

A Study on the Current Situation of Lower Primary School Chinese Teachers' Literacy in Designing Non-Written Homework

Chenxiao Li^{1*}

¹ School of Teacher Education, Guangzhou Huashang College, Guangzhou, China

Email Address

2019020619@m.scnu.edu.cn (Chenxiao Li)

*Correspondence: 2019020619@m.scnu.edu.cn

Received: 15 November 2025; **Accepted:** 3 December 2025; **Published:** 29 December 2025

Abstract:

To investigate the current status of literacy among lower primary school Chinese teachers in designing non-written assignments under the “Double Reduction” policy, this study adopted a stratified random sampling method. A total of 122 first- and second-grade Chinese teachers from 15 primary schools in a district of Guangzhou were selected as participants. Using a self-developed questionnaire with demonstrated reliability and validity, the study examined three dimensions: awareness and attitude, practical ability, and creative ability. The results indicated that lower primary school Chinese teachers exhibited a relatively high level of awareness and positive attitude toward non-written assignment design, a moderate level of practical ability, and a low level of creative ability. Overall, the findings revealed a disconnect between cognition and practice and an imbalance in development. Teachers with a normal education background and 6-10 years of teaching experience demonstrated relatively higher literacy levels, and in-service training was the factor most strongly correlated with literacy improvement. Based on these findings, the study proposed optimization strategies: normal universities should enhance pre-service training systems, frontline schools ought to refine in-service support mechanisms, and Chinese teachers themselves need to strengthen their awareness of independent professional development. This study provides a reference for improving the quality of non-written assignment design in lower primary schools and achieving the goal of “cultivating students through assignments.”

Keywords:

Lower Primary School, Non-written Assignment, Literacy of Non-Written Homework, Double Reduction Policy

1. Introduction

In 2021, the Ministry of Education issued the *Notice on Strengthening the Management of Homework in Compulsory Education Schools*, which clearly stipulated that “the total amount of written homework shall be strictly controlled. Schools must ensure that no written homework is assigned to first- and second-grade

primary school students, and appropriate consolidated exercises may be arranged on campus” [1]. This policy adjustment is not merely a “replacement of homework forms” but a repositioning of the “student-cultivating” function of homework during the basic education stage. It requires homework to shift from a “single goal of knowledge consolidation” to multiple objectives, including ability cultivation, interest stimulation, and habit formation, and from “paper-and-pencil repetitive training” to diverse forms of “practical experience and connection with daily life. In this context, non-written assignments have become the core means for lower primary schools to implement the “Double Reduction” policy and achieve the goal of “reducing quantity while improving quality”. Chinese teachers’ literacy in designing non-written assignments is a key factor in reducing students’ academic burden and improving the quality of education. However, in practice, many Chinese teachers lack systematic knowledge and skills in designing non-written homework, resulting in issues such as monotonous assignment formats, disconnection between content and daily life, and simplistic evaluation methods. Consequently [2], these assignments have become “formalistic tasks” that fail to achieve the intended policy outcomes.

2. Concept Definition

2.1. Non-Written Assignments

The *Encyclopedia Education* defines homework as teaching, encompassing a series of learning activities that students undertake to complete the tasks assigned by teachers [3]. In contrast, non-written assignments refer to homework methods that do not primarily rely on paper-and-pencil exercises. These assignments serve to increase children’s opportunities for diverse activities, enrich their learning approaches, and enhance their personal qualities [4]. Design involves the purposeful planning and conceptualization conducted prior to product development or plan implementation to address relevant problems [5]. Within instructional design, non-written assignment design is a systematic plan developed in advance by Chinese teachers. To prevent excessive written homework from improperly occupying children's time and to restore a normal childhood experience, teachers consciously decompose, select, adapt, or independently create appropriate learning activities based on different teaching objectives and supported by various learning materials. These activities are then combined in ways that meet students’ genuine needs and align with their learning processes, ultimately promoting the achievement of predetermined goals.

2.2. Literacy in Designing Non-Written Assignments

What is literacy? Literacy is an acquired ability to meet work requirements in complex situations and accomplish tasks successfully. It is a collection of relevant knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and emotions, forming a comprehensive and holistic quality structure. Characterized by implicitness, abstract generality, and relative stability, literacy profoundly influences the process and quality of physical and mental activities [6]. This study argues that literacy in designing non-written assignments is a comprehensive and holistic activity literacy that Chinese teachers must possess in various aspects-including knowledge reserves, professional skills, value attitudes, and innovative capabilities-when conducting non-written assignment design activities under the macro background of sustained social development and continuous educational reform.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Objects

To enhance the feasibility of the study and accurately assess the current state of Chinese teachers' literacy in designing non-written assignments in primary schools, this research employed a stratified random sampling method. Fifteen primary schools in a district of Guangzhou were selected, and Chinese teachers from Grades 1 and 2 were chosen as participants. A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed; 132 were returned, and after screening, 10 invalid questionnaires were excluded, resulting in 122 valid responses and an effective response rate of 81.3%. Among the valid respondents, 83 were female teachers (68%) and 39 were male teachers (32%). Specifically, 56 teachers taught Grade 1, and 66 taught Grade 2.

