

“Double Reduction” Policy: Optimization and Research on Unit-Based English Homework in Junior High Schools

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Abstract: Under the “Double Reduction” policy framework, this study addresses the optimization of English unit homework design in junior high schools. Through systematic analysis of current practices and integration of theoretical strategies with practical cases, we propose five evidence-based design principles. Empirical results demonstrate that the optimized homework design significantly reduces students’ academic burden while enhancing learning motivation, assignment quality, and subject-specific literacy.

Keywords: Double Reduction policy, Junior high school English, Unit-based assignments, Instructional design optimization.

1. Introduction

Traditional English homework in China’s junior high schools has long been suffering from its over-reliance on rote memorization, lack of engagement, and insufficient attention to learner diversity. These practices starkly contrast with the “Double Reduction” policy (officially launched by China’s Ministry of Education in 2021), which mandates substantial reductions in after-school lessons and homework volume while emphasizing quality-oriented pedagogical reforms [1]. This study bridges this policy imperative with the cultivation of core English competencies through innovative unit homework design, establishing a framework that aligns with global trends in differentiated instruction and task-based language teaching [2].

2. Current Status of English Homework in Junior High Schools

Current English homework assignments at the junior high school level predominantly suffer from a lack of practicality and integration. The prevailing English homework practices in junior high schools exhibit three systemic deficiencies.

2.1 Monotonous Task Design

Many teachers persist with traditional homework models, prioritizing written exercises characterized by repetitive content and insufficient differentiation to address individual learner disparities. This one-size-fits-all approach fails to accommodate students’ diverse proficiency levels.

2.2 Outdated Assessment Mechanisms

Furthermore, assessment methods remain oversimplified, overemphasizing teacher corrections and final outcomes while neglecting the learning process—a pattern detrimental to cultivating holistic English proficiency.

2.3 Excessive Workload

Quantitatively, students report excessive homework volumes that prolong academic hours, encroaching on rest and

extracurricular activities. Such practices not only undermine student motivation but may also foster academic disengagement.

These issues collectively contravene the “Double Reduction” policy’s core objectives, necessitating urgent pedagogical restructuring through unit-based homework optimization strategies.

3. Design Principles for Junior High School English Homework

3.1 Connotation and Requirements of the “Double Reduction” Policy

The “Double Reduction” policy emphasizes reducing both the total amount and duration of homework. To ensure improved quality in homework design and fully leverage its educational function, teachers must carefully craft assignments while avoiding mechanical and meaningless tasks.

3.2 Theoretical Foundations for Junior High Homework Design

The Constructivist Learning Theory posits that activating students’ prior knowledge helps them actively construct new understanding. The Theory of Multiple Intelligences advocates for targeted and diversified homework designs based on students’ varied intellectual strengths and individual learning needs. The Language Acquisition Theory emphasizes that language learning requires authentic contexts, necessitating the creation of rich contextualized scenarios in homework design for practical language application [3].

4. Optimization Principles for Unit-Based English Homework Design in Junior High Schools

4.1 Objective-Oriented Principle

Homework design must align closely with teaching objectives and unit themes, ensuring each task explicitly targets both

overarching and specific learning goals. Knowledge points should be systematically integrated to create a cohesive pedagogical framework. For instance, in a unit on “Environmental Protection,” grammar exercises, reading tasks, and writing assignments should collectively reinforce climate-related vocabulary and persuasive language structures.

4.2 Integrative Principle

Grounding homework design in holistic unit planning, this principle emphasizes the organic integration of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills to foster comprehensive language proficiency [4]. It synergizes linguistic knowledge, skills, and cultural awareness, enabling students to consolidate and extend classroom learning. For example, A unit on “World Heritage Sites” could combine map analysis (geography), historical timeline creation (history), and bilingual report writing (English/science). This approach ensures in-class learning is consolidated and extended through post-class application. Assignments broaden students’ horizons and facilitate multidimensional training.

4.3 Tiered Differentiation Principle

Tailor assignments into a three-tiered system—foundational, intermediate, and advanced—based on students’ classroom performance, homework completion, assessment results, learning aptitudes, and interests [5].

- The Foundational Tier: Prioritizes language accumulation-lexical/grammatical reinforcement (e.g., cloze tests, sentence patterning)
- The Intermediate Tier: Emphasizes contextual language application (e.g., comparative essays, interview simulations)
- The Extension Tier: Develops comprehensive inquiry, higher-order thinking through project-based learning (e.g., designing report-style conservation proposals)

This approach accommodates diverse learning needs while nurturing knowledge transfer and innovative thinking.

4.4 Practical Engagement Principle

Employ multi-modal tasks to activate diverse learning modalities:

- Collaborative tasks: Role-plays or interview surveys to cultivate teamwork and communication skills to stimulate student motivation through enjoyable task completion
- Creative productions: Poster creation, English newsletter design short drama performances or English vlogs
- Longitudinal projects: Curated reading portfolios or writing initiatives to foster self-directed learning and perseverance

These practices empower students to enhance their capabilities and derive fulfillment from learning.

4.5 Contextual Openness Principle

Embed assignments in authentic language contexts rooted in real-life through.

- Scenario-based design to emphasize the integration of English learning with students’ daily experiences
- Community-connected tasks to develop open-ended tasks in content and format to encourage independent exploration and innovative thinking
- Open-ended problem-solving to ultimately achieving pragmatic language goals

Establish a tripartite evaluation system involving students (self-assessment), peers (rubric-guided evaluation), teachers (diagnostic feedback), parents (progress tracking) as joint assessors. Implement a multi-dimensional assessment framework combining written feedback, oral evaluations, grading scales, and reflective commentary. Develop scientifically grounded evaluation criteria that are explicit, specific, and actionable, aligned with the objectives and requirements of each assignment [6].

