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Challenges and Transformations: The Evolution of English Training Institutions in Togtoh County Post Double Reduction Policy

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Abstract: This study investigates the implications of the "Double Reduction Policy" on children's English education and training institutions in Togtoh County, China. Enacted to alleviate academic burdens and combat the commercialization of education, the policy has led to significant transformations in the educational landscape nationwide. By analyzing the impact of the policy on English training institutions in Togtoh County, this research provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by these institutions and proposes strategies for adaptation and evolution. Before the policy's implementation, Togtoh County boasted a thriving ecosystem of nearly a hundred English training institutions. However, the enforcement of the Double Reduction Policy has resulted in a drastic reduction in the number of operational institutions, with fewer than ten remaining. This reduction in survival space has posed significant challenges to the sustainability of these institutions, leading to declines in student enrollment and business income. As a response, many institutions are exploring diversification and transformation strategies, including a shift away from subject-based training and the integration of after-school services. The study highlights the importance of adopting a holistic approach to language acquisition, emphasizing activities such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing to foster students' English language abilities. Additionally, institutions are strategically targeting new market segments, such as high schools and universities, and exploring opportunities in overseas English training. This research contributes to our understanding of the implications of the Double Reduction Policy on English education in Togtoh County and provides practical insights for English training institutions to navigate the evolving educational landscape.

Keywords: Double Reduction Policy, English education, extracurricular training, children's education, adaptation strategies.

I. Introduction

In July 2021, the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council issued the "Opinions on Further Reducing the Academic Burden of Compulsory Education Students and the Burden of Extracurricular Training" (referred to as the "Double Reduction Policy")^[1]. Subsequently, on July 28th, the Ministry of Education issued the "Notice on Further Clarifying the Scope of Subjects and Non-Subjects for Extracurricular Training in Compulsory Education Stage^[2]," which clearly stipulated that all existing educational enterprises related to subject training must be uniformly deregistered from the market sector and re-registered with the education authorities as non-profit organizations. This move effectively curbs the "commercialization of education."

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Many English education and training institutions focusing on primary and secondary school English education, such as New Oriental and English First, have been significantly impacted by this policy. The same holds for children's English education and training institutions in Togtoh County. Prior to the implementation of the national Double Reduction Policy, these institutions were flourishing. However, following the implementation of the policy, subject training institutions nationwide have entered a period of stagnation.

In this article, the author analyzes the current situation of children's English education and training in Togtoh County after the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy. How to cope with the crisis brought about by the Double Reduction Policy is a pressing issue that needs to be addressed.

Togtoh County is in Inner Mongolia, China. It is located in the central part of the autonomous region, on the Tumochuan Plain at the northern foot of the Daqing Mountains, the watershed of the middle and upper reaches of the Yellow River, bordered to the north by the Yinshan Mountains, and to the south by the Yellow River. It is situated in the hinterland of the "Golden Triangle" development zone of Hohhot, Baotou, and Ordos. The county spans 54.5 kilometers from north to south and 42 kilometers from east to west, with a total area of 1416.8 square kilometers. There are 7 rivers within its territory, with the Yellow River flowing through it for 37.5 kilometers, and an annual average runoff of 21.411 billion cubic meters. The arable land covers an area of 68,060 hectares, while forests and grasslands cover 40,808 hectares. It administers 5 towns, 1 Yellow River wetland management center, 16 communities, and 120 administrative villages, with a population of 166,000, consisting of 32 ethnic groups including Mongolian and Han.

