

A Study on Teacher Workload Under Basic Education Reform: Investigation, Analysis, and Mitigation Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Basic education is the cornerstone of the healthy development of China's educational enterprise. Against the backdrop of increasing demands for teachers' comprehensive competencies, issues such as excessive work intensity, heavy burdens, and a surge in work pressure have become increasingly apparent. Consequently, alleviating the burden on teachers has emerged as a critical issue that urgently needs to be addressed in the pursuit of high-quality development in China's education system. Through interviews and questionnaire surveys with a sample of teachers, this study processes, analyzes, and compares the collected raw data. Adopting a teacher-centered approach, it dissects the current state of teacher workload. Furthermore, based on three dimensions—clarification of responsibilities, professional perception, and management systems—the paper proposes targeted recommendations for burden reduction. The study aims to mobilize the collective strength of society, empowering teachers to become the lifelong gatekeepers and beneficiaries of their own well-being.

1 Background

Basic education is a national quality-oriented education for all students, with the fundamental purpose of improving the basic quality of the citizenry and laying a solid foundation for all school-age children and adolescents to engage in lifelong learning and participate in social life.^[1] The implementation of the “Double Reduction” policy has led to more stringent demands from parents, which in turn compels teachers to enhance their capabilities, consequently shifting the pressure onto basic education teachers. This pressure shift is mainly manifested in the following two aspects.

1.1 The Alienation of Primary and Secondary School Teachers' Workload

Fostering virtue and nurturing people is the primary duty and important mission of teachers. Teachers require a reasonable workload to dedicate their time and energy to their primary task of teaching and educating. Today, however, primary and secondary school teachers are generally busy, bewildered, and aimless, overburdened with excessive and miscellaneous tasks, while their time and energy are heavily consumed by excessive training. The excessive workload of teachers is an objective fact.^[1] In recent years, the issue of excessive teacher workload has been widely discussed in society. The multiple forms of

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alienation in their workload add to their negative stress, affecting their physical and mental health and constraining the development of basic education.

1.2 Reform in Basic Education

Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the Party and the government have always placed great importance on educational development, and efforts to reduce student burden and reform basic education have been continuously advanced. However, China’s basic education is still predominantly “exam-oriented.” Educational reform is therefore imperative. This reform-minded thinking includes: transforming educational concepts, improving educational mechanisms, and establishing a modern view of teaching. The modern view of teaching emphasizes that teaching is a highly professional activity requiring highly professional practitioners, and it also points out that teachers should utilize all available resources and means for instruction. The modern view of teachers emphasizes that they should be professional practitioners who are self-disciplined, self-motivated, and capable of autonomous development.^[2] Consequently, teachers must expend more energy to improve their own capabilities to adapt to the broader environment of educational reform. Meanwhile, the internal governance systems within primary and secondary schools are continuously being improved.

The quality of teachers’ work is intrinsically linked to their physical and psychological stress. To understand the specific work burdens of primary and secondary school teachers, the implementation status of national burden reduction policies, and the progress of basic education

reform, and to identify problems and propose reasonable recommendations, we have conducted a survey on “The Current State of Teacher Burden in the Context of Basic Education” among primary and secondary school teachers.

2 Data Processing

This questionnaire survey and interviews involved primary and secondary school teachers and students from multiple regions. The sample consisted of 32% teachers and 68% students. Among the teachers, 32.5% were front-line teachers in junior and senior high schools, 25% were primary school teachers, and 9.38% were non-teaching staff. The effective response rate was 100%. The reliability and validity analysis, as shown in Table 1, yielded a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.795, indicating the high reliability of the questionnaire. The KMO values for the three aspects were all greater than 0.6, and the significance levels of Bartlett’s test of sphericity were all less than 0.05, making the data suitable for factor analysis. The cumulative total variance explained by the factors generally reached over 70%, demonstrating the high validity of the questionnaire. As the respondents were from across the country, the broad consideration of regional differences contributes to the scientific validity and rationality of the findings. The survey content primarily focused on teacher workload, teacher training, and educational reform. SPSS and Excel were used to analyze and compare the data from the valid questionnaires, and the findings were integrated with interview outcomes and relevant knowledge to explore the research theme.

