

Teacher workload and intensifying demands: Lessons from the Chinese double reduction policy

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The 2018 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results revealed a negative correlation between student academic achievement and wellbeing in China, indicating that higher academic performance often coincides with lower student well-being. In response to these findings and the broader issues within the Chinese education system, the Double Reduction Policy was introduced in July 2021 to reduce the volume of homework and limit the scope of off-campus subject-based tutoring.

This article examines the impact and challenges of this policy within a school by employing semi-structured interviews to gather qualitative data from various stakeholders, including teachers, students and parents. The study identified several findings and challenges, including inadequate quantity and quality of after-school services; an unclear teacher remuneration system, which causes uncertainty and stress among teachers; and a mismatch between the expectations of parents and the goals of the double reduction policy.

The study employed network governance theory and Mohe under the concept of Asia as the method to understand how teachers and other stakeholders manage and allocate resources to adapt to the new policy requirements. Network governance theory suggests that teachers are willing to collaborate and share their resources to enhance students' learning experiences despite potential personal and professional sacrifices. This article argues for better after-school services, improved homework-setting practices, a clear teacher evaluation system and the alignment of parental expectations with policy goals. It suggests leveraging off-campus resources and fostering collaborative efforts among stakeholders to overcome these challenges. Additionally, it suggests a shift from an exam-oriented educational system to a more holistic approach to address the underlying issues affecting student well-being and academic achievement in China.

Keywords: *student wellbeing; academic achievement; teacher workload; education reform; double reduction policy; Network governance and Mohe*

INTRODUCTION

The reciprocal and interconnected relationship between wellbeing and learning is important. Wellbeing positively influences student learning outcomes, and success in learning enhances student wellbeing. However, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) as an international benchmark revealed a negative correlation between student academic achievement and wellbeing in China, indicating that higher academic performance often coincides with lower student wellbeing. The Chinese Double Reduction Policy (DRP) was introduced in July 2021 to reduce the volume of homework and to limit the scope of off-campus subject-based tutoring (Ministry of Education, 2021c).

To compensate for the two reductions, an extra two hours of afterschool service sessions were introduced (Ministry of Education, 2021c). By 22 September 2021, it was found that 96.3% of the 108,000 schools surveyed for compulsory education had provided after-school services. Over 5.3 million schoolteachers participated in these services, and around 77.4 million students signed up for them (Ministry of Education, 2021b). As of the end of October 2021, 99% of compulsory education schools nationwide reported offering after-school services (Chen & Zhao, 2022), indicating a successful implementation of the DRP (Lu et al., 2022).

The DRP positions teachers at the forefront of educational reform, significantly altering the landscape of academic expectations and workload. To strike a balance between alleviating academic pressure on students and upholding educational quality, teachers must navigate new challenges as they adapt to these changes (Jin & Chen, 2022). Collaborations with students, parents, and principals are crucial to ensuring the policy's effectiveness in achieving educational outcomes (Ministry of Education, 2021b). Through the lens of network governance theory, the study reported on in this article examined the increased workload and intensified demand encountered by teachers in a school case study and explored how various stakeholders collaborate to address these challenges.

The overarching research question to guide this study is: What are the challenges and strategies for teachers under the newly implemented DRP in China?

LITERATURE REVIEW

From 2009 to 2018, the PISA consistently ranked Chinese education at the top. This high-performing Chinese model is frequently referenced and borrowed by other countries and regions, such as Germany and the United Kingdom. However, this 'Chinese model' represents students' outstanding academic achievement at the expense of their health and wellbeing. To rectify this perspective and to promote a more 'student-centred' approach to enhancing school education (Yesil & Aras, 2024), the Chinese government introduced the DRP in July 2021 to reduce the amount of homework, limit off-campus subject-based tutoring, and implement after-school services. The following sections discuss the literature addressing the various challenges and strategies of teachers engaged in DRP.

Extended duties and working hours for teachers

Chinese teachers work longer hours than their international counterparts, who average 40.8 per week (OECD, 2019). The introduction of the DRP has worsened this situation (Teng et al.,

2024). The policy has heightened teacher expectations and responsibilities regarding homework assistance and extracurricular activities during the additional two hours of afterschool services (Ministry of Education, 2021a). Fang et al. (2024) found that over one-third of teachers participated in the after-school service at least three days per week. Cao et al. (2022) reported that teachers' daily on-campus time stretched up to 11 hours under the policy. Teachers were especially burdened with extra responsibilities, including more administrative work, homework redesign and corrections, preparations for after-school services and policy-related activities (Teng et al., 2024; Yang, 2022). The new requirements resulting from DRP require teachers to labour for an additional 1.5-3 hours per day on class preparations and homework corrections (Liu, 2022).

