

Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact of the Double Reduction Policy on the Design and Amount of English Homework in Primary Schools – An Empirical Study

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Abstract

In compulsory education, homework is considered a key means to help students consolidate the knowledge acquired in class. The introduction of the Double Reduction Policy in 2021 sets new requirements for assigning homework to students in the compulsory education phase. This study investigates the impacts of the Double Reduction Policy on the design and amount of English homework in primary schools as well as students' perceived willingness to do the homework before and after the implementation of the new policy in a third-tiered city in Guangdong Province, China. Through the method of questionnaire and the statistics generated from paired samples t-tests, the study found that there was significant difference in terms of English teachers' weekly class hours, students' average time on doing English homework, English teachers' practice of assigning unified and stratified homework before and after the Double Reduction Policy was implemented. In other words, students do less homework after the Policy was introduced. However, there was no significant difference in students' perceived willingness to do English homework before and after the Policy. These findings may have practical implications for the Double Reduction Policy to be truly effective in its implementation.

Keywords: double reduction policy, homework, English teaching in primary school

1. Introduction

For years, despite calls for quality education and education reform, Chinese students in the nine-year compulsory education stage (six years of primary school education followed by another three years of junior secondary education) have been known for their heavy workload and extremely tight after-school subject-based training schedules (Jin, 2022). In light of this, the General Office of the Central Committee of China's Communist Party and the General Office of the State Council of China jointly released a milestone document titled *the Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Off-Campus Training for Compulsory Education Students* (hereinafter referred to as the Double Reduction Policy) on July 24, 2021, and the document took immediate effect on the day of its release (MOE, 2021). In the document, Double Reduction refers to reduction in two aspects: one in the total amount and time students spent on doing homework required by school and the other in the burden of students attending after-school subject-based training programs. The aims of introducing and implementing the Double Reduction Policy include overall school education improvement, reduction of excessive study burdens on the students, reduction of anxiety experienced by parents, alleviation of social inequity, regulation and standardization of off-campus training, and better protection of minors' interests, etc.

This study focuses on the first aspect of reduction – reduction in homework related to the subject of English in primary schools. It should be noted that in China's compulsory education system, English did not become a recognized subject from grade three onwards in the primary school curriculum nationwide until 2003 (MOE, 2003), two years after it was introduced to early English language teaching in 2001 when the Ministry of Education issued a document titled *Guidelines for Promoting English Language Instruction in Primary Schools* (MOE, 2001). Ever since then, English has become one of the three core subjects alongside Chinese and mathematics (Qi, 2016), and its importance in primary school education became more prominent with the release of *Standard English Curriculum in*

Compulsory Education by Ministry of Education in 2011(MOE) and an updated version in 2022 (MOE, 2022).

Based on the above introduction, English teaching in the study refers to English taught to third graders through sixth graders as a compulsory course in primary schools; English teachers refer to those who teach English to primary grade three to six, and English homework refers to assignments given by teachers to students of primary grade three to six.

That being said, the following session reviews literature pertinent to homework and relevant theories on the design of homework.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Homework

Homework literally means work that is done by students either at home or during non-school hours because students may do their homework during library time, study hall or subsequent classes (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006). For this reason, homework is often defined as “an assignment given to a student to be completed outside the regular class period” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

2.2 Purposes of Homework

Homework or homework assignments are regarded as a crucial way to evaluate teaching effects, such as whether the assignment helps students consolidate the knowledge acquired in the class session and foster their ability to apply what they have learned into practice. Generally speaking, the purposes of homework can be classified into two categories: instructional and non-instructional objectives (Cooper et al., 2006). Instructional objectives of homework assignments include providing students with the opportunities to prepare for new lessons, practice or review what they have learned and the material presented in class by transferring learned skills to new situations, or integrate learned concepts and skills into an organic whole (Cooper et al., 2006). Non-instructional objectives of homework include establishing communication between students and their parents or among students themselves, and fulfilling directives given by school administrators, etc. (Cooper et al., 2006).

