

Original Paper

Research on Senior High School English Homework Design Oriented to Core competencies: From the Perspective of the English Learning-Activity View

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Abstract

The new curriculum standards have established the basic literacy requirements for students. Currently, most of the senior high school English homework focuses on memorizing knowledge points, has monotonous forms and rigid evaluation criteria, and thus fails to meet the demands of developing students' all-round linguistic abilities. The three periods of learning activities in the English Learning-Activity View are learning and understanding, applying and practicing, and transferring and creating; they can provide a theoretical support for improving the design of after-school homework. Based on the diary text "My First Day at Senior High" from Book 1 (Compulsory) of Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press senior high school English textbooks as the research object, this paper designs a gradient-based hierarchical after-class homework system based on the learning logic of "based on discourse - delving into discourse - transcending discourse". It has divided into required and elective courses, and integrated teaching, learning and assessment at the level of self-assessment, peer assessment and teacher assessment. Thus, the whole learning cycle will be text input, language internalization and transfer-oriented creative application in real life.

Keywords

senior high school English, homework design, English Learning-Activity View, core competencies.

1. Introduction

With the introduction of the General High School English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition, revised in 2020), considerable changes have occurred in the goals of English courses. As specified in the new standards, curriculum implementation should be based on the development of students' core competencies, and attention should be paid to the all-around improvement of students' linguistic ability,

cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability (Xu, 2025). However, the old English teaching methods still have some deficiencies. For example, too much emphasis is placed on memorizing vocabularies and grammatical knowledge points, as well as examination-oriented skill training; thus, more weight is given to knowledge acquisition than to the actual use of language (Zhang, 2025). Such training can hardly meet the all-around linguistic needs of the students. Thus, how to promote the cultivation of core competencies at every link in teaching has become a research problem in English education.

Classroom teaching is the first form of quality-oriented education. As a necessary link in the process of teaching, after-school homework helps students master what they have learned in class and promotes the all-around development of their abilities and the habit of independent study. It is one way to achieve the teaching goals. High-quality English homework can help students consolidate their linguistic foundation and create real-life scenarios for application; thus, they can practise thinking and transfer knowledge in linguistic practice. However, most of the current homework is mainly for consolidating knowledge and does not promote the all-around development and essential literacy of students. Specifically, the aim of homework is to have students learn some knowledge, so it does not require extensive use of language. Second, homework is generally in a uniform written form, such as copying words and completing textbook exercises; thus, it has little appeal for students (Jiang, 2026). Third, there is no assessment of the process; only the final result will be graded. Therefore, the students do not know their own shortcomings in time and fail to reflect. Therefore, the design of English homework should be changed from traditional knowledge consolidation to competency development.

Given the problems above, the English Learning-Activity View offers a new theoretical basis for designing English homework. Based on the above theory, students acquire knowledge and develop various abilities through the processes of learning-and-understanding, applying-and-practicing, and transferring-and-creating. The order of these activities in learning is: discourse-based learning, in-depth discourse exploration and discourse-transcending application; together they form a complete process of learning that moves from surface understanding to deep cognition (Tang & Hu, 2025). Its educational concept is in line with the goals of cultivating basic literacy and offers some ideas for improving homework.

Therefore, this paper studies optimization methods for senior high school English homework design based on core competencies from the English Learning-Activity perspective and hopes to provide a reference for front-line English teachers in designing high-quality homework.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Research on Senior High School English Homework Design Oriented to Core Competencies

With the full implementation of the General High School English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition, revised in 2020), a key change in the reform of senior high school English is to cultivate students' subject-specific core competencies; thus, the original educational goals and teaching forms for senior

high school English have been modified. Traditional English teaching focuses on learning new words and grammar rules for tests. Teaching is to present isolated knowledge such as words, grammar and sentences. The corresponding homework mainly consists of mechanical operations, such as copying words, reading aloud and practising grammar; it does not add much new knowledge to extend learning (Zhang, 2025).

