



Research on Strategies of Easing Burden and Increasing Efficiency in Junior High School English Class Based on the Background of Double Reduction

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ABSTRACT

Under the environment of a “double reduction” policy, the concept of reducing the burden and increasing efficiency is of practical significance to constructing efficient classrooms, easing students’ excessive homework burdens and improving teaching quality for teachers. Frontline teachers, as implementers and promoters of the “double reduction” policy, innovate teaching methods from the mode of the layered teaching, homework management mechanism, language environment and assessment ways through interpreting the “double reduction” policy and combining it with the existing problems in junior high school English classroom. These ways ensure that students learn well in class and achieve the goal of reducing excessive academic burdens on students and increasing teaching efficiency for teachers.

Keywords: double reduction, easing burdens and increasing efficiency, junior high school.

1. Introduction

In July 2021, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council (2011) has issued *Guidelines to ease the burden of excessive homework and Off-campus tutoring on students undergoing compulsory education*, which mentioned that the quality of education and teaching need to be vigorously improved; Make ensure that students learn enough and well at school, promote the quality and balanced development of compulsory education, and enhance the quality of classroom teaching.

Recently, China has been committed to reducing the excessive academic burden on students. For example, *the Notice on Measures to Reduce the Burden of Primary and Secondary School Students in 2018* and *the Thirty Articles on Reducing the Burden of Primary and Secondary Schools* in 2019 are issued by the Ministry of Education. However, its effectiveness is worrying, so much so that it is difficult to get out of the trouble in reducing the burden.

It implemented the “double reduction” policy which aims to reduce the academic burden on students and increase teaching effectiveness in class, enhance students’ mental and physical health as well as promote their personal development. Therefore, the key to easing the burden of excessive homework and increasing the effectiveness of teaching in class is to start with every class taught by the teacher themselves. The educational departments also should play a leading role in the “double reduction” policy so as to lessen students’ pressure with schoolwork.

2. Analyzing the Current Situation in the English Classroom

2.1 Burdening of Students with Academic Requirements

Students’ excessive academic burdens are usually divided into two parts. One is the in-class assignments being the learning of new knowledge from teachers; the other is off-campus ones like redundant homework, after-school programs and featuring curriculum tutoring. The pressure on students mainly comes from the exam-oriented education system because they need to get admission into those great universities with good grades.

However, some parents cannot get a thorough understanding of the policy and believe that reducing the amount of homework and learning tasks will affect their children’s grades. Therefore, they arrange off-campus tutoring for their children on national festivals and holidays because they want to lay a solid foundation for their children’s future. The above situation leads to the common phenomenon of reducing the burden in school but increasing the burden after school, which decreases students’

learning efficiency. From the perspective of the educational model, there is no doubt that teaching in the classroom should be the primary choice of all learning methods, while off-campus training is a supplement for students who have trouble self-learning. Apart from this, if classroom efficiency is higher, students need not spend too much time taking extracurricular lessons, so the academic burden on students and even their parents' economical stress will also be eased.

In addition, due to students' individual differences and traits, it is difficult for teachers based on the mode of large class teaching to take account of the whole class. Accordingly, students' learning problems may be revealed including being lack of motivation in learning, low learning efficiency, and frustration with academic tests.

2.2 Lack of Skills in Managing Homework

The quality and quantity of homework is the key to easing the burden of excessive homework in primary and secondary education, and it is also the way for students to consolidate their knowledge independently. Although teachers' attention is paid to reducing the quantity of homework, they neglect the quality of homework. As a result, the reform of homework did not get valid results at the present. The large amount of homework and the inappropriate schedule of lessons in various subjects have also affected the efficiency of English learning.

At present, English homework designed for students has appeared the following weaknesses, which include a single and boring form of tasks, an excessive amount of homework, complicated content and clichés questions. What is more, the teachers design homework beyond the teaching syllabus and fail to consider students' English levels? Students' personal traits and differences are ignored completely, which is not conducive to developing students' interest in learning, or even their overall development.

