

A STUDY ON THE OPTIMAL DESIGN OF ENGLISH AFTER-CLASS HOMEWORK FOR STUDENTS IN GRADE 8 UNDER THE BACKGROUND OF "DOUBLE REDUCTION"

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ABSTRACT

After-class homework is a crucial component of the teaching and learning process, providing a necessary complement to classroom activities and reinforcing students' understanding. However, the traditional English homework model is often one-sided and can have negative effects on students' progress. As a result, China has implemented the "Double Reduction" policy to alleviate the excessive burden of homework and extracurricular training on students. [1]

145 students in Class 1 Grade 8, Class 2 Grade 8 and Class 3 Grade 8 of Yinyan Campus of Longyan Junior High School were regarded as the research subjects. The problems in the progress of English after-school homework optimal design for students in Grade 8 in this school were investigated and studied by means of questionnaires and interviews, and the causes of these problems were analyzed. By analyzing the data, there are six problems in the progress, such as lack of motivation in the study, inability of students, negative attitude toward English after-class homework, uneven abilities of students, simple forms and boring contents as well as overdue and simple feedbacks. To address these problems within the framework of the "Double Reduction" policy, seven measures were proposed in the paper, including increasing fun of homework, controlling of homework's difficulty, targeted homework, the proper amount of homework, homework of social practice, homework of practice operation as well as timely and various feedbacks.

The strategies not only require junior high school English teachers to effectively reduce students' academic pressure and promote students' happy growth but also require teachers to explore teaching methods that "reduce the burden and improve the efficiency" and "reduce the burden but not the quality".

Keywords: After-class English Homework, Double Reduction, Optimal Design, Problems, Strategies.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

After-class homework is an important part of the teaching and learning process and is likewise an extension and reinforcement of learning. The scientific design of English after-class homework can play an important role in students' effective learning and comprehensive development. In junior high school English teaching, effective homework can maximize students' English proficiency and reduce their learning burden. However, most of the traditional English homework is one-sided and very detrimental to students' individual development. The principle of "teaching students according to their abilities"

should be adhered to in the classroom. At the same time, when teachers assign homework to students, they should also adhere to this principle and look at their individuality through a connected and developmental angle. [2]

In junior high school English teaching, the optimal design of English after-class homework enables teachers to better understand the learning characteristics, cognitive level and learning ability of students in their classes.

In traditional junior high school English teaching, teachers usually assign a large number of English homework to students as a way to improve students' academic performance. In the English teaching work of Grade 1 and Grade 2, the English knowledge of Grade 3 will be taught, and then a large number of exercises will be trained in Grade 3. This kind of teaching method with enormous exercises is frequently used in junior high school English teaching at present. But the teaching effect of this method is not ideal, and even leads to some students' negative emotions of being tired of learning due to excessive learning pressure, resulting in the corresponding impact on students' scores in the middle school examination.

Based on this situation, China has issued a "Double Reduction" policy. After the introduction of this policy, all sectors of society have paid more attention to the burden of off-campus training of students and the harm of capital impact on education, while they have not paid too much attention to reducing the burden of students' homework in school. This is mainly because, in the environment of exam-oriented education, the work of reducing students' homework burden is not easy to be implemented through external management methods such as rigid management. Students' homework in school will involve how to better carry out student exercise training and how to cultivate students to consolidate their knowledge in exercise training. However, the rigid management method only objectively reduces the students' homework burden but does not better give teachers direction of how to design reasonable homework after class, causing teachers to be unable to accurately grasp the design of students' homework after class, and thus affecting the teaching effect.

1.2 Literature Review

Wang Huanxun defined the term "homework" and believes that homework includes both classroom and after-class homework, which are independent learning activities to complete learning. Gu Yuanming suggested that homework is divided into two categories: classroom homework and after-class homework. After-class homework refers to learning activities that students do independently outside of class time and is also used as a way to test students' mastery of old knowledge points.[3]

The term "zuoye" is explained in the book "Cihai" as an activity carried out to accomplish a given task in production, learning, etc. For example, industrial work, classroom work, etc. And "zuoye" includes production and other aspects of education and learning. Wang Aiyun and Kong Fanqing suggested that there are classroom homework and after-class homework in teaching. Homework is an important part of the bilateral teaching process between teachers and students, an important way for students to acquire knowledge, form abilities and develop emotions, and an important

basis for teachers and students to evaluate each other and improve teaching and learning. Homework, especially after-class homework, assists students in reviewing and consolidating the knowledge and skills learned in the classroom and provides a way for further improvement and innovation outside the class. In short, homework is an extension and supplement of classroom teaching, with many functions such as management, formation, feedback and evaluation, and is an important part of teaching and learning activities.[4]

In summary, there are aspects of their theory that are deficient. Their theory does not elaborate on the optimal design of operations.

