

Issues and Improvement Strategies for Junior High School Geography Unit-Based Assignment Design

Mi Hu, Bo Wang

Qing'an Junior High School, Xi'an, Shaanxi, 710077, China

Abstract: Teaching and evaluation reforms based on core skills are now deepening. Unit-based assignment design is becoming increasingly popular as a means of applying basic geography competencies. Based on existing unit assignment design methods in junior high school geography, this research methodically examines the practical obstacles in goal formulation, content organization, and evaluation mechanisms, and recommends related improvement measures. The study shows that promoting a systematic and competency-based transformation of unit assignment design is critical for decreasing student workload, encouraging deep learning, and realizing geography's educational value.

Keywords: junior high school geography; unit assignment design; core competencies; and improvement methodologies

DOI:10.12417/3029-2328.25.10.006

The Compulsory Education Geography Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition) (hereinafter referred to as the "Curriculum Standards") state that core competencies are the concentrated manifestation of a curriculum's educational value, embodying the correct values, essential character traits, and key abilities that students gradually develop through coursework ^[1]. In recent years, as classroom teaching research led by core competencies has advanced, geography teaching approaches have undergone significant alteration. Teachers' instructional design priorities have evolved from individual lessons to complete, large-scale modules. Against this backdrop, unit-based instructional design that focuses on subject-specific core competencies is considered the most effective strategy to incorporate these capabilities ^[2].

Geography unit assignment design is the systematic process by which teachers, guided by curriculum standards and instructional objectives, integrate multiple strands—including unit knowledge structures, geographical thinking methods, interdisciplinary content, and core competencies—based on textbook natural or reconstructed units. This process entails determining assignment objectives, content, implementation, and assessment ^[3]. This method successfully combines previously disjointed knowledge, improves continuity and progression between assignments within class periods, aids students in creating systematic knowledge structures, fosters the development of transferable application skills and holistic cognition, and gradually builds core geographic competencies. Even while more junior high geography teachers are starting to take notice of and try to create unit assignments, there are still many obstacles to overcome in the real implementation. In order to give frontline instructors a point of reference, this study will assess the main problems with the existing middle school geography unit assignment design and suggest specific reform ideas.

1. Creation of the Unit-Based Assignment System for Middle School Geography

The competency objectives of the geography discipline, which are based on the curriculum's logic, serve as a guide for the assignment system's development, which embodies the spirit and core of curriculum reform. It encourages a shift in teaching methods that is learner-centered ^[4]. In order to further curriculum and teaching reform, educational practice should be founded on the student's key role, with the learning process as the primary orientation. Clear learning objectives, material structure, process direction, and evaluation feedback are the four main elements that are usually covered at the assignment design level. Teachers create incremental learning scaffolds by assessing the overall structure of the unit. They focus on teaching priorities and difficulties, dynamically guiding students

toward deep knowledge mastery and cross-domain integration, allowing them to explore successful learning routes that are better aligned with student development needs. A unit assignment design system is produced by practicing and analyzing unit assignments while integrating classroom instruction, teaching, and evaluation. It entails "defining assignment objectives, developing assessment rubrics, designing assignment content, refining implementation processes, and enhancing analytical methods". The particular stages are as follows. First, define the overarching objectives for unit assignments and then divide them into logically related, phased sub-objectives ordered by lesson. Second, create a two-way rubric for assignments to explain their direction and the design of the assignment material holistically. Third, create a series of unit assignment questions organized around four categories: fundamental reinforcement, skill extension, applied inquiry, and integrated practice. Fourth, improve the submission, grading, review, and feedback procedures to ensure the assignment's quality and relevance. Finally, improve the assignment analysis system by assessing the quality and efficacy of the assignments themselves while also informing instructional methods. This includes resolving instructional inadequacies, adapting subsequent teaching tactics, and ensuring that learning objectives are met comprehensively.

