



A Review on English Homework Design in Compulsory Education under the “Double Reduction” Policy

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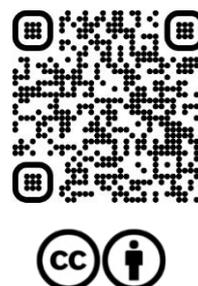
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Abstract— In 2021, Chinese authorities introduced a set of guidelines to ease the burden of excessive homework and off-campus tutoring for students undergoing compulsory education (the “Double Reduction” policy). As an effective extension of classroom teaching, homework can promote the development of students' personality and core literacy. Research on homework at home and abroad is mainly based on empirical studies, and under the policy of “Double reduction”, this article reviews domestic and foreign researches on English homework design in compulsory education, focusing on the design and correction of homework, homework teaching, homework reduction, and homework reform. And homework research tends to shift from intellectual education to moral education.



Keywords— Double-reduction policy, Homework, English homework design

I. INTRODUCTION

As a result of the onslaught of subject-based out-of-school training, academic competition at the compulsory education has intensified, the financial burden on families has increased, and the disparity in the educational resources received by students has widened, seriously affecting the public interest and fairness of compulsory education. On July 24, 2021, the “Double Reduction” policy was introduced in China to reduce students' homework and academic tutoring burden. “Double reduction” policy has been widely implemented in primary and secondary schools across the country, not only to reduce the heavy workload of students, but also improve the quality of homework design, and systematically design basic homework that conforms to the characteristics of age and the laws of

learning, and reflects the orientation of quality education. And reducing the burden of homework is also considered to be a powerful lever for prying the reform of classroom teaching in schools.

Homework is an effective extension of teachers' classroom teaching, a consolidation and deepening of students' classroom learning achievements, and also an important way of students' extra-curricular learning (Gu Mingyuan, 1990). Homework is also an important way for students to cultivate the habit of completing homework independently and to improve their self-management ability. However, the alienation of homework and the excessive burden of homework have been the main problems of education and anxiety. The “Double Reduction” policy clearly proposes to comprehensively reduce the total

amount and length of homework, and specifically puts forward the ideas of improving the homework management mechanism, categorizing and clarifying the total amount of homework, improving the quality of homework design, strengthening the guidance for the completion of homework, and scientifically utilizing after-school time.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 "Double Reduction" Policy

China, the birthplace of the imperial examination, has a long tradition of imperial examination culture and a sense of merit. And the college entrance examination is like hordes of soldiers and horses passing a single-log bridge, which has formed the phenomenon of education involution only focusing on scores and intellectual education. The phenomena of excessive quantity, low quality and functional alienation of homework in primary and secondary schools across China are prominent.

Since the basic education curriculum reform in 2001, the state has been guiding and regulating homework practices at the policy level. In order to realize the transformation from "education to the test" to "quality education" that comprehensively improves the quality of the nation, Commission for Further Reform under the CPC Central Committee held its 19th meeting on May 21, 2021, and considered and adopted the "Guidelines on Further Easing the Burden of Excessive Homework and Off-campus Tutoring for Students Undergoing Compulsory Education". On July 24, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued a formal notice requiring all regions and departments to conscientiously implement and enforce the measures in light of actual practice. Thus, the most stringent "Double Reduction" policy in history has officially landed.

The policy consists of 30 key points in eight areas, including: comprehensively reducing the total amount and duration of homework, upgrading the level of after-school services, comprehensively regulating the behavior of out-of-school training, upgrading the quality of education and teaching, as well as strengthening supportive governance, etc., which embodies the overarching principle of "student-centeredness".

The core essence of the "Double Reducing" policy is to build a high-quality education system, comprehensively

improve the quality of school education and teaching, strike a balance between quality and fairness, and promote the all-around development and healthy growth of students, which does not mean lowering the quality of education. This point was mentioned by Prof. Xiang Xianming in his speech in 2021: In the process of implementing the "Double Reduction" policy, it is necessary to always keep in mind one basic principle - reducing the excessive academic burden of primary and secondary school students is not simply letting children learn less and more simply, but letting them learn more easily and vividly, and learn more and more under the state of great interest. Instead, we want to make children learn more easily and vividly, and learn more, learn faster and learn better in a state of great interest. The original intention of "reducing the burden" is to improve the quality of the nation and to produce more and better talents.

