

Optimizing English Homework Design Models Under the “Double Reduction” Policy in Compulsory Education

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Abstract:

The assignment and correction of English homework is a crucial part of English teaching, serving as an extension and expansion of English classes. It helps students consolidate learned knowledge, develop various language abilities and comprehensive skills, and enables frontline teachers to check teaching effect, conduct teaching reflection, and improve teaching practices. In late July 2021, the Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Off-Campus Training for Students in Compulsory Education (hereinafter referred to as the “double reduction policy”) issued by the General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council proposed goals of “comprehensively reducing students’ excessive academic burden” and “more scientific and reasonable homework assignment”. [1] This has put forward higher and newer requirements for the quantity and content of English homework. At present, the “double reduction policy” has been implemented for more than a year. Issues such as whether English homework complies with the policy’s requirements and norms, existing problems, and solutions to current deficiencies urgently need to be addressed.

Keywords:

Double Reduction Policy, Compulsory Education, English Homework Design

1. Introduction

This study integrates the latest national educational policies into teaching practice, actively responding to national educational guidelines. It aims to enhance students’ learning efficiency while reducing their academic burden, promote their comprehensive and healthy growth, and better fulfill China’s educational objectives.

2. Domestic and Foreign Research Results

2.1. Foreign Research

2.1.1. Forms and Content of Homework

American scholar Cooper classifies homework into four types based on purpose:

Practice homework: Helps students practice knowledge and skills learned in class.

Preparation homework: Assists students in understanding background knowledge related to course content before class, laying the groundwork for formal learning.

Extension homework: Enables students to transfer classroom knowledge to real-life scenarios.

Integrative homework: Combines knowledge and skills to cultivate students' comprehensive abilities.

Kairov categorized homework into three types:

Educational homework: For practice, preparation for new lessons, and personal development.

Interactive homework: Facilitates home-school communication, parent-child interaction, or peer collaboration.

Political homework: Designed to fulfill policy directives. [2]

2.1.2. Quantity of Homework

Cooper's social surveys concluded that the relationship between homework quantity and learning effectiveness presentation an inverted "U" curve: too little homework fails to consolidate knowledge, while excessive homework leads to mechanical repetition, reducing interest and effectiveness. Homework quantity should also be age-appropriate: [3]

Below Grade 4: ≤ 3 assignments/week, completed in ~45 minutes.

Grades 4–6: 2–4 assignments/week, 1–3 hours total.

Grades 7–9: 3–5 assignments/week, 4–9 hours total.

Grades 10–12: 4–5 assignments/week, 9–10 hours total.

Soviet educator Sukhomlinsky opposed excessive homework, advocating afternoon extracurricular activities to balance physical and mental development, which was proven to enhance teaching quality and student well-being. Alfie Kohn argued that homework is necessary but shows weak correlation with academic achievement; excessive homework diminishes interest and causes psychological stress.

2.1.3. Difficulty of Homework

Japanese scholar Yoshio Hatano emphasized tailored homework based on students' situation and interests to avoid uniformity. Cooper supported a mix of difficulty levels (basic, intermediate, advanced). Soviet educator Shatalov proposed assigning basic tasks with additional challenging ones to accommodate diverse abilities, maximizing potential without overwhelming students. [4]

2.2. Domestic Research

2.2.1. Forms and Content of Homework

Chen Li noted that English homework should integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing to engage multiple senses. He argued that current primary and secondary school homework focuses on written tasks, with few practical activities. [5]

Zhang Nianhong defined homework as activities to complete learning tasks, dividing

it into in-class and after-class categories (including written, oral, practical, preview, and review tasks). Yu Kunlun suggested innovating homework forms based on cognitive characteristics, emphasizing inquiry-based and activity-oriented tasks, and experimenting with differentiated and layered designs. [6]

2.2.2. Quantity of Homework

Fang Yinglian proposed limiting daily homework duration to ≤ 30 minutes per subject (Chinese, Math, English). Li Ming opposed “question sea tactics” and advocated moderate quantities. [7] Yao Liming emphasized inter-teacher coordination, warning that excessive homework causes anxiety and fatigue, suggesting ≤ 1 hour/day for primary students. [8]

2.2.3. Difficulty of Homework

Zou Ning advocated layered homework for students with high, medium, and low abilities to stimulate motivation. Tan Zhenhua argued homework should serve remediation, consolidation, and enhancement functions, enabling progress for all. Yao Meihua suggested personalized, tiered difficulty allowing students to choose tasks matching their abilities. [9]

2.2.4. Homework Design Under the Double Reduction Policy

Since the policy’s implementation, Chinese educators and teachers have conducted relevant research. He Xiaolan and Liu Mingdong proposed optimizing homework through student-centered content improvement, form innovation, and feedback refinement. [10] Teacher Ming Ying outlined principles: student subjectivity, theory-practice integration, gradual progression, and inspiring learning. Zhang Sishi emphasized establishing a correct homework concept, balancing systematic goals with basic and inquiry-based content, selecting appropriate types, controlling difficulty, and promoting personalized learning. [11]

3. Research Methods

This study focuses on optimizing English homework design under the Double Reduction Policy, using questionnaire surveys and interviews. After background research, a two-part questionnaire was developed:

Part 1: Basic information (name, gender, grade, household location).

