

School Administration under the Double Reduction Policy in the Middle Schools of Yunnan Province

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of China's "Double Reduction" policy on middle school administration in Yunnan Province using a mixed-method approach. The objectives are: (1) to identify the key factors influencing school administration under the policy, and (2) to propose actionable guidelines for effective school management within the policy framework. Quantitative data from 450 participants and qualitative data from interviews with 9 administrators were analyzed to explore areas such as course scheduling, classroom teaching quality, homework design, home-school cooperation, teacher training, campus activities, after-school services, and the teaching evaluation system. The findings highlight the significant roles of optimizing homework design, enhancing classroom teaching quality, and improving curriculum arrangements in effective school administration. Regression analysis and expert interviews underscore the importance of these factors in reducing academic stress and improving student outcomes. The study identifies challenges in policy implementation but also highlights successes, emphasizing the need for targeted strategies to achieve policy objectives. Based on these insights, practical recommendations are proposed at the school, government, and research levels to enhance the administration of middle schools under the "Double Reduction" policy. These guidelines aim to foster holistic management strategies, aligning with the policy's goals of reducing student burden and promoting high-quality education.

Keywords: School administration; Double Reduction Policy; Middle schools; Yunnan province

Introduction

The intensifying competition in China's education system has placed a heavy academic burden on primary and secondary students, adversely affecting their physical and mental health (Li, 2022). Rising myopia rates and declining physical fitness among adolescents have become pressing issues. The demanding workload not only diminishes students' interest in learning but also leads some to experience psychological issues such as anxiety, addiction to video games, self-harm, social withdrawal, and school avoidance. Cases of dropouts and even suicides due to academic pressure have also been reported.

To address these issues, the Chinese government has implemented several policies aimed at reducing students' academic burdens. While these policies have yielded some positive results, significant challenges remain. Responding to public demand for educational reform, the government launched the "Double Reduction" policy in 2021 and reinforced it in 2023, aiming to decrease homework loads and limit after-school tutoring services, thereby alleviating students' academic burdens. However, the effectiveness of this policy depends

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heavily on school management. Effective school management involves not only supervising student learning and teacher performance but also fostering collaboration with families and communities to ensure the successful implementation of the policy (Chen, 2008). In Yunnan Province, which is characterized by its rich cultural heritage and socio-economic diversity, implementing the policy presents unique challenges.

Despite government efforts to promote policy implementation, balancing burden reduction with students' holistic development, including their physical and mental well-being, requires further understanding and research (Fu Zhiqiang, 2024). Schools urgently need clear management models that support policy compliance while also promoting students' healthy development. Against this background, this study focuses on middle schools in Yunnan Province to examine the practices of school management under the "Double Reduction" policy, analyze the key factors influencing policy implementation, and provide practical guidelines for school management.

The primary objectives of this study are to: 1) examine the level of school management in middle schools in Yunnan Province under the "Double Reduction" policy; 2) study the current practices related to optimizing curriculum design, improving classroom teaching quality, refining homework design, enhancing parent-school cooperation, strengthening teacher training, enriching campus activities, improving after-school services, and reinforcing teaching evaluation systems; 3) investigate the factors that affect school management in middle schools in Yunnan Province under the "Double Reduction" policy; and 4) propose guidelines for school management in Yunnan Province's middle schools under the "Double Reduction" policy.

The results of the study showed that homework design, quality of classroom instruction, and curriculum were the factors that had the greatest impact on school management, and that other factors also had an impact on school management, with the final model explaining more than 90% of the variance in school management outcomes. Based on the quantitative and qualitative findings, recommendations were made to improve school management under the Double Reduction Policy from the perspective of each of the eight factors.

By focusing on the key areas of curriculum design optimization, classroom teaching improvement, homework refinement, parent-school collaboration enhancement, teacher training reinforcement, campus activity enrichment, after-school service improvement, and teaching evaluation strengthening, this study aims to develop a comprehensive school management model suitable for the "Double Reduction" policy. This model seeks to promote students' holistic development and provides theoretical and practical support to assist the government in further optimizing the policy.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the factors affecting the school administration of middle school in Yunnan province under the "Double Reduction" policy.
2. To propose the guidelines for the school administration of middle school in Yunnan province under the "Double Reduction" policy.