However, Yang Yi's theory explains what is the optimal design of English homework in junior high school. The optimal design of junior high school English after-school homework is an important part of junior high school English teachers' teaching management and a necessary supplement to English teaching. [5]

In addition, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council officially introduced the "Double Reduction" policy on July 24, 2021. It is a policy about easing the burden of excessive homework and off-campus tutoring for students undergoing compulsory education. Therefore, to the requirements of the "Double Reduction" policy, this paper will focus on the optimal design of junior high school English after-school homework to help students learn English happily and improve their English proficiency.

1.3 Research Significance

Firstly, in the context of the "Double Reduction" policy, the optimal design of English after-class homework for students in middle school can effectively promote students' mentality. Compared to elementary school English, junior high school English knowledge is more difficult with larger vocabularies and more complex grammatical knowledge. Some junior high school students are unable to effectively improve their English learning performance due to their weak English. Under the background of the "Double Reduction" policy, actively carrying out management on middle school English homework can change the form of homework, stimulate students' enthusiasm for completing homework through more interesting and practical homework, and enable students to form good English thinking in diverse homework exercises, which can effectively improve students' English learning effectiveness. Moreover, carrying out this management can also change the way of homework evaluation, with encouragement and guidance as the main focus, allowing students to establish good learning confidence, further stimulate their English thinking, and improve their mentality better.

Secondly, under the background of the "Double Reduction" policy, the management of middle school English homework can achieve effective continuation and supplementation of classroom teaching, and enhance the effectiveness of subject teaching. According to the "Double Reduction" policy, teachers need to assign high-quality homework to help students consolidate, expand and improve their knowledge while reducing their after-school learning pressure. It requires teachers not to assign too much English homework. At the same time, it is necessary to effectively reduce the time students spend completing written homework. On this basis, teachers' homework management for students will focus more on

enabling students to complete homework of comprehensive application related to classroom knowledge, allowing students to extend their understanding and consolidate the knowledge they have learned, and cultivating good English learning habits to promote personalized development of students.

Finally, under the background of the "Double Reduction" policy, the management of junior high school English homework can effectively improve students' learning effectiveness, enabling them to grasp and apply the English knowledge learned in the classroom through targeted knowledge sorting in their spare time and achieve personal English proficiency improvement. The content of junior high school English homework under the "Double Reduction" policy is more reasonable and does not consume too much time. Students can have more time to sort out knowledge and expand it through completing the homework. This not only effectively improves students' English thinking and learning abilities, but also greatly improves their English learning efficiency.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

2.1 Research Objects

The questionnaire was administered randomly to 145 students in Class 1 Grade 8, Class 2 Grade 8 and Class 3 Grade 8 at the Yinyan Campus of Longyan Junior High School. To ensure the authenticity, objectivity and convenience of the data, the questionnaire was filled out anonymously. This makes it possible for survey respondents to make choices based on their actual situation, ensuring maximum of data authenticity and validity. In addition, as a supplement to the questionnaire results, four students with English scores above 110, 120, 130, and 140 were selected from each of the three classes to be interviewed separately to explore the differences in the learning situations of students with different English proficiency levels.

2.2 Research Methods

This study mainly used questionnaires (Annex 1) and interviews (Annex 2) to collect data. The literature review provided theoretical support for the questionnaire design and interviews. The purpose of the 20-question questionnaire was to investigate the motivation of students in Grade 8 in English learning so that the design of English homework for them could be optimized in a more rationally. The information statistics and data classification of the returned valid questionnaires were conducted, and the results were summarized and derived through computerized statistical calculations.

2.3 Preparation for Questionnaires and Interviews

The questionnaire was designed by finding relevant information from the App "Wen Juanxing" and discussing it with the tutor. The interviews were designed from the student's perspective to explore the difficulties encountered by students in Grade 8 and the more specific requirements of the course so that teachers can better optimize the design of English after-class homework.

2.4 Data Collection and Analysis

After designing the questionnaire, 145 questionnaires were randomly distributed to the students who took the survey this time with the help of the class headmasters. Finally, 145

questionnaires were successfully collected, including 75 for males and 70 for females, with 145 valid questionnaires and a 100% recovery rate. The effective rate of the questionnaire was 100%, which achieved the desired sample size. To a certain extent, the sample obtained is representative and the results of this survey can be trusted. After the statistical calculation results were summarized and exported by computer, the summarized data were analyzed and organized.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

3.1 The Problem in the Progress of English After-class Homework Optimal Design

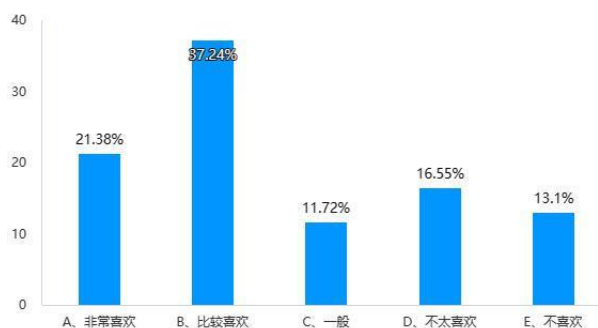
According to the analysis of the results of the questionnaires and interviews, there are still more problems in the design of after-class for junior high school English teachers, as the following:

