

The Current Status and Prospect of After-School Tutoring Organizations in Primary and Secondary Education in China

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Abstract

Since the implementation of the double-reduction policy, the attention of society to the off-campus tutoring service has been increasing. Concurrently, research in this field is experiencing rapid growth. Through literature search and analysis, our results indicate that the current focal points of research in the field include both theoretical development and empirical implementation. Theoretical research focused on connotation and evolution of core concepts, insights from foreign experience, and historical policy evolution processes. Empirical research primarily employed regional “problem-solution” methodologies, multi-perspective analyses of shadowing education, and transformational path analyses within the context of the double-reduction policy. In conclusion, we recommend placing greater emphasis on comprehensive study of pedagogy and other disciplines, focusing on rural areas, and prioritizing the integration of high-quality of research methodology for future investigations.

Keywords: Primary and secondary education tutoring, Off-campus tutoring organization, Shadowing education.

Introduction

In early 2018, the Ministry of Education in China issued a notification aiming at reducing the extracurricular workload of primary and secondary school students, specifically targeting at after-school tutoring organizations. This development marked China’s transition into a phase of comprehensive and rigorous evaluation implemented in after-school tutoring organizations (Chen and Li, 2021). In 2020, the Ministry of Education issued a negative concerning six subjects of compulsory education that exceeded the standard and advanced training, thereby refined the negative list of those subjects. In July 2021, The State Council released the “Opinions on Further Reducing the Homework and Off-campus Training Burdens of Students in Compulsory Education” (referred to as the “double-reduction” policy hereafter). This policy had a significant impact on after-school tutoring organizations operating within primary and secondary education. Consequently, over the past five years, the government has progressively strengthened the governance of institutions. That said, It is important to conduct survey on the current situation of after-school tutoring organizations in primary and secondary education, and summarize and assess the existing research in order to identify problems, avoid duplication of work, and help understand the shortcomings or areas not covered by existing research, and work out solutions.

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Methodology

The Chinese journal service platform was used as the retrieval database, using key words such as “tutoring of primary and secondary education” to search for Peking University core journals and CSSCI journals published between January 2018 and September 2022. A total of 115 literature references were gathered. By analyzing the literature, we examined the current research findings in China regarding off-campus tutoring organizations, with a focus on theoretical and empirical research.

Results

1. Theoretical Research on Primary and Secondary Education After-School Tutoring Organizations

Chinese scholars have explored the fundamental theoretical issues concerning primary and secondary educational tutoring, including connotation and development of core concepts, insights from foreign experience, and historical policy evolution processes.

1.1. The Evolution of Fundamental Concepts

Off-campus tutoring for primary and secondary school students involves tutoring in subjects such as Chinese, mathematics, foreign languages, morality and rule of law, history, geography, physics, chemistry, biology and other academic content. Various countries and regions have different names for disciplinary extracurricular training, such as extracurricular tutoring, private supplementary tutoring, educational coaching, shadowing education (Pan and Wang, 2020). Shadowing education refers to “a series of educational activities designed to improve students’ educational performance outside school education” (Stevenson and Baker, 1992). In official statistical classification, off-campus tutoring organizations are categorized as a type of private non-academic education. Nevertheless, the evolution of fundamental concepts differs among different countries and regions. Even within the same region, the definition of these core concepts changes over time as informal and formal education systems evolve. Zhang et al. (2020) argued that even in an English context, there are inconsistencies in defining certain terms, such as “tutoring”, which can refer to one-on-one or small group instruction but is also frequently used to describe large lecture hall classes in much of the literature. Fu (2019) proposed that the connotation of “private educational institutions” has evolved from a policy science perspective. Initially, private education schools and private education institutions were not differentiated. However, with the 2016 revision of the Law on the Promotion of Private Education, private education institutions underwent a transformation from being perceived as a substitute for public education to becoming for-profit entities that offer non-academic educational services.

1.2. Insights from Foreign Experiences

Our off-campus tutoring organizations face various challenges, from which many scholars draw insights from the experiences of South Korea, Japan, Britain and other countries to inform our governance institutions. Some scholars focused on the perspectives of government, society, and schools, while others started from other perspectives, such as educational equity. Table 1 shows the insights obtained by different authors from international shadowing education.

