

# Analysis on the Innovation of the Teaching System Against the Background of the "Double Reduction" Policy Taking the Education Reform of Beijing National Day School as an Example

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## ABSTRACT

Since 2021, the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council have issued the "Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Off-Campus Training on Students at the Compulsory Education Stage", and education departments across the world have responded positively, seeking to cultivate high-quality students who are well-rounded in moral, intellectual, physical, social and aesthetic development and to reverse the traditional criteria for screening talents in which marks are paramount. In terms of curriculum reform and cultivation guidelines, there are different degrees of innovative reforms around the world. This study compares the educational reform achievements of Beijing National Day School and a suburban high school in Shandong Province. Through structured observation, semi-structured interviews, data review and other investigative methods, this study analyzes the similarities and differences of the teaching and learning reforms of the different schools and the causes behind them, and provides suggestions and countermeasures for the future system formulation of relevant education departments and the education of teachers, students and parents.

**Keywords:** *Beijing National Day School, "Double reduction" policy, Autonomy, Curriculum selection system.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Entering the new era, the Party Central Committee, with Comrade Xi Jinping as its core, has put forward higher requirements for the development of education in the new era. On 24 July 2021, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued the "Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Off-Campus Training on Students at the Compulsory Education Stage (hereinafter referred to as "Opinions"). [1] The "Opinions" stated that all regions and departments should earnestly implement them in conjunction with the actual situation. In August, the Office of the Education Supervisory Commission of the State Council issued a special notice to

inform the provinces of the progress of their work in the implementation of "Reducing the burden of homework and off-campus training on students" (hereinafter referred to as "double reduction") on a semi-monthly basis. [2] In October 2021, the National People's Congress (NPC) stated that the double reduction was to be explicitly incorporated into the law to avoid increasing the burden on students at the compulsory education stage. [3] In November of the same year, the General Administration of Market Regulation and other departments issued a "Notice on the Proper Control of Advertising for Off-school Training". The "Notice" stated that advertisements about off-school training must be firmly eliminated from billboards and advertising spaces belonging to the underground and bus stations. [4]

In March 2021, the Ministry of Education issued a "sleep order" and "double reduction" policy was introduced in July of the same year, both of which led to a significant improvement in students' rest time. According to the data, since the implementation of the "sleep order" and "double reduction policy", around 60% of primary and secondary school students have increased their sleep time to varying degrees, with 9.41% of them getting more than 2 hours of sleep, 21.66% of them getting 1 to 2 hours of sleep, and 28.88% of them getting 0 to 1 hour of sleep. [5]

The "double reduction" policy aims to abandon formalistic and useless work that takes up a lot of students' spare time for rest, sports and recreation, and to return primary and secondary school students to enjoy the healthy, happy and well-rounded adolescence. On the one hand, the "double reduction" policy is conducive to the physical and mental health of students, and reduces the stress and burden in a performance and utilitarian culture; on the other hand, students have a lot of spare time to engage in creative and practical activities. In this way, students can participate in the practical activities of quality education and develop themselves in a variety of ways. Secondly, the trinity of society, school and family is better integrated to create a good environment for the learning of minors by eliminating the interference of capital in the field of education. The three parties should work together to reduce the burden and pressure of education and remove obstacles to its development.

As a result, the "double reduction" policy has prompted many schools across the country to embark on innovative educational reforms. One of the most significant examples is Beijing National Day School, which had already been implementing shift duty system and an optional class system before the "double reduction" policy. With the innovative curriculum reform as the top design, Beijing National Day School has left behind the problematic tactics and engaged students in quality education practices, and students have the opportunity to make their own choices and explore their potential with a large number of club activities. Can the current curriculum reform, with "double reduction" and quality education as its core ideology, be able to move steadily under the pressure of the entrance exams? What are the reactions of teachers, parents and students to the "double reduction" policy? How the policy has been adapted to different economic and cultural contexts is an important point of discussion.