2.2 Definition of homework

The term "homework" has a long history in China, first appeared in the pre-Qin literature "Guanzi -Qing Zhong Ding", "The order was issued for half a year, and when the people heard about it, more than half of them gave up their daily business and built warehouses to store grain." Here, "homework" means labor, and it is regarded as a kind of physical labor. One of the world's earliest treatise on education and teaching issues, "Record of Studies", also related to the record of homework, such as "When you're studying, you concentrate on your studies, and when you're taking a break, you have fun with your juggling skills." "The teaching of the regular classes is carried out according to certain times or seasons; there must also be a variety of extracurricular work during the breaks.", refers to extracurricular activities (including extracurricular homework), is a continuation and supplementation of classroom learning. It means that extracurricular activities (including extracurricular homework) are the continuation and supplement of in-class learning, and are interdependent and mutually reinforcing with in-class learning.

In German, however, homework is a derogatory term for a kind of drudgery, and the word 'Arbeit' meant nothing more than slave labor or service. But as work was extended to crafts and fishing, as well as spiritual work, the connotation gradually changed to simply a feeling of work, more like the neutral perception of work in Chinese and

English.

Homework first appeared in German schools in 1505 and began to develop as a learning activity. When teaching shifted from individualized teaching to classroom teaching, homework became a means of individualized learning to make up for the limitations of school learning activities and the classroom system. In the 18th century, German scholars Lessing and Kant were the first to apply "homework" from physical labor to mental labor, forming the concept of "book assignments" and "mental work. Homework is an important and effective supplement to education and teaching.

In modern times, the field of education has given full play to the scope of application of this concept, and more and more attention to play the important educational value of homework. In the 19th century, the German educator Herbart's educational ideology began to influence the European school. In his book "General Pedagogy", Herbart advocated students to apply and practice the knowledge they had learned after class, this work was extended to the home to allow more time for teaching in the school classroom, and homework became a continuation of in-class learning. Since then, homework has been gradually recognized by teachers and students as a continuation of in-class learning.

The concept of homework is included in most of the encyclopedias and dictionaries compiled in China, and the Dictionary of Education (1990), edited by Gu Mingyuan, categorizes homework into in-class work and extra-class work. Extra-class work was once called "homework". Extracurricular homework is a form of teaching organization in which students are required by their teachers to carry out learning activities independently outside of class time. It is generally believed that it is an extension of classroom teaching to help consolidate and perfect the knowledge and skills learned by students in class and develop students' independent learning ability and study habits.

Cooper (1989), an American scholar, considers homework as a task assigned by school teachers to students who expect it to be completed during non-school hours. This definition explicitly excludes (1) guided learning at school; (2) home study subjects delivered by mail, television, radio, video, or the Internet; and (3) extracurricular activities such as clubs or sports.

Based on the above literature, the author defines homework as a kind of learning activity that learners apply and deepen their understanding of what they have learned purposefully and systematically outside the classroom, which helps to consolidate and transfer knowledge and skills learned in the classroom.

2.3 Research on homework at home and abroad

Foreign research on homework has a long history of development, and foreign countries mainly focus on the purpose, type, difficulty, amount of homework, people's attitudes toward homework, the content of homework, the relationship between the quality of homework completion and students' English performance, the influence of parental involvement in homework, and teachers' feedback and evaluation of homework through survey and experimental methods.

Research on homework in China can be broadly categorized into survey research, discursive research, experience summary (or action research) and experimental research. Recently, research in China has gradually switched from discursive research to empirical research, and some researchers in China have conducted some studies on homework by using the survey method, which include studies on the current situation of homework, the relationship between homework and students' burden of schoolwork, and the causes of excessive homework. Some scholars in China, especially teachers in primary and secondary schools, have conducted research on the type, design and correction of homework based on their own teaching experience, action research or some contemporary educational theories.