2.3 Types of Homework

The Double Reduction Policy makes it clear that to reduce students’ burden in doing homework, teachers should not assign homework that is mechanical, repetitious, or punitive (MOE, 2021). The most common form of such homework is copying and dictating words, phrases, and sometimes even the whole passage from the textbooks for multiple times. The consequences of assigning such homework are that students will gradually become weary of and lose interest in learning English, and may eventually resort to scribbling for the sake of doing homework. Consequently, a vast majority of them are not able to use English for daily communication. All these are counterproductive to the purposes of assigning homework.

To avoid the negative impacts brought by doing boring and repetitious assignments, teachers should assign homework that is fun and interest-oriented, relevant to students’ life experience, challenging at an optimum level, compatible with students’ cognition development, and suitable to individualized development (MOE, 2021). Adding creativity to homework design is key to solving the problems. For instance, teachers may assign homework that involves synthesizing all the words learned in the class by asking students to categorize the words and put them into a table; or they may design English homework involving organization ability development by asking students to put what they have learned into a mind map and write a report based on the mind map either individually or in a group.

2.4 Amounts of Homework

The Double Reduction Policy specifies the time of commitment by students in primary schools to do homework, which is no more than 60 minutes of homework for primary graders from three through six (MOE, 2021). Since English, Chinese and mathematics are all core subjects in the curriculum, it is assumed that the total amount of time of commitment to finish homework is equally distributed among the three subjects. In other words, based on the Double Reduction Policy, primary school students should spend no more than 20 minutes to finish their English homework on a daily basis on weekdays.

2.5 Theories on English Homework Design

The way English homework is designed reflects the theoretical principles guiding English language teaching. There are several major theories on how children learn a foreign language and develop foreign linguistic competence. Each of the theories looks at the issue from a different perspective and offers a different interpretation of why it is carried

out in one way rather than the other. The theories can be divided into three major categories: structuralist view of language, behaviorist view of language, and the functional and constructive view of language.

2.5.1 Structural View

Structuralism or structural view on language is committed to the principle that a language is itself a self-contained relational structure made up of phonetics, lexicon, and grammatical structures (Dai & He, 2013). Therefore, to learn a language is to learn its phonology, morphology and syntax. Following this principle, English teaching is about helping students understand the language's grammatical structures, speak and write English properly according to grammatical rules, and read English properly according to the rules or principles of comprehension. In light of this, English homework is about copying and reciting words, phrases, and sentence patterns.

2.5.2 Behaviorist View

Behaviorist theory or behaviorism is the thought that human behavior can be explained with respects to conditioning with no appeal to thoughts or feelings. That is, given the stimuli, the response can be predicted and vice versa (as quoted in Chomsky, 1980). Based on this perspective, a learner learns a foreign language through language dialogues and drills from the teacher or tape playing; the language input is structured by grammatical complexity, and the output is characterized by structured repetitions and grammar pattern drill responses. Students are under the pressure to repeat immediately and their errors are corrected immediately, too (Dastpak, Behjat, & Taghinezhad, 2017). This study theory corresponds to the structural view on language. Based on this principle, English homework is also featured by drills of words, phrases, and syntactical structures.

2.5.3 Functional and Constructive View

Functionalism or the functional view of language builds on the principle that language is used for performing functions. Descriptive, expressive, and social functions are three major recognized functions (Dai & He, 2013). By descriptive function, it means language is used for conveying factual information; by expressive function, it means language is used for supplying information on users' feelings, values or preferences; and by social or interpersonal function, it means that language is learned and used for communication in-between people. Based on this principle of functionalism, English language teaching is for communication and interaction, and therefore, English homework is about how students use English for daily communication: conducting a dialogue, giving a speech, or writing / presenting a report, etc.

