



# A Survey of English Homework in Primary School under the Double Reduction Policy

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## **ABSTRACT**

The excessive homework burden in schools has long been an issue. In 2021, the "Double Reduction" policy was issued to clarify homework quantity, enhance design quality, and build management mechanisms, aiming to improve education quality and reduce students' academic burden. After the policy's implementation for months, this study surveyed 353 pupils and 40 primary English teachers. It found that English homework quantity has decreased significantly, with completion time within 30 minutes. The types have changed slightly, with more oral and less written work. Evaluation methods remain mostly the same. Students are satisfied with the quantity and prefer innovative vocabulary review, various oral tasks, and drawing - based homework, and they like encouragement words in evaluation. Teachers support the policy but worry about teaching pressure, homework design inexperience, and lack of assessment platforms. In the future, digital technology can be used for homework arrangement and evaluation, and teachers' skills can be improved through learning activities.

**Keywords:** the "Double Reduction" Policy; English homework; primary school English

## **1. Research Background**

The "academic burden reduction" has been around for a long time. Many scholars have attempted to investigate the fundamental reasons for the homework burden and proposed some constructive solutions. However, the problem of "excessive quantity and poor quality" has not been alleviated greatly. On July 24, 2021, the General Office of the State Council released a guideline on the "double reduction" policy (Ease the burden of excessive homework and off-campus tutoring for students), aiming to effectively improve the education level of schools, to reduce the excessive homework and after-school tutoring burden on students (Zhou, 2022).

It's key to attach the importance of homework reduction in primary school. No matter at home or abroad, we widely agree that there should be less homework in primary school (Ren, 2015). The purpose of homework in primary school is to develop students' learning habits, active attitude and improve basic learning skills. If students in primary school have too much homework, it will stifle their interest in learning. And more seriously, it will affect their learning in junior high school. Therefore, burden reduction should start in elementary school. And it is necessary to know about the situation of English homework in primary school.

In order to know about the effect of the "Double Reduction" policy that has been implemented for several months, the author conducted questionnaires and interviews to understand the status of English homework in primary school. Through the survey, we were able to gain a preliminary understanding of the changes in the quantity, type, and evaluation, as well as teachers and students' perception of English homework. Meanwhile, we were able to provide some suggestions to reduce the burden of future homework and improve the quality of homework.

## **2. Research Design**

### **2.1 Research Question**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the changes of English homework in terms of quantity, type and evaluation in primary school and English teachers' attitudes to the "Double Reduction" policy. The following are the two research questions that will be addressed in this study:

1. What are the changes of English homework in terms of quantity, type, and evaluation in primary school under the "Double Reduction" policy?
2. How do teachers and students perceive English homework in primary school?

## **2.2 Participants**

Teachers and students all participated in the survey. Participants in the questionnaire included 357 students (191 boys and 166 girls) from different grades. 132 are from middle grades (three and four grade) and 225 are from high grades (five and six grade). In addition, we administered the study to 40 teachers (19 for middle grades and 21 for high grades). Their teaching experience ranged from one year to more than ten years. 21.21% of teachers had 1 to 5 years of experience. Approximately half had 6 to 10 years of experience. And the remaining teachers had more than 10 years of experience. Besides, twelve teachers from elementary school were chosen for interviews. Twenty children from the same school but different grades (five on average each grade) were randomly selected to participate in the student interviews.

## **2.3. Instrument**

Based on a literature review, a 45-item scale questionnaire (ranging from 1 (NEVER) to 6 (ALWAYS)) for teachers was created to study the changes in elementary school English homework. The first part collects teachers' basic details like teaching grades and seniority. The second part focuses on pre-policy English homework in terms of quantity, type, and evaluation, and the third part, similar to the second, deals with post - policy homework. The last part is about "After - school service" and teachers' attitudes towards the policy. The nine-item student questionnaire has the first two items for students' basic info, and the rest cover English homework quantity, type, evaluation, and their favorite homework types and evaluation methods. Some sentences are replaced with pictures of different homework types (e.g., word - copying, reading, investigation, coloring) and evaluation methods (e.g., marking, rating, encouragement words, in - class display, material rewards) to facilitate completion.