Teachers ignored the mental development level and age characteristics of junior high school students. When they assign homework, teachers should take into account the current learning situation of middle school students, as their English foundation is not solid enough. Teachers should assign homework according to students' different learning abilities but they fail. In addition, teachers place excessive emphasis on students' exam results, so they always assign some mechanical homework, which is single in form and boring in content. Teachers often arrange homework with the same content for all students, without allowing them the opportunity to choose. Due to differences in the learning foundation and abilities of different students, assigning homework with the same content, teachers can lead to difficulties for some students with poor learning abilities to complete homework smoothly, leading to phenomena such as copying homework and searching for answers online. When evaluating homework, due to some teachers not paying enough attention to homework, they cannot timely check homework and do not adjust teaching content based on students' feedbacks on homework. In this situation, students find it difficult to form a correct understanding of homework and do not focus on the quality of homework.

3.1.1 Lack of Motivation in Study

Currently, the school still has a vast number of students in Grade 8 who do not have a strong motivation to learn English and lack the incentive to learn English. There are not many students who are very interested in English. As the following in the table 3.1.1.1

Table 3.1.1.1 你是否喜欢英语?



In the questionnaire, "Do you like taking English classes?", only 31 chose to "like it very much", accounting for 21.38% of the total. 54 chose to "enjoy it more", accounting for 37.24% of the total. 17 people chose "average", accounting for 11.72% of the total number. 24 people chose "dislike a little", accounting for 16.55% of the total number. In addition, 19 people chose "dislike", accounting for 13.1% of the total number. The latter three students are forced to learn English and lack motivation to learn English.

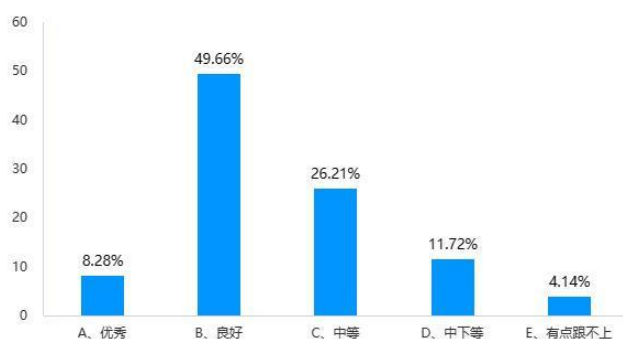
Table 3.1.1.1 shows that only about one-fifth of the students are highly motivated and have a strong desire to choose English language learning.

The students at this school were lack motivation in English, which has had a significant impact on the teaching of English to Grade 8 at the school. For this reason, students are unable to take lessons seriously and teachers' teaching is not as effective as it should be. [6]

3.1.2 Inability of Students.

After-school homework is completed independently by students after class and designed according to their learning ability and actual learning situation. Therefore, when assigning homework, teachers need to arrange the homework according to the students' learning condition and further highlight the students' main position, which is the basic requirement for designing homework. However, some teachers do not follow it and used a one-size-fits-all approach to make students master their knowledge by increasing the amount of homework. This not only fails to meet students' learning needs, but also increases students' learning pressure, undermines their confidence in learning, eliminates their interest in learning English, and leads to a gradual decline in their learning ability. As the following in table 3.1.2.1:

Table 3.1.2.1 你在班里的学科成绩是怎样的？



In the questionnaire, "What is your grade in the subject in your class?", Only 12 students have excellent English scores, accounting for 8.28% of the total number. 72 students' scores were good, accounting for 49.66% of the total number. 38 students' scores were middle, accounting for 26.21% of the total number. 17 students' scores were lower than middle, accounting for 11.72% of the total number. In addition, 6 students expressed a slight inability to keep up, accounting for 4.14% of the total number.

From the table 3.1.2.1, less than 10% of students' English scores were excellent, almost 50% of students' English scores were good, and more than 40% of students' English scores were moderate, or even worse. The English scores of these students are not considered excellent overall, and the students still lack some proficiency. This has had a significant impact on the teaching of students at this school. There are a majority of students with low English proficiency. Students in this category feel terrible in the English classroom. Although this group of students comes to class, they are unable to effectively absorb the content of the class in the face of the teacher's instruction, resulting in an inability to effectively complete after-class homework. Ultimately, this only leads to further deterioration of these students' English performance, causing them to lose their confidence in learning. [7]

3.1.3 Negative Attitude for English After-class Homework

In the survey questionnaire, "Do you always actively complete English after-class homework?", only 33 students chose "full conformity", accounting for 22.76% of the total number. 50 students chose to "moderate conformity", accounting for 34.48% of the total number. 18 students chose "basic conformity", accounting for 12.41% of the total number. The 28 people chose "a little unconformity", accounting for 19.31% of the total number. In addition, 6 students chose "full unconformity", accounting for 11.03% of the total number. As the following in the table 3.1.3.1:

