

PROFESSIONAL INTEGRITY AND THE DOUBLE REDUCTION POLICY: INPUTS TO A SOCIAL SUPPORT PROGRAM FOR OFF- CAMPUS TRAINING CENTER FOR TEACHERS

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Abstract

Introduction: Professional integrity is a fundamental attribute of teachers and plays a critical role in maintaining educational quality and ethical practice. In China, the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy significantly transformed the operational environment of off-campus training centers, raising concerns about its impact on teachers' professional integrity. This study examined the level of professional integrity of off-campus training center teachers before and during the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy and identified implications for a social support program.

Method: The study employed a quantitative descriptive research design using a survey method. A total of 237 teachers from off-campus training centers in Dongying, Shandong Province, China, were selected through purposive sampling. A researcher-modified questionnaire measured professional integrity in terms of character traits and workplace integrity before and during the policy implementation. Descriptive statistics and paired-sample t-tests were used to analyze the data at a 0.05 level of significance.

Result: Findings revealed that teachers' professional integrity was rated low both before and during the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy. However, significant differences were found between the two periods, with improvements observed in diligence, communication skills, discipline, and relationships with parents during policy implementation. No significant changes were noted in knowledge mastery, teaching methods, and feedback provision. Workplace integrity showed only minimal improvement, indicating persistent ethical and organizational challenges.

Conclusion: The Double Reduction Policy had a significant yet uneven impact on teachers' professional integrity, improving observable professional behaviors while leaving core instructional and ethical competencies underdeveloped. The findings underscore the need for a structured social support program to strengthen teachers' professional integrity amid educational reforms.

Keywords: Professional Integrity, Double Reduction Policy, Off-Campus Training Centers, Teachers, Social Support Program.

Introduction

Professional integrity is a foundational principle in the teaching profession, encompassing ethical conduct, moral responsibility, accountability, and a sustained commitment to learners' holistic development. Teachers are entrusted not only with the transmission of knowledge but also with the responsibility of modeling ethical behavior, fairness, and respect, which significantly influence students' values and social development. In educational systems worldwide, professional integrity serves as a cornerstone for public trust, educational quality, and institutional credibility. When teachers' integrity is compromised, the consequences extend beyond individual classrooms, affecting learner outcomes, parental confidence, and societal perceptions of education as a whole (Stelios & Christodoulou, 2020).

In China, the role of teachers has long been regarded with high social esteem, reflecting the nation's emphasis on education as a vehicle for social stability, economic development, and national progress. However, recent structural reforms in the education sector have reshaped teachers' professional landscapes, particularly with the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy. Introduced in 2021, this policy aims to reduce students' academic burden by limiting excessive homework and strictly regulating off-campus tutoring and training institutions. While the policy seeks to promote educational equity and student well-being, it has also generated significant implications for teachers employed in off-campus training centers, including job insecurity, altered professional roles, and shifting performance expectations (Yu, 2022).

Teachers working in off-campus training centers occupy a unique and often precarious position within China's education system. Unlike public school teachers, they operate in environments with less standardized regulation, varying employment conditions, and heightened market pressures. The implementation of the Double Reduction Policy has intensified these challenges, raising concerns about how teachers maintain professional integrity amid institutional closures, reduced teaching hours, income instability, and changing societal

perceptions of their work. These pressures may affect teachers' ethical decision-making, commitment to professional standards, and overall work attitudes, underscoring the need for systematic investigation.

Social support plays a critical role in helping teachers navigate such professional and emotional challenges. Research indicates that adequate social support - whether emotional, informational, or material - can buffer stress, promote positive coping strategies, and sustain professional identity and ethical behavior in demanding work environments (Diers, 2020; Turner et al., 2022). In the context of educational reform, social support mechanisms are particularly vital for teachers facing role conflict, uncertainty, and diminished professional recognition.

Given these realities, it is essential to examine how the Double Reduction Policy influences the professional integrity of teachers in off-campus training centers and to identify the forms of social support necessary to sustain ethical practice and professional well-being. This study seeks to assess teachers' self-perceptions of professional integrity before and during the policy's implementation and to use these findings as a basis for proposing a responsive social support program. By addressing the intersection of policy reform, professional integrity, and social support, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of teachers' experiences under educational transformation and offers practical insights for policymakers, educational leaders, and support institutions committed to fostering ethical and resilient teaching professionals.

Methods

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative descriptive research design, utilizing a survey method to gather data from respondents. Descriptive research is appropriate when the objective is to describe existing conditions, perceptions, or characteristics of a population without manipulating variables (Creswell, 2018). This design enabled the researcher to assess teachers' self-reported professional integrity in terms of personal characteristics and workplace integrity, as well as to determine significant differences in these variables before and during the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy.