After proposing the core competencies concept, the aims of senior high school English teaching have been altered. Instead of only valuing the accumulation of knowledge and test scores, education aims to develop the four areas of basic competencies together: language ability, cultural awareness, thinking capacity and learning ability. It shows that language learning is practical, all-encompassing and beneficial for education. Adjusting teaching objectives motivates improvements in homework functions. Homework is no longer an add-on to class teaching or a way to prepare for exams. It has become an essential way to achieve the general objective of moral education in schools, connecting teaching content with teaching, learning and evaluation activities to cultivate students' basic competencies (Gao, Guo, & Liang, 2026). Homework design has moved away from regular repetition and is now more situational, life-oriented, inquiry-based, and all-encompassing. It helps students assimilate knowledge, develop their thinking, learn about culture and improve self-study in the process of using language.

Many studies by Chinese scholars have explored the design of core-literacy-oriented senior high school English homework. Most of the previous research has focused on design ideas, optimization methods, hierarchical construction, unit-integrated homework, etc. Many scholars believe that the core-literacy-oriented senior high school English homework should adhere to the principles of context, relevance, practicality and hierarchy. According to the students' zones of proximal development, teachers should design gradient-based and diversified homework tasks to meet the different proficiency levels of the students and achieve teaching in line with their aptitudes (Guo, 2026). In response to the "Double Reduction" policy, several practical teaching studies have introduced new kinds of assignments to solve the problems of fragmentation and mechanization in traditional homework and promote all-round development of students' linguistic abilities (Zhuang, 2026).

According to the above research results, there are already many studies on the design of homework for core competencies in senior high school English. However, there are still some shortcomings. First, most research is based on the overall plan or unit-integrated homework design. Less attention is paid to the features of particular discourses and actual classroom situations. Second, some researches focus excessively on formal innovation, yet the designed tasks poorly match in-class discourse content and students' real-life learning contexts. They do not address the important and difficult teaching points, and there is no full cultivation cycle from knowledge input to literacy output. Therefore, there are still no particular studies on homework design in context.

2.2 Research on English Homework Design from the Perspective of the English Learning-Activity View

One of the teaching concepts proposed in the new curriculum standards is the English Learning-Activity model. It believes that learning English is constantly changing. According to the

meaning of the theme, the three stages of activity for students will be learning and understanding, applying and practicing, and transferring and creating. At the same time, they combine linguistic knowledge and cultural connotations, train thinking and learning abilities, actively explore thematic meanings, internalize linguistic competence and develop subject-specific core competencies (Chen, 2026). Breaking the mould of fragmented and rote teaching, this idea is that language learning should be contextualized, practical, logical and all-encompassing. In the design of teaching content and tasks, teachers should create realistic language-application situations, consider students' cognitive laws, and promote the all-round development of knowledge, thinking and literacy.

Homework Design for Core-Literacy-Oriented Senior High School English is in line with the general direction of the English Learning-Activity View and can thus provide strong theoretical support for homework optimization. Neither one likes the mechanical repetitive knowledge drills. Based on the exploration of thematic meanings, value-authentic contexts are built, students are actively involved, and various competences are gradually developed to foster students' core English literacy. As an extension and consolidation of classroom teaching, homework can move the three types of in-class learning activities to after-school time under the guidance of the English Learning-Activity View. It makes up for the lack of class time, promotes the internalization of knowledge, linguistic practice and thinking expansion after class, and achieves the goal of integrating classroom teaching with after-school homework organically.

Recently, some scholars have begun to study how to use the English-Learning Activity View for homework. Construct gradient tasks corresponding to the levels of learning-and-understanding, application-and-practice, transfer-and-innovation, and design homework from mechanical exercise drills into literacy-oriented inquiry assignments. Huang (Huang, n.d.) designed spiral progressive homework for Grade 3 English based on the theme of "Who's Who?" and friendship. The first step was to read and organize the provided information; next, through card making and bilingual name card design, we started to communicate; AI help and self-introduction videos added more variety to our learning. The above tasks have achieved integrated literacy cultivation of learning, application and creation.