For example, at the time of correcting assignments, if students answer incorrectly in a question, the teachers believe that they do not get the hang of knowledge points. It is a pity that the teachers do not deeply research mistakes that students made, thus making it difficult to exert the nurturing effect of homework.

2.3 Rigorous Teaching Requirements for Teachers

The implementation of the "double reduction" policy has brought new changes to basic pedagogy. Reducing students' excessive homework and off-campus tutoring has become an imminent task in public. On the one hand, *English Curriculum and Standards for Compulsory Education*(2022) emphasizes higher requirements for teaching, which include language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability. On the other hand, students' scores are regarded as the most important indicator for enrollment. The above requirements from the public are changing to unconscious stress on frontline teachers.

Nowadays, Teachers spend much time dealing with tricky and full- challenging work all the time, but they are still difficult to keep pace with teaching requirements. There are two major troubles caused by the above work mechanism. The high quality of after-school services also requires that the schools have high-quality teachers. One is the strict requirements for teachers to cope with a set of tough tasks such as safe and rewarding after-school services for students and guiding students with homework. The other is the lack of positive power and strong motivation in teaching research. As a result, it is difficult to develop students' interest when communicating, owing to a lack of an appropriate language environment and effective teaching methods.

2.4 Lack of Effective Evaluation Methods

It is easy to find that some teachers mainly focus on the transmission of knowledge in class from the perspective of teaching evaluation. The teachers always emphasize whether teaching objectives are completed or not. The reason why is that way can help teachers quickly transfer knowledge to students efficiently and save time to practice a lot. In fact, the style of “one-talking” teaching overemphasizes the “threedimensional objectives” of the curriculum standards, and the teachers have paid less attention to the core literacies of the English subject. The teachers use the summative assessment to verify teaching efficiency in exams like end-of-unit exams, midterms and final exams. The summative assessment emphasizing selecting and distinguishing students is based on whether those students can get high scores on exams, while it neglects to explore students’ potential in other performances.

This kind of single assessment is difficult to cover students' well-grounded development because students with other outstanding performances are neglected except for grades. Consequently, students’ value of emotional attitude and thinking quality cannot be improved. It will certainly have a hindering effect on students’ development and learning efficiency. Accordingly, it is also difficult to achieve the goal of reducing the excessive homework burden on students and increasing teaching efficiency in class.

3. Strategies for Reducing the Burden and Increasing the Efficiency in Class

Faced with the current teaching situation, the “double reduction” policy indicates over and over again that the demand of students undergoing compulsory education needs to be catered to in learning. The teachers need to optimize every segment of their English classes according to the problems that arise in the teaching process in order to reach the purpose of reducing the burden and increasing efficiency.

3.1 Considering Students' Individual Differences and Implementing Layered Teaching

The core concept of the new curriculum standards is to face all students and respect individual differences. Under the background of the new curriculum standards, students’ status and their individual differences are advocated exceedingly. Layered teaching (Wang, Y. L., 2017) is the reform of the traditional teaching mode which promotes the overall development of students at different kinds of levels. There are five levels of compulsory education in the *English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education* (2011), while the ministry of education has promulgated the *English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education* whose levels are changed to four levels(2022). The *National Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education*(2022) elaborates on the basic principles of all-around development and cultivating people as well as facing all students and teaching according to their abilities.

When layered teaching is implemented, some factors need to be combined with learning situations, teaching materials and methods. The purpose of layered teaching is for students to have a comprehensive understanding of knowing what they have learned. In the teaching process, if the teachers design appropriate learning goals for students, they should consider various factors such as students' performances in and after class, and students’ weaknesses and strengths in their schoolwork.

In conclusion, the key point is to set learning objectives based on the student’s level in the proceeding of layered teaching. For example, the teachers advise students who have some basic knowledge of the language set higher learning goals, while other students who are not good at English make an easier plan by themselves. Compared with traditional teaching, the teachers focus on oral practices, condensed sentence patterns and strive to give every student the opportunity to practice.

3.2 Optimizing Homework Design and Management Mechanism

“Double reduction” policy states that written homework is not assigned for first and second graders, but that exercises can be appropriately arranged to complete within the school. The ministry of education indicates that pupils from third to sixth grades should have an average of fewer than 60 minutes of their homework a day, and students in junior high school should have an average of fewer than 90 minutes.