3.2. Research Tools

3.2.1. Scale of Lower Primary School Chinese Teachers' Literacy in Designing Non-Written Assignments

To ensure scientific rigor, the questionnaire used in this study was developed with reference to existing large-scale survey instruments-such as the "Questionnaire on the Current Situation of Design and Implementation in Compulsory Education Stages in Shanghai" (designed by the Teaching and Research Section of the Shanghai Municipal Education Commission) and the "Questionnaire on Influencing Factors of Effective Mathematics Homework" (designed by Dr. Xu Xiaolian)-and was adapted to reflect the characteristics of non-written assignments for lower grades. Titled the "Questionnaire on Lower Primary School Chinese Teachers' Literacy in Designing Non-Written Assignments, it comprises four modules: teachers' basic information; awareness and attitudes toward non-written assignments; practical ability in designing non-written assignments; and creative ability in designing non-written assignments. Specifically:

- (1) Basic information: This includes the teachers' gender, teaching grade, school location, and alma mater.
- (2) Teachers' Awareness and Attitudes Toward Non-Written Assignment Design: This includes teachers' understanding of the importance of non-written assignment design, their feelings about engaging in such activities, and their behavioral intentions related to these tasks.
- (3) Teachers' practical abilities in designing non-written assignments include clarifying assignment objectives, determining assignment formats, managing the difficulty and duration of assignments, conducting correction and evaluation, and continuously updating and optimizing the assignments.
- (4) Teachers' creative ability in designing non-written assignments: This high-level and relatively independent literacy primarily involves innovation in the content, topics, formats, and evaluation methods of non-written assignments.

3.2.2. Reliability and Validity Testing of the Questionnaire

The reliability and validity of the questionnaire were assessed through a pre-survey with a sample size of 80. Using SPSS 26.0 for analysis, the Cronbach's coefficient for the overall scale was 0.923. Among the dimensions, the coefficients were 0.812 for

“awareness and attitude towards non-written assignments”, for “practical ability in non-written assignment design”, and 0.798 for “creative ability in non-written assignment design 0.7, indicating good reliability”. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.885 (> 0.8), and Bartlett’s test of sphericity yielded $\chi^2 = 1526.378$ ($p < 0.001$), demonstrating excellent construct validity. These results indicate that the questionnaire is suitable for formal investigation (see Table 1).

Table 1. *The results of KMO and Bartlett's Test.*

Indicators		Values
KMO measure of sampling adequacy		0.870
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1354.599
	df	276
	Sig.	0.000

3.2.3. Data Processing

SPSS 26.0 was used for descriptive statistics, difference analysis, and correlation analysis of the scores of each dimension of the questionnaire and the distribution of options for key questions. This study presents the overall current situation of Chinese teachers’ literacy in designing non-written assignments and assesses teachers’ cognitive level of the objectives of non-written assignments.

4. Statistical Analysis of Research Findings

4.1. Overall Current Status of Chinese Teachers’ Literacy in Designing Non-Written Assignments

4.1.1. Score Statistics for Each Dimension

The scores for each dimension of the questionnaire were standardized on a 1–5 scale (1=lowest, 5=highest). The mean and standard deviation for each dimension were then calculated. The results are presented in Table 2:

Table 2. *Means, Standard Deviations, and Score Levels of Literacy Dimensions.*

Dimensions of Literacy	Mean	Standard Deviation	Score Level
Awareness and Attitude	4.12	0.58	Relatively High
Practical Ability	3.21	0.69	Medium
Creative Ability	2.87	0.73	Relatively Low

The results indicate that the average score for Chinese teachers’ awareness and attitudes toward non-written assignments was 4.12, suggesting that most Chinese teachers have developed a correct understanding of the value of such assignments. The score for practical ability in designing non-written assignments was moderate (3.21), highlighting significant shortcomings in teachers’ actual assignment design skills. The score for creative ability in non-written assignment design was the lowest (mean=2.87), indicating that while Chinese teachers possess some awareness of assignment adaptation, they lack systematic methods. Overall, there is considerable room for improvement in the literacy of lower primary school Chinese teachers regarding the design of non-written assignments.