However, the above studies show some shortcomings in homework design based on the English learning-activity view. On the one hand, many studies are relevant to junior high school students and have achieved good results in designing unit-based and lesson-based activity-oriented homework. Fewer studies have explored the learning environment, curriculum difficulty and educational needs of senior high school students. At the same time, most of the existing research on senior-high students is still in a unit-holistic view and has not focused on unit-integrated and theme-based homework (Lin, 2026). Fine-tuning homework based on students' individual speech habits and actual teaching situations has not been done. Therefore, based on the English Learning-Activity View, this paper develops hierarchical and targeted homework tasks for senior high school English texts to provide a model for improving senior high school English homework design.

3. Hierarchical Homework Design for My First Day at Senior High under the English Learning-Activity View

This paper selects “My First Day at Senior High” from Unit 1, Book 1 (Compulsory) of the FLTRP senior high school English textbooks as the carrier for homework design. According to the English Learning-Activity View put forward in the new curriculum standards, a homework system will be established. Gradient-based after-school activities will be organized according to the plot, language features and growth themes of the diary in this paper. A learning chain of “based on discourse - delving into discourse - transcending discourse” will be implemented in class and after class to improve students’ language skills, cultural literacy, thinking ability and learning habits.

3.1 Design Basis and General Ideas

The homework Design is based on My First Day at Senior High from FLTRP Compulsory Book 1. Meng Hao writes a first-person diary to record his feelings about being a new high school student, such as meeting teachers and classmates, taking part in class, and other emotions at the beginning of senior high school. Meng Hao is full of high hopes for senior high school. He feels uneasy when introducing himself to new teachers in class, but eventually learns from his teacher and grows as a person. It has a full plot and is emotionally rich. Cover the basic linguistic knowledge of past perfect tense, adverbial clauses of time and emotional descriptive chunks for scenario description. It has a good story and can be used as a model for teaching; it also has educational value and provides rich materials and inquiry points for homework.

The English Learning-Activity View is the main theoretical basis. It is hoped that students can build linguistic knowledge, all-round abilities and subject-specific literacy through three types of successive activities: learning and understanding, application and practice, and transfer and innovation. Based on this theory, the design of homework will expand to include in-class discourse exploration activities and strengthen the three-level learning activities in homework tasks to make full use of the limited classroom time and integrate in-class and after-class learning. At the same time, this set of homework will be contextualized, relevant, feasible and hierarchical. According to the students’ zones of proximal development, different tasks will be given for learners at different levels. All exercises and output tasks are closely related to the diary and are not independent mechanical exercises; therefore, progressive learning is achieved by having students produce text and internalize language for real-life transfer and application.

3.2 Three-level Gradient Homework Task Design

3.2.1 Learning-and-Understanding Homework: Based on the Discourse to Consolidate Linguistic Foundations and Sort out Text Context

Learning-and-understanding tasks aim to obtain surface-level information from text and acquire linguistic knowledge. Mandatory for all students, they take about 10 minutes to complete and help students learn the structure and basic language of the original diary.

Task: Text Mind-map Construction. Students reread the full text and draw a mind-map themed Meng

Hao's First Day. The mind map should contain the time of the story, campus locations, main characters, four key events, emotional adjectives for each stage, turning points and reflections at the end of the text. By using visual tools, students will be able to organize the chronological order of events in their diaries, train their skills in extracting and summarizing information from text, and form an all-round understanding of the discourse. Not a high-efficiency, distributed word-copying activity.

3.2.2 Applying-and-Practicing Homework: Delving into the Discourse for Language Internalization and Exploration of Implied Textual Meanings

The three optional subtasks of differentiated application-and-practice homework are text analysis, dialogue creation and text adaptation. Choose one subtask and finish it within the estimated 10 minutes. The tasks need to produce language based on the original scenarios and sentence patterns in the diary to achieve language knowledge assimilation.

