectations, as stated by T. Liu (2022) who writes "double reduction" means "double increase" for family education work (p. 242). This is a pertinent point that aligns with the questions posed in my research regarding how the DRP affects families.

The omission of grandparents from academic discussions and the focus on parenting styles offer another perspective on the DRP's intent: strengthening the family unit to create a healthier environment. Whether the policy also aims to boost birth rates or control educational market forces is open to debate. While literature on parental anxiety and family education is plentiful, there is limited empirical data from parents on the DRP's practical effects, which is a focus of this research.

Teacher Destabilisation

Practical challenges for teachers have also shifted under the DRP. Z. Liu (2022), who interviewed ten state teachers, found that 44.3% reported a "drastic increase in workload" following the implementation of the DRP (p. 3039). Despite decreased student burdens, teachers received little guidance on implementing streamlined homework, holistic after-school activities, or increased classroom efficiency to compensate for the reduced tuition (pp. 3038-39). The transition from habitual pedagogical practices to new demands occurred with minimal training beyond written policy directives (p. 3038).

Huang et al. (2022), using semi-structured interviews with 15 state teachers and a qualitative grounded theory approach, support these concerns, citing studies on gaps in teacher training. Chen (2013) reported that 35.9% of the teachers questioned whether professional development met their pedagogical needs (p. 197). Clark et al. (2012) argue that training focuses on "understanding" rather than "creating" (p. 197), reflecting a limited emphasis on practical preparation. Yue et al. (2023) expand on this through interviews with 45 in-service primary and junior high school teachers, noting the risks of dismissal, added financial pressures during the COVID-19 pandemic, and increased DRP-related workload, none of which were matched by salary adjustments (p. 9). These factors collectively create significant challenges for teachers' stability and functioning ability.

ASTC teachers, disproportionately affected, receive less attention. Jia and Peng (2022) employed a Bi-LSTM model on social media posts to assess public sentiment, identifying terms such as "fear," "sadness," and "disgust" associated with ASTC staff who lost their livelihoods (p. 6). W. Zhang (2019) details, through interviews, how ASTC staff adapted to stringent restrictions, experiencing "insecurity and confusion" (p. 36), and faced job losses or retraining for transformed centres (p. 38). Yu (2022) echoes

these concerns, reporting that ASTC teachers received no support for transitioning to non-academic roles or alternative employment (p. 69). The destabilisation for ASTC staff is more pronounced than for state teachers, affecting a significant portion of the workforce. As with state teachers, empirical data on ASTC teachers' experiences is limited, which this research seeks to address.

3.2.6 The Media

The media offers critical perspectives on the DRP that are largely absent from academic literature. This section is included to address those gaps, particularly the emotional, financial, and social implications for parents, teachers, and businesses, areas often overlooked or constrained by academic and political limitations. While academic publications on the DRP are predominantly written in Chinese and may reflect state-aligned narratives, foreign and independent media provide broader, often more critical insights. This diversity of perspective helps contextualise the official narrative and exposes less visible consequences.

Media coverage emphasises how ASTCs served roles beyond education: they offered childcare, generated significant economic activity, and employed vast numbers, including older and less formally educated workers. Academic texts largely centre on student-focused outcomes, but media sources highlight the human and financial toll of the DRP, including massive job losses (Table 4), some estimates reaching up to a million. These effects are primarily reported by non-state media, suggesting official reluctance to acknowledge the scale.

Table 4

Layoff numbers from major ASTC companies

Company	Number of employees before the policy	Number of Layoffs
New Oriental Education & Technology Group Inc. (EDU)	100,000	6,000
TAL Education Group (TAL)	100,000	9,000
GSX Techedu Inc. (GOTU)	30,000	10,000
Yuanfudao	50,000	20,000
Zuoyebang	35,000	15,000
VIPKid	12,000	6,000
ByteDance Education	15,000	5,000

Note. Table showing the estimated number of job losses caused by the DRP for a selection of the biggest education companies. From "200K Layoffs, \$100B Lost: The Tsunami of China's Regulation on Education Analysing the impact of China's regulatory crackdown on the nation's for-profit education industry", by Ma, R. 2021, The Report (<https://www.classcentral.com/report/china-regulatory-tsunami/#layoff>).

Financially, the DRP caused immediate stock market turmoil, with implications for both domestic and international investors. While academic studies note market reactions, media sources connect these losses directly to family economics and investor trust. For example, Zhu et al. (2021) and CNN report how the crackdown affected foreign investor confidence, while Stevenson (2021) and Ye (2021) explore its repercussions for parents and private business owners. The media also noted the emergence of black market tutoring and offshore workarounds, issues scarcely addressed in academic texts.

Media outlets also explored ideological motives behind the DRP, such as reducing foreign influence, promoting Chinese culture, and addressing cybersecurity concerns. Sources, including Chen (2022), Chau et al. (2021), and Stevenson (2021), suggest that

nationalistic drivers and efforts to control external investment in education are at play. Others, such as Angran (2021), offer sociological insights into parenting norms, social stratification, and the likelihood that the policy will entrench, rather than reduce, educational inequality.

A total of 26 articles from varied political and geographic backgrounds were analysed to balance bias and enrich understanding. While all media have inherent biases, these sources offer valuable context, nuance, and critique that complement and sometimes challenge academic interpretations. This inclusion ensures a more comprehensive and balanced understanding of the DRP's full impact.

3.3 CHAPTER DISCUSSION

The review of literature on the Double Reduction Policy (DRP) identified four major themes:

- **Pedagogical and Welfare:** This theme examines the policy's impacts on students, parents, and teachers, focusing on educational and well-being outcomes.
- **Political:** Here, the analysis centres on how political framing and affiliations shape public and academic discourse surrounding the DRP.
- **Cultural and Value-Based:** This theme explores the policy's connections to national identity, morality, and resistance to perceived foreign influences in education.
- **Practical:** The discussion addresses implementation challenges, shifts in family roles, and issues of educational access arising from the policy.

In addition to these themes, the review analysed methodologies and authorial contexts to assess research validity and pinpoint gaps in the literature. A notable tension emerged between the DRP's stated objectives, its observed effects, and the divergent interpretations of these effects among different stakeholders.

The empirical evidence base for evaluating the DRP remains weak. While policy documents articulate clear intentions to reduce student academic burden and regulate the private tutoring market, robust evidence demonstrating achievement of these goals is largely absent. The few methodologically sound studies suggest persistent challenges: teacher workload increases, continued parental demand for tutoring, and maintenance of competitive educational pressures.

The literature is dominated by opinion-based analysis, policy advocacy, and theoretical discussion rather than systematic empirical investigation. This evidence gap, combined with documented constraints on academic freedom in Chinese social science research, highlights the need for independent, methodologically rigorous research to assess the DRP's actual impacts on its intended beneficiaries.

Evidence on parental and student experiences remains equally fragmented. On the one hand, studies highlight persistent parental anxiety and continued demand for tutoring services, often shifting to informal or underground markets (Liu et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2022). On the other hand, the absence of rigorous longitudinal data means that central claims of reduced student burden or improved academic balance remain largely unsubstantiated. The most robust mixed-methods evidence (Liu & Bray, 2022) indicates that entrenched competitive pressures continue to shape educational behaviour, suggesting that structural forces may outweigh policy interventions.

Pedagogical and Welfare

There is widespread agreement that the DRP sought to reduce excessive academic burdens. However, many sources argue that the black market for ASTCs is likely to grow rather than disappear. This undermines the policy's goals by potentially increasing educational inequality and failing to alleviate student workloads.

Parental anxieties remain high due to the unchanged competitiveness of public education. Teachers face new stressors, from job losses in the private sector to increased demands in the public sector. Despite many papers employing qualitative methods to capture these effects, numerous Chinese publications lacked transparency in their methodology, thereby reducing trust. Yet, these texts may serve as informal primary sources, reflecting lived experiences amid constraints on academic freedom.

These findings prompt several questions: Has the DRP truly lightened student burdens? Are parents and teachers adapting, or resisting, policy aims? And is the DRP part of a broader state effort to reorient social behaviours toward national goals?

Political

The political undertones varied by language and location. Chinese-language publications, especially those from within China, often lacked critical analysis or clear methods, reading more as policy endorsements than research. These works frequently employed formal, state-aligned rhetoric and echoed slogans rather than independent inquiry (Table 5).

Table 5*Author Affiliations and Corresponding Perspectives*

Author Type	Pro-China	China Critic	Western Critic	Pro-Western
Chinese in China (65)	38	3	24	0
Chinese overseas (30)	16	6	11	0
Foreign in China (2)	2	0	1	0
Foreign overseas (7)	2	2	2	0

Note. Chinese-language literature offers a focused domestic perspective, providing insight into student experiences, though it may present limited methodological transparency and diversity of viewpoints.

Notably, there was an absence of any pro-Western in the literature analysed. This is particularly significant given the centrality of English language education to the DRP, and English's inherent association with Western culture and pedagogical approaches. The absence of pro-Western perspectives in discussions of English education suggests that the discourse around the DRP may conflate legitimate concerns about educational inequality with broader anxieties about Western cultural influence. This makes it difficult to separate pedagogical critiques of ASTCs from cultural or political motivations. Additionally, a recurring but unofficial theme was the DRP's link to birth rate concerns. Though absent from policy documents, ten Western papers, one Chinese paper, and six media reports inferred that the DRP aimed to reduce education costs to encourage childbirth. This is part of China's broader demographic strategy, as seen in the concurrent "summer blizzard" of new regulations. This adds a deeper layer to the DRP as a vehicle for sociopolitical engineering.

Cultural and Value-Based Considerations

The literature highlights how the DRP may promote national cohesion and ideological realignment. Themes include:

- Minimisation of English language learning
- Resistance to Western influence via education
- Emphasis on moral development and parent-school cooperation

While not always explicitly stated, the literature suggests the DRP encourages citizens to reassess their roles in national development, using education as a cultural transmission tool deeply embedded in family life.

Practical Considerations

Practically, the DRP places heavy emphasis on family education. The policy critiques parenting norms, either for being too lax or for placing undue pressure on children and attempts to redistribute educational responsibility to parents. This implies parents themselves may be key contributors to student overburdening and may resist or undermine the DRP through continued use of tutoring services.

ASTCs, once state-supported, were important for employment and economic growth. Their collapse has resulted in job losses and potentially worsened educational access for less affluent families. The restriction on English-language learning and foreign teachers signals a turn away from global integration, but the long-term impacts of this shift remain unclear.

Despite the apparent intent to reduce inequality and improve family dynamics, the DRP may be deepening divides and creating an elite, tuition-accessible educational

class. It is possible that by pursuing a stringent reform, the state may have unintentionally encouraged a shadow education market to emerge that contradicts its own goals.

3.4 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

A review of existing literature revealed several key findings that provide context and highlight gaps addressed by this research. A notable distinction emerged between domestic Chinese research and overseas studies. Domestic literature often lacks primary data and transparent methodologies. Among the sources that specified methodology, most employed qualitative approaches, grounded theory frameworks, and empirical data collection through interviews, text analysis, or first-hand observation. Across both domestic and international literature, there was a scarcity of first-person accounts from teachers and families directly affected by English language education policies, though this gap was more pronounced in Chinese-language studies. This absence forms the central knowledge gap addressed by this research.

Beyond the methodological differences, similarities between domestic mainland and overseas literature by Chinese authors included general support for the DRP in terms of alleviating student stress, but with emerging speculation that the DRP may not be successful for a number of reasons, including a lack of support from parents who are said to be in need of 'family education' to better utilise free time for family-centred activities, in place of extended classes and homework. Discussions on the importance of maintaining and promoting Chinese culture, morals and social cohesion were prevalent, as were the criticisms of any entity that may threaten them. Discussions on preserving Chinese culture, moral values, and social cohesion were prevalent, whereas explicit criticism of the DRP was largely confined to English-language literature, highlighting differing motivations and constraints across research contexts.

These major themes were identified across the literature:

1. Persistence of academic competition: Without systemic changes to the gāokǎo -centred education system, parental ambition and high student engagement remain. Underground tutoring services illustrate a continued demand for ASTCs, a phenomenon that is insufficiently explored in the current literature but is central to this study.
2. Pedagogical limitations in state schools: Existing literature does not fully account for the constraints teachers face, including class sizes, lesson durations, professional responsibilities, and systemic training, which affect their capacity to implement less utilitarian teaching methods.
3. Historical and socioeconomic context of ASTCs: While ASTCs are often criticised for excessive homework and extracurricular academic activities, literature rarely explores their historical origins, the role of parents in shaping demand, and the involvement of state teachers in creating a supplemental education market. This study includes teacher perspectives to address this gap.
4. Economic and ethical dimensions of ASTCs: Literature frequently frames ASTCs as profit-driven, yet this perspective omits the complexities of educators operating within market realities. This research considers both pedagogical and economic motivations of ASTC staff.
5. De-westernisation of education: The reduction of English curricula, closure of ASTCs, and restriction of foreign teachers point to a broader shifts in values and priorities. Notably, whilst Western nations actively promote their own languages and values in education systems globally, similar efforts by China to assert educational sovereignty and reduce foreign influence are often characterised negatively in Western discourse. This asymmetry in perspective warrants critical examination.

6. Demographic implications: Falling birth rates and policy efforts to reduce education costs suggest the DRP may aim to encourage larger families, highlighting the interplay between education and broader sociopolitical strategies.

Although the DRP was introduced in July 2021, deep-seated societal beliefs about education are unlikely to shift rapidly. The persistence of underground tutoring risks exacerbating social inequalities, potentially limiting access to quality education to wealthier families and reinforcing elite social stratification (Pan, 2022). Conversely, proponents of ASTCs emphasise their benefits, including support for students struggling in state schools, childcare provision, employment opportunities, exposure to authentic language learning, and supplementary income for state teachers (Weng, 2022). These contrasting perspectives suggest potential divides based on age, nationality, or professional experience.

Politically, the DRP is multifaceted. For policymakers, it reduces Western influence in education, consolidates state control, and addresses demographic concerns. Economically, it mitigates perceived financial burdens on families and aligns with long-term strategies to manage an ageing population. Yet literature often treats these effects in isolation, failing to integrate broader social, cultural, and economic contexts.

Across the literature base, three limitations stand out. First, the overwhelming reliance on descriptive surveys and opinion-based policy analysis undermines the empirical credibility of the field. Second, the dominance of Chinese authorship and publication raises concerns about intellectual independence, especially given constraints on academic freedom and the prevalence of nationalist rhetoric in policy-focused publications. Third, the absence of longitudinal, comparative, or experimental designs means that questions of causality, on whether the DRP reduces burden, reshapes inequalities, or alters learning outcomes, remain unanswered.

The unspoken or omitted factors in existing studies create opportunities for further exploration, which are addressed in subsequent chapters.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1.1 Ontological Foundations

This research investigates the effects of the Double Reduction education policy in China on its primary stakeholders - teachers, students, and families - within English language learning contexts. The research questions are divided into two sections: first, what the policy is and means, both overtly and covertly; second, what effects the policy has on those involved.

Sub-elements include how the policy affects various aspects of EFL in China, such as overall attitudes toward EFL, the substitution of international materials with state-approved ones, and sudden workload changes (from an additional burden for public school teachers to total employment loss for training centre teachers).

Additional themes include an apparent push for social change, such as reversing declining birth rates, strengthening patriotism, and addressing parents' roles as educators in preparing youths to become meritorious citizens, as well as how these are integrated into education policy and practice. An apparent anti-Western sentiment emerging from an increased nationalistic narrative could be a factor motivating the new policy (Liu, 2022). These combined factors may be affecting the quality of English language education in China.

To address the main themes and sub-questions, the following key concepts are identified:

1. What does the Double Reduction Policy mean? What are the overt and covert rationales and motivations for the DRP according to official policy documents?
2. What are the effects of the Double Reduction Policy on its main stakeholders: teachers, parents, and students?

The specific objectives were to:

- Analyse the Double Reduction Policy for its explicit and implicit content.
- Examine how the DRP was introduced and implemented.
- Understand the relationship between the DRP and its stakeholders.
- Determine the immediate, tangible effects of the DRP on stakeholders.
- Determine the long-term implications and consequences for stakeholders.
- Develop recommendations for future or similar policy proposals.

4.1.1.1 Comparative Analysis of Theoretical Considerations

This research is situated within a sociocultural context that is informed by predefined philosophical assumptions. Two general ontological categories are considered: Realism and Idealism. Realism emphasises objectivity, while Idealism emphasises subjectivity.

Objectivism assumes reality exists independently of individuals. Subjectivism assumes individuals actively construct reality. Objectivism underpins positivist methods of objective observation applied to both natural and social worlds. Positivism holds that logical deductions can reveal facts or universal laws, often employing quantitative

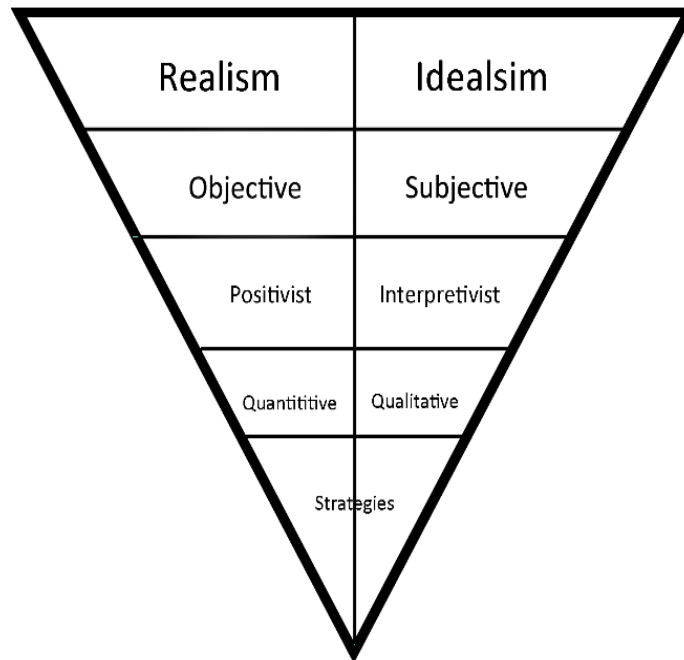
methods. Conclusions are typically reached using "statistical, mathematical, or numerical analysis of data collected through polls, questionnaires, and surveys, or by manipulating pre-existing statistical data using computational techniques" (University of Southern California [USC], 2022a). However, these methods overlook the subtleties of human experience, including emotions, beliefs, intuition, identity, and values.

The counterbalance is Interpretivism, which emphasises context and meaning. Rooted in idealism, interpretivism generates methods for understanding human behaviour, affirming that social and natural sciences cannot share the same methods. Interpretivist research employs qualitative methods to analyse data that cannot be measured directly, such as social realities or constructs created through interactions like language, consciousness, religion, or political beliefs. Qualitative methods emphasise quality and meaning, allowing the researcher to interpret causal relationships between variables through in-depth analysis (USC, 2022b).

Human behaviour, value systems, and organisational strategies vary significantly depending on contextual factors such as culture, geographic location, historical period, and environmental conditions. In applying meaning to these elements, researchers can take two routes, as seen in Figure 17.

Figure 16

Comparative Image of Two Opposing Approaches in Social Research



Critics of a Realist route argue that its reductionist and mathematical conclusions omit the individuality of humans and their experiences (Beckwith et al., 2008; Ryan, 2006). Therefore, an Idealist Philosophy was applied using an Interpretivist framework. Ontologically, an Idealist or constructivist stance claims there can be multiple realities which may be "equally true, rational or justified, but mutually incompatible" (Baghranian, 2019, p. 249).

An Idealist paradigm can be understood as one of curiosity, where reality is in constant motion and dependent on both the perceiver and the interpreter, contrasting with a Realist paradigm that employs deductive reasoning to reach conclusions deemed irrefutable through objective, data-led evidence. Although every paradigm has unique characteristics, Idealism broadly assumes that whilst the existence of matters outside human consciousness is acknowledged, "reality" in this context refers to perception,

interpretation, and mental constructs, making it open to endless interpretation. At its core is the assertion that reality is individual, whether it pertains to a person or a group. Despite differences, philosophers such as Kant, Marx, and Nietzsche argued that knowledge is not grounded in objective reality but is a product of human thought (Burr, 2015; Ültanir, 2012). Humans do not simply possess knowledge but rather enact shared truths through social processes constructed over time and specific to their context. Every reality is subjective and open to interpretation. Social sciences therefore reject the essentialist nature of positivist research.

This framework underscores a constructivist dimension, emphasising that human behaviour, values, and organisational strategies are not merely discovered but are actively constructed through social interactions, cultural discourses, and individual interpretations. Thus, while the metaphysical foundation of this study is idealist, the epistemological approach incorporates constructivist insights to explore how meaning is co-created in specific contexts.

Epistemologically, using language as a prism to refract the strands of this research, and utilising information from a policy text, available literature, and participant accounts, an interpretive, subjective analysis constructs meaning for each stakeholder group. This leads to Social Constructionism, which opposes positivism and empiricism and asks us to cast a critical eye over what we understand as "truth". Conventional acceptance of "truth" is based on objective, quantifiable information provided by the natural sciences. Burr (2015) posits that our means of understanding are historically and culturally specific (p. 4), influenced by overarching power in each context. Therefore, knowledge and understanding cannot be taken as absolute.

This can be illustrated with Western discourse, which often assumes indigenous knowledge to be less legitimate, thereby minimising its role in collective understanding. Conversely, Eastern cultures view imperialist knowledge structures as immature and exclusionary, focusing on reductionist scientific facts while ignoring natural and holistic

elements (Joshani, 2014; Mojab, 2023; Pattberg, 2009). Very generally speaking, Western culture tends to value autonomy more, while Eastern culture values unity more. Social Constructionism acknowledges both perspectives and argues that "truth" is problematic. Knowledge is constructed through social processes, shared experiences, cultural frameworks, and historical contexts. Burr (2015) expands: "If all knowledge is historically and culturally specific, this must include knowledge generated by social sciences" (p. 10). Within this dissolving of absolutes, Social Constructionism posits that "truth" cannot be sought; instead, contextual social processes and their individual "truths" can be understood.

An essential facet of Social Constructionism is the role of language. Through language, acquired as people exist in environments where words are reproduced, shared, and enacted, knowledge is constructed (Chen, 2015; Clair, 1982; Cojocaru et al., 2012). Human beings collectively create and sustain social phenomena through their everyday social practices (Burr, 2015, p. 15). Simultaneously, life is experienced as though the collectively constructed "reality" is preconceived and fixed. Through repetitive and cumulative sharing, individuals are conditioned to accept the reality they have co-created as "truth". Reality emerges as an effect of social processes (Main, 2023), deeply dependent on cultural and historical contexts, with language serving as a central force in constructing social realities. Social Constructionism, therefore, functions as a critical observer of these constructed "truths," highlighting the ways in which shared meanings are created, maintained, and potentially challenged.

Buhler (1971) emphasises the need to "study the person as a whole" (p. 378), not just elements reducible to statistics. Social Constructionism maintains that "truth" is created by contextual power. Whatever is claimed as truth serves to validate its own power and invalidate another (Buhler, 1971, p. 173; Yang, 2023). Social Constructionism becomes a tool for examining the language through which humans construct truth.

Knowledge is created both individually and collectively, shaped by cultural, political, geographical, and biological conditions (Lundberg et al., 2023). By using Social Constructionism as a foundation, this research highlights the central role of language: the language of policy, the language of English education, the construction of knowledge through language, and the cross-cultural effects of language-based events.

In keeping with a context-driven reality, the sub-theme of Cultural Relativism should also be acknowledged. Cultural Relativism suggests moral codes and related actions should not be judged by outsiders (Benedict, 2019). Context is key to unearthing this research's realities. Stakeholders' experiences may differ - positive, negative, or overlapping - depending on contexts and cultural influences. To capture these realities, qualitative data explores the multifaceted truths generated through social phenomena (Bailey, 2008, p. 127).

Social Constructionism holds that all meaning is socially created, and knowledge construction is politically driven. Its "dependence on historical, political, and economic conditions" engenders an environment where policy becomes accepted knowledge and vice versa (Vinney, 2021, para. 2).

4.1.2 Methodological Framework & Strategies

While philosophical research explores conceptual matters, empirical research is based on observable phenomena and presents measurable or verifiable knowledge. Qualitative research questions are non-directional, focusing on discovering, explaining, or interpreting naturalistic phenomena. They are often exploratory or descriptive. In this study, interpretive interview questions allowed participants to describe their experiences in their natural settings without the research influencing the outcomes.

Observable phenomena are defined as actions, behaviours, or events. In this research, they comprise the DRP and its impacts. Participants' experiences, collected via interviews, were analysed and coded to generate conclusions about meaning. Additionally, Critical Discourse Analysis was applied to the policy text to identify both implicit and explicit meanings, thereby providing contextual depth. Together, the policy and its effects, as reported by participants, constitute the primary phenomena under investigation. Sub-aspects add further nuance and breadth.

The research process initially followed an inductive approach, as no pre-existing theory or data were available to validate the hypotheses. As data accumulated, both inductive and deductive reasoning were applied to triangulate findings and ensure the robustness of conclusions. These steps formed a documented, replicable research design, culminating in a comprehensive theory derived directly from primary data.

4.1.2.1 Methodological Approach

This study employed Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) as its methodological strategy, allowing hypotheses and theories to emerge from data rather than being pre-imposed (Bell & Waters, 2018). Unlike rigid, quantitative, deductive methodologies, qualitative, inductive approaches recognise diversity and individuality within groups or phenomena and do not prioritise representativeness (Barbour & Barbour, 2003). Grounded Theory requires the researcher to remain open-minded, focusing on the data and its revelations, akin to a story unfolding.

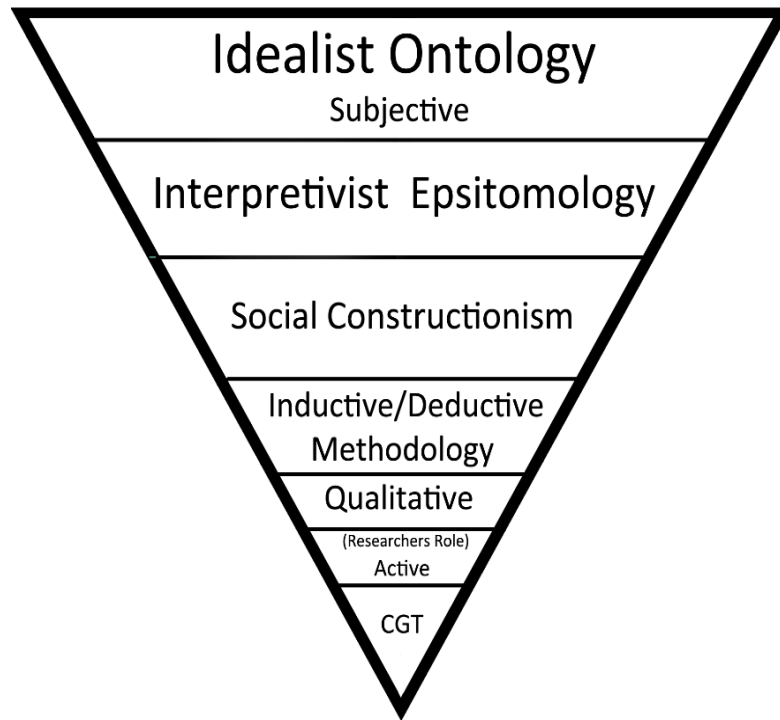
Grounded Theory has evolved since its inception. Charmaz (2012) identifies five central questions guiding its cyclical process of data collection, coding, and analysis:

- What is being studied?
- What is the data suggesting?
- From whose perspective is the data being scrutinised?
- Which theoretical categories are being revealed?
- With what consequences are participants acting? (p. 5)

Glaserian (Classical) Grounded Theory, developed in the 1960s, established the foundation of theory grounded in collected data through simultaneous data collection and analysis, using a constant comparative method (Chamberlain-Salaun et al., 2013). The literature review follows data collection and analysis, allowing theories to develop entirely from substantive and theoretical coding (Kenny & Fourie, 2015, p. 1273). Straussian Grounded Theory, emerging in the 1990s, emphasised verification and systematic coding, often using selective coding and memo-taking (Berterö, 2012; Kenny & Fourie, 2015, p. 1275). Constructivist Grounded Theory, developed in the 2000s, builds on these foundations while acknowledging the researcher as an active participant. Charmaz (2000) highlights that "data do not provide a window on reality" (Mills et al., 2006, p. 31), but rather, the "discovered" reality arises from interactive processes within temporal, cultural, and structural contexts. This approach typically concludes (Figure 18) with the researcher's interpretive understanding of the studied social process, presented in narrative form (Hallberg, 2006, as cited in Kenny & Fourie, 2015, p. 1279).

Figure 17

Research Design



The advantages of applying a Subjective ontology, incorporating a Relativist/Interpretivist stance with Cultural Relativist awareness, are that the knower creates truth, and context is a primary influence. By using Constructivist Grounded Theory, contextual complexities are given space to be recounted by participants, free of predefined hypotheses or expectations. Burr (2015) captures the focal point for these design decisions:

"Social Constructionism denies that our knowledge is a direct perception of reality. Instead, as a culture or society, we construct our own versions of reality between us... we have to accept the historical and cultural relativism of all forms of knowledge. All knowledge is derived from looking at the world from some perspective" (p. 9).

This stance acknowledges individual and subjective realities, shaped by societal, cultural, geographic, and temporal contexts. Understanding these complexities requires a subjective, interpretive approach and reflexive strategy such as Constructivist Grounded Theory, which recognises both researcher and participant engagement rather than a fixed, causal Realist perspective.

This research utilises Constructivist Grounded Theory, which provides a structured yet flexible approach to capturing the complex effects of policy on individuals lived experiences. Its combination of methodological rigour and interpretive flexibility makes it particularly suited to exploring diverse, contextually specific human experiences, generating insights applicable to practical contexts (Giles et al., 2016, pp. E29-E44).

By describing participants' largely unknown experiences, a clearer picture of policy cause and effect emerges. Each participant has unique experiences, including financial concerns, emotional impact, and societal traditions. Translating these into hypotheses requires methods such as coding and narrative recounting. Constructivist Grounded Theory is "patently more interpretative, intuitive, and impressionistic" (Hallberg, 2006, as cited in Kenny & Fourie, 2015, p. 1279), reflecting the reality of research on multiple, otherwise unrelated experiences.

Potential downsides include reliance on subjectivity, which some argue may bias results through participant or researcher influence, including misapplication or misinterpretation of the method (Stough & Lee, 2021). This is mitigated by creating a replicable model demonstrating reasonable objectivity. Another concern is that Constructivist Grounded Theory can be time-consuming (Timonen, Foley, & Conlon, 2018); however, coding can be iterative if approached systematically. To address these concerns, a methodical approach was taken. First, the theoretical framework was established with research objectives in mind, focusing on policy effects on intended recipients. Framework choices reflected the topic's nature, focusing on people and their social realities, and the use of accepted social science theories ensured reliable

procedures. Second, the research focuses on understanding experiences rather than relying on statistical data, thereby negating the need for alternative methods. Third, Constructivist Grounded Theory shifts the focus from assumptions to data, allowing social research to gain validity through a systematic and critical examination of the data.

This research employs a common social science framework, utilising an interpretive conceptual framework with a qualitative approach. An Idealist, subjective ontology with a Relativist/Interpretivist stance and Cultural Relativist awareness views truth as created by the knower and context as primary. Constructivist Grounded Theory collects participants' experiences navigating EFL education in China, following the DRP, and uncovers actions and attitudes, identifying relationships with policy. This methodology is relevant as it considers culture, history and current affairs, recognising that human action is contingent upon these contexts together.

4.1.2.2 Study Design

This study employs a cross-sectional method, which is observational in nature and designed to describe rather than measure variables. This approach stems from descriptive research and aligns with the Idealist paradigm commonly implemented in social research. While this research has a causal question, examining the effects of policy on a population at its core, the study takes an observational stance to report findings rather than establishing cause-and-effect relationships. The cause (policy implementation) and effect (people's experiences) are predetermined; this study explores the specific effects that occurred, making a cross-sectional, observational method appropriate.

Cross-sectional studies are characterised by:

- Research conducted at one point in time.
- Ability to study multiple variables simultaneously.
- Straightforward implementation.
- Comparison of different characteristics concurrently.
- Description of phenomena within specific populations.
- Generation of findings that can prompt further research.

The cross-sectional approach offers several practical advantages for this research. Unlike longitudinal methods that require repetitive data gathering from the same participants over time, cross-sectional studies provide a renewable participant supply, enabling the collection of new or additional data as needed. This flexibility is particularly valuable when examining multiple variables simultaneously, which suits the nature of observing people's diverse interpretations of policy experiences.

However, cross-sectional studies face inherent limitations that must be acknowledged. The primary methodological concern involves contextual influence, where timing and location may affect outcomes, potentially yielding different results if the study were conducted elsewhere or at another time. Paradoxically, this apparent limitation becomes a strength for this particular research, as temporal context is essential rather than problematic. The research question specifically addresses current policy effects within this time and place, making cultural, geographical, and value-based contexts integral to understanding policy impact. Indeed, the same policy would inevitably produce different effects in other contexts, making the contextual specificity a necessary feature rather than a flaw.

Additional methodological challenges include potential reporting or exclusion bias. The subjective nature of interviews and surveys means information cannot be independently verified or measured, and if particular participant profiles are excluded,

whether purposefully or accidentally, results may lack representativeness. Furthermore, cross-sectional studies cannot establish causality; however, this limitation is irrelevant for this research, as the cause is predetermined. Rather than determining what created the effects, this study focuses on identifying and describing the effects themselves.

4.1.2.3 Sampling Strategy

Sampling strategies generally fall into two categories: probability and non-probability. Non-probability sampling is commonly used in qualitative research to collect subjective data, such as opinions or experiences, although it is less suitable for generalisable findings. Methods include proportional quota sampling, where participants are selected according to predetermined quotas to capture a percentage of students, teachers, parents, and convenience sampling, which prioritises the most accessible and suitable participants.

Given this study's qualitative focus on individual experiences within China's large population, probability sampling was unsuitable. Targeting specific individuals who could provide relevant data was more practical than sampling from over a billion people. Consequently, multiple non-probability approaches were employed.

The sampling strategy evolved in phases. Initially, purposive sampling identified a small pilot group, including one representative from each key stakeholder group: an ASTC teacher, a parent, and a former student, to test the research design. A questionnaire was successfully used during the pilot phase to test the research design and recruit pilot participants via WeChat. Following the pilot phase, the questionnaire was distributed more widely for the main study; however, this broader release yielded insufficient responses, with questionnaires either unreturned or left largely incomplete. Given these challenges, the questionnaire approach was abandoned, and the study

proceeded with snowball sampling as the primary recruitment method for the main study. Early participants recruited others within their networks, supplemented by pre-identified potential participants from the research development phase, ensuring diverse perspectives were captured. Following these phases, snowball sampling gathered additional participants, with early participants recruiting others within their networks. This was supplemented by pre-identified potential participants from the research development phase, ensuring diverse perspectives were captured.

4.2 Data Collection Method: Gathering, Participants, and Procedures

Participant-Generated Data

Sampling / Recruitment

Potential participants were identified based on the sampling strategy, including English teachers in public and private schools (ASTCs), parents of school-aged children, and former students (recent graduates of compulsory education or those in higher education) who had experienced the DRP. Initial recruitment for the main study began by distributing voluntary questionnaires through digital platforms, including professional networks that included fellow teachers, social media groups of local parenting groups, and alumni social-media networks of former students known to me. However, this approach proved unsuccessful, generating insufficient responses for meaningful data collection or further recruitment. The questionnaire was therefore abandoned (see Appendix 4).

Following the abandonment of the questionnaire approach, snowball sampling became the primary recruitment method. Pilot participants and other early contacts

were asked to refer other eligible individuals such as colleagues, peers, or acquaintances who met the study's criteria. This approach helped identify additional teachers, parents, and former students, ensuring a broader range of perspectives. Digital platforms continued to be used for communication and coordination with participants, aligning with their predominance as a means of communication in China and allowing participants to engage at their convenience.

Data Gathering: Interviews

Common qualitative methods, such as questionnaires, and in-depth interviews, were central to this study during the pilot phase. Questionnaires allowed for efficient remote data collection from a large number of participants, though responses could sometimes lack depth or detail. In contrast, interviews provided rich, nuanced insights into individual experiences but required significant time and limited the sample size.

The questionnaire was designed to gather both quantifiable data (closed items) and qualitative insights (open-ended items). The questionnaire drew on existing instruments from educational research (Bell & Waters, 2018), for example studies on the experience of teachers in English language education China (Baumber, 2025). The questionnaire included three main constructs, including demographic information (e.g., role, years of experience, school type), experiences with the DRP, with closed questions to assess familiarity, satisfaction, and perceived impact, alongside open-ended questions to capture nuanced perspectives; and questions targeting specific themes, such as perceived outcomes of the DRP. While existing questionnaires provided a guide, questions were tailored to the local context of the DRP.

The questionnaire proved successful during the pilot study. However, when deployed for the main study, it yielded almost no engagement. Consequently, the questionnaire

was abandoned early in favour of snowball sampling and semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method.

Interview questions (Appendix 5) were developed through a multi-step process. During the literature review, key themes and gaps identified from prior research, or the lack thereof on the DRP, shaped the initial question bank. Draft questions were then reviewed by a senior educator (my supervisor) to ensure alignment with the study's goals and avoid leading or ambiguous phrasing. Questions were designed to probe deeply into participants' experiences, such as:

- In which way did the policy have an effect on you/your finances/employment/time/emotions?
- What were the biggest challenges faced by ASTCs/state teachers during the DRP's implementation?
- How successful do you feel the policy has been overall?
- The interview guide included follow-up prompts to explore emergent themes such as emotional responses, unintended consequences, and predictions for future effects.

Data Analysis

Two primary data sets were analysed for the main study:

1. DRP Text: Official documents, guidelines, and communications related to the program.
2. Questionnaire Data: Both closed-item and open-ended responses (Pilot only).
3. Interview Transcripts: In-depth narratives from 30 participants representing diverse perspectives from each stakeholder group.

Interviews were audio-recorded (with consent) and transcribed verbatim. Responses were compiled digitally and then translated using a combination of a hired Chinese translator, supported by a translation tool (Otter). They were then categorised, analysed, and coded in NVivo to explore language, power dynamics, and underlying assumptions in participants' responses, as well as in the DRP text itself. This triangulated approach, guided by Constructivist Grounded Theory, allowed constant comparison across sources and is detailed in the following section.

4.1.3. Data Analysis: Double Reduction Policy Text

The Double Reduction Policy was introduced through a press release by Xinhua, an official government communication channel (Xin, 2012, p. 3).

The DRP was produced by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council, the two highest governing bodies in China, and released through Xinhua and the official government website (General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China & General Office of the State Council, 2021). The document was freely accessible on Xinhua's website, the government's Ministry of Education portal, and major Chinese media outlets such as People's Daily, CCTV. It was widely publicised, targeting educational authorities, schools, parents, students, and tutoring industry stakeholders.

An official English translation ("Guidelines on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Off-Campus Training for Compulsory Education Students", Appendix 1 – ORIGINAL TEXT) was available on the Xinhua site, although it has since been moved or removed. While the translation is accurate, some minor grammatical or spelling details were cross-referenced with the original Chinese text and adjusted by the translator for comprehension and analysis. The original Chinese document exceeds 6,000 words; its

English translation, sourced from the government website (Appendix 1 TRANSLATED ENGLISH TEXT), is over 4,000 words and is the version analysed in this study. Implications of translation are discussed throughout.

4.1.3.1 Computer-assisted Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is employed to examine the policy document, a method commonly applied to policy texts (Fairclough, 2013; Marshall, 2020; Taylor, 2004) and language education policies specifically (Anderson & Holloway, 2018; Dorner et al., 2023; Poudel & Choi, 2021). CDA allows the deconstruction of texts to understand meaning and potential social effects.

CDA posits that meaning is co-constructed through language, whether viewed as a product or precondition of thought. Language expresses inner states and external experiences, described by Burr (2015) as the "currency of concepts" (p. 60). Social Constructionism posits that language shapes reality through social interaction. Here, the government wields language in policy to implement social change. This approach recognises the central role of language in constructing realities and aligns with the sociocultural focus on this study.

As a CDA theorist, Halliday (1985) distinguishes between three metafunctions of language:

- Ideational: conveys experiences or ideas.
- Interpersonal: establishes social connections.
- Textual: links meaning to context.

Each sentence simultaneously reflects experience (ideational), integrates into discourse (textual), and connects with the audience (interpersonal). The ideational

function corresponds to the field of register (Halliday, 1985), revealing thematic content and both overt and covert intentions. These three functions are applied to analyse the Double Reduction Policy, using three stages for critical analysis:

- Contextual analysis: consider the circumstances of text production, distribution, and reception to understand social construction of reality.
- Formal analysis: examine lexical and structural patterns.
- Interpretation: explore how textual features shape social discourse, political positions, institutional values, and hegemonic support or challenge (Fairclough, 1992; Burke, Welch-Divine, & Gustafson, 2013; Suryani & Madjdi, 2015).

Chapter 5. explains the stages of CDA used here in detail. Analysis followed an inductive CDA approach, where research questions were defined, contextual information was collected, and content was examined to understand both overt and covert intentions, considering the authors (the government) and the intended audience (the population). Lexicogrammatical analysis, detailed in Section 4.2.1.3, identified themes, patterns, and implicit messages. Results were compared with the participant-generated data to answer the research questions.

4.1.3.2 Undertaking Critical Discourse Analysis and Translation

A specific challenge in analysing this document is the dimension of translation. The original Chinese-language document was translated by a Chinese speaker into English and retrieved from the original website where the DRP text was published. It is this English version that is being analysed in this research. Gao (2024) notes that translation conveys meaning across languages but is inherently constrained by cultural and societal

influences. Effective communication requires understanding cultural nuances and overlooking differences between Chinese and Western contexts can obscure meaning. Incorporating Chinese philosophy and culture enhances translation accuracy (Gao, 2024, p. 1). However, the reader's cultural background - Welsh, Palestinian, Ukrainian, German, or otherwise - inevitably shapes how the text is interpreted. Lei and Zhao (2022) emphasise that translation issues often arise not from word choice but from misunderstandings of cultural context (pp. 613-614). Every stage, from initial conception to final reading, alters meaning, making perfect translation impossible, especially when analysing an English version of a Chinese policy.

While some scholars question whether Critical Discourse Analysis can be legitimately applied to translated rather than original texts, some evidence supports its meaningful use, especially when researchers reflect critically on the translation process (Sichani & Hadian, 2017). Abu Zaghlan et al. (2023) cite research by Schäffner and Adab (1997), Schäffner (2002), Munday (2001), Calzada Pérez (2003), and Bongie (2005) which shows that translation studies and CDA can work together effectively to explore how ideological meanings are constructed, transformed, or maintained across languages. Additionally, (Sichani and Hadian (2017) argue that CDA of translated texts is not only possible but can also provide unique analytical perspectives, because translation itself is a site where power relations and value-based positions are actively negotiated. For example, a translator might soften or amplify certain messages, choose specific words, or omit content, all of which disseminate a message in ways that might not be apparent in the original.

The specific difficulties in conducting CDA on translated texts relate particularly to lexicogrammatical analysis. For instance, Chinese policy documents frequently employ four-character idioms (*chéngyǔ*, 成语) that hold deep cultural and historical meanings which cannot be directly translated or understood in their English equivalents. When analysing word frequency and collocations in translation, the researcher may identify

patterns that reflect the translator's lexical choices rather than the source text's linguistic features. Similarly, Chinese often omits explicit grammatical subjects, relying on context to convey agency, whereas English translation requires explicit subjects, potentially altering the representation of who holds responsibility or power. The passive voice in Chinese can function differently than in English, affecting how agency and accountability are constructed in the text. These translation-specific challenges mean that lexical analysis must account for the translator's interpretative decisions alongside the original author's discursive choices. However, rather than rendering CDA impossible or inadvisable, these challenges require methodological transparency about what is being analysed and how translation mediates that analysis.

In the present study, my role as both translator and analyst represents a methodological strength rather than a weakness. I worked primarily with the existing English translation but systematically cross-referenced it with the original Chinese text, particularly when key policy terms, concepts, or ambiguous passages required verification. This involved consulting with a professional translator to validate critical sections and resolve instances where the English version appeared to depart from the Chinese original in ways that might affect ideological interpretation. Because I undertook substantial verification and refinement of the translation myself, I occupy something of a hybrid position: largely *etic*, given my analytical distance as a non-Chinese researcher, but also somewhat *emic* through sustained engagement with both the policy context and its linguistic subtleties. This combination allows for the critical distance that CDA requires, whilst also providing the contextual depth that researchers relying entirely on existing translations may lack. Recent work by Lin (2025) on the Translation Embedded Approach (TEA) to CDA, and Elharraki's (2022) discussion of translation through the lens of register and critical discourse analysis, both illustrate how translator-analysts can draw on their understanding of translation choices to reveal the construction of ideological meanings in source and target texts alike, effectively rendering the translation process a valuable object of critical analysis in its own right.

Analysing the English translation of the DRP text raised several lexical and cultural challenges. Certain Chinese policy terms do not translate neatly into English, such as the phrase "立德树人" (lì dé shù rén) [DRP section 1.1], translated as "*the fundamental task of cultivating moral character and cultivating people*," which carries deep Confucian philosophical awareness, understood by the Chinese, but cannot be fully conveyed through literal translation. Another example could be "严肃处理" (yánsù chá chǔ) [DRP section 4.14], translated as "*strictly investigate and punish*," which is serious, but typical administrative language in Chinese policy documents (see also Appendix 2 – Education Law). However, it can sound particularly severe or punitive to English-speaking readers. To address these issues, I performed CDA on the English translation whilst systematically cross-referencing the original Chinese text with the translator to identify where translation choices affected meaning, tone or emphasis, with the intent of preserving awareness of cultural and political nuances that may be lost in translation.

A critical consideration in analysing the DRP is how different perspectives such as those of the government as author, the Chinese public as primary audience, and external readers such as myself and this thesis's audience, each shape the interpretation of the text and, consequently, the CDA. The government's framing of the DRP reflects its policy intentions and priorities, while the Chinese public's understanding is influenced by cultural context, personal experiences, and communication from media, schools, and peer groups, as Entman's (2008) Cascading Network Activation Model highlights. Meanwhile, external readers, including researchers such as myself, and international audiences, interpret the text through additional layers of translation, academic lenses, and cultural distance. Poststructuralist theory further underscores this variability, arguing that meaning is not fixed by the author but actively constructed by readers in their specific contexts (Derrida, 1978; Weedon, 1997). Thus, the DRP's analysis must account for these multiple frames of understanding, as each perspective introduces nuances that shape how the policy's language, goals, and implications are perceived and critiqued.

To analyse the texts, an iterative interpretative process using computer-assisted discourse analysis (CADA) methods was employed. An authoritative tradition of text analysis using such methods has been drawn upon from Stubbs (1996), who recognised that "sociological focus on the relation between the microstructure of texts and the macrostructure of social institutions, such as schools" (p. 15) could only be sufficiently analysed with computerised support:

"Deep patterning is beyond human observation and memory. It is observable only indirectly in the probabilities associated with lexical and grammatical choices across long texts and corpora. This therefore, leads in turn to a methodological focus on computer-assisted and quantitative methods, particularly in cases where native speaker intuitions are very limited, and where description can proceed only on the basis of attested corpus data" (p. 15).

Stegmeier (2012) describes developing and normalising Computer Aided Methodology for Text Analysis (CAMTA). Studies such as Lanvers (2018), Lucas et al. (2015), and Taylor (2004) cite education text analyses that have applied CDA to analyse education policy documents, making CDA a well-established approach to the analysis of educational texts, based on the earlier work of van Dijk (1997) and Fairclough (1989, 2001), the founders of CDA who advocated tailoring CDA approaches to each study. In this research, CDA was applied using NVivo 12 software, initially during the literature review to identify and document emerging themes and patterns. This iterative interpretative process was used for the DRP document analysis.

Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) developed the concept of lexicogrammar, in which all components of language combine to create meaning beyond the function of each element individually. A lexicogrammatical approach identifies grammatical patterns, word frequencies, and forms, enabling the researcher to understand a text's register, style, or intention. For instance, repeated imperative verbs convey a different mood than declarative adjectives, reflecting variations in

professional, instructional, or narrative styles and deepening understanding of the author's intentions, context, and message.

Figure 18

Unit Ranking (Highest to Lowest)

-Sentence

-Clause

-Group

-Word

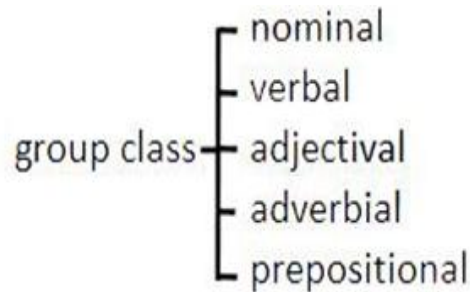
-Morpheme

Note. SFL Adapted from Gillett (2023a).

Gillett (2023a) identifies the main units recognised by SFL as sentence, clause, group, word, and morpheme, organised hierarchically (Figure 19). Units are further grouped and assigned to specific classes: nominal, verbal, adjectival, and adverbial groups, which comprise nouns, verbs, and adjectives as word classes (Gillett, 2023a; Halliday, 1985). Halliday distinguished groups from phrases: "A phrase is different from a group in that a group is an expansion of a word, a phrase is a contraction of a clause" (in Fontaine & Schönthal, 2019, p. 118). In this study, the term *group* is used consistently to align with SFL's functional approach. Prepositional groups, similar to adverbial groups, serve as adjuncts within clauses (Gillett, 2023b; Figure 20).

Figure 19

SFL Group Systems



Note. Adapted from Gillett (2023)a.

- Nominal groups consist of nouns or nominal elements as their main component and typically serve as the subject of a clause.
- Verbal groups are centred around verbs and generally act as the predicator or functional element of a clause.
- Adjectival groups, led by adjectives, function as complement elements within a clause structure.
- Adverbial groups, which are led by adverbs, serve to modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs within a clause.
- Prepositional groups are led by prepositions and can also function as adjectives or adverbs. Similar to adverbial groups, prepositional groups serve as adjunct elements within a clause structure. (Adapted from Gillet, 2023b)

The NVivo coding produced visualisations displaying the frequency and distribution of each category (Appendix 6, i & ii), which allowed the inference of meaning,

contextualisation within existing literature, and cross-referencing with interview data, and are discussed in detail in Chapter 6: Results.