Research Methodology

Population and Sample

There are 1,692 junior high schools in the province. Stratified sampling method was used in this study. To better obtain a suitable sample, the following method was used: based on the geographical characteristics of Yunnan, this study divided the 16 cities in Yunnan into 4 major parts, namely, the first northwestern part, the second northeastern part, the third southeastern part, and the fourth southwestern part. One city was taken from each part and questionnaires were distributed to secondary schools in the four cities to conduct the survey.

Samples in this study are drawn from school administrators and teachers, for a total of 450 respondents. This group is selected because they are both school administrators and participants, and the study can provide a comprehensive understanding of school administration under the "Double Reduction" policy at both the leadership and instructional levels.

Qualitative research was conducted through interviews with 9 experts in school administration under the "Double-Reduction" policy, including academics, principals, and education specialists, to consider the important factors in school administration under the "Double-Reduction" policy and to form a management guideline.

Research Instruments

The first instrument is a survey questionnaire. This study uses an online electronic survey instrument that contains 93 questions involving 8 independent variables and 1 variable. In this study, an online questionnaire was administered to 450 middle school administrators and teachers in Yunnan using the Chinese online questionnaire platform, Questionnaire Star.

The second research instrument is the interview. In this study, semi-institutionalized interviews were used to conduct the interviews. The researcher is given the key themes that need to be researched as well as an interview guide, and the interview process allows for flexibility in asking questions based on these key points in addition to discussing new issues. The interviews have a pre-drafted outline and key questions that can be flexibly determined on a case-by-case basis. 9 experts, all of whom were qualified, were selected for interviews for this study. Content analysis is used by Nvivo.

Data collection

1. Contact schools and school administrators, explain the purpose and content of the survey, and obtain permission to conduct the survey.
2. Conduct the online survey using the online questionnaire website - Questionnaire Star, release the questionnaire, and set the deadline for two weeks later.
3. Export the data after two weeks and analyze the data.
4. contact the interviewer, ask him/her whether he/she chooses to conduct offline or online interviews, and at the same time, make an appointment with the interviewer for the specific time of the interview.
5. Organize and analyze the content of the interviews.

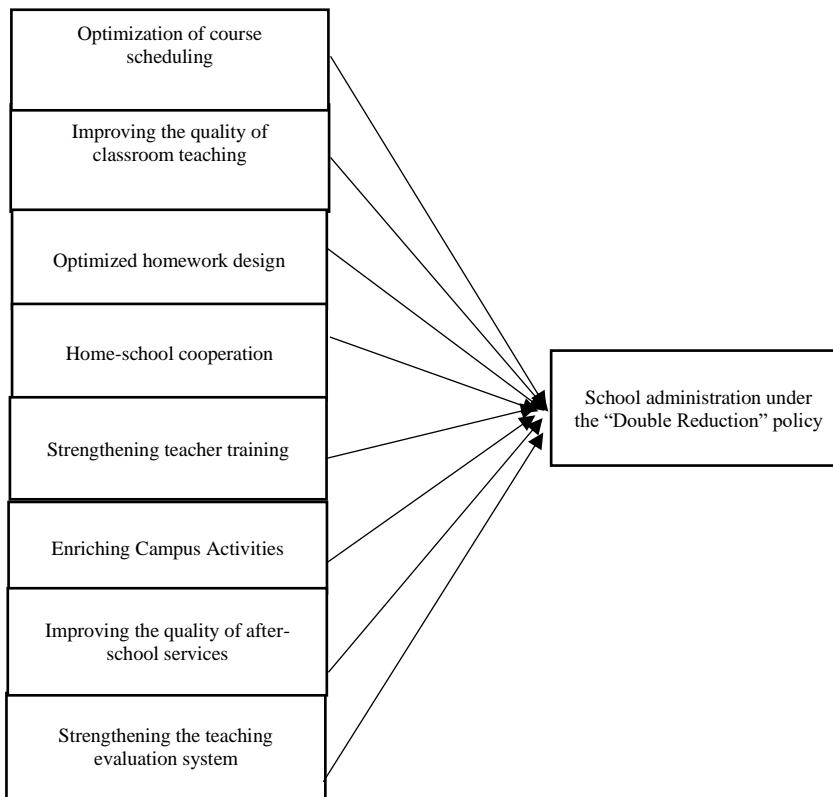
Data Analysis

1. The questionnaire utilized a five-point Likert scale. In order to ensure the consistency of the questionnaire topics with the research objectives, the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) method was used in this study, and the IOC values were all higher than 0.6. Meanwhile, the internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed in this study, and it was measured by using Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient. The Alpha value of the overall questionnaire was 0.97, indicating that the questionnaire has high internal consistency.