Table 3.1.3.1 你是否总是积极地完成英语课后作业

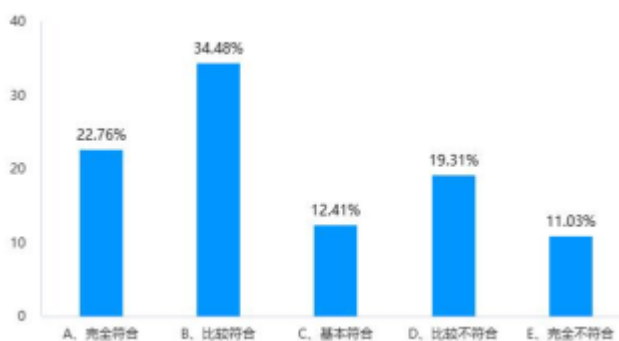


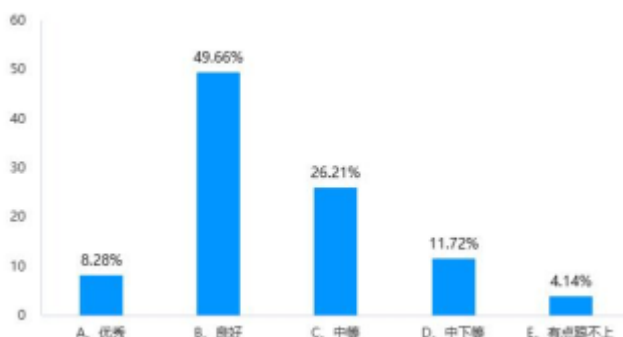
Table 3.1.3.1 shows that only about one-fifth of the students are always motivated to complete their English homework. In addition, more than 40% of students are not motivated to complete their English homework. The attitude of the students in Grade 8 towards English homework is generally more negative, and there are still more students who treat English homework negatively. This has a significant impact on the quality and efficiency of homework. Students have a very negative attitude towards homework, yet teachers assign a lot of homework. In this case, only a small number of students can complete the homework well, and most of them can only do the homework casually. What's worse, when they are faced with homework they cannot complete, they do not think, or ask their classmates or teachers for help at first, but choose to copy the answers from others. Students will gradually

develop this bad habit and their English learning performance will not be improved if they keep on it for a long time. [8]

3.1.4 Uneven Levels of Students

In the questionnaire, "What is your grade in the subject in your class?", Only 12 people have excellent English scores, accounting for 8.28% of the total number. 72 students' scores were good, accounting for 49.66% of the total number. 38 students' scores were middle, accounting for 26.21% of the total number. 17 students' scores were lower than middle, accounting for 11.72% of the total number. In addition, 6 students expressed a slight inability to keep up, accounting for 4.14% of the total number. As the following in the table 3.1.4.1

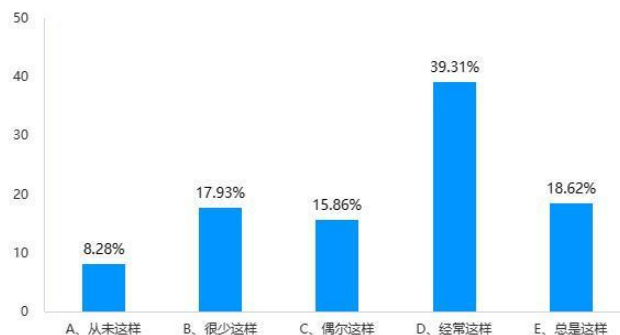
Table 3.1.4.1 你在班级里的学科成绩是怎么样的? (备注: 此表与表 3.1.2.1 相同)



In the table 3.1.4.1, less than 10% of the students' English scores are excellent, almost 50% of students' English scores were good, and more than 40% of the students' English scores were moderate or even worse. The English proficiency of these students is not considered excellent overall. Students still have some deficiencies and their proficiency is uneven, which has had a significant impact on the learning of English for the students at this school. The uneven ability of students resulted in the teacher being unable to reach all students. Although all students are in the same teacher's classroom, some of them may not understand the knowledge taught in class, while others may not be able to keep up with the pace of the teacher's class. The result is that the best students are not able to further improve, while the students who are struggling do not make progress, so they lose confidence. [9]