4.2 EMPIRICAL DATA COLLECTION

4.2.1 Pilot Study

4.2.1.1 Purpose and Theoretical Foundations

Systematised requirements for the validity of social research are supported by quality standards described as "credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, as cited in Al Riyami, 2015, p. 414). These ensure that findings are credibly grounded through participants' perspectives, transferable to similar contexts, dependable by being consistent over time, and authentic by being free from, or acknowledged, researcher bias (Al Riyami, 2015). To adhere to these standards, a pilot study, trialling the theoretical framework and methods within China, aimed to test whether the methods of data gathering and analysis yielded data suitable for answering the research questions.

4.2.1.2 Participant Recruitment and Selection

Criteria for recruitment required participants to be, or to have been, engaged in English language education in China during the introduction and implementation of the Double Reduction Policy (DRP) of 2021. Roles included students, parents, state or private teachers, or staff/owners of ASTCs. Only adults were included, as they were considered more likely to understand the wider historical, national, and cultural context.

Initial outreach for the pilot study involved identifying three participants, each representing one of the target groups. The three selected from the initial response included a female After-School Training Centre (ASTC) teacher from Jiangsu, a female high school student from Zhejiang, Shaoxing, who was in her final year during the introduction of the Double Reduction Policy (DRP), and a female parent from Jiangsu, Lianyungang, whose child was in elementary school at the time of the DRP's implementation. Once selected, participants were contacted using the details they had provided, and written consent was reconfirmed verbally with an explanation of security measures and anonymity. Each message contained a request to participate in the survey and a follow-up interview, and they were directed to carefully read the consent information again before starting.

4.2.1.3 Data Collection and Processing

The pilot participants were invited to complete a questionnaire (Appendix 4) using a link to Qualtrics, distributed via WeChat and email. This approach served as the foundation for the subsequent snowball sampling method employed in the main study, where direct participant selection for interviews rendered questionnaires unnecessary. The pilot questionnaire began with informed consent, after which participants completed the online survey. The questionnaire survey contained both open and closed questions to assess the suitability of participants for further in-depth interviews

and to gather general information on opinions regarding the DRP. The original questionnaire used in the pilot study is provided in Appendix 5; however, this was abandoned for the main study. Having completed the questionnaires, the participants were invited for an interview. There was no linking record kept that identified which questionnaire was completed by which respondent (Figure 21).

Figure 20

Section of the Record of Interview Participants

CODE	NATIONALITY	ROLE(S) 2021	LOCATION	INTERVIEW DATE	LANGAUGE	TRANSLATOR	NOTES
IPS001	Chinese	ASTC Teacher	Jiangsu,	21.02.2024	English	No	Conducted a follow-up interview to develop answers, which had proven too limited during first interview
IPS002	Chinese	Student	Zhejiang, Shaoxing	29.02.2024	English	No	Conducted a follow-up interview to try to develop answers, which had proven too limited during first interview
IPS003	Chinese	Parent	Jiangsu, LYG	01.03.2024	Chinese	Yes	Participant declined invite for follow-up interview

Note. Full document available. See '*Data Collection*'

Questionnaire responses were compiled into a summary Excel document for visualisation (see Appendix 4, ii, Separate Document withheld in accordance with ethical protocols to protect participant safety). Interview transcripts were coded in

NVivo using the rubrics based on the literature review codes (see Appendices 6 and 7, Separate Document), enabling comparative analysis of themes and, where necessary, follow-up questions. The results are discussed below.

Once interviews and data processing were completed, identifying information such as email addresses was deleted. The framework was designed from the epistemological and ontological foundations of the study, with Constructivist Grounded Theory selected to support the aims and objectives. This approach provided an idealist, subjective framework for exploring human behaviours, values, and organising strategies, dependent on cultural, locational, temporal, and environmental contexts (see 4.1.1 Ontological foundations).

Based on the pilot study, several key adjustments were made for the main study. The interview questions were revised for clarity and relevance, and follow-up prompts were added where pilot responses were too brief. The feasibility of using snowball sampling and online recruitment for broader participation was also confirmed.

4.2.2 Analysis of Pilot

Interviews were conducted using approved online meeting software. In-built and independent secure transcription software recorded the conversations, with files stored immediately in the university cloud and deleted from the software. Transcriptions were checked against the audio for accuracy. Chinese transcripts were sent via university email to an approved translator for inspection and editing.

Having identified the participants, the interviews were completed, and the data were compiled into a summary sheet; however, the transcription process took longer. The English transcription was made relatively efficient by using Otter software to transcribe the interview and then editing any mistakes. The Chinese transcription took much

longer. Notta software was used to transcribe the original Chinese and then translate into English. A translator was used during the interview to check and correct the Chinese transcription. Finally, the English version had to be rechecked by the translator to ensure accuracy, as although I, as the researcher, am able to converse in Chinese, my level of proficiency does not reach the standard necessary to transcribe translations accurately.

4.2.2.1 Thematic Analysis

The transcriptions were coded using NVivo to identify the themes that emerged and to compare them with the themes identified in the literature review. As seen in Figures 22 and 28, the initial coding grids expanded significantly. For example, from an initial four general themes (National Values & Principles, Responsibilities, Education and Main Stakeholders) for the CDA of the DRP, an additional 32 subcategories were created.

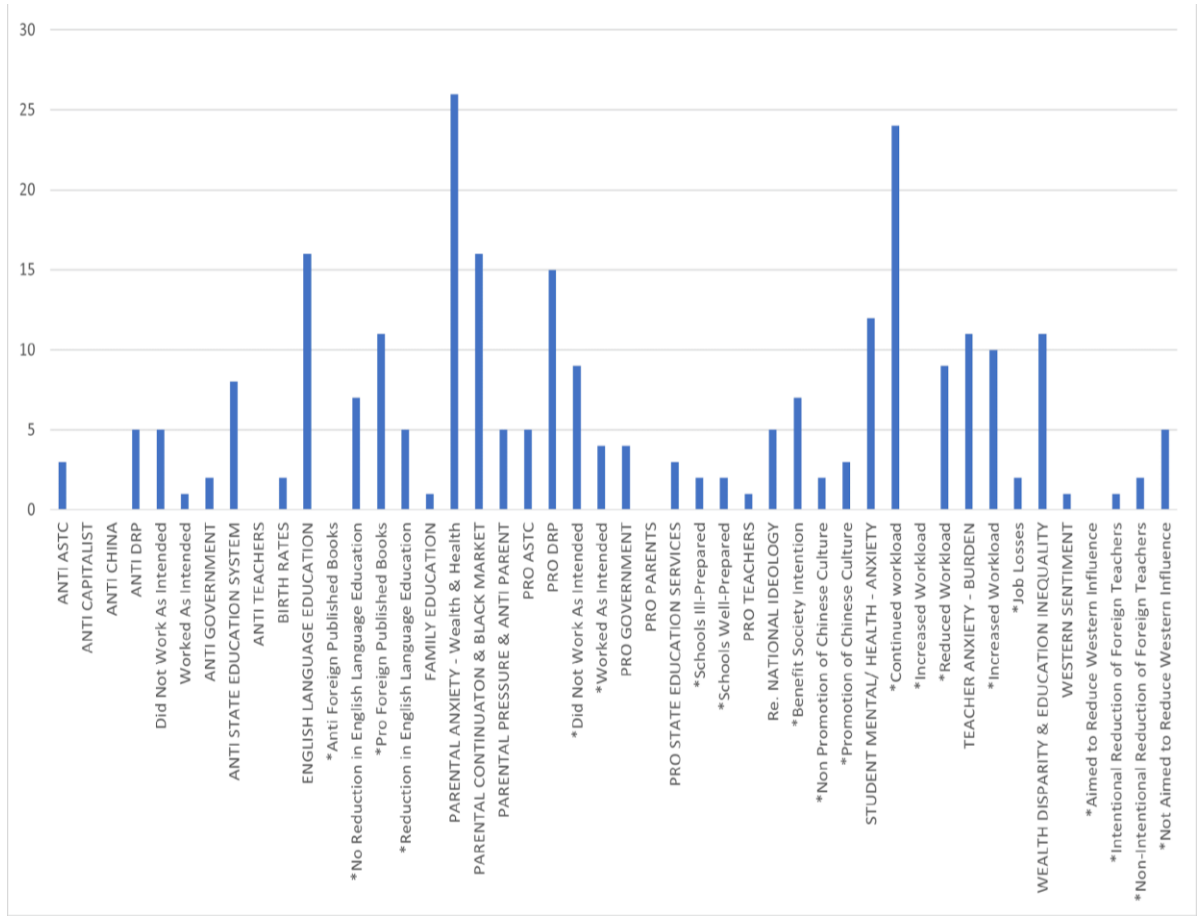
Analysing the data inductively, three main themes emerged, which were subdivided into the 25 categories used in the literature review, with further subdivisions added to the existing themes for clarity, e.g. under 'Teacher Burdens' were added 'Job Losses' and 'Increased Workload (Appendix 7). A new set of coded themes was added to better represent the opinions discussed on the subject of de-Westernisation (Appendix 7). The additional or expanded codes were developed by first considering the general themes outlined in the literature review, which included general, expected stances such as pro-DRP, anti-DRP, pro-ASTC, anti-ASTC, pro-state education, and student/teacher burdens. Whilst these were suitable to form the foundational thematic direction of the literature review, it became apparent that more sub-themes were required to understand the scope of issues encompassed by the DRP. Themes such as birth rates, anti-Western

sentiment, wealth disparity, author nationality, and value-based considerations were added.

The expansion reflected a deeper understanding of the DRP's multiple impacts. For instance, "Teacher Burdens" varied depending on the category of participant: ASTC teachers reported salary loss or job termination, whereas state teachers highlighted increased hours without additional pay. Sub-themes were identified by analysing primary literature, noting repeated topics, and placing them within existing categories. In this way, interview data could be analysed with greater nuance and representativeness. By expanding on some existing themes and adding more detailed coding nodes in NVivo, the subject matter elicited during the interviews can be analysed in a more nuanced and representative manner.

The pilot study provided initial insights into participant perspectives on the DRP. Pilot questionnaire responses helped identify areas needing clarification in preparation for the main study, while interviews revealed key themes such as continued workload for students and parental anxiety. The pilot confirmed the effectiveness of NVivo coding, while highlighting the need to expand thematic categories such as job losses, wealth disparity, and cultural values to better capture the complex impacts of the DRP before proceeding to the main study.

Figure 21
Pilot Study Themes



Note. Thematic results from interviews with Pilot participants show effects and opinion patterns that would later be expanded upon in the Main Study.

Following interviews, consent forms were returned to participants for their records. Data were then organised systematically and securely stored.

4.2.2.2 Reflection on the Pilot

Two issues arose, regarding general research constraints and data-gathering challenges, which are discussed here alongside mitigation strategies. The first involved common issues in cross-cultural research, including limited time due to delays in ethics approval and funding for a translator; participants' varying willingness to elaborate on sensitive issues; and the use of both English and Chinese throughout the research process.

Another challenge was the literature, namely restricted access to domestic academic material, and the expanding body of literature. As experiences of the policy became embedded in everyday life, new research continued to appear. A decision had to be made to stop the review at a certain point. While this necessarily limited contemporaneousness, it also ensured that the study captured a distinct stratum of the phenomenon in real time, strengthening its contribution to the field.

The language in which the interviews were conducted was either Chinese or English, depending on the preference of the participant. The teacher and student spoke English, while the parent spoke Chinese. A professional translator was engaged to support interviews and transcription, while official translations were used where available. Nonetheless, reliance on translation technology, due to budget constraints, introduced extra workload and the risk of minor inaccuracies.

A further limitation concerned participants' willingness to discuss a potentially sensitive topic. This section underwent sequential piloting to address limitations in data depth and participant engagement. In Phase 1, interviews with the initial three participants, one teacher, one student, and one parent, revealed uneven response quality. One participant avoided direct discussion of policy implementation, while another provided vague responses, complicating thematic categorisation.

To mitigate risks, the research design focused on the effects of the education policy from a personal perspective, rather than on broader political critique. Follow-up interviews were therefore conducted to refine focus and adjust questioning strategies for the main study. This adjustment included adding targeted prompts, such as "Can you describe how the DRP affected your daily work?" instead of "What are your views on the DRP?" Interviews were also structured to prioritise specific policy impacts, such as workload, job security, or teaching practices.

In Phase 2, these revisions yielded deeper, more focused data. Participants provided detailed accounts of their experiences, such as the teacher describing reduced working hours but increased administrative tasks, and the student explaining changes in homework load. This sequential approach confirmed that narrower, experience-based questions improved response relevance and depth, while retaining the need to be sensitive around politically themed lines of questioning, informing the final interview protocol for the main study. The pilot data itself was discarded, but the refined questioning strategy was retained. In transferring the methods and strategies from the pilot to the main study, it was decided to first give space for the participants to answer freely within the scope of their own experiences and understanding, and then to introduce the specific questions that may not have arisen and that are of interest in this research.

Practical issues also arose during the pilot. Ethics approval was delayed, reducing the time available for data collection, though this was mitigated by pre-selecting participants and preparing technical tools in advance (Qualtrics, Otter, Notta, secure storage systems). Financial constraints further limited reliance on professional translation. Although a translator reviewed and corrected the work, the researcher had to undertake much of the transcription and translation process independently, adding significant time pressure, but also increased the reliability of translation.

4.2.2.3 Adjustments Taken After Pilot/Recommendations for Improvement

A number of decisions were taken to improve the data collection phase of the research. Conducting and processing Chinese language interviews proved to be time-consuming, as the original expectation of manually transcribing and using generic translation software was not feasible. With large amounts of text, more specialist software had to be sourced as accuracy proved to be extremely poor in several of the available programmes. Using a translator for interviews, transcription, and editing/checking is costly. For an English language PhD, it is recommended to identify English-speaking participants; however, this could influence the research outcomes by changing the demographics. For the main study, the transcription and translation process was refined to ensure both accuracy and efficiency in data processing, while maintaining the focus on Chinese-speaking participants to preserve the study's integrity and relevance.

Regarding the sampling it became apparent that the participant groups all had valuable and different perspectives. However, the interviews conducted in English yielded shorter responses, as expected, since respondents were using a second language, which potentially limited their answers. The Chinese language interview was much more productive. This led to a clearer estimation of the time and resources required for the main study.

It was estimated that the final sample size for the main study should be in the range of 5-10 participants from each group. The required amount of time for analysing a full sample could be projected as follows. It took one day from the initial request/sharing of the link to collect answers from the participants. Transcription took around three to four days, plus editing/correction from the translator. The expected timing for a large sample was not expected to alter significantly. Thus, for the main study, it was

expected that coding and analysis of 15-30 responses would take around a month of full-time work.

The pilot study showed that the interview questions needed minor adjustments; some questions elicited repeated answers so were omitted for the main study, such as generalised or vague questions, such as "Do you believe the DRP was a good idea?", and specificity was added to some interview questions, as some key areas were not forthcoming. For example, when asked if participants felt that the policy was designed to address any issues other than student workload, all responded "no". For the final interview, the issues of birth rate, family finances and cultural education were suggested individually and elicited a much more fruitful response.

4.2.3 Main Study

Use of English by Participants

Most participants were Chinese citizens, while two were American and one was British. Interviews were conducted in two ways: L1 interviews with translator support (where the interviewer primarily spoke English) or using Chinese to facilitate communication or when translators were unavailable. In three cases, expected English-speaking interviewees chose Chinese to better articulate their thoughts. Regarding bilingual interviews, various terms, and vocabulary peculiar to English L2 speakers in China may convey alternative meanings to unfamiliar listeners. For example, "let" is commonly used beyond the standard "allow" or "permit", often meaning "make", 'encourage', or simply as a doing verb: "I let my children to study Cambridge English" means "do" rather than "allow" - an L1 speaker might say "My children study Cambridge English". Other L1/2 interference instances include direct translations of

common Chinese terms that are unused in English, such as "the release of nature" (tiān xìng de shì fàng 天性的释放), meaning liberating the child's innate playful nature through reduced workload. Where meaning is unclear, [notes/additions/corrections] have been added for clarification in Chapter 6. Results.

The bilingual nature of the research presented minimal challenges, as recordings and transcripts were sent to translators for review and correction. Once verified, some instances were identified where more in-depth follow-up questions could have been asked; however, opportunities were missed due to language and cultural barriers, which may have made participants reluctant to discuss certain topics with a foreigner. However, this has not impacted data quality, as combined interviews produced rich results. The challenges of conducting research that incorporates two languages are discussed in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.3.

Questionnaire Issues

Following pilot study methods, a questionnaire was prepared to identify and engage participants. Despite following identical procedures, the questionnaire failed to produce expected results. Twenty respondents completed it, but only one agreed to a follow-up interview. Several respondents left answers blank or provided minimal information in open questions. After examining the questionnaire data, the decision was made to disregard the questionnaires and begin snowballing from the single participant who had been interviewed. Deciding to dispense with the recruitment questionnaire as it did not provide enough (or in many cases any) useable information to warrant the additional step, when more fruitful data could be collected through interviews. This also reduced the onus on participants. Additionally, pivoting to snowballing from the initial pilot participants afforded direct recommendations for interview with people who met the criteria set out during the initial planning stages.

Overall, this decision, while taken late into the process, increased efficiency, and eliminated overburdening the participants.

4.2.3.1 Participants

For the main study, I aimed for the recommended 5–10 participants. I ultimately recruited 30 participants (Table 6), fairly equally representing each stakeholder group of parents, teachers (both state and private sector), and former students who are defined as individuals who had experienced the DRP during their compulsory education but were no longer enrolled in school at the time of interviews. This group consisted primarily of university students, selected because they could provide reflective analysis of the policy's implementation and effects whilst avoiding the ethical complexities of interviewing minors.

Table 6*Participant Demographic/Informational Table*

ROLE	SUBJECT	NATIONALITY	TRANSLATOR
Former Student	x	Chinese	N
Former Student	x	Chinese	N
Former Student	x	Chinese	N
Former student	x	Chinese	N
Former student	x	Chinese	N
Former student	x	Chinese	N
Former student	x	Chinese	N
Former student	x	Chinese	N
Parent	x	Chinese	Y
Parent	x	Chinese	N
Parent	x	Chinese	Y
Parent	x	Chinese	N
Parent	x	Chinese	Y
Parent	x	Chinese	Y
Teacher	English	English	N
Teacher	High School	Chinese	Y
Teacher	Primary Music	Chinese	Y
Teacher	English	Chinese	N
Teacher / Parent	High School	Chinese	Y
Teacher/Parent	Biology	Chinese	Y
Teacher/Parent	High School Maths	Chinese	Y
ASTC / Teacher	Chemistry	Chinese	Y
ASTC Teacher	English	Chinese	N
ASTC Teacher	Homeroom	UK	N
ASTC Teacher / Parent	English	Chinese	Y
ASTC Teacher / Parent	English	Chinese	N
ASTC Teacher/Parent	English	Chinese	N
Uni Teacher / Parent	EAP/Translation	Chinese	N
KG Teacher	Homeroom	USA	N
KG Teacher	Homeroom	USA	N

Note. The table shows overlapping roles among participants. Participants were asked which role they would prefer to be interviewed about, and the first role shown is their chosen role.

Eight state teachers were interviewed, and all are Chinese citizens. Seven were in China, and one was in the UK. Of the eight, one was a university teacher and, therefore, one step removed from the state system. The university teacher and the teacher in the UK both teach English and conducted their interviews in English, while the rest conducted theirs in Chinese. In total, three are English teachers while the rest teach other subjects. The state teachers worked in a variety of schools (primary, middle and high) and all had first-hand experience of the DRP.

14 participants interviewed were parents, of which eight were also teachers, both in the state (4) and private sector (4). Six identified as parents only. The state teachers responded to interview questions in their primary role as teachers, with passing references to their roles as parents. The private sector teachers responded more evenly as dual-role teachers/parents.

4.2.3.2 Data Collection

Language of Interviews

The predominantly Chinese participant base necessitated careful consideration of language barriers and cultural sensitivities in data collection procedures. Two distinct interview approaches were implemented:

- L1 interviews with translator support: The researcher conducted interviews primarily in English with professional translator assistance, strategically incorporating Chinese to establish rapport or clarify complex concepts.

- Mixed-language interviews: In three instances where translators were unavailable, participants opted to respond in Chinese, despite anticipating English-language interviews, as they felt more comfortable articulating complex thoughts in their first language.

All recordings and transcripts underwent rigorous verification processes. The translator reviewed and corrected all transcripts post-interview, identifying instances where language barriers may have prevented deeper questioning. While some opportunities for more detailed exploration were missed due to linguistic and cultural constraints, particularly when participants were reluctant to discuss sensitive topics with a foreign researcher, the combined interview data yielded substantial analytical material.

Specific attention was paid to L1/L2 interference patterns and culturally specific terminology that required clarification. For example, the term "let" frequently appeared in non-standard usage, meaning "allow," "make," or "encourage" rather than conventional English usage. Direct translations of Chinese expressions, such as "the release of nature" (天性的释放), required contextual clarification through bracketed annotations to ensure accurate interpretation.

4.2.3.3 Data Analysis

Building on the pilot study's successful application of constructivist grounded theory strategies, the main study employed systematic lexical coding to identify thematic patterns. This approach allowed themes to emerge organically from the data rather

than imposing predetermined categories, while maintaining consistency with the analytical framework established during the literature review.

The coding process, built on the systematic approach established during the pilot study, was significantly expanded to manage the larger dataset. Initially, all 30 interview transcripts underwent open coding, which identified recurring concepts and patterns. This stage required substantial expansion of the pilot study's original framework to accommodate the added complexity revealed by the larger sample. From there, more precise codes were developed through focused coding, guided by both frequency and significance across stakeholder groups. Categories were refined and subdivided where necessary to capture the distinct experiences of different participant types. Finally, theoretical coding integrated these focused codes into broader thematic categories, revealing relationships between concepts and illuminating differences in perspectives across stakeholder groups.

Presentation of results

The study employed a mixed-methods approach to data presentation, strategically balancing quantitative overview with qualitative depth. The quantitative component provided frequency counts of coded themes across stakeholder groups, presented through tables and figures illustrating discussion prominence rather than establishing statistical significance. This numerical foundation was complemented by qualitative depth through rich descriptive accounts incorporating extensive participant quotations, allowing stakeholder voices to emerge authentically while maintaining analytical rigour.

The methodology culminated in systematic cross-stakeholder comparison, identifying convergent and divergent perspectives across participant groups. This comparative

dimension proved particularly valuable in revealing patterns invisible when examining individual stakeholder groups in isolation.

Frequency data should be understood as indicative of discussion prominence rather than quantitative measures of opinion distribution. Many participants held complex, sometimes contradictory viewpoints (for example, supporting policy intentions while criticising implementation outcomes), making simple classifications insufficient for capturing stakeholder perspective nuances.

4.2.3.4 Methodological Limitations

Recruitment and Sampling Limitations

The questionnaire approach failure represented a significant methodological challenge requiring an adaptive response. The low conversion rate from questionnaire completion to interview participation (5%) suggested either insufficient engagement with the research topic or reluctance to participate in a detailed discussion, necessitating abandonment of the planned mixed-methods approach in favour of purely qualitative data collection.

The shift to snowball sampling, while necessary for participant recruitment, introduced potential network bias. Participants recruited through personal networks may overrepresent certain perspectives, geographic regions, or socioeconomic backgrounds - a particular concern in policy research, where individuals tend to connect with others who are similarly situated.

My Position as Researcher: Between Emic and Etic

As the researcher, my status as a foreign interviewer appeared to influence participant responses, particularly regarding politically sensitive topics. Participants expressed discomfort with questions about the effectiveness of government policy or political motivations, creating tension between the objectives of academic inquiry and participant welfare. Despite confidentiality assurances, concerns about the potential consequences of criticising government policy likely influenced the authenticity of responses in China's political context.

This effect was most pronounced among state teachers, where responses demonstrated remarkable uniformity, potentially reflecting institutional pressure to provide positive government policy assessments rather than expressing personal perspectives. One interview was terminated early when questions were perceived as politically sensitive, highlighting the challenges inherent in cross-cultural policy research within politically restrictive contexts.

Different stakeholder groups provided varying levels of openness and detail, potentially affecting thematic representation. ASTC teachers proved notably forthcoming about negative policy impacts, possibly due to their outsider status relative to state institutions, while state teachers offered more guarded responses that may not fully reflect their actual perspectives. This differential willingness to discuss policy criticisms may be linked to participants' relative positions following policy implementation, potentially creating an imbalanced representation of critical viewpoints.

These methodological challenges, particularly those related to political sensitivity and cultural barriers, reflect broader issues in conducting social science research within politically restrictive contexts. They simultaneously offer valuable insights into the

research environment itself and how political contexts shape both policy implementation and academic inquiry into policy effects.

4.3 ETHICS

Investigating the effects of the Double Reduction Policy on participants of English Language Education in China required speaking with those directly affected. To ensure a productive approach to understanding the questions posed in this research, while adhering to ethical considerations, ethical approval was sought by outlining the multi-perspective nature of the research.

In clarifying the ethical and logistical principles, the following areas guide this research: voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, data protection, potential for harm, social responsibility, and results communication.

- **Informed consent:** Participation is entirely voluntary, and participants have the agency to decide their level of involvement. They are kept abreast of developments and have opportunities to review their input. Additionally, only select individuals are invited to participate, e.g., those over the age of 18.
- **Anonymity, confidentiality, and data protection:** Participants are informed of the levels of anonymity and should feel secure in the knowledge that their identities will be protected, and their data will be used responsibly. To ensure anonymity, records of questionnaire respondents and interview participants from both the pilot and main study were labelled separately and stored independently.

- Potential for harm: All reasonable precautions have been taken to protect participants from any potential harm.
- Social responsibility: Research should contribute to the common good.
- Results communication: In addition to the results presented in this thesis, participants will be informed of the research results, should they wish to know.

Additional matters to consider included the context in which the research was being conducted, i.e. geographically, politically, and socio-culturally. China has stringent laws on state security, and therefore, this research had to work within the parameters of both law and what is culturally acceptable to discuss. These considerations were not only to abide by the rule of law, but also to ensure the comfort of the participants during the interview. While evaluating the risks and implications of each stage of the research, a data management plan was written in accordance with the University of York's policies. These covered issues such as data management, long-term storage, access, and secure communication with participants. Additionally, the participants were positioned centrally as the guiding element in applying for ethical approval. Considerations such as comfort and safety, particularly when discussing topics that could be deemed sensitive in their country, were factored into the data-gathering plan. Furthermore, special attention was paid to ensuring that no participants were asked to comment on or criticise the government, but to discuss the direct and personal effects of a nationwide education policy. These elements of the ethical perspective were all recorded in both the data management plan and the ethics approval documentation to ensure trustworthiness and validity. Together, these steps were intended to mitigate any potential risks.

4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has outlined the theoretical foundations and methodological strategies employed to investigate the effects of the DRP on key stakeholders in the context of English language education in China. Rooted in an Idealist and Interpretivist paradigm, the research adopts a Social Constructionist lens and employs Constructivist Grounded Theory to explore the subjective realities shaped by sociocultural and political contexts. The design and execution of data collection, including a pilot study and main study, were carefully aligned with ethical considerations and methodological rigour to ensure credibility and trustworthiness. The use of Critical Discourse Analysis and thematic coding, as facilitated by NVivo, provided a systematic and replicable framework for examining both policy texts and participant perspectives. Together, these elements form a comprehensive and contextually responsive research design that enables a rich, nuanced understanding of the DRP's implications. Building on this methodological foundation, the next chapter undertakes a Critical Discourse Analysis of the Double Reduction Policy text, examining how language constructs, reinforces, and negotiates the policy's intended and lived meanings, leading to the effects on key stakeholders.

5. CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE DOUBLE REDUCTION POLICY TEXT

This chapter undertakes a Critical Discourse Analysis of the English translation of the Double Reduction Policy text, examining how its language and thematic structures construct meaning within broader social, political, and educational contexts. While the analysis is based on the translation, it is important to acknowledge that translation is never a neutral process but inevitably reflects cultural and ideological positioning (Liddicoat, 2007). The original Chinese text was referenced to ensure that sociopolitical and discursive nuances were preserved as much as possible.

The analysis proceeds from two perspectives: lexical and thematic. First, an analysis of the context surrounding the policy will be considered through a discussion on the production and consumption of the text. Next, a detailed report on the lexicogrammatical elements of the text is presented, utilising data from a corpus linguistic analysis conducted using NVivo. Following this is a thematic analysis of the policy document, which aligns with the thematic analysis conducted in the literature review. Here, the categories of the text and the goals of the policy are discussed. Finally, a discussion on the critical discourse analysis of the Double Reduction Policy text concludes the chapter.

5.1 ANALYSING THE CONTEXT: PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION OF THE POLICY DOCUMENTS

5.1.1 The Text Structure

The structure and organisation follow a simple framework. A bold and clear heading identifies the authors - General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council - followed by the title. This leaves no doubt about the authority of the contained text.

The document is organised into clear paragraphs of similar sizes and subtitled with the objectives. The opening section, "*1. General requirements*" introduces the central concept and goals in three sections: "*Guiding ideology*," "*Working principles*," and "*Work goals*." These convey the national principles, long-term objectives, rationale, and strategies for their implementation. The document is clearly structured and free of distractions such as imagery or exaggeration, as is typical for policy texts.

5.1.2 Identifying the Policy Consumers

The DRP was designed for multiple consumer groups within Chinese society. The primary consumers include students, parents, families, teachers, schools, and ASTCs, as evidenced by the policy's direct references to these stakeholders throughout the text. The secondary consumers encompass government departments, education officials, and the broader Chinese public, who are affected by the policy's implementation and social impact.

The text was created for the Chinese population, as evidenced by its public release through both the government's website and its main media outlet, Xinhua News Agency. Additionally, schools and tuition centres were informed through official communications and regular in-person visits from the Ministry of Education. The policy is clearly designed to encompass a massive percentage of the population, including major groups such as "*parents*", "*families*", "*teachers*", and "*students*". Meanwhile, the approximately 15 million private education sector workers (Wang et al., 2022b) are marginalised through allegedly being referred to by the president as part of the "stubborn malady" (Jie et al., 2021) that needs to be eliminated. This deliberate vilification of private sector teachers highlights a clear power imbalance against ASTCs, reflecting the government's intention to exert greater control over both the content taught to students and the individuals responsible for teaching it, in order to raise standards and realign education with national principles.

The availability of an English translation on the government website (Government of the People's Republic of China, 2021) suggests recognition that international consumers (researchers, policymakers, educators outside China) may also engage with the text, though they were not the primary intended audience. However, it is unclear whether this is aimed at the foreign community within China, education providers abroad, or others.

5.1.2 Policy Production Context

China's English education market, the world's largest, positions language education policy as a matter of significant national interest (Cheng & Wei, 2021). According to Hu (2021), English language education policy in China is "closely intertwined with its political, ideological, socioeconomic, and cultural shifts, reflecting and responding to national priorities and changing agendas" (p. 19). The Double Reduction Policy (DRP)

emerged during a period of national rejuvenation, aligning with broader policies that emphasise cultural identity and collective renewal (Zhao, 2021).

As an official government document, the DRP carries clear political motivations and national objectives: reducing academic pressure on students by reforming state school practices and curbing the private education sector. Its aims also align with China's broader goal of advancing "common prosperity" and addressing inequalities (Wu, 2022). This connection was underscored in China Daily, where President Xí Jìnpíng described "common prosperity" as an essential requirement of socialism and a cornerstone of Chinese-style modernisation, urging adherence to a people-centred, high-quality development model (Xi, 2021; Yiping, 2021).

5.1.3 Dissemination

The policy follows established Chinese governmental communication patterns, through the Xinhua News Agency, along with publicly available methods, such as newspapers displayed on street boards, television, and social media, to reach large audiences with near-universal accessibility. Because education policies affect virtually every household, they are distributed swiftly and collectively, allowing public responses to be observed at key moments. The information is disseminated in two ways: formally and informally. Formal channels target specific stakeholders directly, for example, through written correspondence to education departments and schools, in-person visits during inspections or routine interactions, and official announcements through institutional hierarchies. Simultaneously, informal distribution occurs through media coverage and online discussion. As with many countries, public discourse in China is encouraged to a certain extent to gauge opinion and disseminate information (Stockmann & Luo, 2017). This comprehensive approach ensures that both primary and secondary consumers receive official policy-related information.

5.1.4 Analytical Framework

This research deconstructs the DRP through critical discourse analysis, triangulated with a literature review and interviews that explore stakeholder opinions both at the time of implementation and over subsequent years. This combination provides a comprehensive view of facts, consumer interpretations, and effects across different stakeholder groups.

Whilst various CDA approaches informed the theoretical background of this study (including Van Dijk's focus on cognitive processes linking individual thoughts with societal structures, and Wodak's emphasis on historical context in shaping discourse), this analysis employs Fairclough's three-dimensional framework as its primary analytical tool. Fairclough's approach examines text (linguistic features), discourse practice (production and consumption of texts), and sociocultural practice (broader social and cultural context). Austin's (1962) speech act theory provides background context through its three functions:

- Locutionary act - saying something.
- Illocutionary act - doing something with words. The intended meaning.
- Perlocutionary act - accomplishing something with words.

In summary, whilst Van Dijk, Wodak, and Austin provide important theoretical context for understanding CDA and speech acts, this study operationalises Fairclough's three-dimensional framework as the primary analytical tool for examining the DRP text. Combining Fairclough's analytical framework with the contextual insights from Van Dijk, Wodak, and Austin enables a better understanding of policy documents produced in styles and contexts unfamiliar to consumers from differing cultural or discourse conventions. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, official communications in China, like those in most cultures, adhere to an established register that is dependent on

formality, social hierarchy, cultural norms, and context. This stems from the historical necessity for mutual intelligibility across dialects, and, according to Zhen (2024), the Chinese government placing "greater emphasis on releasing authoritative information and is more meticulous in its use of language" (p. 6). This linguistic tradition is also seen in official translations, where interpreters receive professional training in political documents, contributing to more informative and formal language that "tends to be less interactive" (Zhen, 2024, p. 6). China's cultural adherence to hierarchical respect further influences discourse style with formal Chinese using direct wording, strict grammar, and reserved tone when addressing superiors or delivering communiqués, contrasting sharply with informal Chinese communication (Lee, 2020). An unspoken formality scale positions speech acts from highly formal to informal, influenced by communicator-audience relationships and social context, allowing Chinese consumers to easily situate and process information appropriately (Li & Graesser, 2016). Crucially, Chinese "politeness" differs fundamentally from Western norms, emphasising hierarchical distinctions with the government holding the highest position, thereby highlighting and maintaining social rank differences (Zhu & Bao, 2010).

The DRP's intended consumers were the general population of China, as evidenced both by its means of release (a news agency accessible by all), and by its content, referencing the vast majority of the population, from students, parents and families, to teachers, schools, businesses and government departments, to the nation as a unified cultural unit. Written in Chinese for citizens, the policy nonetheless included an English translation on the government website where the policy text remained accessible at the time of writing (General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, & General Office of the State Council, 2021), indicating accessibility for international consumers whilst not being primarily intended for them. The policy was created as part of an ancient and ongoing series of educational policies throughout China's history rather than in isolation, with modern governmental communications typically delivered through Xinhua (Ma, 2020). This established pattern suggests

Chinese consumers are familiar with such delivery methods and stylistic conventions, whilst international consumers may find the approach incongruous.

5.2 NVivo CORPUS LINGUISTICS

The first perspective used to analyse the DRP is lexical. Lexicogrammar is the integration of vocabulary and grammar into a unified system and is a concept central to systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and corpus linguistics (CL), both of which are key to applied linguistics (Sardinha, 2019). Lexicogrammatical analysis is the exploration of how the interaction between vocabulary (lexis) and grammar (syntax) forms meaning and, ultimately, how meaning is constructed by utilising text and context. However, the grammatical analysis needs to be considered with care, given that a translated version was used to perform the analysis, and that structural differences between Chinese and English are significant. Despite these challenges, lexicogrammar is suited to the structural properties of Chinese, as the lexicogrammar perspective suggests that even the most rigid or abstract grammatical processes rely on lexical connections. In this view, lexis and grammar are not considered separate but are seen as interdependent aspects of linguistic structure. By applying the principles to the analysis of the DRP text through deconstructing the document using NVivo computer-assisted critical discourse analysis, we may consider and interpret its implicit and explicit meanings.

To perform a CDA of the text, the English-translated version, which consists of eight subsections covering 30 points and contains 4,017 words, was uploaded into NVivo. From here, each word or group was categorised into two main categories: Lexical Analysis and Thematic Analysis (Table 7), and then into specific codes, which were grouped according to more concentrated themes (Appendix 7). These are discussed in more detail below.

Table 7

Main Categorisations of Lexical Analysis of the DRP

Perspective	Main Themes	Sub-themes
LEXICAL ANALYSIS	Lexicogrammatical Features	x
	Connotations	x
	Mood	x
THEMATIC ANALYSIS		

Note. For detailed reproductions and a comprehensive list of sub-themes, see Appendix 7.

5.2.1 Coding Descriptions

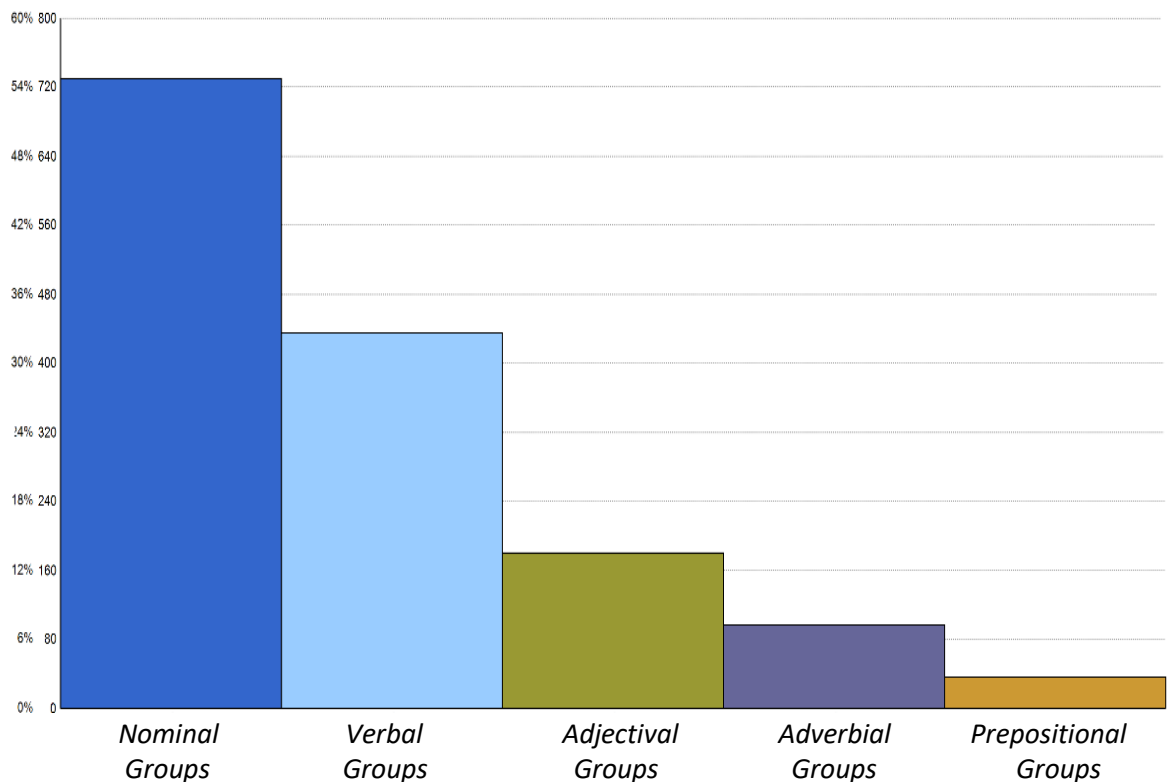
The coding deconstructs written language typically used to communicate national policies and provide domestic and international audiences with clear objectives, directives, and information. Thus, the interpreted and non-interpreted diplomatic languages are comparable in communicative settings, speaker identity, and the delivery mode of preconceived texts. During data analysis, the assumption remained on the premise that the text accurately represented the formal language utilised in Chinese official discourse. For this study, a set of codes was compiled using the themes that emerged during the literature review and subsequent text analysis, to facilitate consideration of commonalities and prepare for later coding of the interview data. The main units in the DRP text are sentences, which were further divided into groups or individual words according to suitability for the predefined codes. Within the two main analysis categories of lexical or thematic, codes were categorised using general themes such as Education, National Values and Principles, and Stakeholders, then divided into

more specific sub-themes, including Parents, Students, and Teachers. Further codes were added as analysis progressed.

Using the SFL principles of "groups", whereby a group of words represents or describes an entity, grouping the individual units in this way complements the characteristics of the Chinese rhetorical style, which utilises character groupings, set phrases and similar devices, and was evident in the formal, direct register of the English translation. Of the over 4,000 analysed words in the DRP document, five groups were identified and used (Figure 23). Conjunctions were not included because of their overtly functional rather than ideational meaning.

Figure 22

Lexicogrammatical Features: Groups



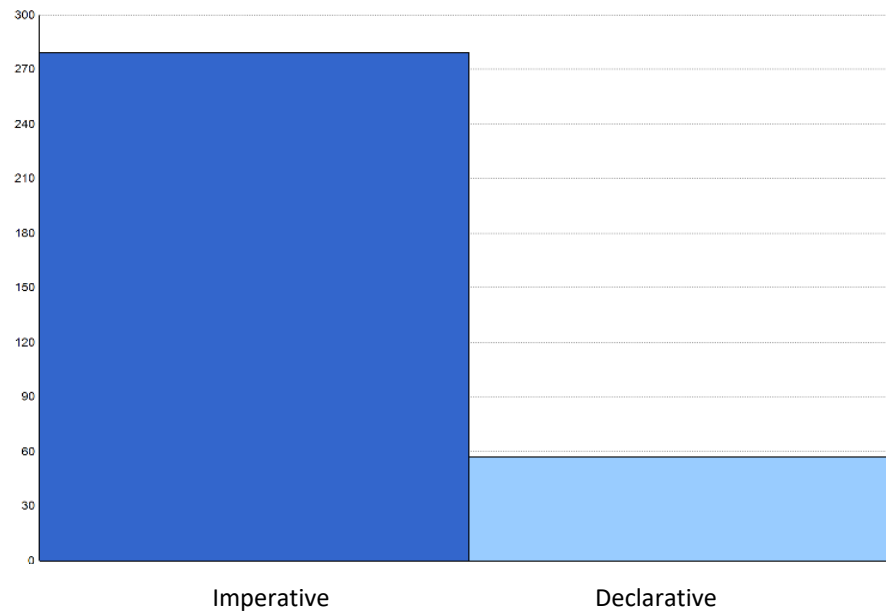
Note. A total of 4,017 words categorised into 1,478 groups is 89.42% of the DRP text. The remaining 10.58% are conjunctions.

5.2.1.1 Functions and Groups

Analysing the DRP document on a lexicogrammatical and thematic level, using Nvivo, provides additional perspectives on ideational and practical intention. The text was categorised into functionality (imperative, declarative, and interrogative). Lexicogrammar features were divided into verbal, adjectival, adverbial, and prepositional groups.

Figure 23

Lexicogrammatical Features: Functionality



As seen from the analysis results (Figure 24) there are 279 imperative sentences, with 56 declaratives, and no interrogatives. This shows a clear weighting toward directives favouring imperative statements, which are densely built from nominal phrases (Figure 23). The prevalence of imperative sentences, delivered in a formal style typical of official communications, emphasises the hierarchical relationship between the government and citizens, implying a focus on actions and practical functions, similar in style to instruction manuals. The dominance of imperatives conveys the authoritative nature of the text, implying that specific tasks will be carried out with no requirement or expectation for interaction.

As presented in Section 4.2.1.3, the primary units identified by SFL are sentence, clause, group, word, and morpheme, arranged hierarchically:

- Sentence
- Clause

- Group
- Word
- Morpheme (Gillett, 2023c)

The analysis of the groups is as follows: 730 nominal, 435 verbal, 180 adjectival, 97 adverbial, and 36 prepositional.

i. Nominal Groups

Each section of the DRP is presented using headings, subheadings, and subsections, which contribute to the number of noun phrases and help create a clear, well-structured document, a format commonly seen in texts such as policy documents, which require an unambiguous understanding. The high density of nominal phrases suggests firstly that a large amount of information is being relayed and that the information is focused on entities, such as groups or individuals, and organisations, such as schools and departments. Specificity and substantial information are easily conveyed, with less opportunity for misunderstanding or error, ensuring efficient execution.

Table 8

Lexicogrammatical Features: Nouns

Unit	Count
school	79
training	76
education	45
institutions	40
students	36
campus	31
schools	29
high	24

quality	24
service	22
work	20
homework	18
services	18
good	17
regulations	15
department	14
departments	14
supervision	14
governance	13
laws	13
management	13
online	13
teachers	13
teaching	13
job	12
party	12

Note. The first 25 words have been displayed as a representative sample.

The predominant group is nominal, constituting 55.54% of the text (Table 8), in both phrase and individual word form. From this, we can deduce that the document primarily comprises factual information delivered in a format that prioritises clarity and objectivity ("*students' right to rest*" [DRP section 1.2]; "*after-school education activities*" [DRP section 3.9]). The relatively high quantity of noun phrases demonstrates a densely packed text, with each sentence carrying one or several necessary functions. This style of writing is formal in that it favours language devoid of unnecessary elements, such as those found in narrative or conversational discourse. An objective style is achieved by presenting directives using factually accurate terms and avoiding opinions or emotions, which gives them an impersonal tone ("*Use spare time scientifically*" [DRP section 2.8]).

Within the nominal groups, the most frequently used nouns, both abstract and concrete, were all related to education and educational institutes. "School" (79) and "training" (76) were the most widely used, revealing the main focus of the policy: that

of state schools versus training centres. This could support the hypothesis of the purported foundations of all sub-missions of the DRP, such as returning education from the market to the state, thus reducing unregulated influences, unqualified teachers, and inconsistent curricula, controlling capital and reducing family expenditure, to alleviate burdens possibly to support other social issues such as birth rates, and value-based and cultural protections.

In Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), ideational nouns represent concepts or experiences, both tangible and intangible, such as thoughts, actions, or experiences.

- Processes: Actions or events that occur
- Participants: Individuals, animals, or objects involved in those actions
- Circumstances: Information on how, when, where, or why something takes place (Halliday, 1994)

The nouns used in this text are predominantly ideational, which suggests a focus on outlining broad aims, objectives, and principles, rather than providing detailed instructions or interpersonal relationships that might facilitate their implementation. This is in keeping with China's regional autonomy (see 2.1 The Chinese Governance System), whereby provinces are economically decentralised and have a certain amount of autonomy under top-down, politically centralised Beijing government (Han & Mills, 2021).

ii. Verbal Groups

Table 9

Lexicogrammatical Features: Verbs

Unit	Count
should	36
must	24
strengthen	21
improve	20
implement	11
provide	10
use	10
adhere	9
carry	9
make	9
promote	9
clarify	8
ensure	8
guide	8
complete	7
establish	7
control	6
formulate	6
reduce	6
approve	5
exceed	5
incorporate	5

The second most common category is verbal groups, constituting 14.93% of the analysed text (Table 9). While a much smaller percentage than the nominal groups, the content informs the reader as to the direct intent of the text. The verbal groups identified are commonly found in formal texts such as policies, guidelines, regulations, or procedures, which tend to serve the purpose of commanding compliance. Cardno (2018) describes educational policies as interpreting and converting policy requirements into actionable steps that can be implemented to realise both value-

driven and practical goals. "There is no such thing as a value-free policy: all policy has value-based intent" (p. 624). These actionable steps are relayed through verbal groups to direct, logistically, and conceptually, but with clear space for provinces to implement them in their own way. In most cases, these appear as individual words and not as longer phrases, suggesting that the information relayed through nominal groups is the dominant focus.

Many verbal groups denote an expectation of abiding by rules or standards and exhibit a sense of authority. Terms such as "adhere to, follow, implement, ensure that, comply with" and modal verbs such as "must", (used 24 times) are very frequent. The next frequent group of verbs express a seemingly ambitious plan to advance and improve education: "improve" is used 21 times, strengthen (20 times), followed by deepen, build, promote, enhance, optimise, develop, upgrade, expand, accelerate, innovate and foster,". Furthermore, the next frequent group of verbs describes support or assistance: "support, assist, guide, help and aid" are frequently used for directives that help students in some way [e.g. in DRP sections 2.7,8,9 and 10] where adults are directed to "guide" students to participate in home activities, use electronic devices less frequently and utilise the state after-school provisions. This underpins the apparent primary focus of the DRP, which is improving the lives of children of compulsory education age.

Furthermore, a different group of verbs is used to express methods of evaluating and responding to non-compliance, such as "oversee, inspect, audit, monitor, evaluate, correct, punish, enforce and discipline". Regulation and control is demonstrated through terms such as "prevent behaviours, regulate and control, strictly forbidden, and prohibited", frequently relating to ASTC operations, teachers who work privately and issues of capital, possibly revealing the main issues causing rancour, as previously suspected and discussed in Section 1.2.3, when the president described after-school tuition as a "stubborn malady...driven by disorderly expansion of capital" (Chang, 2021). The directives to achieve regulation are communicated with verb groups such as

"perform, carry out, undertake, responsible for, organise and coordinate", which along with the communicative verbs such as "explain, communicate with, publicise, inform, announce, and notify" express methods of executing a plan, which appear to be directed to numerous groups within Chinese society, from teachers, parents and schools to government departments, banks and the media.

A chosen group of verbs, which relate to compliance, improvement, regulation, and communication, suggests a structured, directive approach aimed at the orderly and efficient implementation of the DRP, with clear implications for violations or activities regarded as damaging to the country and society.

The most commonly used word among the verb groups (Table 9) is the modal verb "should" (36), followed by "must" (26), which appears to express the authoritative and directive nature of the text, employing high deontic modality commonly seen in legal documents. Kroeger (2023) describes deontic modality as indicating "possibility and necessity relative to some authoritative person or code of conduct which is relevant to the current situation" (p. 290) and suggests that it "tends to be future-oriented, since both permission and obligation relate to future actions" (p. 304). He adds that epistemic modality exhibits the possibilities that stem from the speaker's knowledge or is speaker-oriented (p. 303). The use of modality appears to lend the text a sense of non-negotiable actions.