Task One: Analysis of Characters and Images. Students study the two main paragraphs of Ms. Meng's speech in the text. Organize the personality traits in her comforting words at the beginning, unpack the main ideas, calming methods and teaching goals of the post-class enlightenment remarks, summarize the teacher's image using English adjectives and locate relevant textual evidence. In addition to understanding the story, students will be able to discover the educational value of characters' words and develop higher-order thinking abilities such as text analysis and logical reasoning.

Task Two: Situational Dialogue Creation. In the post-class hallway, this task has students take on Meng Hao's position and reassure Li Ming after he has been embarrassed during the self-introduction. The written English dialogue should have at least eight turns and use the core phrases from the text, such as "butterflies in my stomach" and "keep calm and be prepared". Since this task starts with campus communication, it will help the students improve their language skills. Learners use textual expressions in simulated communication to achieve the purpose of language application.

Task Three: Narrative-Perspective Shift Writing. The two prompts for text adaptation are as follows. Option one: Retell the self-introduction part from Ms. Meng's perspective and show her observations and feelings. Option two: record the entire English lesson from the perspective of a female desk mate. The length should be no less than 100 words, stick to the original plot, and make reasonable additions of the characters' psychological states. In this task, one needs to know the entire story and use perspective-taking to learn through reading and writing.

3.2.3 Transferring-and-creating Homework: Transcending the Discourse for Creative Application Linked to Real-life Experiences

Homework Transfer and Innovation are excellent choices for the top students. Based on the main theme of "facing new challenges and achieving growth" in the diary, these extension tasks are about 20 minutes long. They encourage students to go beyond the world of text, connect it with their own lives, and use thinking and creation in various forms.

Top-level optional task: Thematic Creative Poster Design. Ms. Meng put forward the idea of "calmness in the face of adversity", and the students created an English-language freshman-oriented poster

entitled “Overcoming Challenges”. Classic quotes taken from the text are used as slogans, and around 80 words of English reflection and notes on layout design ideas are added. Integrate text and pictures in this multimodal task to have students explore the values in the discourse and create works combining their own experiences; thereby, they will develop aesthetic consciousness, innovation and cross-cultural expression ability.

3.3 Integrated Embedded Homework Evaluation System

Based on the concept of “teaching-learning-assessment integration”, it will no longer be a single-score assessment. At each time, in conjunction with self-assessment, peer assessment and teacher feedback, the students will complete their homework. Data Collected from the Follow-up Evaluation of Teaching Guides.

First, students conduct self-assessment and reflection. Complete the task and then fill in the four sections of the self-assessment: understanding of the task, learning difficulties, self-satisfaction, and areas for improvement. Self-reflection can help students learn how to learn and study independently over time.

Second, groups carry out peer assessment. Standardized assessment scales will be distributed for the output-oriented tasks of character analysis, dialogue creation and narrative writing. The four indices of peer assessment are content sufficiency, linguistic correctness, logical order and originality. The two evaluation items should be a strength and a weakness. Peer learning helps everyone grow and corrects mistakes.

Third, teachers implement individualized differentiated assessment. Homework is divided into three categories: language expression, text comprehension and general literacy. Teachers offer specific reasons for the errors in grades. The first kind of correction is a lack of knowledge about text organization and grammar. For output-oriented tasks, teachers can improve sentence patterns and logic, guide students in applying textual phrases reasonably, etc. For the creative assignment, more weight will be given to the depth of the theme. Good works, such as mind maps, English compositions and creative posters by students, are chosen for the classroom.

Evaluation results inform the revision of teaching. Teachers identify common weaknesses in homework, address them together at the beginning of the next class, etc. Student Self-Assessment Feedback Guide for Modifying Follow-up Extended Teaching. Good homework can be saved in one’s own study portfolio to keep track of the development of language skills. Thus, the purpose of assessment will promote literacy.

4. Suggestions on Hierarchical Homework Design Guided by the English Learning- Activity View

Hierarchical Homework Design for Individual Senior High School English Discourses Based on the English Learning-Activity View has practical value in implementing core competencies education. Based on the homework design case above, this paper puts forward the following implementation suggestions.