Twenty students from different grades and 12 English teachers took part in the interviews. The interviews with teachers aimed to gain more in - depth and context - details about their homework - setting practices compared to what questionnaires could offer, focusing on detailed homework practice and new issues after the "Double Reduction" Policy, with each face - to - face interview lasting about 5 minutes. Student interviews centered on their attitudes towards English homework and subject training. With teachers' help, the interviewer carried out grade - by - grade group interviews, with 4 groups of 5 students each and each group interview taking 10 minutes.

## **2.4 Data Collection and Analysis**

Totally, 357 questionnaires (students) were sent out. 353 valid questionnaires were recovered by excluding 4 invalid questionnaires (Depending on the completion time is less than 30 seconds).

And 40 valid questionnaires (teachers) were recovered, of which 40 were effectively received. The process of interviewing with teachers and students were taped to collect the data.

In order to analyze the differences of assigning English homework in terms of quantity, type and evaluation between before and after the policy, data management and analysis were performed using SPSS 26.0. First, the Paired Samples T-test was used to analyze whether there is a significant difference in assigning homework. At the same time, the frequency analysis was used to know about the situation of English homework in primary school

### **3. Results and Discussion**

#### **3.1 The Changes in the Amount of English Homework**

Table 3.1 (see *Tables & Figures* section) shows that there is a significant difference in the quantity of homework between before and after the policy when teachers estimate that students complete their homework within 30 minutes ( $t = -3.457$ ,  $df = 39$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). And there is also a significant difference when teachers estimate that students complete their homework between 30 minutes and 60 minutes ( $t = 3.134$ ,  $df = 39$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). So, after the practice of the policy, the quantity of English homework is significantly less than before ( $MD1 = -0.525$ ,  $MD2 = 0.650$ ).

There is a significant difference in the quantity of homework. To be specific, as shown in Figure 3.1 (see *Tables & Figures* section), now 87.5% of teachers believe that students can finish the English homework in less than half an hour and only 12.5% estimate that students finish the English homework over 30 minutes. The results obtained from the teacher's questionnaire are similar to the student questionnaire. Figure 3.2 shows the results of average completion time of English homework from the perspective of students after the policy. About 88.1% of students can finish the homework in half an hour. The results reported in quantity are in line with Ning's (2022) investigation into homework practice, which have found that teachers, students, and parents all considered that the amount of homework has decreased significantly compared to the last term.

Generally, the amount of English homework in primary school meets the requirements in the Notice. Furthermore, according to the interview, T1 said that 'students completed their English homework within 30 minutes before the policy. Now, we must obey the acquirement of educational document that the total amount of homework assigned in elementary schools can't exceed one hour. So, I try to keep it less than 15 minutes because there are other subjects.' At the same time, most students said that they could finish English homework during the after-school tutoring program (There are two classes in the after-school tutoring program, the first class is aimed at developing students' interests and the second one is aimed at tutoring homework). However, a small part of teachers stated that there was no difference in the amount of homework before and after the policy because the amount of homework assigned before was so small that there was no room for reducing.

#### **3.2 The Changes in the Type of English Homework**

Table 3.2 shows that there is no significant difference in the types of English homework before and after the policy ( $p > 0.05$ ). But it does not mean that there is not any change, which can be seen from the data in Figure 3.3 that 82.5% of teachers often assign reading aloud. Only 32.5% often assign copying and 40.5% assign homework from exercise book after the policy. Meanwhile,

compared to before the policy, there are still a few changes following the practice of the policy. The most obvious is the reduction of written homework, especially the copying and exercise book. And teachers increase the reading homework. However, there is a little practice in other creative homework, such as poster, mind-map, dubbing and English use in real life.

Figure 3.4 is the result of the question “what’s your main English homework?” At present, most students’ English homework mainly consists of copying, reading aloud, and reciting. Among 90.65% of students will read aloud and 54.67% of students will do exercise book, which is consistent with the result that teachers often assign reading aloud and tend to reduce homework from the exercise book. However, there are 84.42% of students have copying homework, which is not in line with teachers’ questionnaire. Finally, other innovative assignments such as posters, mind maps, English dubbing, reporting are still few.

### **3.3 The Changes in Evaluation of English Homework**

Homework is the essential supplement to teaching activities. And the evaluation of homework is a significant part in teaching, which is a large contributor of burden reduction and quality improvement. As can be seen from the Table 3.3, there is a significant difference in marking between before and after the policy ( $t = 2.759$ ,  $df = 39$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), which means that teachers use marking to assess homework less frequently than before and teachers are changing the view of mark oriented ( $MD = 0.35$ ). But there is no significant difference in other ways of evaluation, such as encouragement words, displaying and material rewards ( $p > 0.05$ ).