2.3.1 The purpose of homework

American scholars have done a lot of research on the purpose design of homework. Epstein (2001) categorized the purposes of homework into the following 10 types: to provide students with opportunities to practice, to prepare for the classroom, to engage in practical activities, to develop students' personalities and improve parent-child relationships, to strengthen home-school cooperation, to promote peer interactions, to implement school or district policies, to build up the image of the school, and to punish problematic students (etc.). One of Epstein's main objections is to punish students by giving them a lot of homework. The most important and meaningful purpose of

homework is to reinforce knowledge through practice, to achieve personal development, and to promote parent-child relationships.

Cooper (1994) categorized the purposes of homework assignments into instructional and non-instructional purposes, and most teachers categorized the instructional purposes of homework assignments as: practice, preparation, extension, and integration. Non-instructional purposes can be summarized into four categories: (1) facilitating parent-child communication; (2) fulfilling instructions from school administrators; (3) punishing students; and (4) establishing public relations, such as informing parents about what is happening in the school.

Chen (2019), a Chinese scholar, states that the main purpose of homework is to help students master the knowledge and skills they have learned in class and use them in practice. By completing homework, students can better understand what they have learned in class. They then need to apply what they have learned to real life situations. Homework should be a guide to life. English homework can not only broaden the channels of learning and using English, but also improve the ability to practice the language, so as to achieve the purpose of acquiring English knowledge. While scholar Zhang (2019), from the perspective of core literacy, English homework should be conducive to the cultivation of students' core literacy in the context of core literacy. Homework should play a role in developing students' language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, learning ability and so on.

The purposes of homework vary according to different scholars, but the different purposes of homework are not mutually exclusive. Homework can also serve multiple purposes at the same time, such as consolidating what has been learned in the classroom, previewing new knowledge, strengthening the ability of cooperation among classmates, and facilitating communication between parents and children, and so on.

2.3.2 The role of homework

Chinese and Western scholars generally recognize the positive effects of homework, but also indicate that excessive homework can bring about many negative effects. Supporters generally agree that homework, as a supplement to and continuation of classroom teaching in schools, is one of the integral parts of the curriculum and a bridge

connecting in-class and out-of-class learning as well as schooling and family education, and that its positive impacts can be categorized into academic and non-academic aspects: firstly, it contributes to the teaching and learning in schools, such as reinforcing classroom content, enhancing students' proficiency in skills, guiding them to preview new content to be taught by teachers, providing a diagnostic tool for teachers to monitor students' learning progress on a daily basis, motivating them to do more and more. For example, it reinforces what is taught in the classroom; enhances students' skill proficiency; guides students to prepare for what the teacher is going to teach; provides a diagnostic tool for teachers to monitor students' progress on a daily basis; and motivates more parents to pay attention to the teaching and learning process.

Homework, on the other hand, provides non-academic benefits: it helps students develop good study habits; it allows them to identify and learn to use resources such as the Internet, reference books, and other social resources; it allows them to apply what they have learned to new areas or areas of interest; it allows them to use their unique talents and abilities to do personalized and creative work; it improves their time management and organizational skills; it develops perseverance; it improves their time management and organizational skills; and it improves their ability to manage and organize their time. management and organizational skills, and develop personal qualities such as perseverance, responsibility, self-confidence, and self-discipline.

In terms of the correlation between the function of students' homework and academic achievement, Cooper et al. (1999) found that, on the basis of a large number of related studies, to a certain extent, homework has a positive effect on the improvement of students' performance, but this correlation is not completely absolute. In other words, under the right circumstances, there is a positive correlation between students' completion of homework and improved academic performance.

In conclusion, by completing homework, students can help them become proficient in what they have learned in the classroom and better understand and digest their knowledge; they can cultivate their sense of independent thinking and develop good study habits; and they can promote the development of students in various aspects and

improve their literacy.

2.3.3 Amount of homework

It is difficult to define the amount of homework in domestic and international studies, and most scholars measure the amount of work according to the amount of "homework time".