Constructivism regards that man, as a social being, needs to stay in close contact with the environment surrounding him and therefore, his learning is affected by the surrounding. In other words, the central idea in constructivism is that learning is a social activity, something that people do together by interacting with one another (Dewey, 1986). Learning is regarded as an active rather than a passive process, a view opposite to that of behaviorists, because learners are supposed to construct meaning via active engagement with the environment. Therefore, for learners, understanding does not come from passive reception of knowledge but rather from making meaningful connections with the world surrounding them, integrating prior knowledge, newly acquired knowledge, and the learning processes involved. Grounded on this study theory, when one learns a foreign language, his linguistic input comes from natural language from his teacher, friends or books; his linguistic output, though unstructured, is focused on communication between him the learner and others; and his linguistic output is natural speaking when communicating with others. Also, except natural impulse to communicate, the learner has no pressure to speak, and he has no worries of making errors because only errors that hinder communication will be corrected, and those errors will be corrected naturally as meaning is, as mentioned before, negotiated (Dastpak et al., 2017). This view corresponds to the functionalist view on language. Accordingly, English homework thus designed is to enable students to explore the world by using the language, and help them synthesize what they learned and put them into practice and give full play to their own potentials, for instance drawing a mind-map, writing a report or staging a show by taking the unit as a whole rather than drills that only reflect isolated, disconnected linguistic or grammatical points.

2.6 *Studies on English Homework Reform after the Double Reduction Policy*

One and a half years into the promulgation and implementation of the Double Reduction Policy, there have been studies on its impacts on various aspects in the compulsory education system in China.

A report published in early 2022 by the Department of Education of Guangdong Province showed that provincial-wide, all schools (totaling 14,885) within the nine-year compulsory education stage have achieved the goal of reducing the total amount of homework and time committed by students on doing homework. Scholars in the field of education research also expound their views on this issue from different perspectives.

Chen (2022) argued that to fully implement the Double Reduction Policy, teachers should optimize homework design and improve its quality and efficiency. Homework is assigned to assess learning effects, consolidate knowledge acquired, promote skill application and provide feedback for improving teaching. To these aims, Chen (2022) suggested that teachers, apart from reducing the time on finishing homework, should first change their concepts guiding homework design by taking into consideration of students' weaknesses and strengths and giving full play to developing their abilities; second, teachers should provide students with timely, constructive, targeted, and diversified feedback on their assignments done to help individuals improve; and third, teachers should not design and assign homework purely revolving around passing the examinations but diversify the forms of homework. Lastly, Chen (2022) called on the school authority to instill a system to guarantee optimal functions of homework design to enhance students' academic performance.

Zheng (2022) contended that reduction in homework burden should go hand in hand with increasing teaching efficiency, and therefore, teachers should optimize the assignment design apart from reducing the amount of time on doing it. For instance, the content of the assignments should be in line with the curriculum requirements – *Standard English Curriculum in Compulsory Education* (MOE, 2022), and optimal to the students' cognitive levels – cognitively challenging enough to stimulate deep thinking. It does not mean that memorization is completely unnecessary, though mechanical repetition or copying should be reduced to minimum or avoided. Also, according to Zheng (2022), teachers should use stratified strategy when designing and assigning homework to students based on their varying learning abilities, such as basic homework for lower-level students to complete and optional, elective, and more challenging homework for more advanced learners. In other words, homework under the Double Reduction Policy should bear the characteristics of appropriateness in terms of amount, precision, and suitability, reducing or putting an end to the practice of assigning unified, repetitious homework and increasing the practice of flexible stratified homework.

Both Chen (2022) and Zheng (2022) expounded general understanding of how homework should be designed under the Double Reduction Policy but they did not distinguish the subjects, namely Chinese, mathematics, and English. Liu (2022), however, presented a case study with detailed illustration of how English homework in primary schools should be designed by citing an example from one module from the grade five English textbook. Liu (2022) pointed out that to reduce burden and increase efficiency, homework designed should be based on whole unit of teaching to avoid knowledge fragmentation. A series of progressive and interlocking homework activities conducive to active thinking, independent exploration and knowledge construction were designed to help students learn, memorize and use new words, including “situational fill-in-the blank”, “Q & A”, and anagram; mind-map drawing is assigned to help students integrate knowledge acquired, and recommended picture books were intended to help students consolidate and expand knowledge. In addition, to enhance the practicality and application of English language learning as emphasized by the new *Standard English Curriculum in Compulsory Education* (MOE, 2022), guiding students to retell stories or present reports based on themes summarized from the text and relate them to real life experience is essential to realizing the goal of using English to do things. Liu (2022) concluded that high-quality progressive and holistic English homework should become a continuation and extension of classroom teaching, and noted that students' attitude towards English homework changed after such homework was assigned to them – from being bored to becoming interested in doing it.