1.3. History of the Policy Governance

The governance of primary and secondary school tutoring organizations has undergone a gradual process, from the initial stage of government non-intervention, and gradually tightening governance efforts, eventually leading to a comprehensive and strict control process. Generally speaking, since the 2010s, the governance of shadowing education has entered a comprehensive rectification. Several scholars have categorized the historical progression of policy governance for after-school tutoring organizations in primary and secondary education into three distinct stages, while others categorized it into four distinct stages. Table 2 summarizes the authors’ division of the historical process of governance institutions.

2. Empirical Research on After-School Tutoring Organization in Primary and Secondary Education

Empirical research on after-school tutoring organizations in primary and secondary education in China primarily relies on regional “problem-solution” methodologies, multi-perspective analyses of shadowing education, and transformational path analyses within the context of the double-reduction policy.

2.1. Regional “Problem-Solving” Methodologies

The term “problem-solution” involve presenting solutions to the issues prevalent in off-campus tutoring organizations within specific provinces or regions. These methodologies are commonly used in master’s degree thesis. Those regions include Z City of Guangdong Province (Feng, 2020), Nanchang of Jiangxi Province (Xiong, 2015), Bozhou of Anhui Province (Ling, 2018), Linfen of Shanxi Province (Li, 2020), Yulin of Shanxi Province (Ma, 2020), among others. Scholarly published journal articles also adopted these methodologies. For instance, the study conducted by Yan and Zheng (2021) examined the current state of shadowing education in primary and secondary schools in Huizhou, Guangdong Province. The study identified issues at three levels, namely government, market, and institutions and recommended that the government should strengthen laws and regulations, standardize charging standards and complaint mechanisms. In 2022, Wan conducted an analysis regarding issues identified during the investigation of off-campus tutoring organizations in K City,

Table 1. Insights from international shadowing education experience.

Author	Reference Country	Insights
Lingshuai Kong and Wenting Ma (2018)	Britain	a) The development of extracurricular guidance policies for disadvantaged students. b) The reformation of examination-centered selection systems, the encouragement. c) Guidance of extracurricular tutoring organizations to assist disadvantaged students. d) The enhancement of the quality of education within mainstream education systems.
Bingcan Yang (2018)	Other countries	a) It is imperative for the government to prioritize the management and direction of shadowing education. b) The current governance must be delineated with precision. c) The crux of shadowing education governance lies in the enhancement of the caliber of school education.
Jinshen Yu and Lishai Jia (2020)	Japan	a) Customize governance approaches to suit the specific circumstances of the nation. b) Augment policies and regulations to guarantee efficient governance. c) Encourage self-regulation within industries and advocate for the adoption of market standards.
Lei Ling (2022)	South Korea	The effective management of shadowing education governance necessitates skillful handling of: a) the dynamic interplay among school education, pedagogy, and societal progress in the current era. b) The interrelation between assessment, admission, and the development of shadowing education. And c) the connection between relevant policies and regulations and the supervision of the shadowing education market.
Lan Yang (2022)	Other countries	Governance could be implemented through four aspects: strict government policies, school education reform, public benefit supplementary courses implementation, and industry association autonomy.

Table 2. Examples of the historical stage division of policy governance within after-school tutoring organizations.