Furthermore, due to the staff shortage in the after-school service sessions, subject teachers were required to run non-subject activities, such as physical education, music and arts, which they are not trained for, thus causing them extra stress and emotional issues (Jin & Chen, 2022). Research indicated that teachers tended to show lower motivation and job satisfaction after introducing the DRP (Cao et al., 2022). The increased work pressure significantly intruded on teachers' private time, causing a significant work-life imbalance (Xiao, 2024). Senior teachers reported their physical wellbeing was impacted due to the increased workload (Liu, 2022), and younger teachers with families reported losing time to care for their own families. The resulting job dissatisfaction has led to conflicts between school and teachers.

Inequitable incentive for teachers

Despite the extended workload and time, after-school services subsidies are not yet fully in place, leaving teachers' rights insufficiently safeguarded (Xiao et al., 2024). Hence, this is causing teachers' dissatisfaction with their compensations under the DRP (Fang et al., 2024). A survey of 16,166 head teachers found a discrepancy between the actual after-school service subsidy received by head teachers and the amount they anticipated receiving (Liu & Zhao, 2022). Schools in Jiangxi Province charge each student RMB 600 (approximately A\$120) per year, while schools in Henan Province charge over 10 times more (RMB 6,600 RMB, approximately A\$1,320) (Yang & Chen, 2022). This inequitable incentive system has further exacerbated conflicts and reduced teachers' job satisfaction (Xiao et al., 2024).

Unrealistic expectations of teachers by parents

Family-school collaborations have become more crucial to the policy's successful implementation (Ministry of Education, 2021a). However, collaboration between schools and families has not yet formed because of a lack of detailed practical measures from the central government, such as clarifying the roles of families and schools (Wang & Ru, 2022). Chinese parents tend to have higher expectations of teachers (Chan et al., 2021). Because parents do not fully understand their duties as required under the DRP, they delegate entirely their children's educational responsibilities to teachers (Cao et al., 2022). Parents even hope teachers can compensate for what they have missed from off-campus tuition reduction (Xu, 2023). This has created a mismatch of expectations and conflicts between parents and teachers about parental involvement in students' education (Zhao, 2022). Yang (2022) reported that some families have taken an extreme approach by assuming a *shuǎi-shǒu-zhǎng-guì* (甩手掌柜) (referring to people relegating all their responsibilities to others or avoiding any active involvement in their work) position with minimal parental engagement in their children's education. Teachers were found to play multiple roles, including classroom teacher, security guard, school nurse, and

counsellor, as well as being in charge of dormitory and dining arrangements for boarding students (Ren et al., 2022).

Mitigating teachers' workload and compensation for teachers' additional work hours

The literature points to some strategies for reducing teachers' workloads. Yang et al. (2023) found that because implementing the DRP in schools is difficult for teachers, it demands the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders, including the government, schools and families. A strategy is for the government to allocate additional funding and systematically shift financial allocations to afterschool services to compensate teachers for their additional after-school services (Liu & Yuan, 2024). While parents have expressed their disagreement with schools charging them fees (Li & Zhen, 2022), it is worth noting that parents are willing to pay higher-end off-campus tuition at the market price of RMB 500 (approximately A\$100) per hour (Song, 2022). The Ministry of Education has promulgated a notice of 'Key points of the work of the Teacher Affairs Department of the Ministry of Education in 2023' to remunerate teachers for participating in afterschool services (Ministry of Education, 2023). Jiangsu Province offers teachers a minimum salary of RMB 60 (approximately A\$12) per lesson (Yao & Zhang, 2022).

Enhancing professional support and flexible working hours for teachers

Eliminating administrative or non-teaching tasks is one of the essential strategies to reduce teachers' burdens. In this way, teachers can concentrate on their teaching and professional development (Zeng & Du, 2023). It is noted that the DRP has resulted in a substantial increase of 29.4% in teachers' administrative responsibilities (Yang, 2022). Also, flexible working hours for teachers has provided teachers with greater autonomy in managing their time and for relaxation, thereby allowing them to regulate the time spent on campus outside of their teaching responsibilities (Liu, 2022; Ministry of Education, 2021a). Finally, Psychological support and counselling are also essential services to teachers.