Part 2: Current status and problems of English homework.

A total of 50 questionnaires were distributed, 33 recovered (30 valid). Supplementary interviews were conducted to explore specific perceptions of homework design.

4. Experimental Data Analysis

Table 1. Question 5.

Option	Quantity	Proportion
Not in line	1	3.3%
Not very in line	5	16.6%
In line	19	63.3%
Very in line	2	6.6%
Extremely in line	3	10%

Observation: Over half of students are satisfied with homework difficulty, but some low-achieving students find it challenging, while high-achieving students desire more exploratory tasks.

Table 2. Question 6.

Option	Quantity	Proportion
Not in line	3	8.06%
Not very in line	10	24.19%
In line	22	50%
Very in line	0	0%
Extremely in line	0	0%

Observation: Student satisfaction with homework quantity is low. No students reported “no pressure”; interviews revealed heavy recitation and dictation tasks cause stress.

Table 3. Question 7.

Option	Quantity	Proportion
Not in line	2	6.6%
Not very in line	17	56.6%
In line	7	23.3%
Very in line	3	10%
Extremely in line	1	3.0%

Observation: Influenced by exam-oriented education, homework prioritizes written tasks, neglecting English proficiency and oral skills.

Table 4. Question 8.

Option	Quantity	Proportion
Not in line	0	0%
Not very in line	24	80%
In line	6	20%
Very in line	0	0%
Extremely in line	0	0%

Observation: Homework focuses on independent problem-solving, lacking collaborative tasks to develop teamwork.

Table 5. Question 9.

Option	Quantity	Proportion
Not in line	12	40%
Not very in line	16	53.3%
In line	1	3.3%
Very in line	1	3.3%
Extremely in line	0	0%

Observation: Over 80% of students believe teachers insufficiently emphasize practical language application.

Table 6. Question 10.

Option	Quantity	Proportion
Not in line	0	0%
Not very in line	4	13.3%
In line	12	40%
Very in line	14	46.6%
Extremely in line	0	0%

Observation: Most students complete homework independently, demonstrating good study habits.

Table 7. Question 11.

Option	Quantity	Proportion
Not in line	10	33.3%
Not very in line	10	33.3%
In line	5	16.6%
Very in line	4	13.3%
Extremely in line	1	3.3%

Observation: Heavy homework burdens occupy leisure time, limiting voluntary extracurricular learning.

Table 8. Question 12.

Option	Quantity	Proportion
Not in line	0	0%
Not very in line	24	80%
In line	5	16.66%
Very in line	1	3.33%
Extremely in line	0	0%

Observation: Most students find homework monotonous, failing to stimulate interest.

Table 9. Question 13.

Option	Quantity	Proportion
Not in line	0	0%
Not very in line	0	0%
In line	4	13.33%
Very in line	26	86.66%
Extremely in line	0	0%

Observation: Students highly value timely teacher feedback and recognition.

Table 10. Question 14.

Option	Quantity	Proportion
Not in line	2	6.66%
Not very in line	18	60%
In line	9	30%
Very in line	1	3.33%
Extremely in line	0	0%

Observation: Despite digitalization, most teachers use conservative homework assignment methods, rarely leveraging new media.

5. Discussion of Results and Solutions

Data analysis reveals problems in current English homework design. While the Double Reduction Policy alleviates student stress, excessive stress may harm learning. Thus, measures should balance burden reduction and quality improvement:

(1) Diversify Homework Forms with Technology

Homework should extend beyond textbooks. The 13th Five-Year Plan for Educational Informatization emphasizes integrating technology into teaching. Schools can use online platforms for interdisciplinary activities, automated grading, and data analysis to identify teaching gaps, enabling data-driven decisions.

(2) Enhance Feedback and Correction

Timely feedback: Teachers should promptly review homework, providing error corrections and encouraging comments. Public criticism is discouraged; warnings should be private.

Constructive comments: comments should complement “right/wrong” marks by addressing problem-solving thinking, abilities, habits, and emotions. They should be concise, encouraging, specific, and respectful, using collaborative language to foster positive habits.

(3) Strengthen Process Guidance and Student Autonomy

Value perception: Help students understand homework’s purpose, transforming passive compliance into active engagement (“I want to do” vs. “I have to do”).

Strategy training: Teach cognitive and metacognitive strategies for self-regulation, time management, and error correction. Provide resources and support to create a conducive environment.