Partition Stage	Author	Years	Conclusion
Three stages	Shuang Chen and Zhendai Zhang (2022)	1978-1999	Low government involvement: aimed to promote social forces to manage schools and alleviate students' on-campus burdens.
		2000-2012	Increased government involvement: prioritized the standardization of off-campus activity venues and the prohibition of on-campus paid remedial classes.
		2013-present	High government involvement: emphasizes special governance and comprehensive supervision of off-campus tutoring.
	Yuanyuan Chen and Huichun Li (2021)	pre-2009	"Non-interventionist governance": the government has adopted a largely hands-off policy.
		2010-2017	Partial governance: the government set to tighten supervision of shadowing education, focusing on the governance of public schools and teachers accessing to its market.
		2018-present	Comprehensively strict controlling: the government has entered a period of strict control over shadowing education.
	Zhanyong Qi et al. (2019)	2000-2008	Preliminary regulation stage: the policy revolved around the governance norms of "off-campus activity places", and the concept of off-campus tutoring organizations has not been clearly proposed.
		2008-2014	Policy design stage: focusing on the balanced development of compulsory education with rational allocation of resources.
		2014-present	Comprehensive regulation stage: concretization of governance measures, integration of social resources and improvement of support systems.
Four stages	Dongdong Pan and Mo Wang (2020)	1978-1998	Embryonic period: characterized by in-school remedial courses and private tutoring.
		1999-2003	Transitional period: marked by the emergence of tutoring organizations.
		2004-2009	Rapid development period: tutoring organizations experienced significant growth
		2010-present	Normative development period: a shift from industry self-discipline to government regulation.
	Cheng Yang (2021)	pre-2005	Initial stage: there has been no large-scale off-campus training, mainly based on private tutoring.
		2005-2009	Market analysis stage: the state encourages social forces to run schools and education in terms of policy.
		2010-2018	Fairness research stage: off-campus tutoring has affected traditional school education to varying degrees, and its rationality has been widely explored.
		2018-present	Governance research stage: research on how to effectively govern off-campus tutoring organizations and return to the track of following educational laws.

Fujian Province. The study recommended to for enhance the regulations governing the establishment of tutoring organizations, improve the comprehensive law enforcement mechanism, advance the "transferring power, regulating and serving" reform, and effectively manage social publicity and supervision. The majority of those articles scrutinized the developmental state of an organization within a particular locality via investigation and interviews and examined various aspects such as the type, duration, mode, rationale, influencing factors, and attitude analysis to identify issues and their underlying causes, and suggest tailored recommendations and remedial measures.

2.2. Multi-Perspective Analyses of Shadowing Education

Scholars have examined after-school tutoring organizations from various perspectives. Some authors have utilized Hofstede's cultural dimension, educational ecological crisis, maximizing public interest, and legal regulation as their perspectives. Additionally, new research perspectives, such as game theory, have emerged Table 3 shows the perspectives of different authors on shadowing education.

2.3. Transformational Path Analyses Under the Double-Reduction Policy

The implementation of the double-reduction policy has posed numerous challenges for after-school tutoring organizations, necessitating prompt transformation and develop-

ment. Liu (2022) found that specialized education and training should be a future direction for after-school tutoring, yet, such transformation will encounter several obstacles in the process. The article proposed several characteristic transformation paths, including: a) Transformation should be in alignment with national policies. b) Enhancing collaboration with professional colleges and venues to cultivate a skilled teaching workforce. c) Promoting active government involvement in education and tutoring initiatives. In 2022, Zhao put forth three primary methods of transformation. The first involved converting for-profit off-campus tutoring organizations catering to compulsory education students into non-profit entities. The second emphasized the importance of quality-oriented education, with many organizations introducing products focused on programming, robotics, aesthetic education, and other educational offerings. The third involved exploring new markets. For example, New Oriental's "Oriental Selection" live sales, and Tomorrow Advancing Life's expansion to overseas markets to provide Chinese courses. While offline organizations have found alternative paths, concerns have been raised about the future of online educational organizations. Taking K12 online education organizations as an example, Chen (2022) has identified a developmental predicament in the realm of online education, which involves restrictive regulatory policies, imbalance between the supply and demand of quality online education, and the regional disparities in development. To address this issue, the author proposed three potential solutions. The first involves the integration of educational resources and the innovation of quali-

Table 3. Analyses of different authors' perspectives on shadowing education.