At this point, it might be helpful to address whether the specific text genre "education policy" explains the modality stances observed here. For this purpose, a sample education policy document from a Western context, addressing matters in a similar field (English as a second or other language in education), is considered. The Welsh Government's (2019) "English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) policy for Wales" is a policy document produced by the government for consumption by the public, as is the DRP. This text differs almost entirely from the DRP in every way. Firstly, it is designed with appealing colours and is personalised by presenting a

photograph of the minister for education and relaying case studies of real people, making it relatable. It is written in a narrative style, often using questions posed to the reader and frequently employing pronouns and inclusive terminology to engage and appeal to a broad audience. In Chinese regulatory documents, known as "red-headed" documents or "normative documents" (guī fàn wén jiàn 规范文件), typically employ a direct, formal style that minimises the potential for misunderstanding or interpretation (Horsely, 2019).

The Welsh Government's ESOL policy provides a particularly apt comparison for several reasons. First, both documents address language education policy within specific governmental contexts, making them functionally comparable despite their geographic and cultural differences. Second, Wales represents a unique case study in language policy implementation, as it operates within the broader UK framework while maintaining distinct cultural and linguistic considerations, similar to how Chinese language policies must balance national unity with regional diversity. Third, the Welsh context offers insights into how Western democratic governments approach multilingual education challenges, providing a stark contrast to the Chinese administrative approach. Finally, both policies ultimately aim to integrate linguistic minorities into broader society while preserving cultural identity, though they employ fundamentally different rhetorical and structural strategies to achieve these goals. This comparison therefore illuminates not merely stylistic differences, but fundamental variations in how different political systems conceptualise the relationship between government, citizen, and language policy implementation.

iii. Adjectival Groups

The third most common group are adjectival, at 12.38% (Table 10). Although over 200 individual adjectives were identified, many served as part of noun phrases and so were

excluded as they did not adhere to the SFL system (see Section 4.2.1.3), which was used to categorise and analyse text in this research. A noun phrase functions as the subject or object of a sentence, while an adjective phrase acts by modifying a noun. Identifying a noun or adjective phrase is done by recognising that a noun phrase can appear anywhere in a sentence, while an adjective phrase can only appear before or after. For example, "off-campus training institutions" were categorised as a noun phrase, as opposed to using "off-campus" as an adjective, because it is assumed that the institute is being discussed, not described.

Table 10*Lexicogrammatical Features: Adjectives*

Unit	Count
good	15
strict	11
high-quality	9
quality	8
social	5
comprehensive	5
overall	5
relevant	5
excessive	4
scientific	4
timely	4
special	4
balanced	4
reasonable	3
basic	3
various	3
free	3
illegal	3
corresponding	3
normal	3
false	3
serious	3
ordinary	3
related	3
fundamental	2
main	2

Note. The 25 most frequent adjectives that appear in adjectival groups in the translated version of the DRP

Adjectives play a crucial role in the ideational function of language, helping to construct the experiential content of the text by describing and classifying phenomena, which contribute significantly to conveying the policy's details, intentions, and criteria. In using descriptive adjectives, ideational functions are revealed. In the context of a policy document, adjectives often carry value-laden weight; they don't only neutrally describe things but may also reflect the perspectives or priorities of the country. Through these choices, the ideational functions of the discourse reveal what is

prioritised or framed as important in the policy. For example, positive adjectives are generally used in groups when discussing state education (e.g. "*high-quality*" (9 instances) [DRP sections 1.1, 3.12, 5.16, 5.18]; "*quality*" (8 instances) [DRP sections 1.2, 1.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.10, 2.12, 4.14, 5.17, 18 and 19 etc.]; "*good*" (15 instances) [DRP sections 1.1, 1.7, 3.12 and throughout sections 8.27-8.30]; and "*improve*" [DRP sections 2.4, 2.6, 3.10, 4.14, 5.16 etc.]). Negative adjectives are used within groups used to discuss ASTCs (e.g. "*excessive*" (4 instances) [DRP sections 1.2, 1.3, 4.15, 5.17, 7.24]; "*vulgar*" appears once [DRP section 4.14]; "*illegal*" (3 instances) [DRP sections 4.14, 5.18]; "*chaotic*" appears one time [DRP section 7.24]). This tactic is commonly used in propaganda to sway opinion in favour of the author's views (Ramberdiyeva et al., 2024; Shabo, 2008). Furthermore, evaluative adjectives used in groups conveying the desired approach to education and parenting emphasise the logical stance of the policy (e.g. "*scientific, reasonable*" (appear four and three times respectively) [DRP sections 1.3, 6.21]; "*timely*" (4 instances) [DRP sections 2.7, 8.28, 8.30]; "*significant*" appears once [DRP section 1.3]). These adjectives highlight the importance and anticipated positive impact of the policies, aiming to convince the reader of their effectiveness and necessity.

Interpersonal functions are largely expressed via modal adjectives, softening the tone of the directives, and possibly appealing to people's sense of autonomy and emphasising that welfare is of a high priority (e.g. "*flexible*" appears two times, including in "*flexible commuting system*" [DRP section 3.9]; "*special*" appears four times, including in "*special needs*" [DRP sections 3.9, 7.29]). Throughout the text, directives are personalised (e.g. "Teachers must... [DRP section 2.7]; "Schools and parents should guide students..." [DRP section 2.8]), potentially to ensure the reader directly connects the intention to the national and personal responsibilities of collective improvement, for the betterment of the health and wealth of citizens. Collectively, these 195 adjectival instances across 95 unique adjectives reveal a strategic linguistic pattern where positive descriptors dominate discussions of state education, representing approximately 40% of all adjective use, while negative

descriptors are specifically deployed to characterise alternative education providers, creating a stark evaluative division throughout the document.

As presented in the opening paragraph of the DRP, the text states a "focus on building a high-quality education system... implement the fundamental task of cultivating moral character... and effectively alleviate parents' anxiety, and promote students' all-round development and healthy growth" (see Section 1.1 Guiding ideology), suggesting the DRP is positioned as focusing on educational reform and "moral cultivation" with the explicit goal of improving life for students and parents. The adjectives seem to be selected to convey the policy's objectives, principles, and expected standards. Descriptive and evaluative adjectives prevail throughout the text, highlighting the quality and efficacy of the proposed actions. Within the policy text, adjectives are used strategically to serve ideational ("good education ecology" [DRP section 1.1]), interpersonal ("*organise outstanding teachers*" [DRP section 3.12]), and authoritative ("strict examination and approval agencies" [DRP section 4.13]) functions. The careful selection and positioning of adjectives ensure that the text effectively conveys the intended reforms and their expected impact on the educational system, while ensuring there is little room for misunderstanding the uncompromising and rigid new rules in place. By framing state education through adjectives invoking unquestionable virtues (e.g., "good," "quality," "balanced") while characterising alternative providers through negative terms (e.g., "excessive," "chaotic," "illegal"), this linguistic strategy presents a particular educational vision as objectively correct, assuming universal acceptance of these standards and eliminating space for alternative interpretations or values.

iv. Adverbial Groups

The adverbial groups, which occupy 5.2% of the text (Table 11), are indicative of the resolute nature of the policy's intentions. From the wording, there is little doubt about the uncompromising objectives, supported by the most commonly used adverb, "strictly", which appears 18 times, again expressing high deontic modality.

Table 11

Lexicogrammatical Features: Adverbs

Unit	Count
strictly	18
resolutely	7
actively	6
fully	6
effectively	4
reasonably	3
seriously	3
carefully	2
conscientiously	2
gradually	2
mainly	2
properly	2
rationally	2
scientifically	2
appropriately	1
comprehensively	1
earlier	1
jointly	1
originally	1
significantly	1
systematically	1
uniformly	1

Note. The 25 most frequent adverbs that appear in the translated version of the DRP

Terms such as "strictly forbid, resolutely overcome, seriously investigate, uniformly register, strictly prohibit, strictly control and resolutely investigate" attest to a policy that should be followed without exception, or the consequences will be significant. Remarkably, every adverb in the text, whether expressing enforcement ("strictly," "resolutely"), thoroughness ("fully," "comprehensively"), or deliberation ("carefully," "rationally"), invokes rigour as its defining characteristic. This pervasive emphasis on rigour functions as both explicit directive and implicit warning: the policy will be implemented, come what may. Expectancy of enforcement and adherence to the guidelines are further demonstrated with the use of more reinforcing adverbial phrases such as "actively explore, further improve, fully stimulate, actively carry out, conscientiously implement, rationally determine, gradually increase/reduce, fully consider and fully mobilise" which, despite their collaborative tone, underscore the policy's seriousness and scope. Even softer adverbs like "gradually" signal deliberate, phased implementation rather than optional participation, reflecting the state's commitment to comprehensive educational reform.

v. Prepositional Phrases

Prepositional phrases appear only 36 times, accounting for 1.3% of the text (e.g., Table 13); however, they do convey some of the intentions and objectives of the policy. Prepositional groups, comprising a preposition followed by a nominal group (e.g., "in accordance with [the law]," "according to [standards]"), help clarify purpose through identifying participants, conditions, or methods. In focusing on the targets or conditions, prepositional groups help clarify purpose through identifying participants, conditions, or methods.

Table 12

Lexicogrammatical Features: Prepositional Groups

Group	Count
in accordance with	8
according to	7
based on	6
combined with	6
in conjunction with	4
including	3
incorporate into	3
in the compulsory education stage	3

Note. A smaller number of prepositional groups were identified.

The title, for example, contains much of the key information on the main objectives of the policy. The goals are relayed under the heading "*on Further Reducing the Burden of Students' Homework and Off-campus Training*", while the individuals targeted are described as "*for students in the compulsory education stage*". Also within the title is a clear indication of the hierarchical positioning of the policies architects: "*of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council*" [DRP title]. Ideational meaning is imparted almost immediately, within the first paragraph, with "*by adhering to the guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era*" [DRP section 1.1], clearly putting the government, party and the chairman, president and "caretaker of the nation" (Immelman, & Chen, 2021, p. 1) clearly at the helm of the policy, transmitting a gravitas that leads the reader to understand the ultimate authority carried within the policy.

On a more practical level, the scope is defined clearly with temporal frames, such as "within one year" and "within three years" for achieving specific goals. Additionally, the repeated use of "in accordance with," which appears once, highlights the legal foundations and implications connected to the policy. Prepositions also define the physical locations where directives apply, with "in school" versus "outside the school" used to categorise clearly ASTCs and state education institutes.

5.2.1.2 Modality

Further to the earlier references to the use of modality, a brief discussion on the use and understanding of modal verbs is presented here. Modality is the notion of intermediate degrees between positive and negative poles (Halliday, 1994), and can differ significantly between English and Chinese contexts, due to cultural and linguistic differences. These are often described in terms of low- and high-context communication. A high-context communication is one where most of the information is understood by the person, with only a small amount conveyed through the explicit, transmitted message. In contrast, low-context communication places the majority of the information in the explicit content of the message itself (Hall, 1976, as cited in Alizadeh, 2021). In many English-speaking cultures, low-context communication tends to be more direct, and modal verbs such as "can," "may," "should," and "must" are often used to express permission, ability, necessity, or advice clearly and directly. However, indirectness is often valued more in Chinese "high context" communication, especially in spoken communication within hierarchical or formal settings, which supports cultural traits such as maintaining harmony and saving face (Lee, 2020). The directness of modal verbs like 'can' or 'must' could be perceived as too assertive or impolite, and people might avoid using them too bluntly in certain contexts.

English speakers frequently use modal verbs in daily conversation, employing flexibility in various tenses and constructions. The choice of modals can reflect politeness, certainty, or degree of obligation. Chinese does not use modals in the same way as Indo-Germanic languages such as English, like the polysemous *yīng gāi* (应该 should/ought), *kě yǐ* (可以 can/may), or *bì xū* (必须 must/of course) are used to convey similar meanings.

Table 13

Lexicogrammatical Features: Modality

Words	Count
should	36
must	24
shall	7
can	4
may	2
will	1

The words "should" and "must" are used frequently in the DRP text (60 times in total) (Table 13), although as discussed, the words "should" and "must" (yīng gāi 应该) are often used interchangeably in terms of probability or suggestion, as opposed to a stern command, and commonly translated into English as "ought to", which has a less forceful sense. There are many different ways to say "should" in Chinese that do not exist in the English language (Li, R. 2004), e.g. gāi 该, gāi dāng 该当, gāi yíng 该营, yīng dāng 应当, lǐ yīng 理应 and yí 宜. Each differs in terms of nuance, formality, contemporaneousness, and context.

The policy document, which is a written text of high authority, and therefore more direct, uses a variety of terms to convey the same meanings, for example, "*Improve the operation management mechanism. Schools should improve homework...*" [DRP section 2.4]. The original version uses "yào" (要), which can mean "demand", "want", "need", "will", "shall" or "about to", and is used 62 times throughout the original text. While repeated use of the word "should" in English could appear overbearing, in its original form, in Chinese it is a functional term without the same connotations, particularly in a formal policy document. As discussed in Section 5.1, the direct style of communication is favoured in formal Chinese, where direct wording, strict grammar, and a reserved tone characterise official capacities, contrasting with informal, everyday, spoken Chinese (Lee, 2020). This formal register emphasises directness and employs highly

directive language, influencing how modal verbs function within the text. The DRP document exemplifies this approach through directives using assertive modality. However, as previously discussed, English speakers (whether L1 or L2) reading a translation of a Chinese document, created by a Chinese writer and analysed by an English speaker, unavoidably mutate the language, as previously exemplified by Entman's (2008) Cascading Network Activation Model of a "diffusion of frames". The challenging analysis of modality has been carried out with these contextual considerations in mind.

5.2.1.3 Connotations of Lexical Units

Concordance examines the context in which words appear and can reveal how certain concepts are framed within a particular linguistic environment (Wulff, 2020).

Connotations of positive, negative and neutral were analysed by categorising individual words and groups (Tables 14, 15 and 16) within the DRP text.

Positive Connotations

The text proved to be largely positive in tone, with 249 positive, 83 negative and 67 neutral instances. Each unit, which could be an individual word or a group, was selected for its positive, negative, or neutral connotations based on identifying the linguistic choices that express evaluation. These evaluations are typically embedded in the attitude system of SFL, which is concerned with affect, judgment, and appreciation (Llinares & Nikula, 2016).

Table 14*Lexicogrammatical Features: Connotations (positive)*

Units	Count
improve	25
quality	25
strengthen	22
good	19
actively	9
build	4
focus on	4
balanced	4
actively promote	3
give full play to	3
fundamental needs	2
healthy growth	2
fully implement	2
encourage	2
respond to	2
protect	2
quality of school education	2
reduce the burden	2
good education ecology	1
all-round development	1
effectively alleviate	1
actively respond to	1
smooth and orderly	1
give full consideration to	1
creation of high-quality	1

The text proved to be largely positive in tone, with 249 positive, 83 negative and 67 neutral instances. To examine how positive evaluation functions within the policy, a collocation analysis was conducted on the three most frequent positive adjectives: "good" (15 instances), "high-quality" (9 instances), and "quality" (8 instances). This analysis reveals not only what is being evaluated positively, but also who or what is positioned as the agent of improvement.

"Good" collocations:

- "good education ecology" (Section 1.1)
- "good job of answering questions" (Section 2.7)
- "good learning and living habits" (Section 2.8)
- "good job in..." (Sections 8.27-8.30, appearing 11 times)

The collocation pattern "good job in..." consistently positions schools, education departments, and government bodies as the agents responsible for implementation (e.g., "schools must do a good job in teachers' ideological work," "education departments must do a good job in overall coordination").

"High-quality" collocations:

- "high-quality education system" (Section 1.1)
- "high-quality online education and teaching resources" (Section 3.12)
- "high-quality school network platforms" (Section 3.12)
- "high-quality and balanced development" (Section 5.16)
- "high-quality schools" (Section 5.16)

"High-quality" consistently modifies state education infrastructure and resources, never commercial training providers, thereby positioning public education as inherently superior.

"Quality" collocations:

- "quality supervision" (Section 2.4)
- "quality education" (Section 2.6)
- "quality evaluation" (Sections 5.17, 5.18, 5.19, appearing 5 times)
- "academic quality standards" (Section 5.17)

"Quality" collocates with evaluative and regulatory processes, positioning the state as the arbiter of educational standards.

Collocation patterns reveal that:

1. Positive adjectives consistently frame state actors (schools, departments, government) as implementers of change
2. Public education infrastructure is positioned as the site of quality and improvement
3. Regulatory and evaluative processes are portrayed as inherently positive mechanisms of change

This pattern reinforces the ideational function of the text: reform is implemented by and through state institutions, with no comparable positive framing of non-state actors. Despite initially seeming heavily didactic, with frequent use of directive modality, a high percentage of clauses and phrases had positive intentions, and frequently relate to development and quality of education, and "strengthening" behaviours and relationships, e.g. "*strengthen quality supervision*" [DRP section 2.4]; "*strengthen face-to-face commentary*" [DRP section 2.7]; "*strengthen teaching management*" [DRP section 5.17].

Negative Connotations

Table 15

Lexicogrammatical Features: Connotations (Negative)

Units	Count
burden	6
investigate	6
prohibited	5
strictly forbidden	4
strictly prohibited	4
punish	4
disguise	3
deal with	3
outside	2
concerns	2
adhere to strict	2
may not	2
strictly implement	2
no longer	2
mechanical and invalid operations	1
difficult issues	1
excessive homework	1
weak teachers	1
revoked	1
without approval	1
parents' anxiety	1
violate the interests of the masses	1
vulgar content, illegal content, and piracy	1
must not be leaked	1
false discounts, and false publicity	1

Note. 25 representative examples are presented.

Negative connotations can be used to criticise or discredit a particular system, practice, or group. In this case, of the 83 negatively connotated instances, which were comprised of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences, most frequently relate to ASTCs and their associated activities. To examine how negative evaluation functions within the policy, a collocation analysis was conducted on the three most frequent negative terms: "burden"

(6 instances), "investigate" (6 instances), and "prohibited/strictly forbidden/strictly prohibited" (13 combined instances). This analysis reveals not only what is being evaluated negatively, but also who or what is positioned as the source of problems.

"Burden" collocations:

- "students' homework burden and off-campus training burden" [DRP Section 1.3]
- "excessive academic burden" [DRP Section 1.2]
- "burden of heavy homework on students" [DRP Section 2]
- "reduce the burden on parents" [DRP Section 1.2]
- "family education expenditure and the corresponding energy burden of parents" [DRP Section 1.3]

"Burden" consistently collocates with ASTCs and homework, positioning off-campus training institutions as the source of excessive pressure on students and families.

"Investigate/punish" collocations:

- "investigate and deal with outstanding issues" [DRP Section 4.14]
- "investigate and punish off-campus training institutions" [DRP Section 4.13]
- "strictly investigate and deal with teachers' paid supplementary lessons" [DRP Section 3.11]
- "resolutely investigate and deal with violations" [DRP Section 4.15]

"Investigate" collocates exclusively with ASTCs and individual teachers engaged in private tutoring, framing these actors as requiring surveillance and potential punishment.

"Prohibited/strictly forbidden/strictly prohibited" collocations:

- "strictly prohibited to assign...homework to parents" [DRP Section 2.4]
- "strictly prohibited: capitalised operations" [DRP Section 4.13]
- "strictly forbidden: overseas education courses" [DRP Section 4.14]
- "prohibited from engaging in subject training" [DRP Section 4.14]
- "Exceeding standards and advance training are strictly prohibited" [DRP Section 4.14]

"Prohibited" consistently collocates with ASTC practices and market behaviours, positioning commercial training providers as violators requiring restriction.

Collocation patterns reveal that:

1. ASTCs are framed as the primary source of "burden" on families and students
2. Commercial training providers and private tutors are positioned as requiring investigation and punishment
3. Market-driven educational practices (capitalisation, overseas courses, advance training) are framed as prohibited behaviours

Passages resolutely describing the limitations for ASTCs and consequences for violating the rules are presented with an unmistakable sense of authority and intimidation:

- *"no longer approve new subject-based off-campus training institutions"* [DRP Section 4.13]
- *"If the approval is not passed, the original filing registration and Internet Information Service Business License (ICP) shall be cancelled"* [DRP Section 4.13]
- *"strictly investigate and punish off-campus training institutions that do not have the corresponding qualifications and conduct training in multiple locations without approval in accordance with laws and regulations"* [DRP Section 4.13]

- *"Disciplinary training institutions are not allowed to be listed for financing" [DRP Section 4.13]*
- *"capitalised operations are strictly prohibited" [DRP Section 4.13]*
- *"listed companies may not invest in discipline training institutions through stock market financing" [DRP Section 4.13]*
- *"may not purchase the assets of discipline training institutions by issuing shares or paying cash" [DRP Section 4.13]*
- *"foreign capital shall not be acquired through mergers...Those who have violated regulations shall be cleaned up and rectified" [DRP Section 4.13]*
- *"Exceeding standards and advance training are strictly prohibited" [DRP Section 4.14]*
- *"non-disciplinary training institutions are prohibited from engaging in subject training" [DRP Section 4.14]*
- *"overseas education courses are strictly prohibited" [DRP Section 4.14]*
- *"resolutely investigate and deal with outstanding issues such as out-of-scope training, uneven training quality, vulgar content, illegal content, and piracy" [DRP Section 4.14]*

By framing the ASTC industry in a negative light using these strong terms, the justification for the DRP is strengthened, offering an improved education and financial ecology for families. At no point does the policy consider those families that rely on ASTCs as a source of income or as support in tutoring.

Neutral Connotations

67 neutral connotations drawn from individual words and phrases, often involved practicalities and objectives:

Table 16

Lexicogrammatical Features: Connotations (Neutral)

Units	Count
in accordance with	14
laws and regulations	11
performance	9
ensure	9
carry out	9
adhere to	9
establish	7
complete	7
meet the *** needs	6
operations	6
make full use of	4
normal	4
conduct	4
guarantee	4
organise (<i>sic</i>)	4
spare time	2
scientifically	2
fully implement	2
expectations	2
regulate	2
law-based governance	1
uniformly	1
goals	1
uniformly	1
engage in	1

Note. 25 representative examples are presented.

The use of terms such as '*legally sound*', '*systematic*', and '*law-based*' suggests a rational, structured approach that is based on an established legal and procedural

framework; however, this is not explicitly itemised. Frequently used term "*adhere to*", used in multiple formal nominal groups "*adhere to law-based governance*", "*adhere to government-led, multi-party linkage*"; "*adhere to overall planning*" [DRP section 1.1], and "*adhere to the correct guidance of public opinion*" [DRP section 8.30] seem to imply that each responsible administration, school, or parent will be familiar with or have access to the relevant information to comply. This also supports the decentralised nature of Chinese governance, which autonomizes policy for each province.

The text, although declarative and clearly designed to inform, direct, and disfavour the ASTC industry, appears to mainly focus on positive outcomes, particularly for students and for the education system in general, feeding into the narrative of an overall improvement on a macro, societal level in terms of the policy's aim to reduce burdens on families.

5.3 THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF POLICY DOCUMENT

The second perspective used to analyse the text is thematic. As outlined in Section 4.2.1.3, the process of thematic analysis is based on a framework of categorised themes using NVivo. Three frameworks were created in total – one for the literature review, one for the critical discourse analysis of the policy text, and one for the analysis of the interview data. Each framework relates to the others in terms of general themes, with more specific categories relevant to each undertaking (see Table 17; Section 5.3.1 Thematic Analysis: Categories. The general thematic categories of education, stakeholders, and national values and principles were deductively selected according to the predetermined main topic of the research. In contrast, the more focused thematic categorisations were generated inductively as more data were analysed and re-analysed, in keeping with the Constructivist Grounded Theory methods described in

Section 4.1.2. All categories will be compared in Chapter 6. Results to determine if initial deductively hypothesised theories align with later inductively hypothesised theories.

Thematic analysis identified four main thematic categories: Education, Stakeholders, National Values and Principles, and Responsibilities, which were subdivided (Appendix 7) and used for granular analysis and are discussed first. Following this, the subsequent discussion concerns secondary analysis, focusing on the main goals of the policy.

5.3.1 Thematic Analysis: Categories

Within the thematic perspective, four general categories of education, main stakeholders, national values and principles, and responsibilities (Table 17) emerged via inductive reflective coding.

Table 17

Main Categorisations of Thematic Analysis of the DRP

Perspective	Main Themes	Sub-themes
LEXICAL ANALYSIS		
THEMATIC ANALYSIS		
	Education	x
	Main stakeholders	x
	National Values & Principles	x
	Responsibilities	x

Note. See Appendix 7 for detailed reproductions

The four main thematic categories were then subdivided into further categorisations as the text was read and re-read to locate and code repeating themes or patterns.

Main stakeholders

Ultimately, education policy is a society-wide issue, as according to the World Economic Forum (2024), in 2020, approximately 90% of the world's population had completed a primary education. China's Ministry of Education (2023) reports that there were 158,206,000 registered students and 10,654,600 faculty and staff in primary and junior high schools as of 2022. These figures exclude kindergartens, high schools, universities, independent international schools, and ASTCs, underscoring the significant impact of education policy on its primary stakeholders.

Table 18

Thematic Analysis: Section of Main Stakeholders and Related Themes

Perspective	Main Themes	Sub-themes	Sub-themes
THEMATIC ANALYSIS	Education National V&P Responsibilities Main stakeholders	Family Students Teachers (state)	Family burdens Family ed. Student burdens Student mental health Teacher burdens Teacher mental health

Note. See Appendix 7 for detailed reproductions

The analysed text was initially quantified by frequency. While the methodology is qualitative, not quantitative, these frequencies provided a sense of the dominant themes that emerged from the analysis. These were then used to create a qualitative thematic analysis, with the quantitative data giving an indication as to the text's overall ideological stance.

Within the DRP document, instances of families, students and teachers being referred to were categorised into areas of effect (Table 19). Each had instances of burdens, mental health and solutions, albeit in different tones.

Table 19
Regular Demographic/Informational Table

Theme	Frequency	Example from DRP	DRP Section
Teaching standards	20	"Improve the quality of classroom teaching"	5
Student burdens	6	"Reducing the excessive academic burden of students"	1.2
Family burdens, anxiety, and mental health	5	"Create anxiety for parents"	6.22
Family education	4	"Guide parents to establish scientific parenting concepts"	6.21
Teacher burdens	2	"Consider the factors of teachers' participation in after-school services"	6.20
Teacher mental health	1	"For teachers to implement the 'flexible commuting system'"	3.9

These weightings show a clear focus on student welfare and the goal of raising teacher standards by seemingly placing the onus directly on teachers, with less attention on the potential impacts on this group, although it is specified that teachers should be properly reimbursed for after-school work, and "*flexible commuting system*" may be implemented [DRP section 3.9]. This may be by design, in order to focus on students or a deliberate exclusion to highlight the message that changes need to be driven from within schools, e.g. "*Teachers should seriously correct homework, provide timely feedback, strengthen face-to-face commentary, carefully analyse academic conditions, and do a good job of answering questions*" [DRP section 2.7]; "*After-school services to be undertaken by the teachers of the school, and retired teachers...outstanding teachers in the region to provide after-school services to schools with weak teachers*" [DRP section 2.11].

National values and principles

Table 20

Thematic Analysis: National Values and Principles

Perspective	Main Themes	Sub-themes
THEMATIC ANALYSIS	Education Main stakeholders Responsibilities National Values and Principles	Anti-Capitalist Anti-non Chinese sentiment Birth rates Future Morality-Character-Behaviour Party – Values & Principles Wealth disparity

Note. See Appendix 7 for detailed reproductions.

A further salient theme was that of National values and principles. Then new sentence. inevitably permeate all countries' education policies, as education systems inculcate the "knowledge and values needed for the creation of a good (moral) person as a contributing member of society and for economic competitiveness" (Simmie & Edling, 2016, p. 1). Within the sub-thematic categories of National Values and Principles identified in the DRP, the instances were as follows:

Table 21*National Values and Principles: Thematic Categories and Frequencies in the DRP*

Theme	Frequency	Example from DRP	DRP Section
Anti-capitalist	11	"Foreign capital shall not be acquired through mergers and entrusted operating, franchising, and using variable interest entities to hold or participate in academic training institutions."	4.13
Morality/character/behaviour	9	"Resolutely prevent behaviours that violate the interests of the masses."	1.1
Anti-overseas/non-Chinese sentiment	6	"Overseas education courses are strictly prohibited."	4.1 4
Party/values and principles	6	"School party organisations must conscientiously do a good job in teachers' ideological work."	8.2 7
Wealth disparity	2	"Accelerate the reduction of the education level gap between urban and rural areas, regions, and schools."	5.16
Future	2	"Results to be significant within three years."	1.3

Note. Thematic categories were identified through qualitative coding of the DRP policy document. Each frequency count represents a textual instance referencing the specified theme.

The most frequently referenced issue was capital in education, specifically in ASTCs and the private sector. This strongly indicates the government's intention to eliminate

market forces and financial competition from education but could also be covertly lessening the non-Chinese influence through more stringent controls on who is able to teach in China and in which capacity. By introducing stringent limitations on ASTCs, the previously fertile employment opportunities for foreign teachers, both in-country and online, are stifled. The process for gaining working visas in public schools is much more closely monitored than that of the private sector.

The second most commonly referred-to categories were morality, character, and behaviour (e.g., "*implement the fundamental task of cultivating moral character and cultivating people*" [DRP section 1.1]). Again, strong terms were used to denigrate the ASTC industry: e.g. "*Resolutely investigate and deal with outstanding issues such as out-of-scope training, uneven training quality, vulgar content, illegal content, and piracy in accordance with laws and regulations*" [DRP section 4.14]. Aligning with the current governmental stance of aligning social morality with nationalism (Wong, 2023), the six instances of ideology or party allegiance seem to illustrate the direction that the government wishes education to take in terms of shaping the citizens of the future, e.g. "*promote students' all-round development and healthy growth*" [DRP sections 1.1 and 1.2]; "*...help them develop good learning and living habits*" [DRP section 2.8]. Again, it is important to note the differing connotations that the term "ideology" engenders, particularly when discussing China. Much as the word "propaganda" is used negatively in the West and neutral in China, Clarke and Sussex (2023) draw attention to the Western view of Chinese "ideology" implying "something false, exploitative, or otherwise bad", whereas in China it is seen as "a non-pejorative usage, where it more neutrally denotes some sort of systematised political thinking" (p. 28).

Responsibilities

Table 22

Thematic Analysis: Responsibilities

Perspective	Main Themes	Sub-themes	Sub-themes
THEMATIC ANALYSIS	Education Main stakeholders National V&P Responsibilities	Civic responsibility Family responsibility School responsibility Teacher responsibility State responsibility Governance	Adherence to governance & law Provincial schemes Punishment Policies

Note. See Appendix 7 for detailed reproductions.

Responsibility emerged as a predominant theme (Table 22) throughout the DRP text, with 146 instances identified, ranging from the top-down responsibilities of the state to the collective responsibilities of society as individuals. This reflects the political model of China, as described in Section 2.1, whereby the 23 provinces are economically decentralised and have a certain amount of autonomy under the politically centralised Beijing government (Han & Mills, 2021), with 58 inferences to governance. The decentralised directives for provinces and their schools to manage themselves according to the guidelines is clear (e.g. *"Provincial governments should formulate methods for guaranteeing school service funds"* [DRP section 6.20]; *"All provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government) should improve their working mechanisms, establish special working institutions, and clarify*

the roadmap, timetable and responsible persons for special governance actions in accordance with the 'double reduction' work objectives and tasks" [DRP section 8.29], as is the ranking of personal responsibility (Table 23).

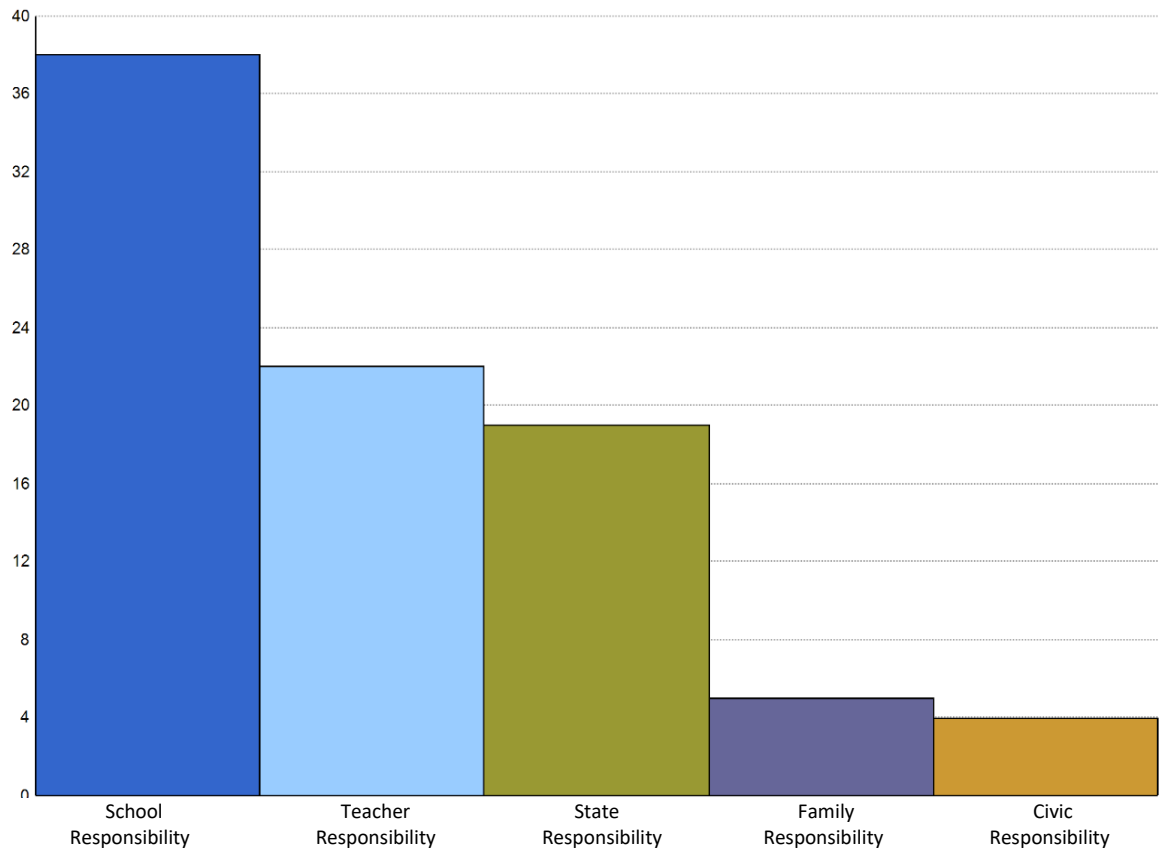
Table 23*Distribution of Responsibility Themes in the DRP*

Theme	Frequency	Example from DRP	DRP Section
School responsibility	39	"Schools should improve homework management methods, strengthen subject group and grade group homework coordination, rationally regulate and control homework structure."	2.4
Provincial schemes	25	"The party committees and governments of all provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government) should make the 'double reduction' work a major livelihood project."	8.27
Teacher responsibility	22	"Teachers should seriously correct homework, provide timely feedback, strengthen face-to-face commentary, carefully analyse academic conditions, and do a good job of answering questions."	2.7
State responsibility	19	"Actively respond to social concerns and expectations."	1.2
Adhere to governance	13	"Strictly investigate and punish all kinds of illegal off-campus training advertisements that exaggerate the effectiveness of training, mislead the public's education concepts, and create anxiety for parents in accordance with laws and regulations."	6.22
Punishment	11	"Strictly investigate and deal with teachers' paid supplementary lessons outside the school in accordance with laws and regulations, until the teacher's qualification is revoked."	3.11

Note. Categories were identified through thematic coding of responsibility-related passages in the DRP. Frequencies represent distinct instances where responsibility is assigned or invoked for each stakeholder category

Figure 24

Thematic Analysis: Responsibility Weighting



Note. The figure shows a clear weighting towards the responsibility of schools to carry out the enactment of the policy.

Education

Table 24

Thematic Analysis: Education

Perspective	Main Themes	Sub-themes	Sub-themes
THEMATIC ANALYSIS	Responsibilities Main stakeholders National V&P Education	Homework Improve national standards School as the main education provider ASTCs	Requirements Restrictions (capital) Restrictions (operations) Restrictions (teachers/ing) Restrictions (teaching material)

Note. Sub-sub-themes provide the most granular level of analysis, capturing distinct instances or categories within each sub-theme. See Appendix 7 for detailed reproductions.

As expected, a large amount of the policy text is dedicated to the theme of education (Table 25). The subcategories were first separated into two broad themes - state education and ASTCs. The matter of state education broadly comprises the need and means to improve standards and student experience. The matter of ASTCs, of which there are 52 instances, broadly comprises restrictions to limit their presence and influence:

Table 25*Restrictions Applied to ASTCs*

Theme	Frequency	Example from DRP	DRP Section
Restrictions (operations)	26	"Strictly implement the relevant provisions of the Juvenile Protection Law, and off-campus training institutions shall not occupy national statutory holidays, rest days, and winter and summer vacations to organise subject training."	4.14
Restrictions (capital)	12	"Strictly control the excessive influx of capital into training institutions."	4.15
Restrictions (teachers/teaching)	7	"The recruitment of foreign personnel in China must comply with relevant national regulations, and it is strictly forbidden to hire foreign personnel abroad to carry out training activities."	4.15
Restrictions (teaching materials)	5	"Overseas education courses are strictly prohibited."	4.14
Requirements	2	"The management of subject training institutions for ordinary high school students shall be implemented in accordance with the relevant provisions of this opinion."	8.30

Both the number of references to restrictions on operations (26) and the language used send a powerful indication of the authorities' resolve to change the landscape of education and tip the balance back toward state education, e.g., "*student learning improved by returning to campus*" [DRP section 1.3]. The second most frequent reference was regarding the presence of private capital in education. By limiting

investment and spending opportunities, the goal is to suppress the private education industry and alleviate financial burdens on families.

Table 26
Strengthening State Education Provision: Key Themes

Theme	Frequency	Example from DRP	DRP Section
Improve national standards	33	"The quality of school education and teaching and service levels to be further improved."	1.3
Homework	13	"Systematically design basic homework that conforms to age characteristics."	2.6
Improve national standards	33	"The quality of school education and teaching and service levels to be further improved."	1.3
Homework	13	"Systematically design basic homework that conforms to age characteristics."	2.6

Improving national standards has the most frequent references (33), which point to a substantial goal of the government, despite the policy being titled and promoted as focusing on reducing student workload. The trifecta of student welfare, improved state education and the repression of ASTCs naturally complement each other, although they are not treated the same linguistically. When referring to students, the tone is benevolent or parental, e.g. "*focus on the healthy growth of students, protect students' right to rest*" [DRP section 1.2]; "*pay attention to their children's psychological emotions*" [DRP section 2.8]. When referring to state education, the tone is of a collective effort to succeed (25 instances of using the word "improve" to discuss schools, education, homework, teacher standards, etc. and "*Vigorously improve the*

quality of education and teaching to ensure that students learn well in school" [DRP section 5]. When referring to ASTCs, the tone is scathing and vitriolic e.g. *"Online training institutions shall not provide and disseminate unhealthy learning methods ...that inert students' thinking ability, affect students' independent thinking, and violate the laws of education and teaching"* [DRP section 4.15]; *"Strictly investigate and punish all kinds of illegal off-campus training advertisements that exaggerate the effectiveness of training, mislead the public's education concepts, and create anxiety for parents"* [DRP section 6.22]; *"Training institutions with low standards, malicious recruitment of students"* [DRP section 7.26] Besides communicating rationale and objectives, the tone used for each situation invariably influences the reader's opinion. Whether this is intentional or not is difficult to validate; however, context and assumed knowledge suggest that it is likely an apparatus to sway opinion and ensure the policy's success.

5.3.2 Thematic Analysis: Goals of DRP

By exploring the goals outlined in the policy document and regrouping the content into two main themes, further subdivisions into codes was made, allowing for more specific viewpoints to be considered:

1. Reducing the burden on students and families.
2. Improving the education system.
 - i. Guiding ideology
 - ii. Governance and Implementation
 - Party members
 - Cross-sector responsibilities
 - Citizens
 - iii. Regulation of ASTCs

Reducing the Burden on Students and Families

The primary goal of the DRP, as evidenced by its title "Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Students' Homework and Off-campus Training in Compulsory Education", is to reduce the excessive homework and off-campus training burden on students, which has been a significant source of stress and anxiety for both students and parents. This aligns with general concerns about student wellbeing, mental health, and family burdens related to logistics and educational expenditures. The policy aims to achieve this by outlining various plans, such as reducing or eliminating ASTCs that do not comply with a very narrow set of conditions (e.g. "*Resolutely reduce subject-based off-campus training*" [DRP section 7.24]), returning the focus to state education by replacing commercial ASTCs with school-based activities, which concurrently drives students and teachers who may have been engaged in private tutoring, back to state institutes (e.g. "*Encourage qualified schools to provide students with interest-based after-school service activities*" [DRP section 7.25]; "*After-school services to be undertaken by the teachers of the school*" [DRP section 3.11]) and directing regional governments to provide funding to develop their respective schools according to the policies aims (e.g. "*Provincial governments should formulate methods for guaranteeing school service funds after school, clarify relevant standards, and adopt methods such as financial subsidies, service charges or agency fees to ensure that funding is in place*" [DRP section 6.20]). In this analysis, the broader objective appears was broken down into the following:

Pedagogical Quality

Emphasis on adherence to national curriculum standards indicates a focus on developing state education and improving the overall quality of teaching nationally to reduce reliance on external tutoring and for future nation-building goals (e.g., sections 5.16 and 5.17 titled "Vigorously improve the quality of education and teaching to ensure that students learn well in school").

Homework Management

Along with raising teaching standards, the policy advises the standardisation of homework (e.g., "*homework assignments to become more scientific and reasonable*" [DRP section 1.3, 2.4, 5, 6, 7 and 8, titled "*Reduce the total amount and duration of homework in a comprehensive way, and reduce the burden of heavy homework on students*"]). The text advocates for a more "scientific" approach to homework assignments with explicit guidelines on the duration and type of homework to be completed in school (e.g., "*the average completion time of written assignments for grades three to six in elementary school should not exceed 60 minutes, and the average time to complete written assignments for junior high school should not exceed 90 minutes*" [DRP section 2.5]). The regulation of ASTCs' influence is also targeted (e.g., "off-campus training institutions shall not occupy national statutory holidays, rest days, and winter and summer vacations to organise subject training," and "*Exceeding standards and advance training are strictly prohibited, non-disciplinary training institutions are prohibited from engaging in subject training, and overseas education courses are strictly prohibited*" [DRP section 4.14]), indicating a move towards improving pedagogy and workload to reduce student burdens. This reflects a shift towards more structured and evidence-based educational practices. Additionally, by stipulating that parents should not be involved in the traditional task of managing and

marking homework, the policy aims to reduce the burden on parents and encourage families to use their time together to build stronger familial relationships and cultivate balanced lives (e.g., *"It is strictly forbidden to assign or disguise assignments to parents, and it is strictly forbidden to ask parents to check and correct the assignments"* [DRP section 2.4]; *"Parents should actively communicate with their children, pay attention to their children's psychological emotions, and help them develop good learning and living habits"* [DRP section 2.8]; *"guide parents to establish scientific parenting concepts, rationally determine their children's growth expectations, and strive to form a consensus on reducing burdens"* [DRP section 6.21]). The policy frames ASTCs as the primary cause of student overwork while positioning parents as complicit through unrealistic expectations. Repeated references to "scientific parenting concepts" suggest parental attitudes, driven by competitive pressure, contribute to student burdens.

State-Run After-School Programs

The text emphasises improving after-school services to meet diverse student needs, including academic tutoring, physical exercises, and cultural activities (e.g. section 3, titled "Improve the school's after-school service level to meet the diverse needs of students"). This conveys an empathetic approach to education, recognising the importance of non-academic activities in student development, which is reportedly a factor lost during the intensive years of the ASTC industry's expansion. The requirement to provide diverse after-school activities points to an evolving understanding of education as an embracing process. Finally, by directing retired teachers and qualified professionals to participate in after-school services, the policy encourages an inclusive approach to education that not only utilises various members of society that due to the relatively low retirement age in China (Feng et al. 2019; Khan & Dander, 2023), may appreciate an additional income or activity, but also potentially

creates a cross-learning opportunity between experienced educators and their successors.

Wealth Disparity

This government's broader goal of promoting social equity is reflected in calls within the text for the high-quality and balanced development of compulsory education, aiming to reduce disparities between urban and rural schools (e.g. "*The balanced development of resources promotes educational equity*" [DRP section 3.12]). This also ties in with the severe restrictions placed on commodifying education, as seen by the suppression of capital in the ASTC industry.

2. Improving the Education System

The general task of improving the education system begins with setting and confirming the nation's value framework, followed by practical matters of governance.

i. Guiding Ideology

The text opens by framing its directives within the "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era." ref to which section? This immediately places the policy firmly within the broader context of national values and principles, underscoring the objectives of aligning educational reforms with its core principles.

The emphasis on morality (e.g. implementing the fundamental task of cultivating moral character and cultivating people [DRP section 1.1]) and developing education (e.g. "*focus on building a high-quality education system*" [DRP section 1.1]; "*The quality of school education and teaching and service levels to be further improved*" [DRP section 1.3]) reflects the government's desire to shape academically proficient students to cement their place both in the international education community and internally as a strategic feature of nation-building. Additionally, the Chinese culture of cultivating morally upright citizens from a young age is reflected in the directives for students to develop well [e.g. "*promote students' all-round development and healthy growth*" [DRP section 1.1]; "*Encourage qualified schools to provide students with interest-based after-school service activities in their spare time for students to choose to participate in*", and "*the development of interests and specialties*" [DRP section 7.25]], for families to take responsibility as parents and co-educators (e.g. "*Schools and parents should guide students to complete the remaining written homework after school, perform necessary schoolwork, engage in housework within their capacity, carry out appropriate physical exercises, and carry out reading and literary activities*" [DRP section 2.8]; "*Further clarify the responsibilities of home-school education, close home-school communication, innovate collaborative methods, and promote the construction of a collaborative education community*" [DRP section 6.21]) and for education to be returned from a largely unregulated sector to the state (e.g. "*student learning improved by returning to campus*" [DRP section 1.3]). This aligns with traditional Confucian values, which prioritise moral education, the cultivation of virtue, and upholding ethics, with the expectation that each citizen will act within a community of humanity and place the interests of others above their own needs or wishes (Gao et al., 2012). Again, here we see an assumption of responsibility for student burdens, this time on schools, and their cooperation with parents.

ii. Governance and Implementation

The text repeatedly emphasises the phrase "adhere to law-based governance" or similar iterations, highlighting the legal frameworks involved in implementing educational reforms. Bearing in mind that the Chinese governance system, which promotes provincial autonomy (see Section 2.1), this document nonetheless proposes a top-down approach to government-led initiatives, where compliance is framed as unquestionable. This mismatch provokes the question how implementing this substantial social (not just educational) change is envisaged. The text itself mentions a number of stakeholder groups, and subgroups within these, to achieve this:

- Party members: Throughout the document, party members who operate in all areas of education and governance are called on to carry out directives, emphasising the hierarchical position of the authorities (e.g., "*Clarify the responsibilities of the department*" [DRP section 8.28]). However, the policy frames party officials' responsibilities in broader, more general terms, whereas teachers, schools, and private providers receive specific operational directives and measurable outcomes.
- Cross-sector responsibilities: Clear responsibilities among various government departments and organisations, (e.g. "*Set up a special work organisation for the coordination mechanism in the Ministry of Education, do a good job in overall planning and coordination, and strengthen the work guidance for all localities*" [DRP section 8.29]; "*the People's Bank of China, China Banking Regulatory Commission, and China Securities Regulatory Commission are responsible for guiding banks and other institutions to manage and control the pre-charging risk of off-campus training institutions*" [DRP section 8.29]; "*The news media must adhere to the correct guidance of public opinion and create a good social atmosphere*"

[DRP section 8.30]; "*All provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government) should improve their working mechanisms, establish special working institutions, and clarify the roadmap, timetable and responsible persons for special governance actions in accordance with the 'double reduction' work objectives and tasks*" [DRP section 8.29]) suggests a coordinated effort to ensure the policy's success.

- Citizens: The ordinances that advise on family education, cooperation between schools and parents and healthy living habits for students (e.g. "*The education department should work with the Women's Federation and other departments to set up parent schools or online family education guidance platforms, promote the construction of community family education guidance centres and service sites, guide parents to establish scientific parenting concepts, rationally determine their children's growth expectations, and strive to form a consensus on reducing burdens*" [DRP section 8.21]); admonishments for teachers who contravene the regulations (e.g. "*Strictly investigate and deal with teachers' paid supplementary lessons outside the school in accordance with laws and regulations, until the teacher's qualification is revoked*" [DRP section 3.11]) and encouragement for the general public to report non-compliance indicate an inclusive approach to applying and monitoring the DRP (e.g. "*All localities should set up supervision platforms and special reporting telephones to unblock the masses' supervision and reporting channels*" [DRP section 8.30]). However, this distributed responsibility structure, which mobilises citizens as monitors whilst leaving party officials' accountability strategically ambiguous, may create confusion regarding ultimate oversight and decision-making authority when potential implementation challenges arise.

Finally, a significant proportion of the policy is dedicated to the control and restriction of the ASTC industry:

iii. Regulation of ASTCs

Strict Approval and Regulation: The document outlines stringent measures for approving and regulating ASTCs (e.g. "*All regions no longer approve new subject-based off-campus training institutions for students in the compulsory education stage, and existing subject-based training institutions to be uniformly registered as non-profit institutions*" [DRP section 4.13]), demonstrating active steps to address concerns about the influence, quality, and unequal access to educational resources (e.g. "*The online discipline training institutions that were originally filed to be changed to an examination and approval system. All provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government) shall conduct a comprehensive investigation of the online discipline training institutions that have been filed and re-approve the approval procedures according to the standards. If the approval is not passed, the original filing registration and Internet Information Service Business License (ICP) shall be cancelled*" [DRP section 4.13]). The commercialisation of education appears to be of particular concern and is referenced several times (e.g. "*capitalised operations are strictly prohibited*" [DRP section 4.13]; "*Strictly control the excessive influx of capital into training institutions*" [DRP section 4.15]). The proposed regulations include changing existing and approved ASTCs to become non-profit immediately (e.g. "*existing subject-based training institutions to be uniformly registered as non-profit institutions*" [DRP section 4.13]), prohibiting foreign capital or activity on stock markets, and stringent edicts regarding pricing, profit allocation, and public transparency [DRP section 4.13]. These measures appear to adopt a tougher stance towards protecting and promoting improved national education by shifting the balance back from industrialised private education to state education, while severely restricting the ASTC system.