Two studies conducted by Beaton (1996) and Mullis et al. (1997) found that there is an inverted U-shaped curve relationship between homework time and students' academic performance, i.e., a moderate amount of homework time is associated with high academic performance, and when the amount of homework time is increasing, the students' academic performance tends to decrease. The American scholar Cooper (1989) investigated the number of after-school homework assignments and the time needed for students to complete after-school homework in compulsory school. He pointed out that the number of after-school homework is not the less the better or the more the better, too little after-school homework students can not achieve the effect of training, too much after-school homework students may be bored with the psychology of the completion of after-school homework counterproductive effect. He therefore suggested that the optimal amount of homework per week should be set for each grade level: four to five times per week for grades 7 to 9, each time for 70 to 90 minutes, including homework for each subject.

Most studies have shown a positive correlation between the amount of homework and student academic achievement, but this correlation is not constant and varies with the grade level of the student, with homework having a positive effect on students in grades 6-12. For high school students, there is a positive correlation between the amount of time spent on homework and student academic achievement. (Cooper, 1989)

In recent years, the excessive academic burden and learning pressure of domestic students have gradually aroused widespread social concern. Our scholars Wang Yuefen and Zhang Xinyu conducted a survey on the implementation status quo of the amount of homework at the basic education stage in Shanghai in 2013, and the results showed that 53.7% of secondary school students completed more than one hour of homework every day, among which 20% of them completed more than two hours

of homework, and 7.5% completed more than three hours of homework every day. Therefore, in 2021, the Double Reduction Policy promulgated by China explicitly proposed to comprehensively reduce the total amount and length of homework and alleviate the excessive homework burden on students: schools should ensure that no written homework is assigned for the first and second grades of elementary school, and that consolidation exercises can be appropriately arranged within the school; the average time for completion of written homework for grades 3-6 of elementary school should not be more than 60 minutes, and the average time for completion of written homework for junior high school should not be more than 90 minutes.

2.3.4 Types of homework

Homework is wide-ranging and varied. Scholars have studied homework types from different aspects. There are big differences in the design of homework types at home and abroad. Chinese scholars regard homework as a supplement and continuation of classroom teaching, mainly written assignments, emphasizing consolidation and accumulation. In contrast, homework in the United States is viewed more as a part of the curriculum, focusing on the combination of homework and real life, and emphasizing the investigative, practical and fun aspects of homework.

Lee & Pruitt in 1979 proposed a generally accepted classification of homework, namely (1) practice homework (2) preparatory homework (3) extension homework (4) creative homework. These four types of assignments have different design purposes. Practice assignments are designed to help students master a certain skill; preparatory assignments make students well prepared for a new course and new learning content; extension assignments are assignments in which students go beyond the information they have learned in the classroom and transfer the skills or concepts to a new situation; and creative assignments are assignments in which skills and concepts are combined.

Homework in the United States advocates going into life, only when students realize that what they have learned is immediately applied to real life and solve practical problems with what they have learned, they will be interested in learning knowledge and keep it in mind (McMullen, 2008). It can be seen that, as far as the type of homework design is concerned, foreign experts and scholars pay more attention to innovative and extended

homework, that is to say, through the completion of homework to promote the integration and transfer of knowledge and innovation, and emphasize the importance of giving students a broad space for thinking.

In the article "English Homework Design under the New Curriculum", Wang Fang (2007), a scholar in China, categorized English homework into five types: fun homework, practical homework, innovative and expansive homework, inquiry learning homework and free-choice homework. Interesting homework can use children's songs, riddles, games and other forms to mobilize students' interest. Practical assignments can be carried out by doing things around us, investigating and enumerating, and observing and recording. Innovative homework is focused on cultivating students' creative thinking and developing creative personalities, such as new lyrics, new stories and so on. Exploratory learning assignments can be realized by collecting and excerpting English around them, collecting holiday customs in English-speaking countries and so on. Free-choice assignments are assignments designed by teachers at different levels according to the latest development zone of students' learning to meet different students' needs for assignments.