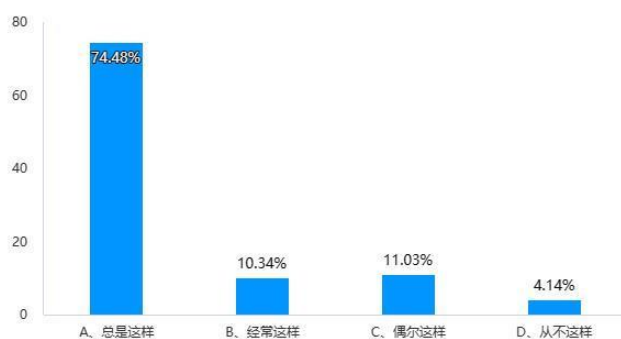
3.1.5 Simple Forms and Boring Contents

In the questionnaire, "Does your English teacher assign different types of English after-class homework every day?", only 27 students answered "always", accounting for 18.62% of the total. 57 people answered "often", accounting for 39.31% of the total. 23 students answered "occasionally", accounting for 15.86% of the total. 26 students answered "seldom", accounting for 17.93% of the total. In addition, 12 students answered "never", accounting for 8.28% of the total. As the following in the table 3.1.5.1:

Table 3.1.5.1 你的英语老师会每天布置不同类型的英语吗？

In table 3.1.5.1, less than 20% of students believe that teachers always assign different types of homework, almost 40% believe that teachers often do it, and more than 40% of students have views that are opposite to those of the first two categories. English homework assigned by the teachers in this school is generally homogeneous. However, a single form of English homework is relatively boring, which can easily make students feel tired and difficult to stimulate their interest in learning. [10]

In another questionnaire, "Do you usually have the same English homework for the whole class?" 108 students answered "always", accounting for 74.48% of the total. 15 students answered "often", accounting for 10.34% of the total. 16 students answered "occasionally", accounting for 11.03% of the total. In addition, 6 students answered "never", accounting for 4.14% of the total. As the following in the table 3.1.5.2:

Table 3.1.5.2 通常情况下，你们全班的英语课后作业是相同的吗？

In table 3.1.5.2, more than 80% of students thought that their English homework is the same. Less than 20% of students opposed it. The English homework assigned by the teachers in this school is generally uninteresting in terms of content, and due to the

dullness of the English homework content, this leads to an inability to stimulate students' interest in learning.

Therefore, from it, it can be found that teachers do not give full play to the educational role of English homework. The English homework that students need to complete is often highly homogeneous, focusing on memorizing English words and important grammar knowledge learned in class or reciting important conversations from English textbooks. Teachers set the same kind of English homework for students. The lack of interesting and practical features makes students feel that junior high school English homework is very uninteresting. In the long practice, it will reduce students' motivation and enthusiasm to complete English homework, and they will often adopt a perfunctory attitude when completing homework, which is not conducive to giving full play to the educational role of English homework. [10]

3.1.6 Overdue and Simple Feedbacks

Through interviews with four students, they said that teachers' feedback on student work was too homogeneous. In addition, they also said that teachers sometimes did not correct English after-class homework on time.

It can be concluded that teachers' evaluation of homework is mostly simple and handwritten comments are main ones. The assessment of students' listening, speaking and reading skills is rarely seen in the homework assessment, and this phenomenon is also related to the type of current English homework design in junior high school. At junior high school, the written test is usually the main part of the English test, and the written test score accounts for a high percentage of the test score while listening is only a small part of the test score. When teachers assess students' reading and speaking skills, English homework is rarely covered and there are no clear requirements for pronunciation, which leads to students' inability to express themselves flexibly in English and deepens the phenomenon called "dumb English". In addition, due to the teachers' usual heavy workload of various teaching, this also leads to a problem that teachers cannot give timely feedback to students. [11]

4. STRATEGIES FOR OPTIMAL DESIGN OF ENGLISH HOMEWORK FOR STUDENTS IN GRADE 8

4.1 Increasing Fun of Homework

According to the "Double Reduction" policy, teachers must be innovative in their teaching and design models. Especially in the homework section, the design of junior high school English after-class homework should be in line with the characteristics of the English subject and the growth needs of students, allowing each student to improve their English learning ability in a relaxed learning environment. Because of the psychological characteristics of the students, they are in the process of rapid physical and mental growth, and performance-based homework can stimulate their learning enthusiasm more than the single one. At the

same time, performance-based homework creates an English learning environment that helps students achieve good results.

Teachers can assign English performance homework to students according to different teaching units to encourage students to showcase themselves in specific contexts to improve their English language skills. In the process of assigning performance-based homework, to clarify students' learning direction, teachers can draw up a storyline for students and provide some character dialogues and language materials with English elements for students to complete the homework in the form of cooperative learning. As a result, it is helpful for students to improve the effectiveness of completing English homework and to feel the pleasure of completing English homework.

For example, in the Unit 2 "Keeping Healthy", Topic 2 "I must ask him to give up smoking." of the book, Renai English Grade 8 Volume I, teachers should make it clear that this lesson is about Wang Junfeng's preparation to persuade his father to quit smoking and convey the important idea that smoking is harmful to health and to maintain good living habits. Through this course, students have accumulated relevant vocabulary and sentence patterns. To meet the requirements of English homework design in the context of "Double Reduction" policy and improve the teaching effect, teachers can integrate the elements of daily life into the homework to improve students' basic English proficiency and guide them to understand the harm of smoking and cultivate good living habits to further achieve the teaching purpose.