In total, the DRP document communicates its goals and ambitions very clearly through decentrally but not autonomously developed strategies for the country of 1.4

billion to align with the greater goal of improving the education system, acknowledging that there will be collateral damage, but targeted and therefore desired.

5.4 CHAPTER DISCUSSION

In performing a critical discourse analysis on the text of the DRP, I explored several key factors that illuminate the policy's deeper meanings and intentions. This analysis examined how the text was produced and the institutional contexts that shaped its creation, alongside an investigation of how the text is consumed and interpreted by its various audiences. I also analysed the text's attitude toward its subjects, revealing the underlying perspectives and power relationships embedded within the language. The study further examined the resources that the text draws upon, including linguistic, cultural, and ideological elements, before identifying the broader sociocultural elements that are revealed within the text itself.

The Text Structure

Revisiting the structure and presentation of the Double Reduction Policy text, which emphasises its institutional authority and purpose. The document adopts a clear hierarchical organisation, with distinct headings, uniform paragraphing, and objective-driven subsections that reinforce its status as an official directive. The opening segment, "General Requirements," illustrates this structured approach by methodically presenting the policy's guiding principles, objectives, and strategies for implementation. This deliberate organisation enhances the text's credibility and provides a coherent framework for analysing its linguistic and thematic elements.

The language and register employed are direct, clear, and formal (see Section 5.1.4 and Chapters 2 and 3). Each section primarily comprises directives regarding specific objectives. The tone is authoritative, using direct language that leaves little room for misinterpretation. The vocabulary includes heavy use of modality to both project authority and suggest actions. The inclusion of target audiences keeps the reader fully aware of which sections pertain to whom and reminds them of the author, who is one of the highest officials in the Chinese government system.

The effectiveness of the document lies in its very directive and authoritative tone, coupled with accessibility to the intended audience, as it maintains clarity throughout, using precise language to provide clear rationales and practical solutions to issues, along with feasible implementation guidance tailored to its intended audience.

The Text Production

Having established the DRP's position as an official government document aimed at reducing academic pressure and curtailing private education as part of China's broader "common prosperity" agenda, this section examines how the policy accomplishes its goals through its textual construction. Austin's (1962) speech act theory, introduced earlier, provides a useful analytical framework for distinguishing between what the policy says, what it intends to do, and what it actually achieves.

The locutionary act constitutes the policy's release through official, public channels and its subsequent dissemination through schools and the wider population. These words provided clear directives on objectives and implementation in practical terms, whilst maintaining sufficient flexibility for each administrative region to enact them individually. The illocutionary act represents the intended meaning embedded within

these directives. The perlocutionary act concerns what the policy accomplishes through its linguistic construction.

The strong authoritative stance of the policy text reveals intentions that go beyond the removal of after-school tuition such as strengthening and embracing national culture, reducing external influences that may erode or threaten foundational principles, such as the growing presence of capital and unsuitably qualified professionals in the education system. However, the tone of the policy was not raised by any participant, possibly because the formality is the standard tone of official communication, or because the policy document had not been read in its original form, but rather via filtered communications.

Additionally, in a climate of financial stress (Rosen et al., 2023) in the housing market, the pandemic, falling birth rates, an ageing population, and increasing costs of raising children, a state goal appeared to be alleviating pressure on family expenditure. Furthermore, growing dissatisfaction with increased working hours for both students, exemplified by the term "involution" (Chen & Hong, 2023; Hizi, 2024; Liu, 2024) and working people beholden to the 9-9-6 culture (Yi & Wan, 2024; Zhou et al., 2024) of working 12 hours a day, six days a week may have been a factor in the government's aim of reducing burdens. The policy's focus on reducing homework, lessening student burdens, and strengthening families reflects these broader value-based concerns. This is discussed in detail in Section 6.4 Summary.

The DRP text thus exhibits the following biases, all embedded in the policy's political, cultural, and economic context. These include:

- **State Bias:** The policy may be designed to highlight favourable outcomes while supporting and safeguarding national and cultural principles. It reflects China's educational and cultural values, including reverence for state teachers over those in the private sector, and emphasises the importance of academic success for

successful nation-building. Additionally, the policy may oversimplify the issues in education by focusing only on reducing tutoring and homework while overlooking deeper societal expectations and structural restraints within the system. These include the continued competition, especially for older students, and the ongoing pressure from parents and families who feel ensnared by the inescapable meritocratic nature of success and progress for their children.

- **Bias Toward Policy Effectiveness:** The text frames success of the policy as optimistic while minimising implementation difficulties and viewpoints from stakeholders such as tutoring companies, parents, or older students. The policy may primarily represent the government's perspective, with limited input from parents, students, or educators; however, it does consider regional differences through its model of administrative region autonomy, which is used in most policy implementations. However, the direct language used to focus on regulation could illustrate a bias of top-down control, disregarding more flexible, grassroots approaches to education reform.
- **Sector Bias:** The policy's impact on the tutoring industry's staff, with limited consideration of its economic and emotional consequences or how different socioeconomic groups experience academic pressure, is not addressed within the document. Heavy emphasis on the role of state teachers in the future of Chinese education places the focus firmly back in the state system, as pronounced in the first paragraph ("focus on building a high-quality education system, strengthen the role of school education as the main position" (see Section 1.1 Guiding ideology) disregarding the desire of parents and some students to maintain the auxiliary support of private tuition. Whilst parents are repeatedly positioned as policy enactors, the text provides limited practical guidance on how they should fulfil this role.

- Exclusion of international perspectives: The policy might reflect a nationalistic viewpoint, neglecting discussions on varied educational availability or alternative models, from the many international companies that operate online education platforms, provide teachers, or produce educational publications. However, this may be a main goal, as eliminating foreign capital in Chinese education was explicitly discussed. The available English translation may to some extent obscure cultural nuances, affecting international understanding. However, as the policy was primarily intended for a domestic audience, this may not have been a primary concern.

These biases help explain why the policy's perlocutionary effects may diverge from its stated goals, highlighting the gap between official intentions and practical outcomes.

The Text Consumption

Having established that the DRP text was primarily created for the Chinese population through official channels and targeted major stakeholder groups including parents, families, teachers, and students, this section examines the implications of the policy's distribution strategy and audience positioning. Of particular interest is the tension between the policy's broad reach across Chinese society and its marginalisation of the approximately 15 million private education sector workers. The deliberate vilification of private sector teachers, allegedly referred to by the president as part of the "stubborn malady" that needs to be eliminated, reveals significant power imbalances that merit closer analysis. Additionally, the presence of an English translation raises questions about intended international engagement, whether aimed at the foreign community within China, education providers abroad, or other audiences. The external reader, such as translators, journalists, researchers, or others outside the primary audience, adds an additional layer of interpretation, influencing the way the text is understood.

The analysis suggests that the power dynamics in this case can shift, particularly when parents, as secondary consumers, interpret and respond to the policy in unforeseen ways, potentially altering its intended effect. Through the analysis, the power dynamics of a government (as the producer of the policy text) holding power over the public (as consumers) is highlighted with the use of directives and consequences if they are not carried out and adhered to.

This release followed a thread of historical education policies and can therefore be considered part of the regular political, social, and historical factors that influence policy updates. The DRP continues a historical trajectory of educational policies, situating its release within broader political, social, and historical contexts and aligning its purpose with its domestic audience.

The analysis of the Double Reduction Policy text revealed that it is largely positive in tone. As discussed, the positive connotations were linked to terms that promote progress, growth, and improvement, such as "new era", "strengthen", "good education ecology", and "healthy growth." Negative connotations often centred on the issues with ATSTCs, including concerns about student and parent burdens, as well as strict regulations against unqualified institutions. Neutral connotations were mostly practical terms related to implementation and regulations, such as "perform," "engage in," and "standardise".

Emotive language is deployed to emphasise what it perceives as the negative influence of ASTCs, such as "violate", "weak", "unfair", and "vicious". This states a definitive stance, with no room for confusion. No hedging or vague terms are used, further solidifying the policy's intentions.

Despite the text's didactic tone, the overall message emphasises positive outcomes for parents, students and the education system, presenting the policy as a societal improvement or a solution to widespread issues within the education sector.

The Text's Resources

The DRP heavily draws on domestic laws and cultural-political values rather than external resources such as think-tanks, academic scholars, experts or data, citing existing laws and value-based references commonly seen in Chinese cultural and political discourse:

- **Education:** The policy emphasises improving the education system for the "good of the nation." This reflects a focus on collective wellbeing over individual achievement, a central aspect of the Chinese educational and social framework, and a key component of the "common prosperity for all" goal, which adheres to socialist principles of collective effort for collective wellbeing rather than the perceived Western individualistic ethos. The policy emphasises the idea of "harmonious development" by balancing academic pressure with student wellbeing through limiting academic tutoring and promoting "holistic" activities that foster moral and cultural development. Phrases like "healthy growth" and "promoting students' right to rest", the policy aligns with traditional Chinese values that prioritise family wellbeing and social stability over individualistic, competitive approaches, possibly in response to the well-publicised competition existing in the education system by "actively respond[ing] to social concerns and expectations". Terms like "promote all-round development" and "good education ecology," which align with China's broader principle of social harmony, emphasise balance and stability. This collective approach to creating a strong foundation through a robust education system ultimately benefits society as a whole.
- **Hierarchy:** The text reflects China's deeply ingrained observance of hierarchy and authority, including in educational settings. The resolute tone of objectives such as "*strictly investigate and deal with*" [DRP section 3.11] or "*adhere to strict governance*" [DRP section 4] reinforces the idea that the government maintains

the ultimate authority in shaping education, regardless of external influences. This aligns with the social hierarchy practised through the age-old observance of filial piety in Confucian societies. Guo et al., (2022) describe the impactful relationship between filial piety and students' academic achievement, potentially pointing to an unspoken understanding from the state that in implementing the DRP, these forces will invariably work to support its objectives, be it by students complying with the new education rules, parents complying with the policy or ASTCs complying with the law.

- Capital: The policy's strict control of ASTCs reflects the distaste for the Western capitalist model, particularly in key sectors such as education. The emphasis on regulating private tutoring businesses and curbing the influence of capital, with statements such as "*capitalised [sic] operations are strictly prohibited*" [DRP section 4.13], reflects China's commitment to maintaining oversight of the educational landscape and ensuring that neoliberal motives do not undermine social harmony or negatively impact education.

The references to guiding principles in the DRP text reflect China's traditional values and socialist market economy model. Although lacking external or opposing voices, this vernacular tone is consistent with official communiqués in China. It possibly demonstrates a strategic move to decisively implement a significant and impactful policy.

In sum, the core values the reader is asked to resort to interpret the text strongly align with the 12 core socialist values of the DRP references academic traditions, social wellbeing, and national values. The text of the DRP emphasises "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics." The use of "social concerns," "social resources," "social security," and "social atmosphere" reinforces the collective nature of the policy and its underlying sociocultural norms.

While the DRP text upholds Chinese educational traditions, such as the high value placed on academic success, the emphasis on reducing academic pressure does not necessarily reflect a shift away from traditional values that prioritise hard work and achievement above wellbeing, as the policy does little to alleviate pressure on older students, who remain beholden to the gruelling gāokǎo exam.

5.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Critical discourse analysis of the Double Reduction Policy reveals a carefully constructed document that communicates educational reform while advancing broader sociopolitical objectives. Lexicogrammatical and thematic analysis identify authoritative modality, formal register, and value-driven language, promoting national cohesion, re-centralisation of education, and emphasis on moral cultivation. The policy employs authoritative lexicogrammatical choices to shape public understanding and compliance, with the thread of consideration for students' wellbeing running throughout. Thematic patterns reveal a strong nationalistic agenda and a clear objective for state-controlled education over the capitalised private sector.

This chapter demonstrates that critical analysis of policy discourse reveals both overt and subtle mechanisms of control and persuasion, showing how linguistic choices simultaneously achieve immediate policy objectives and promote long-term cultural and social goals by defining the roles and responsibilities of institutions, families, and individuals.

Examining the DRP through lexical-grammatical, thematic, and contextual lenses, grounded in established CDA traditions and supported by computer-assisted corpus linguistics tools, offers a robust methodology for understanding how educational discourse shapes national identity, regulates social practices, and defines institutional

responsibilities. These findings will be instrumental in triangulating with interview data in the subsequent chapter, providing a layered and thorough understanding of how the policy text is not only constructed but also lived and contested, by exploring how these discourses are received, resisted, or reinterpreted by stakeholders on the ground.

6. RESULTS: STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES ON THE DOUBLE REDUCTION POLICY

6.1 INTERVIEW CONTEXT

This chapter presents the findings on stakeholder perspectives on the DRP beginning with the pre-interview context that shaped the data collection process. I then examine the interview results organised by stakeholder groups, followed by comparative analysis across these different participant categories. The chapter concludes with a comprehensive summary that synthesises the research findings.

This section presents the results of the interviews conducted with various stakeholder groups (Figure 2) involved in the English language education system in China. The interviewees were selected from three main stakeholder groups, and further divided into two participant sub-categories of state and commercial teachers:

- State teachers
- ASTC teachers (to include kindergarten teachers as mostly private sector staff)
- Parents
- Former students

An additional consideration was the dual role of:

- Parent -Teachers (Figure 26)

The dominant role during the interview was recorded according to how each participant introduced themselves when asked if they were a student, parent, or teacher at the time of the DRP's release (Question 1 of the interview).

Figure 25
Interview Participants

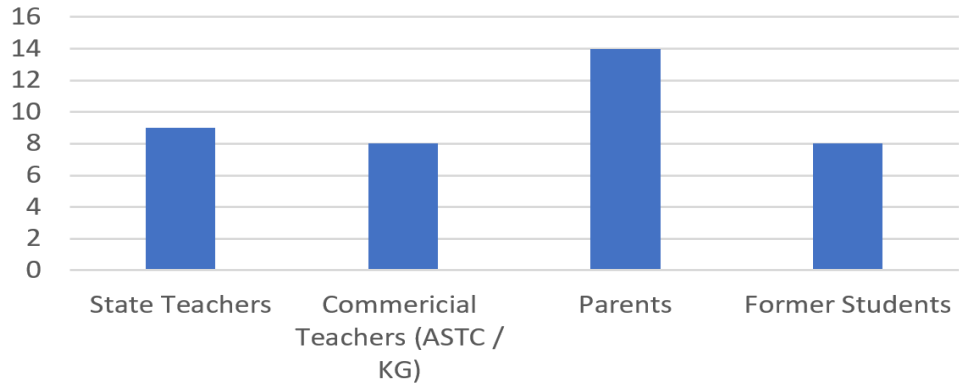
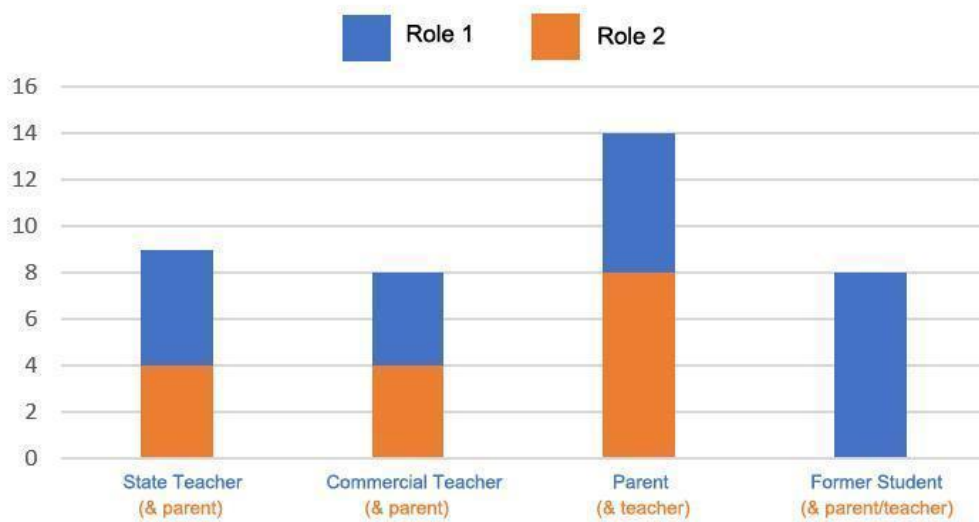


Figure 26
Interview Participants - Dual Roles



The participants were chosen to represent a range of perspectives on the effects of the DRP. These include teachers at various educational levels (state, ASTCs, kindergarten, and university), parents who play an active role in children's education (parent-teachers), as well as parents in general, and former students (those who had recently completed compulsory education or were in higher education). Due to ethical concerns regarding interviewing minors, former students were selected rather than current schoolchildren, as they could provide informed, reflective perspectives based on their recent, direct experience of the DRP. This diverse range of stakeholders allows for a representative overview of attitudes. Each stakeholder group highlight their perspectives, experiences, and perceptions of the effects of the DRP, and these are further recorded through codes which have are available, but are currently kept securely to protect the identities of those who participated.

While this table shows frequencies of each code per group, reflecting the system used to categorise the literature review, it does not describe the nuances of most interviewees holding dichotomous viewpoints, such as an ASTC teacher being both anti- and pro-DRP, as the policy's intentions were seen as positive, however, the personal impact was negative; or several people reporting an increase and decrease in student workload, dependent on the level of education (primary vs high school). Therefore, these figures should not be viewed as quantitative representations, but rather as an overview of the topics discussed.

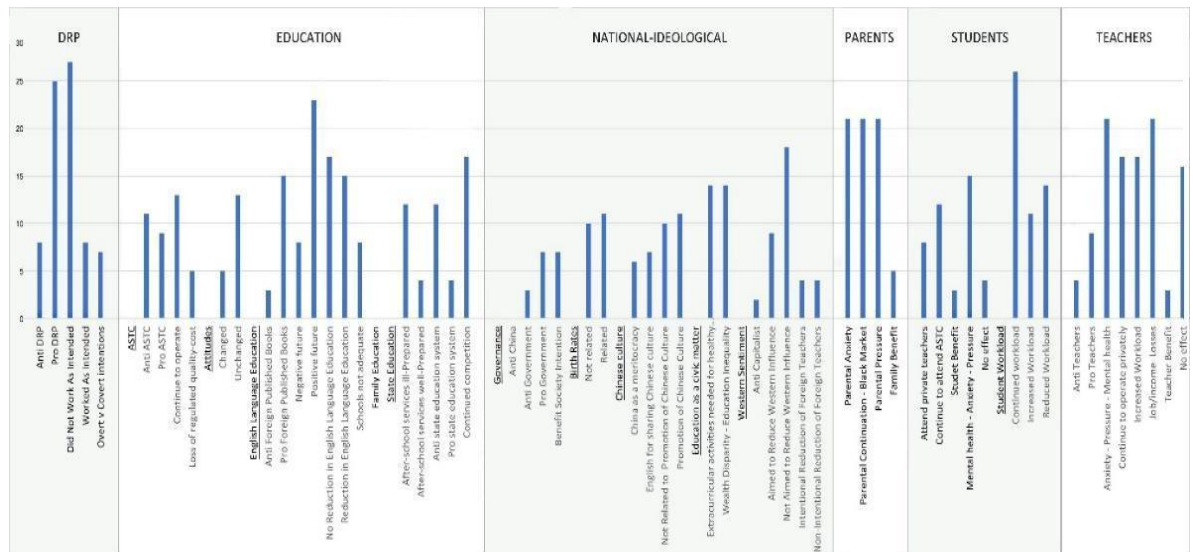
These figures illustrate general trends within each group, such as parents and ASTC teachers adopting a more critical stance against the DRP, or state teachers presenting a more negative outlook on the future of English language education. These are described in more detail below in the stakeholder groups discussions.

'Themes and codes across all stakeholder participants' (Figure 27) present the total number of times codes were discussed, providing an overview of perspectives (e.g., pro/anti...) that represent the themes emerging from the interviews and show clear

viewpoints, but do not differentiate by role. While initial coding included deductive categories (e.g., attitudes toward DRP), an inductive approach was used to identify additional themes, such as anxiety, workload and private tutoring. The themes are summarised here:

Figure 27

Themes and Codes across all Stakeholder Participants' Codes for all Participants



Note. Full-size figure available in Appendix 8

6.2 INTERVIEWS

6.2.1 State Teachers

The teachers interviewed included state, ASTC, kindergarten, and university teachers, all overseen by the state to varying degrees, which provided them with differing

experiences of the effects of the DRP. As the interviews progressed, the teachers naturally divided into two distinct groups with differing viewpoints or intentions: those who articulated state rhetoric and those who offered personal evaluations.

Support for the DRP

This group generally held views that were largely supportive of the policy, positive about the outcome and suggested minimal impact other than students, teachers and parents feeling the benefits:

IMS016 shared a representatively positive view by stating, "Well, this is definitely not an impact [*on teachers*], it's a good thing, and definitely the homework will be reduced." (06:46);

IMS027 was keen to emphasise that there were no negative effects from the DRP, including no impact on teachers: "Teacher... is a group with strong adaptability. Well, not only do you need to be diverse in your methods, but you also need to have strong adaptability to adapt to the development of our times...as a teacher, we don't work too long in a day [*re. increase in working hours*] ... We have a great group, right? It is the collective wisdom and strength, so it is not very hard" (09:53 & 10:51). They added "I don't think the impact is that big. It's mainly for students, the impact is a little bigger, and they are more free" (IMS027, 06:00);

"In my view... Both teachers and the students benefit from Double Reduction Policy" (IMS015, 00:54);

"I think it is a very good policy" (IMS018, 02:33).

However almost all participants communicated that the policy had not worked as intended but demonstrated a degree of allowance due to difficulty in implementing and needing more time:

"The idea is good, but it's hard to really put into implementation" (IMS019, 01:11).

"No. I don't think so. You know, it's just three years " (IMS011, 31:01).

On Student Welfare

Three state teachers obliquely stated it had succeeded:

"I just feel right now the [*education*] environment is better" (IMS011, 13:04); while several pointed to the benefits of the 'guiding ideology' in the DRP to increase the amount of non-academic activities that students engage in, to promote 'all-round development' (Double Reduction Policy, 2021, 1.1 & 7.25):

"Uh, regarding this question, actually at the beginning I mentioned that the main point of success is the release of the students' nature [*reduction of pressure and opportunity to enjoy the natural state of childhood*], which I think is of great help to their comprehensive development in the future" (IMS027, 13:57);

"I suppose the government want the kids to have more sleep, more free time, to just... they can be the boss of their life rather than they need to study all the time" (IMS011, 02:06);

"If it's just learning, it wipes out the child's joyful nature, his, creativity" (IMS028, 02:38);

"As for students, they have less homework and they have more time to do some interesting things to develop their hobbies. That is, they have more time to communicate with their parents. Do some fun things, they will not [*be*] so stressful about the assessment, they will not be worried about their homework" (IMS015, 00:54);

"With less homework and less extracurricular tutoring at home, I think students can have more freedom to develop some subjects that they are interested in" (IMS027, 01:40).

On Families

IMS028 continued the positive narrative, considering the perspective of families: "mentally the children will have less homework, and they will definitely be happy" (08:58). The collective message appears to be that teachers have felt no negative effects and that while students have benefitted, parents' concerns remain the same.

IMS028 extended their opinion that parents were untroubled or affected by the DRP: "Double reduction, in fact, it has no impact on us, we don't care whether they reduce it or not. In fact, our parents' requirements for our children are still the same as before, and there will be no change" (06:10).

"I personally think that the family will be more, uh, balanced and harmonious. When parents do not pursue students' grades so one-sidedly but pay attention to their hobbies and interests, then the children can get real care" (IMS018, 02:33).

On ASTCs

Questions related to the ASTC industry generated an impression among some teachers that they no longer exist, despite evidence to the contrary (including first-hand accounts from parents and students (see below)), or they have little to no apparent knowledge of any private teaching:

"Aren't all the training institutions banned? Now there are no more" (IMS028, 08:07).

Four teachers expressed an explicitly anti-ASTC stance:

"Some teaching centres do not, are not qualified, you know?" (IMS011, 13:37), and one of support:

"We can't just kill all the institutions with one blow. We should allow high-quality, capable institutions to survive" (IMS029, 22:41).

Only one instance of a state teacher suggesting that state schools alone were not adequate for learning English was recorded:

"There are many students who cannot learn high-quality English in public schools" (IMS029, 03:43). Generally, neutral responses were given, possibly to diminish the importance of ASTCs, in line with government goals; or perhaps to publicly support the policy's aim to shift from ASTCs to state school provisions.

On English Language Education

In terms of English language education, again most participants stated a positive outlook, including seven state teachers:

"English teaching? I think English teaching is very important for personal development" (IMS017, 06:29);

"China is going out to the world and facing the world...I think it will develop very well in the future." (IMS027, 14:34).

These statements represent the general consensus that English is a requirement for global engagement and align with the fact that English remains an important element in education progression exams that ultimately lead to opportunities in higher education. Six state teachers supported the opinion that there had been no targeted reduction in English language education:

"I think the Double Reduction Policy is not for foreign language learning. It is for all subjects in the college entrance examination, including Chinese, mathematics, English, physics, chemistry, biology" (IMS018, 08:31).

Echoed by IMS015, and IMS016 who disagree that the DRP was explicitly aimed at English "I don't think it has a lot, much influence in English language." (IMS015, 03:12);

"No, it's not targeted at English; it's targeted at everything. It's to reduce the burden on students." (IMS016, 04:00).

Despite the general belief that English is not the target of the DRP, one state teacher, who teaches maths, and conducted the interview in Chinese, believes that English will decrease in importance:

"English, its importance should shrink. Why? Because the high school now has a new Japanese language class, and the Russian language class is a small language class. The importance of English in high schools has been at least reduced" (IMS028, 15:06).

On Western Influence

Within these discussions, the viewpoint that the DRP was aimed at reducing Western influence was loosely supported by two state teachers, but, as echoed by other groups who don't believe it was intended to decrease foreign influence, was more to promote its own national culture and relevant education content:

"Maybe, but right now, because the Chinese government will let more people, or the attention focus on the spirit of Chinese, Chinese tradition. We would like to let the kids to speak English in order to spread Chinese culture to the world rather than completely put their focus on the language" (IMS011, 06:18).

Summarised by IMS017, the common stance generally experienced in China, is one of pride in its culture and enthusiasm toward any instance that helps promote it in any context:

"Yes. If this policy is included in our textbooks, we should be able to see an increase in China's traditional culture and the penetration of China's positive energy consciousness" (10:49).

Balancing the viewpoints, IMS018, an English teacher, pragmatically stated that English remains an integral element of the all-important Gāokǎo (高考 college entrance exam):

"I think the Double Reduction Policy is more aimed at the college entrance examination [*not the promotion of Chinese culture/eradication of Western culture*] and the development of China's education system." (11:07).

Interviewer (04:00): "Also related to learning English, there were earlier policies, where foreign published books were replaced with domestic publish books. Do you think this had an effect on English learning?"

IMS027 (04:35): "To be honest, I don't really understand this."

Interviewer (11:05): "Another group of teachers, I want to think about are the training centre teachers, and there are two group here - Chinese teachers and foreign teachers. Do you think the effects on these two are different or the same?"

IMS027 (11:42): "This has not been researched, so it is not particularly clear."

As expected, any questions that veered too closely toward national or political matters were firmly deflected, or, in one instance, resulted in a participant bringing the interview to a halt, with accusations of perceived ulterior motives behind the questions. IMS16, whom I later discovered was an older, traditional teacher, was belligerent throughout the interview:

Interviewer (04:43): "Do you think the policy was designed to reduce Western influence, or foreign influence, because there were lots of tuition centres and English centers, and to promote Chinese culture more?"

IMS016 (05:23): "Well, I found that there is something wrong with your question."

Interviewer (05:30): "So do you think the policy was designed..."

IMS016 (05:29): "Because this position seems to involve politics. You have a problem with this."

Interviewer (06:26): "How did the policy effect you personally? Workload, or how much homework you have to give, or things like this?"

Interviewer (7:10): "Well, sometimes we have extended classes now. Extended classes mean that children spend more time in school. Will this affect your workload? "

IMS016 (07:22): "No, no, no. After the double reduction, the time students spend in school is actually shorter, not longer. I don't know where you got this data?"

Interviewer (08:09): "When the policy was announced it was quite late in the summer. Do you feel like teachers and schools had enough time to prepare for the changes so the students were ready?"

IMS016 (08:35): "No, no, no, no, I told you this, the Double Reduction is something that everyone supports, students welcome it, teachers welcome it too, right?"

Interviewer (10:54): OK, and just a few other questions. Do you think the policy has worked as it intended to work? Has it been successful?"

IMS016 (11:15): "I find that your question seems to be wrong. I just feel that you have other purposes. This is a national policy. What does it matter whether it succeeds or not? I tell you, I feel that your motives are not pure. Your question is meaningless. I think this is the end of it".

Additional Themes: Birth rates and Finances

Regarding the question of whether the DRP was partly designed to address the falling birth rates, which have partly been attributed to high costs (Lucero-Prisno III et al., 2022; Qian et al., 2023), five teachers refuted the idea:

"I don't think it is relevant. Even if it is relevant, the money they save is small, and the effect is not great" (IMS018, 29:22), while only one suspected there may be a link, albeit unsuccessful:

"Fertility rate, well, it costs money to have children, and the fertility rate may not go up. It seems that I have also seen a saying that in order to stimulate parents to have children, on the one hand, stimulate the real estate market, that is, to let parents have more money to invest in real estate and have children, but it seems to have no effect" (IMS005, 16:56).

Interviewer (24:57): "Do you think the policy was designed to try and help young families to have more kids to make it more affordable?"

IMS011 (25:24): "No, I don't think so. No, I don't think so. Because right now a lot of young people don't want to have kids".

When asked about issues of wealth disparity, the state teachers single out the ASTC industry, seemingly without considering the role of the competitive state education system as a catalyst:

"I thought that the Double Reduction would eliminate the unnecessary extracurricular tutoring classes and the phenomenon of special competition in training institutions, but in fact, it is not the case. On the contrary, the competition is getting worse and worse, and the fees of training institutions are also slowly increasing, making it increasingly difficult for children from ordinary families to make up for the lessons, so this situation has emerged" (IMS005, 02:24).

In keeping with the parents' perspectives, state teachers discussed financial burdens caused by the need to continue supporting their children with extracurricular classes, post-DRP:

"What is the impact of the Double Reduction on parents? Does it mean that they have to pay more money, and pay more money for tutoring?" (IMS005, 15:37);

IMS017 described a typical situation for many families, as supported by conversations with parents and ASTC teachers, whereby previous academic classes have been replaced by non-academic classes, negating any financial savings:

"I have invested more than before, because now, in Sichuan Province, the college entrance examination is quite competitive, so for the training of children, I should say that the financial investment is definitely much greater than before. Uh, for the eldest child, I basically only had one interest class before, and I learned it from high school to junior high school. I stopped learning it in the first grade of junior high school, but for the younger children, I would let her try all kinds of interests, and then I chose two of them, which are painting and calligraphy, and let her stick to them. And now the eldest child has extracurricular training, such as cultural training, and cultural training may be more. As for high school, the cost of her cultural course is definitely much higher than

before, much higher than previously imagined. The investment of time and money is definitely greater than before, far beyond previous expectations" (12:01).

Summary

Overall, the state teachers often answered using non-sequiturs and non-committal stances, conforming to vague, state-supportive answers: "[The DRP] is a matter for the country to consider. It has nothing to do with us, we just implement it" (IMS016, 03:15).

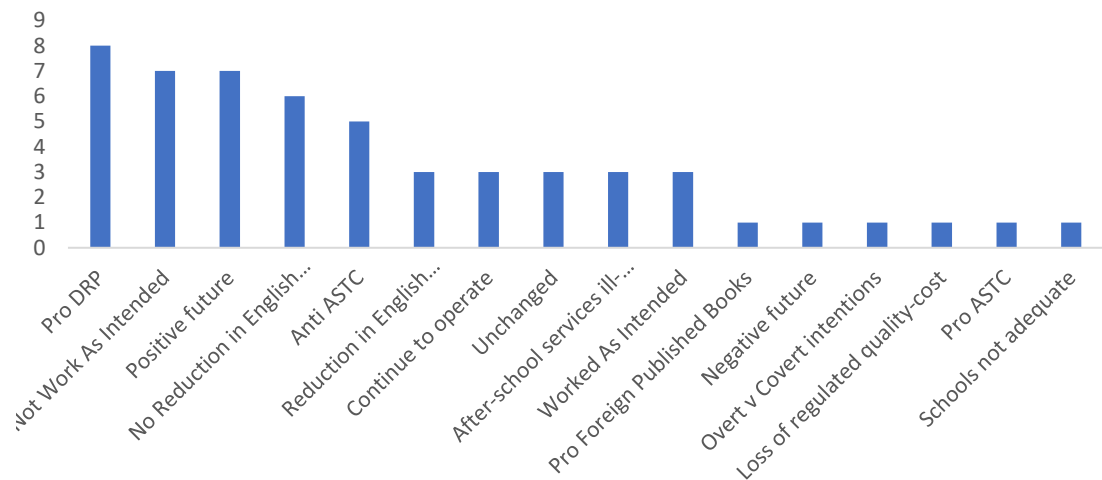
State teachers often provide generalised, overwhelmingly positive assessments, characterised by a lack of criticality. Their narratives typically emphasise that policies are effective, students are thriving, teachers are content, and alternative teaching institutes are either non-existent or present minimal disruptions. This group was remarkable in that, aside from the English language teachers, each interview was almost identical.

Among the interviews conducted in Chinese with non-English subject teachers, there was a definite sense of avoidance, defensiveness, or reluctance to betray any loyalty to the country or its policies. Working for the state comes with additional responsibilities of being publicly supportive and setting positive examples as ambassadors to the country. Being a foreign interviewer also possibly engendered a sense of distrust that would have impacted the responses, although this was much less so during interviews with the other groups. While it provided insight into the stance taken by state teachers and their attitude toward education, the DRP, and its effects, excluding the impact on other groups, such as ASTC teachers and older students, leaves a sense that more was left unsaid than was said. The three English teachers potentially understood the intention of the questions as they were hearing and understanding themes they were asked, not through a translator. Having an additional understanding of English in China

could also have furnished them with a different perspective, having considered English and its place in both China and the wider context in a way that other subject teachers may not have. This contextual familiarity may have influenced their perspectives and answers, which were more amenable and demonstrated more criticality.

Figure 28

State Teachers Thematic Responses



Analysis indicated that stakeholders generally expressed support for the DRP (Figure 29), but interviews uncovered a contradiction, as the majority acknowledged its practical failure, with state teachers often providing evasive responses shaped by loyalty or responsibility, highlighting a disconnect between policy intentions and real-world outcomes due to professional and cultural factors.

6.2.2 ASTC Teachers

The eight private sector teachers interviewed describe challenges such as financial strain, experiences of depression, and difficulties fulfilling parental responsibilities as they would prefer. These accounts also highlight broader losses, including diminished opportunities for work, community engagement, and professional advancement.

Support for the DRP

There was more discussion in favour of the policy than against it, with 26 of 30 participants expressing positivity toward the concept **around 7 of whom were ASTC teachers (figures are not precise, as participants frequently belonged to more than one group)**. However, there were substantial criticisms of the impact, with 27 of 30 expressing unfavourable viewpoints such as the unintentional negative effects on teachers in terms of pressure, anxiety and mental health:

"The pressure and workload of school teachers have also increased" (IMS002, 13:32).

Criticism of the Implementation of DRP

Among this group, there were eight instances implying that the DRP had not worked as intended, with no instances of the opposite:

"At the beginning, when the idea came, I think it was good. But now it seems it was, it is as usual. The kids still have more homework. A lot of homework" (IMS003, 01:54);

"Well, I don't think it the policy really worked at all like especially for the homework." (IMS026, 04:48);

IMS005 explained the intended and expected impact on ASTCs at the time the DRP was released, but how, three years later, the effects have not had the desired effect: "At that time, I thought that the Double Reduction Policy might cause these training institutions to gradually collapse, and many training institutions did collapse at that time. But later I found that, in fact, not so many institutions collapsed, and some institutions even became bigger and bigger" (01:51).

This is supported by IMS030, who highlighted the discrepancies in implementing the policy in China's 'Sandwich Model' (Meng & Su, 2021) of governance where top-down meets bottom up management:

"Well, for now, look back, I think the country meant well. However, once the policy was down to each city, was down to each, like, part of the city and then it changes its origin and directions. So it started getting stupid. But probably at the beginning. They meant well. They just the wrong way of doing it" (07:16).

On Student Welfare

Most agreed that students' workload had either stayed the same or increased, with 26 of 30 participants stating continued workload and 11 of 30 describing increased workload:

Interviewer (13:19): "So the students still have a lot of work. How about at home?"

IMS003 (13:29): "The same as usual. Yeah."

Interviewer (12:31) "Do you think they have less work than before?"

IMS003 (12:37) "No - even more".

IMS025 commented on the long hours of studying that students continue to experience:

"I leave school usually before they do, and they have classes at the weekends" (05:31).

On Families

In tandem with the workload, and in agreement with state teachers, the matter of parental pressures, both personal and transmitted to students, was frequently discussed:

"Yes! I think Chinese parents asked their kids to do homework at home. That's the most common thing" (IMS003, 13:40);

"Parents ourselves as in: as parents ourselves we?? will give kids extra, because really worried that kids will fall back, compared with other students" (IMS030, 10:22).

"There is no training, but uh, for some parents who are just worried about their children's bad grades or poor academic performance, they will push their children even more, you know? (IMS002, 11:34);

"Parents are giving them extra homework, like, themselves. I know some parents do that as well because they don't like the policy, so they give their children homework themselves" (IMS23, 10:00).

Similar to state teachers, ASTC teachers agreed that the greatest pressures were both on and from parents, who bear responsibility for their children's education and, ultimately, the family's future success. While the DRP specified the aim to "alleviate parents' anxiety" (DRP, 1.1) and to create a less pressured home environment for students, there is clearly a major discrepancy between policy and practice.

On English Language Education and Western Influence

During discussions on English language education, ASTC and kindergarten teachers demonstrated a predominantly positive stance toward foreign-published books:

"[If] you have to learn a foreign language, it must be a foreign data that is more appropriate. Well, it is necessary to increase the practicality rather than the written test-taking education" (IMS002, 09:40) ;

"I think the difficulty of getting foreign books makes it harder to learn English" (IMS025 01:20);

"The culture introduced in the original textbooks will be more, how should we say, clearer, and maybe the information ...written by our own country will be slightly... there will be some errors" (IMS004, 12:13).

Similarly, the ASTC teachers held a positive view on the future of English language education in China:

Interviewer (21:46): "Now for the future of English language education in China. What do you think will happen in the next 5, 10, 20 years?"

IMS003 (21:59): "Haha! That's a big question! I think English is still important as before, even more important because it's an international language. So if you want to, like, to go abroad or to go to a international company, you have to learn English. So it's still really important".

IMS004 agreed and explained the practical necessity of English:

"I think the teaching of English will be very good in the future, because English is an international language after all. Many companies, factories, and countries still need

such a language. If you want to achieve some results internationally, or have some influence, this language is inevitable" (39:28).

While it was common for most participants to agree that English remains a necessity and will likely remain an integral part of Chinese education, there was also a palpable sense among the groups that English is very much a utility to achieve something tangible, such as passing exams or enhancing work prospects. Additionally, there were a number of people who feel that English is a means to share Chinese culture and should not have too much importance placed on it, as described by IMS004:

Interviewer (04:31): "Do you think maybe... it [*the DRP*] was partly to have more control over English language learning in China?"

IMS004 (05:01). "No. It may also be because for a long time in the past, Chinese people may have been too heavily influenced by Western culture. For example, they celebrate Christmas more than New Year's Day, which may not be very good. So, the country may introduce some policies to advocate our new culture. Our children should promote our own culture and not pay too much attention to Western culture. It may be because by reducing the study of English, or making English learning seem less important, they will increase the study of our national culture. I think the country may have such an idea. In the true sense, they are not saying that they want to reduce the study of English. It is just that the country may select more, or more excellent English learners through such a policy."

"The country may introduce some policies to advocate our new culture. Our children should promote our own culture and not pay too much attention to Western culture" (IMS004 05:01).

This echoes one possible aim of the policy: to reduce the influence of English or Western culture within China, which could be detrimental to the positive development of its own culture. In contrast to state teachers, there was a sense that there had been a reduction in English language education, with ASTC teachers naturally discussing their own job losses, while state teachers supported the notion that there had been no change from their perspective within state schools:

Interviewer (05:16): "Do you think the policy is related to English education?"

IMS002 (05:25): "Yes. Because I have heard that many people are calling for reducing the proportion of English. I think the Double Reduction is also related to this."

This was described more directly by IMS026:

Interviewer (02:40): "Do you think English language education was specifically related to the policy?"

IMS026 (02:56): "I mean, it feels like it a little bit because I don't think they closed down all training centres. It was just like the English training centres, wasn't it? Because you could still take like the after-school art classes and sports and things like that."

Interviewer (03:15): "OK. So do you think maybe it was designed to reduce English language education in China, particularly the private after-school tuition centres?"

IMS026 (03:26): "Yeah, I guess so. Yeah."

Although this opinion of a reduction specifically in English language education isn't universal:

"I don't feel that there is such a situation at all. Well, it is for all subjects, especially all subjects in the nine-year compulsory education. It is not so strict for high school, so I don't feel that it is only for the subject of English" (IMS005, 06:28).

Financial, Personal and Career Impact

Job losses and income issues were a matter of serious concern among ASTC teachers. IMS004 was particularly forthcoming during their interview, which was highly emotional in parts, due to their personal experience of the effects of the DRP:

"People in their twenties, who have just graduated from school, may have lost their jobs, and they have a lot of energy. They can do this, find a new job, or study other skills. Uh, life skills or survival skills, they are all possible, because they are young and have unlimited energy. What about people in their thirties? If the person is not married, it is OK, but for those who are close to forty, like my age, it is a big blow, because around this time, we have to have a family, have children, and then, uh, people of this age will have mortgages. Car loans. If I lose my job at this time, it will actually have a certain impact on my family, and then it may take a long time" (IMS004, 10:30);

IMS030 also lamented the loss of a career: "I worked in a tuition centre and because of the Double Reduction I lost my job after 16 years working there" (01:13).

Several teachers reinforced this issue: "I think it's been pretty rough if you've been in a training centre for the past few years because they shut down a lot of them and they're just like super restricted and regulated now. I definitely think it's not good for people trying to find jobs" (IMS023, 12:12);

"I had just started working at a training centre when the policy was being introduced and so there was a few months where no one was really sure what was going to

happen, and if the school would close or stuff like that...they temporarily moved our work into a kindergarten and then I left" (IMS025, 03:48);

"Also have some bad impact on Chinese, like training teachers, because that came so suddenly. So we even didn't have time, have enough energy to find another job. Both for foreign teachers and Chinese training teachers. Upset, really felt upset. Yeah, mostly because colleagues were... most of us like, worked in the training school. So we are the same" (IMS003, 07:22 & 10:40).

IMS004 went on to describe the impact on their mental health, future and their family:

"During that period, I might not be able to control my mood, because you have been working, and then suddenly you lose your job because of the national policy, and, well, I didn't have any plans for my future, which was, I have to go to work, and then plan this and that, and maybe the school leaders would help me plan it out, that is, the leaders of the training centre would help me plan it out. After the policy came out, I actually didn't have any plans for my life, and I was confused about my time, and I didn't know what to do, and I definitely didn't have any income, because in school, because I was unemployed, I had to stay at home, and I didn't have much income. And I was suddenly caught off guard in educating my children. It will have a lot of impacts and bring a lot of negative emotions to my children. In fact, it is particularly bad for my children. Then, because of unemployment, my mood at home is also very low. Then the whole living environment or physical condition is not particularly good" (15:44).

On Wealth Disparity

Wealth disparity affecting educational opportunities as a result of the DRP was discussed. Among the ASTC teachers, increased wealth disparity as a result of the policy was raised six times:

"Before, everybody could go to the tuition centre; it's not that crazily expensive. yes, the richer family got better opportunities" (IMS030, 19:27). This is pertinent as one of the goals of the DRP was to "build a good education ecology, effectively alleviate parents' anxiety" (DRP, 1.1) through "clarify[ing] the charging standard, and resolutely curb excessively high fees and excessive profit-seeking behaviour" (DRP, 7.26). Two teachers discussed the positive intention of "levelling the playing field, so to speak, for like underprivileged communities, like poorer students or students that don't have access to training facilities and stuff" (IMS023, 01:53);

"Maybe to like equalise a little bit? The most of the kindergartens that have foreign teachers, you know, the kids that go there are all like really rich. So they're the ones who can afford the, the after-school classes. So maybe the reduction in policy was to make it so that the kids that aren't as rich aren't falling behind as much" (IMS026, 02:07). Others suggest that the objective had not been achieved:

"I thought that the Double Reduction would eliminate the unnecessary extracurricular tutoring classes and the phenomenon of special competition in training institutions, but in fact it is not the case. On the contrary, the competition is getting worse and worse, and the fees of training institutions are also slowly increasing, making it increasingly difficult for children from ordinary families to make up for the lessons, so this situation has emerged" (IMS005, 02:24). IMS30 echoed the issues raised regarding wealth disparity by highlighting the sense of systemic constraint: "Since our [*exam-based education system*] will not change, its even more work and more pressure" (09:22).

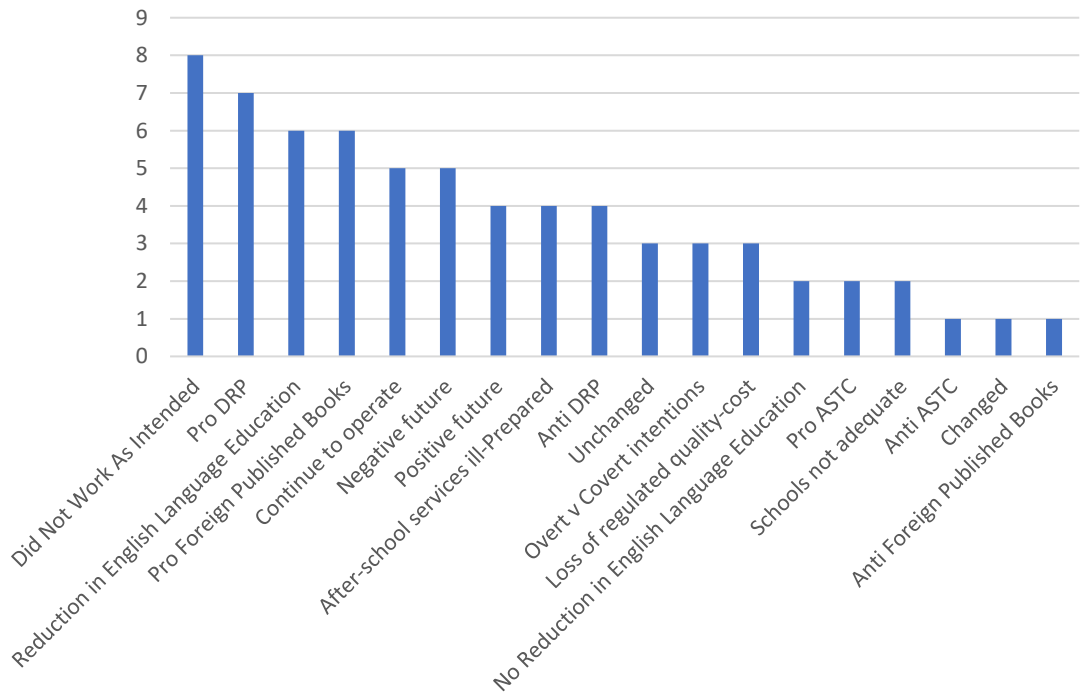
The ASTC teachers almost universally agreed that the unintended deregulation of private tuition had created an inequitable educational environment, which was unavoidable as long as the exam-focused competition persisted. The opinion seems to be that DRP has acted as a temporary cure when what is needed is a comprehensive prevention.

Summary

Overall, ASTC teachers appear to see the DRP as a positive endeavour (Figure 30) but with limited or negative consequences. What was strongly articulated was that their experiences exposed the DRP's unintended consequences, including deepened inequities, heightened professional instability and a perceived link to efforts to reduce Western influence, leaving them doubtful of its success and anxious about their career prospects and their family's welfare.

Figure 29

ASTC Teachers Thematic Responses



6.2.3 Parents

For the purposes of this section, insights from interviews with parents discussing their experiences and perspectives on the DRP exclude the four state teachers who disclosed that they are also parents, as the dominant role of 'teacher' was evident during the interviews.

Support for the DRP

IMS007 appeared positive in their views, suggesting that more time is needed for the policy to take root and be successful:

"That's only about three years, I don't know. I think there's less pressure on kids... so they have less anxiety and their expenses less" (20:41);

Criticism of Implementation

The majority failed to see any significant changes, in large part due to parents replacing tuition centres with their own methods of tutoring their children:

"I feel like it doesn't seem to have any impact, because if I can't tell if there were any Double Reductions, I think parents will still give their children... How can I put it? They are still competing" (IMS006, 06:02).

"For me, I only know 'Oh yes, our Chinese give us a new policy'. Not so surprised because the Chinese government have their methods. I only know 'OK, I know, a new policy'" (IMS009 02:08).

IMS004 emphatically refuted that the DRP had worked as intended as the education system had not been adequately reformed:

"No! They don't have any at all, because now the scores of the high school entrance examination are getting higher and higher every year. They are not decreasing because of the burden reduction. The admission scores are decreasing, and the scores are getting higher and higher every year. So this is not reducing the burden at all" (37:46).

