



Nova Science Press

Journal of Psychology & Education

Vol. 1, No. 5 (2026)

**Practical Pathways for Coordinating Burden Reduction and Quality Improvement
in Primary and Secondary Schools Under the Double Reduction Policy**

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Journal of Psychology & Education • Vol. 1, No. 5 (2026)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.66581/mtjk6269>

Received 15 June 2026 • Accepted: 26 June 2026 • Published 30 June 2026

CITATION

Tang, L., Duan, X., & Shen, Z. (2026). Practical pathways for coordinating burden reduction and quality improvement in primary and secondary schools under the Double Reduction policy. *Journal of Psychology & Education*, 1(5), 12.

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Abstract

Objective: This paper constructs a practice-oriented pathway for coordinating burden reduction and quality improvement in primary and secondary schools under China's Double Reduction policy. **Methods:** Drawing on policy analysis, school-based practice reflection, and the logic of instructional improvement, the study develops an implementation framework covering school governance, homework redesign, classroom transformation, after-school services, home-school collaboration, and evaluation reform. **Results:** The analysis identifies a coordinated pathway that clarifies school-level governance responsibilities, reconstructs homework as diagnostic evidence of learning, improves classroom efficiency through meaningful learning tasks, builds differentiated after-school services, strengthens home-school communication, and replaces score-centered accountability with process-oriented quality monitoring. **Conclusion:** The central purpose of Double Reduction is not a simple reduction in learning time, but a structural shift from externally imposed pressure to internally generated educational quality. Sustainable burden reduction becomes possible only when curriculum, teaching, homework, services, and evaluation are redesigned as an integrated system.

Keywords: Double Reduction; burden reduction; quality improvement; homework governance; after-school service; basic education

Introduction

China's Double Reduction policy, issued in 2021 for compulsory education, aims to reduce excessive homework and off-campus tutoring burdens. Its policy intention is not merely the administrative compression of homework or tutoring time, but a deeper reconstruction of the

ecology of basic education (General Office of the CPC Central Committee & General Office of the State Council, 2021). When external tutoring is restricted and written homework is regulated, schools become the central sites in which educational quality, learning equity, and student well-being must be secured.

In practice, however, burden reduction and quality improvement can easily become disconnected. Some schools interpret reduction primarily as numerical control over homework quantity, while the quality of classroom learning remains unchanged. Some teachers reduce assignments but compensate by accelerating classroom pace, thereby shifting pressure rather than reducing it. Some parents, concerned about examination competition, transfer the burden to hidden tutoring, repeated practice, or intensive home supervision. These tensions indicate that Double Reduction cannot be implemented through isolated administrative measures. It requires a coordinated system in which curriculum design, classroom teaching, homework, after-school services, family education, and evaluation reform support one another.

This paper addresses the practical question of how primary and secondary schools can reduce students' excessive academic burden while improving the quality of learning. Rather than treating burden reduction as a policy slogan, the study regards it as both a school-based governance problem and an instructional-improvement problem. The central argument is that sustainable implementation depends on a shift from time-based management to quality-based learning design. The paper therefore constructs a practical pathway that connects governance, pedagogy, service provision, home-school collaboration, and evaluation.

Theoretical Basis and Policy Logic

The policy logic of Double Reduction is grounded in three related concerns. First, excessive homework and shadow education increase students' academic pressure and weaken the developmental functions of schooling. Second, dependence on off-campus tutoring can enlarge educational inequality, because families with greater economic and cultural resources can purchase additional learning opportunities. Third, an examination-oriented learning culture often narrows the curriculum and reduces students' time for sleep, exercise, reading, social participation, and personal interests.

From the perspective of school improvement, reducing burden does not mean lowering academic standards. Learning quality is not determined simply by the number of exercises completed, but by the alignment among learning objectives, meaningful tasks, timely feedback, and opportunities for transfer. Research on formative assessment suggests that feedback, diagnostic evidence, and student involvement in learning goals can improve learning more effectively than repetitive low-level practice (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Similarly, studies of effective teaching emphasize clarity, feedback, and visible learning processes rather than the mechanical accumulation of learning time (Hattie, 2009).

Double Reduction also has an equity dimension. Studies of shadow education show that private tutoring can operate as a hidden market that reshapes educational opportunities outside formal schooling (Bray, 2009). If mainstream schools cannot provide high-quality teaching and appropriate after-school support, restrictions on tutoring may produce anxiety or substitution effects. The core responsibility of schools is therefore to make high-quality learning available

within the public school system, so that students do not need to rely excessively on external supplementation.