The “Double reduction” policy demands to reduce the burden of excessive homework comprehensively, whose the requirements of homework should not be limited to the traditional teaching mode. Instead, it should be oriented to reduce the quantity of homework and enhance the quality of students’ learning. However, controlling the amount of homework is never the same as lowering the demands on students and teaching quality. The design and layout of homework should be innovative for the current situation, and after-school homework can be improved from the following aspects.

Firstly, in terms of the quality of homework, teachers should consider the whole students’ level, so assignments designed can be divided into basic, extensive, and comprehensive assignments for students. Secondly, in terms of teaching philosophy, teachers can enrich the form of homework based on the core competencies of English subjects and teaching materials. Oral practices should be designed appropriately such as situational communication and role-play. Thirdly, in terms of design homework itself, homework can be designed based on the teaching syllabus. We can also stimulate students’ interest in learning through a series of valid homework, and give students the right to choose their own homework. Finally, in terms of homework evaluation and feedback, students’ attitudes need cultivating to take their homework seriously. Some positive evaluations which include progressive evaluation, graded evaluation and dialogic evaluation can be used in various ways to motivate students learning.

The author designed three kinds of writing tasks based on the textbook, and the content is from Section B (3a-3b), unit 6, Grade 7, published by the new PEP Junior School English Book. The first homework is to use the sentence patterns and vocabulary learned in this unit to write a short English essay about personal eating habits. The second one is to make a survey about students eating and life habits. The last one is to make a poster about one’s individual healthy meals a day. The topic of this unit is talking about food, describing someone what he likes or dislikes about food and eating habits. The teaching objective is to learn to express the food you or others like and dislike to eat, and to use countable and uncountable nouns correctly. Based on the teaching objectives, homework can be divided into three ways including basic consolidation, extended performance and practical activities, which are related to students' own practical experiences and improve their understanding and expression skills.

To sum up, this assignment for students is designed to internalize the language and then smoothly produce it in written form. Students will imitate passages to write short essays by using the vocabulary and key grammar learned in the unit. In addition, the students made a poster by themselves, which not only cultivate their creativity but increase the student's sense of achievement.

3.3 Creating a Proper Language Environment for Students

Students’ ways of learning include both teacher instruction and student training. The Chinese scholar (Zhang, F., 2018) points out that at the present stage of compulsory education, there is a tendency that emphasizes grammar but not speaking, that is, stressing traditional written content but not listening and speaking training. It can be seen that it is imminent to develop students’ oral skills in English teaching. Therefore, teachers should focus on creating an active language environment for students so as to nurture students’ sense of language and comprehensive language skills.

According to the *National Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education*(2022), the state

21 *Research on Strategies of Easing Burden and Increasing Efficiency*

partially adjusted the proportion of class time for each subject in free nine years of compulsory education, while the subject of Chinese, math and English in traditional teaching mode. The proportion of time in the curriculum standards remains large for both Chinese and math, and the proportion of class time for English is only 6%-8%, which is lower than that for physical education and art subjects. It shows that the proportional score of physical education and art in the examination will also be increased. Accordingly, there is a misunderstanding that English is believed to be an unimportant subject in the community and even in the whole education department. In fact, English still plays a role in the country's education system, thus increasing the burden on English teachers and students.

The creation of a learning environment is a difficult problem to be solved in class. The author analyzes a listening and speaking lesson, and the content is from Section A, unit 3, Grade 8, published by the new PEP Junior School English Book. Part 1a is to discuss people and what they do or do not do housework based on the given pictures, the part of which belongs to the presentation of vocabulary. The picture shows that the mother asks the boy to throw the garbage that can be combined with the actual life of the students. It can help students understand the related words and phrases more easily. Part 1b is a listening task in which students are guided through the exercise of matching housework activities with characters in the table. Part 1c is an oral output activity in which students are guided to use the phrases in 1a to write dialogues, so the linguistic structures they have learned can be further consolidated through teamwork. This lesson focuses on language structure, training students in listening and speaking skills and completing the process from input to output, and further enhancing students' language competence.