Table 1 Validity Analysis of Teacher Workload, Teacher Training, and Educational Reform

Validity Analysis	KMO and Bartlett’s Test		
	Teacher Workload	Teacher Training	Educational Reform
KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.723	0.701	0.776
Approx. Chi-Square	259.777	612.580	254.862
Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity	df	105	120
	Sig.	.000	.000

Satisfaction Analysis: Job satisfaction is a concept in psychology and management studies. It refers to a teacher’s overall, affect-laden perception and evaluation of their job, profession, and working conditions.^[3] It can be categorized by individual background factors, individual psychological factors, and organizational and environmental factors. Key variables include educational stage, school management, interpersonal relationships, work stress, working hours, and workload.^[4] This study select-

ed the typical factors of working hours and workload for investigation. The results show that 68.76% of teachers work more than 8 hours per day on average, while only 17.19% expressed satisfaction with their working hours and workload. The SPSS analysis revealed that teachers perceive severe sources of stress to be from superiors and their own psychological pressure, with the primary reasons being the deepening of basic education reform and high demands from superiors.

Table 2 Statistics on Teacher Satisfaction with Working Hours at Different Educational Stages

Teacher Type	Satisfaction with Working Hours				Total
	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	
Teachers in Graduating Grades (9 & 12)	0.0%	62.5%	21.4%	0.0%	27.6%
Teachers in Non-Graduating Junior & Senior High Grades (7, 8, 10, 11)	0.0%	12.5%	57.1%	33.3%	37.9%
Primary School Teachers	100.0%	25.0%	14.3%	33.3%	24.1%
Non-teaching Staff	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	33.3%	10.3%

Table 3 Statistics on Teacher Satisfaction with Workload at Different Educational Stages

Teacher Type	Workload Satisfaction				Total
	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	
Teachers in Graduating Grades (9 & 12)	25.0%	40.0%	33.3%	0.0%	27.6%
Teachers in Non-Graduating Junior & Senior High Grades (7, 8, 10, 11)	0.0%	60.0%	40.0%	40.0%	37.9%
Primary School Teachers	75.0%	0.0%	13.3%	40.0%	24.1%
Non-teaching Staff	0.0%	0.0%	13.3%	20.0%	10.3%

Figure 1 Distribution and Severity of Teacher Stress

The increasing burden on teachers is closely related to the problems within China’s primary and secondary school educational administrative management system. According to the survey results, 93.1% of respondents believe that the current system excessively interferes with the autonomy of schools; 65.5% believe the management system is inflexible, lacks innovation, and that the administrative personnel are not sufficiently professionalized; and 44.8% believe that an effective oversight mechanism for the administrative system needs to be improved. Under the basic education reform, multimedia teaching has become essentially universal, but laboratory facilities still require improvement. It is evident that the trend in teachers’ expectations for the focus of school development is as follows: student mental health > societal demand for certain subjects > student academic performance > student interests > moral education > competency development. Teachers expect schools to strive for balanced development while prioritizing the identification and resolution of students’ psychological problems.

3 Analysis of Teacher Burden in the Basic Education Survey

3.1 Current State of Teacher Burden

Through interviews, it was found that the current sources of teacher pressure mainly fall into four aspects:

First, the burden from students’ parents is the most significant. Excessive focus on grades and rankings leads to immense pressure being exerted on teachers by students and parents. According to the interview results with teach-

ers at various educational stages, this pressure can be categorized into three areas: student academic performance, student management, and the degree of parental attention. Parents are overly reliant on schools and teachers.

Second, pressure from school administration cannot be ignored. There is an excess of non-essential tasks, such as inspections from superiors and numerous meetings. Excessively high teaching metrics have become a major source of pressure. Excessive pressure from both home and school regarding academic performance causes teachers’ instructional energy to be diffused, affecting the quality of teaching.

Third, demands at the societal level are increasing year by year. Some segments of the public hold a stereotypical perception of the teacher’s image, and their stringent requirements regarding teachers’ appearance and conduct cause distress.

Fourth, teachers have stringent self-imposed demands. Teachers need to continuously improve their professional level and strictly constrain their daily behavior; working hours encroach upon and squeeze personal life, severely impinging upon their personal and family time.