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study were teachers currently employed in off-campus training centers located in Dongying, Shandong Province, China. A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents who met the following criteria: (1) they had been

teaching in off-campus training centers for at least two years prior to the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy, and (2) they remained employed for at least one and a half years during the policy's implementation. From an estimated population of 1,140 teachers, a total of 237 respondents were selected as the sample size based on Slovin's formula, ensuring adequate representation and statistical reliability.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using a researcher-modified survey questionnaire consisting of two major parts. The first part measured teachers' self-assessment of professional integrity before the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy, while the second part measured the same variables during its implementation. Professional integrity was assessed across two dimensions: (1) character traits (such as diligence, communication skills, discipline, and accommodation of individual differences) and (2) workplace integrity (including adherence to the code of ethics, teamwork, excellence, and respect for others). The instrument was subjected to content validation by education experts and underwent reliability testing to ensure clarity, consistency, and appropriateness for the target population.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, formal permission was secured from the administrators of the selected off-campus training centers. The validated questionnaires were then distributed to the respondents, either in printed or electronic form, depending on accessibility. Respondents were given sufficient time to accomplish the questionnaire to ensure thoughtful and accurate responses. Completed questionnaires were retrieved after one week, and responses were carefully checked, organized, and encoded for analysis. Ethical considerations such as voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity were strictly observed throughout the data-gathering process.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools. Descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, weighted means, standard deviations, and rankings, were used to describe teachers' levels of professional integrity before and during policy implementation. To determine whether there were significant differences between the two periods, a paired-sample t-test was employed. All statistical tests were conducted at a 0.05 level of significance. The results of the analysis served as the empirical basis for proposing a social support program responsive to the identified needs of off-campus training center teachers.

Results

Table 1: Assessment of Teachers' Professional Integrity in Terms of Character Traits Before and During the Implementation of the Double Reduction Policy

Character Traits	Before Implementation (WM)	VI	Rank	During Implementation (WM)	VI	Rank
Diligence	1.15	SD	8.5	1.19	SD	7.5
Knowledgeable	1.17	SD	6	1.17	SD	9
Good Communication Skills	1.15	SD	8.5	1.22	SD	5.5
Friendly and Approachable	1.17	SD	6	1.24	SD	3.5
Good Relationships with Parents	1.17	SD	6	1.26	SD	1.5
Feedback Provision	1.22	SD	3	1.24	SD	3.5
Teaching Methods	1.24	SD	2	1.22	SD	5.5
Discipline	1.19	SD	4	1.26	SD	1.5
Individual Differences	1.28	SD	1	1.19	SD	7.5
Composite Mean	1.19	SD		1.22	SD	
Standard Deviation	0.399			0.413		

Legend: 1.00–1.50 = Strongly Disagree (SD)

Interpretation

Table 1 shows that teachers rated their professional integrity in terms of character traits as “Strongly Disagree” both before and during the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy, with composite means of 1.19 and 1.22, respectively. This indicates an overall low self-assessment of professional integrity in both periods.

Before implementation, the highest-ranked trait was *accommodation of individual differences* (WM = 1.28), suggesting that teachers exerted effort to address students' varied learning needs despite other challenges. Conversely, *diligence* and *communication skills* ranked lowest, indicating perceived deficiencies in lesson preparation and instructional delivery.

During implementation, *good relationships with parents* and *discipline* emerged as the highest-ranked traits (WM = 1.26). This shift suggests that the policy heightened teachers' focus on parental engagement and classroom management, possibly due to increased scrutiny and accountability. However, *knowledge mastery* remained the lowest-ranked trait (WM = 1.17), reflecting persistent concerns regarding subject expertise.

The results suggest that while certain interpersonal and management-related traits improved slightly during policy implementation, core instructional competencies remained weak, underscoring the need for targeted professional and institutional support.

Table 2: Assessment of Teachers' Professional Integrity in Terms of Workplace Integrity Before and During the Implementation of the Double Reduction Policy

Workplace Integrity Indicators	Before Implementation (WM)	VI	Rank	During Implementation (WM)	VI	Rank
Professional Integrity (Code of Ethics)	1.15	SD	4	1.22	SD	4
Teamwork	1.26	SD	2	1.26	SD	1.5
Excellence	1.17	SD	3	1.26	SD	1.5
Respect for Others	1.30	SD	1	1.24	SD	3
Composite Mean	1.22	SD		1.24	SD	
Standard Deviation	0.443			0.428		

Interpretation

Table 2 reveals that teachers' workplace integrity was consistently rated as “Strongly Disagree” before and during policy implementation. The composite mean slightly increased from 1.22 to 1.24, indicating a marginal improvement but still reflecting low perceived workplace integrity.

Before implementation, *respect for others* ranked highest (WM = 1.30), suggesting that teachers

maintained collegial courtesy despite structural and organizational challenges. *Professional integrity* ranked lowest, indicating difficulties in fully adhering to ethical standards, possibly due to institutional pressures and unclear regulatory expectations.

During implementation, *teamwork* and *excellence* jointly ranked highest (WM = 1.26). This suggests that policy changes may have encouraged

collaborative efforts and heightened performance awareness. However, adherence to the *Code of Ethics* remained low, highlighting the ethical strain imposed by changing work conditions and job insecurity.

