

HOMEWORK GIVING: ITS ROLE IN TARGET LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND RELATION TO LEARNERS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS

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Abstract.

The notion of “homework” has always been under discussion for many decades. This paper attempts to reveal the role of homework in foreign language learning and increasing academic achievement. During the research special attention was given to the correlation homework assignments and students’ academic performances in EFL classes. The results compiled from the previous studies on the homework shows that there is a strong relationship between them. However some main purposes and conditions of assigning home tasks should be taken into consideration.

Key words: foreign language teaching, homework, academic achievement, homework giving.

INTRODUCTION.

Homework is an inseparable activity in the teaching-learning process. It is understood as an assignment that pupils are required to complete at home; it is also defined as tasks assigned to pupils by school teachers that are meant to be carried out during non-school hours (Cooper, 1989). The authors of theoretical sources point out a number of benefits of homework: improvements in factual knowledge, understanding concept, attitudes to learning, study skills, self-discipline, and problem solving skills. Moreover, homework improves academic achievement for any level of school pupils and what is more significant in homework is the fact that it develops study habits and makes learners autonomous in learning and in language learning as well, additionally, homework helps pupils develop their good character and study habits, such as goal setting, following directions, organizing materials, planning ahead, and budgeting time, as well as strategies for dealing with mistakes, difficulties, and distractions. (Lina Lelešienė, 2008). However, as Lina Lelešienė states “nowadays schooling is not possible to imagine without homework as an

activity in teaching-learning process. It is one of the most frequently useable tasks. Homework is useful for both teachers and, especially, for pupils. Homework tasks are an effective form of English studying as well. The basic objectives of assigning homework to pupils are the same as schooling in general: to increase the knowledge and improve the abilities and skills of the pupils”(2008).

THE THEORETICAL REVIEW OF HOMEWORK. Definitions of homework become more complicated when variations in the types of assignments given are considered: difficulty level; skill or subject area; completion deadline (short or long-term); degree of individualization; social context (completed independently or with other pupils); mandatory or voluntary; and if it will be submitted for grading)(Brewster & Fager, 2000). Furthermore, teachers assign homework for many different reasons, although researchers have noted that most assignments usually serve multiple purposes. Common reasons for assigning homework include: (a) reinforcing material that has already been presented in class (National Education Association, 2008; Centre for Public Education, 2007; Pytel, 2007; Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2005; Brewster & Fager, 2000; Paulu, 1998); (b) determining if pupils understand the lesson and have mastered the required skills (National Education Association, 2008); (c) Increasing pupils’ skill proficiency (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2005); (d) introducing pupils to new material the teacher will present in the future (Centre for Public Education, 2007; Pytel, 2007; Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2005); (e) applying previously learned skills to new situations or other areas of interest (Centre for Public Education, 2007; Shellard & Turner, 2004; Hancock, 2001); (f) providing opportunities for pupils to identify and learn to use resources, such as the library, internet, reference books and other community resources (National Education Association, 2008; Brewster & Fager, 2000; Milbourne & Haury, 1999; Paulu, 1998); (g) allowing pupils to use their unique talents and abilities to produce individualized and creative work products (Horowitz, 2005; Corno, 2000; Nuzum, 1998; Doyle & Barber, 1986); (h) helping pupils improve their time management and organizational skills and develop perseverance, responsibility, self-confidence,

and self-discipline (Hetherington, 2005; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Hancock, 2001; Brewster & Fager, 2000; Corno, 2000; Wood, 2000; Epstein, 1983); (i) improving communication between parents and their children on the importance of schoolwork and learning (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001); (j) Fulfilling school or district mandates, such as requirements for a specified amount of daily or weekly homework (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). Analysing common reasons for assigning homework which were given in theoretical sources the presumption could be made that homework is a very important part of studying, because there are too many reasons why pupils have to do homework (Cooper, 1994a). Regarding these facts, it is surprising how little attention is paid to the topic of homework in teacher education, said Cooper (1994a). Most teachers in the United States report that in education courses they discussed homework in relation to specific subjects, but received little training in how to devise good assignments, how to decide how much homework to give, and how to involve parents, moreover, homework often causes a great deal of conflict among teachers, pupils, and parents. Indeed, many doctors and family counselors indicate that problems with homework are a frequent source of concern when children experience medical problems (Cooper, 1994a). In keeping with Cooper (1994a), teachers should never use homework as punishment - using it in this way communicates to pupils that schoolwork is boring and aversive. It is quite understandable that high school teachers can view the homework as an extension of the classroom as the homework that involves practice and review of lessons previously taught and simple introductions to material prior to its coverage in class is desirable (Cooper, 1994a). Assignments that require pupils to integrate skills or differing parts of the curriculum should also be common, regardless of pupils' ages, the formal role of parents in homework should be minimal (Wood, 2000).