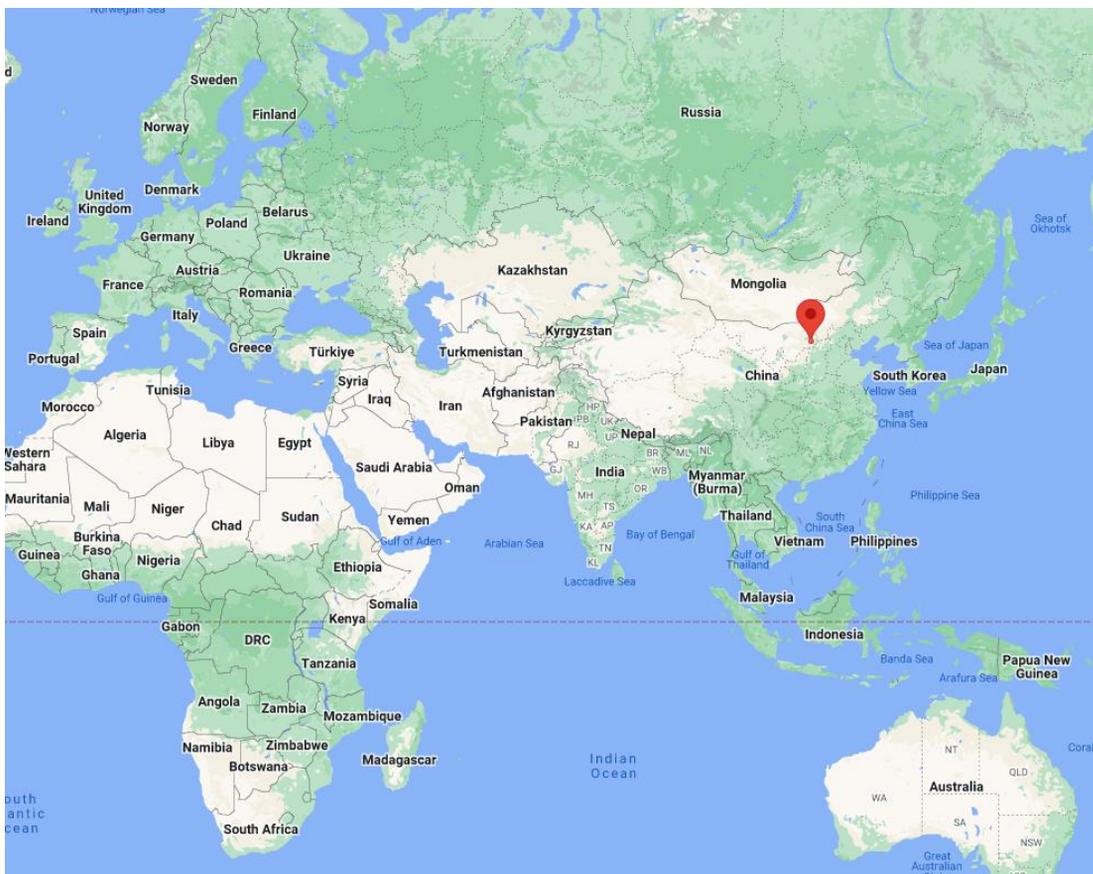


Figure 1, Location of Togtoh Contry on Google Map (Source: google map)

Togtoh County has a long history and profound cultural heritage, being one of the earliest human birthplaces in Inner Mongolia. As early as five to six thousand years ago during the Neolithic Age,

humans inhabited and multiplied here, with the county containing Neolithic human remains named the Haisheng Bulang Culture by archaeologists. In 390 BC, Duke Wu of Zhao built the Yuncheng City. In 307 BC, King Wu Ling of Zhao established the Yuncheng Commandery and reformed the military system, implementing the "Hu clothing and horseback archery" policy. After the unification of the six states by the Qin Dynasty in 221 BC, the Yuncheng Commandery became one of the thirty-six commanderies of Qin. In 1392, the Dongsheng Wei City was built, which is now the most well-preserved rammed earth city in China. In the tenth year of the Jiajing reign of the Ming Dynasty (1531 AD), Alatan Khan's adopted son "Tuotuo" stationed in Dongsheng Wei City, hence the name "Togtoh". During the Tang Dynasty, Togtoh County became an important military fortress of the Tang Empire and one of the political, economic, and cultural centers of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region^[3].



Figure 1, landscape of Togtoh County (Source: Xinhau Agency)

II. Literature Review

In 2021, the Chinese government has implemented the "double reduction" policy, aiming to alleviate the academic burden on students in the compulsory education stage. This policy has drawn significant attention from researchers across various disciplines, leading to a growing body of literature investigating its implications and effects.

Wu^[4] provides insights into the Chinese government's strong control over the domestic market through the implementation of the "double reduction" policy. This study highlights the government's regulatory measures and their impact on educational institutions and related sectors. Yan^[5] delves into the psychological effects of the "double reduction" policy on students, teachers, and parents. By examining changes in attitudes and perceptions, this research sheds light on the multifaceted impact of the policy on key stakeholders within the educational system. Li et al.^[6] offer a comprehensive analysis of the impact of the "double reduction" policy. Their study explores the background of the policy, current effects at both micro and meso levels, and the challenges it presents. By addressing these aspects, the research provides valuable insights into the policy's broader implications.

Jin et al.^[7] address the challenges posed by the "double reduction" policy, focusing on its potential

implications for educational institutions, families, and society. This study offers critical perspectives on the policy's effectiveness and identifies areas for improvement. Xue et al.^[8] analyze the underlying essence of the "double reduction" policy from a narrative perspective. Their research highlights the policy's core objectives and its alignment with broader goals of enhancing educational quality and accessibility. Yu et al.^[9] conduct a survey to gauge parental understanding and perceptions of the "double reduction" policy. By examining factors such as education anxiety and perceptions of policy effectiveness, this study provides valuable insights into parental attitudes towards the policy. Zhou^[10] investigates strategies to improve the efficiency of social education under the "double reduction" policy. Through experimental surveys, this research identifies key approaches for enhancing educational outcomes and addressing societal needs.