Similarly, noting the significance of implementing the Double Reduction Policy, Yang and Wang (2022) stated that to realize the goal of reducing the amount and duration of doing English homework, teachers are both expected and required to reasonably and scientifically regulate and design the structure or layout of homework, so that students, particularly those in primary schools, can finish their most of, if not all their homework at school. They also raised the issue of providing teachers with more professional training to deal with the challenges brought by the Double Reduction Policy.

Li (2022) carried out a questionnaire survey among senior graders and their teachers in primary schools in Xi'an, Shannxi Province. The survey focused on the status quo of English homework design in the following aspects: the amount of homework, time commitment to finish homework, and type of homework assigned to students. Results from the survey revealed that there are still problems existing in designing and assigning English homework to primary school students. For instance, among those surveyed, more than one third had to spent more than half an hour doing English homework every day; many complained that the English homework assigned was repetitious like copying words, expressions, or texts. As a result, many English teachers had doubts over the effectiveness of such homework design. The study concluded by stating that the reform of English homework design is a must, especially if the homework is aimed at encouraging students' autonomy and diversified developments. Therefore, unified, repetitious homework like copying should give way to more creative and scientific homework design, in particular

against the backdrop of the Double Reduction Policy.

2.7 Research Questions

The above literature survey shows the importance of implementing the Double Reduction Policy and what kinds of English homework are considered conducive to developing students' cognition and language learning abilities. However, there has been very limited quantitative research in this field. With the research gap identified, the current study aimed to address the following research questions (short for RQ):

RQ1: Is there a significant difference in the amount of weekly workload undertaken by English teachers before and after the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy?

RQ2: What are the average time students spent on finishing English homework before and after the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy, respectively?

RQ3: Is there a significant difference in teachers' practice of assigning unified repetitious English homework before and after the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy?

RQ4: Is there a significant difference in teachers' practice of assigning stratified English homework before and after the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy?

RQ5: Is there a significant difference in teachers' perception of students' willingness to do English homework before and after the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy?

3. Methodology

To answer these research questions, the study employed an on-line survey to collect data. The questionnaire came from two sources: *Questionnaire on Pupils' English Homework* and *Questionnaire on English Teachers in Primary and Junior Middle School* (Mei & Wang, 2022), and it was distributed via the online survey platform called Wenjuanxing. The adapted questionnaire was checked, reviewed, improved and approved by two experts in the field English teaching in elementary education. A pilot study was conducted among 30 English teachers in primary schools, and it was found that the items were well understood by the English teachers. All the items in the questionnaire were written in Chinese to ensure correct understanding and later translated into English by a professionally accredited translator.

The population in this study referred to 310 English teachers from about 140 primary schools distributed in the city's urban, suburban and county areas, an average of two to three English teachers per primary school. The sample consisted of 176 of these English teachers, and more than half of them (52.84%) teach English to more than one grade. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), for a population of 320, a sample size of 175 is large enough to obtain its sampling reliability. Therefore, in this study, the sample of 176 is considered big enough to represent its population.

As the study focuses on investigating the differences in pupils' English homework in terms of its design and amount of time before and after the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy, pair-samples t-test is employed. Paired-samples t-test, also known as repeated measures t-test, was employed when the research targets detecting and comparing differences between two sets of data measured twice before and after a treatment is introduced (Dörnyei, 2007).

For ethical concerns, all participants in the survey were de-identified, and ensured of anonymity and exclusive use of the data for academic purpose only.