2. Practical Challenges in Creating Middle School Geography Unit Assignments

2.1 Issues with Unit Assignment Objective Design

Unit assignment objectives are the starting point and final goal of assignment design, affecting its direction and effectiveness. Currently, middle school geography unit assignments confront the following basic challenges with objective design: First, they are disassociated from core competency criteria. Many teachers continue to develop objectives with a "knowledge-centered" approach, emphasizing the memorization and repetition of fragmented geographical facts and concepts. Assignment objectives fail to accurately reflect the basic concepts and procedures of the geography field, resulting in a diluted set of competency goals. Second, they lack order and progression. Unit assignment objectives should be organized in a systematic, hierarchical framework that spans the unit of learning. In practice, however, these objectives frequently appear fragmented—merely listing lesson-specific aims without integrating them into the unit's broader concept. Tasks lack logical linkages and skill advancement, failing to reflect the cognitive sequence of "basic understanding" to "comprehensive application" and, finally, "transfer and innovation." This impedes the profound development of kids' cognitive systems. Third, objectives are frequently defined generically and without operational precision. Many objectives are vaguely written, resulting in unclear assignment design. This ambiguity makes it difficult for teachers to create accurate matching activities or adequately assess goal achievement.

2.2 Issues with Unit Assignment Content Design

The quality of assignment content directly affects the student experience and learning outcomes. Current difficulties in junior high geography unit assignments are most noticeable at the subject level.

2.2.1 Fragmented content structure

Many "unit assignments" simply aggregate many course assignments rather than organically integrating them around a common thematic thread. Content focuses on individual knowledge points, with assignments that lack contextual, thematic, or competency-based links. This stops pupils from gaining a comprehensive and systematic understanding of geographical phenomena.

2.2.2 Types of Monotonous Assignments

Paper-and-pencil activities are overemphasized in assignments, which mostly consist of written tasks. There are still a few practical assignments that call for field observations, hands-on exercises, or group inquiry. This runs counter to geography's practical application, rendering students' geographic knowledge and critical thinking skills useless. Additionally, developed scenarios frequently lack strong application components and are disconnected from reality. Most assignments either use out-of-date, fictional case studies that are quite disconnected from students'

real-world experiences, or they are abstract and context-free. Assignments like "geography in daily life" and "real-world geographic issues" fall short in their attempts to imitate or authenticate situations. As a result, even when students acquire knowledge, they find it difficult to apply and transfer it when faced with novel, real-world issues. The development of core competencies is still just a catchphrase.

2.3 Problems with Unit Assignment Evaluation Design

2.3.1 One-dimensional assessment that prioritizes results above procedures

The "quantity" of finished assignments and the accuracy of knowledge mastery are the main focus of evaluation, with little consideration given to students' process-oriented performance, which includes thinking abilities, inquiry techniques, teamwork, and attitudes/interests displayed throughout the assignment process. The complete, developmental aims of core competencies are not adequately assessed by this outcome-centric approach, which also deters students from participating in lengthy inquiry-based tasks.

2.3.2 Evaluation in a Monolithic Way: Subjects and Procedures, Absence of Feedback Features

Students, who are the main learners, are not included in the assessment process as teachers virtually control all evaluation activities. They lose out on chances for introspection and peer assessment as a result. Assessment techniques lack focused, meaningful feedback and are limited to grades and scores. Students are simply taught if they are right or wrong, not why they are incorrect or how to improve. The diagnostic, motivating, and regulatory roles of assessment have been severely diminished, making it impossible to foster students' metacognitive growth and improve their independent learning capacities.

2.3.3 Lack of evaluation criteria that are linked with the unit assignment objectives

Many assignments lack well-defined, specific evaluation criteria that relate to competency goals. Teachers sometimes use subjective assessments based on personal experience while grading, resulting in arbitrary ratings and an inability to effectively express the requirements for high-quality work to pupils. This causes a significant gap between assessment and objectives, reducing its efficacy in driving learning and making it impossible to determine the educational impact of unit assignments.