These findings emphasize that organizational ethics and professional standards are vulnerable during policy-driven transitions, particularly in less-regulated educational environments.

Table 3: Difference Between Teachers' Professional Integrity in Terms of Character Traits

Character Traits	Mean (Before)	Mean (During)	t-value	Sig.	Decision	Remarks
Diligence	1.15	1.19	-3.224	0.001	Reject Ho	Significant
Knowledgeable	1.17	1.17	0.000	1.000	Accept Ho	Not Significant
Communication Skills	1.15	1.22	-2.565	0.011	Reject Ho	Significant
Friendly & Approachable	1.17	1.24	-2.255	0.025	Reject Ho	Significant
Good Relationships	1.17	1.26	-4.664	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant
Feedback	1.21	1.24	-1.000	0.318	Accept Ho	Not Significant
Teaching Methods	1.23	1.22	1.000	0.318	Accept Ho	Not Significant
Discipline	1.19	1.26	-3.993	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant
Individual Differences	1.28	1.19	4.790	0.000	Reject Ho	Significant
Overall	1.19	1.22	-2.865	0.005	Reject Ho	Significant

Interpretation

Table 3 indicates that the overall difference in teachers' professional integrity before and during the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy is statistically significant ($p = 0.005$). This confirms that the policy had a measurable impact on teachers' professional integrity.

Significant improvements were observed in diligence, communication skills, approachability, relationships with parents, and discipline, suggesting that teachers adapted to increased expectations related to classroom effectiveness and stakeholder engagement. These changes may reflect heightened accountability under the policy.

However, no significant differences were found in *knowledge mastery*, *feedback provision*, and *teaching methods*. This indicates that while surface-level professional behaviors improved, deep instructional competencies and pedagogical development did not significantly change.

Notably, teachers' ability to address *individual differences* significantly declined during implementation, possibly due to increased workload, reduced autonomy, and constrained instructional flexibility.

The results demonstrate that the Double Reduction Policy significantly influenced teachers' professional integrity, particularly in interpersonal, behavioral, and management-related domains. However, instructional quality and ethical confidence remained weak, highlighting systemic gaps in training, support, and professional development. These findings strongly justify the need for a structured social support program that addresses not only emotional and material needs but

also ethical guidance, pedagogical capacity-building, and professional identity reinforcement.

Conclusion

This study examined the professional integrity of teachers working in off-campus training centers in Dongying, Shandong Province, China, before and during the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy. Specifically, it assessed professional integrity in terms of personal character traits and workplace integrity and determined whether significant differences existed between the two periods. Based on the findings, several conclusions are drawn.

First, the overall level of professional integrity among off-campus training center teachers was found to be low both before and during the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy, as reflected in the consistently low composite mean ratings across all indicators. This suggests that teachers perceived limitations in their professional conduct, ethical confidence, and instructional competencies regardless of the policy period. The persistent low ratings indicate that challenges related to professional integrity are not solely policy-induced but are deeply rooted in the structural and organizational conditions of off-campus training centers.

Second, while professional integrity remained generally low, the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy resulted in statistically significant changes in several character-related dimensions. Teachers demonstrated improvements in diligence, communication skills, approachability, discipline, and relationships with parents during the policy's implementation. These changes imply that increased regulation and accountability may encourage teachers to strengthen visible professional behaviors

and interpersonal responsibilities. However, the absence of significant improvement in knowledge mastery, teaching methods, and feedback provision indicates that core instructional competencies were not substantially enhanced, highlighting a disconnect between behavioral compliance and pedagogical development.

Third, workplace integrity exhibited only minimal improvement during policy implementation. Although teamwork and commitment to excellence showed slight increases, adherence to professional ethics and overall workplace integrity remained weak. This finding suggests that policy reforms, when not accompanied by institutional support mechanisms, may place ethical strain on teachers rather than strengthen their professional values. Job insecurity, unclear expectations, and reduced institutional stability likely contributed to teachers' difficulty in maintaining high ethical standards.

The significant overall difference in professional integrity before and during the policy confirms that the Double Reduction Policy has had a measurable impact on teachers' professional experiences. However, the nature of this impact appears to be uneven - favoring surface-level professional behaviors while leaving deeper instructional and ethical foundations underdeveloped. This imbalance underscores the importance of comprehensive support systems that address not only compliance and performance but also teachers' professional identity, ethical resilience, and pedagogical growth.

The findings highlight the urgent need for a structured social support program for off-campus training center teachers. Such a program should integrate emotional, professional, and institutional support to help teachers adapt to policy changes while sustaining professional integrity. By addressing both individual and organizational needs, educational stakeholders can foster a more ethical, resilient, and professionally grounded teaching workforce amid ongoing educational reforms.

Conflict of Interest

The authors certify that no significant competing personal, professional, or financial interests could have affected the execution or presentation of the work contained in this manuscript.

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