### **3.4 Students’ Perception of English Homework**

Students are the major learners. It’s equal important to understand their perception of English homework, including, are they satisfied with the amount of homework? What’s their favorite types of English homework? And what’s their favorite ways of evaluation? Figure 3.5 shows that 93.48% of students think that the amount of English homework is few. And according to the results of the interviews, almost all kids said that they could do their homework during school, which indicates that pupils are content with the existing amount of homework.

The results of the student’s favorite types of English homework are shown in Figure 3.6. Three favorite homeworks include copying words, reading aloud, and drawing pictures to explain the meaning of words or phrases, rather than practical homework, such as poster, mind-map, do a survey and report. The outcomes are not what have been anticipated, and it’s opposite to another research. Cooper (2015) investigated the status quo of English homework in primary school and the results is that there are few students like regular homework, such as copying and reading aloud, instead they prefer extension homework and integration homework. The reason why traditional homework is chosen by students is that they are simpler and could be completed quickly. Poster, and do a survey and report, on the other hand, would take a long time to complete. At the same time, a girl said in the interview that ‘we require parental help. My parents were not at home, and my grandparents were unable to assist me with my handwritten newspaper or investigation report assignment.’ So, it is hard for pupils to finish this challenging homework without the help of parents or teachers. However, there is still a small part of pupils to believe that copying and reading aloud are too monotonous. Mind-map and reporting tasks, on the other hand, are a lot of fun.

## **4. Conclusion**

### **4.1 Summaries and Major Findings**

Under the “Double Reduction” Policy, there is a significant difference in the amount of homework. The amount of homework is less than before and the completion time is well controlled within 30 minutes. Besides, there are a few changes in the types of homework. Now English teachers in primary schools increase oral homework, such as reading aloud with various forms and decrease written homework, such as copying words or phrases and doing exercise books. They strongly agreed that the benefits of oral homework in developing students’ speaking. However, it is a pity that teachers seldom assign innovated homework, such as mind-map, poster, survey, dubbing etc. Finally, there is nearly no change in evaluation. And the common ways of evaluation are marking and rating. Compared to before the policy, teachers prefer rating to marking, which is a good beginning to change the traditional view of scores-oriented. However, there is still room for practicing various forms of assessment, such as annotating encouragement words, displaying in class and material award. Besides, digital technology improves scientific management and assessment of homework.

In general, students are satisfied with the quantity of English homework. Their three favorite types of homework include vocabulary review in innovative ways, oral assignments with various reading forms and practical homework by drawing. Although this homework is easier for students to finish, other homework, such as dubbing, surveys and reports are also worth trying for pupils to broaden their horizons. Meanwhile, their favorite method of assessment is annotating encouragement words, which is different from teachers’ common practice.

In addition, most teachers are in favor of the “Double Reduction” policy, and it has brought impacts on the amount and types of homework. But they are still concerned about these problems emerged from the policy, including the enormous teaching pressure with the reduction in homework quantity, the contradiction between the acquirement of high quality and inexperience of homework design, and lack of scientific technology assessment.

### **4.2 Implications**

There are some new problems in the practice of the policy. Firstly, teachers have realized the importance of designing high quality of homework. But they are confused about how to improve the quality of lack of professional instructions. Second, it’s difficult to give effective feedback or non-written homework. Third, teachers worried about the quality of students’ learning, as well as the teaching efficiency with the reduction in the amount of homework. There are three suggestions to resolve these problems: First, improve teachers’ professional skills in designing homework. It’s a good way for the Academic Affairs Office and school teaching groups to hold lectures and competition about homework design. In addition, making "burden reduction" a scientific research topic for all teachers in the school (Chen, 2021), which can strengthen teachers' abilities of homework design and research individually. Finally, regularly checking the practice of homework, as well as updating and optimizing the homework resource database, are required.

Technology assists the scientific evaluation of non-written homework. Teachers can only roughly know about students' learning because of limited time and energy, which is not helpful in accurate teaching. Nowadays, the development of artificial intelligence offered new opportunities to human's learning environment and ways of learning. So, it's an irresistible trend to use the technology to give scientific evaluation for students. For example, some apps can correct students' pronunciation, as well as collect and analyze the data thoroughly. Then, teacher is easier to clearly obtain students' learning difficulties.