First, the homework should focus on the thematic meaning of the discourse and be in line with what is taught in class. Homework is not independent practice separate from class; rather, it is an extension of the text study conducted in class. When designing lesson-based homework, teachers should be mindful of the narrative logic, linguistic features and educational themes of intensive reading texts. Avoid fragmented exercises that are not connected to the course and mechanical copying of homework. Task difficulty should match key and difficult teaching points. Learning-and-understanding homework is based on the results of in-class text sorting; applying-and-practicing homework reuses sentence patterns and contexts from the texts; and transferring-and-innovating homework realizes thematic transfer to real life. The goals of in-class teaching and after-school study are the same, so they constitute an uninterrupted sequence of learning.

Second, build a different hierarchy and adjust the proportion and difficulty of the required and non-required items accordingly. Hierarchical homework should not differentiate students by task quantity. All flexible optional tasks should be based on the zone of proximal development for students. Compulsory basic-level tasks ensure that all students have covered the basic curriculum. Optional advanced tasks for high-achieving students aim to promote their thinking and various forms of creativity; they are not required for all students. Teachers should clarify the requirements of the two types of assignments and have students choose optional tasks based on their own abilities so as not to put too much academic pressure on students with lower grades and teach according to their aptitudes.

Third, promote the actualization of teaching-learning-assessment integration and make full use of the feedback and motivation functions of process-oriented assessment. Teachers should be less reliant on basic scores and use self-assessment, peer assessment and teacher feedback for all-around evaluation instead. Distribute the standardized assessment scales in advance so that the students know what aspects of homework will be graded. Self-assessment helps students know themselves better; peer assessment fosters cooperation. Teachers should give specific recommendations for improvement based on grades, praise excellent homework, such as mind maps and creative posters, in class, identify common problems in homework, adjust subsequent teaching plans accordingly, and have assessments support all-around development of students.

Fourth, regulate the amount of homework and improve its quality, coordinating linguistic training with quality-oriented education. Teachers should organize the total time students spend on after-school homework reasonably and distribute this time among learning-and-understanding, applying-and-practicing, and transferring-and-creating activities, avoiding too many output-oriented tasks that are too burdensome for students. Based on training in linguistic knowledge, teachers should be able to discover the educational values in discourse. Narrative writing and thematic poster creation are assignments that have encouraged students to express themselves through their own lives. Improve the quality of thinking, aesthetics and cross-cultural communication by learning a foreign language.

5. Conclusion

Based on the diary entry “My First Day at Senior High School”, this paper presents a complete homework system according to the three-level activity logic of the English Learning-Activity View. Learning-and-understanding activities have textual foundations and basic linguistic perception through text sorting. Applying-and-practicing activities help learners learn new words by reading and using them in actual life and sentences. Transferring-and-creating activities extend the theme of growth and connect learning with life to enable creative application of language. According to the content, narrative structure and educational theme of the diary, the homework does not include irrelevant general exercises and adheres to the four design principles: context, relevance, practicality and hierarchy. It meets the demand for lesson-based teaching and can address the problems of imprecise instruction. Considering all sides, in all areas and across all stages of homework, a complete cultivation cycle of “learning - practice - creation - evaluation - reflection” has been established. Help to change the direction of senior high school English after-class homework from knowledge absorption to quality-oriented education, and offer an application case for fine-tuned hierarchical homework design based on individual intensive reading materials.

However, this paper has some deficiencies. This set of homework has only reached the scheme design stage and has not been applied in actual classes. There is no information on students’ task completion, contextual adaptation or application results. Therefore, task difficulty, time allocation and evaluation standards cannot be adjusted according to the actual performance of the students. Follow-up research can carry out the homework plan in actual teaching, collect the students’ work and feedback, conduct empirical verification, and continuously improve the design ideas for hierarchical homework of individual discourses in real-world practice.

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