Research Design

This paper adopts a practice-oriented analytical design. The research object is not a single school case, but an implementation mechanism that can guide school-based reform under Double Reduction. The analysis follows a chain of policy requirement, school problem, practice pathway, and quality evidence. On this basis, the study synthesizes common implementation tasks in primary and secondary schools and organizes them into a coordinated framework.

The analytical framework includes five dimensions: school governance, homework design, classroom teaching, after-school service, and evaluation. These dimensions correspond to the main sites where student burden is generated or reduced. Governance determines whether responsibility is clear; homework reflects the relationship between teaching and learning evidence; classroom teaching determines the quality of core learning time; after-school services influence equity and differentiated support; and evaluation shapes the behavior of teachers, students, and parents.

Because this paper is a practice-pathway study rather than a statistical evaluation, it does not claim causal effects based on experimental data. Its value lies in clarifying operational principles, implementation steps, and quality indicators that schools can adapt to their own contexts. Future empirical studies may test the framework through longitudinal school data, student workload surveys, classroom observation, teacher interviews, and comparative evaluation.

Practical Pathways for Coordinated Implementation

First, schools should establish a governance mechanism that links burden reduction with quality improvement. A school-level Double Reduction working group should not only check homework time, but also review assignment quality, classroom progress, after-school service participation, student well-being, and parent feedback. The principal's office, teaching-research groups, grade groups, moral education departments, and parent committees should share information through a regular review cycle. This converts Double Reduction from a compliance task into a continuous improvement process.

Second, homework should be redesigned from quantity control to learning diagnosis. In many schools, homework becomes burdensome because it repeats classroom exercises without differentiation. A quality-oriented homework system should include basic consolidation tasks, optional extension tasks, interdisciplinary inquiry tasks, and reflection tasks. Teachers should estimate completion time before assigning homework, collect evidence of common errors, and use homework results to adjust subsequent instruction. The key question is not only whether homework is reduced, but whether each task has a clear learning function.

Third, classroom teaching should become the main field of quality improvement. If classroom efficiency remains low, reducing homework will be perceived as a risk to achievement. Teachers need to strengthen lesson preparation around core concepts, learning difficulties, and transfer tasks. Classroom time should be used for explanation, inquiry, practice, feedback, and correction rather than one-way coverage of content. Cooperative learning, problem-based tasks, and formative assessment should be adopted selectively when they serve learning objectives. A

high-quality classroom allows students to understand, practice, and receive feedback before they leave school.

Fourth, after-school services should shift from supervision to developmental support. After-school time is often used only for homework completion or childcare. Under Double Reduction, it should become a structured service system that includes academic support, reading, arts, sports, science and technology, labor education, and mental-health activities. Schools should design differentiated service menus for students with different needs. For students with learning difficulties, after-school services can provide targeted guidance; for students with strong interests, they can provide enrichment activities; and for all students, they can offer time and space for holistic development.

Fifth, home-school collaboration should guide parents from anxiety-driven supervision to developmental support. Parents are important participants in Double Reduction because family expectations can either consolidate or undermine school reform. Schools should explain the purpose of burden reduction, provide clear homework standards, share evidence of student development, and offer guidance on sleep, reading, exercise, and digital-device use. Parent education should not rely on moral persuasion alone; it should provide practical tools that help families build reasonable routines and trust school-based learning.

Sixth, evaluation should be reconstructed to support quality rather than pressure. If schools continue to evaluate teachers mainly by test rankings and students mainly by scores, Double Reduction will remain superficial. Schools should develop a multi-source quality-monitoring system that includes academic progress, classroom participation, homework quality, physical health, reading habits, interest development, and psychological well-being. Examination results

remain important, but they should be interpreted as one form of evidence rather than the sole purpose of schooling.

Implementation Framework

The practical pathway can be organized as a closed-loop framework of diagnosis, design, action, evidence, and adjustment. Diagnosis identifies where burden is produced; design translates policy goals into school routines; action implements changes in classrooms, homework, services, and family communication; evidence records workload, learning quality, and student development; and adjustment uses evidence to refine practice. This closed loop prevents Double Reduction from becoming a one-time campaign.

