

## Fali Study on Reducing Teachers' Non-duty Work Burden

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[ **Abstract** ] Currently, primary and secondary school teachers face the practical predicament of excessive non-duty work burdens encroaching upon their professional responsibilities. This not only erodes the professional dignity of teachers but also fundamentally undermines the quality of education. However, existing research has yet to establish a systematic Fali framework for understanding this issue. The “inherent principles of education” dictate that educational activities must ensure teachers can focus on their core mission of nurturing students. The unchecked expansion of non-instructional tasks essentially violates the fundamental laws and ethics of education. Meanwhile, “legal stipulations” manifest in the system of rights and obligations established by laws and regulations, which embodies the fundamental spirit and principles safeguarding teachers' rights and interests. Based on this analysis, recommendations include strengthening consensus on law-based educational governance through legal awareness initiatives, clarifying the boundaries of professional duties via responsibility list systems, and improving the oversight mechanisms for educational administrative law enforcement. The ultimate objective is to construct a collaborative governance ecosystem guided by ethical governance and fortified by robust legal safeguards.

[ **Key words** ] Fali analysis; teachers' rights and interests; non-duty work burden; teachers' professionalization development

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“Realizing educational modernization and running education that satisfies the people” is not only a strategic goal for national education development but also the essential aspiration of the public for high-quality education. Ensuring teachers' basic rights and interests, reducing their non-duty work burdens, and promoting their willingness to teach are crucial for achieving these objectives. However, due to historical and institutional reasons, teachers, especially primary and secondary school teachers, still face heavy workloads. For example, high-repetition and low-efficiency work deployments, numerous inspections and supervisions, and the collection of non-educational data have gradually become “important” tasks that frontline primary and secondary school teachers must complete, even being alienated into rigid assessment indicators. This not only hinders the normal development of educational and teaching activities but also seriously damages teachers' physical and mental health.

Although academic circles have paid significant attention to this issue, most existing studies focus on structural contradictions at the institutional level, failing to conduct in-depth analysis from a Fali perspective. This limitation in research perspective has led to difficulties in clarifying the legal boundaries between administrative power and professional autonomy when addressing teachers' non-duty work burdens, as well as the inability to construct a institutionalized solution mechanism based on the principle of balance between rights and responsibilities, ultimately

falling into a cycle of “treating the symptoms rather than the root cause”.

Education activities aim at the core goal of “cultivating morality and educating people”, and teachers’ focus on teaching and education is an inevitable requirement for education to return to its essence. However, the disorderly expansion of non-duty work deviates from this value orientation and hinders the all-round development of students. Meanwhile, the complexity of rights and obligations in educational jurisprudence requires precise definition of teachers’ responsibility boundaries. The Teachers’ Law grants teachers professional rights such as the right to education and teaching and the right to academic research, but the proliferation of non-duty work has blurred these boundaries and disrupted the balance between rights and obligations. Therefore, to overcome these research limitations and practical puzzles, it is urgent to systematically construct the Fali basis and measures for reducing teachers’ non-duty work burdens.

## **1 Fali basis for reducing teachers’ non-duty work burden**

### **1.1 The connotation of Fali**

Fali contains rich connotations and meanings. The *Cihai (Sea of Words)* defines “Fali” as “the basic spirit and academic theory forming a country’s laws or a specific branch of its laws”. The *Great Chinese Dictionary* interprets it as “legal principles”. Shu Guoying argues that “Fali” essentially refers to legal regulations or norms. Zhang Wenxian, a long-time scholar of Fali, has written that “Fali” encompasses the rationale of law, the principles of law, the logic of law, the axioms of law, the norms of law, the practical reasoning of law, the virtues of law, and the values of law. He notes that Fali pervades every aspect of legal practice, political life, and public life. Therefore, safeguarding teachers’ rights and reducing their non-duty work burdens also embodies rationales, axioms, and values rooted in jurisprudence. Although Fali is omnipresent, it often remains implicit or unarticulated, which explains why it is easily overlooked—and why non-duty work assignments for teachers are often mistakenly normalized in daily operations.

According to jurisprudential methodology, the value and efficacy of jurisprudence rely on specific carrier forms. Scholars have identified ten representative forms of “jurisprudence carriers”, categorized into six groups: legal terms and concepts, proverbs and maxims, propositions and discourses, judicial precedents and cases, stories, and legal provisions. Drawing on the understanding and interpretation of Fali by many scholars, this study holds that the Fali basis for reducing teachers’ non-duty-related workload includes both the basic laws governing educational activities, namely the “principle of matters”, and the basic spirit and provisions of laws and regulations, namely the “stipulations of law”. The “principle of matters” and the “stipulations of law” together form the Fali foundation for alleviating teachers’ non-duty-related workload.