IMS009 and IMS010 were two holding exclusively anti-DRP views:

"I think right now the use is not too useful for us. It's only a beginning of the policy. Some of the children may be sacrificed by this policy. For example, the children from my friends family, her score is lower and lower" (IMS009, 17:47);

"Well, I don't think it's a particularly good policy... it has not played the role of reducing the burden, but the children are more tired" (IMS010, 01:40 & 15:45). IMS004 who described the calamitous effects on their finances, mental health and family was one participant who held balanced views. When asked about the implementation, they responded with how it could have been more successful following trials, in keeping with the Chinese experimental model of policymaking (see 2.1 The Chinese Governance System):

"Because this policy is like a bomb, it exploded, and then I was the one who was blown away, so I think it would be better if the country could interview it, maybe, for example, make a pilot scheme in Beijing or Shanghai" (29:30). Describing conversations with colleagues in similar positions, they highlight how they were left with few options, having previously believed they were in a stable career:

"We don't have some positive and optimistic ideas like before... But this policy may make us all complain about life, why didn't we save money before, why didn't we learn more skills, and why, why, why..." (17:26). This is echoed by IMS030 who reveals the personal impact while considering the good intentions of the policy:

"I think the Double Reduction from the beginning is try to create more free time, like try to give kids more time. To spend with family... (00:30). Well, for now, look back, I

think the country meant well" (07:16). Well since the policy, I've lost my job, after I've been in... worked as an English teacher in the tuition centre for over 16 years. And to be honest, now I'm at kind of middle-age, and I lost a job. That means start everything new, and at this very competitive world, to try to get a job it's kind of hard. So it does affect a lot of my living quality. Life quality" (08:04).

Of the 30 participants, all but three made statements regarding the DRP not working as intended - two of these were state teachers. Within the parent group, there were nine instances of claiming that the DRP had not worked as intended, with only three parents stating the opposite.

On Families

While the greatest effects are said to be on primary-school-aged students, the reduction in school homework has left a perceived vacuum filled by parents who provide additional homework:

"Well now the school doesn't really give much homework to the kids, unless it's a big holiday. However, because of that, so parents ourselves will give kids extra, because really worried that kids will fall back, compared with other students" (IMS030, 10:22);

"I think Chinese parents asked their kids to do homework at home. That's the most common thing" (IMS003, 13:40). IMS003 goes on to consider the continued pressures of homework from the perspective of students:

"At the beginning, when the idea came, I think it was good. But now it seems it was, it is as usual. The kids still have more homework. A lot of homework" (01:54). This is repeated by other parents, who identified that high school students remain as busy as before:

"If there is homework then they can't play, they still have to do it, and still have to do a lot of homework. They are in high school now, so they have more homework.

Basically, they can't finish homework until 10:30 in the evening" (IMS12, 14:50);

"As for the children, you ultimately said that the Double Reduction Policy was to reduce the burden on students and make it easier for the children, but the facts prove that the children did not become more relaxed, which means that there must have been deviations in the implementation of this policy" (IMS010, 03:02).

These statements are in direct contrast to the accounts of state teachers who claimed that students now had more free time to pursue non-academic interests due to decreased homework.

This group also almost universally agreed that the pressures on and from parents continued or was greater than prior to the DRP. IMS009 exemplified the position of parents: "I need to plan and give him a schedule, give him a plan for his future (02:08). I also want to give him training and learn something. My wife and me need to plan for him. There are less classes right now, but we also can find some teachers. We have our ways to find the class. What they need to learn, we need to study. (07:51). More, more pressure. Not better (09:48)";

"In China, people think that studying is the way out, and every parent pushes their children so hard that it seems like they don't have any children" (IMS006, 02:03);

"From my perspective I think Double Reduction Policy is good for kids, but still there are a lot [of] stressed parents. No matter what kind of policy carried out, they still want [their] kids to learn more" (IMS011, 04:22); move to: problems with implementing DRP

"Chinese parents, including my colleagues, friends and classmates, have not reduced their attention to their children's English education" (IMS008, 04:01);

"The families, they want their kids to go to their classes so that they can have higher level, higher achievements, you know, more just more time to study, more time to learn things so that the kids can allegedly be more successful. So, I think in that way it's also more pressure" (IMS026, 09:42).

"Studying is the most important thing, that is, only through studying can you change your destiny, so that you can have food to eat in the future" (IMS006 27:09).

On Teachers

Perhaps surprisingly, Parents were more vocal than teachers themselves around the pressures on teachers, to include greater workload (seven parents, reflecting 17 of 30 total participants) and increased anxieties (seven parents, reflecting 23 of 30 total participants), with frequent mentions of job losses:

"Workload? That's the teachers' workload. Teachers have to work late every day, because every school has late hours, so teachers are actually very hard-working. They can't assign too much homework, and they have to improve the grades. Teachers are indeed under a lot of work pressure" (IMS006, 17:39);

"I think it occupies more time of the teacher. The teacher don't have enough time to release [relax]. To do some other things. If the teacher the whole day do[es] one thing: teaching and teaching, teaching and teaching, [then] maybe the teacher is, umm, exhausted" (IMS009, 12:17);

"They (Note. *ASTC teachers*) are facing the possibility of unemployment at any time. Even if they get a job again, they are not sure whether it will be a long-term situation, right? It is unstable, and the pressure is definitely greater" (IMS010, 14:21).

On ASTCs

Perspectives on ASTC closures are mixed. Some parents perceive the closures as financially advantageous, alleviating economic pressures on their families. However, there is also concern about the loss of supplementary study support provided by ASTCs, which many view as essential for navigating the ongoing competitive demands of the

education system, as illustrated by IMS004: "These personal trainers are the lifeline of parents. They put all their hopes on these personal trainers (25:19). IMS010 describes the situation in more detail:

"[*The DRP*] has closed down training institutions, and everyone still has to go to private schools or even one-on-one schools. On the contrary, the economic pressure and other things have increased, and the cost has increased. Because everyone did not say that they would not take supplementary classes, you have to solve the problem from the root. The problem is that everyone thinks it is OK, I can not take supplementary classes, I can also, uh, not take training, but in the end, you still have to take the middle school entrance examination and the college entrance examination, and the results still depend on it. What should I do if I don't take supplementary classes? Just talking about reducing the process, what's the point of reducing the process? The result is still there, you have to take the college entrance examination. Is it true? You have to take the middle school entrance examination, everyone" (18:52).

This is echoed by two parents who equate the closures to increased family pressure: move to code above: pressures on parents and family

"Before parents could count on the tuition centres, professional teachers to do with their kids, so they don't have to be angry all the time or stress out at home. But now parents have to do more, so their stress will actually even added more onto the kids" (IMS030, 23:06);

"Well, this is a big problem. I think from the perspective of our family, it may be that, uh, the additional channels and methods for children to learn and cultivate are not as rich as before. So in terms of choice, if you want to improve your children, you may have to spend time and energy to find some good teachers. Well, that's right, it has an impact in this regard" (IMS008, 19:33).

There was however support for the control of the proliferated, deregulated monetisation of education:

"The country, at that time, should be said to prevent some large foreign or some illegal businessmen from controlling the learning and training through capital operation, and it should be said that it has played a certain effect in this regard" (IMS008, 10:44).

The overall impression is that parents are in favour of tuition centres, provided they do not create excessive pressure, teach suitable content and are properly regulated.

On English Language Education

Regarding the future of English language education in China, nine parents, in keeping with the majority of participants (23 of 30) views, presented a positive stance: move to: relation of DRP to English and Westernisation

"In recent years, China may say that we want to make China's international influence stronger in the future...And in the future, internationalisation will definitely become stronger and stronger. It is still necessary to learn English. We think that as parents, English is still very important" (IMS010, 04:14);

"I think English is still due to the economic reform and opening up, and now it is a combination of the East and the West. So everyone should still pay more attention to English" (IMS006, 03:46);

"We attach great importance to English education. Our generation teaches our children English because we are not very good at it. So we hope that China will go international. If you want to go out, go out of China, you must know another common language to broaden your horizons" (IMS012 03:57).

However, there was a sense that English language education had been reduced somewhat (six instances).

On Western Influence

Support of foreign-published books threads throughout many of the parents' interviews:

"Learning a language is not only learning the language, it's also learning the culture, also learning the habits and learning about the people. So of course, original books is much better than like, other countries designed. For example if we learn Chinese outside China, the best book of course is books from China, not really books from other country which made Chinese. So I think the same to English" (IMS030, 05:44);

"I still let my children continue to study Cambridge English in the original school, and they are still learning" (IMS006, 04:50).

This is coupled with a general consensus that the policy was not intended to reduce foreign teachers or Western influence:

"I don't think that the Double Reduction is aimed at foreign teachers. It's because it's aimed at training institutions" (IMS010, 06:41);

"Chinese traditional culture is fundamental. We should inherit it. I think it should be passed on. English is for better development. The country also needs it. I think many adults still want to teach their children English" (IMS006, 07:17);

"I think the Double Reduction has no connection with this, because first of all, traditional cultural education itself should not be considered as subject education" (IMS008, 05:46).

However there is a more nuanced acknowledgement that Chinese culture has been promoted and increased in recent years, not with an emphasis on de-Westernisation but an emphasis on Chinese culture:

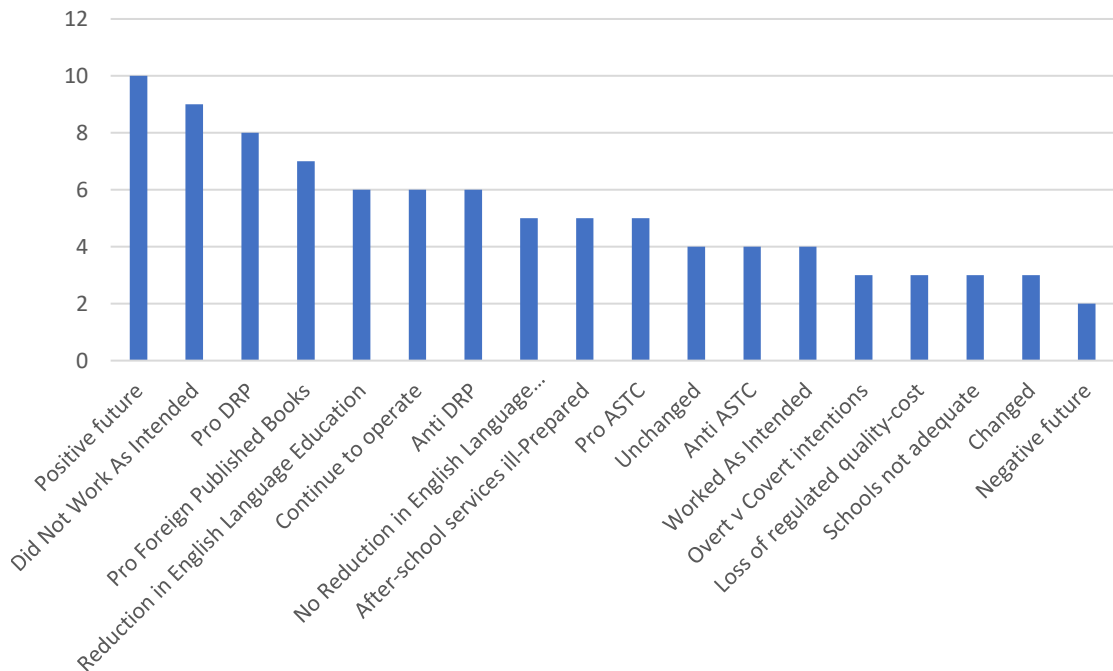
"the country may introduce some policies to advocate our new culture. Our children should promote our own culture and not pay too much attention to Western culture. It may be because by reducing the study of English, or making English learning seem less important, they will increase the study of our national culture. I think the country may

have such an idea. In the true sense, they are not saying that they want to reduce the study of English. They may combine the study of Western countries with Chinese culture" (IMS004, 05:01).

Summary

Discussions on the DRP were mixed. Of all 30 respondents, only nine expressed anti-DRP sentiment during their interviews, while five did not explicitly express pro-DRP sentiment (Figure 31). Of the ten parents, six discussed the negative and positive aspects of the DRP, with two exclusively displaying anti-DRP views and four holding balanced views.

Figure 30
Parents Thematic Responses



In sum, parental voices consistently expressed the view that the DRP was well-intentioned but poorly executed, for the most part, a positive stance toward English language education, agreement that students and teachers had not benefited significantly from the policy and that Chinese culture is a matter of key importance that has no observable link to the DRP which they believe is focused on its published aims – those of reducing the burdens of students' workload and controlling the ASTC industry.

6.2.4 Former students

Former compulsory education students, comprising primarily university students who had experienced the DRP whilst in secondary school, were familiar with the policy's objectives and rationale even though few had read the original document:

"Honestly, I don't think I know a lot about this policy...but I've heard of that, and my basic knowledge about this policy is...it aims to help students...to reduce the academic stress" (IMS001 01:04); "I don't know much about it, but it's double reduction, what exactly is it, it's to reduce the burden on students" (IMS010 01:19). The policy, although not widely read in its original form had achieved its goal of reaching a broad audience across the country.

Support and Criticism for the DRP

Former students, reflecting the view of parents, express overall support for the policy, acknowledging its positive aspects, but believe it did not work as intended and is now

effectively redundant. Of the eight interviewed, all discussed its failings, while three held a balanced view:

"I think it's good, but it because it's really reduce some homework, but the stress, maybe not less!" (IMS013, 01:11);

"The first intention of the policy is good, and it means to make the education cheaper and more convenient for some of the families, but it's also hard to really put it into practice. Reality and imagination, there are some distance between each other." (IMS019, 20:10).

On Student Welfare

The eight former students interviewed provided descriptions of the effects of the DRP on students' workloads. There were ten instances of discussing increased or continued workload, with three instances of decreased workload. This is in keeping with the other participant groups interviewed here. The students were largely in agreement that the distinction is between primary and high school students, whereby primary students have benefited the most, while high school students continue to be pressured by the competitive zhōngkǎo (中考 high school entrance exam) gāokǎo (高考 college entrance exam) system:

"I think the aim or the purpose of the policy is a good one because I can see maybe the government feel[s] like 'OK, so young kids in China, they are experiencing, like too much pressure from this study. So we want to help', but the reason why I won't say the policy is a purely good idea was because when we practice it, I've seen a lot of problems, for example, there are still institutions that they still secretly do some business...But we got the same stress, the same pressure, I'm going to enter the high school, I'm going to enter the middle school, we've got the same pressure... and people feel more stressed about the future. So this is where I think maybe the policy was not that good" (IMS001, 02:20);

"Well, I think it may be a good idea for junior high school and elementary school students, but I think for high school students, because we are facing the college entrance examination, this Double Reduction Policy may make us learn less knowledge and may affect our performance in the entire college entrance examination, so I think the Double Reduction Policy is not a good idea for high school students" (IMS021, 01:02);

"Oh, after the Double Reduction Policy came out, my homework load didn't decrease, because I was in the first year of high school. For middle school students, um, for middle school students, the increase in their extracurricular time will actually make it easier for them to do their homework. It should be a benefit for them" (IMS014, 14:01 & 17:27);

"Some schools or institutions, they just keep providing the students with the same homework. Yeah, in spite of this policy" (IMS024, 17:53);

"Yeah, I think the after the policy has been put forward, the pressure isn't the, the pressure hasn't been reduced. It's just it's just put the students under the attention of the teacher instead. Before this policy is put forward they still need to do homework at home. It's just the replacement of *where* you're doing your homework, instead of *how much* you're doing your homework" (IMS019, 11:42).

IMS021 used a neologism frequently seen in Chinese media in recent years to describe the diminishing returns of increased pressure in education, resulting in a society that can no longer evolve, no matter how hard it tries – involution (nèi juǎn 内卷) (Hawkins, 2024):

"There may be less homework in school, but because the competition is also very strong in the education environment in China, everyone wants to learn more, which means they will enter a kind of blind involution, everyone is constantly seeking more and more learning, so I think they will cause more intense competition" (07:19).

The former students articulated the continued or increased pressure following the release of the policy, as they found themselves finding their own work to fill the void left by the decrease in homework set by schools, and the disruption of ASTCS:

"Before the Double Reduction Policy, many of the homework and papers were arranged by the school, but after the Double Reduction Policy came out, they would reduce this aspect, so I have to find exercises in this area to do by myself, so I think it increases my pressure" (IMS021, 05:42);

"I think, generate more long-term stress and long-term pressure in the future, which is definitely not a good thing to all the students because I don't think all the students can handle the long-term pressure" (IMS001, 27:05);

"The Double Reduction Policy does not feel that it completely reduces the burden on students. On the contrary, as a student, for me, during that period, it actually increased some burdens, because on the one hand, I had to make up lessons, and on the other hand, I had to, uh, observe, that is, I was afraid of being caught by the Ministry of Education [*if attending ASTC/private classes*]" (IMS014, 11:30).

IMS024 shared their personal experience of the mental health struggles faced by older students preparing for the Gaokao:

IMS024 (02:27): It would even lead to some mental diseases like depression or etcetera because some students are quite not [*unclear*] doing your homework.

Interviewer (03:35): So you think this was a common problem for students to suffer poor mental health because of stress?

IMS024 (03:43): Yeah. And you know, actually, I think majority of students just suffer the pressure from their study load. And also, if they just performed not so well in studying, their parents or their family also put high burden on them. And that will just worsen the condition.

Interviewer (04:13): OK, so there's pressure from the school system having to do so much work and then pressure from the family and having to succeed?

IMS024 (04:23): Yeah.

On Families

Along with continued workload for older students, the continued pressure from parents, who are beholden to the unchanged education system was a common theme among the former students:

"From my perspective I think Double Reduction Policy is good for kids, but still there are a lot to be [of] stressed parents. They, no matter what kind of policy carried out, they still want your [their] kids to learn more. So they I think they tried to find some private teachers to teach their kids" (IMS011, 04:22).

"So the funny things is, the policy said we want to help parents and families to want them together, feel less stressed and less worried about their children, because we're going to create an environment that you know, children no longer need to do a lot of homework and people won't feel so stressed. I think it went actually, kind of like, the opposite way" (IMS001, 23:54).

IMS001 described how parents see themselves as having to fill the void left by restrictions on school-provided homework and ASTCs:

"I've talked to some people and they are all parents and their children are actually in middle school or elementary school, and I asked them if they think the policy helped them to kind of release the pressure about their children's education, but they actually said 'No, we worried more about that because the other children...because we're in a

competition. We're competitors. Things just become unknown. So our pressure has been increased" (11:16).

This is supported by IMS022 who describes the deep-rooted beliefs of Chinese parents in education as a primary necessity:

"I think the gene of Chinese parents is to push their children to learn more and more. I think. They will not, you know, they will just not stop pushing the children to learn more! Even in front of the policy, they can teach them in person at home. I think the attitude is just still remains the same. They just want to learn more and be competitive. Yeah, it's a gene" (20:00).

On National Support

Despite the students sharing impassioned accounts of mental health issues as a direct result of the pressures of education, from both the system and from their parents, they also expressed faith in the intentions of the policymakers to improve the education environment:

"I think the aim or the purpose of the policy is a good one because I can see maybe the government feel[s] like OK, so young kids in China, they are experiencing, like too much pressure from this study. So we want to help" (IMS001 02:20);

"I was not that surprised because China has always been implementing such policies to reduce pressure for students. But it's really hard actually, because for Chinese culture, we always prioritise the high scores and prestigious university admissions first, ahead of others. So it's not surprising this policy is put forward because all those years, similar policies have been put forward.

Interviewer: "OK. So it's one of a long line of other policies?"

"Long line, yeah" (01:36) "Maybe they want to improve the education qualities in China, so they put forward this policy. And in class, the teachers would focus on their education instead of the extracurricular activities, because we Chinese students often find some after-school classes to improve our scores. But we don't really pay attention to the classes we actually take in [state] schools. Since this policy is put forward, we may pay more attention to the education in schools" (02:39).

IMS001 also expressed little surprise at the policy and its intentions:

"It wasn't a secret for the whole world that Chinese students, they are experiencing a lot of academic pressure. And I guess, you know, the government, they're not blind and they know they need to do something. So I was like, OK, I can see the reason why you just released this policy" (04:01).

On English Language Education and Western Influence

The students agreed on the challenges within the existing system in terms of competition, but also showed appreciation for some of the smaller changes that led to a focus on Chinese traditions and culture. For example, while many former students advocate for the inclusion of foreign-published books and teachers, they also emphasise the relevance and effectiveness of domestic materials and teaching methods, which they believe align more closely with the traditional Chinese approach to learning. Notably, they do not perceive de-westernisation as either an explicit policy objective or a necessity, citing a strong sense of cultural identity and pride in their country's policies and overall direction. This was most clearly expressed by IMS014 during the line of questioning regarding de-Westernisation and Chinese cultural promotion. They articulated clearly that Chinese culture is inherently absorbed and there are no concerns of Western influences damaging any aspect of Chinese identity:

"English is now a common language in the country, and in China, everyone is strongly advocating to learn English. Even after the Double Reduction Policy, everyone is still required to learn English from elementary school to university. It is possible that China still needs to be in line with the world. After all, the world's language is still mainly English, and it is also a form of communication. Then, as for Chinese culture, everyone in China will still complete this Chinese culture, and will not worry about being influenced by Western culture, that is, forgetting their own Chinese culture. Well, if you learn English, you will use English to tell the outside world about Chinese culture, and then you can also learn about world culture, Western culture, through these platforms, but you won't say that you are influenced by those things. You are still quite firm and confident" (07:38);

"No no no. I think it's just the two educational systems. China is, you know, learn[ing] for tests. But in Western countries they maybe pay more attention to practice. So, it's not about culture or something, it just the two different ways to teach students" (IMS022, 08:15);

"When you just started to learn a new language, if you are given a totally material that is, that's all about this language, then you would definitely lose all the interest in this language because you don't understand it anymore, you know. Yeah. And maybe in order to lay a solid foundation on their study, maybe I think Chinese version materials should be used at first" (IMS024, 09:56);

"Just in the general picture, you know, China is developing so fast and it gains a more stronger voice over the world and it welcomes many foreigners into China, and so maybe just. In terms of people to people exchange and communication we will just pay much attention to the quality of English teaching to better communicate with you guys!" (IMS022, 25:51).

Meanwhile, one respondent, IMS001, considered that if the move to replace foreign published books with domestic material had in fact elements of de-Westernisation, they still attributed it to strengthening Chinese culture:

"Personally, I think it's a hidden main aim. We can't just say "We're just don't want foreign culture, so we're just going to kick them out". We can't say that. So...I think, I can sense a bit that this is one of the hidden main purpose[s] of this policy: to help Chinese students to know more about their culture, and less about other cultures and less about, you know, the other side of the world" (16:18).

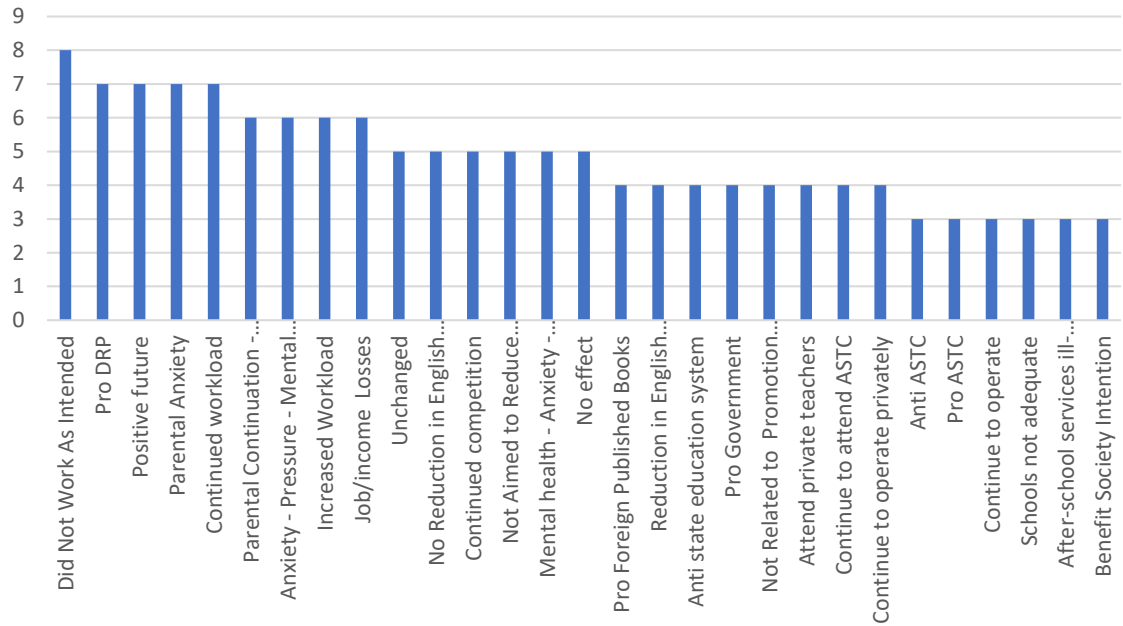
However, they also supported the general consensus that Chinese culture should indeed be the focus of Chinese education:

"But about Chinese, you're in a Chinese environment, in the Chinese culture. So if we did stop helping [the] English field then maybe in some cases, it means we helped Chinese to get better, you know, to learn Chinese culture (11:16). These contributions, despite some doubts, led to disputing the notion that there is an explicit anti-Western bias in the DRP or in society, as English is seen as a useful tool to both connect with other countries for political and economic reasons, and culturally to share Chinese culture globally.

Summary

Former students largely agreed that the policy was well-intentioned and necessary; however, the workload and pressures did not decrease for older students, who are under the most pressure due to entrance examinations for high school and college (Figure 32). They also demonstrated positivity toward policymakers and cultural confidence, dismissing ideas of de-Westernisation in Chinese education in favour of increased and rightful cultural identity.

Figure 31
Students Thematic Responses



Code frequency analysis across stakeholder groups reveals striking contradictions between stated support and perceived effectiveness. Despite most participants across all groups expressing pro-DRP sentiments (state teachers (8), ASTC teachers (7), parents (8), former students (7), an overwhelming majority simultaneously believed the policy "did not work as intended" (32 of 35 participants in total). This paradox suggests participants distinguish between supporting policy intentions and acknowledging implementation failures. The data also exposes significant stakeholder-specific concerns: ASTC teachers showed the highest anxiety levels and job losses, parents demonstrated continued "black market" educational practices (9), and all groups reported sustained student workload despite policy aims to reduce it. Notably, while state teachers claimed minimal negative impact, other groups consistently reported

increased pressure, financial burden, and continued competition. The frequency patterns suggest the DRP created a policy-practice gap, where official support masks widespread circumvention and unintended consequences across China's educational ecosystem.

6.3 ANSWERING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions set out at the start of this study were to:

- Analyse the Double Reduction Policy for its explicit and implicit content.
- Examine the way in which the DRP was introduced and implemented.
- Understand the views on the DRP among its stakeholders.
- Determine the immediate, tangible effects of the DRP on its stakeholders.
- Determine the long-term implications and consequences on its stakeholders.
- Develop recommendations for future or similar policy proposals and schemes.

The interviews yielded rich data on examining the way in which the DRP was introduced and implemented, understanding the views on the DRP among its stakeholders, determining the immediate, tangible effects of the DRP on its stakeholders, and the predicted long-term implications and consequences on its stakeholders.

6.3.1 Overall stance towards DRP

While the four groups - State teachers, ASTC teachers, parents and former students - agreed that the DRP was a necessary and well-intentioned policy, there were

differences in two aspects. One aspect was regarding the effects and consequences, and another was the perspective from which they presented their opinions. The state teachers appeared to differ from the other groups in that they presented a largely positive stance, believing the DRP to have minimal impact other than to alleviate workload burdens on students. They collectively downplayed the effects on the ASTC industry by describing how students now have more or better options for non-academic classes and state schools providing more and better support. They appeared to present the transition in ASTCs clinically by removing any human element, such as discussing the people in the industry who have been affected, teachers who have lost their livelihoods, or parents and students who felt they relied on ASTCs. State teachers stated that they accepted the policy as the latest in frequent updates to national progress and that it bore little weight other than to benefit society by reducing pressure and controlling the private sector.

ASTC teachers, parents and students shared similar views on the DRP. They believe that the DRP was well-intentioned and necessary to address the pressures felt by students, the financial burdens of parents and the unrestrained ASTC industry. However, they also believe that it has had little positive impact and, in many cases, worsened the situation. While supportive of regulating and streamlining education to focus more on state schools providing education, non-academic pursuits enriching students' lives and unscrupulous ASTCs being controlled, the reality is that state education has not relieved any of the competition, academic ASTCs still operate initially through loopholes and later by returning to openly offering subject-support, while tuition has become more unregulated by being forced underground. The main beneficiaries appear to be primary school children, while older students are still subject to the same pressures and workload as before, as are their parents. Overall, these groups' views on the DRP are that it was a good idea that didn't work.

6.3.2 Views on implementation

The interviews revealed a majority agreement between stakeholders that the introduction of the DRP, while rooted in traditional and sequential policies, was sudden and left many unprepared. Private sector teachers felt the greatest impact, as in many cases, jobs were lost and existing social structures were irrevocably changed. State teachers, on the other hand, felt that they were better prepared and that the policy had minimal impact on them. Parents also expressed some unexpected challenges, as the policy did not necessarily reduce their desire to continue providing additional tuition for their children, but with the closures of ASTCs and the directive to focus on non-academic subjects, they chose to locate and appoint private teachers. The effects included higher costs and the proliferation of a black market. This group believed that the implementation was ultimately ineffective. Students shared similar impressions, with discussions of unchanged workloads, particularly for older students, and in some cases, additional stress due to having to create or locate their materials. This group also believes that the DRP is ineffectual due to its implementation, which they feel suffered from regional differences, as well as its failure to change attitudes toward educational stress. Generally, the sense is that the introduction was sudden, leaving the implementation open to inevitable failings.

6.3.3 Perceived effects of the DRP on its stakeholders

In contrast to the perspective offered by state teachers, the ASTC teachers share poignant accounts of the profound impact the DRP has had on their lives. These experiences include financial hardships, battles with depression, loss of valued relationships with colleagues and friends, leading to feelings of isolation, and broader consequences, such as fewer job opportunities and obstacles to career advancement.

State teachers report little change, except for having less homework to assign to younger students. They focus heavily on the immediate benefits to students' wellbeing. Parents describe the benefits for younger students who engage in more non-academic activities, while lamenting the unpredictable costs of unregulated private tuition. This is mirrored by students who have witnessed the easing of pressure on younger students, who are clearly the group who have benefited the most from the DRP.

6.3.4 The long-term implications and consequences of the DRP on its stakeholders

Several participants noted that only three years have passed since the introduction of the DRP; therefore, the long-term implications and consequences are yet to be fully understood. The overall view is that the impact on state teachers is minimal, the benefits to students vary depending on the stage of education they are in, and the financial burden on families is either unchanged or greater, as the ASTC industry has been inadvertently deregulated. There were also a few who perceived the DRP to be more than simply an education policy: IMS023 (15:40): "Oh, I think it has everything to do with the social issues".

6.3.5 Response to Research Questions: Comparison of the Differences Between Stakeholders

The DRP affected stakeholder groups in very different ways, and these differences help answer the research questions about the policy's origins, values, and real-world impact.

The policy clearly favoured state-run schools over private and community-based education. State teachers faced little disruption, thanks to strong institutional support,

while private sector and ASTC teachers suffered job losses, financial struggles, and professional isolation. This imbalance suggests the DRP was built on a centralised, one-size-fits-all approach, protecting state systems at the expense of individual teachers and local education networks.

While the DRP was meant to reduce stress in education, its rollout actually created new problems. Parents dealt with rising costs and unregulated private tutoring, while older students faced heavier workloads and the stress of finding alternative learning resources. Younger students did benefit from more non-academic activities, but these positives were often outweighed by financial and logistical difficulties. The policy's sudden and uneven implementation across regions made existing inequalities worse, failing to tackle deeper issues in the education system.

These differences show a gap between what the DRP aimed to do and what actually happened. The policy aimed to reduce educational pressures and improve equity, but its implementation did not fully address the diverse needs of those affected.

6.4 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The interviews revealed some stark differences between the different stakeholder groups interviewed:

State teachers appear to fully support the policy and believe that it has had a positive impact on students and families, and little negative impact in any area.

ASTC teachers, in contrast expressed doubts about the efficacy, the implementation and the long-term viability of the policy. ASTC teachers also provided the most personal and emotional accounts of the policy's negative impact, citing job losses, emotional and financial consequences, and long-term effects such as changes in their social and support networks.

Parents, for their part, wholeheartedly supported the intention of the policy but were sceptical -or realistic- about the pressures faced by their children, leading them to seek out alternatives to the suppressed ASTCs, meaning that students now have the same or more work than before the DRP, and likely at differing qualities, depending on where they are able to find tuition and at what price.

Finally, Former students believed the policy has benefited younger students the most and were supportive of the policy and national goals. They were the most vocal group in describing the heavy pressures on older students that the policy has not alleviated, as parents continue their dogmatic pursuit of academic success for their children.

Participants agreed that the DRP aims to improve education, though its effectiveness and broader societal impact remain uncertain:

In summary, the participants' view of the DRP text's content is that it communicated an explicit message of alleviating burdens on students and families and reducing the impact of ASTCs. However, the objectives don't appear to have been met, and the implicit intentions remain debatable.

6.5 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Clear themes emerge from the interviews, providing a sense of attitudes toward the education system, the DRP, and its effects. Figure 28 shows strong support for the DRP, yet there is also a belief that it has not worked as intended. There is overwhelming agreement that students' workloads have continued or increased, along with pressures on teachers, revealing ongoing issues in education. Additional themes shed light on matters such as the main pressures on society, particularly on and from parents who

are investing great emotional and financial resources in their children's academic success.

As seen in the first section of Figure 28, titled 'DRP', the prevailing opinion on the policy is that people support it and view it positively but feel it has not worked as intended.

The 'Education' section reveals mixed feelings about ASTCs, with some groups admitting that they are still in operation. Attitudes toward education among the general population remain unchanged as a result of the DRP, and attitudes regarding English language education are largely positive, with most supporting the use of foreign-published books for learning English and predicting a positive future for English language education in China, however opinions are mixed on whether there has been a reduction in English education, as ASTCs have closed, but other avenues of learning have been found. Attitudes toward state education were less favourable, with many highlighting the continued competition within the system, particularly for older students who are required to sit the progression exams, although there was a sense that many felt state schools responded well to the sudden implementation of the DRP.

As expected, the 'National – Values & Principles' section presented the greatest challenges, as participants felt more reluctant to discuss some aspects of national or political issues. As discussed in Section 2.2.5, there is genuine and heartfelt support for the government despite viewpoints from beyond the country that emphasise the negative elements related to freedom of speech in China. While it is commonly accepted that public criticism is not tolerated, people are happy to discuss politics privately. However, the combination of my being a foreigner and the questions being part of recorded interviews inevitably made participants feel more cautious about discussing some of the topics. Some participants expressed that discussing anything related to the government was either unacceptable or uncomfortable, while one participant was very critical of the perceived restrictions on speaking freely. Matters

such as governance and birth rates yielded measured and balanced results, although there was a strong impression that de-Westernisation was not a primary aim of the DRP. Additionally, the belief that children needed more variety beyond academic subjects, which was a prime directive within the policy, was prevalent. Finally, several participants discussed the unintentional consequences of greater wealth disparity resulting from the DRP.

The questions concerning people exposed some of the most firmly held opinions. As seen under 'Parents', there is conclusive evidence that people believe parents are both the victims of the greatest pressure and are responsible for the continuation of after-school tuition and consequential pressure passed on to students. This is supported by many respondents admitting that, despite the policy, students still attend ASTCs or private classes, meaning their workload either remains unchanged or has increased. 'Teachers', meanwhile, are seen to be under pressure and have suffered job and income losses, although, as it will become clearer during the discussion below, there is a significant difference between state and private sector teachers. For example, it can be seen that the 'Job losses' bar illustrates a pronounced result, however, this is pertinent to ASTC teachers more than state teachers, while the 'No effect' bar was only discussed by state teachers, who may be either unaware of the impact on ASTC teachers, or do not wish to discuss any negative aspects of a government policy.

In summary, the analysis reveals a significant correlation between unchanged competition in later compulsory education and parental pressure, which fuels private tuition in a new form. The data also shows significant negative consequences for private sector teachers in terms of job security and emotional impact. Additionally, the majority opinion is that the DRP, while positive in its objectives, did not work as intended. These results will now be discussed in the context of the existing literature, along with their theoretical and practical implications.

7. DISCUSSION

7.1 INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

This research examined the impact of China's Double Reduction Policy on key stakeholders - teachers, students, and families - within the context of English language learning, ascertained via CDA of the policy text and interviews. Sub-questions considered potential changes in EFL practices, shifts in attitudes toward English learning, and the practical consequences of altered working conditions, from added pressure on state school teachers to job losses for ASTC staff. Additional themes included considering links to the DRP's broader social goals, such as reversing declining birth rates, reinforcing cultural identity, redefining parental roles in education, and examining whether anti-Western sentiment influenced policy motivation. This chapter discusses the findings in relation to these questions, while considering the policy's content and implementation, its effects, both immediate and long-term, on stakeholders, and recommendations for future policy. It includes links to relevant literature, implications, study limitations, suggestions for further research, and a final summary.

7.2 INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

7.2.1 Analysis of the Double Reduction Policy for its Explicit and Implicit Content

The critical discourse analysis of the Double Reduction Policy provided a multilayered illustration of China's most recent educational reform, illuminating broader value-based and sociopolitical intentions related to the current context. Thematic patterns

highlighted an emphasis on socioeconomic development goals and a realignment toward a nationally coordinated education policy. Thematic analysis began by creating two analytical perspectives: lexical and thematic. Within these thematic categories, four general areas were identified: Education, Main Stakeholders, National Values and Principles, and Responsibilities.

i. THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Main Stakeholders

Key insights from this study, based on interviews, suggest that China's education policies predominantly impact three main stakeholder groups: students, teachers, and families. Considering that, as of 2022, China's Ministry of Education (2023) reported 158 million students and 10.6 million faculty and staff in China's primary and junior high schools alone, the scale of impact is substantial. Some minor quantitative frequency data supported the qualitative thematic analysis of the DRP within NVivo, as reviewed here:

The most frequently addressed theme was student mental health, of which there were 29 instances, highlighting the policy's clear prioritisation of student welfare. This was followed by a strong emphasis on improving teaching standards (20 instances), emphasising the policy's focus on pedagogical quality within the state school system. Issues such as family burdens and anxiety (5 instances) were also acknowledged, though less prominently. Teacher anxieties and burdens were mentioned the least (3 instances).

These frequencies suggest that, although students are the primary focus of policy, particularly regarding their mental health and academic stress, teachers are also

prominently featured, with an expectation to implement these changes. However, their own workload and well-being receive comparatively little consideration. Families are given responsibility for students' behaviours, health, and educational support, particularly with non-academic activities, although this group is also given even less consideration in terms of how the policy impacts them.

National Values and Principles

The thematic analysis of National Values and Principles within the DRP reveals a clear alignment with broader national priorities and values. The DRP text presents an education system that is once again being shaped or guided to serve broader social, political, and moral objectives. This is evidenced by a strong emphasis on moral and character education, aligning with national ideals around civic responsibility (see section 3.2). A strong stance accompanies this moral emphasis on regulating the role of capital in education, including curbing commercial influence, particularly within the private education sector, and protecting the integrity of state schooling. Another central thread (see Section 3.2.3) is the reassertion of control over curricula. The text emphasises the role of domestic curricula (see 5.3.2) while limiting foreign influence through online platforms and ASTCs, directing schools to take a leading role in advancing national education goals. This includes extending support to students through additional supervised homework time and warning against participation in illegal or private tutoring, either as students or teachers. These national values and principles are all framed within both short and long-term educational reform goals, in keeping with the long tradition of education policy adjustments (see Section 2.2.5)

Responsibilities in Education Policy

The theme of responsibility, although not explicitly named as such, runs prominently throughout the policy text. This is evidenced by 146 documented references (see Section 5.3.1), which range from state-level duties to individual and collective roles in society. This emphasis mirrors China's governance structure, where centralised political authority operates alongside economically decentralised provinces that retain some autonomy in implementing education policies (see Section 2.1). Responsibility is most frequently attributed to schools, with 39 instances, highlighting their central role in coordinating curricula, streamlining homework, and regulating academic workload both at school and at home. There are 25 instances of Provincial schemes, reflecting the nationwide semi-autonomous governance system, as discussed throughout Chapter 2. Context: Facts, Policies and Statistics, where local governments actively implement national directives. Teachers also feature prominently, with 22 instances, focusing on their responsibilities in correcting homework, providing feedback, and addressing students' academic needs directly. The state is referenced 19 times, with 13 references to governance and law, and 11 instances of punishment, asserting a strict regulatory foundation, which threatens investigations and penalties for illegal off-campus training and unauthorised teaching activities. Other responsibilities include policy implementation (7), family support (5), which encourages parents to contribute to their children's emotional and academic well-being, and civic responsibility (4), which calls for improved collaboration between schools and families to support the education environment better, and ultimately society.

Together, these findings reveal a stratified system of accountability that begins with the state and filters through provincial authorities to schools, educators, families, and the broader community, reinforcing the expectation of compliance and responsibility at all levels.

ii. LEXIOGRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS

The lexicogrammatical analysis revealed a focus on formal register and value-laden terminology relating to national cultural value systems. The analysis of the DRP policy document (see Section 5.2.1.1) using Systemic Functional Linguistics as a foundation and lexicogrammatical analysis tool Nvivo, reveals its structure and intentions through different language features - Functions and Groups, Connotations, and Modality, as discussed here:

Functions and Groups

The Functions and groups analysis (see Section 5.2.1.1) illustrates how the text predominantly uses imperative sentences (279) over declaratives (56), with no interrogatives, indicating a strong authoritative, directive tone typical of official documents, which are focused on action rather than discussion or questioning. The text is analysed mainly at the level of groups (nominal, verbal, adjectival, adverbial, prepositional) rather than sentences or morphemes, in keeping with Systemic Functional Linguistics (see Section 5.2), where groups are the key units that express particular functions. These units closely relate to how meaning is constructed in context, avoiding over-simplification or over-complexity, as the objective is to understand the ideational and practical intentions behind the policy text, which are better revealed through how groups are used to construct meaning.

- Within nominal groups (55.54%) there is a high frequency of noun phrases (e.g., school, training, education) reflects a densely packed, formal, fact-focused

document that conveys specific information about educational entities and policies, emphasising clarity and objectivity.

- Within verbal groups (14.93%), frequent verbs like "should," "must," "strengthen," and "improve" indicate a focus on compliance, development, regulation, and practical implementation. Modal verbs represent the subjectivity of the speaker's attitude, while verbs related to support suggest an aim to improve children's educational experience. However, a discussion on the differences between our use and understanding of the authority conveyed through modals in Chinese and English (Yang et al., 2023) is pertinent here and is discussed below.
- Within adjectival groups (12.38%), specific adjectives serve to classify and evaluate, with positive adjectives generally used to describe state education and (often extremely) negative ones applied to off-campus training institutions (ASTCs). Adjectives also help soften directives and personalise responsibility, underscoring quality, reform goals, and strict regulation.
- Within adverbial groups (5.2%), strong adjectives like "strictly," "resolutely," and "actively" emphasise the firm stance of the policy, indicating strict implementation while encouraging a sense of shared responsibility.
- While less frequent, prepositional phrases (1.3%) help clarify the conditions, boundaries, and sources of authority. Phrases like "in accordance with" and "for students in the compulsory education stage" highlight the legal structures of the policy, emphasising its gravity.

These linguistic choices align with the vernacular commonly found in official Chinese communiqués and policy documents and in this case appear to serve a dual function:

supporting the state's efforts to restructure the education landscape while simultaneously reinforcing its core values.

Connotations

The analysis of the DRP text (see Section 5.2.1.2) reveals a predominantly positive tone, with 249 positive, 83 negative, and 67 neutral connotative units (words or groups). This suggests the policy aims to present a developmental, reform-oriented message while also enforcing strict regulatory control.

Most frequently associated with educational improvement, quality enhancement, and supportive reforms, common positive terms include "improve", "quality", "strengthen", "good", "encourage", and "promote". Positive connotations can emphasise growth, active support, and policy benefits, e.g., "strengthen quality supervision"; "encourage healthy growth", and "reduce the burden". These support the portrayal of the policy as constructive and beneficial, particularly for students and educational standards.

Predominantly targeting ASTCs and their practices, lexical choices like "burden", "prohibited", "punish", "strictly forbidden", and "illegal content" frame ASTCs in a highly critical light. The use of negative language may help justify the DRP's regulatory stance, reinforcing a narrative that emphasises protecting the public interest and restoring educational and social order. However, the policy does not address the potential socioeconomic impact on families that depend on ASTCs for income or academic support.

Examples of more neutral terms include "in accordance with", "adhere to", "carry out", "establish", and "performance", and tend to describe procedures, regulations, and operational terms with no overt judgment. The frequent use of "adhere to" suggests a firm message that compliance is non-negotiable, while also conveying an

expectation that the semi-autonomous regions understand what needs to be done and how to do it.

Modality

The analysis of modality in Section 5.2.1.3 highlights both the frequency and function of modal verbs, as well as the cultural-linguistic differences that influence their interpretation in English and Chinese.

The use of modality in the English translation of the DRP reveals important linguistic and cultural dynamics. Modal verbs appear frequently, with "should" (36 instances) and "must" (24 instances) being the most common, while others, such as *shall*, *can*, *may*, and *will* appear far less often. These choices reflect an overtly directive tone in English. However, in the original Chinese version, modals like yào (要) and yīng gāi (应该) often carry softer or more context-dependent meanings, even though they are translated into stronger English equivalents. This highlights a critical contrast: while such modal use in Chinese formal writing is standard and expected, and does not necessarily convey harshness or inflexibility. In English, the same modals can appear more assertive or commanding (Zhang & Cheung, 2022). This divergence stems from cultural differences in communication style. Chinese tends to favour low-context, hierarchical, and directive expressions in formal texts (which differs from everyday speech, which is high-context), while English utilises high-context, nuanced modality to express levels of obligation, permission, or suggestion, as shown in the Chinese/Welsh policy text comparisons in Section 5.2.1.1. As a result, the translation process may inadvertently amplify the DRP's tone, making it seem more authoritarian to English readers than originally intended. This aligns with the previously discussed concept of "diffusion of frames" by Entman (2008), which posits that meaning shifts as it passes

through different linguistic and cultural filters. Thus, the narrative authority of the DRP is shaped not only by its content but also by how modality is interpreted and transformed across languages and contexts.

Overall, the lexicogrammatical features reflect a formal and authoritative policy text designed to enforce strict regulation in education, led by a central authority but to be implemented by each province, city, and school individually.

7.2.2 Implementing the DRP

The interviews revealed a consensus among stakeholders that the introduction of the DRP was abrupt and left many unprepared, despite policy deployment being a common and frequent part of life in China. Private sector teachers were most affected, in many cases losing their careers and facing major disruptions that impacted both their professional and personal lives. In contrast, state teachers felt better prepared and experienced minimal impact, expressing almost universal support for the policy and its perceived positive effects on all stakeholders. Parents experienced challenges with the closures of ASTCs and the pivot to non-academic subjects, leading to the growth of a tuition black market owing to the continued pressure of the national exam system. Furthermore, older students reported unchanged workloads and additional stress due to changes in resources such as having to source their own materials and manage their own workloads and support.

The policy's failure to reduce student stress appears to have been expected by some. This may stem from China's exam-centric culture, where families circumvent policy directives through sourcing private tutors (see Section 2.2.3). The growth of private tutoring (Lyu & Lam, 2025) also reveals a gap in enforcement, suggesting that the DRP's aim to reduce wealth inequality may have inadvertently worsened it when alternatives

such as private tutoring become dependent on income or social advantage. These outcomes highlight tensions between the rapid deployment of policy and actual demand, suggesting a discrepancy between the DRP's stated egalitarian aims and its real-world effects. This discrepancy echoes criticisms of top-down reforms that neglect individual stakeholder contexts (see Chapter 3, Literature Review). The disproportionate impact on private educators aligns with the findings of Asian News International (2022), Weng (2022), and Ye (2021) on the shocks to the financial structure of the education sector, where employees and parents bore the brunt of the policy shifts. Additionally, the emergence of the black-market tutoring contrasts with the DRP's goal of reducing academic pressure, supporting the arguments of Kang et al. (2022), J. Yan (2022), and Zhang and Chen (2022) that demand for competitive education persists despite systemic reforms. Notably, state teachers' positive reports of the success of the DRP within state schools are in direct contrast to the findings of Z. Liu (2022), who reported 44.3% reported a "drastic increase in workload" following the introduction of the DRP (p. 3039) (see Section 3.2.4). Meanwhile, regional disparities in implementation mirror Fan and Zhang's (2020) description of the 2010 policy on decentralisation challenges in national education policies (see Section 2.2.4), reinforcing the overall impression that the sudden introduction of the policy led to predictable failings.

7.2.3 Stakeholder Views on the DRP

As discussed in Section 6.2.3, the views on the DRP among its stakeholders revealed that all groups agreed the DRP was a necessary and well-intentioned policy; however, there were differences in two aspects. One aspect was regarding the effects and consequences, and another was the perspective from which they presented their opinions. A simplified summary is presented below (Figure 29):

Figure 29

Simplified Summary of Views on the DRP among its Stakeholders

	Opinion on Students	Opinion on Parents	Opinion on ASTC Teachers	Opinion on State Teachers
Opinion by Students	Younger students have benefitted, while older students have seen no change.	Parents increased efforts to locate private tutors to replace ASTCs. Costs increased, while attitudes remain unchanged, resulting in creation of black-market private tuition.	Foreign teachers are able to find work elsewhere, experiencing only temporary disruption. Chinese teachers will have suffered the greatest negative impact through job losses.	State teachers have experienced minimal impact, as their workload has been reduced, although many report that teachers continue to provide homework but do not support students as well as before.
Opinion by Parents	Younger students have benefitted, while older students have seen no change.	Some parents increased efforts to locate private tutors to replace ASTCs, while others discontinued tuition. Costs increased, while attitudes remain unchanged.	Foreign teachers are able to find work elsewhere, experiencing only temporary disruption. Chinese teachers will have suffered the greatest negative impact. Private teachers benefit by increasing costs.	State teachers have experienced minimal impact, as their workload has been reduced, although they should work longer hours.
Opinion by ASTC Teachers	Younger students have benefitted, while older students have seen no change.	Parents increased efforts to locate private tutors to replace ASTCs. Costs increased, while attitudes remain unchanged.	Foreign teachers are able to find work elsewhere, experiencing only temporary disruption. Chinese teachers suffered the greatest negative impact through job losses, career losses and emotional effects.	State teachers have experienced minimal impact, as their workload has been reduced.
Opinion by State Teachers	Younger students have benefitted, while older students have seen less change.	Parents benefit from less financial pressure from ASTCs.	No effect as ASTCs have been discontinued, while non-academic schools have replaced them.	State teachers have experienced no impact, as they work together to support the policy.