When teaching, the author will use the following steps: Firstly, the author conducts a free talk for about 5 minutes before the class, during which students express themselves using words they have already learned or refer to the words given in 1a. Then, part 1b is a listening task that used multimedia aids and audio-visual means to practice, which can stimulate students' interest in learning to some extent. Next, combined with the emotional objectives of the unit and the actual life of students, the author creates a variety of scenarios and then carries out more teaching activities, which make the teaching content more intuitive and vivid, and more easily introduce students to the related situations. Finally, the author encourages students to communicate in English based on the dialogue of part 1c.

There are some students who are afraid of making mistakes at the beginning of the class, but the author encourages students to express their ideas freely from their daily life. The author combines native language and scaffolding instruction to explain difficult and key points. In view of the above approaches to creating an appropriate environment for students, the training of verbal and written form is used to apply students' knowledge to specific scenarios, thus achieving the effect of learning to apply.

3.4 Changing the Ways of Assessment

The General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council (2020) issued *China issues guidelines to deepen education evaluation reform*, which proposes that students' comprehensive development should be promoted and their equal rights and interests need to be protected.

Evaluation and assessment are seen as the leading standard to verify teaching quality. It is still important for teachers to provide guidance for students based on multiple assessments. When evaluating, teachers should give positive evaluation and valid feedback to students even if they make mistakes. Characterized by learners' subjectivity, individualized learning and the integration of teaching, learning and assessing, the model aims at facilitating the high-order learning of English learners (Ma, J.

T., & Ma, G. H., 2018).

In terms of evaluating means, the teacher employs multiple assessment methods such as formative evaluation, diagnostic evaluation and summative evaluation. As far as formative assessment is concerned, the emphasis is on teachers' ability to obtain timely feedback during the teaching process, so that they can adjust their teaching methods and teaching design. The assessment is to evaluate students' competence in English, not to singly chase students' high academic scores and enrollment. The various forms of assessment tasks should be designed so as to break the single form of evaluation criteria like scores and rankings.

In addition to students' performance in the classroom, evaluation criteria should involve the value of emotions and attitudes, cooperative and communicative skills, off-campus practices and so on. For instance, tasks that included situations in one's daily life or open-minded tasks are designed that require students to integrate a wide range of knowledge and skills to complete. However, it is worth noting that there is no fixed standard for any open-minded tasks and should work with students to develop evaluation criteria when designing tasks. This not only helps teachers get prompt feedback but also allows students to set their learning goals based on the evaluation criterion.

As to the concept of evaluation, the teachers should study appropriate evaluation standards and reestablish the concept of student-centred education. Moreover, the teachers not only abandon the view of scores as the only criterion for admission but also play a leading role in the evaluation of diagnostic and motivational mechanisms. The teachers should pay attention to students' changes, and use the portfolios to record students' performance such as work, tests and other related things, which not only helps students to get effective feedback but also helps teachers to reflect themselves. The construction of effective teaching evaluation should start from the viewpoint of evaluation in compulsory education requires; the teacher also needs to deeply grasp the core connotation of teaching for learning, learning for student development and focus on the core elements and important links advocated by effective teaching in class (Gu, W. J., 2010).

All in all, teachers should follow the objective rules that ensure the improvement of the quality of teaching. In addition, the teachers are required to play the leading role in class and advocate diversified standards to evaluate. Only in this way can students' abilities of self-learning and self-assessment be cultivated.

4. Conclusion

Under the direction of the *National English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022)* and the "double reduction" policy, it is important to improve teaching quality and cater to the demands of primary and secondary school students. For one thing, the teaching methods need to be optimized in layered teaching, homework design, assessment methods, and language environment, to design a teaching model in line with the student's characteristics. For another, in response to the "double reduction" policy, teachers more efforts should be made to cater to the need of students and their personal development. The initiative choice should be transferred to students, which can help students effectively reduce the academic burden on students and improve the quality of teaching.

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23 *Research on Strategies of Easing Burden and Increasing Efficiency*

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