In addition, the reliability coefficients of all dimensions of the questionnaire were also above 0.80, which meets the reliability requirements in academic research. And the analysis of the factors affecting the school administration uses multiple linear regression.

2. The guidelines for the school administration of middle school in Yunnan province under the "Double Reduction" policy are analyzed by using content analysis.

Research Conceptual Framework



Research Results

1. Results on the factors affecting the school administration

This section examined the relationship between the dependent variable and the 8 independent variables to verify how many independent variables affect the variables and what their patterns of influence are and analyzed the data from 450 questionnaires by multiple linear regression.

It presents detailed data on the influence of each independent variable on the dependent variable (Y: school administration). The regression model summary and regression coefficients provide an in-depth analysis of the overall model fit, the effect of the significance of the independent variables, and the validity of the model.

Table 1 Coefficients^y Matrix

Variables	The name of the variables	b	SE	β	t	p
(Constant)		-0.341	0.057	-	-5.978	< 0.001
X5	Optimizing homework design	0.154	0.018	0.177	8.564	< 0.001
X1	Improving the classroom teaching	0.135	0.018	0.153	7.349	< 0.001
X3	Optimization of course scheduling	0.141	0.018	0.162	7.809	< 0.001
X7	Home-school cooperation	0.176	0.018	0.195	9.874	< 0.001
X8	Strengthening teacher training	0.125	0.018	0.141	6.913	< 0.001
X6	Improving the quality of after-school services	0.125	0.018	0.141	6.850	< 0.001
X4	Enriching campus activities	0.126	0.017	0.140	7.398	< 0.001
X2	Strengthening the teaching evaluation system	0.133	0.019	0.146	6.978	< 0.001
R² = 0.901						

Table 1 provides unstandardized coefficients, standardized coefficients, t-test values, tolerance of the model.

And according to the equation of multiple linear regression model,

$$Y = -0.341 + 0.154x_5 + 0.135x_1 + 0.141x_3 + 0.176x_7 + 0.125x_8 + 0.125x_6 + 0.126x_4 + 0.133x_2,$$

$$Z = 0.177z_5 + 0.153z_1 + 0.162z_3 + 0.195z_7 + 0.141z_8 + 0.141z_6 + 0.140z_4 + 0.146z_2,$$

Regression coefficients for the independent variables: X5 (optimizing homework design), X1 (optimizing course scheduling), and X3 (improving the quality of classroom instruction) showed significant positive effects in all models, and the standardized coefficients had relatively high values, indicating that these variables contributed the most to Y.

The regression coefficients of the respective variables gradually stabilized as more independent variables were added. The value of R² in Model is 0.901, indicating that the variance of the dependent variable explained by the model gradually increased with the increase of the independent variable.

The Model includes all independent variables and explains more than 90% of the variance of the Y variable, indicating that the model has good predictive power.

2. Results on interview for the guideline

In this part, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 9 experts, and data mining analysis was carried out using Python and Voyant tools to explore the factors affecting school management under the “Double-Reduction” policy by means of textual word

frequency statistics, semantic network analysis, and sentiment analysis, and it has been realized to put forward the corresponding school guideline.



Figure 1 Word Cloud of High-Frequency Words in Interview Texts

Source: Author's analysis using Nvivo

A word cloud was generated by analyzing the word frequencies in the interview data, and the size of each word in the word cloud reflected its word frequency (Figure 1). By merging words with different parts of speech but similar meanings and analyzing the interview data for word frequency. The results show that the top 10 words include “school” (221), “management” (127) “students” (105), “teaching” (85) and “affect” (66) can constitute the keywords of this paper. This indicates that the respondents' answers were able to stick to the theme, and school, management, students, teaching, and affect were positioned at the core of the school administration under the “Double Reduction” policy.