The results reveal that the perspective from which the stakeholders presented their opinions affected their views on the effects and consequences. At one end of the scale, ASTC teachers provided multifaceted views of the effects of the DRP, including mixed results for students and extreme effects on ASTC teachers, including financial, professional, emotional, and long-term consequences. At the other end of the scale, state teachers provided a sanitised version of the same events, where every group experienced inconsequential or positive effects. Parents and students offered balanced views that suggest the well-meaning policy did not work as intended, with some positive results (reduced burdens for some students, and control of ASTCs) and some negative results (loss of additional support for students, no change in the education system, no change for older students and deregulated private tuition). As discovered during interviews, the burden of family expenditure was not alleviated. The private tuition industry moved underground, effectively becoming deregulated, resulting in higher costs and exacerbating the wealth gap between families who can afford private tuition and those who can not. Additionally, by retaining private tuition and attending the extended school hours introduced to replace ASTCs, students do not appear to be spending less time on school- or homework. Students expressed that the continued focus of parents on academic success is partially responsible for the increased homework and the creation of a private tuition black market, which negates the objectives of the DRP.

Overall, stakeholder responses to the DRP reveal a complex picture of outward support alongside underlying concerns. State teachers generally complied with the DRP and its message, while potentially suppressing disagreement; ASTC teachers, on the other hand, frequently criticised the policy and its life-changing consequences. Meanwhile, some parents suppressed concerns over diminished academic support while appreciating the policy's intentions. The policy's implementation disrupted established routines and unintentionally created new challenges: students experienced ongoing or additional stress, and many parents responded by turning to informal

tutoring networks. Despite the DRP's aim to reduce educational disparities, the policy reinforced the very issues it sought to address. Ultimately, most stakeholders agreed that the policy was well-intentioned but felt it failed to achieve its goals.

7.2.4 Immediate Effects of the DRP on its Stakeholders

The immediate, tangible effects of the DRP on its stakeholders differ for each group (see Sections 6.2.4 and 7.2.3). One of the primary objectives of the DRP was to curtail the ASTC industry, and ASTC teachers have arguably experienced the most negative impact from the policy. Financial hardships, battles with depression, loss of valued relationships with colleagues and friends leading to feelings of isolation, and broader consequences, such as fewer job opportunities and obstacles to career advancement, were frequent topics (see Section 6.1.2.2). Conversely, state teachers who did not hold dual roles (State and ASTC teachers) appeared to have experienced few effects from the policy. Several reported a reduction in workload, despite changes in working hours and fewer responsibilities with the removal of homework for some age groups. An apparent collective denial of ASTCs and their teachers' challenges added to the positive narrative (see Section 6.1.2.1). The contrast between private and state teachers' accounts of the effects of the DRP shows a stark difference in the transparency of various stakeholder groups. State teachers unsurprisingly hold a set of views that align with their positions and responsibilities, while private or ASTC teachers present a more authentic account of life post-DRP, describing both the positive and negative effects on *all* stakeholder groups, with unrestrained accounts of their own, sometimes devastating experiences. Parents describe the benefits of the DRP for younger students, who engage in more non-academic activities and have more opportunities to enjoy their childhood. However, they also expressed concerns about the loss of tuition centres that provided indispensable support for students' academic endeavours,

exemplified by IMS004: "These personal trainers are the lifeline of parents. They put all their hopes on these personal trainers" (25:19) (in Section 6.1.2.3). Meanwhile, parents continue to labour under the anxieties associated with coaching their children through the arduous exam-driven system. The major difference among this group would be the altered availability of auxiliary resources and their associated costs. And finally, the students themselves. Little changed for the most under-pressure group of older students, and from where pressure is exerted - the system and, consequently, their parents.

7.3 LINK TO LITERATURE

The literature review explored the DRP and broader education policy in China. DRP-related literature spans from the policy's launch in July 2021 to April 2023, while education policy documents range from 2007, and 2017 - 2022 to provide contextual background. Later documents were excluded as they were deemed repetitive or excluded because saturation was judged to have been reached. The review encompassed a range of perspectives, notably domestic and non-Chinese sources. A notable pattern emerged across this body of work: Chinese-language scholarship tended to align more closely with official policy discourse, often emphasising the DRP's welfare intentions and reform goals (e.g. Kaijian, et al., 2021; Qing, Y. 2021; Zhou, X. 2021), while non-Chinese language sources were more likely to critically examine implementation challenges and unintended consequences (e.g., Guo, Y. 2022; Liu & Bray, 2022; Yang et al., 2024). This divergence in perspective highlights the importance of triangulating sources and critically examining the positioning of authors, particularly those affiliated with state institutions who may face constraints in their analysis. Additionally, much of the literature focuses on immediate policy impacts, with limited attention to long-term effects on stakeholders or the sustainability of reforms,

suggesting gaps that this research seeks to address. Key findings from this body of literature will be used to structure this section of the discussion, focusing on pedagogical and welfare considerations, political considerations, and cultural and value-based considerations.

7.3.1 Pedagogical and Welfare Considerations

Some of the existing literature (see Section 3.2.1) presents student welfare as the primary justification for the DRP; however, a closer examination of the literature and the findings in this study reveals a more complex and sometimes contradictory picture. On the surface, there is widespread support for the DRP's focus on student well-being. For example, Kang et al. (2022) report approval ratings of 90-97% from students, parents, teachers, and principals. Many texts describe the burdens students previously faced - long hours, excessive homework, and emotional exhaustion (e.g., Jin & Sun, 2021; Q. Cheng, 2021) - and pair these with aspirational visions of moral development and holistic growth, reinforcing the DRP as a welfare-driven policy.

Chinese-language literature, in particular, amplifies this framing, aligning closely with official discourse and moral language (e.g., Liu & Dong, 2022; Ma et al., 2021). The policy is often portrayed as a means to alleviate an unhealthy educational environment and restore balance, with studies such as Jin and Sun (2022) linking student burdens to excessive homework and "education mania" (see Section 3.2.1).

However, the credibility of the welfare narrative is questioned due to recurring issues. Many pro-DRP Chinese studies lack methodological rigour, offering little detail on empirical methods and relying on atypical perspectives (Liang et al., 2022; Xie, 2021). Much literature serves as reinforcement of official positions rather than independent

research, often quoting political figures or historical narratives to frame educational aims. This discursive framing may also shape the perspectives of authors, many of whom are affiliated with state institutions and are influenced by policy expectations. Even when student burdens are recognised, responsibility is shifted to parents, teachers, or ASTCs rather than addressing systemic causes, such as exam-driven curricula or unequal access.

The literature on parental engagement offers a contradictory view of parents as both sources of pressure and victims of a competitive system. Findings support this dual perspective, with parental anxiety strongly influencing responses to the DRP, both in support and in violation of the policy. Despite efforts by the DRP to reduce stress, many parents worry about their children's futures, which are reliant on successfully passing through the rigorous exam system, driving many to seek private tutoring. Data also shows the dilemma parents face; their pressure fuels the private tutoring industry, continuing pressures for students, while facing limited alternatives. Teachers, including ASTC staff who are also parents, expressed sympathy, seeing parental actions as driven by anxiety and the need to compete, challenging harsher portrayals in the literature such as Jin & Sun (2022) who state, "many parents do not know how to play the role of parents" (p. 772); Yue et al. (2023) who states "some parents don't care how much their children gain in school, they only care how much better their children are than others" (p. 9) (in 3.2.1). Recommendations to "educate parents" (e.g., J. Liu, 2022; T. Liu, 2022) are contentious. While opinions vary, the findings support criticisms that such efforts often fail to achieve their objectives. Parents reported feeling frustrated, and guidance from schools or officials was vague or inconsistent, leaving families to navigate the new regulations and limitations independently. This points to the limitations of autonomous interventions that overlook the deeper, systemic forces driving educational competition. While the literature commonly supports the DRP's aims, it lacks adequate empirical rigour, critical scrutiny, and recognition of alternative perspectives. This study suggests the DRP's child-centred image largely reflects official

discourse rather than individual experience. The student welfare narrative, though persuasive, must be seen in a broader political and institutional context. Furthermore, parents have voiced that they are not passive recipients of policy or sources of pressure, but take active steps through adaptive strategies such as forming informal study groups, building peer networks, or re-evaluating academic goals (e.g. in Section 6.1.2.3, a parent (IMS009) described taking an active role in organising their child's education and future, including arranging a structured schedule. The parent also highlighted their efforts to secure additional learning opportunities, even when formal classes were limited). These actions reflect a degree of agency that is often overlooked in existing research. These grassroots actions complicate the simplistic view of parents and reveal their ability to respond creatively to systemic pressures.

Although the DRP is partly framed as a moral initiative to improve education and family life, participants' experiences reveal a more ambivalent reality. This gap between official aims and lived realities questions assumptions behind pro-DRP narratives and suggests that without addressing structural issues, such value-based policies may remain difficult to realise.

7.3.2 Political Considerations

The discussions in the literature outlined in Section 3.2.2 highlight several key contextual factors relevant to the implementation of the DRP, particularly concerning the evolving role of state education. A notable pattern across much of the research is an emphasis on the central position of the state education system within the broader educational landscape, alongside critical views of alternative educational providers such as ASTCs. Authors, including Q. Cheng (2021), Guo (2022), and Zhang et al. (2022), describe state schooling as playing a crucial role in moral education and fostering social

cohesion, themes that align with commonly expressed goals in official policy documents. For example, Q. Cheng (2021) characterises state schools as "the main channel for building morality and cultivating people" (p. 188), reflecting widely recognised educational objectives. This perspective is supported by findings from this research, where participants, namely state teachers, indicated that policy communication and implementation encompassed both pedagogical aims and broader educational values consistent with national principles. For example in Section 6.1.2.1 one teacher expressed the view that when parents focus less on academic achievement alone and instead pay attention to their children's hobbies and interests, this approach could lead to more balanced and harmonious family dynamics, and better outcomes for the child (IMS018, 02:33).

The literature also tends to attribute challenges within the education system less to state institutions and more to other stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and ASTCs. This is in line with observations by Zhang (2021) that suggest a narrative emphasising the role of non-state actors in shaping educational pressures, while affirming the legitimacy of public education institutions.

In addition to educational considerations, demographic factors such as the declining birth rate are frequently mentioned as an important background to the DRP. Several studies (e.g., Yuan, 2022; Liu & Bray, 2022; S. Wu, 2021) have linked the DRP to the concurrent introduction of the Three-Child Policy (Tatum, 2021), suggesting that it may reduce financial pressures associated with parenting. Yuan (2022) identifies "education fever" as a significant factor influencing fertility decisions, with the DRP potentially mitigating these effects. Similarly, Li et al. (2022) and T. Liu (2022) view the DRP as part of broader social policies addressing declining fertility. However, the findings of this research reveal that, although education was frequently described as a central factor in economic considerations, around half of the participants did not connect the DRP to fertility choices (see Section 6.3, Conclusion).

Wealth disparity emerges as a third key theme in the literature, as discussed in Section 3.2.2, where 38 documents refer to wealth disparity. While the DRP aims to reduce educational inequality by limiting the financial burdens imposed by ASTCs, several authors report unintended consequences that may have increased socioeconomic disparities (e.g. Guo (2022); Pan (2022); Zhong (2023)). Research by Zhang and Chen (2022), Zhou and Qi (2022), and Zhong (2023) documents the emergence of an informal market for tutoring following the closure of licensed ASTCs, with wealthier families better positioned to access higher-cost private services, while lower-income households face reduced options. Guo (2022) and Pan (2022) highlight how this dynamic may reinforce existing class divisions, potentially undermining the policy's equity objectives. Similar concerns emerge in the data, with some parents voicing anxieties about affordability and the difficult choice between unregulated tutoring and under-resourced public education. As discussed in 6.1.2.1, one parent (IMS005, 02:24) expressed that intensifying competition has led to rising fees at training institutions, making it increasingly difficult for children from ordinary families to access supplementary educational support. Zhang (2021) describes this as a dilemma faced by families, between engaging with unauthorised tutoring or depending solely on the public system, intensifying emotional and financial pressures. The literature also notes a shift in parental concerns, from fear of academic underperformance to worries about exclusion from emerging, more selective educational opportunities (Zhang & Bray, 2020; Liu & Bray, 2022). This supports the view that while the DRP is designed to promote fairness, it may inadvertently perpetuate inequalities by not fully addressing the underlying drivers of competition and exam pressure within the state system (Ergenc, 2019; Lin, 2021; Kong, 2022). Overall, while the DRP is generally framed as a corrective measure, current evidence suggests it has introduced new challenges related to equity and access that warrant further examination.

7.3.3 Cultural and Value-Based Considerations

Explicitly, the DRP aims to improve student welfare, alleviate academic pressure, elevate teaching standards, and promote moral development consistent with national values. Implicitly, the DRP appears to seek greater national cohesion through centralised oversight, using education to promote shared values and cultural traditions.

The cultural dimensions of the DRP reveal tensions between traditional educational values and contemporary reform objectives. The policy's emphasis on "all-round development" (DRP, 1.1 & 7.25) resonates with both Confucian ideals and modern concerns about child wellbeing. However, implementation has exposed deeply entrenched cultural attitudes that resist policy intervention. This resistance stems not from opposition to the policy's stated goals but from fundamental beliefs about education's role in Chinese society.

The most significant cultural factor is the embedded belief in education as the primary pathway to social mobility. Parents consistently framed education in existential terms, describing studying as the means to "change destiny" and ensure survival (Section 6.1.2.3). This perspective, rooted in Confucian tradition and reinforced by the gāokǎo system, creates a cultural imperative that operates largely independently of policy directives. The concept of "involution" (nèi juǎn 内卷) emerged in student interviews (as well as the literature, both academic and media) to describe this self-perpetuating cycle of intensifying competition with diminishing returns. Students characterised the competitive drive as almost biological, something passed between generations that exists beyond individual choice or institutional structures.

Parental responsibility, as culturally constructed, creates particular challenges for implementation. The policy's aim to "alleviate parents' anxiety" (DRP, 1.1) confronts a value system where children's academic success directly reflects parental competence. Multiple parents described their identity as parents becoming inseparable from their role as educational managers (Section 6.1.2.3). Rather than experiencing relief, many felt compelled to compensate for reduced school-based instruction through private arrangements. This cultural imperative operates across socioeconomic boundaries. Even participants who acknowledged the policy's positive intentions expressed inability to deviate from established patterns, with the repeated phrase that "no matter what kind of policy" was introduced, parental pressure would continue.

The relationship between the DRP and cultural identity proved more nuanced than expected. Participants, particularly younger ones, demonstrated sophisticated understandings of how English language education and cultural confidence could coexist. The general interpretation was not that the policy aimed to reduce Western influence but rather that it sought to promote Chinese cultural identity. State teachers framed English proficiency as a tool for spreading Chinese culture globally, while students expressed confidence that learning English would not compromise their Chinese cultural identity (Section 6.1.2.4). This cultural confidence among younger participants suggests that concerns about Western cultural influence may be more pronounced in policy discourse than in lived experience.

The DRP's emphasis on the "release of students' nature" represents an attempt to reframe educational values beyond exam performance. State teachers particularly emphasised this aspect, describing it as releasing children from pressure while supporting comprehensive development (Section 6.1.2.1). The phrase invokes traditional views about children possessing innate qualities that should flourish. However, practical application revealed significant limitations. While primary school

students benefited from increased time for non-academic activities, this benefit diminished substantially for older students facing examination pressures. The cultural status of the zhōngkǎo and gāokǎo as critical life-determining events means that "all-round development" is often relegated to younger years, reinforcing rather than challenging educational stratification.

The general acceptance of top-down policy directives represents another notable cultural factor. Participants demonstrated pragmatic acceptance of government decision-making, with state teachers expressing that policy was the government's domain and their role was simply to implement (Section 6.1.2.1). This cultural orientation toward hierarchical governance facilitates rapid policy deployment but may limit feedback mechanisms that could identify implementation challenges early. Even when participants held critical views of the policy's effectiveness, these criticisms were often tempered by deference to governmental authority.

The research revealed tensions between traditional beliefs about childhood and modern economic pressures. The concept of "releasing nature" has been mobilised in support of burden reduction objectives, yet exists in tension with equally traditional beliefs about the necessity of hard work and discipline. Teachers noted risks of focusing exclusively on academic achievement, yet the same cultural framework validates parental pressure and intensive study as expressions of care and responsibility.

These cultural tensions cannot be resolved through administrative measures alone. The limited success in reducing student burden and parental anxiety reflects not merely implementation challenges but fundamental misalignments between policy objectives and deeply embedded cultural values. Parents continue to pursue academic support not because they reject the policy's stated goals but because they operate within cultural frameworks that define educational success narrowly and

position it as essential for family wellbeing and social mobility. The emergence of informal tutoring markets following ASTC closures illustrates this dynamic. The policy changed structures but not the competition itself, leaving parents to navigate the contradiction between official directives to reduce educational intensity and their perception that such reduction places their children at competitive disadvantage.

This cultural analysis suggests that future policy initiatives must recognise that structural changes, while necessary, are insufficient without accompanying shifts in how education, childhood, success, and wellbeing are understood and valued. The DRP demonstrates both the power and the limits of top-down policy reform in contexts where cultural values and institutional structures exist in tension.

7.4 IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study on the effects of the DRP suggest theoretical, practical, and policy-related implications, highlighting the complexities of implementing education reform within the realities of a diverse context with multiple stakeholders. The effects reflect not only the policy's intent but also broader structural, cultural, and value-based influences that shape education and, more broadly, society in contemporary China.

7.4.1 Theoretical Implications

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to critical discourse analysis, specifically of policy texts, by exploring the gap between official policy aims and lived experiences. While the DRP is framed as a student-focused, welfare-oriented reform

aligned with national development goals, stakeholders reported a range of unintended effects.

These findings resonate with theories of policy interpretation that emphasise how value-based reforms are experienced differently by various social groups. The policy's strong focus on national values and its delivery model (autonomous implementation, albeit from a top-down authority) raise important considerations about how policies are shaped, communicated, and understood. The DRP and its effects illustrate the tension between a unified national vision and the diverse regional and individual realities of its education system.

This research contributes to language policy and planning (LPP) scholarship through its application of Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework to education policy discourse. The analysis reveals how linguistic choices in policy documents shape stakeholder understanding and behaviour. Policy language works at textual, discursive, and sociocultural levels, constructing meaning through lexicogrammatical features, production and consumption practices, and broader ideological positioning. Rather than simply analysing policy content, this approach examines how language mediates power relations between state actors and stakeholders. The framework is particularly useful for researchers seeking to understand why policy outcomes often diverge from policy intentions, a phenomenon observed across diverse educational contexts globally. By demonstrating how CDA can illuminate these gaps, this study extends LPP methodology beyond traditional content analysis to consider the constitutive role of language in policy effects.

The findings also contribute to understanding how policy works in practice. Despite the DRP's use of unambiguous directive language ('shall', 'must', 'strictly prohibit'), stakeholder responses varied considerably based on social positioning, economic resources, and cultural values. Parents circumvented restrictions through underground tutoring markets. Teachers navigated compliance requirements whilst maintaining

existing practices where possible. Local administrators interpreted directives selectively. These patterns reveal how policy travels through multiple levels, from national directives to local implementation to individual practice, with meaning transformed at each stage. This aligns with Entman's (2008) concept of frame diffusion, where policy frameworks are reinterpreted as they move between actors and contexts. The research challenges assumptions that centralised policy formulation produces uniform outcomes.

Beyond language policy, these findings contribute to governance scholarship by showing how education policies function as instruments of nation-building and social coordination. The DRP frames English language learning through discourses of national values, cultural identity, and educational sovereignty. This framing serves nation-building objectives that extend well beyond pedagogy. The policy text embeds these priorities through specific linguistic mechanisms: modality markers that construct government authority and responsibility, transitivity choices that position the state as coordinator of educational provision, and establish boundaries around acceptable educational practices. The analysis reveals implicit hierarchies that privilege state over private education, domestic over foreign influence, and collective over individual interests. What appears as technical educational reform articulates broader visions of appropriate education and national development. For governance scholars, this demonstrates the need to examine not just policy content but the linguistic resources through which policies construct educational priorities and coordinate complex stakeholder interests.

7.4.2 Practical Implications

On a practical level, the implementation of the DRP revealed tensions among key stakeholder groups. Students, the main intended beneficiaries, reported mixed experiences: younger students in pre- and primary education appeared to benefit the most from reduced homework and increased time for extracurricular activities, while older students experienced similar or increased pressure due to the unchanged exam culture and, notably with lower-income families, limited or reduced access to academic support. Teachers in the private tutoring sector experienced sudden job loss and professional disruption, revealing the challenges in adapting to rapid and uncompromising change, while state teachers reported lighter workloads and alleged reduced stress for all stakeholder groups. Parents, while nominally relieved of the financial burdens of utilising ASTCs, have turned to, or arguably fuelled, informal networks and black-market tuition to ensure continued academic support for their children, especially for older students who continue to navigate a highly competitive education system. Additionally, this has further highlighted wealth and education disparity.

These outcomes suggest that while the DRP has had success in reducing academic burdens for some, it has also resulted in an expanded shadow system that may inadvertently perpetuate inequality, particularly where wealthier families are better positioned to access informal support options. Most significantly, it has impacted the lives of ASTC teachers, with economic, professional, social, and emotional effects.

7.4.3 Policy-Related Implications

At the policy level, the DRP provides insights into the challenges of implementing large-scale educational reforms. While the policy drives broader national goals such as reducing student burdens, limiting education costs for families, and eradicating foreign

influence or capital from education, it has resulted in localised difficulties, both human and economic.

The emphasis on reinforcing value-based education positions the DRP within a long-standing tradition of education serving wider social functions in China (see Section 2.2.5). The re-centralising of state education and the stringent regulation of ASTCs are consistent with national goals of equity. However, the stakeholder responses suggest that value-driven reforms must be balanced with pragmatic measures that recognise diverse ground-level conditions. For example, the proliferation of a tuition black market driven by parental motivation highlights the unchanged demand for academic support; however, it is too late for the ASTC teachers who have, possibly unnecessarily, lost their careers.

The linguistic elements of the text, examined through critical discourse analysis, have shaped how directives are perceived, both as flexible and open to interpretation, and as strict mandates. For example, schools and educational institutions recognise the legal obligations within the policy, and of the requirements and potential consequences of non-compliance (9 instances of the word 'consequences' within the DRP text. See also Y. Li (2021) in 3.2.2). Meanwhile, some parents view elements of the policy as unworkable or negotiable, often prioritising personal motivations over stated rules. For instance, one parent (IMS028, 06:10) stated that the DRP has had no impact on their family, as their expectations for their child remain unchanged regardless of the policy. This varied interpretation and application reveal how language choices influence both understanding and tangible outcomes. CDA, supported by empirical data, helps provide a deeper, more nuanced view of a policy's implicit and explicit intent and impact.

7.4.4 Broader Contributions to Methodology and Policy Research

Methodological Contribution: Triangulating CDA with Empirical Data

This study contributes methodologically by demonstrating how critical discourse analysis can be triangulated with empirical stakeholder data to validate textual interpretations. Although CDA has become established for analysing education policy texts, scholars have noted methodological challenges including the potential for researcher subjectivity and the need to connect textual analysis with empirical investigation of real-world effects (Wood, 2019 p. 788; van Dijk, 2015, p. 479). This research addresses that gap by applying the same analytical framework (NVivo coding structure) to both policy text analysis and interview data, enabling direct comparison between policy discourse and stakeholder experience. The CDA revealed layers of meaning within the policy text, while interview data showed that participants' interpretations differed from the analytical results, focusing instead on practical implementation concerns. This disconnect between textual analysis and lived interpretation demonstrates the value of empirical triangulation. The approach in this study offers policy researchers a framework for bridging discourse analysis and empirical research, which is valuable in contexts where official policy discourse and intention differ from lived experiences.

Linking Findings to Critical Policy Research

This research shows how equity-focused education policies can paradoxically intensify the inequalities they aim to reduce. Critical scholars such as Cairney et al. (2022) describe how education policies claiming to promote equity often legitimise existing social

hierarchies whilst appearing to challenge them (p. 370). The DRP exemplifies this dynamic. Explicitly designed to reduce educational inequality by eliminating expensive private tutoring, policy implementation created new stratification as tutoring moved underground with higher costs and reduced regulation. This aligns with research documenting how education policies targeting symptoms rather than root causes shift rather than eliminate disparities (Hadden et al., 2025, p. 18). Critical education scholars demonstrate how seemingly equalising policies can reproduce inequalities through implementation, as "market mechanisms" and "choice" systems enable more affluent families to monopolise opportunities whilst disadvantaged families face under-resourced provision (Reay, 2022, pp. 7-8, 15-16). This has implications beyond China, suggesting that education policies which attempt to regulate markets or change behaviours without transforming underlying systemic structures produce counterproductive outcomes.

Connecting to Shadow Education Research and Comparative Insights

These findings contribute to shadow education research by documenting how attempts to eliminate private tutoring produce predictable patterns of market adaptation. Rather than reducing inequality, such policies appear to intensify it. Attempts to ban or severely restrict private tutoring have occurred in several contexts, notably South Korea's 1980 ban, which was gradually relaxed and eventually abandoned after driving tutoring underground and increasing costs (Kim & Lee, 2010, p. 265). The DRP findings parallel this Korean experience, suggesting common dynamics across East Asian educational contexts despite different political systems. Research on China specifically shows how parents are 'responsibilised' for managing educational precarity created by policy contradictions (e.g. Liu & Bray, 2022), with wealthier families better positioned to navigate these uncertainties. This research contributes to shadow education scholarship by demonstrating how bans affect families differently across socioeconomic groups. These findings have implications

for policymakers globally who contemplate regulating private tutoring markets, suggesting that effective approaches must address root causes such as high-stakes examinations and school quality disparities rather than prohibiting tutoring supply.

7.4.5 Implications for Future Practice

The findings discussed in this chapter have significant implications for future policy design, implementation, and research. These contributions to knowledge, including theoretical, practical, and methodological implications, will be explored in detail in Section 8.3.

7.5 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed how the research has investigated the impact and effects of the Double Reduction Policy on key stakeholder groups. The findings reveal the policy's explicit student workload reduction and regaining control of national education, as well as its implicit intentions of strengthening cultural and value-based elements of society. Together, the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the potential far-reaching effects of education policy. These findings underscore the importance of structured planning by policymakers to mitigate potential negative impacts on stakeholders through clear, structured transitional support, while also highlighting the complexity of implementing a substantial education reform in a vast geographical area. The following chapter synthesises how stakeholders' selective understanding of the DRP reflects a disconnect between state messaging and lived experience, examines the policy's function as both educational reform and nation-building tool, explores how "street-level bureaucracy" and emotional labour shaped

implementation outcomes, and reflects on the core tension between China's centralised governance and localised realities.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1. INTRODUCTION TO THE CONCLUSION

This study examined the Double Reduction Policy in China, analysing its overt and covert rationales, as well as its impact on key stakeholders, as reported by students, state and private sector teachers, and parents themselves. The framework for this study adopts an interpretive conceptual framework, utilising a qualitative approach to collect information. The interpretive framework is grounded in Social Constructionism, with data from interviews across the stakeholder groups. It reflects the researcher's positionality and explores how language and policy shape social realities. Combining theoretical and empirical aims, the study follows Constructivist Grounded Theory, with the researcher actively engaging with emerging data to answer two central questions:

1. What does the Double Reduction Policy mean? What are the overt and covert rationales and motivations for the DRP according to official policy documents?
2. What are the effects of the Double Reduction Policy on its main stakeholders, the teachers, parents, and students?

Reflecting the discussion presented in Chapter 7, this concluding chapter synthesises the key findings that emerged from the research before examining the theoretical and practical contributions this study makes to the field. I then acknowledge the limitations encountered during the research process and outline recommendations for future research directions. The chapter concludes by exploring the broader implications for policy and practice, followed by final reflections on the research journey and its outcomes.

8.2. REFLECTIONS ON KEY FINDINGS

Power is not owned or imposed by any one entity, but is a productive force embedded within the entire social system (Foucault, 1988, in Galal, 2017), although it remains structural, minimising individual agency (Haugaard, 2022). Haugaard argued that 'power' circulates through non-official societal channels, in this case, through teachers, parents and social discourse. While the DRP has directly affected each of the stakeholder groups, the majority had not read the policy document but had received information relevant to their role via other channels.

For example, parents reported having received instructions on changes to homework from their child's teachers, while teachers received directives through professional channels, such as in the normal course of their work, as was my own experience in the education sector, through school meetings, general training, and official announcements. Private sector teachers for their part were informed through government communications, inspections, and interactions with students, parents, and state teachers. Students experienced the DRP directly, partaking in the changes enacted by the policy. Because this "power" is realised through everyday interactions, it aligns with the Social Constructionist framework used in this research, which posits that "through repetitive and cumulative sharing, people are conditioned to accept the reality that they have created as 'truth'". In this process, "reality" as experienced by stakeholders represented in this research, manifested itself in practical consequences. Few believed there was any meaning beyond the practical changes of reducing homework and ASTCs, as this was the primary message being relayed and reinforced. Most participants rejected the notion that the DRP was designed to tackle larger issues such as birth rates. There were mixed responses to the issue of de-Westernisation, with some refuting the idea and others agreeing that it was both necessary and beneficial. They did concede however, that one main concern was to promote Chinese culture,

but not suppressing other cultures. Most participants agreed that the stringent control of the ASTC industry was a clear aim of the DRP and was initially effective, although the repercussions were not intended. Overall, most participants appear to accept the DRP and its literal directives to reduce burdens caused by various elements of education, at face value.

No other Western countries have a policy similar to the DRP, although several East Asian countries do. This reveals a difference in educational culture between two geographical areas. The closest UK policy identified for comparison is the "Education Policy" (UK Conservative Government, 2018). This policy, available online, features a foreword from the Secretary of State, which discusses personal visions, global focus, international partners, and teachers and students. The policy text that follows is written in narrative form, addressing the reader directly by introducing key statistics related to equality, inequality, global issues, and the reasons for its educational goals. The text goes on to list its objectives and rationales to ensure the reader understands the context. The text is supported by images, graphs, data, and a comprehensive reference list to provide supporting evidence. These elements contrast with the DRP, which is introduced with "guiding ideology," "principles," and "goals." The context is firmly within China, with no discussion of other countries. Directives, expectations and reasoning populate the text. Confucian and Socialist principles, without supporting evidence or references to external sources, underpin these. What is clear is that one places itself firmly in the international community, whilst the other focuses purely on domestic matters. These factors reveal cultural differences in how education and authority are conceptualised. The UK policy is presented in a friendly, conversational style and accompanied by colourful images, whereas the Chinese policy is purely text-based and delivered efficiently with minimal embellishment. While different arguments can be made for the efficacy and efficiency of each country's government, what is evident is that the UK provides its readers with various devices to access and understand its policies, whilst China expects its readers to be able to digest policies and

their meanings as they are written. Whether this is indicative of differing levels of authoritarianism or intellectualism can be argued. The conclusion is that both aim to improve education in their respective countries, albeit from different perspectives.

The CDA analysis of the DRP also reveals a potential disconnect between state messaging and stakeholder understanding, echoing Althusser's (2014) concept of "ideological conditioning", where policies are indirectly promoted through institutions such as schools and media. Power dynamics shift among different consumer groups, including the government, public, and external readers, such as those in academia, based on interpretation and context. Following poststructuralist discourse theory, meanings are shaped by how consumer groups interpret texts rather than solely by governmental intentions.

While officials frame the DRP as a unified reform of educational systems and cultural promotion, stakeholders focus on the practical impacts, such as homework reduction and the closure of ASTCs. This selective understanding reflects China's governance, where public compliance with policies can lack scrutiny, while stakeholders selectively comply or circumvent according to individual circumstances. The divide highlights both the effectiveness of state mechanisms for steering national objectives and perceptions, and their limitations in fully implementing new policies as intended. The CDA Analysis revealed a focus on curbing capitalist and foreign influence in education through strict control of ASTCs, which are linguistically portrayed negatively, creating a clear binary between state virtue and private vice. This aligns with the strong national identity reinforcement campaign seen over the past decade, extensively communicated through 'Xí Jìnpíng Thought' (Garrick & Bennett, 2018; Izaguirre Pechirra, 2024), establishing the policy as not just educational, but also political and value-driven, containing strong moral and behavioural components, that uses education as a means for shaping civic conduct and cultural practices. While operational execution is decentralised to the regions, the value-based focus remains centralised.

Hochschild's (1983) concept of "emotional labour" - managing feelings to meet institutional demands - reflects stakeholder responses to the DRP. State teachers possibly displayed compliance by masking potential disagreement, while some parents concealed anxieties about reduced academic support. The DRP's disruptions inadvertently created further problems, as students' increased anxieties, for example, through needing to self-source materials and content, while parents' concerns about diminished academic support fuelled black-market tutoring. Sellar & Zipin (2018) describe "critical resilience", where people or systems respond to difficulties in ways that initially seem helpful but ultimately exacerbate existing inequalities. In the case of the DRP, although the policy aimed to reduce inequality, it paradoxically resulted in increasing it. In this analysis, all groups believe the DRP was a good idea that didn't succeed as intended.

From the perspective of policy enactors and stakeholders, the DRP constitutes a severe disruption to practice - in this respect alone, some resistance to change would be expected. The DRP's inconsistent results in terms of implementation can be described using Lipsky's (1980) "street-level bureaucracy theory", which posits that implementers of public policy - including educators - exercise substantial autonomy in operationalising formal directives through routine decision-making. Contrary to hierarchical assumptions of policy execution, these street-level actors effectively function as secondary policymakers, with their discretionary actions arising from three systemic constraints: 1) competing demands from client populations requiring situational responses, 2) constrained resources (p. 58) and 3) ambiguous directives (p. 4). This reflects the implementation of the DRP, revealing tensions between state mandates and localised interpretations. Examples of superficial compliance include state teachers reducing official homework while maintaining academic intensity through alternative means. The emergence of a shadow education market reveals how parents created alternative systems when existing resources were removed. These adaptations underscore Lipsky's central thesis: policies are inevitably remade through

"street-level bureaucracy," framing the DRP's effects as the result of each collective stakeholder's contextual response to it. These actions, in turn, create new accepted realities, as discussed in Section 4.1.1, where Chen (2015), Clair (1982), and Cojocaru et al. (2012) argue that Social Constructionism relies on the underlying role of language, where words are reproduced, shared, and enacted, and knowledge is constructed. Through repetitive and cumulative sharing, people are conditioned to accept the reality that they have created as "truth".

Together, the CDA of the DRP and the interview data suggest that the research question concerning the overt and covert rationales and motivations for the DRP revealed somewhat different answers between official policy documents and interviewed stakeholders, with the latter tending to downplay any ideological intentions.

8.3 CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE

This study makes several contributions to knowledge, including theoretical, practical, and methodological.

8.3.1 Theoretical Contributions

Examining the DRP through multiple lenses of lexicogrammatical, thematic, and contextual, based on the foundations of established CDA traditions, alongside computer-assisted corpus linguistics tools, has employed a comprehensive methodology for understanding how educational discourse constructs national identity, controls social practices, and mediates institutional responsibilities. These findings are instrumental in triangulating with interview data in *7. Discussion*, providing a layered and thorough view

of how the policy text is not only constructed but lived and contested, by exploring how these discourses are received, resisted, or reinterpreted by stakeholders on the ground.

A consideration of stakeholder power dynamics leads us to question whose voices are amplified or marginalised in the wake of the policy's implementation. Clearly as schools and state teachers were active in communicating the logistics of the policy from its earliest incarnation, it can be deduced that civil servant voices had and have primacy in leading public discourse, whereas ASTC teachers were not only suddenly and unexpectedly removed from their work and security, but have also since been marginalised, and to a degree silenced, by either working in the shadows of the law or by exiting education altogether. Students and parents must demonstrate a certain level of compliance, at least publicly, in order to successfully navigate the educational journey. Furthermore, variability in how the policy is implemented at the local level suggests that regional differences, particularly the well-documented rural–urban educational divide (e.g. Guo & Li, 2024) may shape both compliance and perception. Socioeconomic status variables such as income, education level, and occupation, as well as gender, are also likely to influence stakeholder responses to the policy. These elements would benefit from further research to better understand how inequality and demographics shape how education policies are both implemented and experienced.

8.3.2 Practical Implications

At the time of writing, only three years have elapsed since the introduction of the DRP. Therefore, the long-term implications and consequences are yet to be seen. As with most policies in China, there is a long-term view, utilising 'five-year plans' to shape the country's direction (Heilmann, 2018). The DRP is no different and sits among older policies and adjusted versions of the original iteration.

While many view the DRP as having little meaningful impact, others see it as one step among many in the continual shaping and realigning of national agendas. What is apparent is the drive to provide a more balanced educational environment that enables students to develop all facets of their character and skills, becoming successful adults who will contribute positively to the Chinese nation, in line with the value-based goals set out by China's leadership. The generation of children growing up with the DRP may hold differing views in the future, creating generational shifts in attitudes toward education and the notion of 'success', but that remains to be seen.

Arguably, individual education policies often have unintended consequences, affecting different stakeholders in unequal ways. In the case of the DRP, the most significant collateral damage has been borne by ASTC industry teachers. The impact on state teachers is minimal, and the matter of financial burden on families is a problem that cannot be resolved by policy alone but rather requires a deeper transformation of both the competitive education system and the societal attitudes that sustain it. The years following the release of the DRP saw regular 'family education' sessions in an attempt to address attitudes, and there may be future policies to reshape the mindset, however as a fundamentally Chinese and more broadly, an Asian characteristic, a change in the meritocratic belief in education would be a change in the very kernel of a culture. As discussed in *Chapter 3. Literature Review*, Liu and Bray (2022) compare the DRP to a similar initiative in South Korea, which ultimately failed due to initially pushing shadow education underground and then reallowing its operation under strict regulations. As the education system remained competitive, market demand did not dissipate. This discussion also suggested that the DRP is flawed and may not succeed (see Section 3.2.3 Cultural and Value-Based Considerations - Anti-Capitalist - Anti-Western sentiment).

8.3.3 Implications for Future Policy Design and Implementation

In terms of education policy, this study suggests that future policy design and implementation could benefit from broader stakeholder engagement to assess broad opinion, such as the continued demand for supportive tuition, which could be incorporated into state after-school services. It would also benefit from mechanisms for monitoring and supporting stakeholders during transitions, particularly when reforms involve structural changes. A critical gap emerges regarding the actual extent of continued after-school tutoring activity: the apparent reluctance to rigorously investigate ongoing practices may allow policymakers to claim success. At the same time, teachers feel able to continue operations informally. This creates an unacknowledged reality that undermines both policy assessment and future reform efforts.

The DRP does appear to convey a sincere effort to improve the educational experience for students and promote equity. However, the results have also revealed broader sociopolitical and value-based objectives, and a disconnect between declared policy and the willingness to scrutinise its implementation. In sum, this study has highlighted both the positive and potential negative effects of education policy.

8.3.3 Methodological Implications

This research combines critical discourse analysis with empirical interview data and existing literature to comprehensively analyse the relationship between official policy texts and the lived experiences of key stakeholders, demonstrating how education policy is interpreted, negotiated, and enacted through linguistic channels. Additionally, the application of a social constructionist framework illustrates how language serves as a

medium through which realities are constructed and evolve as meanings prove to be fluid rather than fixed.

The CDA of the DRP reveals how policy language functions on multiple levels, highlighting various explicit and implicit strategies used within the text. By deconstructing the text, the analysis reveals how the policy addresses both immediate practical goals, such as defining and mandating institutional and individual roles and responsibilities and promotes longer-term values and objectives.

The analysis shows how the policy constructs a narrative that brings institutions, families, and individuals together toward a shared goal, while supporting existing power relationships, such as reinforcing the authority of state education over the private sector, re-centring the status of state teachers within the system, and recruiting families as supportive partners. Policy language not only justifies reform and directs behaviour, but also (discreetly?) addresses social and political aims, allowing the policy to operate on multiple levels beyond its stated educational objectives, while possibly avoiding significant scrutiny.

In summary, this methodological approach not only enriches our understanding of education policy linguistic devices and strategies, but also offers a way to explore how discourse shapes real-world implementation and stakeholder experiences.

8.4. LIMITATIONS

As with all qualitative research, this study has certain limitations that may affect the broad applicability of its findings. There are three areas where this could be considered to have limitations: methodological boundaries, limited generalisability, and cultural and contextual specificity.

Methodological Boundaries

The methodological framework developed for this study was grounded in an idealist foundation and employed interpretivist strategies, allowing stakeholder experiences to be foregrounded and aligning with the central aim of the research: to explore the effects of the DRP on its key stakeholders. While the role of the researcher was intentionally acknowledged as a significant aspect of the study, certain limitations remain. For instance, the use of CDA to examine policy texts is inherently interpretive and may be shaped by the researcher's lens. In this context, the use of two languages (Chinese and English) during interviews, as well as the cultural differences between the researcher and participants, inevitably influenced how concepts were interpreted. This ranges from the meaning of individual policy terms and expressions, of modality, to the translation and nuance of interview dialogue. Each of these elements carries degrees of bias and contextual influence. CDA relies on interpretation, and interview responses are shaped by participants' personal circumstances, which may include apprehension about potential repercussions or suspicion toward a foreign researcher.

Additionally, despite careful translation and verification procedures, subtle meaning differences may have occurred, particularly with culturally specific concepts and political terminology. These challenges may have influenced data interpretation in politically sensitive areas, creating analytical limitations despite the support of translators. Some nuanced follow-up opportunities were missed when complex concepts required real-time translation, potentially limiting the depth of exploration in certain thematic areas.

Finally, while this study analysed the positive and negative connotations of individual words, a more detailed collocation analysis could have provided deeper insights into how responsibility for the current situation and potential solutions is framed. Such an analysis would examine the most frequent positive and negative terms in combination with their surrounding words, revealing not just sentiment but also agency and blame.

Due to time constraints, this approach was not undertaken here, but it would be a valuable direction for future research.

Limited generalisability

The study enlisted a relatively small sample size and scope of participants for interview - 30 in total – who were chosen to represent the main stakeholder groups of state teachers, ASTC teachers, parents and former students. While each group was represented fairly equally, this may not reflect all perspectives, such as those across geographical areas, urban-rural divides, school types, age, or ethnicity (China has 56 officially recognised ethnic groups (Liu, X., 2020)). However, the range of participants provided a reasonable representation and prioritised depth over breadth, which was necessary for this particular study, focusing on the effects of a policy rather than statistical data.

As addressed in *Chapter 4. Research Questions and Methodology*, the researcher's positionality and bias, played an acknowledged role in this research. Through selecting Charmaz's (2006) Constructivist Grounded Theory, this study aimed to generate a theory grounded in participants' experiences while acknowledging the researcher's interpretive role. This may be apparent in several contexts, such as my being Welsh, conducting research in China, which places me as an 'outsider'. This could have affected or influenced participant openness, interpretation of data, or access to certain stakeholders or information. While efforts were made to mitigate bias, such as employing a local interpreter or using Chinese where possible in interviews, triangulating information, and seeking advice from European and Asian academics on how to navigate both the practical and theoretical tasks of this research, there remains the facts of my personal biases, experiences and perceived or factual 'otherness' that will have made its way into this study.

The timing of this research is also significant. Although the initial research proposal was developed in conjunction with the release of the policy, and the policy itself continues to evolve, some long-term effects remain unclear. Notably, this study commenced in a context where existing literature on the Double Reduction Policy was scarce. Since then, research on the DRP has proliferated, potentially reducing the novelty of this work over time and affecting its perceived impact. However, this study differs in two areas. Its focus is on exploring stakeholders from the wider community, as opposed to only students or teachers. Additionally, it serves as an immediate record of their experiences, perceptions, and narratives, rather than measurable educational outcomes or performance data. While it cannot address objective indicators such as test scores or employment rates, its strength lies in capturing lived realities in real time.

Cultural and Contextual Specificity

This research is heavily rooted in China and its unique traditions, education system, family dynamics and societal and governmental values. While these are context-dependent and strongly influence the overall research, certain themes are transferable to any context, such as top-down policy enactment, power relationships, parental pressures, education policy adjustments and personal experiences. While the specific elements and insights may not be directly transferable to different countries or policy environments, the findings may be conceptually applicable to other education systems or contexts of education policy reform. Additionally, there is a significant interest in Western universities, which currently enrol many Chinese students (Hattersley & Nicholson, 2024) and could benefit from a deeper understanding of the educational and cultural contexts from which these students originate.

While the limitations of this research have been outlined, they also point to valuable opportunities for future research development. Firstly, the methodology could be

redesigned to include additional quantitative data to integrate with qualitative data, thereby broadening the scope of the results. Secondly, a larger or more diverse sample could be selected to provide more representative accounts from the various subgroups, such as regional, socioeconomic, or ethnic. Thirdly, a longitudinal study could be undertaken to assess the evolving or long-term impacts on various stakeholder groups. All of these could build on the work from this study and are discussed in more detail below.

8.5. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

While the limitations discussed above constrain the scope of the findings, they do not render them invalid. This study's value lies in providing insight into an under-researched area: the effects of an education policy on wider society within a complex and shifting educational landscape. Furthermore, acknowledging limitations enhances the integrity of this research and opens up pathways for future studies.

One key area for future research lies in comparative studies with other national contexts. While the DRP is distinctly shaped by China's sociopolitical structures and Confucian heritage, several countries, particularly in East Asia, face similar issues related to academic pressure, shadow education, and top-down education reform. For instance, South Korea's efforts to regulate private tutoring and Japan's evolving education policies provide valuable points of comparison. Equally, Western nations dealing with private sector education systems could serve as useful contrasts. For example, the UK, particularly England, has implemented strong market-based reforms, including school choice, performance-based funding, league tables, and academisation, which have led to resistance to over-testing, privatisation, and increasing managerialism in education (West & Yaghi, 2025). Comparative studies could reveal

how different governments, cultures, and family values influence the creation and implementation of education policies, situating the DRP within a broader global conversation about education, power, and responsibility - key themes in this research.

A second suggestion for future research is longitudinal studies that track the evolving impacts of the DRP over time. Given that the policy is still relatively new and continues to develop, many of its long-term effects remain unknown. A longitudinal design would enable researchers to follow stakeholders, assessing how their experiences and perceptions evolve over time. This would be particularly valuable in examining whether the policy's intended goals, such as reducing academic burden and rebalancing public-private education provision, are realised over time. This research could also explore whether early apparent compliance eventually leads to indifference, different choices, or further unintended outcomes.

The experiences of ASTC teachers represent another meaningful direction for future research. This study has revealed their marginalisation and the emotional and relational impact. Ethnographies or longitudinal case studies could more fully capture the complexities of their professional and personal transitions, and document how these educators navigate informal labour markets, reinvent their professional identities, or exit the education sector altogether. This would also likely be a gender-based research study, as the majority of ASTC teachers are female (Alduais et al., 2021; Zhou, 2023). Such research would shed light on how policy changes reverberate through the lives of those most directly affected.

Related to these suggestions, future research could pay closer attention to regional and demographic variations in policy effects and experience. China's educational landscape is marked by pronounced rural-urban divides, disparities in educational resource allocation, and differences in cultural and economic capital. A more targeted investigation into these variables, such as regional case studies or ethnicity variables, could offer insight into how power, privilege, and context affect stakeholders.

A final recommendation for future research is the integration of quantitative data to complement qualitative approaches. While this study focused on stakeholder perceptions and narratives, incorporating measurable indicators would help assess the broader effectiveness of the DRP. Potential areas of interest might include academic performance data for the specific age group targeted by the DRP, private tuition school attendance rates, parental spending on supplementary education, changes in student well-being, data on the migration of private tutors out of the system, or the economic impact on ASTC teachers. A mixed-methods design could provide a fuller picture by linking subjective experiences to objective outcomes. This would not only enhance the credibility of findings but also allow for triangulation of data across methods.

Future scholarship could therefore focus on longitudinal tracking of student learning and wellbeing, robust multi-stakeholder assessments that foreground teacher, parent, and student perspectives, and comparative and international analyses that situate the DRP within broader debates on educational inequality and state intervention. Without such evidence, evaluations of the DRP will remain speculative, limiting both scholarly debate and policy refinement.

In conclusion, the study suggests several pathways for future research that would expand and deepen our understanding of the DRP's implications. Combining various research methods could all help us better understand education policy by focusing on the context and the people affected. As China remains influential in global education and Western universities continue to enrol large numbers of Chinese students, research that explores the cultural, institutional, and social contexts of Chinese education can provide valuable insights. This study lays a foundation for future research that not only broadens our understanding of the DRP's far-reaching effects but also emphasises the critical importance of continuing to focus on the lived experiences of those impacted by education policy, encouraging future education

reforms to be examined through the complex realities of culture, context, and human experience.

8.6. POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study suggest several implications for policymakers, educators, and parents, as well as broader structural considerations:

Policymakers might consider phased rollouts of reforms to allow for adjustment and mitigation of unintended (if that's what they are) consequences. Although extensive public consultation may not align with China's governance style, increased stakeholder engagement could improve policy implementation and effectiveness. Additionally, addressing the entrenched exam culture is crucial, as reforms like the DRP will have limited impact without changes to high-stakes testing, university admissions and perceptions around vocational vs knowledge-based professions.

For teachers, there is a clear need for retraining programs that provide not only practical skills but also emotional and economic support, especially for displaced ASTC teachers. For state teachers, more holistic professional development that integrates policy goals and pedagogy may enhance their capacity to adapt to evolving demands.

Parents require clearer communication regarding the aims and potential benefits of education policies. Offering equitable alternatives to private tutoring or strengthened regulation could alleviate the pressures that drive families toward costly or unqualified supplementary educators.

At a structural level, lessons can be drawn from other contexts, such as South Korea's experience regulating private tutoring under state oversight (Bray, 2024). Consideration of similar frameworks could help curb the growth of underground

tutoring markets. Furthermore, reforming university admissions to reduce academic pressure by diversifying assessment methods and promoting vocational pathways could support the DRP's equity objectives. Ultimately, the DRP can be seen as a policy intervention that attempts to remove a single overburdened component of excessive tutoring, without addressing the broader issues within the education system. This seemingly isolated approach risks dysfunction elsewhere, such as the growth of informal markets, or the mass unemployment faced by ASTC teachers (see 6.2.2). This aligns with policy implementation theories, such as Fullan's (2008) systems thinking, which emphasise the interdependence of educational components to ensure the success of policies or large-scale reforms. Without complementary reforms to high-stakes assessments, university admissions, and societal definitions of academic success, the DRP and future policies may struggle to achieve their long-term aims.