Strengthening parents' involvement in their children's study

The DRP emphasised the importance of good family-school collaboration and defined, clearer roles and responsibilities for schools and parents (Yuan, 2022). The successful implementation of the policy appears to strongly correlate with the trust and effective involvement of parents (Zhang & Xiong, 2022). Parental involvement in their children's education positively influences students' socio-emotional status and academic performance (Xu, 2023). The academic motivations of students are significantly influenced by the interests of their parents (OECD, 2018). Parents appear to find it more beneficial when teachers instruct them on facilitating their children's learning at home (Cooper et al., 2006). Wang and Ru (2022) argued that schools should provide more opportunities for teachers and parents to interact, including by establishing parent-teacher associations (PTAs); inviting parents to participate in student activities; increasing the scheduling of individual or group meetings with teachers; and initiating the development of a comprehensive collaboration plan to benefit students' successes.

NETWORK GOVERNANCE AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Network governance is another mode of governance, an alternative to bureaucratic governance and market governance. It is defined as a 'self-organising, inter-organisational networks characterised by interdependence, resource exchange, rules of the game and significant

autonomy from the state' (Rhodes, 1997, p. 15). The popularity of network governance is seen in the adoption by governments to accommodate the interests of multiple participating stakeholders in policy or decision-making. Often, network governance is carried out through decentralisation, policy collaborations, partnerships, negotiations and resource exchanges. Network governance is supported by a growing body of research and practice in the modern world (Ball, 2008). Under this approach, the sovereign state does not exert hegemony or absolute authority (Chan, 2014). Instead, the state enables a wide range of actors to participate, interact, solve complex problems and attain collective objectives (Klijn, 2008; Koppenjan et al., 2004). Network governance has been credited with enhancing efficiency and promoting fairness in response to socio-economic coordination (Milner et al., 2020).

Ball (2008) applied network governance theory in Education. Disagreeing with the 'hollowing out' of this framework in Education, Ball advocated network governance as 'a new modality of state power, agency, and social action, and indeed a new form of state' (p. 748). Further on, Ball refuted the notion that networks are neither a complete replacement of the hierarchy and market governance approach nor fundamental alteration in the way the state governs education. Instead, he argued it is a 'mix between the different elements of government—bureaucracy, markets, and networks' (Ball, 2016, p. 559). Therefore, the application of network governance has elicited diverse opinions between political science and Education.

Scott and Thomas (2017) claimed that network governance is a form of social coordination that brings together the joint efforts of government agencies, businesses, and members of communities to address public issues. Ball and Junemann (2012) and Goodwin and Grix (2011) argued that network governance has become a more prevalent practice for governments to engage various stakeholders from different sectors to cooperate in creating and implementing policies in the public and education sectors. In Education governance, Unlike the government hierarchical control and inter-school competition market emphasising parental choice approaches (Whitty, 2000), network governance has been utilised as a method to enable collaboration among government, schools and communities in the Education reform process (Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2004). It is also a popular strategy for facilitating the turnaround of persistently low-performing schools and building school capacity through the joint efforts of external- and internal-school stakeholders (Meyers & Hitt, 2017; Muijs, 2010).

Policy-related studies are increasingly being seen as a cultural phenomenon (Baice, 2023). The concepts of network governance and policy networks are interwoven in the studies of the Chinese context. Their social and political science applications are becoming increasingly prevalent among Chinese scholars. The direct translations of 'network governance' in Chinese is *wangluo guanzhi* (网络管制) or *wangluo zhili* (网络治理).

Various empirical studies have applied network governance and policy networks to public policy and management issues, revealing that Chinese policy-making initially concentrated on China's Communist Party (CCP) and Central Government, then progressively expanded to non-state policy actors, such as stakeholders and interest groups from various sectors. The studies examined rural taxation reform (Tang, 2004), politics in the provincial legislatures (Xia, 2008), public health insurance reform (Zheng et al., 2010), collaborative environmental governance (Huang et al., 2022), rural governance performance (Jiang et al., 2023); and it further extended to educational research, including examination of the complexity in university governance (Lang & Wang, 2024), interactions between multiple actors in school turnaround (Tao, 2022), transformation of state-owned enterprise schools (Chan, 2019), school-to-school collaborations (Fang, 2022), and implementation of *Suzhi* education in the Chinese Party Schools (Zhou, 2023).