First, the teacher can guide the students to make groups, and after it is completed, they need to clarify the responsibilities of the students in the group and do the role assignment. At the same time, students need to practice with the information provided by the teacher. Second, teachers need to create some story situations for students, such as "Suppose your father or a friend is smoking, how do you persuade them to quit?". This context can be used to develop students' thinking skills. Students need to work in groups for contextual conversations, and the process of independent practice helps develop students' English language skills and thinking skills. The objectives of junior high school English teaching not only focus on strengthening students' memory of knowledge but also on students' flexible use of English vocabulary and sentence patterns, which meets the requirements of the "Double Reduction" policy and achieves the effect of reducing the burden and increasing the quality of homework design. [12]

4.2 Controlling of Homework's Difficulty

With the goal of the "Double Reduction" policy, the first thing teachers need to consider when designing tiered English after-school assignments is the pressure students face in learning English after school. Teachers should ensure that students have enough time to complete their tasks and relax in other subjects after completing their English studies. Therefore, it is very important to grasp the difficulty of students' English assignments.

So, in the process of stratifying the difficulty of homework, the number of homework assignments should also be stratified by subdividing each difficulty into mandatory and

optional sections. The mandatory part is set to ensure students' learning effect after class, while the optional part is to give students some gaps for improvement. These improve students' English skills and learning effect without enormous pressure on the study.

For example, in the homework design of Unit 3 "Our Hobby", Topic 1 "What is your hobby?" in the book, Renai English Grade 8 Volume I, the "Grammar" and "Function" is a difficult post-lesson task. To reduce the students' learning tasks after the lesson, the part "Read the passage and complete the table as the compulsory questions" should be finished. But for other parts, the students can choose to complete it according to their free time. For the exercises in "section A" of this lesson, there are two less difficult parts, which are "Read the passage and fill the blank and Match the picture with phrases and listen to number the pictures". Therefore, students can finish these two parts first. Such a task design approach not only takes into account the stratification of difficulty but also the matching of difficulty and task volume, minimizing students' stress and improving the efficiency of English learning. [13]

4.3 Assigning Targeted Homework

The "Double Reduction" policy emphasizes a student-centered philosophy. Therefore, teachers should respect students' differences, solve the universal problems in traditional homework design, and help students grow by ensuring orderly English teaching activities through more varied and tiered homework and diverse assessment methods. The analysis of the learning meets of the top and bottom students revealed that most of the top students could understand the basic knowledge taught by the teachers in the classroom. For the top students, teachers should develop their potential by giving them extensive homework as a way to expand their knowledge. For the bottom students, they have difficulty in grasping the content presented in class. For them, teachers should focus on consolidating their basic knowledge and lowering the difficulty of homework to ensure students' absorption of old and new knowledge. Therefore, teachers should also be fully aware of the learning characteristics of each student and design more hierarchical homework to meet students' learning and ensure that students with different learning capabilities can achieve staging growth. For example, after completing the unit of Unit 2 "Keep Healthy" in the book, Renai English Grade 8 Volume I, teachers can design different hierarchical homework according to students' learning status. Teachers can also divide students into three groups, A, B and C. Students in group A generally are in low learning ability, so they are required to master the text and learn how to read vocabulary and sentence patterns, to deepen students' memory of new vocabulary. Students in Group B have a certain knowledge base, but they are slow to absorb new knowledge. For this reason, teachers can ask students in this group to deepen their understanding of the text and to practice reading the whole text fluently. After completing the basic homework, they can try to use English to elaborate on how to maintain good habits through oral expressions. Such as "You/He/She had better drink lots of boiled water", "You/He/She mustn't stay up at night", "Don't eat too much salt or sugar and so on". Students in Group C belong to the top students, so teachers should raise the difficulty of homework and ask students to write an English composition around the topic elaborated in the text on the premise of completing the homework of Group A and B students, to achieve the comprehensive training of their English thinking, language ability and creative ability. However, as the content becomes

more difficult, there will be differences in learning ability among students. Therefore, students' groups should also be diverse. Assuming that students in Group A have gradually become capable of completing the homework of students in Group B, teachers should give students the right to choose their homework and let them choose its difficulty, to result in a variety of homework. Teachers meet the basic needs of different students on the basis of respecting their differences and help them develop in the field of English in junior high school. [14]

4.4 Assigning the Proper Amount of Homework

One of the core points of the "Double Reduction" policy is to reduce the academic burden of students. Therefore, the total amount of English after-class homework should be reduced to ensure that students can complete their homework within a reasonable time and avoid unnecessary pressure on their studies. Teachers need to adjust the amount of homework appropriately, taking into account the variability of students' English learning capacity, as a way to improve students' efficiency in completing English homework. Teachers can control the amount of homework according to the efficiency that students show in the process of completing class exercises. Teachers also need to pay attention to the gap between the quality of completed homework and expected goals. If there is a decline in the quality of homework, the quantity of homework should be adjusted promptly.