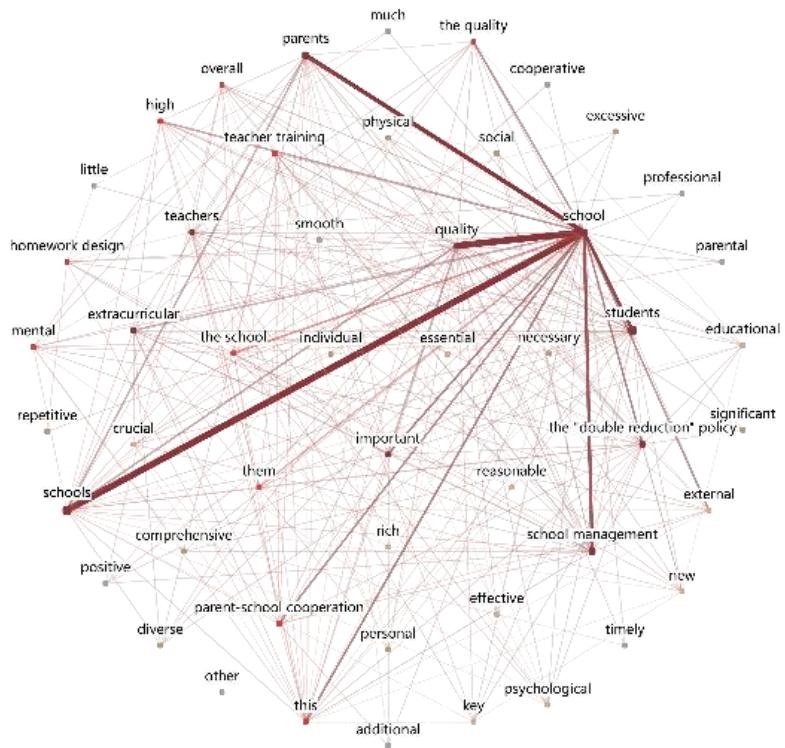


Figure 2 Semantic Network Relationship Diagram
Source: Author's analysis using Nvivo

This semantic network demonstrates the interdependencies among various aspects of school management under the 'Double Reduction' policy. The diagram highlights how improvements in curriculum design, assignments, and teacher training are essential for achieving policy success, while parent-school collaboration, after-school services, and campus activities support students' overall development. The focus on evaluation systems ensures accountability, and classroom quality remains at the core of achieving educational outcomes. The network illustrates that school administration requires a holistic and integrated approach, with each aspect reinforcing the others.

Meanwhile, the results showed that 77.19% of the interviews exhibited a positive sentiment, approximately 21.05% had a neutral sentiment, and 1.76% had a negative sentiment. As shown in Figure 4.7, the respondents were positive about the factors affecting school management under the “Double Reduction” policy, expressing positive perceptions and attitudes towards school management, while also showing concerns in their conversations about the current school management and students' learning as well as students' future development.

Research Findings

1. Factors Affecting School Administration

Regression analysis identified homework design, classroom teaching quality, and curriculum scheduling as the most impactful factors on school management, with the final model explaining over 90% of the variance in school management outcomes. These factors demonstrated strong predictive power and low multicollinearity, confirming the model's reliability. Qualitative interviews echoed these findings, with experts affirming the significance of these factors in enhancing school administration.

2. Guidelines for School Administration

Based on quantitative and qualitative findings, the following guidelines are recommended to improve school administration under the “Double Reduction” policy:

2.1 Optimize Course Scheduling: Arrange a balanced curriculum to enhance student choice and integrate interdisciplinary approaches.

2.2 Enhance Classroom Teaching Quality: Promote innovative, student-centered teaching methods and teacher professionalism through continuous training.

2.3 Refine Homework Design: Reduce redundant assignments, prioritize quality over quantity, and tailor tasks to students' individual abilities.

2.4 Strengthen Home-School Collaboration: Foster regular communication and collaborative activities to build trust between parents and educators.

2.5 Advance Teacher Training: Support teachers' professional growth with policy-focused training and reflective practices.

2.6 Enrich Extracurricular Activities: Develop diverse programs aligned with students' interests to promote holistic development.

2.7 Improve After-School Services: Provide varied, quality after-school programs that cater to students' needs.

2.8 Enhance the Evaluation System: Develop a comprehensive, multidimensional assessment model that includes input from teachers, students, and parents.

These guidelines outline pathways for optimizing school administration in the context of the “Double Reduction” policy, emphasizing the need for adaptable, evidence-based strategies to support sustainable educational development.

Discussion

1. Main findings and explanations

This study identifies the key factors affecting the administration of middle schools in Yunnan Province under the “Double Reduction” policy, with special emphasis on the role of optimizing homework design, improving the quality of classroom teaching, and optimizing curriculum arrangements. Both the regression analysis and the qualitative analysis of the expert interviews proved that these factors had the most significant impact. The findings suggest that targeted strategies focusing on these factors are necessary to achieve effective school administration within policy constraints, which is consistent with the broader goals of reducing academic stress and enhancing the student experience.