Simultaneously, carry out the "Double Reduction" policy and evaluation reform. Most teachers are favor of the policy. But there is a problem that how to deal with the examination competitive system with the reduction of homework quantity. So, it's necessary to find the balance between burden reduction and evaluation. In the compulsory education stage, it's important to weaken the function of evolution-choose the best and cover different standards of evaluation, such as moral trait, physical quality, aesthetic ability and Labor-craft Education.

#### **4.3 Limitations**

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the sample size of the teacher questionnaire was small, with only 40 valid ones. This is due to the small number of English teachers in primary schools and difficulties in inviting others via group chats. In future research, cooperation with schools and participant support are needed to ensure an adequate sample.

Secondly, only teachers and students were investigated. Parents, who also impact burden reduction, should be included. Their attitudes towards the policy and suggestions on English homework are valuable for teachers to improve homework quality.

Finally, the research on English homework was not comprehensive. It only covered quantity, types, and evaluation, missing aspects like function, difficulty, and content. Moreover, there's a lack of research on the policy's status quo. Monitoring the policy's dynamic practice in different areas and schools is crucial. Regular investigations on school management, teacher practice, student satisfaction, and parent feedback can help determine policy effectiveness, while summarizing typical experiences and noticing new problems.

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## TABLES &amp; FIGURES

**Table 3.1** Paired sample T-test for completion time of English homework from teacher's perspective

	Before		After		MD	t	df	Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD				
< 30 minutes	4.70	0.791	5.23	0.733	-0.525	-3.457	39	0.001
30 - 60 minutes	2.68	1.509	2.03	1.050	0.650	3.134	39	0.003

Note : Never=1; Rare=2; Seldom=3; Sometimes=4; Often=5; Always=6.

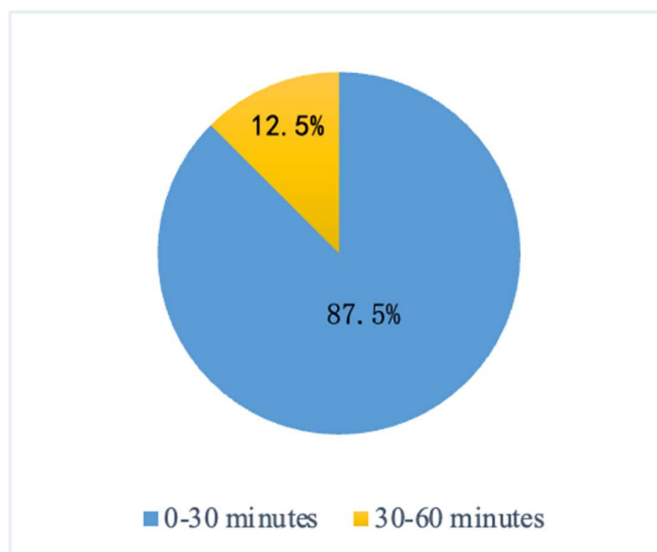
**Table 3.2** Paired sample T-test for types of English homework from teacher's perspective