4. Findings and Data Analyses

4.1 Normal Distribution of Data

Before running the paired-samples t-test, the two sets of data, data on English homework design before and after the Double Reduction Policy was introduced, should meet the requirement of approximate normal distribution. According to Ghasemi and Zahediasl (2012), the absolute value of the score must fall within the range of ± 1.96 for approximate normal distribution of data. Results from the normality tests showed that the values of Skewness (referring symmetry) and Kurtosis (referring to point) for the data the pre-Double Reduction Policy were .143 and .036, and those for the post-Double Reduction Policy were .160 and .280, respectively. In other words, all the absolute values of the data set were within the range of -1.96 to 1.96. Therefore, the set data were normally distributed and the paired-sample t-test could be applied.

4.2 Findings and Data Analyses

RQ1: Is there a significant difference in the amount of weekly workload undertaken by English teachers before and after the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy?

This question aimed at evaluating the effects of the Double Reduction Policy on English teachers’ weekly class hours before and after the Policy was introduced. To this aim, paired samples t-test was applied. Results of Paired Samples t-test were shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Results of Paired Samples t-test of Teachers’ Average Weekly English Class Hours before and after the Policy

		Paired Samples Test								
		Paired Differences						t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
					Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	Weekly Class Hour Before – Weekly Class Hour After	.369	1.952	.147	.079	.660	2.510	175	.013	

Table 1 clearly shows that there was a significant difference in the teacher’s weekly workload (class hours) before (m=14.39) and after (m=14.02) the implementation of Double Reduction Policy (p<.05). Therefore, RQ1 was answered.

It is a normal practice that teachers assign homework after each class (Chen, 2022). And the fact that teachers’ weekly workload or class hours decreased significantly after the Double Reduction Policy may imply that the total amount of homework completed by the students would decrease accordingly as well. The findings are consistent with the survey results by Department of Education of Guangdong Province (DOE, 2022) that the overall homework amount across all primary and middle schools provincial wide has been reduced after the Double Reduction Policy was introduced. In other words, the Policy has been effective in reducing homework burden on the part of the students. In light of this, RQ 1 was answered.

RQ2: Is there a significant difference in the average time students spent before and after the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy?

This question probed into the average time students committed in finishing English homework before and after the Double Reduction Policy, and results from paired samples t test was shown in Table 2:

Table 2. Results of Paired Samples t-test of Students’ Average Time on Doing Homework before and after the Policy

		Paired Samples Test								
		Paired Differences						t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
					Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	Time on Homework Before – Time on Homework After	.313	.622	.047	.220	.405	6.660	175	.000	

Results from Table 2 clearly indicates that overall, there was a significant difference (p<.05) in the average time students spend on doing English homework before and after the Policy was implemented. In this way, RQ2 was

answered.

Table 3. Distribution of Average Time Slots to Finish English Homework Before and After the Policy

Average Time Slot	Percentage Before (%)	Percentage After (%)
10 mins	9.09	18.18
20 mins	44.32	51.7
30 mins	37.5	26.14
40 mins	7.95	3.41
50 mins	1.04	0.57

A comparison of the distribution of average time slots showed that more English teachers assign homework that can be done within 10 and 20 minutes after the Policy. Those assign homework that can be done within 10 minutes doubles from 9.09% to 18.18%; more than half (51.7%) assign homework to be done within 20 minutes, a rise of about 7%. In contrast, fewer teachers assign homework that requires 30 minutes or even 40 minutes to finish, declining from 37.5% to 26.14%, and from 7.95% to 3.41%, respectively. These findings are in line with the survey done by the Guangdong Provincial Department of Education that overall, students are perceived to have spent less time on doing homework after the Double Reduction Policy was implemented (DOE, 2022). They also respond to the requirements stipulated in the *Standard English Curriculum in Compulsory Education* (MOE, 2022) that for primary school students, the average time on doing homework for each subject should not exceed 20 minutes, and that a majority of primary school students, even senior ones, now finish their English homework within 30 minutes (Li, 2022).