Author	Perspective	Conclusion
Tao Chen et al. (2019)	Hofstede's cultural dimension	It is necessary to introduce the "meta-governance" of the family and constantly reconcile family cultural values through "external influence" and "self-construction", so as to achieve rational choice of shadowing education.
Yadong Ding and Haiping Xue (2020)	Game theory	The uneven result of shadowing education game intensifies the unfair distribution of educational resources.
Bufan Sun and Yike Cheng (2022)	Educational ecological crisis	To build a new education ecological governance community, find the "opportunity in the crisis" in the original education ecology, and finally realize the substantive transformation from danger to opportunity.
Heng Wan and Xinyu Gao (2022)	Maximizing public interest	The protection of public interests requires a return to the basic of comprehensive governance and the exploration of win-win cooperation.

ty education curriculum resources. The second involves overcoming technical obstacles and leveraging the advantages of online education. And the third involves strengthening cooperation with the government and mainstream schools to support in-school education.

Discussion

Outlook on the Research of After-School Tutoring Organizations in Primary and Secondary Education in China

The research findings pertaining to after-school tutoring organizations in primary and secondary education have received considerable attention within the academic community. Moving forward, scholarly investigations into off-campus tutoring organizations may prioritize the following areas of inquiry.

1.1. Research Perspective: Comprehensive Study of Pedagogy and Other Disciplines

The focus of current research in this field primarily revolves around pedagogy. However, this perspective is somewhat limited as it fails to recognize the interconnectedness of educational institutions with broader societal structures, potentially resulting in fragmented solutions. To address this, it is necessary to adopt a multi-dimensional approach that considers governance institutions and their various complexities. While some scholars, such as Liu et al. (2021) have explored shadowing education from a geographical perspective, Ding et al. (2018) from an economic perspective, Li and Li (2020) from a mathematical modeling perspective, there is still a lack of research from other disciplinary perspectives. Based on the existing literature, the exploration of ways for the survival of organizations under the new circumstances is still in its preliminary stage, with many challenges remaining to be solved. Therefore, it is expected that future research will shift perspective from pedagogy to economics, management, law and even philosophy.

1.2. Research Focus: Focusing on Rural Areas

While studying the development of after-school tutoring organizations in first-tier cities is significant, it is also important to pay attention to rural areas. Mei et al. (2020) conducted a study of the effect of implementing shadowing education in rural areas, providing guidance for the orderly development of shadowing education, promoting educational equity, and enhancing policies related to poverty alleviation through education. Authors also constructed a more comprehensive framework for analyzing and evaluating shadowing education. Zhou et al. (2021) focused on a special group that is large and indispensable -- rural migrant children, and investigated the influence and heterogeneity of shadowing education on the development of rural migrant children and local children using the dual model and relevant tools. At present, there is limited literature in this field, so future research could focus

more on rural areas.

1.3. Research Methods: Combination of Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methodology

In contemporary academic research on after-school tutoring organizations, many scholars and professional teams employ questionnaire surveys or analyze pre-existing open data to explore relevant topics and gather primary information for their theoretical investigations. For example, Pei et al. (2018) conducted a sample survey of students and parents in nine provinces (municipalities directly under the Central Government), Li (2019), and Li and Li (2020) conducted analyses based on PISA data, while Xi and Li (2020) utilized CEPS (China Education Panel Survey) data for analysis. Although Yang and Li (2022) adopted field visits and questionnaires to understand the implementation status of double-reduction policy in counties, Qiu et al. (2022) adopted interviews and questionnaires to understand the governance issues of off-campus tutoring organizations in the implementation of double-reduction policy in regions, in general, many scholars pay little attention to the research using the combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodology. It is recommended that scholars choose appropriate methods according to their research topics and strive to combine various methods to supplement the existing institutional research.

Conclusion

Under the national strategic framework and the government's key governance, after-school tutoring organizations in primary and secondary education are encountering both new opportunities and challenges. This paper presents a systematic review of the research conducted on after-school tutoring organizations over the past five years. The review reveals that the current research field is characterized by a focus on both theoretical development and empirical implementation. Theoretical research has centered on exploring the connotation and evolution of core concepts, drawing insights from foreign experience, and analyzing historical policy evolution processes. On the other hand, empirical research has predominantly employed regional "problem-solution" methodologies, multi-perspective analyses of shadowing education, and transformational path analyses within the context of the double-reduction policy. Looking forward, we suggest that future research place greater emphasis on comprehensive studies encompassing pedagogy and other disciplines, prioritizing research on rural areas, and emphasize on the combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodology.

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