4.1.2. Distribution of Options for Key Questions

Firstly, regarding awareness and attitudes toward non-written assignments: 92.6% of Chinese teachers agreed that “non-written assignments” should cultivate students’

practical abilities, and 88.5% believed that “assignment design” should consider the attention characteristics of lower-grade students. However, only 45.1% of Chinese teachers could accurately state the “three core objectives of non-written assignments, indicating that although teachers have a correct perception, they lack systematic theoretical support”. Secondly, in terms of practical ability in non-written assignment design, only 28.7% of Chinese teachers often design interdisciplinary non-written assignments, and 31.1% assignment materials from daily life. In contrast, 65.6% of Chinese teachers’ assignment forms are concentrated on oral reading and simple practice, reflecting problems such as a limited variety of assignment types and a disconnect between content and daily life. While 58.2% of Chinese teachers’ adjust assignment design based on students’ classroom feedback, only 23.8% design special evaluation scales for non-written assignments. Most teachers still use “completion rate” as the sole evaluation criterion, resulting in simplistic assessment methods. Finally, regarding creative ability in non-written assignment design, only 24.5% of Chinese teachers stated that they would “explore and use current hot issues or occasional campus events to design non-written assignments” for content innovation. Regarding the subjects responsible for completing assignments, 31.5% of non-written assignments are completed through cooperation between students and parents, 58% are completed independently by students, and 11.5% are completed through cooperation among students. Reason: The revision improves clarity, flow, and technical accuracy by correcting punctuation, refining vocabulary, and restructuring sentences for better readability. It also ensures consistent use of terms and parallel structure while maintaining the original meaning.

4.2. Analysis of Differences in Non-Written Assignment Literacy Among Teachers with Diverse Backgrounds

4.2.1. Differences Between Teachers Graduating from Normal Universities and Those from Non-Normal Universities

The results of an independent samples t-test showed that teachers who graduated from normal universities scored significantly higher in “awareness and attitude towards non-written assignment design” (4.35 ± 0.52) than those who graduated from non-normal universities (3.68 ± 0.61) ($t=5.82$, $p<0.001$). They also scored significantly higher in “practical ability in non-written assignment design” (3.52 ± 0.70) compared to their counterparts from non-normal universities (3.01 ± 0.75) ($t=4.13$, $p<0.001$). These findings indicate that normal education plays a fundamental supporting role in Chinese teachers’ literacy in non-written assignment design. However, there was no significant difference in the score for “creative ability in non-written assignment design” between the two groups ($t=1.27$, $p>0.05$), suggesting that in-service training should focus on the unified improvement of both reflective and creative abilities.

4.2.2. Differences Among Teachers with Varying Years of Teaching Experience

The results of a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that teaching experience significantly affected the score for “awareness and attitude towards non-written assignment design” ($F=3.98$, $p<0.05$). This suggests that, regardless of teaching tenure, lower primary school Chinese teachers possess a certain level of understanding of non-written assignments and generally acknowledge their value. As teaching experience increased, the “practical ability in non-written assignment design” exhibited a pattern of initially rising and then declining. Teachers with 6–10 years of experience achieved the highest score (3.35 ± 0.68), those with less than 5 years had

the lowest score (2.72 ± 0.74), and teachers with more than 10 years scored moderately (3.10 ± 0.65). Post-hoc multiple comparisons revealed that teachers with 6–10 years of experience scored significantly higher than those with less than 5 years ($p < 0.05$), indicating that accumulated teaching experience enhances practical assignment design skills, while less experienced teachers would benefit from increased practical training.

4.3. Correlation Analysis of Factors Influencing Literacy

Pearson correlation analysis revealed that the following factors were significantly positively correlated with teachers' overall literacy scores ($p < 0.01$): First, participation in non-written assignment design-related courses during pre-service education ($r = 0.48$), indicating that foundational training contributes to literacy development. Second, the frequency of participation in non-written assignment design training after employment ($r = 0.62$), which emerged as the most influential factor in enhancing literacy. Third, the frequency of teachers' independent study of non-written assignment design materials ($r = 0.53$), highlighting the importance of individual motivation for professional growth. Fourth, the frequency of school-based teaching and research activities on non-written assignment design conducted by schools ($r = 0.45$), reflecting the synergistic effect of institutional support.

5. Conclusions and Implications

5.1. Research Conclusions

5.1.1. Core Characteristics of Chinese Teachers' Literacy in Designing Non-Written Assignments

Firstly, the literacy of lower primary school Chinese teachers in designing non-written assignments is marked by a disconnect between cognition and practice. Although teachers' awareness and attitudes toward non-written assignments scored as high as 4.12, their creative ability in designing such assignments is significantly lacking, resulting in the contradiction of knowing but not being able to implement effectively. For example, while most teachers agree that assignments should be connected to daily life, they still predominantly rely on textbook materials in actual design. Secondly, the development of lower primary school Chinese teachers' literacy in non-written assignment design is uneven. Significant differences exist among teachers with different backgrounds: those who graduated from normal universities and have 6–10 years of teaching experience exhibit relatively higher literacy levels, whereas young teachers with less than five years of experience and those who graduated from non-normal universities represent key groups requiring literacy improvement. Finally, lower primary school Chinese teachers' literacy in non-written assignment design is influenced by multiple factors. It is strongly associated with four key elements: pre-service normal education, in-service training, independent learning, and school-based teaching and research. Among these, in-service training has the greatest impact ($r = 0.62$) and serves as a critical leverage point for enhancing Chinese teachers' literacy in non-written assignment design. Reason: The revision improves clarity, coherence, and technical accuracy by refining sentence structure, enhancing vocabulary, and correcting minor grammatical issues. It also ensures consistent terminology and smooth transitions between points, making the text more readable and professional.