RQ3: Is there a significant difference in teachers’ practice of assigning unified repetitious English homework before and after the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy?

This question aimed at examining the impacts of the Double Reduction Policy on English teachers’ practice of assigning unified, repetitious homework before and after the Policy was introduced. Paired Samples t-test was applied for comparison, and the results were shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Paired Samples Test of Teachers’ Practice of Assigning Unified English Homework before and after the Policy

		Paired Samples Test								
		Paired Differences				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	Unified Homework Before – Unified Homework After	-.170	.897	.068	-.304	-.037	-2.520	175	.013	

Findings from Table 4 show that there was a significant difference ($p < .05$) in teachers’ practice of assigning unified, repetitious English homework before and after the Double Reduction Policy was introduced, so RQ3 was answered. These findings are consistent with the views of Li (2022) that before introducing the Policy, English teachers tended to assign homework in a unified way, without discrimination of students’ varying levels of learning. In response to the Double Reduction Policy, teachers should avoid such practice and focus more on designing homework catering to students’ varying needs (Liu, 2022).

RQ4: Is there a significant difference in teachers’ practice of assigning stratified English homework before and after the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy?

This question set to investigate English teachers’ practice of assigning stratified homework based on students’

learning levels before and after the Policy was introduced. Results of paired samples t-test were shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Paired Samples Test of Teachers' Practice of Assigning Stratified English Homework before and after the Policy

		Paired Samples Test								
		Paired Differences						t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
					Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	Stratified Homework Before – Stratified Homework After	.460	1.030	.078	.307	.613	5.927	175	.000	

Findings from Table 5 clearly show that there was a statistically significant difference in English teachers' practice of assigning stratified homework before and after the Policy ($p=.000$). Therefore, RQ4 was answered. In other words, the Policy has been effective on encouraging teachers to design more stratified homework to cater to students' different leaning abilities. The findings are parallel to the view of Zheng (2022) that English teachers should put an end to assigning too much unified and repetitious homework to students. Instead, to fully implement the Double Reduction Policy, English teachers should work on designing stratified homework for the students to maximize the benefits of homework: reducing the amount while enhancing its effectiveness on helping students learn better. These findings are also in line with the opinions of Li (2022) and Liu (2022) that stratified or hierarchical homework as an extension of classroom teaching, should be so designed that it gives students the opportunity to practice, consolidate, and expand what they have learned in class.

RQ5: Is there a significant difference in teachers' perception of students' willingness to do English homework before and after the implementation of the Double Reduction Policy?

This question focused on English teachers' perception of their students' willingness towards doing homework before and after the Double Reduction Policy was implemented. Paired samples t-test was applied to detect the difference.

Table 6. Paired Samples Test of Teachers' Perception of Students' Willingness to do English Homework before and after the Policy

		Paired Samples Test								
		Paired Differences						t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
					Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	Willingness Before – Willingness After	.045	.631	.048	-.048	.139	.956	175	.340	

From Table 6, it is interesting to note that there was no statistically significant difference ($p>.05$) in English teachers' perception of students' willingness to do homework before and after the Policy was introduced, despite the significant findings from RQ1, RQ2, RQ3 and RQ 4, which show that English teachers have already reduced the amount of homework, reduced the practice of assigning unified homework like copying, and increased the practiced of more diversified and stratified homework. This finding ran counter to the finding of Liu (2022) that students' attitude towards doing English homework have changed for the better when hierarchical homework was assigned to

them after the Policy was introduced: from being bored with the homework to expecting doing homework. Therefore, the expectation that students like stratified homework better may involve guesswork in the estimates, which may beget more empirical research to prove the anticipated causal relationships. In other words, perception of optimum amounts of homework may be dependent on many other factors, and students' attitude or willingness to do homework may depend on the nature of homework and students' individual differences (Cooper et al., 2006).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study collects data on primary school English teachers' perceptions on the reform of English homework against the background of implementing the Double Reduction Policy by means of questionnaire and mainly conducts paired samples t tests to compare and analyze the collected data. Findings from the tests show that overall, the Double Reduction Policy has been effective in reducing the amount of English homework and students' time of commitment to do it, but English teachers' perception of students' willingness to do English homework did not show significant difference before and after the Policy was implemented. These findings may have practical implications.