## **2. COMPARISON OF CURRICULUM SELECTION SYSTEM AND "271" MODE**

### ***2.1 Different Innovation Models***

With the new national philosophy of new curriculum reform, relevant policies introduced by the state and the help of parents, Beijing National Day School, as a comprehensive pilot school for education, has achieved periodical educational success. [6]

In order to foster a sense of freedom and responsibility and to explore the maximum potential and possibilities of students, the curriculum reform has always been the top design of the school. With the free curriculum selection system as the core, the school has introduced 265 subject courses, 30 integrated practical courses, 75 career study courses and 272 clubs. [7] Through "trial and error" in different course experiences, students can find out what they are good at and what they are not good at, and overcome the weakness effect on the learning road. Finally, school can independently arrange a set of unique curriculum schedule, and students can clearly judge the subject direction they are interested in before filling in the college entrance examination. In the process of making their own choices, students will gradually realize that they are responsible for their own choices in their future lives.

At the same time, some regions in Shandong Province have also launched an educational curriculum reform called "271".

"271" refers to dividing students' course time into 20% teacher lecture time, 70% independent study and discussion time of students, and 10% review and collation and stocktaking time. All courses at school are designed to be conducted in small group discussion mode in a circle, instead of the previous standard of front-to-back seating. A significant amount of time is given to students for independent pre-study and problem solving. All difficult questions can be discussed with classmates for 70% of the time, while the teacher will answer the most difficult questions in a unified manner for 20% of the time. This new form of teaching challenges students' independent learning skills. In the past, the cramming mode of teaching has led to the formation of thinking inertia and serious dependence of students. The new "271" model has created a new atmosphere in the school, which is very different from that of traditional teaching.

Below, this study summarizes the impact and short-term implications of the curriculum reform by compiling interviews with some teachers, students and parents from Beijing National Day School and some parents, teachers and students from C School in Shandong Province.

## 2.2 Levels and Perceptions of Teachers

The documentary "*Real Growth*", which follows the curriculum reform at Beijing National Day School, shows the occasional conflict and contradiction between the teachers as they conduct a workshop on curriculum and teaching. Some of the teachers argue that the classroom should not include formalized tests such as "slips of paper" (quiz), but rather that students should read a lot to build up their knowledge base. However, some teachers still keep the traditional mode of teaching. Thus, even in Beijing National Day School, a school with high quality educational resources, there is a wide range of disagreements and differences of opinions among teachers in the face of a major curriculum reform. The good news is that these teachers are on average highly educated and have a better understanding of the new curriculum. The disagreements among teachers in Beijing National Day School exist only within the context of the curriculum reform, with most teachers disagreeing over the full implementation of the curriculum selection system, but no one has ever outright opposed the school's approach to curriculum reform.

In C School of Shandong Province, the feedback is quite the opposite, with interviews with seven teachers revealing a consistent response, and each teacher opposing the new '271' education model to varying degrees. Teacher A confessed: "How can the children be self-motivated if they are only allowed to learn by themselves?" Teacher B added: "This new format can only be applied for fun in the first year of high school, but in the third year, they still have to return to the traditional classroom". It is clear from the teachers' interviews that the teachers in School C in Shandong Province are concerned about devolving power to the students. During the lecture, it is found that the students' presentation of solutions on the board is not promising and a large number of topics are not effectively solved in group discussions. Due to the poor autonomy of the minors, some groups tend to gossip, etc. during free talk time. Those so-called lively discussions are more of an illusion, with the formalization of the guide and the reuse of

reference books, leaving learning in an ineffective dilemma. [8] And 20% of concentrated lecture time is not nearly enough for the teacher to spend on answers, thus giving rise to delays or reluctant calls to stop.

## 2.3 Parental Support

Parents of students from the two schools have different attitudes due to differences in family economic and knowledge levels. Beijing National Day School has classes abroad and an international section, and some students do not have the pressure of the Chinese college entrance examinations. At the same time, a significant proportion of students taking the college entrance examination also have plan B to study abroad. In the documentary "*Real Growth*", viewers can see that parents of students from Beijing National Day School have a deeper understanding of the curriculum reform, some even have a strong research interest in the education reform itself, and the ensuing support is quite optimistic. Thus, there are "favourable climatic, geographical and human conditions" for curriculum reform in Beijing National Day School.