Humanistic psychology, which argues that academic stress and anxiety impede safety, belonging, and respect, confirms that structured and supportive learning environments promote better academic achievement by balancing the quality of instruction with the amount of student work. Integration with this theory suggests that by carefully planning curricula and

instructional practices, schools can better meet the academic and psychological needs of students within restrictive policies that allow for self-fulfillment.

2. Comparative analysis with previous research

Our findings are consistent with previous studies in similar educational contexts.

Chen Z. (2022) and Zhang, Z. (2023) both indicated that well-structured homework assignments, especially project-based homework assignments, increase student engagement while reducing parental supervision, which supports our findings that project- or practice-based homework assignments are better suited to develop students' self-directed learning abilities. Jiang J. (2022), Huang, L. (2024) pointed out the importance of tailored classroom instruction and curriculum design, arguing that tailored and engaging instruction is important to the development of independent learning. Jiang J. (2022), Huang, L. (2024) pointed out the importance of tailored classroom instruction and curriculum design, suggesting that tailored and engaging teaching methods reduce the need for additional tutoring outside of school.

Liu, G. (2022) and Liang, Q. (2022) emphasized that rich campus activities and after-school services can reduce the burden of students and are effective in cultivating students' interests, strengthening the system and relaxing their minds and bodies, and school administration needs to play a leading role in arranging and supervising this area to better serve the students.

This study provides empirical support for existing research by identifying feasible strategies for school administration under the “Double Reduction” policy. While previous studies have been rather one-sided, with the main general focus on school administration under the “Double-Reduction” policy focusing on, e.g., reducing the amount of homework and strengthening home-school cooperation, such as Fang Y. (2023) and Liu Y. (2024), there has been limited investigation of a holistic, integrated approach to school administration under policy constraints. Thus, our findings provide a comprehensive perspective that reveals how multifaceted strategies can create synergistic effects in school administration, thus contributing to a more nuanced understanding of effective implementation of educational policies.

3. Theoretical Implications

These findings reinforce the importance of holistic governance theory of school administration under the “Double Reduction” policy. Its applicability in understanding the dynamics of school administration under the “Double Reduction” policy aimed at reducing the school workload of students. The framework argues that effective education management relies on the ability of the government, the education sector, primary and secondary school principals, schoolteachers, and students' parents to work with each other to operationalize the reduction of students' burden. At the same time, all 8 factors have an impact on school administration, and only by recognizing the role and impact of each factor can we continue to improve the implementation of the burden reduction policy.

4. Limitations and future research directions

Despite the fruitful results, there are still some limitations of this study. First, the study focused on secondary schools in a specific region, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other educational settings or regions. Future research could extend this analysis to different educational levels or provinces to examine the broad applicability of these findings. Additionally, relying on educators' self-reports may introduce bias; therefore, future studies may consider incorporating student feedback or performance indicators to gain a more balanced perspective.

5. Synthesize the New Knowledge

This study synthesizes new knowledge by integrating quantitative and qualitative findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of school administration under the "Double Reduction" policy. It bridges existing gaps in research by presenting an integrated approach that combines curriculum optimization, improved classroom teaching, and tailored homework design. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on isolated strategies, this research demonstrates how these elements interact to create a cohesive framework for effective school management.

Recommendations

1. Practical Recommendations for Schools

1.1 Optimize Curriculum and Scheduling:

Align curriculum with student development stages, balancing major and minor subjects. Integrate interdisciplinary courses to foster critical thinking and creativity.

1.2 Improve Classroom Teaching and Professional Development:

Provide regular teacher training on innovative teaching methods and inquiry-based learning. Use peer evaluations and observations to support continuous improvement.

1.3 Strengthen Home-School Cooperation:

Establish online platforms and regular communication channels for parent involvement. Offer parent workshops to enhance understanding of educational objectives.

2. Policy Recommendations for Government

2.1 Strengthen Policy Support and Financial Resources:

Allocate targeted funding for teacher training, after-school services, and resources for rural schools. Implement monitoring systems to track and assess policy effectiveness.

2.2 Promote Teacher Professional Development:

Create long-term training plans that align with new policy goals, including certification updates. Encourage innovative teaching practices that support reduced academic burdens.

3. Future Research Directions

3.1 Explore Multiple Intelligences Theory in Curriculum Design:

Investigate strategies to tailor curricula to various student intelligences, improving engagement and learning outcomes.

3.2 Longitudinal Studies on Policy Impact:

Conduct long-term research on the "Double Reduction" policy's effects across different school stages, identifying successes and challenges over time.

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