### **1.2 The “principles of matters” for reducing teachers’ non-duty work burden**

Education is the foundation of a nation’s long-term development, and teachers are the foundation of education. As the cornerstone of national development, education’s essence lies in achieving cultural inheritance and innovation through specialized pedagogical activities. Analyzing the root of the conflict, the issue of teachers’ non-duty work burdens essentially reflects a value clash between educational laws and administrative logic. John Dewey’s theory of “education as growth” establishes teachers’ role as professional guides, which in contemporary educational governance embodies three core propositions: first, teachers’ professional autonomy is a prerequisite for educational effectiveness; second, the continuity of teaching activities forms the guarantee for educational outcomes; third, the purity of educational relationships defines the boundary of teachers’ responsibilities. Christopher Day also notes that within the context of teachers’ “professional capital”, their professional development is influenced by human capital, social capital, and decision-making capital, which ultimately enhance each other in a harmonious state, thereby promoting overall improvements in education quality. However, heavy non-duty work burdens directly cause systemic damage at three levels: micro-level degradation of teachers’ professional capabilities, meso-level weakening of schools’ educational functions, and macro-level delays in educational modernization. From an educational ecology perspective, reducing teachers’ non-duty work burdens

essentially involves reconstructing the energy allocation mechanism of the education system. Practices have proven that any burden-shifting deviating from professional priorities will disrupt the balance of the educational ecosystem. Therefore, establishing a “negative list” system for teachers’ responsibilities based on educational laws not only aligns with the requirements of building a “support system for teachers’ professional development” proposed in *China’s Education Modernization 2035* but also serves as a key breakthrough for achieving modernized educational governance.

### 1.3 The “stipulations of law” for reducing teachers’ non-duty work burden

The “Principles of Matters”, by emphasizing education’s fundamental requirement to focus on nurturing people, provide value guidance and a content framework for the “stipulations of law”. From a legal perspective, the spirit and regulations safeguarding teachers’ rights originate from the basic laws of educational activities and the fairness and justice emphasized in laws and regulations. This essentially transforms educational laws into enforceable institutional arrangements through the synergistic effect of multi-level legal norms. First, as the fundamental law, the *Constitution of the People’s Republic of China* establishes the principle of “improving working conditions” in Article 42, along with specific measures such as rationality reviews of work burdens and legalization of responsibility lists, which provide a value foundation for formulating rules to protect teachers’ rights. Second, at the level of specialized education laws, regulations such as the *Education Law of the People’s Republic of China* (hereinafter referred to as the *Education Law*) and the *Teachers Law of the People’s Republic of China* (hereinafter referred to as the *Teachers Law*) construct a closed-loop system of “rights-obligations-responsibilities”: on the one hand, the purposive restriction of “loyalty to educational undertakings” in Article 33 of the *Education Law* strictly limits teachers’ obligations to professional categories directly related to teaching activities; on the other hand, the expansive interpretation of Article 7(4) of the *Teachers Law* (“the right to timely remuneration, enjoyment of welfare benefits stipulated by the state, and paid vacations during winter and summer holidays”) implicitly includes the right to refuse non-duty work. It is worth noting that although the *Labor Law* does not directly apply to teachers in public institutions, the labor standards it establishes indirectly regulate the rationality of work through judicial precedents and administrative regulations. This three-dimensional regulatory model of “constitutional guidance—specialized law refinement—basic law supplementation” ultimately forms a clear “golden circle of norms” for teachers’ responsibilities: the core layer consists of statutory core responsibilities such as teaching and education; the buffer layer includes necessary auxiliary work consistent with the principle of proportionality; and the prohibited layer excludes all irrelevant social affairs, thus achieving institutional guarantees for teachers’ workload reduction at the normative level.

## 2 Governance strategies for teachers’ non-duty work burden based on Fali analysis

### 2.1 Following *Educational Laws* and returning to the core responsibility of cultivating virtue and nurturing talent

Educational activities possess inherent professionalism and systematicness. As key subjects for knowledge transmission and value shaping, teachers’ rational allocation of energy and time directly influences education quality. Teachers are not merely “professional workers” but also “natural persons”. Work burdens exceeding their job responsibilities not only encroach on time for lesson preparation, teaching research, and reflective practice but also reduce the frequency and scope of teacher-student interaction. Additionally, such burdens exacerbate professional burnout, severely damaging teachers’ physical and mental health as well as professional dignity. From the perspective of *Educational Laws*, cumbersome non-teaching tasks violate the basic logic that “teachers should focus on teaching and educating”. Ethically, excessive workload and unbalanced rights-responsibilities disrupt the virtuous cycle of the educational ecosystem.

Therefore, teacher education management activities must be guided by the “principles of matters” (*Educational Laws*). We should firmly establish the educational development philosophy that “education is the foundation of a nation’s long-term development”, reaffirm the goal of “cultivating virtue and nurturing talent”,

and center on the core mission of “education”. Through practical actions and measures, we must leverage teachers’ pivotal role in facilitating educational activities and guiding students’ healthy growth, thereby inspiring teachers to dedicate themselves fully to the noble cause of education.