Yang Rundong (2015) proposed that the design of homework should follow the principles of living, interesting and scientific, in addition to paying attention to the connection and integration between disciplines. For example, the design of English homework not only contains English knowledge, but also integrates art and sports knowledge, which can not only help students grow their wisdom, but also cultivate students' ability to appreciate and appreciate beauty, and cultivate students' noble aesthetic consciousness.

Different researchers focus on different points of view when categorizing homework, so there is no clear classification of homework types. However, according to the viewpoints of domestic and foreign researchers, homework is not only limited to the contents of books, but should be connected with life, fully mobilize students' interests, be based on the textbooks but beyond the textbooks, and cultivate students' creative thinking and critical thinking.

2.3.5 Contents of homework

Cross (1992), in his book *Handbook of Practice in*

Language Teaching and Learning, puts forward two criteria for assigning English homework: firstly, English homework should not create excessive workload for the teacher; secondly, the task should not be too difficult. In this book, he gives some suggestions to English teachers about the contents of English homework. These include drawing activities, games, substitution, matching, information gap activities, multiple choice questions, right/wrong questions, parallel writing, guided writing, task reading, etc.

Cross believes that by assigning homework, students' language learning time can be increased, and that the homework assigned by the teacher should be as interesting as possible so that in the class, especially in some large classes, the homework should not be too difficult and should not be too difficult. Teachers should make homework as interesting as possible, so that in a class, especially a large class, it helps students to make as few mistakes as possible and to be able to correct them themselves.

III. CONCLUSION

The "Double Reduction" policy focuses on strengthening the requirements for homework design, categorizing and specifying the total amount of homework, such that the average time for completion of written homework in junior middle schools should not exceed 90 minutes. "Reduce the burden" is not only to reduce the burden of homework, but also to improve the quality of homework design, systematic design in line with the age characteristics and learning rules, reflecting the quality of education-oriented basic homework, while encouraging the arrangement of layered, flexible and personalized homework, resolutely overcome the mechanical, ineffective homework, and put an end to repetitive, punitive homework.

In addition to the design of homework, the "double reduction" also emphasized that students should not be required to self-correct their own homework, teachers should carefully correct their homework, provide timely feedback, strengthen face-to-face explanations, carefully analyze the learning situation, and do a good job of answering questions and tutoring. In recent years, there have been more studies on the correction of homework, and scholars have been thinking about how to efficiently provide feedback on students' homework.

Under the background of "double reduction", many

primary and secondary schools have carried out practical exploration of homework improvement, designing homework, proposing effective teaching strategies and creating efficient classrooms. Research on homework mainly focuses on the design and correction of homework in primary and secondary schools, homework teaching, homework reduction and homework reform. The principles followed in the design of homework (after-school homework) and the specific design of homework appear most frequently in various literatures.

Secondly, the five provinces (municipalities directly under the central government) that pay the most attention to homework in primary and secondary schools are, in order, Jiangsu Province, Shanghai, Shandong Province, Beijing and Zhejiang Province, with East China, represented by Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui and Shandong, paying the most attention to homework research, and the rest of the geographic regions are less. (Wu Libao et al., 2021)

The current "Double Reduction" policy has begun to bear fruit, but schools may often reduce the amount of homework but neglect the quality of homework. Therefore, an in-depth investigation of the current situation of homework in the context of "double reduction" is very necessary. Not much research has been done on the current situation of homework after the official implementation of the "double reduction". In the future, researchers can follow up the research from the three levels of teachers, students and parents, and conduct objective and systematic investigations on the implementation of the policy through questionnaires and interviews, focusing on the improvement of the homework burden, homework design and feedback.

The "Double Reduction" encourages tiered, flexible and personalized homework, and the systematic design of homework that is in line with the age-specific characteristics and learning patterns of students. In addition to daily teaching, teachers in primary and secondary schools need to spend a lot of time and energy on designing homework and face-to-face explanation, which undoubtedly increases the burden of teachers. With the development of education informatization, researchers can construct perfect homework evaluation standards and create online services such as answering questions.

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