Even though there appears to be an increasing trend in the growth of the application of the network governance concept in China, the topic is still under-researched and far from being mature (Chan, 2014). The main concept of network governance was simply translated from Western literature and applied into a Chinese context with the possible meaning (Chan, 2014; Zheng et al., 2010). Due to existing issues in China's public governance, such as a relatively weak public voice and the reliance of social organisations on government, many Chinese studies view network governance as a promising and innovative approach with potential significance to advocate in public governance (Zheng et al., 2010).

ASIA AS METHOD

Western theoretical frameworks have been playing a dominant role in social science research, and Asian scholars have struggled to fit existing Western theories to Asian contexts and explain Asian-specific phenomena (Zhang & Chan, 2023). 'Asia' is a convenient term for distinguishing a local situation from its Western counterpart (Bowring, 1987). Chen (2010) regarded 'Asia as the "method" or an imaginary anchoring point and that societies in Asia can become each other's point of reference, so that the understanding of the self may be transformed, and subjectivity rebuilt' (p. 212). 'Asia' has three main components: translation, base entities and inter-referencing (Zhang & Chan, 2023).

To localise the concept of network governance better in the Chinese context, Ming Xia (2000) has initiated translating network governance to Chinese *Mohe* 磨合, a grinding process of automation used as a metaphor to describe different new components that adapt and fit each other to function harmoniously. Inspired by Xia, Chan (2014) applied network governance theories to state-owned enterprises' transformation through the lens of 'Asia as a method'. This new 'Asia as a method' research started to become popular, not as a challenge to Western theory but as a transformation of Asian ideas to the West and a supplement to the existing theoretical bodies. The study reported in this paper aims to explore the application of network governance theory further in the Chinese context.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative approach. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews at a Zhejiang Province, Southern China public school. A semi-structured interview was employed in this study. Galleta (2013) notes that this form of interview allows versatility and flexibility such as particular aspects of research questions to be explored, as well as unique perspectives and insights on the study topic to be provided by the participants. In this research, we interviewed one school principal, one administrator and five teachers. Each participant was interviewed for 45 minutes with the same set of questions to accurately gather and combine consistent responses (Bryman, 2012). Interviews were audio-recorded on an electronic device. Parents and junior secondary students were involved in focus groups and invited through an advertisement on the school noticeboard or personal acquaintances and references (snowballing) (O'Leary, 2017).

Thematic analysis was utilised to analyse and make sense of interview transcripts. Core themes were identified and interpreted through coded text (Bryman, 2016), aiming to identify and explain the key data elements guided by the research question (Clarke & Braun, 2017). In this research, we prioritised the researcher's ethical obligations by ensuring that the participants were fully informed, their confidentiality was maintained, they were not subjected to physical

or psychological harm, and the data was collected anonymously (O'Leary, 2017). This study obtained approval from the University Human Research Ethics Committee before the data collection process.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section reports the research findings by outlining teachers' challenges after implementing the DRP in their schools. It also discusses strategies to overcome the challenges.

Heavier workload and longer working hours for teachers

The teaching workload and external duties have been significantly increased after the implementation of DRP. Three teachers shared their views on this matter. Cathy, a Mathematics teacher, explained:

Before the double reduction policy, we conducted three teaching sessions per day, but now we teach an additional two sessions, including an after-school session and an evening session.

Zoe, leader of teaching and research group, mentioned that teachers are required to work during the weekend:

I am required to come to work on Sunday evening for students' evening session; we worked between Monday and Friday evening. Each of the five main subject teachers will be responsible for one weekday evening per week.

Sunny, an Information technology teacher, expressed:

Teachers often feel overburdened with energy, particularly after finishing their evening class at 9 p.m. and arriving home at 10 p.m. Then, they need to arrive at school at 7 a.m. the following morning. Their daily workload is too much for them. The challenge to the family is very prominent. Teachers are taking care of other people's children, but they cannot take care of their own children.

There are several solutions to address the aforementioned challenges, such as arrangements in which the school provides housing for instructors who live a long way away from the school and offers flexible teaching arrangements.

Naomi, a Chinese teacher, argued that shared accommodation will be provided to the teachers when needed.

If teachers are required to conduct the first morning session at 7:30 a.m. after the late evening class the previous day, they cannot return home because their houses are outside the school's district. The school will provide apartment-style accommodation.