In keeping with Cooper (1989), he also advises that teachers individualize few assignments within classes - developing individualized homework demands considerable teacher time and has few benefits. Teachers who teach the same course to several classes that are progressing at different rates might consider giving the same assignments to the top pupils in the lowest class and the lowest-performing

pupils in the highest class (Cooper, 1989). Furthermore, most homework assignments should not be graded, teachers should not view homework as an opportunity to test (Vaterott, 2010). Almost all pupils should complete assignments successfully; thus, teachers should not differentiate much among performance levels because having pupils do homework out of fear of negative consequences which turns a situation ideal for building intrinsic motivation into one that implies the teacher to believe 'pupils need rewards or punishment in order to complete assignments' (Vaterott, 2010). Teachers should collect homework, check it for completeness, and give intermittent instructional feedback, this procedure shows that the teacher takes homework seriously and purposefully - the major purpose should be to identify individual pupils' learning problems (Vaterott, 2010). According to Darn (1997) homework seems to be an accepted part of teachers' and pupils' routines, and there is a little mentioned of it in ELT (English language teaching) literature. Darn (1997) gives us 8 reasons why homework is worth giving by teachers and worth doing by pupils: 1) homework is expected by pupils, teachers, parents and institutions; 2) homework reinforces and helps learners to retain information taught in the classroom as well as increasing their general understanding of the language; 3) homework develops study habits and independent learning and also encourages learners to acquire resources such as dictionaries and grammar reference books. 4) homework offers opportunities for extensive activities in the receptive skills which there may not be time for in the classroom. It may also be an integral part of ongoing learning such as project work and the use of a graded reader; 5) homework provides continuity between lessons and may be used not only to consolidate class work, but also for preparation for the next lesson; 6) homework may be used to shift repetitive, mechanical, time-consuming tasks out of the classroom; 7) homework bridges the gap between school and home. Pupils, teachers and parents can monitor progress. The institution can involve parents in the learning process; 8) Homework can be a useful assessment tool, as part of continual or portfolio assessment. There are a lot of reasons why pupils have to do their homework. Darn (1997), gave us 8, the most important reasons why pupils should

do homework tasks. Of course not all of those reasons suitable for all pupils. Every student is different and it depends on student's personality if they do their homework or not. As regards to the purpose of homework, a couple of students mentioned homework as a tool for revising, and they mentioned English as a subject in which homework is important. One student said that homework could be vital for the pupils that were shy and silent in class. With homework, they got the opportunity to learn the things that their self-confidence or personality blocked them from learning in class. None of the pupils could imagine a school without homework. On the one hand, the pupils said that not having homework would be detrimental to their learning of new things. On the other hand, they seemed to think that it would create a "crisis" in the classroom (Leo, 2004).

THE ROLE HOMEWORK PLAYS IN ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT.

Homework was seen as a way of showing the teacher that the pupil had accomplished a certain task, if there were no homework, the classroom would turn into a competitive arena in which the pupils compete for the teacher's attention (Leo, 2004). Therefore, it can be asserted that homework could influence students' English achievement. Because when reading English text at home, the students spend several moments translating the information into their native language, and then switch back to English to make the most sense of what they have read (Baydick, Ergul, Bahap, 2012). It will make the students get more information from the text when they do the task at home. Homework itself means the task given by the teacher to the students and should be done at home. For this reason, homework will be defined as any task assigned to students by school teachers that is mean to be carried out during nonschool hours and excludes in-school tutoring, nonacademic extracurricular activities, or home study courses (Trautwein, 2007). According to Trautwein by doing homework at home the students learn more deeply about the materials that they get from the school. So, if the students do their homework and spend their time to do their homework, they can more understand about the English, and finally they will get high score in English achievement. Trautwein (2007) point out that homework completed and time spent on homework have a much stronger influence