(4) Shift to multiple assessment

Diversified homework requires moving from result-only evaluation to multiple assessment

assessment, ensuring personalized and educational feedback.

Appendix

Questionnaire on English Homework Design Under the Double Reduction Policy

Dear Students,

This questionnaire aims to understand your satisfaction with current English homework to improve learning outcomes and interest. Responses are confidential and used for research only. Please answer truthfully. (1=Not in line; 2=Not very in line; 3=In line; 4=Very in line; 5=Extremely in line)

Part 1: Basic Information

Gender: ☐Male ☐Female

Household location: ☐Urban ☐Rural

School: _____

Grade: _____

Part 2: Questionnaire Content

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
5	Daily English homework difficulty is appropriate for my learning needs	0				
6	I can complete daily English homework on time without feeling pressured	8				
7	Written homework and other forms appear equally often.	2				
8	Independent and collaborative homework appear equally often.	0				
9	Thinking/practical tasks outnumber mechanical copying/recitation tasks	0				
10	I can mostly complete English homework independently.					
11	I take initiative to do extra English homework after finishing assigned tasks					

12	Completing English homework increases my interest in learning English					
13	I care about teachers' feedback and evaluations on homework.					
14	Teachers use internet/multimedia to assign homework.					

6. Conclusions

Through our observations, we find that despite the internet's pervasive integration into modern life since the information age, most English teachers still employ outdated assignment methods without actively exploring new media tools. Discussion of Experimental Findings and Corresponding Solutions The research data reveals multiple issues in current English homework assignments for primary and secondary schools. As modern education emphasizes student-centered approaches, particular attention is given to students' physical/mental health and personality development. The implementation of the "Double Reduction" policy has indeed helped alleviate students' prolonged academic pressure, allowing them to grow more freely and joyfully. However, excessive homework reduction may negatively impact English learning and students' overall well-being. Therefore, measures should balance stress reduction with improving English proficiency. Homework shouldn't be limited to textbook exercises or excessive drilling. In this era of rapid technological advancement, integrating technology into modern education is inevitable – we must neither over-rely on it nor reject its benefits. Leveraging its advantages, we can help students improve themselves and broaden their cognitive horizons while avoiding negative impacts. Last year, the Ministry of Education's "13th Five-Year Plan for Educational Informatization" proposed: By deepening the integration of information technology with teaching and educational management, we can strengthen the support of educational informatization for teaching reforms, especially curriculum reform. With the new requirements for core competencies in national primary and secondary school education reforms and educational development, traditional homework assessment methods have become impractical. The advantages of online platforms provide ample space for diversified homework formats. Schools can explore various subject-based practical activities to refine question design, assignment creation, completion, grading, and student performance analysis. Additionally, big data support enables teachers to promptly identify previously overlooked teaching issues and make instructional improvement decisions. Grading should be accompanied by timely feedback and corrections. Schools must collect and check students' assignments promptly, providing both correct/incorrect information and encouraging comments. For diligent students, schools should maintain records of completed assignments; for incomplete or poorly completed ones, teachers should offer necessary warnings without public criticism or scolding. Teachers should avoid simply using yes/no symbols when grading. Instead, they should provide detailed explanations for challenging errors. Students can use teacher feedback to understand their comprehension and identify mistakes for correction. Grading comments serve as a platform for teacher-student communication and emotional encouragement. In homework evaluation, crafting thoughtful comments can compensate for the limitations of simple "right or wrong" judgments. By addressing multiple dimensions including problem-solving approaches, academic competence, study habits, emotional intelligence, and character development, this method fosters teacher-student rapport, ignites students' interest in learning, and cultivates effective study habits. Effective comments should highlight key points with concise yet impactful language that serves as motivation rather than criticism. Emphasize specific achievements over general

praise, and focus on concrete improvements. Teachers should identify positive aspects in assignments while avoiding authoritative tones and adopting discussion-oriented, inspirational approaches. Maintain fairness and impartiality in evaluations. High-quality assignments inherently hold potential value, which can only be realized through students' active participation in the learning process. To enhance assignment effectiveness, educators must prioritize guidance during the completion process. Helping students understand the intrinsic value of assignments and set clear academic goals transforms passive compliance into proactive engagement. Provide students with appropriate self-regulation strategies and learning methods, including cognitive strategies and metacognitive techniques. Strengthen feedback mechanisms to help students monitor errors, reflect on mistakes, and correct themselves, thereby developing self-monitoring habits. Implement time management systems for homework completion, improve self-directed learning capabilities, offer supplementary materials, and foster home-school collaboration to create supportive homework environments. With the deepening of the new curriculum, the form and content of homework are increasingly rich, which requires us to adopt the evaluation form corresponding to the form of homework in the correction of homework, from a single result-oriented evaluation to a multi-dimensional evaluation, so that the homework evaluation can be personalized education.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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