In summary, teachers often bear a heavy burden as they actively or passively seek to balance these competing demands. The expectation that teachers should still deliver high-quality instruction under high pressure warrants deeper reflection.

3.2 Perception of Basic Education Reform and New Sources of Pressure

In the context of educational reform, curriculum integration has become a key direction. There are growing

teaching requirements such as interdisciplinary teaching, textbook reform, knowledge expansion, and the cultivation of comprehensive competencies. Innovations in classroom teaching models, sharing of high-quality online courses, new instructional methods, and the Gaokao (college entrance exam) reform have become tasks that teachers face in the context of reform, posing challenges for both teachers and students. In response to the Gaokao reform, as the fixed exam subjects shift to models like “3+3” or “3+1+2,” the issue of subject selection for students, starting from the first year of high school, has emerged. Since students lack a scientific understanding of career planning, teachers must also shoulder the heavy responsibility of guiding students and parents in making correct subject choices.

4 Recommendations for Alleviating the Burden on Primary and Secondary School Teachers

The primary role of teachers is to teach and nurture students. Long-term high pressure adds to their mental and psychological stress and reduces their motivation. Solving the problem of excessive teacher burden is urgent. To this end, we propose the following targeted recommendations from three dimensions: clarification of responsibilities, professional perception, and management systems.

4.1 Dedicated Personnel for Specific Roles

Based on the interview and questionnaire results, implementing a system of dedicated personnel for specific roles can effectively address the issue of role ambiguity among teachers. A more rational and clear work structure ensures that non-instructional affairs are properly handled, a more rational evaluation system for teacher development is established, and the demand for skills unrelated to teaching and nurturing is reduced. Schools should reasonably delineate the boundaries of teachers’ instructional duties and simplify unrelated tasks. Achieving dedicated personnel for specific roles and clarifying teachers’ primary responsibilities will be a goal for considerable time in the future.

4.2 Guiding a Correct Public Understanding of the Teaching Profession

The methods for evaluating teachers’ teaching should be changed. More tactful approaches should be adopted to create a buffer zone among the school, teachers, parents, and students—for instance, ordering by performance instead of ranking, and implementing suitable measures based on actual situations. At the same time, students and parents should be guided to value comprehensive

competencies, alleviating parents’ psychological anxiety over scores and reducing the teaching pressure from schools and families. As times change, teaching styles are no longer monolithic. To address this, it is recommended that schools adopt more flexible regulations regarding the professional image of teachers, allowing the expression of their unique individuality, in addition to their professional commonalities. This helps them find their own correct understanding and positioning in their professional practice. In summary, changing the stereotypical perception of teachers held by the public requires a concerted effort from all levels and sectors of society.

4.3 Establishing a Sound and Mature Educational Management System

Regarding teacher training, organizers should strive to improve its quality by focusing on multiple links, including curriculum, teaching materials, pedagogy, and the teachers themselves.^[1] It is recommended to improve the incentive and evaluation mechanisms for teacher training and to develop a more scientific and standardized evaluation standard system, such as establishing an interactive system involving multiple stakeholders to scientifically evaluate the effectiveness of training through diverse evaluation objectives, varied assessment methods, and specialized evaluation tools. It is recommended to increase multi-stakeholder investment in teacher training for rural areas. Drawing on policies for attracting excellent teachers, we can attract outstanding educators to work in inland regions, innovating teacher allocation mechanisms to alleviate the shortage of teachers in certain subjects and areas; establishing orderly, high-quality teacher training and increasing opportunities for rural teachers to receive training will make tangible contributions to the development of inland education and further promote equitable educational development.

5 Conclusion and Outlook

With the development of basic education reform, the issue of teacher burden urgently needs to be addressed. Based on these objective social phenomena, we have found that the multifaceted pressures teachers face disrupt their own work rhythm, preventing them from delivering high-quality instruction. In the wave of educational reform, teachers are both implementers and subjects of reform. This not only disadvantages their own development and the education of their students but also becomes an obstacle on the path of reform. Confronting the problems teachers face and alleviating their excessive pressure is an inevitable part of the educational reform process. This

requires understanding from society, a rational division of labor within schools, and active cooperation from families. Facing the comprehensiveness and complexity of educational reform, it is necessary to integrate the different roles and perspectives in society and coordinate them with supportive government measures.

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