3.Strategies for Improving Middle School Geography Unit Assignment Design

3.1 Establish Unit Assignment Goals through Systematic Planning. Based on Competencies

Teachers must properly understand curricular standards, turning overall competence requirements into individual unit assignment objectives in order to create a well-structured, organically interrelated goal system. At the practical level, the first step is to break down competency goals into specific components. Second, align unit assignment objectives with instructional objectives. Assignments for each lesson under the overarching unit objectives should be independent yet display progression and interconnectedness, resulting in a continuum for accomplishing objectives. Finally, consider creating distinct assignments. Design multi-tiered objectives based on students' cognitive levels and talents to ensure that each student builds on their current foundation.

3.2 Develop New Content Formats to Create a Structured and Open-Ended Assignment System

In content design, emphasize integration and links both within and between disciplines. On the one hand, develop broad inquiry topics that integrate physical and human geography within the subject. On the other hand, improve interdisciplinary integration with other topics, such as creating an inquiry assignment on "Geographical Changes Along the Silk Road" with history. In terms of format innovation, build varied forms to overcome the limits of traditional paper-and-pencil tasks. This not only piques kids' interest in learning, but also encourages the development of their numerous intelligences. Simultaneously, give appropriate long-term projects and group collaboration activities to foster students' sustained inquiry skills and cooperative spirit. By creating a homework system that blends structure and openness, geography assignments may actually serve as a platform for student development.

3.3 Changing Assessment Methods to Highlight Process and Developmental Functions

Revamping homework evaluation is a critical lever for altering unit-based assignments. According to the new curricular concept, homework assessment should emphasize its process-oriented, developmental, and motivating purposes. First, create a diverse evaluation system that includes student self-assessment, peer review in groups, and other ways. Create geography assignment rubrics to support students' self-reflection and peer evaluation. Second, increase emphasis on formative assessment. Track students' cognitive processes, method application, and attitudes using homework diaries and process documentation. Third, stress the developmental role of evaluation. Teachers should provide constructive and instructive criticism rather than making simplistic right/wrong judgments. Use descriptive, insightful remarks to emphasize success and places for development, and make specific ideas. Finally, set up homework display and exchange methods. Organize geography homework exhibits and outstanding assignment sharing sessions to provide students the opportunity to demonstrate their work and exchange ideas.

3.4 Creating a Support System to Promote Teacher Professional Development

Teachers are the major designers of unit assignments, and their professional competence has a direct impact on the quality of assignment design. As a result, a multi-tiered support structure is required to give professional guidance and growth opportunities for teachers involved in assignment creation. At the school level, create a collective lesson planning approach for geography teaching research groups that includes unit assignment design as an important component of teaching research activities. Regular activities, such as specialized seminars on assignment design, the sharing of example assignment cases, and the study of implementation effects, should be held to encourage teacher experience exchange and knowledge sharing. Concurrently, a school-based assignment resource repository should be created to gather and organize outstanding assignment design cases for teacher use. Regional teaching research departments could improve professional assistance and mentorship for educators. Specialized training sessions on geography assignment design should be conducted, including professional lectures and workshops to help instructors improve their theoretical understanding and practical abilities in assignment creation.

4. Conclusion and Outlook

Unit-based assignment design is both a necessary and refined method for geography teaching reform in the era of "Double Reduction" and core literacy development. It is not only a modification to typical assignment structures, but rather a radical shift in educational theory and practice. While junior high geography unit assignment design presently confronts several conceptual, content, and assessment issues, it also has enormous revolutionary promise. Geography instructors should actively welcome this transition. Taking a comprehensive, macro-level approach with the ultimate objective of developing students' fundamental abilities, they should innovate assignment content and forms while reforming evaluation procedures. This strategy will result in high-quality unit assignments that lessen student load while also improving overall skills. Moving forward, more practical investigations and empirical studies are required to demonstrate the efficacy of various optimization methodologies, therefore propelling junior high geography education into a more scientific, efficient, and student-centered future.

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