In terms of speculative policy evolution, the DRP's evolution and effects to this point prompts three possible future developments: First, the growth of black-market and underground tutoring may lead to regulated marketisation, with state-approved tutoring centres returning with enhanced monitoring and regulations, mirroring South Korea's eventual shift from prohibition to controlled permission (Liu & Bray, 2022). Second, without addressing the competitive culture, the DRP's social equity goals may remain unrealised, potentially prompting university admissions reforms to include reformed assessments or, as is already being promoted, vocational pathways (Liu & Hardy, 2021; Zong, 2024). Third, persistent parental resistance could prompt further value-driven campaigns to reshape perceptions of educational success, although this seems unlikely.

The DRP's long-term success rests on resolving a core tension: whether policymakers adapt to 'street-level realities' (Lipsky, 1980) by accommodating local expectations and interpretations or enforce rigid compliance. This carries significant implications for China's education reforms, balancing sociopolitical aims with societal expectations. As with past reforms, iterative adjustments within Five-Year Plan frameworks (Heilmann,

2018) appear likely, though the policy's ultimate success depends on synchronising political, cultural, and values-based changes through practical means.

8.7. FINAL REFLECTIONS

The DRP serves as a powerful case study in the complexities of education reform in contemporary China. At its core lies a fundamental tension: the policy reflects clear top-down objectives aimed at social equity, ideological alignment, and national cohesion, yet its enactment has been deeply shaped by bottom-up interpretations, adaptations, and resistances. This dynamic interplay illustrates how education policy is never implemented in a vacuum but is continually negotiated through the lived realities of those it seeks to govern.

As explored in this study, the DRP can also be understood as a nation-building tool. A policy that uses education not only to address social disparities but also to reinforce broader value-based aims. The effort to restructure the educational ecosystem by reducing dependence on private tutoring, promoting state schooling, and reasserting national values suggests a deliberate attempt to reorient societal behaviours in keeping with state values. In this sense, education is not merely a site of learning, but a mechanism for cultural steering and value reinforcement (Althusser, 2014).

While the short-term effects and outcomes of the DRP have drawn both criticism and support, the current effects should be understood as manifestations of deeper tensions between state objectives and societal realities. Particularly, the unintended consequences reveal significant structural and cultural challenges that the policy has yet to adequately address, such as the proliferation of private tutoring. These issues highlight the complexity in implementing policies that attempt to enact top-down

change without sufficiently engaging with entrenched social practices and expectations across regions and demographics. Other consequences, such as the widespread job losses experienced by ASTC teachers, remain ambiguous in terms of intent, and whether these outcomes were unforeseen side effects or anticipated elements of a broader strategy to reshape the education sector and reassert state control over educational provision and national narratives.

This research, 'Purposes and Effects on English Language Learning Participants Following China's Double Reduction Policy: A Critical Discourse and Stakeholder Analysis,' offers a compelling reminder that education policy is not merely a procedural task but a fundamentally human one.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1: The Double Reduction Policy

ORIGINAL TEXT

中共中央办公厅 国务院办公厅印发

《关于进一步减轻义务教育阶段学生作业负担和校外培训负担的意见》

2021-07-24 19:04 来源： 新华社

新华社北京7月24日电 近日，中共中央办公厅、国务院办公厅印发了《关于进一步减轻义务教育阶段学生作业负担和校外培训负担的意见》，并发出通知，要求各地区各部门结合实际认真贯彻落实。

《关于进一步减轻义务教育阶段学生作业负担和校外培训负担的意见》全文如下。

为深入贯彻党的十九大和十九届五中全会精神，切实提升学校育人水平，持续规范校外培训（包括线上培训和线下培训），有效减轻义务教育阶段学生过重作业负担和校外培训负担（以下简称“双减”），现提出如下意见。

一、总体要求

1. 指导思想。坚持以习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想为指导，全面贯彻党的教育方针，落实立德树人根本任务，着眼建设高质量教育体系，强化学校教育主阵地作用，深化校外培训机构治理，坚决防止侵害群众利益行为，构建教育良好生态，有效缓解家长焦虑情绪，促进学生全面发展、健康成长。

2. 工作原则。坚持学生为本、回应关切，遵循教育规律，着眼学生身心健康成

长，保障学生休息权利，整体提升学校教育教学质量，积极回应社会关切与期盼，减轻家长负担；坚持依法治理、标本兼治，严格执行义务教育法、未成年人保护法等法律规定，加强源头治理、系统治理、综合治理；坚持政府主导、多方联动，强化政府统筹，落实部门职责，发挥学校主体作用，健全保障政策，明确家校社协同责任；坚持统筹推进、稳步实施，全面落实国家关于减轻学生过重学业负担有关规定，对重点难点问题先行试点，积极推广典型经验，确保“双减”工作平稳有序。

3. 工作目标。学校教育教学质量和服务水平进一步提升，作业布置更加科学合

理，学校课后服务基本满足学生需要，学生学习更好回归校园，校外培训机构培训行为全面规范。学生过重作业负担和校外培训负担、家庭教育支出和家长相应精力负担

1年内有效减轻、3年内成效显著，人民群众教育满意度明显提升。

二、全面压减作业总量和时长，减轻学生过重作业负担

4. 健全作业管理机制。学校要完善作业管理办法，加强学科组、年级组作业统

筹，合理调控作业结构，确保难度不超国家课标。建立作业校内公示制度，加强质量监督。严禁给家长布置或变相布置作业，严禁要求家长检查、批改作业。

5. 分类明确作业总量。学校要确保小学一、二年级不布置家庭书面作业，可在校

内适当安排巩固练习；小学三至六年级书面作业平均完成时间不超过60分钟，初中书面作业平均完成时间不超过90分钟。

6. 提高作业设计质量。发挥作业诊断、巩固、学情分析等功能，将作业设计纳入教研体系，系统设计符合年龄特点和学习规律、体现素质教育导向的基础性作业。鼓励布置分层、弹性和个性化作业，坚决克服机械、无效作业，杜绝重复性、惩罚性作业。

7. 加强作业完成指导。教师要指导小学生在校内基本完成书面作业，初中生在校内完成大部分书面作业。教师要认真批改作业，及时做好反馈，加强面批讲解，认真分析学情，做好答疑辅导。不得要求学生自批自改作业。

8. 科学利用课余时间。学校和家长要引导学生放学回家后完成剩余书面作业，进行必要的课业学习，从事力所能及的家务劳动，开展适宜的体育锻炼，开展阅读和文艺活动。个别学生经努力仍完不成书面作业的，也应按时就寝。引导学生合理使用电子产品，控制使用时长，保护视力健康，防止网络沉迷。家长要积极与孩子沟通，关注孩子心理情绪，帮助其养成良好学习生活习惯。寄宿制学校要统筹安排好课余学习生活。

三、提升学校课后服务水平，满足学生多样化需求

9. 保证课后服务时间。学校要充分利用资源优势，有效实施各种课后育人活动，在校内满足学生多样化学习需求。引导学生自愿参加课后服务。课后服务结束时间原则上不早于当地正常下班时间；对有特殊需要的学生，学校应提供延时托管服务；初中学校工作日晚上可开设自习班。学校可统筹安排教师实行“弹性上下班制”。

10. 提高课后服务质量。学校要制定课后服务实施方案，增强课后服务的吸引力。充分用好课后服务时间，指导学生认真完成作业，对学习有困难的学生进行补习辅导与答疑，为学有余力的学生拓展学习空间，开展丰富多彩的科普、文体、艺术、劳动、阅读、兴趣小组及社团活动。不得利用课后服务时间讲新课。

11. 拓展课后服务渠道。课后服务一般由本校教师承担，也可聘请退休教师、具备

资质的社会专业人员或志愿者提供。教育部门可组织区域内优秀教师到师资力量薄弱的学校开展课后服务。依法依规严肃查处教师校外有偿补课行为，直至撤销教师资格。充分利用社会资源，发挥好少年宫、青少年活动中心等校外活动场所在课后服务中的作用。

12. 做强做优免费线上学习服务。教育部门要征集、开发丰富优质的线上教育教学

资源，利用国家和各地教育教学资源平台以及优质学校网络平台，免费向学生提供高质量专题教育资源和覆盖各年级各学科的学习资源，推动教育资源均衡发展，促进教育公平。各地要积极创造条件，组织优秀教师开展免费在线互动交流答疑。各地各校要加大宣传推广使用力度，引导学生用好免费线上优质教育资源。

四、坚持从严治理，全面规范校外培训行为

13. 坚持从严审批机构。各地不再审批新的面向义务教育阶段学生的学科类校外培

训机构，现有学科类培训机构统一登记为非营利性机构。对原备案的线上学科类培训机构，改为审批制。各省（自治区、直辖市）要对已备案的线上学科类培训机构全面排查，并按标准重新办理审批手续。未通过审批的，取消原有备案登记和互联网信息服务业务经营许可证（ICP）。对非学科类培训机构，各地要区分体育、文化艺术、科技等类别，明确相应主管部门，分类制定标准、严格审批。依法依规严肃查处不具备相应资质条件、未经审批多址开展培训的校外培训机构。学科类培训机构一律不得上市融资，严禁资本化运作；上市公司不得通过股票市场融资投资学科类培训机构，不得通过发行股份或支付现金等方式购买学科类培训机构资产；外资不得通过兼并收购、受托经营、加盟连锁、利用可变利益实体等方式控股或参股学科类培训机构。已违规的，要进行清理整治。

14. 规范培训服务行为。建立培训内容备案与监督制度，制定出台校外培训机构培

训材料管理办法。严禁超标超前培训，严禁非学科类培训机构从事学科类培训，严禁提供境外教育课程。依法依规坚决查处超范围培训、培训质量良莠不齐、内容低俗违法、盗版侵权等突出问题。严格执行未成年人保护法有关规定，校外培训机构不得占用国家法定节假日、休息日及寒暑假组织学科类培训。培训机构不得高薪挖抢学校教师；从事学科类培训的人员必须具备相应教师资格，并将教师资格信息在培训机构场所及网站显著位置公布；不得泄露家长和学生个人信息。根

据市场需求、培训成本等因素确定培训机构收费项目和标准，向社会公示、接受监督。全面使用《中小学生校外培训服务合同（示范文本）》。进一步健全常态化排查机制，及时掌握校外培训机构情况及信息，完善“黑白名单”制度。

15. 强化常态运营监管。严格控制资本过度涌入培训机构，培训机构融资及收费应

主要用于培训业务经营，坚决禁止为推销业务以虚构原价、虚假折扣、虚假宣传等方式进行不正当竞争，依法依规坚决查处行业垄断行为。线上培训要注重保护学生视

力，每课时不超过30分钟，课程间隔不少于10分钟，培训结束时间不晚于21点。积极探索利用人工智能技术合理控制学生连续线上培训时间。线上培训机构不得提供和传播“拍照搜题”等惰化学生思维能力、影响学生独立思考、违背教育教学规律的不良学习方法。聘请在境内的外籍人员要符合国家有关规定，严禁聘请在境外的外籍人员开展培训活动。

五、大力提升教育教学质量，确保学生在校内学足学好

16. 促进义务教育优质均衡发展。各地要巩固义务教育基本均衡成果，积极开展义

务教育优质均衡创建工作，促进新优质学校成长，扩大优质教育资源。积极推进集团化办学、学区化治理和城乡学校共同体建设，充分激发办学活力，整体提升学校办学水平，加快缩小城乡、区域、学校间教育水平差距。

17. 提升课堂教学质量。教育部门要指导学校健全教学管理规程，优化教学方式，

强化教学管理，提升学生在校学习效率。学校要开齐开足开好国家规定课程，积极推进幼小科学衔接，帮助学生做好入学准备，严格按课程标准零起点教学，做到应教尽教，确保学生达到国家规定的学业质量标准。学校不得随意增减课时、提高难度、加快进度；降低考试压力，改进考试方法，不得有提前结课备考、违规统考、考题超标、考试排名等行为；考试成绩呈现实行等级制，坚决克服唯分数的倾向。

18. 深化高中招生改革。各地要积极完善基于初中学业水平考试成绩、结合综合素

质评价的高中阶段学校招生录取模式，依据不同科目特点，完善考试方式和成绩呈现方式。坚持以学定考，进一步提升中考命题质量，防止偏题、怪题、超过课程标准的难题。逐步提高优质普通高中招生指标分配到区域内初中的比例，规范普通高中招生秩序，杜绝违规招生、恶性竞争。

19. 纳入质量评价体系。地方各级党委和政府要树立正确政绩观，严禁下达升学指

标或片面以升学率评价学校和教师。认真落实义务教育质量评价指南，将“双减”工作成效纳入县域和学校义务教育质量评价，把学生参加课后服务、校外培训及培训费用支出减少等情况作为重要评价内容。

六、强化配套治理，提升支撑保障能力

20. 保障学校课后服务条件。各地要根据学生规模和中小学教职工编制标准，统筹

核定编制，配足配齐教师。省级政府要制定学校课后服务经费保障办法，明确相关标准，采取财政补贴、服务性收费或代收费等方式，确保经费筹措到位。课后服务经费主要用于参与课后服务教师和相关人员的补助，有关部门在核定绩效工资总量时，应考虑教师参与课后服务的因素，把用于教师课后服务补助的经费额度，作为增量纳入绩效工资并设立相应项目，不作为次年正常核定绩效工资总量的基数；对聘请校外人员提供课后服务的，课后服务补助可按劳务费管理。教师参加课后服务的表现应作为职称评聘、表彰奖励和绩效工资分配的重要参考。

21. 完善家校社协同机制。进一步明晰家校育人责任，密切家校沟通，创新协同方

式，推进协同育人共同体建设。教育部门要会同妇联等部门，办好家长学校或网上家庭教育指导平台，推动社区家庭教育指导中心、服务站点建设，引导家长树立科学育儿观念，理性确定孩子成长预期，努力形成减负共识。

22. 做好培训广告管控。中央有关部门、地方各级党委和政府要加强校外培训广告

管理，确保主流媒体、新媒体、公共场所、居民区各类广告牌和网络平台等不刊登、不播发校外培训广告。不得在中小学校、幼儿园内开展商业广告活动，不得利用中小学和幼儿园的教材、教辅材料、练习册、文具、教具、校服、校车等发布或变相发布广告。依法依规严肃查处各种夸大培训效果、误导公众教育观念、制造家长焦虑的校外培训违法违规广告行为。

七、扎实做好试点探索，确保治理工作稳妥推进

23. 明确试点工作要求。在全面开展治理工作的同时，确定北京市、上海市、沈阳

市、广州市、成都市、郑州市、长治市、威海市、南通市为全国试点，其他省份至少选择1个地市开展试点，试点内容为第24、25、26条所列内容。

24. 坚决压减学科类校外培训。对现有学科类培训机构重新审核登记，逐步大大压

减，解决过多过滥问题；依法依规严肃查处存在不符合资质、管理混乱、借机敛财、虚假宣传、与学校勾连牟利等严重问题的机构。

25. 合理利用校内外资源。鼓励有条件的学校在课余时间向学生提供兴趣类课后服

务活动，供学生自主选择参加。课后服务不能满足部分学生发展兴趣特长等特殊需要的，可适当引进非学科类校外培训机构参与课后服务，由教育部门负责组织遴选，供学校选择使用，并建立评估退出机制，对出现服务水平低下、恶意在校招揽生源、不按规定提供服务、扰乱学校教育教学和招生秩序等问题的培训机构，坚决取消培训资质。

26. 强化培训收费监管。坚持校外培训公益属性，充分考虑其涉及重大民生的特

点，将义务教育阶段学科类校外培训收费纳入政府指导价管理，科学合理确定计价办法，明确收费标准，坚决遏制过高收费和过度逐利行为。通过第三方托管、风险储备金等方式，对校外培训机构预收费进行风险管控，加强对培训领域贷款的监管，有效预防“退费难”、“卷钱跑路”等问题发生。

八、精心组织实施，务求取得实效

27. 全面系统做好部署。加强党对“双减”工作的领导，各省（自治区、直辖市）

党委和政府要把“双减”工作作为重大民生工程，列入重要议事日程，纳入省（自治区、直辖市）党委教育工作领导小组重点任务，结合本地实际细化完善措施，确保

“双减”工作落实落地。学校党组织要认真做好教师思想工作，充分调动广大教师积极性、创造性。校外培训机构要加强自身党建工作，发挥党组织战斗堡垒作用。

28. 明确部门工作责任。教育部门要抓好统筹协调，会同有关部门加强对校外培训

机构日常监管，指导学校做好“双减”有关工作；宣传、网信部门要加强舆论宣传引导，网信部门要配合教育、工业和信息化部门做好线上校外培训监管工作；机构编制部门要及时为中小学校补齐补足教师编制；发展改革部门要会同财政、教育等部门制定学校课后服务性或代收费标准，会同教育等部门制定试点地区校外培训机构收费指导政策；财政部门要加强学校课后服务经费保障；人力资源社会保障部门要做好教师绩效工资核定有关工作；民政部门要做好学科类培训机构登记工作；市场监管部门要做好非学科类培训机构登记工作和校外培训机构收费、广告、反垄断等方面监管工作，加大执法检查力度，会同教育部门依法依规严肃查处违法违规培训行为；政法部门要做好相关维护和谐稳定工作；公安部门要依法加强治安管理，联动开展情报信息搜集研判和预警预防，做好相关涉稳事件应急处置工作；人民银行、银保监会、证监部门负责指导银行等机构做好校外培训机构预收费风险管控工作，清理整顿培训机构融资、上市等行为；其他相关部门按照各自职责负责起责任、抓好落实。

29. 联合开展专项治理行动。建立“双减”工作专门协调机制，集中组织开展专项

治理行动。在教育部设立协调机制专门工作机构，做好统筹协调，加强对各地工作指导。各省（自治区、直辖市）要完善工作机制，建立专门工作机构，按照“双减”工作目标任务，明确专项治理行动的路线图、时间表和责任人。突出工作重点、关键环节、薄弱地区、重点对象等，开展全面排查整治。对违法违规行为要依法依规严惩重罚，形成警示震慑。

30. 强化督促检查和宣传引导。将落实“双减”工作情况及实际成效，作为督查督

办、漠视群众利益专项整治和政府履行教育职责督导评价的重要内容。建立责任追究机制，对责任不落实、措施不到位的地方、部门、学校及相关责任人要依法依规严肃追究责任。各地要设立监管平台和专门举报电话，畅通群众监督举报途径。各省（自治区、直辖市）要及时总结“双减”工作中的好经验好做法，并做好宣传推广。新闻媒体要坚持正确舆论导向，营造良好社会氛围。

各地在做好义务教育阶段学生“双减”工作的同时，还要统筹做好面向3至6岁学龄前儿童和普通高中学生的校外培训治理工作，不得开展面向学龄前儿童的线上培训，严禁以学前班、幼小衔接班、思维训练班等名义面向学龄前儿童开展线下学科类（含外语）培训。不再审批新的面向学龄前儿童的校外培训机构和面向普通高中学生的学科类校外培训机构。对面向普通高中学生的学科类培训机构的管理，参照本意见

有关规定执行。

责任编辑：于珊

http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2021-07/24/content_5627132.htm

TRANSLATED ENGLISH TEXT

**General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China
and the General Office of the State Council
"Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Students' Homework
and Off-campus Training in Compulsory Education"**

2021-07-24 19:04 Source: Xinhua News Agency

1. General requirements

1. Guiding ideology. Adhere to the guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era, fully implement the party's educational policy, implement the fundamental task of cultivating moral character and cultivating people, focus on building a high-quality education system, strengthen the role of school education as the main position, deepen the governance of off-campus training institutions, and resolutely prevent behaviours that violate the interests of the masses, build a good education ecology, effectively alleviate parents' anxiety, and promote students' all-round development and healthy growth.

2. Working principles (Long term): Adhere to law-based governance and treat both symptoms and root causes, respond to concerns, follow the laws of education, focus on the healthy growth of students, protect students' right to rest, improve the quality of school education and teaching as a whole, actively respond to social concerns and expectations, and reduce the burden on parents; and strictly implement the compulsory education law, the minor protection law and other legal provisions, strengthen source governance, system governance, and comprehensive governance; adhere to government-led, multi-party linkage, strengthen government coordination, implement departmental responsibilities, give full play to the main role of the school, improve security policies, and clarify family School-community coordination responsibility; adhere to overall planning and steady implementation, fully implement the national regulations on reducing the excessive academic burden of students, conduct pilot projects on key and difficult issues, actively promote typical experiences, and ensure the smooth and orderly "double reduction" work.

3. Work goals. The quality of school education and teaching and service levels to be further improved, homework assignments to become more scientific and reasonable, state after-school services meet the fundamental needs of students, student learning improved by returning to campus, and the training behaviour of off-campus training institutions is fully standardized. The burden of students' excessive homework and off-campus training, family education expenditure and the corresponding energy burden of parents to be effectively reduced within one year, and the results to be significant within three years, and the education satisfaction of the people to be significantly improved.

2. Reduce the total amount and duration of homework in a comprehensive way, and reduce the burden of heavy homework on students.

4. Improve the operation management mechanism. Schools should improve homework management methods, strengthen subject group and grade group homework coordination, rationally regulate and control homework structure, and ensure that the difficulty does not exceed the national curriculum standards. Establish an internal publicity system for homework and strengthen quality supervision. It is strictly forbidden to assign or disguise assignments to parents, and it is strictly forbidden to ask parents to check and correct the assignments.

5. Categorize the total amount of operations. Schools must ensure that no homework is assigned to the first and second grades of elementary school, and consolidation exercises to be properly arranged in the school; the average completion time of written assignments for grades three to six in elementary school should not exceed 60 minutes, and the average time to complete written assignments for junior high school should not exceed 90 minutes.

6. Improve the quality of job design. Give full consideration to the functions of homework diagnosis, consolidation, and academic analysis, incorporate homework design into the teaching and research system, and systematically design basic homework that conforms to age characteristics and learning rules, and reflects the orientation of quality education. Encourage the arrangement of layered, flexible and personalized operations, resolutely overcome mechanical and invalid operations, and eliminate repetitive and punitive operations.

7. Strengthen the guidance for completion of homework. Teachers should instruct elementary students to fully complete written assignments in school, and junior high school students to complete most of the written assignments in school. Teachers should seriously correct homework, provide timely feedback, strengthen face-to-face commentary, carefully analyse academic conditions, and do a good job of answering questions. Students are not required to approve and modify their homework.

8. Use spare time scientifically. Schools and parents should guide students to complete the remaining written homework after school, perform necessary schoolwork, engage in housework within their capacity, carry out appropriate physical exercises, and carry out reading and literary activities. Individual students who are unable to complete written assignments after hard work should also go to bed on time. Guide students to use electronic products reasonably, control the duration of use, protect their eyesight, and prevent Internet addiction. Parents should actively communicate with their children, pay attention to their children's psychological emotions, and help them develop good learning and living habits. Boarding schools should make overall arrangements for their after-school study and life.

3. Improve the school's after-school service level to meet the diverse needs of students

9. Guarantee service time after class. Schools should make full use of resource advantages, effectively implement various after-school education activities, and meet the diverse learning needs of students in the school. Guide students to voluntarily participate in after-school services. In principle, the end time of after-school services should not be earlier than the normal local off-duty time; for students with special needs, the school should provide extended custody services; junior high schools can open self-study classes in the evening on weekdays. Schools can make overall arrangements for teachers to implement the "flexible commuting system".

10. Improve the quality of after-school services. after-school education activities. Make full use of the after-school service time, guide students to complete their homework seriously, provide tutoring and answer questions for students with learning difficulties, expand learning space for students who have the ability to learn, and carry out a variety of science, culture, art, labour, reading, interest groups and club activities. Do not use after-school service hours to teach new classes.

11. Expand as non-profit institutions. After-school services to be undertaken by the teachers of the school, and retired teachers, qualified social professionals or volunteers can also be hired to provide them. The education department can organize outstanding teachers in the region to provide after-school services to schools with weak teachers. Strictly investigate and deal with teachers' paid supplementary lessons outside the school in accordance with laws and regulations, until the teacher's qualification is revoked. Make full use of social resources and give full play to the role of children's palaces, youth activity centres and other off-campus activities in after-school services.

12. Free online learning services to be stronger and better. The education department should collect and develop a wealth of high-quality online education and teaching resources and use national and local education and teaching resource platforms and high-quality school network platforms to provide

students with high-quality thematic educational resources and learning resources covering all grades and subjects for free to promote education. The balanced development of resources promotes educational equity. All localities must actively create conditions and organize outstanding teachers to conduct free online interactive exchanges and answer questions. Schools in all regions should increase publicity, promotion and use, and guide students to make good use of free online high-quality educational resources.

4. Adhere to strict governance and comprehensively regulate off-campus training behaviour

13. Adhere to strict examination and approval agencies. All regions no longer approve new subject-based off-campus training institutions for students in the compulsory education stage, and existing subject-based training institutions to be uniformly registered as non-profit institutions. The online discipline training institutions that were originally filed to be changed to an examination and approval system. All provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government) shall conduct a comprehensive investigation on the online discipline training institutions that have been filed and re-approve the approval procedures according to the standards. If the approval is not passed, the original filing registration and Internet Information Service Business License (ICP) shall be cancelled. For non-disciplinary training institutions, localities should distinguish sports, culture and art, science and technology, etc., clarify the corresponding competent departments, formulate standards by category, and strictly review and approve. Strictly investigate and punish off-campus training institutions that do not have the corresponding qualifications and conduct training in multiple locations without approval in accordance with laws and regulations. Disciplinary training institutions are not allowed to be listed for financing, and capitalized operations are strictly prohibited; listed companies may not invest in discipline training institutions through stock market financing, and may not purchase the assets of discipline training institutions by issuing shares or paying cash; foreign capital shall not be acquired through mergers and entrusted operating, franchising, and using variable interest entities to hold or participate in academic training institutions. Those who have violated regulations shall be cleaned up and rectified.

14. Standardize training service behaviour. Establish training content filing and supervision systems and formulate and promulgate training materials management methods for off-campus training institutions. Exceeding standards and advance training are strictly prohibited, non-disciplinary training institutions are prohibited from engaging in subject training, and overseas education courses are strictly prohibited. Resolutely investigate and deal with outstanding issues such as out-of-scope training, uneven training quality, vulgar content, illegal content, and piracy in accordance with laws and regulations. Strictly implement the relevant provisions of the Juvenile Protection Law, and off-campus training institutions shall not occupy national statutory holidays, rest days, and winter and summer

vacations to organize subject training. Training institutions must not rob schoolteachers with high salaries; personnel engaged in subject training must have corresponding teacher qualifications, and the teacher qualification information must be announced in prominent locations on the training institution's premises and websites; parents and students' personal information must not be leaked. Determine the charging items and standards of training institutions according to market demand, training costs and other factors, and publicize them to the public and accept supervision. Make full use of the "Out-of-school Training Service Contract for Primary and Secondary School Students (Model Text)". Further improve the normalized investigation mechanism, grasp the situation and information of off-campus training institutions in a timely manner, and improve the "black and white list" system.

15. Strengthen normal operation supervision. Strictly control the excessive influx of capital into training institutions. The financing and fees of training institutions should be mainly used for training business operations. Unfair competition in the form of fictitious original prices, false discounts, and false publicity for the promotion of business is strictly prohibited, and industry monopolies shall be resolutely investigated and dealt with in accordance with laws and regulations. Online training should pay attention to protecting the eyesight of students, each lesson should not exceed 30 minutes, the interval between courses should be no less than 10 minutes, and the training end time should be no later than 9 o'clock p. m. Actively explore the use of artificial intelligence technology to reasonably control the continuous online training time of students. Online training institutions shall not provide and disseminate unhealthy learning methods such as "photographic search for questions" that inert students' thinking ability, affect students' independent thinking, and violate the laws of education and teaching. The recruitment of foreign personnel in China must comply with relevant national regulations, and it is strictly forbidden to hire foreign personnel abroad to carry out training activities.

5. Vigorously improve the quality of education and teaching to ensure that students learn well in school

16. Promote the high-quality and balanced development of compulsory education. All localities should consolidate the basic and balanced results of compulsory education, actively carry out the creation of high-quality and balanced compulsory education, promote the growth of new high-quality schools, and expand high-quality educational resources. Actively promote group school running, school district governance and the construction of urban and rural school communities, fully stimulate school running vitality, improve the overall school running level, and accelerate the reduction of the education level gap between urban and rural areas, regions, and schools.

17. Improve the quality of classroom teaching. The education department should guide schools to improve teaching management procedures, optimize teaching methods, strengthen teaching management, and improve students' learning efficiency at school. Schools must fully open the nationally prescribed courses, actively promote the connection of young and elementary sciences, help students prepare for school, strictly follow the curriculum standards, and teach from the beginning, so as to teach everything that should be taught, and ensure that students meet the nationally prescribed academic quality standards. Schools are not allowed to increase or decrease class hours at will, increase difficulty, and speed up progress; reduce test pressure, improve test methods, and must not end class preparations in advance, violation of unified examinations, excessive examination questions, examination rankings, etc.; examination results are presented in a hierarchical system and resolutely overcome only scores propensity.

18. Deepen the reform of high school enrolment. All localities should actively improve the enrolment model of high school students based on the scores of junior high school level examinations combined with comprehensive quality evaluation, and improve the examination methods and performance presentation methods based on the characteristics of different subjects. Adhere to the study-based examination, further improve the quality of the high school entrance examination questions, and prevent partial questions, strange questions, and problems that exceed the curriculum standards. Gradually increase the proportion of high-quality ordinary high school enrolment indicators allocated to junior high schools in the region, standardize the order of ordinary high school enrolment , and eliminate illegal enrolment and vicious competition.

19. Incorporate into the quality evaluation system. Local party committees and governments at all levels must establish a correct outlook on political performance, and strictly prohibit assigning indicators for advancement or unilaterally evaluating schools and teachers based on the rate of advancement. Conscientiously implement the guidelines for the quality evaluation of compulsory education, incorporate the effectiveness of "double reduction" work into the quality evaluation of compulsory education in counties and schools, and consider students' participation in after-school services, off-campus training, and reductions in training expenses as important evaluation content.

6. Strengthen supporting governance and improve support and guarantee capabilities

20. Guarantee the school's after-school service conditions. All localities must make overall plans and approve the staff according to the size of students and the staffing standards of elementary and middle schools and have enough teachers. Provincial governments should formulate methods for guaranteeing school service funds after school, clarify relevant standards, and adopt methods such as financial

subsidies, service charges or agency fees to ensure that funding is in place. After-school service funds are to be mainly used to subsidize teachers and related personnel involved in after-school services. When determining the total performance salary, relevant departments should consider the factors of teachers' participation in after-school services and use the amount of funds used for teachers' after-school service subsidies. Incorporate performance pay as an increment and setting up corresponding items, not as the base for the normal assessment of the total performance pay for the following year; for the after-school service provided by off-campus personnel, the after-school service subsidy can be managed according to the labour service fee. The performance of teachers participating in after-school services should be used as an important reference for professional title evaluation, commendation and rewards and performance salary distribution.

21. Improve the coordination mechanism of home, school and society. Further clarify the responsibilities of home-school education, close home-school communication, innovate collaborative methods, and promote the construction of a collaborative education community. The education department should work with the Women's Federation and other departments to set up parent schools or online family education guidance platforms, promote the construction of community family education guidance centres and service sites, guide parents to establish scientific parenting concepts, rationally determine their children's growth expectations, and strive to form a consensus on reducing burdens.

22. Do a good job in the management and control of training advertisements. Relevant central departments, local party committees and governments at all levels must strengthen the management of off-campus training advertisements to ensure that mainstream media, new media, public places, various billboards and online platforms in residential areas do not publish or broadcast off-campus training advertisements. Commercial advertising activities shall not be carried out in primary and secondary schools and kindergartens, and advertisements shall not be published or disguised in disguised form using textbooks, auxiliary materials, exercise books, stationery, teaching aids, school uniforms, school buses, etc. of primary and secondary schools and kindergartens. Strictly investigate and punish all kinds of illegal off-campus training advertisements that exaggerate the effectiveness of training, mislead the public's education concepts, and create anxiety for parents in accordance with laws and regulations.

7. Do a good job in pilot exploration to ensure the steady progress of governance

23. Clarify requirements for pilot work. While carrying out comprehensive governance work, Beijing, Shanghai, Shenyang, Guangzhou, Chengdu, Zhengzhou, Changzhi, Weihai, and Nantong have been identified as national pilots, and at least one prefecture and city shall be selected for pilots in other provinces. The contents of the pilot program are those listed in Articles 24, 25 and 26.

24. Resolutely reduce subject-based off-campus training. Re-examine the registration of existing training institutions for disciplines, and gradually reduce them to solve the problem of excessive use, serious problems such as non-qualification, chaotic management, taking advantage of opportunities to collect money, false propaganda, and collusion with schools for profit in accordance with laws and regulations Institutions.

25. Reasonable use of resources inside and outside the school. Encourage qualified schools to provide students with interest-based after-school service activities in their spare time for students to choose to participate in. If the after-school services cannot meet the special needs of some students, such as the development of interests and specialties, they can appropriately introduce non-disciplinary off-campus training institutions to participate in the after-school services. The education department is responsible for organizing selection for schools to choose and use and establishing an evaluation exit mechanism to provide services for emergencies. Training institutions with low standards, malicious recruitment of students in schools, failure to provide services in accordance with regulations, disrupting school education and teaching and enrolment order, and other issues, will resolutely have training qualifications cancelled.

26. Strengthen the supervision of training fees. Adhere to the non-profit nature of off-campus training, fully consider its characteristics related to people's livelihoods, incorporate the fees for subject-based off-campus training in the compulsory education stage into the government-guided price management, scientifically and reasonably determine the pricing method, clarify the charging standard, and resolutely curb excessively high fees and excessive profit-seeking behaviour . Through third-party custody, risk reserve funds, etc., risk management and control of the pre-charge of off-campus training institutions, strengthen the supervision of loans in the training field, and effectively prevent problems such as "difficulty in refunding fees" and "rolling out of money".

8. Carefully organize and implement to achieve practical results

27. Complete system deployment. Strengthen the party's leadership of the "double reduction" work. The party committees and governments of all provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government) should make the "double reduction" work a major livelihood project, put it on the agenda and include it in the provincial (autonomous region, municipality) party committee education work leading group. Focus on key tasks and refine and improve measures based on local actual conditions to ensure the implementation of the "double reduction" work. School party organizations must conscientiously do a good job in teachers' ideological work, and fully mobilize the

enthusiasm and creativity of teachers. Off-campus training institutions should strengthen their own party building work and give full play to the role of party organizations as a fighting fortress.

28. Clarify the responsibilities of the department. The education department must do a good job in overall coordination, strengthen the daily supervision of off-campus training institutions in conjunction with relevant departments, and guide schools to do a good job in the "double reduction" work; the publicity and cybersecurity and informatization departments must strengthen public opinion and guidance, and the cybersecurity and informatization departments must cooperate with education, industry, and The information department should do a good job in the supervision of online off-campus training; the organization establishment department should make up the teacher establishment for primary and secondary schools in a timely manner; the development and reform department should work with the finance and education departments to formulate school after-school service or charging standards, and education, etc. The department to formulate the charging guidance policy for off-campus training institutions in the pilot area; the financial department must strengthen the guarantee of school service funds; the human resources and social security department must do a good job in the verification of teacher performance wages; the civil affairs department must do a good job in the registration of subject training institutions; the market Regulatory departments must do a good job in the registration of non-disciplinary training institutions and the supervision of fees, advertising, and anti-monopoly of off-campus training institutions, strengthen law enforcement inspections, and work with education departments to seriously investigate and deal with violations of laws and regulations in accordance with laws and regulations; political and legal departments must properly maintain harmony and stability; public security departments should strengthen public security management in accordance with the law, jointly carry out intelligence and information collection, research and judgment, and early warning and prevention, and do a good job of emergency response to related stability-related incidents; the People's Bank of China, China Banking Regulatory Commission, and China Securities Regulatory Commission are responsible for guiding banks and other institutions to manage and control the pre-charging risk of off-campus training institutions, and the financing and listing of training institutions shall be cleaned up; other relevant departments shall take responsibility in accordance with their respective responsibilities and implement them well.

29. Jointly carry out special governance actions. Establish a special coordination mechanism for "double reduction" work and focus on organizing and carrying out special governance actions. Set up a special work organization for the coordination mechanism in the Ministry of Education, do a good job in overall planning and coordination, and strengthen the work guidance for all localities. All provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government) should improve their

working mechanisms, establish special working institutions, and clarify the roadmap, timetable and responsible persons for special governance actions in accordance with the "double reduction" work objectives and tasks. Highlight work priorities, key links, weak areas, key targets, etc., and carry out comprehensive investigations and remediation. Violations of laws and regulations shall be severely punished and punished in accordance with laws and regulations to form a warning and deterrent.

30. Strengthen supervision and inspection and publicity and guidance. The implementation of the "double reduction" work situation and actual results will be an important content of supervision, special rectification that ignores the interests of the masses, and the supervision and evaluation of the government's performance of education duties. Establish a responsibility investigation mechanism, and strictly hold accountable places, departments, schools, and related persons responsible for failing to implement responsibilities and inadequate measures in accordance with laws and regulations. All localities should set up supervision platforms and special reporting telephones to unblock the masses' supervision and reporting channels. All provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government) should sum up the good experiences and good practices in the "double reduction" work in a timely manner and promote them well. The news media must adhere to the correct guidance of public opinion and create a good social atmosphere.

While doing a good job in the "double reduction" of students in the compulsory education stage, all localities must also coordinate the management of off-campus training for 3 to 6-year-old preschool children and ordinary high school students. Online training for preschool children must not be carried out. It is strictly forbidden to carry out offline subject (including foreign language) training for preschool children in the name of preschool classes, preschool transition classes, thinking training classes, etc. New off-campus training institutions for preschool children and subject-based off-campus training institutions for ordinary high school students will no longer be approved. The management of subject training institutions for ordinary high school students shall be implemented in accordance with the relevant provisions of this opinion.

Editor: Yu Shan

http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2021-07/24/content_5627132.htm

Appendix 2: Education Law of the People's Republic of China

Education Law of the People's Republic of China

(Adopted at the third session of the eighth National People's Congress on March 18, 1995,
promulgated by Order No.45 of the President of the People's Republic of China on March
18, 1995 and effective as of September 1, 1995)

Chapter I General Provisions

Article 1 With a view to developing educational undertakings, improving the quality of the whole nationality, accelerating the construction of the socialist material and spiritual civilisation and in accordance with the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, the present Law is hereby formulated.

Article 2 The present Law shall be applicable to all kinds of education at all levels within the territory of the People's Republic of China.

Article 3 In developing the socialist educational undertakings, the state shall uphold Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought and the theories of Constructing socialism with Chinese characteristics as directives and comply with the basic principles of the Constitution.

Article 4 With education being the foundation for construction of socialist modernisation, the state shall give priority to the development of educational undertakings.

The whole society shall pay attention and render support to the educational undertakings.

The whole society shall respect teachers.

Article 5 Education shall serve the construction of socialist modernisation, be combined with production and labour and satisfy the needs of training constructors and successors with all-round development of morality, intelligence and physique for the socialist cause.

Article 6 The state shall conduct education among education receivers in patriotism, collectivism and socialism as well as in ideals, ethics, discipline, legality, national defence and ethnic unity.

Article 7 Education shall be carried out in the spirit of inheriting and expanding the fine historical and cultural traditions of the Chinese nation and assimilating all the fine achievements of the civilisation progress of human beings.

Article 8 Education activities shall be in the benefit of public interests of the state and the society.

The state shall separate education from religion. Any organisation or individual may not employ religion to obstruct activities of the state education system.

Article 9 Citizens of the People's Republic of China shall have the right and duty to be educated.

Citizens shall enjoy equal opportunity of education regardless of their nationality, race, sex, occupation, property or religious belief etc.

Article 10 The state shall help all minority nationality regions develop educational undertakings in light of the characteristics and requirements of different minority nationalities.

The state shall support the development of educational undertakings in remote border areas and poverty-stricken areas.

The state shall support the development of educational undertakings for disabled people.

Article 11 The state shall fit in with the needs of the development of the socialist market economy and the social progress, accelerate educational reform, promote the coordinated development of all kinds of education at all levels, establish and perfect the whole life education system.

The state shall support, encourage and organise scientific research on education, spread the scientific research achievements on education and improve the quality of education.

Article 12 The Chinese language, both oral and written, shall be the basic oral and written language for education in schools and other educational institutions. Schools or other educational institutions which mainly consist of students from minority nationalities may use in education the language of the respective nationality or the native language commonly adopted in that region.

Schools and other educational institutions shall in their educational activities popularise the nationally common spoken Chinese and the standard written characters.

Article 13 The state shall offer awards to those organisations and individuals who have made distinguished contributions to the development of educational undertakings.

Article 14 The State Council and all local People's government at different levels shall supervise and manage the educational work according to the principle of management by different levels and division of labour with individual responsibility.

Secondary and lower education shall be managed by the local People's government under the leadership of the State Council.

Higher education shall be managed by the State Council and the People's government of province, autonomous region or municipality directly under the central government.

Article 15 The department of the State Council in charge of educational administration shall be responsible for the educational works of the whole country, make overall plans and coordinate the management of educational undertakings of the whole country.

The departments in charge of educational administration under the local People's government at and above the county level shall be responsible for the educational works within the jurisdiction of the respective administrative region.

Other relevant departments of the People's government at and above the county level shall be responsible for relevant educational works within their terms of reference.

Article 16 The State Council and the local People's government at and above the county level shall report to the People's congress at the respective level or its standing committee on educational works, budgets and financial accounts of educational expenditures and submit to their supervision.

Chapter II Basic Educational System

Article 17 The state shall adopt a school education system including infant school education, primary education, secondary education and higher education.

The state shall establish scientific school system. Regulations in regard to institution of schools and other educational institutions within the school system, forms of education, length of schooling, admissions requirements and educational objectives shall be formulated by the State Council or the departments in charge of educational administration so authorised by the State Council.

Article 18 The state shall adopt a nine-year compulsory education system.

The People's government at different levels shall adopt every measure to ensure children and juveniles of school age to go to school.

Parents and guardians of children and juveniles of school age and relevant social organisations or individuals shall have the duty to ensure that children and juveniles of school age complete the compulsory education of a prescribed length.

Article 19 The state shall adopt a vocational education system and an adult education system.

The People's government at different levels, relevant administrative departments, enterprises and institutions shall adopt measures to develop and ensure for citizens vocational school education or vocational training in various forms.

The state shall encourage the development of adult education in various forms and make sure that citizens receive proper forms of education in politics, economy, culture, science, technology, profession and whole life education as well.

Article 20 The state shall adopt a national examination system of education.

The national educational examinations shall be categorised by the department in charge of educational administration under the State Council and be conducted by institutions authorised by the state to organise examinations.

Article 21 The state shall adopt a schooling credentials system.

Schools and other educational institutions with the approval or consent of the state shall award schooling credentials or other schooling certificates according to corresponding regulations of the state.

Article 22 The state shall adopt a academic degree system.

The units who confer academic degrees shall confer correspondent titles of academic degree upon people who have achieved certain academic standards or professional standards of technology and award the correspond academic credentials.

Article 23 The People's government at different levels, self-managed mass organisations at grass- roots level and organisations in enterprises and institutions shall take every measure to develop education to eliminate illiteracy.

Citizens who according to the state statutes have the capacity to receive education intended for elimination of illiteracy shall receive such education.

Article 24 The state shall adopt educational inspection system and educational assessment system for schools and other educational institutions.

Chapter III Schools and Other Educational Institutions

Article 25 The state shall formulate plans for educational development and institute schools and other educational institutions.

The state shall encourage enterprises, institutions, mass associations, other social organisations and private citizens to establish schools and other educational institutions according to law.

Any organisation or individual may not establish schools or other educational institutions for the purpose of making profit.

Article 26 The establishment of schools or other educational institutions shall be subject to the following requirements of availability:

- (1) organised institution and constitution;
- (2) qualified teachers;
- (3) teaching and learning rooms, facilities and equipment that meet the prescribed standards;
- (4) funds necessary for operation of the school and steady source of capital injection.

Article 27 The establishment, change or termination of a school or other educational institution shall go through procedures of examination, approval, registration or record according to corresponding state stipulations.

Article 28 A school or other educational institution shall exercise following rights:

- (1) autonomous management according to constitution;
- (2) organising and conducting educational activities;
- (3) recruiting students or other education receivers;
- (4) exercising school administration over education receivers and awarding prize or imposing punishment;
- (5) awarding corresponding schooling credentials upon education receivers;
- (6) employing teachers or other staff and awarding prizes or imposing punishments;
- (7) managing and using facilities and capitals of the own unit;
- (8) refusing to accept any illegal interference into the educational and teaching/learning activities by any organisation or individual;
- (9) other rights as provided for by the law and regulations.

The state shall protect schools and other educational institutions from breach of their legitimate rights and interests.

Article 29 Schools and other educational institutions shall perform following duties:

- (1) obeying the law and regulations;
- (2) implementing the state directives on education, practising the state educational and teaching/learning standards and guaranteeing the quality of teaching and learning;
- (3) safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of the education receivers, teachers and other staffs;
- (4) providing convenience in a proper manner for education receivers and their guardians to be informed of the receivers' school achievements and other results;
- (5) charging fees according to relevant state prescriptions and making public the charges;
- (6) submitting to supervision according to law.

Article 30 Schools and other educational institutions sponsors shall decide on the management of schools and other educational institutions according to concerned state regulations.

Headmasters or chiefs of schools and other educational institutions shall be those who are of the Chinese nationality, residing in the territory of China and fit for the conditions prescribed by the state. Their appointment and removal shall be made according to corresponding procedures provided for by the state. Headmasters of schools shall be held responsible for teaching/learning activities and administration.

Schools and other educational institutions shall guarantee the participation of teachers and staffs in democratic management and supervision through the organic form such as the teachers and staffs congress mainly consisting of teachers in accordance with relevant provisions of the state.

Article 31 Schools and other educational institutions who have satisfied conditions for legal persons shall obtain the status of legal persons from the date of approval or registration of legal persons.

Schools and other educational institutions shall enjoy civil rights and interests and bear civil liabilities in civil activities according to law.

State owned assets of schools and other educational institutions shall be within the ownership of the state.

Enterprises sponsored by schools and other educational institutions shall solely undertake civil liabilities of their own.

Chapter IV Teachers and Other Educational Workers

Article 32 Teachers shall enjoy the rights and interests stipulated by law, perform duties prescribed by law and devote to the People's education cause.

Article 33 The state shall protect the legitimate rights and interests of teachers, improve the working and living conditions of teachers and higher the social status of teachers.

The teachers' wages, remuneration and welfare shall be handled according to laws and regulations.

Article 34 The state shall adopt a qualification-based post-employment system, improve the quality of teachers and strengthen the development of teachers by way of examination, rewards, fosterage and training.

Article 35 Schools and other educational institutions shall adopt an educational staffs system for the management.

Schools and other educational institutions shall adopt an professional-skills-based posts employment system.

Article 65 The People's government at different levels shall carry out priority or preferential policies according to corresponding state regulations in respect to the publication and distribution of textbooks and other books or materials for the purpose of teaching and learning, to the production and supply of instruments and equipment for teaching and learning, and to the import of books, materials, instruments and equipment for the purpose of school education or of teaching and learning.

Article 66 The People's government at and above the county level shall develop education through satellite television and other modern advanced approaches to teaching and learning, which shall enjoy preferential arrangement and sustaining support of administrative departments.

The state shall encourage extended application of modern teaching and learning methods.

Chapter V Education Receivers

Article 36 Education receivers shall enjoy equal rights in going to school, entering higher school, employment and etc.

Schools and relevant administrative departments shall guarantee that females enjoy equal rights with males in going to school, entering higher school, employment, conferment of academic degrees and being sent abroad for learning.

Article 37 The state and society shall provide with different forms of financial aids to children, juveniles and youths who are eligible for schooling but in poor families.

Article 38 The state, the society, schools and other educational institutions shall organise education in consideration of the physical and mental characteristics and requirements of the disabled people and offer them with assistance and convenience.

Article 39 The state, the society, schools and other educational institutions shall create conditions for those minor offenders to receive education.

Article 40 Employees shall have the right and duty to receive vocational training and continuous education according to law.

State organs, enterprises, institutions and other social organisations shall provide conditions and convenience for the learning and training of the staffs of their own.

Article 41 The state shall encourage schools, other educational institutions and social organisations to create conditions for the whole life education of citizens.

Article 42 Education receivers shall enjoy following rights and interests according to law:

- (1) participating in different activities conducted in accordance with educational programme or teaching/learning syllabus; using educational or teaching/learning facilities, equipment or books and materials;
- (2) obtaining scholarship, loan for education and stipend according to relevant state regulations;
- (3) obtaining fair assessment in terms of academic achievements and behaviour; being conferred correspondent credentials of learning and academic degree upon fulfilment of prescribed school work;
- (4) bringing a complaint with relevant department in case of refusal to accept a disciplinary action of the school; bringing a complaint or a suit according to law if the right of personal safety or property has been infringed upon by the school or the teacher;
- (5) other rights and interests as are provided for by law and regulations.

Article 43 Education receivers shall perform the following duties:

- 1) abiding by law and regulations;
- (2) observing conduct standards of the school; showing respect to teachers and developing good ideology, proper morale and behaviour habit;
- (3) studying strenuously and fulfilling assigned learning tasks;
- (4) obeying rules of the school or other educational institution to which the education receiver is attached.

Article 44 Administrations of education, physical education and health, schools and other educational institutions shall improve sports and health care facilities and protect the physical and mental health of students.

Chapter VI Education and the Society

Article 45 State organs, the army, enterprises, institutions, social associations and other social organisations and individuals shall create good social environment for the healthy growing-up of children, juveniles and young student.

Article 46 The state shall encourage enterprises, institutions, social associations and other social organisations to cooperate by various ways with higher education schools, secondary vocational schools in teaching and learning, scientific research, technology development and dissemination.

Enterprises, institutions, social associations and other social organisations and individuals may support the construction of schools and participate in management through proper forms.

Article 47 State organs, the army, enterprises, institutions and other social organisations shall render assistance and convenience for students to practise and conduct social practical activities organised by the school.

Article 48 Schools and other educational institutions shall take an active part in local public welfare activities under the precondition that normal educational and teaching/learning activities are not affected.

Article 49 Parents or guardians of minor children shall provide their underage sons and daughters or children under the guardianship with necessary conditions for their education.

Parents or guardians of minor children shall collaborate with the school or the other educational institution on the education of their sons and daughters or children under guardianship.