For example, in the Unit 3 "Our Hobby", Topic 1 "What's your hobby?" of the book, Renai English Grade 8 Volume I, teachers can design homework after the lesson. The homework is divided into two parts: compulsory and optional. Students use the key sentence patterns in the text to make sentences to complete the compulsory part, and complete an English composition writing task with the theme of "My hobby". The optional part is to meet students according to their favorite hobbies using key sentence patterns or to communicate with each other and other students. The optional section mainly serves students who can learn to expand their English. This form of strict control over the amount of homework can well reduce the learning burden of students with average learning ability, and at the same time, the optional part can meet the learning needs of students with excellent ability.

In the context of the "Double Reduction" policy, junior high school English teachers need to reduce students' homework burden and keep the amount of homework within a reasonable range. Teachers need to remove some mechanical, repetitive English homework and improve its quality. Less and better homework is the only way to meet the developmental needs of students. Middle school English teachers need to communicate effectively with teachers who teach other subjects, to be able to make a coordinated design of homework and to control the amount of homework according to the study time of each subject. This will truly reduce the stress of homework for students. [15]

4.5 Homework of Social Practice

Social life is a big stage to exercise students' abilities. Under the background of the "Double Reduction" policy, teachers can assign some social practice English after-class homework to students, so that they can apply what they have learned in class to real life, reflecting

the practical and instrumental characteristics of language, and letting them deeply feel charmed of English.

Middle school English teachers should dare to break through the inherent form of homework design, from traditional written homework to novel practical homework, to cultivate students' core English literacy in a more vivid form of homework. The design of English homework should not be superficial, so it should be connected with life and reality. Therefore, when designing homework, English teachers should not only focus on the content of the textbook and make students mechanically copy words and recite texts but also make the homework "alive" and enter into students' daily life, to motivate them to complete homework and take initiative. English is a language like instruments. English learning should be close to life, related to life, and enhance English practicality.

For example, the main learning goal of Unit 5 "Feeling Excited" in the book, Renai English Grade 8 Volume II is to enable students to express their emotional attitudes accurately in English. Accordingly, teachers can design practical homework so that students can apply what they have learned and promote their development. Teachers can start by giving students some English vocabulary that expresses emotion, such as "angry", "happy", "anxious", "sad", etc.

After students have a firm grasp of emotion, teachers can conduct a month-long English diary homework in the class, making it homework to write an English diary to record interesting events and stories about their lives and to record changes in their feelings. Teachers should give appropriate guidance and assistance to students in the process of writing their journals, such as the choice of tense and the use in their journals, to ensure that students' English expression is as accurate as possible.

For another example, teachers can ask students to collect English slogans in their lives after class, such as "No Smoking", "No Parking", "No Littering" and so on, and share the results of their collection with their classmates. It allows English learning to be closely related to life so that students can apply what they have learned. This activity can be further extended by having students design their English slogans, such as "close the door with your hands", "walk on the right on the stairs", "be careful of slippery floors", etc. After the teacher's review, these will be made into reminder slogans and posted in classrooms, corridors and so on. In this way, students will not only learn English knowledge but also be able to use and express them flexibly.^[16]

4.6 Homework of Practice Operation

Middle school students are in the adolescence, they are playful and active. If students focus on books or exercise books and engage in mental but simple activities, it is not suitable for their characteristics at this age. As everyone knows, Students love to play and be active, so teachers can design practical homework for them so that they can use their brains as well as their hands to improve their interest and effectiveness in completing homework.

For example, in Unit 1 "Playing sports" of the book, Renai English Grade 8 volume I, teachers can ask students to look up the English expressions of various sports, such as "play basketball", "play soccer", "running high" and so on. Teachers can organize a relay competition before the next class to test who can speak more words about sports. This type of homework is an effective way for students to practice their ability to find and integrate skills and to test their study at the end of the class in a fun game.

For another example, Unit1 Topic1 Section D 1a is an article about David Beckham in that book. After explaining the article, teachers can ask students to collect information about the person's life and write a short English essay based on the information they have collected. A few students were randomly selected to come up and share their writing in the next class so that students could have a deeper understanding of the soccer star.

For the last example, in the teaching of "What's your hobby?" in Unit 3 "Our hobbies" in Topic 1 of that book, teachers can ask students to make an English poster according to their hobbies. The poster can describe their hobbies in English and can also be illustrated with pictures. Before the next class, students will vote for the best posters and post them at the back of the classroom to enrich the student's learning activities. [17]

4.7 Timely and Various Feedbacks

Teachers' inspection and evaluation is an important part of checking the quality of English after-class homework, but different methods of inspection should be adopted flexibly according to its different contents.

