

IMPLEMENTATION DIFFICULTIES AND QUALITY-EFFICIENCY IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES OF AFTER-SCHOOL SERVICES UNDER THE "DOUBLE REDUCTION" POLICY

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Abstract: This paper presents a comprehensive analysis of the implementation challenges facing after-school services under China's "Double Reduction" policy, with a specific focus on issues related to teaching staff, curriculum design, and resource allocation. It identifies key obstacles such as teacher shortages, lack of diverse and engaging curricula, and insufficient educational resources, which collectively hinder the effectiveness of these services. In response, the study puts forward a series of practical strategies aimed at enhancing the quality and efficiency of after-school provision. These include optimizing the structure and capacity of the teaching workforce through professional development and flexible recruitment, innovating the curriculum system to incorporate interdisciplinary and interest-oriented learning activities, and improving the integration and expansion of resources via digital platforms and community partnerships. The proposed measures are designed to not only address current operational difficulties but also to promote the sustainable and high-quality development of school-based after-school services. Ultimately, this research seeks to support the broader goals of the "Double Reduction" policy in reducing academic burdens and strengthening holistic education, thereby creating a more supportive and enriching environment for students' growth.

Keywords: Double reduction policy; After-school services; Difficulties; Improvement strategies

1 INTRODUCTION

In the sweeping wave of educational reform, China's "Double Reduction" policy has made a significant and timely debut. Introduced in 2021, this landmark initiative aims to fundamentally transform the educational landscape by alleviating the excessive academic burden imposed on students in compulsory education—specifically by reducing heavy homework assignments and curtailing off-campus tutoring. The policy embodies a clear and profound vision: to allow education to return to its original essence, emphasizing holistic development over mere test scores, and fostering a healthier, more balanced learning environment.

As a crucial supporting mechanism of the "Double Reduction" policy, school-based after-school services function as an essential bridge between formal schooling and students' personal growth. These services create a dedicated, structured, and supportive space where students can engage in meaningful academic reinforcement, explore diverse interest-based activities, and develop social and practical skills beyond the regular classroom hours. By extending the school day in a constructive manner, after-school programs play a pivotal role in enriching students' educational experiences, supporting their intellectual and creative curiosity, and strengthening their physical and emotional well-being.

The significance of these services extends beyond the students themselves—they also provide tangible assistance to parents. By offering a safe, supervised, and enriching environment after normal school hours, after-school services help resolve practical challenges faced by many families, particularly working parents who struggle to pick up their children at the end of the conventional school day. This not only enhances parental peace of mind but also reduces the economic pressure and time constraints associated with private tutoring or alternative childcare arrangements.

However, the implementation of after-school services is fraught with real-world challenges and complexities. One major issue is the shortage of qualified and sustainable teaching staff. Many teachers, already burdened with heavy instructional responsibilities during the school day, experience fatigue and decreased motivation when tasked with additional after-school duties. This has led to concerns over teaching quality and continuity. Furthermore, there is an over-reliance on existing school faculty without sufficient diversification of instructors, such as involving professional community experts or external partners.

Another critical challenge lies in curriculum design and content delivery. Many after-school programs tend to prioritize academic remediation or homework supervision, often at the expense of more innovative and interest-driven activities. While academic support is important, an overemphasis on formal instruction risks replicating the very pressures the "Double Reduction" policy seeks to mitigate. There is a pressing need to introduce more varied, stimulating, and holistic learning experiences—such as STEM projects, arts, sports, mental health education, and community service—that truly contribute to students' all-around development.

Resource availability and integration also pose significant obstacles. Schools, especially those in rural or economically disadvantaged regions, frequently encounter difficulties in securing adequate funding, facilities, and educational materials to run high-quality after-school programs. The imbalance in resource distribution exacerbates educational

inequality, as students in better-resourced urban schools enjoy more opportunities than their peers in underserved areas. Additionally, the effective integration of digital tools and community resources remains underdeveloped, limiting the potential for innovative and scalable solutions.

Given these multifaceted challenges, improving the quality and effectiveness of after-school services has become an urgent priority. There is a growing consensus that systemic measures are required—including optimizing teacher allocation through specialized recruitment and incentives; enriching the curriculum with modular, student-centered activities; and enhancing public-private partnerships to mobilize additional resources. Such efforts are essential to ensure that after-school services fulfill their intended role as a catalyst for educational equity, student well-being, and sustainable development[1-3].

2 IMPLEMENTATION DIFFICULTIES OF AFTER-SCHOOL SERVICES UNDER THE "DOUBLE REDUCTION" POLICY

2.1 Insufficient Number of Professional Teachers

The courses involved in after-school services are rich and varied, covering many fields such as arts, sports, and technology. However, looking at the current staffing situation in schools, the number of professional teachers falls far short of the demand. Taking programming courses as an example, many schools simply lack professional programming teachers. When offering after-school programming services, they often have to temporarily pull in teachers from other subjects to "fill the gap." But as these teachers are not specialists, they often struggle to explain programming knowledge thoroughly during teaching[4]. Consequently, the teaching effectiveness is greatly reduced, and students end up with only a partial understanding.

2.2 Limited Teacher Energy

Teachers already undertake heavy daily teaching tasks. Now, with the addition of after-school services, their working hours have been significantly extended. Working non-stop from morning till night depletes their energy considerably. Over time, teachers inevitably feel exhausted. In this state, maintaining full enthusiasm and high concentration during after-school services becomes quite difficult. Many teachers helplessly express that with such long working hours daily, they feel a bit "low on battery" by the time after-school services come around[5], finding it hard to guide students with the same vitality they had at the start of the school day.