The majority of students from C School of Shandong Province are from agricultural households, and their families' economic level hovers around the subsistence level, and their parents are not well educated. One parent has said: "All the acrobatics would make the children miserable." From an economic point of view, even the university tuition fees for some students are still difficult to meet, and taking the general entrance exams has become the only way out for children. It is difficult to gain the support of parents and students to carry out curriculum reform at this critical time.

## 2.4 Student Acceptance

The two schools have different student backgrounds. Beijing National Day School is a key school in Beijing, with a student source of the top students in Beijing. Some of the high-achieving students have long acquired the ability to learn independently and ahead of time, and the adapted curriculum reform caters to their learning philosophy. Li Wenting, a student of Beijing National Day School, talks in an interview about the course selection system and club activities, "I have tried something I am not good at in high school early, and it helps me clear what I like. So I will choose mathematics more firmly when I apply

for voluntary examinations". Chen Chuqiao, another student, starts thinking about her future choices and career direction in her first year of high school and says, "I have not expected that I will be so relaxed in Beijing National Day School. As the optional class system is carried out, it means that you don't have the same class teacher watching over you every day. At the same time I also have to start learning to be responsible." These in-depth reflections are precisely the same as those of the advanced teaching model. While Principal Li Xigui states in his *"Reflections on the Art of Education"* that Beijing National Day School is a growing secondary school and that the school should do something and nurture the ecology. If the management gets too involved, it will undermine students' creativity. [9]

In contrast, the student source of C School in Shandong Province is poor, in which students entering the school mainly with the lowest scores on the secondary school entrance examinations, and students' lack of independent learning ability and self-discipline. According to Wang Xinhua's questionnaire study, 85% of students say that it is difficult to discipline themselves when completing the guided learning programme on their own. [10] Most of the problems students faced in the classroom are that they could not understand, learn or remember. Although the school divides the students into tiers according to 20% of top students, 70% of students with potential and 10% of student with learning difficulties [11], students can help each other. However, as there are also limitations in the learning abilities of the top students, it is difficult to make the best use of the independent learning model. Students with learning difficulties are the "also-rans" in a classroom that strives for novelty teaching model.

## 2.5 Different Causes

The above analysis shows that the feedback from the two schools in the curriculum reform of education and teaching is the opposite of each other and can be summarized by the following typical reasons.

- Reason 1: Different students source.

Beijing National Day School is a "top-notch" school, in which the students themselves have the initiative to learn. In contrast, students in C School of Shandong Province have lower grades and are easily hindered in their attempts at independent learning.

- Reason 2: Different geographical locations.

Beijing National Day School is located in the capital of China and is more receptive and aware of new ideas. In contrast, C School of Shandong Province is located in the outskirts of a third-tier city, where the flow of information is slower, and teachers, students and parents are less receptive and less cooperative with the curriculum reform.

- Reason 3: Imbalance of educational resources.

Beijing National Day School has the quality of teachers to match the top students. From the headmaster to the teachers and to the students, it is possible to maximize the benefits of educational reform. At the same time, the school has career planning mentors, project funding planners and a system of self-selected mentors to help implement the top-level design in detail. In contrast, due to the new establishment of C School in Shandong Province, the average age of all teachers is around thirty years old, and most of them come from local schools with lower academic levels, insufficient teaching experience, and their own difficulties in understanding and practising the new teaching model dominate.

- Reason 4: Differences in the economic level of students' families and the educational level of their parents.

As the parents of the students from Beijing National Day School have higher income levels and cultural qualifications, they are in a better position to support innovative attempts at multi-path education. Students from C School of Shandong Province have also been met with a degree of resentment from parents with lower income levels due to the increase in tuition fees for curriculum reform innovations.

- Reason 5: Different levels of understanding of reform and innovation.