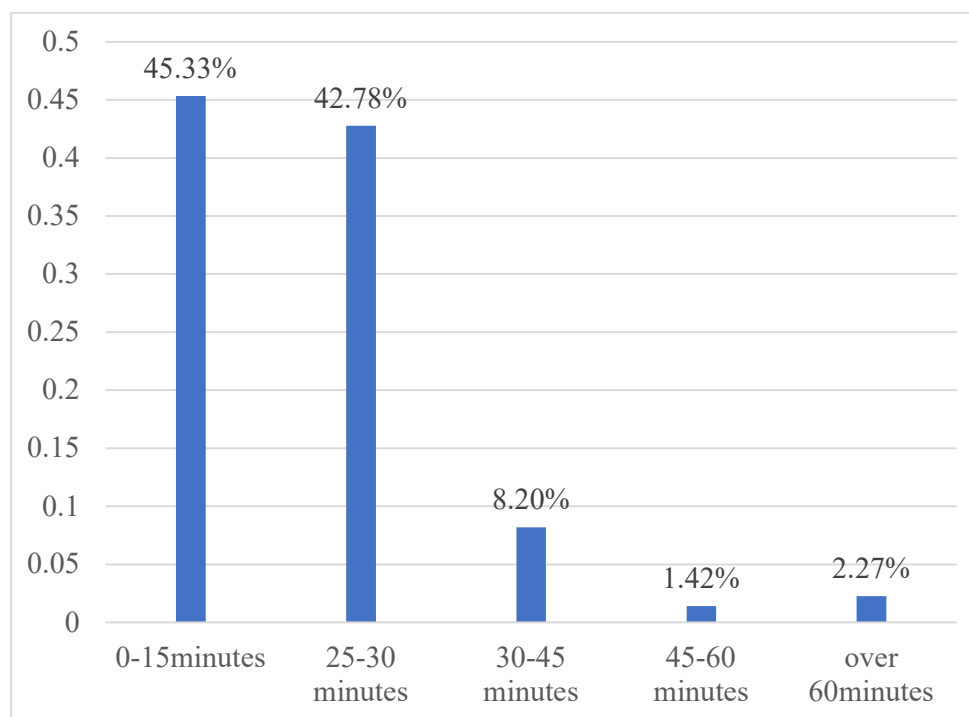
	before		after		MD	t	df	Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD				
Copying	4.0 3	1.368	3.9 3	1.439	0.100	0.941	39	0.352
Reading aloud	5.0 0	0.784	5.1 5	0.770	-0.150	-1.637	39	0.110
Exercise book	3.9 8	1.405	4.0 8	1.403	-0.100	-0.448	39	0.656
Review and preview	3.9 8	1.441	3.7 5	1.428	0.225	1.711	39	0.095
Poster	3.1 0	1.374	3.0 5	1.339	0.050	0.443	39	0.660
Mind-map	2.9 3	1.248	3.0 0	1.340	-0.075	-0.534	39	0.596
Dubbing	2.8 3	1.448	2.7 5	1.373	0.075	0.416	39	0.680
English use in real life	3.2 3	1.330	3.4 8	1.485	-0.025	-1.749	39	0.086

Note: English use in real life is a kind of homework that students use the language learned in class to describe something or communicate with others in real life.

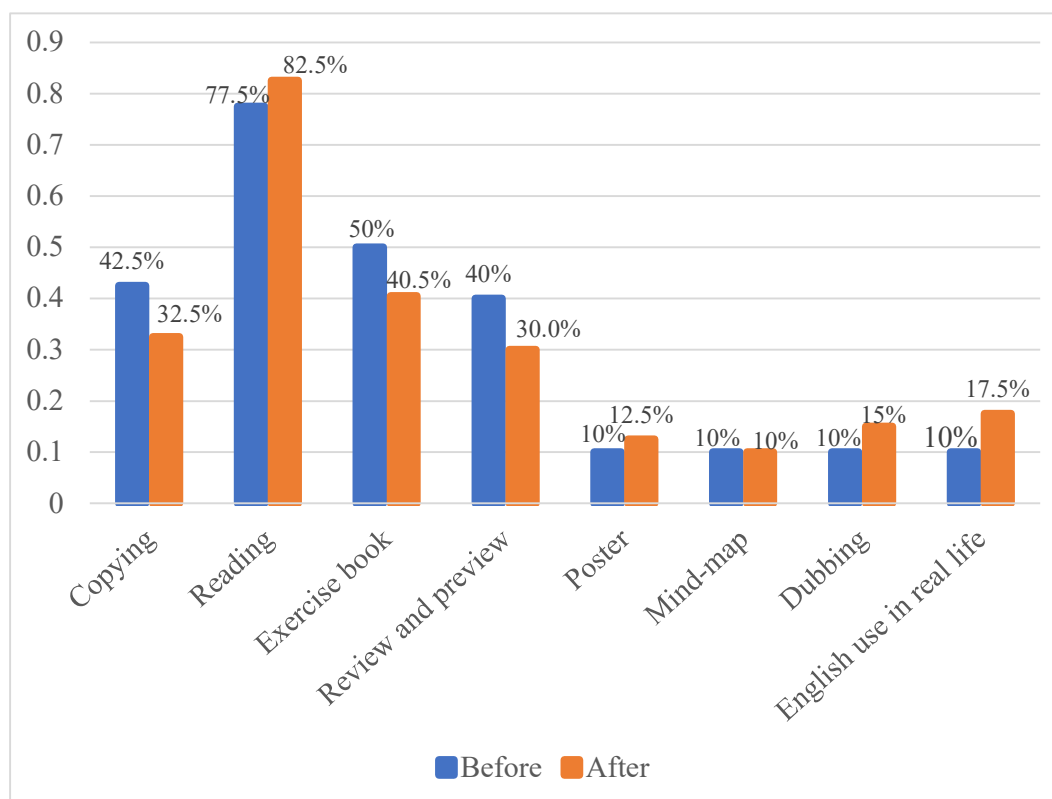
**Table 3.3** Paired sample T-test for ways of English homework evaluation from the perspective of teachers