2.3 Lack of Distinctive Features in Curriculum Design

Observing after-school service classes in some schools reveals a common phenomenon: the curriculum predominantly consists of homework guidance. This monotonous curriculum model lacks novelty and struggles to attract students' attention. Schools fail to fully leverage their own unique characteristics and students' interests, resulting in courses that cannot meet students' diverse developmental needs. In some schools, after-school services almost always involve students doing homework independently with teachers available for questions. The whole process is dull and tedious, failing to boost student participation enthusiasm. Many students even perceive after-school services as another segment of their "learning hardship."

2.4 Untimely Curriculum Updates

While the era is rapidly developing and students' needs are constantly changing, after-school service curricula should ideally keep pace with the times. However, the reality is that the curricula in some schools seem "frozen," remaining unchanged for long periods with outdated content[6]. For instance, consider handicraft courses: in some schools, the content hasn't been updated for several years. While students might find it novel initially, they lose interest over time, feeling listless and finding it tedious during each session.

2.5 Limited Funding Investment

Implementing after-school services requires expenditure in all aspects: hiring professional teachers costs money, purchasing teaching materials costs money, and maintaining venues and facilities involves significant expenses. However, the financial situation of some schools is not optimistic; limited funds simply cannot provide solid support for after-school services. For example, some schools wanting to offer technology-related after-school service courses need to purchase advanced technological equipment[7]. But due to funding shortages, they have to hold back, and students miss the opportunity to engage with cutting-edge technological knowledge.

2.6 Inadequate Venues and Facilities

After-school services require various venues and facilities for support, such as laboratories, gymnasiums, and art classrooms. However, some schools, due to limited space and aging, outdated facilities, greatly restrict the conduct of after-school service activities. Taking dance after-school services as an example, some older schools lack dedicated dance studios. Students can only have classes in regular classrooms, which are not only cramped but also lack

professional dance facilities. Students cannot move freely, and naturally, the learning outcomes are not optimal.

3 STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING THE QUALITY AND EFFICIENCY OF AFTER-SCHOOL SERVICES UNDER THE "DOUBLE REDUCTION" POLICY

3.1 Strengthen In-Service Teacher Training

Schools should prioritize enhancing the professional capabilities of their in-service teachers by regularly organizing various professional training sessions. This is particularly important in fields closely related to after-school services, such as arts, sports, and technology, where training efforts should be intensified. For example, senior teachers from art colleges could be invited to the school to provide professional training in areas like painting and music for the teachers. Through such training, teachers can acquire more professional teaching methods and skills. Returning to the classroom, they will be better equipped to handle the teaching demands of after-school service courses, providing students with a more enriching classroom experience.

3.2 Introduce External Professional Talent

Besides tapping into the potential of in-school teachers, external professional talent can be actively brought in to participate in after-school services. Figures like folk artists and professional coaches possess rich practical experience and superb professional skills in their respective fields[8]. Taking paper-cutting courses as an example, a school could hire a locally renowned paper-cutting artist to conduct a weekly after-school service class. These folk artists can teach students paper-cutting techniques hands-on, allowing students to experience the charm of traditional culture up close. This offers students an experience distinctly different from teaching by in-school teachers, enriching their learning journey.

3.3 Develop Characteristic Courses

Schools should fully leverage their cultural advantages and combine them with students' interests and hobbies to create distinctive after-school service courses unique to the school. For instance, schools with a profound traditional cultural heritage could establish characteristic courses like calligraphy or opera. Through these characteristic courses, students can gain an in-depth understanding of traditional culture, foster a sense of identity with it, and simultaneously discover their own unique interests, finding their own development direction.

3.4 Dynamically Update Course Content

Schools need to establish a dynamic evaluation and update mechanism for course content, regularly collecting student feedback and keeping pace with the times. With the rise of artificial intelligence technology, schools can seize the opportunity/respond accordingly and timely add basic AI knowledge to technology-related courses. This way, the course content consistently maintains freshness and practicality can continuously attract students' attention and stimulate their learning enthusiasm.

3.5 Seek Financial Support

Schools should proactively communicate with government departments to strive for more financial support, providing sufficient funding guarantees for after-school services. The government could also specifically establish special funds for after-school services. These funds could be used to improve teaching facilities, purchase advanced teaching equipment, and also to hire better teachers, thereby enhancing the quality of after-school services from both hardware and software perspectives.

3.6 Integrate Social Resources

There are actually many rich social resources that can be utilized for after-school services. Schools need to be adept at integrating these resources. For example, schools can establish cooperative relationships with nearby science museums, regularly organizing students to conduct scientific practice activities there. In the science museum, students can engage with the latest scientific and technological achievements, personally experience various tech projects, broaden their horizons, and enrich their knowledge reserve.

4 CONCLUSION

Under the "Double Reduction" policy, after-school services hold significant importance for student growth and the development of the entire education sector. Although current after-school services indeed face a series of difficulties during implementation, such as teacher shortages, monotonous curriculum content, and insufficient resource investment, there are always more solutions than difficulties. As long as we start by optimizing the teaching workforce, enriching the curriculum system, and increasing resource investment, and implement various strategies step by step, we will certainly be able to effectively enhance the quality and efficiency of after-school services. Let after-school services truly

become a joyful paradise for students to thrive, a solid reliance for parents to feel assured and secure, thereby promoting the development of education in a more positive and healthy direction.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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