## 2.2 Improving the legal implementation mechanism for protecting teachers’ rights and interests

First, enhance the awareness of law compliance among all parties and foster a Fali mindset for safeguarding teachers’ rights. Abiding by laws and regulations is a social responsibility and moral obligation for every citizen. Strengthening public awareness of law compliance is not only a fundamental aspect of comprehensively advancing the rule of law but also a critical prerequisite for ensuring teachers’ rights, reducing their non-duty work burdens, and promoting educational development. Specifically, enhancing law compliance awareness requires eradicating the stubborn issues of bureaucracy and formalism from the ideological root, particularly among staff in various departments involved in education, who should consciously improve their awareness of managing education according to law and assist in the normal development of educational undertakings in strict accordance with laws and regulations. Furthermore, protecting teachers’ rights and reducing their non-duty work burdens require not only law compliance awareness from all parties but also a Fali mindset. A Fali mindset refers to a comprehensive decision-making approach based on the respect for legal norms and the rule of law order. In the context of safeguarding teachers’ rights and reducing their non-duty work burdens, a Fali mindset means forming a thinking pattern focused on protecting teachers’ rights under the rule of law and adopting work decision-making methods guided by the rule of law. It involves using a legal mindset to carry out teacher education and management, thereby eliminating arbitrary work assignments for frontline primary and secondary school teachers.

Second, improve laws, regulations, and related rules to provide normative guarantees. As a social norm, law is characterized by normativity, generality, and compulsoriness. Sound laws, regulations, and administrative rules can not only restore the dignity of teaching in society but also create a favorable environment for teachers to focus on teaching and educating from a policy perspective. This ensures that teachers can devote their main energy to educational research and professional development, thereby effectively enhancing the professional level and work quality of the teaching staff. In 2019, the Ministry of Education explicitly required that activities not included in the list or unapproved activities should not be carried out in schools. This policy aims to liberate primary and secondary school teachers from various surveys, evaluations, competitions, and social activities unrelated to education, teaching, and research. Therefore, in constructing the institutional system, a three-level guarantee system of “laws-regulations-rules” with clear hierarchy and precise expression should be established. This includes interpreting the *Teachers Law* to clarify responsibility boundaries and scope of application, formulating a negative list system and supporting implementation rules. Finally, through systematic institutional designs such as establishing responsibility lists, improving complaint channels, optimizing evaluation systems, and strengthening supervision and accountability, the goals of reducing teachers’ workload and empowering education can be truly achieved.

Third, strict compliance with laws, rigorous law enforcement, and accountability for violations are not only fundamental requirements of a society under the rule of law but also the core essence of safeguarding teachers’ rights and reducing non-duty work burdens in accordance with the law. Laws and regulations such as the *Education Law* and *Teachers Law* have clearly granted teachers statutory rights including education and teaching, academic research, etc., establishing clear boundaries for teachers’ professional conduct and rights protection. Any act that exceeds the statutory job responsibilities of teachers and arbitrarily assigns non-teaching tasks is essentially an infringement on teachers’ legitimate rights, seriously violating the spirit of the rule of law, legal norms, and the basic laws of educational activities. Therefore, in the process of protecting teachers’ rights and reducing non-duty work burdens, implementing the requirements of “strict compliance with laws, rigorous law enforcement, and accountability for violations” requires three key measures: (1) strengthen educational administrative law enforcement; clarify the criteria for defining violations involving non-duty work and their legal liabilities to ensure law enforcement follows clear rules. (2) unblock channels for teachers’ rights relief; establish a rapid-response

complaint mechanism to address grievances promptly. (3) build a multi-department collaborative supervision system; conduct regular special inspections, impose serious legal accountability for acts violating teachers' responsibility lists or infringing on their rights, and promote the effective implementation of legal norms through strict law enforcement to fully protect teachers' basic rights and professional autonomy.

Fourth, grasp the complementarity and compatibility of the rule of law and the rule of virtue, and adhere to the parallel implementation of both. The rule of law provides hard safeguards, while the rule of virtue offers soft maintenance. The maintenance of social order should be based on the combination of these two approaches. The legal requirement of "safeguarding teachers' rights and reducing non-duty work burdens" emphasizes, from a Fali perspective, the importance of the basic principles of educational activities and the provisions of laws and regulations related to education, serving as a hard guarantee for the smooth advancement of this work. At the same time, it is essential to recognize that the provisions of jurisprudence also contain moral components. Morality is the law in people's hearts, serving as the soft maintenance of rules and an important supplement to the rule of law. In the context of "safeguarding teachers' rights and reducing non-duty work burdens", the rule of virtue means shaping respect for teachers and education into a universal belief across all sectors of society through subtle influence. Specifically, adhering to the integration of the rule of law and the rule of virtue in teacher education and management involves organically and closely combining the coercive power of laws and regulations with the edifying power of moral education. This approach aims to educate and guide Party members, cadres, and the general public to consciously form good behavioral habits of upholding morality and abiding by the law, while respecting the professionalism of teaching and the particularity of educational activities.

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