Thesis title:

Implications of the double reduction policy (2021) in China for the providers of shadow education

Supervisor report:

The diploma thesis deals with the double reduction policy in China, a highly up to date topic and a „hot issue" of the international educational research of shadow education. The current attempt to regulate and ban shadow education in China has its predecessors in Korea and Mauritius, which both failed to achieve its goals, so it may seem that attempting the same goal could be tricky. However, the context of China is very much different, in addition China can learn from past attempts and its failures. Therefore, the author's endeavour to analyze the double reduction policies in China is very laudable and contributes to the emerging literature about the double reduction policy implications.

The author asserts that the general purpose of the thesis was to „explore and analyze what has happened, and what are the implications of the policy. How does the policy influence shadow education providers?" (p. 10). I assume that this overall goal of the thesis was fulfilled, though not perhaps so rigorously or accurately in every part of the text.

The author attempted to analyze policy documents and also sought personal experience and views from seven interviewees. Four research questions are set and answered in separate chapters.

In the theoretical part, the author begins with a definition of shadow education. After reviewing the shadow education literature, she advocates her own definition: „mainstream education imitation of tutoring in compulsory education schools", which, however, seems unclear or poorly defined. Did the author mean, that the tutoring „imitates" the mainstream education? Would a more proper verb be „to mimic" or „to reflect"? Imitation would rather mean that it tries to look and behave the same way as the mainstream education, but that is not always the case (for example, the tutors usually and intentionally do not make their instruction look exactly like the school lesson, they do not give marks, there are no so many pupils in the group etc.) In my opinion, in defining the study focus, it would be „safer" for the author to refer to an existing definition in the rich shadow education literature, rather than inventing one's own, which does not seem to be formulated properly (perhaps this is just a language issue?).

The author describes chronologically various stages of how the Chinese educational policy developed vis á vis the shadow education. The author used the Geelhoed-Schouwstra framework framework to structure her findings and the tables that were presented for each policy stage clearly showed the main points and ideas of the policy in the specific period. A suggestion for improvement of the clarity for the reader would be to supply an overview table with periods of time (year to year), when specific policy approach was implemented (or include it at least somewhere in the text or in the chapter subtitles). Also, the author uses the Geelhoed-Schouwstra framework, which seems appropriate, but seems insufficiently described for a reader who is not familiar with it. For the purpose of the thesis, it was reduced

(it does not include activities, performances and evaluation), but the reduction was not properly justified by the author.

I assume that the data from interviews were not processed and analyzed properly, and were presented only as examples of what the respondents had to say about the topic (for example, on p. 75–77, the author puts it simply as: „The sentences selected from the interviews." and lists some text extracts without further context or comments). This indicates that deeper analysis of the transcribed interviews was not performed. The description of the way how the data was handled (analytical approach) is also missing in the methodology part (e.g., what kind of analysis/coding was employed for the interview transcripts or the policy documents?). In the final conclusion chapter, I appreciate the scheme (Figure 5) that the authors presents.

Overall, as a supervisor, I evaluate positively the approach and work attitudes of the author. She was hard working and cooperative, and always took or tried to take my feedback on her drafts into account. Unfortunately, the work on the thesis began very late and there were only few months for the completion of the thesis. I cannot avoid the feeling that the author / thesis did not reach its full potential. In addition, the thesis is written in English, that is not always clear or unambiguous, and some formulations are difficult to understand (the author should have considered a proofreading by a native speaker to avoid such problems).

Despite the issues mentioned above, I believe the thesis still has a considerable value in mapping the Chinese shadow education policy development based on the original policy documents (in Chinese) and by bringing light on the most recent and also most prohibitive policies of Double reduction and views and perspectives of its providers. Therefore I recommend the thesis for defence.

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Below, I add some minor observations or remarks:

- The thesis is written in English, that is not always clear or unambiguous, and some formulations are difficult to understand. The author should have considered a proofreading by a native speaker to avoid such problems. For example:
    - The distribution of shadow education institutions in China, taking New Oriental Education & Technology Group as an example. => (p. 26; missing verb?)
    - Under this culture, studying harder is a typical description for students. => (p. 30, the term „description for students" is incomprehensible)
    - But basically, there are four types of policy, support, lazier, regulate or ban (Bray, 2009) => what is „lazier"? (p. 34)
- The Chart on p. 27 is misleading, as it presents the absolute number of New oriental centers in five cities, but it does not take into account the different population sizes. More appropriate would be to provide numbers relative to the size of school population (i.e., number of primary and secondary pupils in each city) to get comparable data.
- On p. 33, it is mentioned that shadow education „became a financial burden to low-income families occupying 11 % of the total expenditure." But the context is missing – how is low-income family defined and what proportion the expenditures make in the budget of high income family?

- There are some missing references (e.g., on p. 65: „The policy said: Schools…" without referencing the specific policy document and the page, or p. 70 „All localities must also make…").
- Some parts of the text claim something with a reference, but the referenced information is not included in the original source. For example, on p. 15, the thesis author claims that „China ranks first in the number of publications and impact factors on the topic of shadow education" with a reference to the study of Hajar & Karakus (2022). However, in the study, the two authors claim that PRC belongs to prominent countries in the shadow education research, but actually the number of publications in USA (97) exceeds those in PRC (90) (p. 5–6).
- Chapter 4.2 Labor market as one of the driving forces seems to be insufficiently elaborated and explained / substantiated.
- „The Geelhoed-Schouwstra framework is a systematic process for policymakers to design policies. Using the policy" (p. 37) => is it not rather an „analytical tool"?
- In the chapter 5.2.3, an overview table with the policy analysis framework parts is missing.
- On p. 64, the reference to Figure 5 should be to Figure 4 (?), source of Figure 4 is missing
- „But the private tutors do not mention how to monitor it." (p. 70) => why private tutors? Rather „policy documents"?
- Table 11 is twice in the document, the second instance (Double reduction) is not mentioned in the text, so its context is unclear.
- „The proportion of academic tutoring institutions in Chengdu had declined, the proportion of art and sports institutions had increased, and institutions had engaged in arts, sports, labor education and other types of training accounted for 52% of all training institutions, an increase of 15% over 2019" => here I believe the correct formulation is „increase by 15 percentage points", not 15%.

Questions for the defense:

- What penalties for black market providers could there be in China for violating the double reduction policy? What implications does the risk of illegal provision on the black market have for the providers, consumers, and the features of shadow education (mode, price etc.). How does it affect the sought equity of education?
- Has the Chinese government taken into account also economic implications of the policy? If so, what do the official policymakers propose to mitigate the negative economic impact of the double reduction policy?
- Interviewee 6 became a private tutor afrer the introduction of Double reduction policy. Assuming he/she tutors in the black market, what was their specific motivation to enter after it was made illegal?
- On p. 61, you mention that „there are still 17 % non-profit main subject tutoring existing". What does the percentage 17 % refer to, what is the denominator of this fraction? How is it economically possible to run a non-profit company focused on tutoring provision, assuming that the company provides shadow education for free to its end-users?