Listening is timely and unrepeatable, so when revising listening homework, teachers can replay the recordings uniformly in the class, teach students listening strategies while analyzing the answers, and train students' information grasping and decoding skills through general listening and intensive listening. Oral homework can be checked through playback of recordings, with students being given independent correction before summarizing. This approach not only eliminates plagiarism but also helps teachers grasp the specific situation of students and take targeted measures.

Peer assessment is also a common way for teachers to organize situational conversations and speaking practice with peers, which can be effective in reducing the nervousness and anxiety of speaking English in front of peers. This method also applies to the checking of written homework, either by swapping homework between tables or by checking each other as a group. And the standards are drawn up by teachers before inspection.

Comments are the most effective way for teachers to give feedbacks, which can directly reflect the completion of students' homework and the problems that need be cared, and also serve as a window and link for teachers and students to communicate. With the development of time and a new basic curriculum reform, more and more educators have begun to shift their attention from curriculum to students. Therefore, teachers should abandon the notion that scores are the most important thing. They should use more euphemistic or encouraging words to help students correct their mistakes. Teachers can use some comments, such as "You did a great job". "It would be better if you could be more careful!" "You have finished your

homework seriously, and you will make greater progress next time.” and so on. Because all of these words or phrases can make students feel cheerful. These measures can enhance students' motivation and confidence in learning English, and also facilitate the relationship between teachers and students. Teachers are no longer dominant person, but a guide who follows instructions. At the same time, teachers should also reflect on whether there are any shortcomings in their design and how to improve and enhance it when evaluating students' homework, to promote English learning through assessment and diversified feedbacks. [18]

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary

Through designing questionnaires and interviews, this paper fully investigates the current situation of optimal design of English after-school homework for junior high school students in Grade 8 in this school with the analysis and comparable data. From it, a large number of problems in the design process of English after-school homework in this school were identified, such as lack of motivation in the study, the inability of students, negative attitude toward English after-class homework, uneven levels of students, simple forms and boring contents and as well as overdue and simple feedbacks.

By reviewing and analyzing plenty of references, it was possible to optimize the design of English after-school homework for students in Grade 8 in this school in a targeted manner, such as increasing fun of homework, controlling of homework's difficulty, assigning of targeted homework, proper amount of homework, homework of social practice, homework of practice operation as well as timely and various feedbacks.

To sum up, for junior high school English teaching, after-school homework design is an important link that cannot be ignored, a supplement and extension of English classroom teaching, and a key link to achieving effective English teaching. Due to the excessive emphasis on exam results in some schools, and for the convenience of checking homework, most middle school teachers often assign English after-class homework in written form. The homework design reflects the teacher's will and ignores the students' differences. So it deviates from the core educational philosophy of "put people first and students as majorities".

Therefore, junior high school teachers should change the traditional concept of homework, establish a new vision of homework, and truly play the function of homework education. When teachers design after-school homework, they should not only pay attention to enhancing the fun of homework and controlling the difficulty of homework but also focus on dividing the levels of students. At the same time, they need to assign homework in a targeted way, focus on individual differences of students, and arrange the proper amount of homework reasonably as a way to reduce the burden on students. It is also important to assign social and practical homework, which can develop students' communicative and hands-on skills. In addition, teachers' feedback on this homework should be timely and varied.

In conclusion, with the implementation of the "Double Reduction" policy, the optimal design of English after-school homework is no longer a mechanical repetition of classroom

content and the optimal design of after-school homework is inevitable. As front-line middle school educators, teachers should think further and actively explore how to optimize English homework design under the new situation, to explore a new way for students to truly reduce their burden and learn efficiently, and achieve "Double Reduction" and "win-win results". They need to optimize strategies for English after-class homework to effectively reduce students' stress and improve teaching quality. When teachers only pay attention to the design and arrangement of homework and make students enjoy doing homework, they can cultivate personalized, well-rounded and self-actualized talents.

5.2 Research Limitations

Due to the limitations of objective practical conditions, the sample of this survey was only 3 randomly selected classes with a total of 145 students in Grade 8 of the Yinyan Campus of Longyan Junior High School, which cannot represent the current situation of students in Grade 8 in the school. Therefore, it is not universally applicable to a certain extent, which has some influence on the accuracy of the conclusions.

In addition, due to my limited level and ability, some research methods and strategies need to be further studied systematically. At the same time, this paper was written in a relatively short period and still has many shortcomings. The research of this paper has yet to expand the investigation subjects, extend the experiment time, continue the experiment, and keep on studying more effective methods to improve students' motivation levels in the future teaching process.

For example, I only did surveys and interviews with students and did not further communicate with teachers, parents. However, after analyzing the survey results, I did not propose specific strategies for optimizing the design and teaching practice of English homework at this school and did not test the findings of this study. In the following English teaching process, we hope to better understand students' English learning motivation, so that we can better optimize the English homework to stimulate and cultivate students' learning motivation, improve their English proficiency, and achieve the purpose of English teaching.

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