5.2. Educational Implications

5.2.1. Normal Universities: Enhancing the Pre-Service Training System to Establish a Strong Foundation for Literacy

Most teachers, including those who graduated from normal universities, have not systematically studied the theoretical foundations of assignment design. A survey indicates that 68.9% of teachers from normal universities reported “they did not systematically study non-written assignment design courses during college” and only occasionally encountered relevant content through foundational theoretical courses such as “Pedagogy” and “Curriculum and Teaching Theory”. This results in a lack of both theoretical knowledge and practical experience before entering the profession. To address this issue, normal universities and teacher education programs should enhance pre-service training focused on Chinese teachers’ ability to design assignments for primary schools. Specifically, the curriculum structure should be optimized by offering a specialized course titled “Non-Written Assignment Design for Lower Primary Schools” within the primary education major, supplemented by “simulated design training” sessions. Additionally, the connection between theory and practice should be strengthened by establishing a “university-school cooperation” mechanism with local primary schools. This would involve arranging for normal students to participate in the full process of non-written assignments for lower grades during their internships, under the joint supervision of university instructors and primary school mentors. Furthermore, assignment design ability should be incorporated into the internship assessment criteria.

5.2.2. Frontline Schools: Enhance the In-Service Support Mechanism and Address Literacy Deficiencies

The survey indicates that 57.4% of Chinese teachers reported that schools conduct non-written assignment design training less than once a year. Furthermore, the training lacks systematic content, such as design methods and evaluation tools, making it difficult to address teachers’ practical challenges. To address this issue, schools can take a two-pronged approach. First, they can establish a hierarchical training system by tailoring differentiated training content for various groups—providing basic skills training for novice teachers and innovative ability training for experienced, backbone teachers. Second, schools should enhance the school-based teaching and research mechanism by establishing a Research Group to conduct regular lesson studies (once a month) to analyze the effectiveness of non-written assignments. Additionally, schools could organize a select outstanding proposals and incorporate them into the school’s for teachers’ reference. Finally, including the quality of non-written assignment design in teachers’ performance evaluations would help stimulate their enthusiasm and initiative in participating in this process.

5.2.3. Chinese Teachers Themselves: Strengthening Awareness of Independent Development and Enhancing Literacy Resilience

On one hand, Chinese teachers should cultivate the habit of lifelong learning, expand their comprehensive knowledge, and develop a well-rounded knowledge framework for designing non-written assignments. Beyond subject-specific expertise, teachers need to acquire knowledge about student development, educational contexts, and interdisciplinary fields, integrating these into their understanding of non-written assignment design to create more effective and scientifically grounded assignments. On the other hand, after gaining foundational theoretical knowledge of non-written assignment design, Chinese teachers should engage in practical learning and

application to enhance their design skills. They should connect assignment content with students' real-life experiences, incorporate cultural elements, and design assignments with varying levels of difficulty to improve quality. Additionally, following the implementation of assignments, teachers should gather feedback on the quality of their designs through multiple channels-including teacher evaluations, student self-assessments, and parent feedback-reflect on their practices, and continuously refine their design capabilities.

In conclusion, the lower primary school stage is a critical period for students to develop effective learning habits. At this stage, students exhibit cognitive characteristics such as dominant figurative thinking, short attention spans, strong curiosity, and lively personalities. Non-written assignments naturally align with the developmental needs of lower-grade students; they not only alleviate learning pressure but also cultivate observation skills, practical abilities, and interpersonal communication in life-oriented contexts. Given the current situation-where lower primary school Chinese teachers' proficiency in designing non-written assignments is marked by a disconnect between theory and practice, uneven development, and the influence of multiple factors-efforts should be made through pre-service education, in-service training, and teachers' self-development to enhance their competence in this area. Moreover, it is essential to design non-written assignments that correspond to the physical and mental developmental characteristics of lower-grade students, integrating both enjoyment and practicality, so that students can experience the joy of learning while reinforcing academic content.

Conflicts of Interest

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

Funding

This work was supported by Youth Academic Program of Guangzhou Huashang College (No.2024HSQX037).

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