on achievement. Those reason is predict homework has contribution to support learning process of the students and can influences the students' English achievement. The writer chose the senior high school students as a subject because the students were often given English homework by their teacher, this is base on the pre-observation that is done by the writer. According to English teacher of SMA Negeri 3 OKU there were some problems that are faced by the students in reading skill, much of the students could not understand about the text. The other problem was sometimes the students were just getting to know the kind of the text that was learned. So, it can make them difficult to understand the information of the text. Therefore, with giving them homework, the teacher hoped it will help them to add students' vocabulary. In order to make them more easily understand text that they read(Trautwein,2007). The other reason, there was study is done by Cooper and Valentine (2001), they found that homework's effect on achievement is different depending on the grade level of the students. For students in senior high school, homework had the most influence on achievement level. For middle school or junior high school students, the effect was half as much for elementary students, there was little effect on achievement(Cooper,2001) Was there any significant correlation between students' English achievement and their homework at the eleventh grade students of SMA Negeri 3 OKU? From the result of this study, homework significantly influenced English achievement. Most of the eleventh grade students' achievement in learning English was determined by other factors that influenced the students' achievement in English learning such as interest, motivation, intellectual, aptitude, exhausted, health, school factor and society factor(Cooper,2001). Next study was done by Lina Lelesiene(2008), the investigation was based on qualitative research approach and helped to disclose the attitude of the English language teachers to the role of homework in the process of teaching English in the basic school: organization and carrying out of the research was based on the method of qualitative research, i.e. a semi-structured interview; the conversation was based on the principles of free-will and anonymity; the responses of participants were encoded under different names, then were transcribed and analyzed with the help of the

content analysis method; the interview data was split into meaningful units on the basis of which categories, subcategories and sub-subcategories were distinguished; the interview for teachers consisted of the following questions: What kind of English homework do you usually give to your pupils? What are the reasons of giving a particular kind of homework? What is the role of homework in teaching basic school pupils English? Six English teachers from basic schools participated in the interview: there were five female and one male teacher. They represented three different sized basic schools located in different types of settlements. The content analysis of the answers to the interview questions revealed that homework is a significant and integral part of English teaching process and the variety of homework styles or reasons of giving it can ensure good learning results. Analysis of answers received during the interview allowed to identify the three subcategories of the category of the role of English homework and they are the following: (a) homework style, (b) reasons why homework is given and (c) significance of homework (Lina Lelesiene, 2008). In the homework style subcategory, analysis of topic sub-subcategory revealed that homework is set so that pupils could go deeper into and analyse the current topic, in addition, it turned out that sometimes homework is given because pupils do not manage to do all the work during class lessons and they have to finish the work that has been started in class or analyse it (Lina Lelesiene, 2008). In practical nature sub-subcategory teachers' answers to the question about the form and type of home assignments are analysed; it turned out that the teachers set homework of practical character - the teachers assign their pupils to do project-type tasks in groups or individually which promotes cooperation between pupils (Lina Lelesiene, 2008).

Homework is an extended work which helps to strengthen the students' learning. In this connection, Cross (1992) writes homework is a form of reactivation of learnt activities, during out- of- school time students rework material or engage in practice activities. The chief factor that militates against successful language learning in the school is probably time, by increasing their contact time we can increase the students' level of competence. Classes that get homework usually reach a higher

level of achievement and do better in examination than those that are denied extra learning time. (Cross, 1992). It is commonly acknowledged that Nepali learners of English have limited exposure to practice language items in school time. Most of the government aided schools have allocated forty five minutes period per day for English subject. It is very limited time for the students for practicing the language items, In such a situation homework can offer opportunities for extensive activities. Hence, it can be used as a tool to practice language exercises at the students' home themselves, ultimately it fosters learner autonomy.(Jagadish Paudel, 2012). There is a positive relationship between the amount of homework students do and their achievement outcomes, according to a 2007 study by Harris Cooper, director of Duke University Program in Education, which analyzed and combined the results of dozens of homework studies. The studies found that students who had homework performed better on class tests compared to those who did not. Twelve studies linking the amount of homework to achievement and controlling for other factors, such as socioeconomic status, also found a positive link. Of 35 studies that simply correlated homework and achievement, with no attempt to control for student differences, about 77 percent also found a positive link between time on homework and achievement(Cooper,2007). However, says Cooper(2007), “there was one group in the study for which homework was not correlated with achievement: elementary school students. For these children, the report states that the average correlation between time spent on homework and achievement hovered around zero or no relationship. This may be because younger students have less-developed study habits and are less able to tune out distractions at home”.

Conclusion

From the studies that has been done to define the relationship between homework and academic performance it has been apparent that assignments play a huge role in making progress academically. English homework give contribution in students' English achievement. In the other word, the English homework would help the students in facing English subject and in learning process, finally it influences in English achievement. Language acquisition is the process which requires working

not only in the classroom but also outside of it. Therefore language learning can be encouraged via the usage of home assignments that are relevant, appropriate to learners' level, age, language background and cover whole topic provided in the classroom. English learning stage at school is a very critical period. It is not only necessary to lay the foundation of English, but also to lay the confidence in English learning. Therefore, when evaluating students' English homework, we should affirm their efforts and not let them feel that they are wasting their efforts.

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