Li Xigui, the headmaster of a school in Beijing, has pointed out that "developing the curriculum is actually developing yourself"[12] and he has always updated his educational approach and structure to adapt a set of teaching designs to the level and demands of his students. The "271" education model adopted by some schools has the appearance of being rigidly applied, with students being involved in "performances" in order to show the apparent results of the reform, and the reference answers prepared in advance being presented word for word, so that the teachers only need to clap and applaud, without making any changes. The message

behind these illusions is still that the design of the reform is inappropriate.

### **3. CURRICULUM REFORM BEING CONNECTED WITH HIGHER EDUCATION**

Based on interviews with students in the context of traditional teaching models and curriculum reform, it is found that students who have received independent study and course selection in high school are able to integrate more quickly into university school life, whereas students using in the traditional teaching model take some time to settle in comfortably. What students in the context of traditional teaching can't adapt to most is the lack of supervision by the head teacher. According to the statement of a freshman, "Sometimes they can't find the teacher when they ask for leave, and the teacher doesn't even have an office to sit in." As for the degree of autonomy in course selection, students in Beijing and Shenzhen who have received free course selection can be able to select courses that suited them more quickly, while freshmen from traditional teaching backgrounds believe that course selection is full of challenges and randomness.

In Beijing National Day School, students choose their own classes, and teaching classes replace administrative classes. With the application of the autonomous tutor system, students have a sense of belonging and team spirit. Students learn to work together and help each other from a variety of club activities. Individual interests and the will of the group spirit are respected. [13] This is a miniature social simulation field, a miniature microcosm of university life. Thus, life in a new type of high school, closely aligned with university life, has an extraordinary positive impact on how people are treated and how they behave in adulthood.

### **4. THE CONTRADICTION BETWEEN THE NEW CLASSROOM MODEL AND EXAM-ORIENTED EDUCATION**

In interviews with students from Beijing National Day School, Li Wenting later talks about that classmates who are at a similar level with her have achieved better college entrance examination achievement than her after they have adopted the traditional teaching in high school, while she doesn't perform as well as she should have because of her excessive freedom. Similarly, Zhou Ziqi, a

student of Beijing National Day School, has entered Peking University but hasn't been into the desired HSBC Business School through the entrance examination. With the exception of some students in the abroad class, Beijing National Day School hasn't overachieved in terms of test-taking levels. In contrast, School C in Shandong Province, which has implemented a traditional mode of teaching and a problematic approach in the latter part of the senior year, has eventually achieved a significantly higher ranking in the examinations compared to the performance of the same cohort of students in the Chinese examination. Therefore, there is no denying that despite its major drawbacks, the traditional teaching model is still effective in improving test scores.

### **5. CONCLUSION**

In the context of the "double reduction" policy, schools will take more responsibility for the quality education and all-round development of students, and gradually weaken their reliance on extra-curricular classes.

In the new era of rapid social development, school education will also be updated. The study above shows that there is no single model that can be applied to all schools, and that radical reform and innovation cannot be applied to every district in the country at the same time. In the process of education reform, it is suggested to take into account the actual situation and find a model that is appropriate to the local situation in areas with different economic and cultural backgrounds. At the same time, it is important to teach students according to their abilities and to fully respect their subjective wishes. In "Redefining School" by Li Xigui, headmaster of Beijing National Day School, it is written that while any educational reform is initiated by teachers, its ultimate success must be in accordance with the nature of the students, who are the protagonists of the school. [14] It is the students themselves who are at the core of the whole educational process, otherwise it will be overdone and counterproductive.

In the future, the idea of reducing the burden and diversity will gradually be transmitted to all regions of the country. However, the key point of educational innovation lies in diversifying options, not in replication. Only by adhering to the right direction of innovation will we be able to fight a beautiful battle of reform. [15] Therefore, the results of teaching reforms in any school are of reference value, but they should not be carved out

or copied. The teaching design for each individual student must be "unique", which is the original intention of people oriented education.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Yi Xu.

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