	Before		After		MD	t	d	Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD				
Marking	4.43	1.448	4.08	1.591	0.350	2.759	39	0.009
Encouragement words	4.15	1.167	4.40	1.297	-0.250	-1.796	39	0.096
Displaying	3.88	1.090	4.00	1.132	-0.125	-0.758	39	0.453
Material rewards	3.51	1.315	3.54	1.232	-0.026	-0.206	39	0.838

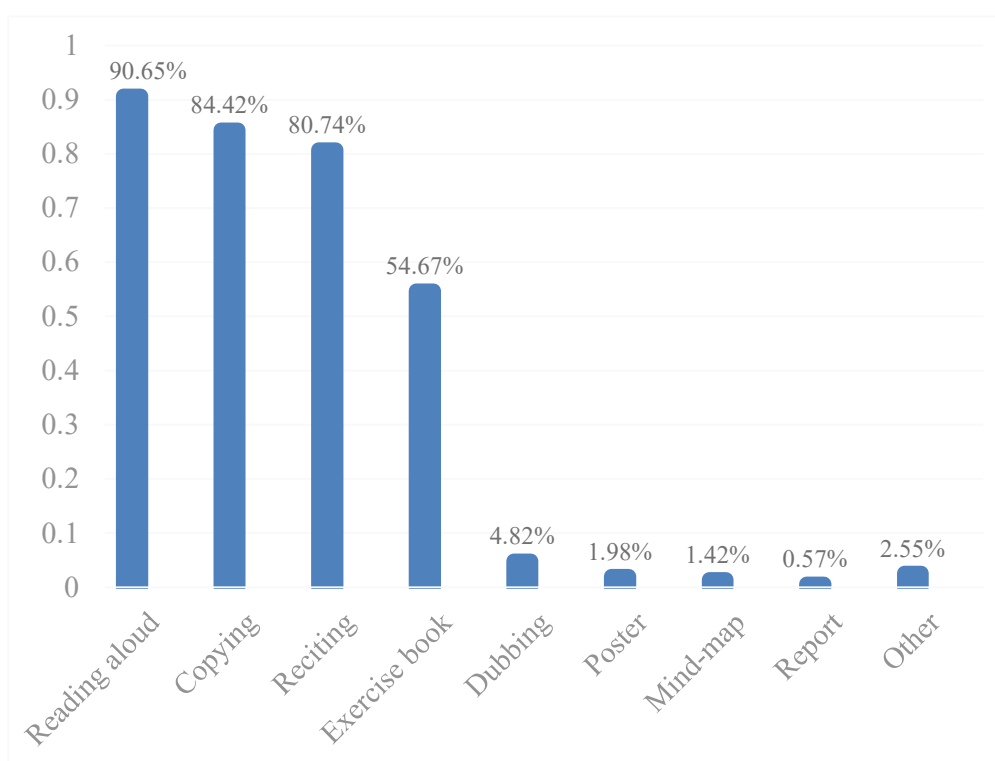
**Figure 3.1** Average completion time of English homework from teacher's perspective after the policy