The original intent of implementing the Double Reduction Policy is twofold: to alleviate the academic burden of homework on primary and secondary school students and to reduce the financial burden on parents struggling to pay for a seemingly endless list of extracurricular subject-based tutoring classes (MOE, 2021). It seems that reducing academic burden is easier to achieve by simply reducing the amount of homework as shown in this study. However, the ultimate purpose of the Double Reduction Policy is not just about reducing homework amount but encouraging students to learn more, gain autonomy and develop their interest in learning. This study has, nevertheless, shown otherwise in that students' perceived willingness to do English homework did not increase in response to reduced homework amount. The reasons for this seemingly contradictory phenomenon may be attributed to the inconvenient truth of primary school English teachers' workload. As has been noted in Methodology, there are on average, about 2-3 English teachers in each primary school in the city. In some extreme cases, only two English teachers for the whole school. Since English is taught started from Grade 3 to Grade 6 (Qi, 2016), it is obvious that each English teacher in their school is responsible for teaching at least two or even three grades and consequently, several classes at the same time. This cross-grade multi-class teaching scope may inadvertently increase the workload for the teachers, which in turn, may make it difficult for them to really settle down and come up with truly scientific and hierarchical homework design for each grade, each class, let alone each student. This concern has been expressed by Yang and Wang (2022) that heavy workload was frequently cited as one reason hindering English teachers' professional development in the context of the Double Reduction Policy. Another reason for failure in boosting students' willingness to do English homework may be due to a lack of proper professional training targeted at primary English teachers as voiced by Yang and Wang (2022) in their questionnaire survey among 30 teachers and the subsequent interview. In the current study, an open-ended question was asked at the end of the survey, requesting the participants to provide a detailed assignment they had designed after the Double Reduction Policy to show how the new homework design guided their students to recall and organize what they had learned, think creatively, and put the acquired knowledge into practice. Nearly 90 percent of them simply answered "No relevant information to provide". This may indicate that the teachers themselves may need further guidance or training on how to create stratified and targeted homework that fully reflects the requirements of the Double Reduction Policy. That is why despite significant reduction on homework amount and time of commitment, students' perceived willingness to do homework did not increase accordingly.

In light of this, the practical implication is that for the top-down Double Reduction Policy to be truly effective, each school should take into consideration of its own situation by recruiting more eligible English teachers to share the heavy workload, and conduct more training on these English teachers so that they know how to design and assign homework really catering to the students' needs. After all, the nature and students' individual differences count (Cooper et al., 2006), and alleviating students' academic burden should be in tandem with boosting their willingness to do homework. Only in this way will the stratified homework reflects the essence of the functional linguistic theory (Dai & He, 2013) and constructivism theory in language learning and teaching as well as homework design (Dewey, 1986).

All that said, this study is not without its limitations. One limitation lies in its sampling. Only 176 in-service primary school English teachers from a third-tiered city in Guangdong Province in Southern China took part in the survey. Therefore, findings from the study can only be applied to primary schools of similar backgrounds and cannot represent the perceptions of other primary English teachers from first or second-tiered cities on homework change brought by the Double Reduction Policy. The second limitation is the research method. Only questionnaire was used

to collect data for statistical analysis. Future studies may consider semi-structured interviews with the participants to get insights into the problems or challenges they encounter when implementing the Double Reduction Policy, especially in how to reduce the amount and time of commitment on the part of the students in finishing the homework without compromising their performance, and how to design truly scientific homework that students are willing to do. Third, the current study only explored English teachers' opinions on the impact brought by the Double Reduction Policy on homework given to students, but the other key stakeholder – the students who are expected to do the homework themselves, are not investigated. Therefore, future studies may examine students' own perceptions on the impacts of the Double Reduction Policy on homework design, amount of time committed, and their willingness to finish it.

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