Zhang et al.^[11] explore the public's psychological perceptions of the education system under the "double reduction" policy. By examining various psychological concepts, this study elucidates public attitudes towards education reform and policy implementation. Yue et al.^[12] focus on teachers' occupational anxiety resulting from the "double reduction" policy. Through theoretical modeling, this research uncovers the underlying mechanisms driving teacher apprehensions and suggests avenues for policy refinement. Tan et al.^[13] investigate the impact of the "double reduction" policy on youth sports participation. Through empirical analysis, this study explores the relationship between parental awareness of the policy and attitudes towards children's involvement in sports, offering insights into policy-driven changes in extracurricular activities.

III. English Education in Togtoh County

Since the autumn of 2001, the implementation of English courses in elementary schools has been gradually expanding nationwide, starting from the third grade in cities at or above the county level. Subsequently, from the autumn of 2002, a similar introduction of English courses began in townships. Despite these efforts, investigations conducted by the author have revealed significant shortcomings in the provision of English education in primary schools within Togtoh County. The availability of English courses in rural schools is primarily nominal, with a scarcity of qualified English teachers. Moreover, primary schools in the county seat frequently experience a shortage of English instructors, necessitating the use of substitute teachers year-round. This neglect of English education at the primary level in rural areas has prompted many parents to seek extracurricular English training for their children, leading to the proliferation of children's English training institutions as a response to parental demand.

3.1 Impact of the Double Reduction Policy on English Training Institutions

Before the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy, Togtoh County boasted nearly a hundred English training institutions of various sizes. However, the enforcement of the Double Reduction Policy has resulted in a dramatic reduction in the number of operational English training institutions, with fewer than ten remaining.

3.2 Challenges Faced by Extracurricular Training Institutions

The introduction of the Double Reduction Policy has significantly constrained the survival space for all extracurricular training institutions in Togtoh County, particularly those primarily focused on subject-based training. This reduction in survival space manifests in several ways. Firstly, there has been a notable decline in student enrollment, leading to a decrease in subject-based training classes, albeit not to the point of disappearance. Secondly, the decline in business income has forced many training institutions to resort to mass layoffs of teaching staff, precipitating internal instability and increasing the risk of closure. Additionally, numerous institutions are grappling with diversification or transformation strategies, while others adopt a cautious approach. Some institutions seek to

circumvent regulatory scrutiny by rescheduling English training sessions from weekends and holidays to weekday evenings, effectively mitigating risks but imposing considerable extracurricular learning burdens on children.

IV. Evolution of Children's English Education and Training Institutions

4.1 Shifting Business Focus

The implementation of the Double Reduction Policy has disrupted the normal operations of children's English education and training institutions in Togtoh County. However, the persistent desire of parents for their children to gain a competitive edge, coupled with the academic pressures faced by students, drives many parents to seek additional English education for their children. Consequently, English education and training institutions are compelled to undergo transformation. In response, these institutions can contemplate a complete departure from subject-based extracurricular training at the compulsory education stage. Alternatively, they may consider offering non-profit courses while ensuring institutional profitability to cater to students' educational needs. It is noteworthy that, influenced by the long-standing emphasis on exam-oriented education, many training institutions have fixated on improving test scores through rote learning and mechanical training, neglecting the holistic development of students' English proficiency. Therefore, it is imperative for English education and training institutions to eschew solely test-driven approaches and instead emphasize holistic language acquisition through activities such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This approach aims to foster students' English language abilities, nurture positive psychological and moral attributes, foster cultural awareness, and prioritize the development of non-cognitive skills, thereby creating an immersive learning environment conducive to student autonomy and effective communication skills development.

4.2 Diversification of Market Beyond Compulsory Education

While the Double Reduction Policy primarily targets reducing academic burdens and extracurricular pressures on students in compulsory education stages, it excludes high schools and universities. Given that English is a mandatory subject for college entrance examinations and a pivotal component of postgraduate entrance exams, children's English education and training institutions in Togtoh County can strategically focus on this market segment. By offering comprehensive English classes and targeting the college and postgraduate entrance exam markets as long-term objectives, these institutions can expand their market reach. Additionally, attention should be directed towards overseas English training opportunities. Collaborating with foreign educational institutions can facilitate the integration of overseas English learning resources, enabling the provision of online tutoring services for students aspiring to study abroad. Leveraging internet-based platforms, these institutions can offer diverse courses, overcoming temporal and spatial constraints. This strategic transition aligns with the objectives of the Double Reduction Policy and presents a viable pathway for these institutions to adapt and thrive.