5. Research Investigation and Case Studies of Optimized Designs

To validate the efficacy of the optimized homework design, this study conducted a year-long practical experiment in a junior high school, involving two parallel Grade 8 classes. The experimental class implemented the optimized unit-based homework design, while the control class retained traditional homework practices. Data were collected through multiple methods, including questionnaires, interviews, classroom observations, and artifact analysis.

Below are cases demonstration of the optimized unit-base homework designs.

5.1 Case Study- PEP Junior English 8A Unit 3: I’m More Outgoing Than My Sister.

5.1.1 Thematic Focus

Healthy Perspectives on Friendship and Self-Identity

5.1.2 Language Objectives

- Master vocabulary for describing appearances and personalities.
- Use base and comparative forms of adjectives to articulate similarities and differences between oneself and peers.

5.1.3 Competency Objectives

- Develop observational and logical thinking skills.
- Guide students to express and internalize constructive friendship values, achieving the educational goal of holistic character development through English learning.

5.1.4 Tiered Task Design

- Foundational Tier (Language Accumulation)
 - Vocabulary reinforcement, spelling exercises and

phrase translation tasks.

- Grammar drills, textbook-based comparative structure practice.
- Intermediate Tier (Language Application)
 - Comparative essay, write a short composition comparing personal traits and hobbies with a friend.
 - Survey project, investigate and present family/classmates' personality traits through oral reports.
- Advanced Tier (Comprehensive Inquiry)
 - "Best Friend Nomination" activity, introduce a friend in English with justifications for nomination.

5.1.5 Implementation and Evaluation

- Self-Assessment
 - Students reflect on their work using predefined rubrics to identify strengths and areas for improvement.
- Peer Assessment
 - Structured peer review sessions to foster critical evaluation skills and mutual learning.
- Teacher Evaluation
 - Holistic feedback addressing progress, challenges, and actionable improvement strategies, accompanied by encouragement and guidance.

5.2 Case Study- PEP Junior English 8B Unit 6: An Old Man Tried to Move the Mountains.

5.2.1 Thematic Focus

Cultural Mythology and Adolescent Identity Construction
Anchoring Text
Ne Zha 2 (2025 animated film)

5.2.2 Language Objectives

- Master mythology lexicon (fate, demon, celestial, etc.)
- Retell narratives using past tense with 85% accuracy
- Employ discourse markers (although, however, in my view) in opinion expressions

5.2.3 Competency Objectives

- Develop cultural confidence through myth analysis
- Cultivate critical thinking via destiny debates

5.2.4 Tiered Task Design

- Foundational Tier (Cultural-Linguistic Anchoring)
 - Task 1 Lexical Expansion- Create bilingual flashcards for 10 film-derived terms (e.g., spiritual pill, thunderbolt)
 - Task 2 Dialogue Remix - Adapt character quotes using "I am the master of my fate!" structure (e.g., Aobing's line translation)
- Intermediate Tier (Contextual Synthesis)
 - Task 1 "Nezha's Diary" - Compose first-person narrative of the Heavenly Banquet battle using past tense and emotional adjectives
 - Task 2 Mythic Parallels - Complete comparative chart: Nezha vs. Zeus (Powers/Weaknesses/Symbolism)
- Advanced Tier (Critical-Creative Synthesis)

- Task 1 "Modern Nezha Reboot"

Design contemporary teen version with English profile poster or 2-min pitch video

- Task 2 Destiny Debate

Structured argumentation on "Can we truly alter destiny?" using PEEL framework

- Task 3 Interdisciplinary Challenge

Dubbing Workshop: Emotional voice-over of beach dialogue scene

Historical Timeline: Create English chronology of Nezha's story (Birth → Training → Heavenly Calamity) within Shang-Zhou context

5.2.5 Table

Table 1: Multidimensional Assessment Rubric

Criterion	Exemplary Standards
Linguistic Accuracy	Consistent past tense usage; precise mythology vocabulary
Cultural Interpretation	Demonstrates understanding of Nezha's cultural symbolism for Chinese youth
Creative Execution	Innovative design reflecting personal aesthetic

6. Evaluation and Analysis of Practical Outcomes

6.1 Evaluation of Practical Effects

- Compare and analyse the students' scores before and after the lesson to understand the students' learning outcomes.
- Observe the changes in students' participation in class and their attitude and motivation in completing assignments.
- Collect feedback from students to understand their satisfaction level [7].

6.2 Analyzing the Effect of Practice

Under the background of "Double Reduction", the design of homework is optimized, which is more conducive to teachers taking care of more individual students. Students are also willing to participate more actively in class discussions. After comparing the two classes, the interest and quality of English homework of students in the experimental class have improved greatly. The ability to use English in a comprehensive way, especially the ability to express themselves in writing in the unit test, improved significantly compared to the comparison class. Students' learning pressure was also eased. These findings confirm that the optimal design of English homework in junior high school can meet the demands of students at different levels.

7. Conclusion

Through theoretical discussion and practical verification, this paper puts forward effective strategies for the optimal design of junior middle school English unit assignments under the background of 'double reduction'. Strongly targeted unit as a whole, hierarchical design, fun, practical as the principle of homework design, can effectively improve the quality of homework, increase interest in learning, reduce the burden of homework, promote students' English subject literacy, in line

with the new ideas of the reform of junior high school English teaching.

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