Cathy, a Mathematics teacher, mentioned the flexible teaching arrangement at the school.

The school tries its best to accommodate the teachers. The teachers are giving two half-days (previously just one-half day) to rest and recover. Additionally, teachers can exchange their after-school sessions or evening sessions with other teachers if they have urgent matters to attend to. This flexibility is great.

Implementing the DRP in schools is tough for teachers because it has increased their workload and lengthened their working hours. This point supports Liu's (2022) findings that teachers stayed at school for more than 11 hours. Their private time has been largely squeezed by the demands of school and parents, leaving them feeling helpless in managing their own families

(Yang, 2022) and resulting in a work-life imbalance (Xiao et al., 2024). Teachers are important stakeholders, so school officials do their utmost to support them by providing temporary accommodation and flexible teaching arrangements. Several studies support the availability of flexible working hours (Fang et al., 2024; Liu, 2022; Ministry of Education, 2021a), but temporary accommodations are school-based innovations found in this study. Network governance provides a lens to examine how these stakeholders (in this case, teachers and schools) work or negotiate with one another to get good outcomes. This framework enhances efficiency and promotes fairness, but the negotiation process takes a while (Milner et al., 2020).

Inequitable incentive for teachers

The DRP has placed new demands on teachers to extend their work hours. It is a form of exploiting the teacher without proper compensation. Teachers are not motivated to work longer hours or even weekends.

Hubert, a science teacher, expressed:

Our government assigned all responsibility for student education to schools and teachers, but not to parents or the community. This is not only an incorrect premise, but it also represents exploitative behaviour. Why don't parents and the community take responsibility in this area? Compared to commercial private supplemental tutoring operations, teachers earn a much lesser remuneration for their extended work hours. The teacher will get a maximum of ¥ 780 per semester, for two times a year. They are not adequately rewarded for their efforts.

Zoe, a leader of teaching and research group, added:

My school offers three daily extra sessions for students, with a fee of around ¥500 (A\$100) every semester. This is equivalent to one day's tutoring fees in off-campus commercial tuition centres prior to the double reduction policy.

To remedy this issue, teachers and parents proposed some strategies. For example, Hubert, a Science teacher, suggested that the schools identify whether this 'service' is a public welfare activity or market behaviour. If it is for public welfare, there should be no fee; if it is a market behaviour, the school needs to charge the full market price. Now, it is somewhere in between. She added, 'if parents pay ¥ 500 per session, they will pay more attention to their child's learning, also the teachers will feel more valuable and motivated'.

Yolanda, a Year 8 parent, even proposed a bigger idea:

We are willing to pay the tutoring fee if the school invites off-campus training providers to take care of classes, while the school provides the venue.

However, not all the parents interviewed had the same thoughts. Penny, a Year 9 parent, expressed:

We are working class anyway, not rich. It is ok that the school charges at the moment is reasonable for us. The previous off-campus tuition fees were too expensive.

However, Zoe, a leader of the teaching and research group, added,

We devote in this teaching profession because you love it, rather than the salary only.

Financial incentive is one of the important factors in valuing an individual's labour and efforts. However, a gap exists between schoolteachers' actual payment and their anticipated amount,

lowering teachers' work motivation and job satisfaction (Fang et al., 2024). Teachers feel discouraged by the inequitable compensation compared to the market price of off-campus tuition. However, parents react differently to the willingness to match the school charges with the commercial tuition fees (Song, 2022). Research revealed that some school teachers were previously involved in off-campus tuition prior to the DRP (Pan, 2024), with a higher payment from those institutions (Wang, 2023). The market prices for private tutoring vary across regions in China, normally ranging from 80 RMB to around 200 RMB per hour (approximately A\$16 to A\$40) (Chusan, 2023). In this case, the equality of teachers' compensation for afterschool services is questionable compared to the market price of off-campus tuition.

Thus, the situation requires the government to set clear remuneration policy guidelines and more financial allocations for schoolteachers. The Ministry of Education (2023) has identified the urgency of safeguarding teachers' remuneration in afterschool services at a central government level. As a neighbouring Province to Zhejiang, Jiangsu Province offers teachers a minimum salary of RMB 60 (approximately A\$12) per lesson (Yao & Zhang, 2022). This provides a good model and gives hope to teachers in Zhejiang to get more reasonable compensation.