4.3 Integration of English Education with After-School Services

The enduring influence of exam-oriented education in Togtoh County has resulted in a disproportionate emphasis on traditional cultural subjects like language and mathematics within schools. Despite the emergence of new educational paradigms, the principles of quality education have not permeated across various subjects and educational stages. Moreover, a scarcity of teachers for non-traditional subjects such as music, art, and physical education is prevalent in many primary and secondary schools in Togtoh County. This dearth of resources underscores the need for education and training institutions to align with educational reforms and integrate English education principles with after-school services effectively. Collaborating with schools, these

institutions can contribute to the cultivation of well-rounded individuals, supplementing the deficiencies of mainstream education and fostering comprehensive cultural literacy among students. Embracing an ethos of affordability and eschewing exorbitant fees aligns with national development imperatives, positioning these institutions as integral components of the educational landscape and promising a prosperous future.

V. Implication

The implementation of the Double Reduction Policy has brought significant implications for English training institutions in Togtoh County, prompting them to navigate challenges and adapt to the evolving educational landscape. Below are the key implications:

Survival Space Constraints: The enforcement of the Double Reduction Policy has dramatically reduced the number of operational English training institutions in Togtoh County. From nearly a hundred institutions before the policy's implementation, there are now fewer than ten remaining. This reduction in survival space poses significant challenges to the sustainability of these institutions.

Decline in Student Enrollment and Business Income: English training institutions in Togtoh County have experienced a notable decline in student enrollment post-implementation of the Double Reduction Policy. This decline has translated into a decrease in subject-based training classes and a corresponding reduction in business income. As a result, many institutions have been forced to resort to mass layoffs of teaching staff, leading to internal instability and an increased risk of closure.

Diversification and Transformation Strategies: Faced with the challenges posed by the Double Reduction Policy, English training institutions in Togtoh County are exploring diversification and transformation strategies to sustain their operations. Some institutions are considering a complete departure from subject-based extracurricular training at the compulsory education stage. Alternatively, they may opt to offer non-profit courses while ensuring institutional profitability to meet students' educational needs.

Holistic Approach to Language Acquisition: The emphasis on exam-oriented education has historically led English training institutions to prioritize improving test scores through rote learning and mechanical training. However, in response to the Double Reduction Policy, there is a growing recognition of the need to adopt a holistic approach to language acquisition. Institutions are shifting their focus towards activities such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing to foster students' English language abilities and nurture positive psychological and moral attributes.

Expansion into New Market Segments: With the Double Reduction Policy primarily targeting reducing academic burdens on students in compulsory education stages, English training institutions in Togtoh County are strategically focusing on new market segments. They are targeting high schools and universities, where English remains a mandatory subject for entrance examinations. Additionally, institutions are exploring opportunities in overseas English training, collaborating with foreign educational institutions to integrate overseas learning resources and offer online tutoring services for students aspiring to study abroad.

Integration with After-School Services: Recognizing the deficiencies of mainstream education and the scarcity of teachers for non-traditional subjects, English training institutions in Togtoh County are seeking to integrate English education principles with after-school services effectively. By collaborating with schools, these institutions aim to contribute to the cultivation of well-rounded

individuals and foster comprehensive cultural literacy among students. Moreover, by embracing affordability and eschewing exorbitant fees, they align with national development imperatives and position themselves as integral components of the educational landscape, promising a prosperous future.

VI. Conclusion:

In conclusion, the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy has ushered in a period of significant change and adaptation for English training institutions in Togtoh County. The policy, aimed at alleviating academic burdens and curbing the commercialization of education, has had profound implications for the landscape of children's English education and training in the region.

The analysis of the current situation reveals a stark reality: a dramatic reduction in the number of operational English training institutions, accompanied by challenges such as declining student enrollment, decreased business income, and internal instability. These institutions are facing survival space constraints, compelling them to explore diversification and transformation strategies to sustain their operations.

However, amidst these challenges lies an opportunity for innovation and evolution. English training institutions are gradually shifting their business focus, contemplating a departure from subject-based extracurricular training towards holistic language acquisition approaches. They are also expanding into new market segments, targeting high schools, universities, and overseas English training opportunities.

Moreover, the integration of English education with after-school services presents a promising avenue for collaboration with mainstream education and the cultivation of well-rounded individuals. By aligning with educational reforms and embracing an ethos of affordability, these institutions can position themselves as integral components of the educational landscape, promising a prosperous future despite the challenges posed by the Double Reduction Policy.

In essence, while the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy has presented formidable challenges for English training institutions in Togtoh County, it has also catalyzed a process of adaptation and innovation. By embracing change and seizing opportunities, these institutions can navigate the evolving educational landscape and continue to play a vital role in shaping the English education landscape for the betterment of students and society as a whole.

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