Schools and teachers may provide parents of students with advice.

Article 50 Students shall enjoy preferential treatment as to public cultural and sport facilities such as libraries, museums, science and technology centres, cultural centres, art galleries, gymnasiums and stadiums, historical or cultural spots and revolutionary commemoration halls or places so that education receivers can be offered convenience for education.

Radio and TV stations shall design education programmes and promote the improvement of students in aspects of ideology, morale, cultural and scientific capacity.

Article 51 The state and the society shall establish out-of-school education facilities for minor children.

Schools and other educational institutions shall collaborate with autonomous grassroots mass organisations, enterprises, institutions and social associations to strengthen out-of-school education of minor children.

Article 52 The state shall encourage social associations, social cultural institutions, other social organisations and individuals to conduct social cultural activities of education that are beneficial to the physical and mental health of education receivers.

Chapter VII Education Investment and Safeguards of Conditions

Article 53 The state shall establish a mechanism based mainly on financial allocation and supplemented with various approaches to raising educational funds, gradually enlarge investment in education and ensure stable sources of educational funds for state-run schools.

Schools and other educational institutions established under the sponsorship of enterprises, institutions, social associations, other social organisations and individuals according to law shall have the school funds raised by the sponsors. The People's governments at different levels may render proper support.

Article 54 The proportion of the state educational investment by way of financial allocation to the volume of general national products shall gradually increase along with the growth of national economy and financial income. The executive steps for the proportion increase shall be determined by the State Council.

The proportion of educational appropriations to the total volume of financial expenditures at different levels of the whole state shall increase step by step with the growth of the national economy.

Article 55 Educational appropriations of the People's governments at different levels shall be listed as a separate item of the financial budget according to the principle of consistency of business power and financial power.

The increase of financial allocation to education by the People's government at different levels shall be higher than the growth of frequent income of the finance. The People's government shall make the average per capita education appropriation for all students in the school increase progressively and ensure that the teacher's salary and the per capita public fund for students grow gradually.

Article 56 The State Council and the local People's government at different levels shall establish specific funds for education and lay special stress on supporting compulsory education in remote border areas and poverty-stricken areas and minority nationality regions.

Article 57 Taxation agencies shall fully collect the added education fee, which shall be controlled by the educational administrations and used mainly in enforcement of compulsory education.

The People's government of province, autonomous region, and municipality directly under the central government may decide on the levy of added local education fee for specific use of education.

The collection of the added education fee in the countryside within the overall finance of townships shall be organised by the People's government of the township. The fee shall be managed on behalf of the township People's government by the education administrative department of the People's government at the county level or by the People's government of the township itself and shall be used for the educational undertakings at the two levels of township and village within the jurisdiction of the township. The accurate proportion of the levy of added education fee in the countryside to the overall finance of the township and the concrete management thereof shall be regulated by the People's government of the province, autonomous region and municipality directly under the central government.

Article 58 The state shall adopt preferential measures to encourage and support schools to develop work-and-study programme, conduct social services and establish campus workshops on the precondition that the normal education and teaching/learning activities are not affected.

Article 59 Subject to the approval of the People's government at the county level the People's government at the level of township or minority nationality township may in light of the principle of voluntary and capacity consideration collect funds to run school within its own jurisdiction, using the funds so collected in reconstruction or repair of dangerous houses in the purpose of enforcement of compulsory education or construct new school houses. The funds may not be used for any other purpose.

Article 60 The state shall encourage social organisations and individuals to donate money for schools.

Article 61 The financial allocation of education funds of the state and donations of social organisations or individuals shall be used in education only and may not be diverted for other purposes or deducted.

Article 62 The state shall encourage the use of banking and credit measures to support the development of educational undertakings.

Article 63 The People's government at different levels and education administrative department shall strengthen supervision and management of educational capitals of schools and other educational institutions and raise the education investment efficiency.

Article 64 The local People's government at different levels and relevant administrative departments thereof shall include the capital construction of schools in the construction planning of the cities and townships, take into consideration the use of land for capital construction of schools and necessary goods and materials and make arrangements accordingly, and shall carry out priority or preferential policies according to related state regulations.

Chapter VIII External Exchange and Cooperation

Article 67 The state encourages foreign exchange and cooperation in education. In conducting foreign exchange and cooperation in education, the principles of independence, equality, mutual benefit and mutual respect shall be adhered to, the laws of the People's Republic of China shall not be violated, and the State sovereignty, and security and the public interests shall not be harmed

Article 68 Chinese citizens within the territory of China who intend to go abroad for purpose of learning, research, academic exchange or teaching shall go through procedures prescribed by the state.

Article 69 Individual persons out of the Chinese territory may, subject to conditions stipulated by the state and after completion of corresponding formalities, enter China and go to Chinese schools or other educational institutions for the purpose of learning, research, academic exchange or teaching. Their legitimate rights and interests shall be protected by the state.

Article 70 Recognition by China of academic degree credentials and schooling credentials awarded by educational institutions out of the territory of China shall be realised subject to international conventions concluded or conceded to by the People's Republic of China or corresponding regulations of the state.

Chapter IX Legal Liabilities

Article 71 In case of failure to examine and allocate educational appropriations based on budget in violation of relevant state regulations, the People's government at the same level shall see to it that the appropriations shall be allocated after examination within a limited period of time. If the violation is a serious case, the persons-in-charge held in direct responsibility and other persons directly responsible for the violation shall be punished by disciplinary sanctions according to statutes.

In case of diversion or deduction of educational capitals in violation of the state financial regulations or accounting procedures, the authority at higher level shall order a replacement of the capitals diverted for other uses or deducted within a limited period of time and shall impose disciplinary sanctions upon those persons-in-charge held in direct responsibility and those directly responsible for the offence. If a crime is constituted, the criminal liabilities therein shall be investigated into according to law.

Article 72 In case some people gather a crowd to engage in an affray, mob, make troubles to the extent of disturbing the educational or teaching/learning order of schools or other educational institutions or damaging houses, grounds or other property thereof, the public security organ shall impose administrative penalties for public security. If a crime is constituted, the criminal liabilities shall be investigated into according to law.

Those who have encroached upon houses, grounds other property of schools or other educational institutions shall bear corresponding civil liabilities.

Article 73 In case of failure to adopt measures upon precise knowledge of dangers with school houses or other educational or teaching/learning facilities to the result of personnel casualties and serious loss of property, the criminal liabilities of those persons-in-charge held in direct responsibility and other persons directly responsible for the damages shall be investigated into according to law.

Article 74 In case of solicitation of funds from schools or other educational institutions in violation of relevant state regulations, the government shall order a replacement of the funds solicited and shall impose disciplinary sanctions upon the persons-in-charge who are held in direct responsibility and other persons directly responsible for the violation.

Article 75 In case of establishment of schools or other educational institutions in violation of relevant state regulations, the education administrative department shall dissolve those schools or institutions so established, confiscate any illegal gains therefrom if there is any and impose disciplinary sanctions according to law upon those persons directly in charge of the matter or other persons directly responsible for the violation.

Article 76 In case of recruitment of students in violation of relevant state regulations, the education administrative department shall order a return of those students and a refund of any fees collected and shall impose disciplinary sanctions upon those persons directly in charge of the matter or other persons directly responsible for the violation according to law.

Article 77 In case of malpractice of favouritism or fraudulence in enrolment of students, the education administrative department shall order a return of those students so enrolled, shall impose disciplinary sanctions upon those persons who are directly in charge of the matter and other persons directly responsible for the malpractice according to law and, where a crime is constituted, investigate into the criminal liabilities.

Article 78 In case of solicitation of fees from education receivers in violation of relevant state regulations by schools or other educational institutions, the education administrative department shall order a return of those fees so solicited and shall impose disciplinary sanctions upon those persons who are directly in charge of the matter and other persons directly responsible for the misconduct according to law.

Article 79 In case of malpractice in national education examinations, the education administrative department shall declare such examinations invalid and impose disciplinary sanctions upon those persons who are directly in charge of the matter and other persons directly responsible for the malpractice according to law.

In case of illegal conduction of national education examinations, the education administrative department shall declare such examinations invalid, confiscate any illegal gains where such gains exist and impose disciplinary sanctions upon those persons who are directly in charge of the matter and other persons directly responsible for the offence according to law.

Article 80 In case of awarding of academic degree credentials or schooling credentials in violation of the present Law, the education administrative department shall declare the credentials so awarded invalid, order a revoke or confiscation of those credentials, confiscate any illegal gains when such gains exist and disqualify the violator from awarding such credentials where the violation is serious.

Article 81 In case of infringement upon the legitimate rights and interests of teachers, education receivers, schools or other educational institutions in violation of the present Law to the extent of any loss or damage, the civil liabilities therefor shall be investigated into.

Chapter X Supplementary Provisions

Article 82 Regulations governing education of military schools shall be formulated by the Central Military Commission according to principles of the present Law. Regulations governing education of religious schools shall be formulated separately by the State Council.

Article 83 Procedures regarding operation or joint operation of schools within the territory of China by organisations or individuals out of the territory of China shall be formulated by the State Council.

Article 84 The present Law shall come into effect as of September 1,1995

Appendix 3: Educational Policy Development in China in the 21st Century

PERIOD	POLICIES
May 29, 2001	The Decision on the Reform and Development of Basic Education by the State Council
Jun. 7, 2001	The Guidelines for Basic Education Curriculum Reform by the MOE
Jul. 26, 2001	The Tenth Five-year National Plan (2001–2005) for Education by the MOE
Feb. 10, 2004	The Rejuvenation Action Plan for Education 2003–2007 by the MOE
May 18, 2007	The Eleventh Five-year National Plan (2006–2010) for Education by the MOE
May 5, 2010	The Outline of the National Mid- to Long-Term Plan for Educational Reform and Development 2010–2020 by the State Council
Oct. 8, 2011	The Curricular Standards for Teacher Education (Provisional) by the MOE
Sept. 29, 2011	The Guidelines for the Promotion of TVET Reform, Innovation and Research by the MOE
Feb. 10, 2012	The Professional Standards for Kindergarten, Elementary and Secondary Schoolteachers (Provisional) by the MOE
Mar. 16, 2012	The Guidelines of Comprehensive Quality Improvement of Higher Education by the MOE
Jun. 14, 2012	The Twelfth Five-year National Plan (2011–2015) for Education by the MOE
Aug. 20, 2012	The Opinion on the Enhancement of the Teaching Workforce by the State Council
Dec. 3, 2013	The Opinion on the Enhancement of Comprehensive Evaluation Experiments of School Qualities by the MOE
Jan. 26, 2013	The Guidelines of Deepening the Comprehensive Reform of Education by the MOE
May 2, 2014	The Decision of Speeding up the Development of Modern Vocational Education by the State Council
Jan. 8, 2014	Promotion Plan for Special Education (2014–2016) by the State Council
Oct. 20, 2014	The Guidelines of Deepening the Promotion for Punishment and Prevention System in Higher Education Institutions by the CPC/MOE
Aug. 11, 2015	The Decision on Speeding up Minorities Education by the State Council
Oct. 24, 2015	Implementation Guidelines for the Comprehensive Promotion for World-class Universities and World-class Disciplines by the State Council
Jul. 13, 2016	Action Plan for Education on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road by the MOE, etc.
Jan. 10, 2017	The Thirteenth Five-year National Plan (2016–2020) for Education by the MOE
Mar. 24, 2017	Popularisation Plan for Senior Secondary School Education by the MOE, etc.

Adapted from Li, J. (2017). *Educational Policy Development in China for the 21st Century: Rationality and Challenges in a Globalizing Age*.

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Appendix 4: Questionnaires For Participant Recruitment

i) Questionnaire

The Questionnaire was used during the pilot but ultimately abandoned for the main study due to limited-to-no engagement. Instead, direct contact through snowballing from an initial identified participant was employed.

Double Reduction Policy: Effects on English Language Learning

双减政策：对英语学习的影

Start of Block: CONTEXT

Q1. In July 2021 were you a student/parent/teacher/After School Training Centre employee? 2021年7月, 您曾是学生/家长/教师/校外培训中心的员工吗?

- Student 学生
- Parent of a student 家长
- Teacher 教师
- After School Tuition Centre employee 皮寻找新的员工
- None of the above. Please do not continue. 都不是

[Type here]

Q2. If you were a student, in which stage of education were you? 如果您是一名学生, 你处于哪个教育阶段?

- Was not a student 不是学生
- Primary School 小学
- Middle School 中学
- High School 高中
- University 大学
- Other. Please specify. 其他。请明确说明

Q3. If you were a parent, at which stage of education was your child (ren)? 如果您是父母, 你的孩子在哪个教育阶段?

- Was not a parent 不是家长
- Kindergarten 幼儿园
- Primary School 小学
- Middle School 中学
- High School 高中
- University 大学
- Other. Please specify. 其他。请明确说明。
-

Q4. If you were a teacher, in what kind of institute did you work (select all that apply)? 如果您是一名教师, 您在什么单位就业?

- Was not a teacher 不是教师
- Kindergarten 幼儿园
- Primary School 小学
- Middle School 中学
- High School 高中
- University 大学
- Training Centre 培训机构
- Other. Please specify. 其他。请明确说明。

Q5. If you were an After School Training Centre employee, what was your role? 如果您曾是校外培训机构的员工, 您的职责是什么?

- Was not an ASTC employee 不是校外培训机构工作人员
- English teacher 英语教师
- Manager 管理者
- Business owner 机构所有者
- Other. Please specify. 其他。请明确说明。

End of Block: CONTEXT

[Type here]

Start of Block: DOUBLE REDUCTION POLICY 双减政策

Q6. In your own words: What is the Double Reduction Policy? 用您自己的话说：您认为什么是双减政策？

Q7. Do you think the policy is a good idea? Why/not? 您认为双减是好政策吗？为什么？/为什么不？

Q8. Were you surprised when the policy was announced? Why/not? 当政策宣布时，您感到惊讶吗？为什么？/为什么不？

Q9. Who does the policy relate to (select all that apply)? 这项政策与谁有关？

- Nobody in my family 没有家庭成员有关
- My Child(ren) 我的孩子
- Myself 我自己
- My family member (spouse/relative etc.) 我的其他家庭成员（配偶或亲戚等）
- My employees 我的员工
- My employer (ASTC only) 我的领导（校外培训机构）
- My colleagues (ASTC) 我的同事（校外培训机构）
- My colleagues (public school) 我的同事（公立学校）

Q10. What effects did the policy have on you or your family/work associate (select all that apply)? 该政策对您或您的家庭或工作伙伴产生了什么影响？

- Financial (e.g. loss of income / added extracurricular costs) 财务方面（如：收入损失或增加的课外费用）
- Emotional (loss of colleagues/classmates/stability etc.) 情绪方面（失去同事、同学、稳定性等）。
- Employment (loss of job/business or increased workload) 就业方面（失去工作、业务或工作量增加等）
- Logistical (change in workplace or new arrangements for children etc.) 后勤方面（工作场所的变化或儿童的新安排等）

End of Block: DOUBLE REDUCTION POLICY 双减政策

Start of Block: STUDENT WORKLOAD 学生工作量

Q11. To the best of your knowledge, do students have less school work than before? 据您所知，学生们学校的作业比以前少了吗？

- Yes
- No

[Type here]

Q12. To the best of your knowledge, do students do less homework at home? 据您所知，学生们在家做作业变少了吗？

- Yes
- No

Q13. To the best of your knowledge, do After School Training Centres still offer core subject classes? 据您所知，校外培训机构是否还提供学科类课程？

- Yes
- No

Q14. To the best of your knowledge, do students still attend subject based extracurricular classes? 据您所知，学生们还参加校外培训机构的学科类课程吗？

- Yes
- No

Q15. Do you know of former After School Training Centre teachers who now teach independently? 您是否知道哪些前校外培训机构教师现在在独立授课？

- Yes
- No

Q16. Do you know of non-subject teachers offering private subject tuition? 您知道有非学科类教师提供非自己专业的学科类私人教学的吗？

- Yes
- No

End of Block: STUDENT WORKLOAD 学生工作量

Start of Block: POLICY EFFECTS 政策效果

Q17. Do you think state schools were adequately prepared for the policy changes? 您认为公立学校是否为政策变化做好了充分的准备？

- Yes
- No

Q18. Do you think the policy hoped to address any issues other than student workload? Describe. 你认为这项政策希望解决学生工作量以外的任何问题吗？例如。

Q19. Do you agree/disagree with After School Training Centre restrictions e.g. non subject classes/no classes after 8pm/ no weekend or holiday classes/foreign books restricted etc.? 您是否同意/不同意对校外培训机构的限制 (例如：限制学科类培训、8点以后不可以有课程安排、周末或节假日不可以安排学科类培训等等)？

- Yes
- No

[Type here]

Q20. Do you think the policy has worked as it intended? Why/not? 您认为这项政策达到了预期的效果吗? 为什么? 为什么不?

- Yes (please explain) 是的 (请解释)
- No (please explain) 没有 (请解释)

End of Block: POLICY EFFECTS 政策效果

ii) Example of Pilot Questionnaire Results Table

See separate file: Appendix 5 ii Pilot_Questionnaire_Results_Table.pdf

[Type here]

Appendix 5: Interview Questions

i) Pilot Study Interview Questions

Pilot Study - Interview Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the purposes and effects of recent education policy changes on participants of English language learning in China, as perceived by key stakeholders. Following the introduction of the Double Reduction Policy (Ministry of Education, 2021), it aims to discover attitudes toward English language education and the effects on its teachers and learners.

This study aims to explore the current socio-cultural attitudes to learning English in light of the most recent change in Chinese law, whose introduction is altering the EFL field nationally and internationally.

CONTEXTUALLY IDENTIFYING QUESTIONS

1. In July 2021 were you a student/parent/teacher/ASTC employee?
2. If you were a student, in which stage of education were you?
3. If you were a parent, at which stage of education was your child(ren)?
4. If you were a teacher, in what kind of institute did you work?
5. If you were an ASTC employee, what was your role?

GENERAL QUESTIONS

6. In your own words: What is the Double Reduction Policy?
7. Did you think the policy was a good idea? Why/not?
8. Were you surprised when the policy was announced? Why/not?
9. There are several possible reasons for the policy: reduce work for students, reduce shadow teaching, do you feel there were any other goals?

[Type here]

EFL and STATE SCHOOLS IN CHINA

10. Do you think do think the policy is related to reducing the amount of English language education in China?
11. Do you think English classes have become less important?
12. Do you also think the policy was to reduce the number of foreign teachers in tuition centers?
13. Many foreign-published books were taken out of schools, and in the years before, taken out of tuition centers. Do you think this is related?

PERSONAL

14. What does the policy mean for you? In which way did the policy have an effect on you/your_____?
 - finances
 - logistics
 - employment
 - time
 - emotions

STUDENT WORKLOAD

15. What effect do you think the policies had on students, specifically who learn English, because you're an English teacher? And do you think that there are still tuition centers that offer English classes?
16. What's your opinion on their workload? Do you think they have less/more/same work as before?

TEACHERS & SCHOOLS

17. In which way do you think state schools prepared for the policy changes?
18. ASTC closures and the effect on foreign/Chinese teachers?
19. Do you know of any previous teachers who worked in tuition centers that are now teaching independently?

FAMILIES

[Type here]

20. What effects do you think it's had on working families / parents?
21. Do you think that the situation regarding private tuition has helped with family finances? In which way?

EFFECTS OF POLICY - NATIONAL/FUTURE

22. What do you think the policies worked as, as intended? Do you think it's been successful?
23. What do you think about the future of English language education in China maybe 5, 10, 20 years later?

ii) Main Study Interview Questions – Amended Following Pilot

Interview Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the purposes and effects of recent education policy changes on participants of English language learning in China, as perceived by key stakeholders. Following the introduction of the Double Reduction Policy (Ministry of Education, 2021), it aims to discover attitudes toward English language education and the effects on its teachers and learners.

This study aims to explore the current socio-cultural attitudes to learning English in light of the most recent change in Chinese law, whose introduction is altering the EFL field nationally and internationally.

PRE-INTERVIEW SAFETY ASSURANCE

While we will be discussing one education policy, I have no interest in discussing China's politics or government

CONTEXTUALLY IDENTIFYING QUESTIONS

Ask: Location + nationality.

24. In July 2021 were you a student/parent/teacher/ASTC employee?
25. If you were a student, in which stage of education were you?
26. If you were a parent, at which stage of education was your child(ren)?
27. If you were a teacher, in what kind of institute did you work?

[Type here]

28. If you were an ASTC employee, what was your role?

GENERAL QUESTIONS

29. In your own words: What is the Double Reduction Policy?

30. Did you think the policy was a good idea? Why/not?

31. Were you surprised when the policy was announced? Why/not?

32. There are several possible reasons for the policy: reduce work for students, reduce shadow teaching, do you feel there were any other goals?

EFL and STATE SCHOOLS IN CHINA

33. How do you think the importance of English in China generally relates to the policy?

34. How do you think the policy was related to reducing English education in China?

35. Foreign-published books were removed from ASTCs and state education. What's your opinion on this?

36. How do you think the policy might relate to concerns about Chinese culture? (and reducing 'Western' culture and morals)?

37. What's your view on the ASTC restrictions, then and now in 2024?

PERSONAL

38. What does the policy mean for you? In which way did the policy have an effect on you/your_____?

- finances
- logistics
- employment
- time
- emotions

STUDENT WORKLOAD

39. What effect has the policy had on students of English? e.g.

- ASTCs still offer core subject (such as English) classes
- School increased hours – optional?
- students have less work than before
- students do less homework at home

TEACHER WORKLOAD

- In which way do you think state schools prepared for the policy changes?
- Public school teacher workload (parents/teachers)

[Type here]

- former ASTC teachers who now teach independently – what challenges?
- ASTC closures and the effect on foreign/Chinese teachers?

EFFECTS OF POLICY NATIONAL/FUTURE

40. Thinking about the previous questions, please describe the effects of the policy on:
- Working families? parents?
 - National issues – birth rates, costs, finances
41. What do you think are the main effects of the Double Reduction Policy on attitudes to education within the country? (mental health / competition / stress)
42. How successful do you feel the policy has been overall?
43. Will the policy disappear/things go back to before?
44. What do you think is the future of English (language education) in China?

iii) Pilot Study Interview Results Table (Example Section)

CODE	NATIONALITY	ROLE(S) 2021	LOCATION	LANGAUGE	TRANSLATOR	NOTES
IPS001	Chinese	ASTC Teacher	Jiangsu, LYG	English	No	Conducted a follow-up interview to try to develop answers, which had proven too limited during first interview. Discussed personal career disruption. Does not believe that ulterior motives such as birth rate are relevant. The policy was seen as benefiting some students by reducing homework, but negatively impacting teachers who had to work longer hours or seek private tutoring.
IPS002	Chinese	Student	Zhejiang, Shaoxing	English	No	Conducted a follow-up interview to try to develop answers, which had proven too limited during first interview. Students continue to work at a similar level to pre-policy. Discussed pressures on high school students and precarious mental health. Parents continue to spend money on private tuition. High school students did not reap any benefits, but younger students did. Standard/quality of English language could drop due to fewer foreign teachers and exposure to foreign-produced learning material.
IPS003	Chinese	Parent	Jiangsu, LYG	Chinese	Yes	Participant declined invite for follow-up interview

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iv) Main Interview Results Table (Example Section)

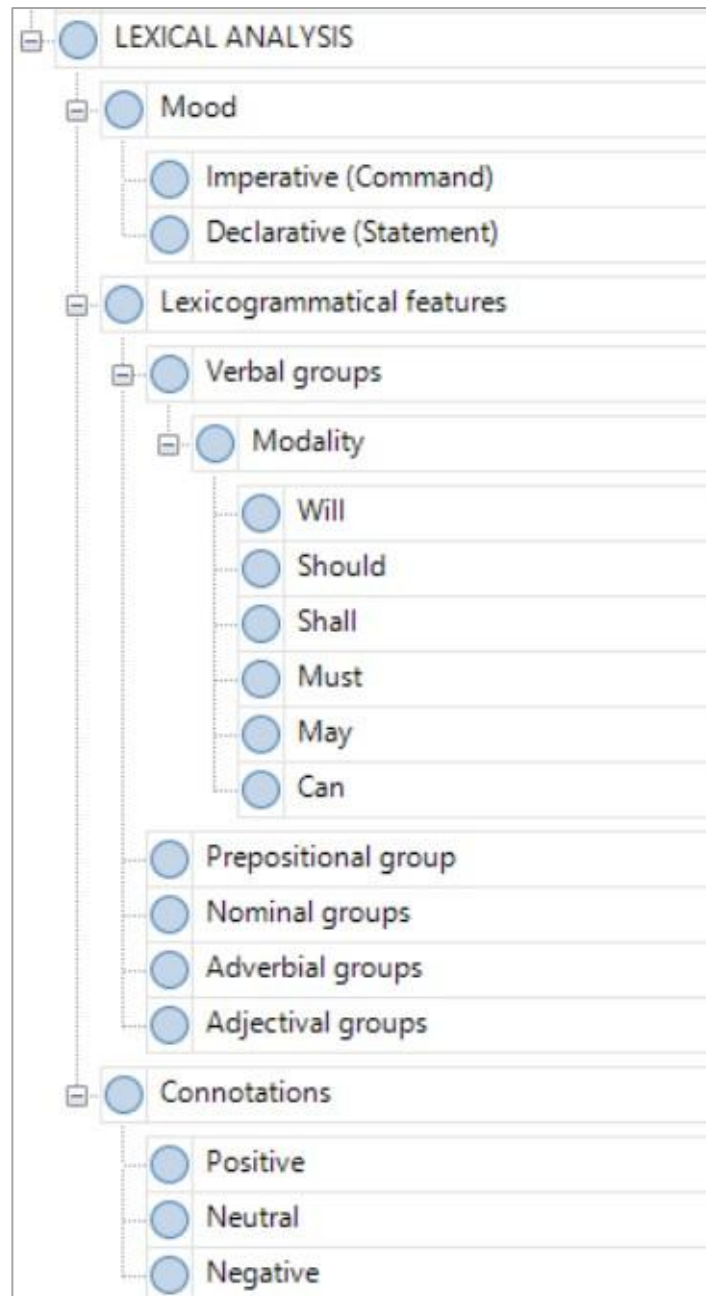
CODE	ROLE	SUBJECT	LOCATION	NATIONALITY	Translat	SUMMARY
IMS001	Former Student	x	Lanzhou, Gansu	Chinese	N	Key points included the policy's effect on students and teachers, and the apparent added workload on both groups. Hidden agendas regarding positive reporting in the media, the de-Westernisation of Chinese education and a sense of government control over citizens were suggested. The concerns over discussing the government was apparent.
IMS002	ASTC Teacher	English	Donghai, Jiangsu	Chinese	N	Does not think the DRP has been effective. Students continue to work hard as parents continue to push, and teachers continue to have heavy workloads as the competitive nature of the education system remains.
IMS003	ASTC Teacher / Parent	English	Lianyungang, Jiangsu	Chinese	N	Believes one of the main aims was to reduce ASTC's but in the end, students have not benefitted from less work, as parents still find ways to provide extra classes, through other means. Thinks the policy may be related to the falling birth rate, but not in any impactful way. Believes English remains an important subject for the future.
IMS004	ASTC Teacher / Parent	English	Lianyungang, Jiangsu	Chinese	Y	Discussed in-depth the devastating effect on teachers and parents such as herself, in terms of job losses and financial insecurity following the DRP. Does not believe the DRP was designed to decrease Western influence or English language education perse, but did encourage more focus on Chinese culture and traditions.
IMS005	ASTC / Teacher	Chemistry	Chengdu, Sichuan	Chinese	Y	As a new graduate had concerns of job stability when the DRP was introduced, however, now feels that it was ineffective. E.g. training centres have flourished, and workloads have not been reduced.
IMS006	Parent	x	Lianyungang, Jiangsu	Chinese	Y	Discusses meritocracy in China, and that education is the main/only way to succeed. Has the opinion that parents are the main driver of student workload, even after the DRP. Does not believe the DRP was intended to address other issues such as falling birth rates, as the attitudes of young adults is the sole driver of this issue.
IMS007	Parent	x	Nanjing, Jiangsu	Chinese	N	Little personal experience in ASTCs but discusses how children should have more free time to play, so largely positive responses re. DRP intentions. Gave the impression of providing acceptable answers as opposed to personal experience or opinion.
IMS008	Parent	x	Lianyungang, Jiangsu	Chinese	Y	Discusses the impact on ASTCs, the necessity to control misused capital, the continued importance of English education and the continued efforts by parents to provide enough additional education for their children. Does not believe state school teachers have been impacted much, nor that de-Westernisation was an aim.
IMS009	Parent	x	Guangzhou, Guangdong	Chinese	N	Discusses how parents have increased responsibilities left by the shortfall from reduced ASTC work/homework. Discusses how vocational colleges need to recruit more people to balance the future workforce in China. Suggests less effort should be spent on English reading/writing and more on communicative abilities. Believes the policy is well-intentioned but only in its infancy as part of a more long term strategy.
IMS010	Parent	x	Lianyungang, Jiangsu	Chinese	Y	Largely a negative impression of the DRP, which has not succeeded to reduce any burdens, as the education system itself hasn't changed. The competition remains. Does not believe the policy was related to any other national issues.
IMS011	Uni Teacher / Parent	EAP/Translation	Chengdu, Sichuan	English	N	Discusses potential wealth disparity due to changes caused by DRP although meritocracy still rules motivation in China. Control of unscrupulous ASTCs. No real change in student workload as the school system remains competitive.
IMS012	Parent	x	Chengdu, Sichuan	Chinese	Y	Focused on the experience of parents and high school students. Does not believe there has been any effective change. Discusses how former ASTC teachers now teach privately which could be beneficial for some. Does not believe that the birth rate issue can be solved with this policy.
IMS013	Former Student	x	Xi'an, Shanxi	Chinese	N	Former student who believed the policy was good and has witnessed younger students having more freedom of choice in their extracurricular studies since the implementation. Believes future generations of parents will change attitudes toward intensive study, having endured the 'burdens' themselves. Does not believe English will have a diminished place in future Chinese education. Does not believe English will have a diminished place in future Chinese education. Thinks foreign published books were too difficult for Chinese students, so domestic books are better suited - not about de-Westernisation. Does not want the pressure of having children.
IMS014	Former Student	x	Urumqi, Xinjiang	Chinese	N	Discussed regional differences in education, and requirements for English. Predicts an educational divide caused by a wealth gap created by private tutoring moving underground and unregulated. Discussed job losses suffered by ASTC staff. Institutes continue to employ domestic staff for the serious business of learning and passing exams, while foreign teachers are for communicative skills. Does not believe the DRP has alleviated burdens on most, due to the continued competition. Feels some students and families benefit from more structured study hours. Does not believe the DRP was to reduce Western influence, as English is useful to promote Chinese culture, and Chinese culture is so strong that outside forces do not pose any kind of threat.
IMS015	Teacher	English	Manchester, UK	English	N	Mixed opinions on the policy's effects. Felt positive benefits for younger students and teachers, but little change for older students. Started positively, in line with other state school teacher participants, but during the interview appeared to realise that students have continued burdens, as do ASTC teachers. Frequently pivoted back to how happy students are as opposed to answering the question, in keeping with other state school teachers responses.
IMS016	Teacher	High School	Chengdu, Sichuan	Chinese	Y	Stock answers. Participant felt the interview was political and abandoned the interview halfway through. Prior to leaving, answers were as expected to a state school teacher, following a pattern - that of positivity and success.
IMS017	Teacher / Parent	High School	Chengdu, Sichuan	Chinese	Y	Pressure greater on middle/high school students. Parents now have more pressure than before as they need to guide their children more than before. Believes wealth disparity has been exacerbated, particularly rural/urban. Does not believe it is connected to birth rates. Thinks Chinese culture is being promoted, but not as a result of the policy. Education competition remains. DRP has both positives and negatives. Predictably neutral answers as a state teacher.
IMS018	Teacher	English	Chengdu, Sichuan	Chinese	N	Wide-ranging discussion. Believes overall the policy is good, with good intentions, but was not implemented effectively enough. Believes parents suffer greater pressure than students, and the policy has stratified families into wealth brackets, where affluent families have increased pressure due to the streamlined competition, while low-income families feel released from the competition by not being able to afford to patake. This goes along with the promotion of vocational education which is a gap in the Chinese market. While the system remains focused on grades screening, the vocational route offers a respectable option for lower income families. Questions if one of two paths are taken (academic/vocational), will the education system provide adequate experience, and following this, will society have jobs and will they be respected? Does the country's academic and professional infrastructural attitudes need to be adjusted? However the benefits are that parents expenditure is more stable with set prices for after-school services in state schools, as opposed to market forces of ASTCs. This also benefits the country's labour force as they are able to focus on work and manage finances better, ultimately stabilising the country. Discusses how families now pay more attention to sleep and happiness. Teachers and students in lower grades have benefitted, while high schoolers see no difference due to the Gaokao. Does not think de-Westernisation was an aim; Chinese books are better suited, better quality foreign teachers are retained, Chinese culture is not related and English will continue to increase in importance.
IMS019	Former student	x	Shaoxing, Zhejiang	Chinese	N	Believes the policy did not reduce homework, but moved the focus of education from ASTCs to state schools, where students are able to get support from their teachers, and families don't need to spend so much money on tuition, however the workload remains the same. Similarly supports the replacement of foreign published books with domestic books as they are more suitable for Chinese students. Does not see it as de-Westernisation. Thinks th epolicy has only been half-heartedly carried out. Believes state teachers were not affected, but have benefitted through less responsibility, while ASTC teachers have increased pressure and workload, due to a generally smaller workforce.
IMS020	Former student	x	Suzhou, Jiangsu	Chinese	N	Approves of the DRP although it doesn't benefit high schoolers. Thinks foreign published books are better for language learning. Believes all teachers have been negatively impacted, while families benefit from less pressure of running around. Has a positive outlook for the future of English. Struggled to understand my questions, so we answers were stilted or off-topic.
IMS021	Former student	x	Suzhou, Jiangsu	Chinese	N	Concerned that the DRP restricts the amount of learning required to successfully pass the Gaokao. Considers if the DRP was intended to diversify education. While the DRP reduced homework, they felt it necessary to fill the gap themselves and find study material to replace the missing exercises. This added further pressure as students and parents who had to find new teachers outside school. Believes teachers were confused at first on the rules. A loss of foreign teachers impacted student learning, but the more stringent system filters out the lower quality teachers. Believes the DRP has had minimal impact overall - younger students benefitted the most, while the older students did not. Discusses how an improved education system will positively impact the country through a "better structural improvement on the social economy, including the entire occupational system".
IMS022	Former student	x	Shaoxing, Zhejiang	Chinese	N	Considers the DRP as a response by the government to the concerns of citizens. Discussed the pressures experienced during school and the negative impact on family relationships. Believes that parental pressure is ingrained but may be lessened with each new generation. Although English is important, it is not as important as math/science. However believes that it will remain important for the future of a stronger China. Considers replacement of foreign books as a practical solution to accommodate Chinese students and education system.
IMS023	KG Teacher	Homeroom	Hangzhou, Zhejiang	USA	N	Discussed how policy has exacerbated the wealth disparity, including how English is used for elite purposes that may not apply to all citizens. Chinese ASTC teachers now teach privately. KG are prohibited from teaching any English and are subject to inspections and directives/fines. Discusses how some foreign teachers have lost work, and those that cannot/will not be employed by state schools are impacted (did not consider if this was an intentional push to retain qualified teachers) but considers how the system will positively impact lower cost education for low-income families. Raising the standard means raising the cost, which exacerbates wealth disparity. Believes the competition in education is too ingrained to be changed with one policy.
IMS024	Former student	x	Malaysia	Chinese	N	*This participant divulged to me prior to the interview that they had suffered personal problems with education related mental health, and had abandoned their studies temporarily. Now they're in a new college and feel more positive, but the effects are visible. Discusses student mental health, continued parental pressure and the competitive system. Considers English difficult for Chinese students to learn in a vacuum of exam scores unrelated to real life experiences, so using domestic books seems sensible to support learning and understanding. Does not think DRP is related to birth rates or Chinese culture promotion. Believes foreign teachers may benefit from DRP through private tuition and increased demand, while Chinese teachers face increased pressure from job losses and limited opportunities. Seems negativ eabout state education system and irresponsible teachers.
IMS025	ASTC Teacher	Homeroom	Hangzhou, Zhejiang	UK	N	Discussed fairly stereotypical notions of China "catching up with the West". Conversely considers if English will be replaced with Chinese as global lingua franca in the future. Critical of the education mode of 'rote learning' which is also a nuanced and subjective stance. Had little knowledge of the DRP or its effects. Believes students have less homework, but continued workload/time, simply shifted to different contexts i.e. into state school.
IMS026	KG Teacher	Homeroom	Hangzhou, Zhejiang	USA	N	Considers how the closure of ASTCs could be an inconvenience on parents who relied on them for after-school care. Discusses wealth disparity. Supports the replacement of foreign published books with domestic books, as they are better suited to the Chinese mode of learning. Does not believe the DRP has been successful.
IMS027	Teacher/Parent	Biology	Lianyungang, Jiangsu	Chinese	Y	Similar answers to other state teachers. Avoided answering questions directly, instead repeating neutral dictums on the strengths and positive aspects of being a parent/teacher/student. e.g. asked twice how the policy affected them personally, they replied with how it has benefitted students. Asked about de-Westernisation, job losses in ASTCs or any potentially contentious issues, replied with a "Don't know". Positive regarding the policy, effects on all groups and the ease with which it was implemented with no visible negative effects anywhere in society. States the DRP is an old policy that has been implemented for many years, so was surprised when it was "announced".
IMS028	Teacher/Parent	High School Math	Lianyungang, Jiangsu	Chinese	Y	Similar answers to other state teachers. Avoided answering questions directly, instead repeating neutral dictums on the strengths and positive aspects of being a parent/teacher/student. E.g. asked what various benefits students have besides less homework, they answered "less homework, which makes them happy". Positive regarding the policy, effects on all groups and the ease with which it was implemented with no visible negative effects anywhere in society. Believes English will become less important over time, and Chinese people will not be influenced by any outside forces when it comes to their educational plans.
IMS029	Teacher	Primary Music	Chengdu, Sichuan	Chinese	Y	Discusses the negative impact of ASTC closures in terms of limited choices, fewer options for students and families to get the auxiliary educational support they need and the loss of income for teachers. Does not equate the DRP to birth rates, de-Westernisation or other larger social issues. Compares the positive benefits for younger students to the continued stress of older students.
IMS030	ASTC Teacher/Parent	English	Lianyungang, Jiangsu	Chinese	N	Describes the impact of losing a 16-year career and the isolation felt. Refers to a friend who has suffered depression from losing their job. Believes the onus of educational tasks ad success has been shifted to parents since the closure of ASTCs, leading to tension. Does not think workload or pressure has been reduced. At first thought that the DRP was related to birth rates and de-Westernisation, but now just sees a failed policy, despite its good intentions.

See separate file: Appendix 5 iv Main Interview Results Table.pdf

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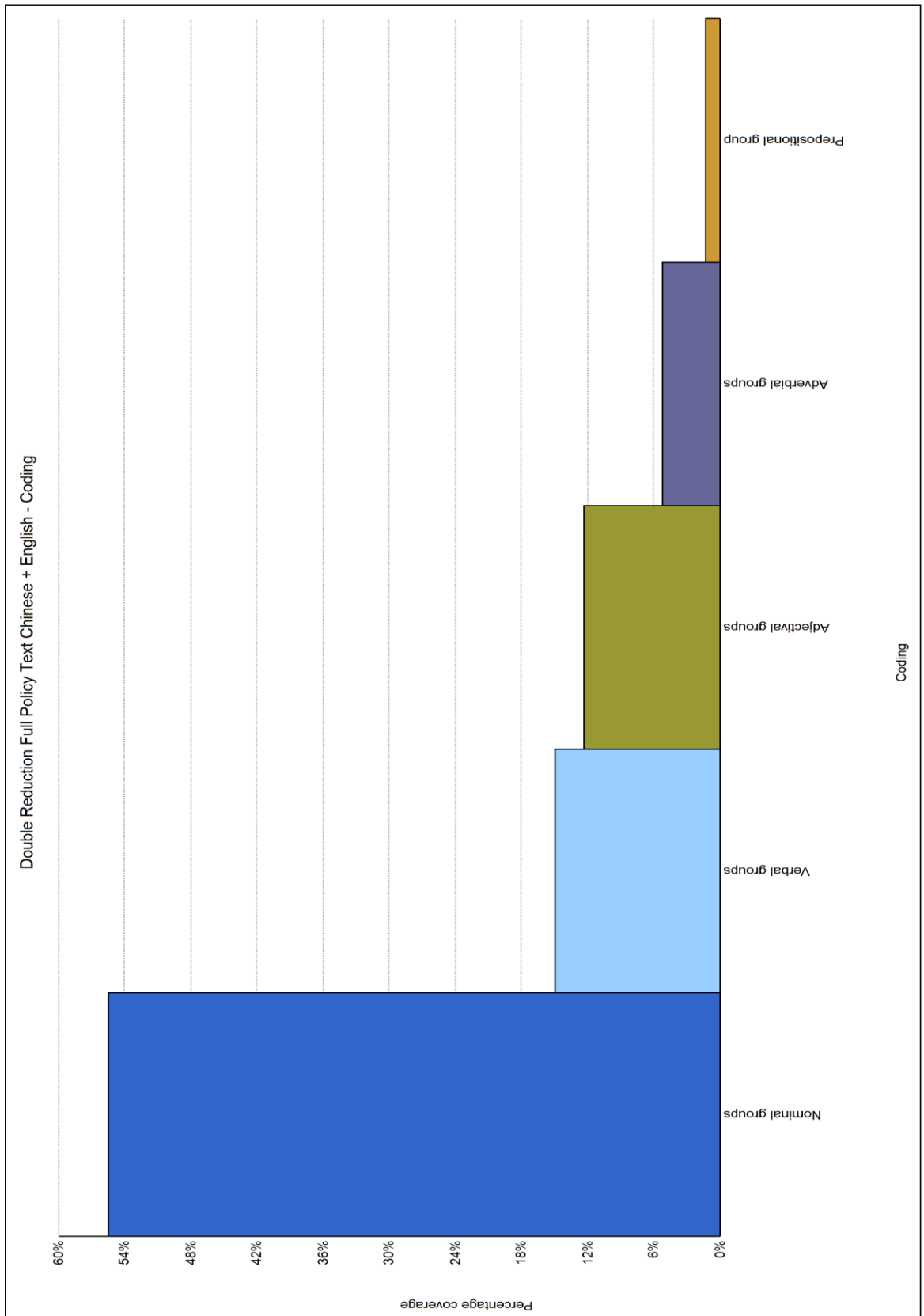
Appendix 6: Lexicogrammatical Analysis

iii) NVivo Analysis Categories - Lexicogrammatical



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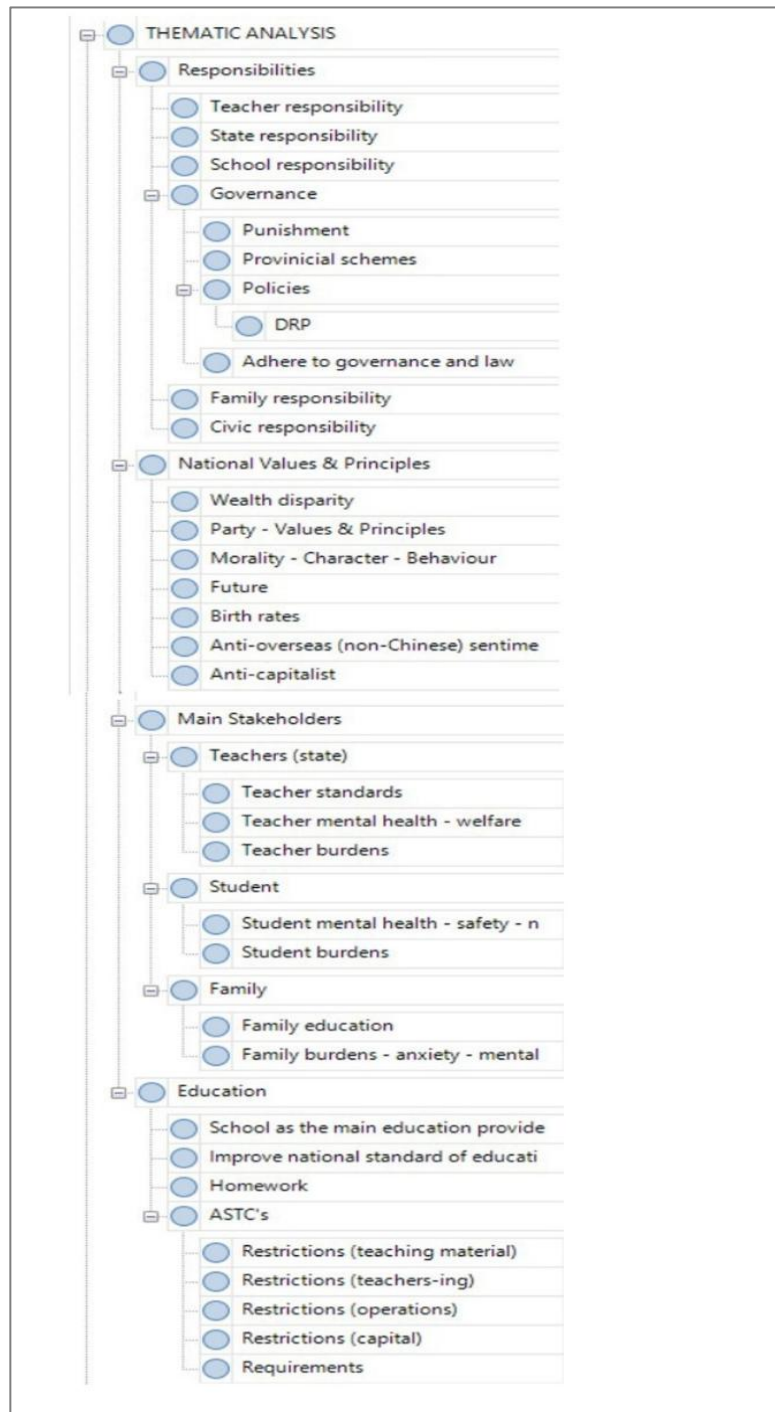
iv) NVivo Analysis: Coding Visualisations of the Frequency and Distribution of Lexical Word Group Categories



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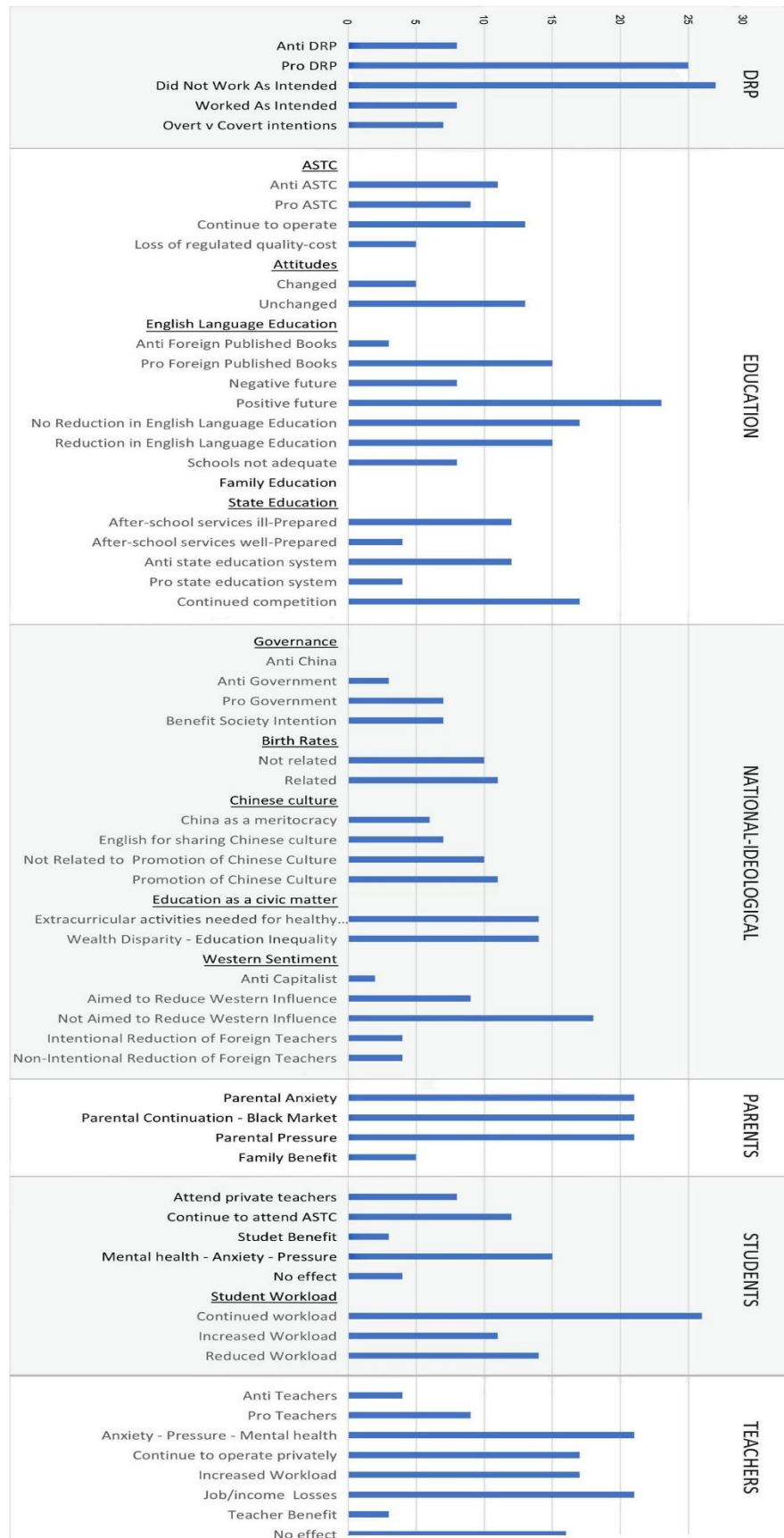
Appendix 7: Thematic Analysis

i) NVivo Analysis Categories – Critical Discourse Analysis of Double Reduction Policy Text



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Appendix 8: Thematic Analysis Chart



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DATA ACCESS STATEMENT

The research data underpinning this thesis cannot be made publicly available due to ethical obligations to protect the safety and anonymity of research participants in a politically sensitive context.

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