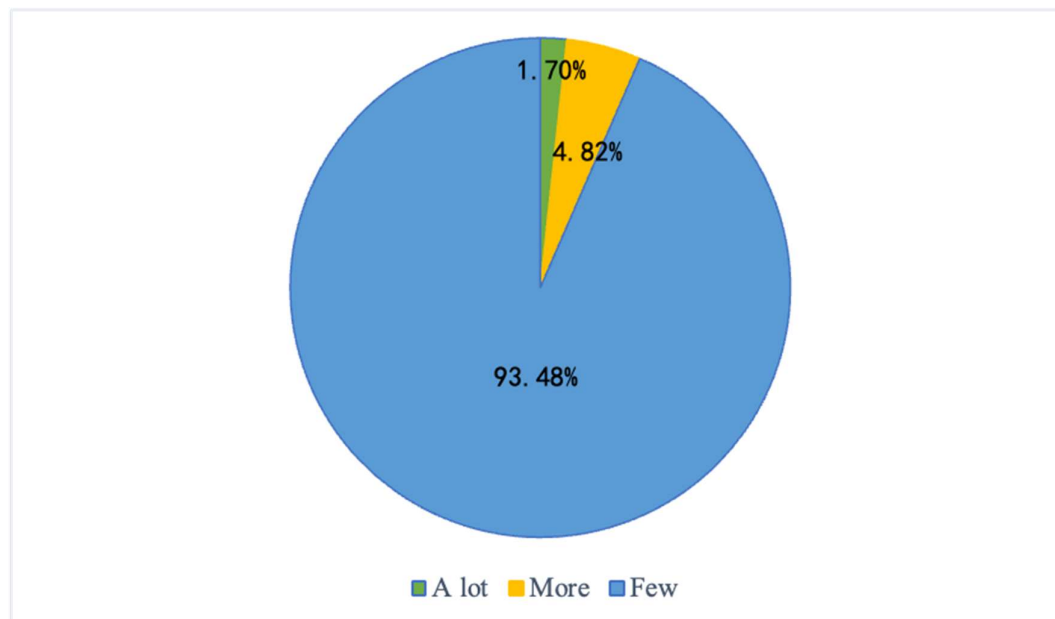
**Figure 3.2** Average completion time of English homework from student's perspective after the policy



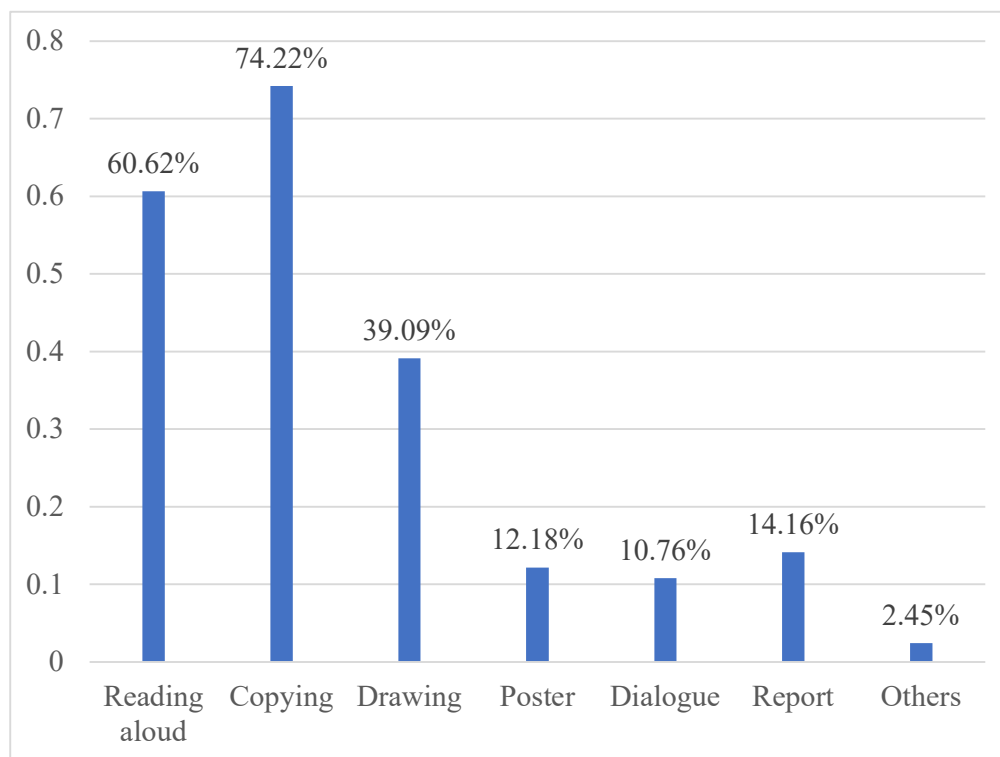
**Figure 3.3** The types of English homework from the perspective of teachers under the background of the policy



**Figure 3.4** The types of English homework from the perspective of students after the policy



**Figure 3.5** Students' perception of the amount of English homework



*Note: Drawing is a kind of homework that students learn vocabularies by drawing pictures to show their meanings.*

**Figure 3.6** Students' favorite English homework