Dimension	Main Problem	Practice Path	Quality Evidence
Governance	Policy tasks are fragmented across departments.	Build a school-level review cycle linking homework, classroom teaching, services, and student well-being.	Monthly workload records; teaching-research meeting minutes; parent and student feedback.
Homework	Assignments emphasize repetition and uniform quantity.	Design layered, diagnostic, and feedback-oriented homework with time estimation.	Completion time, error patterns, revision quality, and teacher feedback records.
Classroom	Low-efficiency teaching transfers pressure to after-class practice.	Use goal-focused teaching, core tasks, formative checks, and in-class correction.	Classroom observation, student work samples, and learning-progress evidence.
After-school Service	Services remain limited to care or homework supervision.	Provide academic support, reading, sports, arts, inquiry, and interest-based programs.	Participation rate, program diversity, student satisfaction, and development portfolios.
Evaluation	Score ranking drives hidden burden and parental anxiety.	Combine academic progress with well-being, habits, participation, and growth evidence.	Student growth files, health records, multi-source evaluation reports.

Table 1. A Coordinated Implementation Framework for Burden Reduction and Quality Improvement

Key Difficulties and Countermeasures

The first difficulty is the tension between reduced workload and examination pressure. In many contexts, entrance examinations remain a strong external constraint. Schools should therefore improve the precision of teaching rather than simply reducing practice. Grade groups

can develop shared lesson plans, common error banks, and targeted remedial resources so that students receive effective support within school time.

The second difficulty is the uneven professional capacity of teachers. High-quality homework design, formative assessment, and differentiated after-school services require professional knowledge and collaboration. Schools should build teaching-research communities that focus on real student work rather than only on lesson-display activities. Teachers can jointly analyze assignments, compare student responses, and refine task design. Such professional collaboration reduces individual workload while improving instructional quality.

The third difficulty is parental anxiety. When parents do not understand school reform, they may seek hidden tutoring or add extra assignments at home. Schools should make learning processes visible. Weekly learning notes, sample feedback, reading records, and student growth portfolios can show parents what students have learned and where support is needed. Transparent communication helps families replace excessive control with informed cooperation.

The fourth difficulty is resource inequality among schools. High-quality after-school services require teachers, facilities, community resources, and funding. Education authorities should support schools through district-level resource platforms, teacher rotation, shared online courses, community partnerships, and targeted funding. Without external support, schools with weaker resources may face heavier implementation pressure and lower service quality.

Discussion

The analysis shows that burden reduction and quality improvement are not inherently contradictory. They become contradictory only when schools equate quality with additional time

and repetitive practice. If learning design is improved, less homework can still support better learning because assignments become more diagnostic, classrooms become more efficient, and after-school services become more differentiated. The essential reform is a change in the production mode of learning quality.

This paper also suggests that Double Reduction should be understood as ecological reform. Student burden is produced by the interaction of policy expectations, school routines, teacher practices, family anxiety, assessment systems, and social competition. Therefore, a single measure cannot solve the problem. The coordinated pathway proposed here emphasizes alignment: homework reform must be connected with classroom teaching; after-school services must be connected with equity; home-school collaboration must be connected with evaluation reform; and evaluation reform must be connected with student development.

At the same time, implementation should avoid formalism. Reducing the number of written assignments without improving task quality may lead to superficial compliance. Providing after-school services without curriculum design may increase teachers' workload without improving students' development. Replacing public rankings with hidden rankings may maintain pressure in another form. Schools need evidence-based monitoring to identify these risks and adjust practice continuously.

Limitations and Future Perspectives

This study is primarily a conceptual and practice-oriented analysis. It constructs an implementation framework but does not provide statistical evidence from a large-scale empirical sample. The proposed pathways should therefore be interpreted as operational guidance rather

than verified causal conclusions. Different regions, school stages, and student groups may require different emphases.

Future research can examine the framework through mixed methods. Quantitative studies may measure changes in homework time, sleep duration, academic progress, participation in after-school services, and parent anxiety before and after implementation. Qualitative studies may use classroom observation, teacher interviews, student learning diaries, and parent focus groups to identify how the mechanisms operate in real schools. Comparative case studies across urban, rural, and county schools can further clarify the conditions for sustainable implementation.

Conclusion

Under the Double Reduction policy, the practical task of primary and secondary schools is to reduce excessive academic burden while improving the quality of school-based learning. This paper argues that the two goals can be coordinated through an integrated pathway consisting of governance reconstruction, diagnostic homework design, classroom quality improvement, differentiated after-school services, home-school collaboration, and developmental evaluation.

The core of Double Reduction is not a mechanical subtraction of homework and tutoring, but a structural improvement of the educational system. When schools provide efficient classrooms, meaningful assignments, rich services, reasonable evaluation, and trustworthy communication with families, students' learning burden can be reduced without weakening educational quality. Such reform requires sustained professional work, evidence-based adjustment, and shared responsibility among schools, families, and education authorities.

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