Rhodes (1997) argued that network governance results in 'significant autonomy from the state', thereby 'hollowing out' a central government's power in the policy community. However, as a base entity, China's centralised state power grants the Central government extensive authority to implement its policies. Therefore, *Mohe*, under Asia as method concept, is not required to exclude the centralised control and provides another lens to examine this Chinese case.

Unrealistic expectations of teachers by parents

Some parents seem to 'handover' their kids entirely to their teachers, with no regard for their children's studies and no communication with schools. Cathy, a Mathematics teacher, noted:

Parents cooperate minimally at this school, with some simply giving over their children. Teachers carry major responsibility for the learning of many 'left behind' students [whose parents work in other provinces], despite their parents' seeming lack of interest. They don't even attend parent-teacher interviews.

However, some parents can go to the other extreme, contacting their children's teachers through all communication channels, including social media and making phone calls outside school hours.

Wendy, a Year 8 parent, described this relationship as follows:

If I don't understand something, I'll send the teacher a WeChat message, and if that doesn't work, I'll phone him. The teacher is capable of doing this. I frequently communicate with the teacher. Allow him to assist me in encouraging my children, because ten sentences of encouragement from a parent may not be equivalent to one sentence from a teacher . . . It's great that the DR policy lessened parents' load, as teachers handled a lot of work that we didn't have to do.

Fey, a Year 7 student, indicated that:

Since private supplementary tutoring is no longer available outside of schools, I will seek guidance from our teachers. For example, if I am unsure about a science issue, I will submit it to my teacher over WeChat and ask for his help. He will get back to me shortly and teach me how to solve it. I believe I can comprehend him since he always speaks to me through audio messages.

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Yolanda, a Year 8 parent, added:

We want to help our children with their academics, but our lack of understanding and the complexity of the school curriculum limit our abilities to help.

Zoe, a teacher, stated:

Students finish their lunch, dinner, and the most of their schoolwork. Teachers are under a lot of pressure; it takes up too much of their energy.

The tensions described refer to the discrepancies in the interpretations of ‘supervision’ of children’s studies between parents and teachers. The school established an innovative parent-child cloud platform to actively engage parents. Principal Julia explained:

We also offer parent-child cloud platforms as a new space specifically designed for parents. They also participated in and worked on several cloud platform projects, such as mobile phone issues, communication on learning environment creation, and so on. In this way, the school influence how parents improve their involvement.

Balanced family-school collaboration became more crucial to the policy’s successful implementation. At one extreme, parents’ handing their children over to teachers without any communication with schools is causing many problems for the teachers. These findings align with the research conducted by Yang (2022), which shows that certain families tend to adopt a *shuǎi-shǒu-zhǎng-guì* 甩手掌柜 belief, resulting in limited parental involvement in their children’s education. At the other extreme, frequently contacting teachers outside of school hours disrupts teachers’ family lives, impacting their work-life balance. Chinese parents tend to have higher expectations of teachers (Chan et al., 2021). They do not fully understand their duties as requested by the DRP, so they relegate entirely their children’s educational responsibilities to teachers (Cao et al., 2022). The school has set up a parent-child cloud platform to educate parents on adequately involving themselves in their children’s education.

Teachers, as key frontline stakeholders, are critical to the success of the DRP implementation. This study offered insights into teachers’ perspectives, revealed teachers’ struggles and showed how schools can better support teachers through a qualitative approach. Zeng and Du (2023) cautioned that the heavy workload could lead to teacher burnout and, ultimately, resistance to the implementation of the DRP.

CONCLUSION

This empirical study examined the challenges school teachers face and their perspectives on the implementation of the DRP. The findings indicate that teachers are experiencing an increased workload, longer working hours, and falling short of expectations for compensation. The DRP outcomes for teachers have led to a significant work-life imbalance and diminished teacher motivation. The study also highlighted the necessity of collaborative efforts to achieve successful educational outcomes under the policy. School officials have implemented flexible teaching arrangements to support teachers and provided temporary accommodations. However, with parents expressing mixed opinions on paying for afterschool services, government intervention is needed to establish clear remuneration guidelines and allocate more financial resources to schoolteachers.

This article uses China’s DRP as an example to explain why actors in a network deploy their own resources in exchange for other actors’ resources to achieve their goals. The concept is generally useful and fruitful for understanding the policy process in China. *Mohe* has the

potential to offer a framework for analysing the policy-making process in the West, particularly in countries where state power persists and is unavoidable.

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