

Homework Assignments at Tertiary Level: Vision to Reality Case of EFL Teachers in Batna 2 University

الواجبات المنزلية على مستوى التعليم العالي: رؤية وواقع
رأي أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعة باتنة 2

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Abstract

Homework assignment perspectives have been cyclical, there has been much debate over the integration of such instructional activity in the classroom. The present study aims to get experiential data on the adaptation of homework assignment by teachers to come up with recommendations and action plans for homework assignment incorporation at tertiary level. To reach this aim, the targeted population of the present study is teachers of English at Batna 2 University of which they responded to the questionnaire. The analysis of results reveals that not all teachers agreed on the importance of homework assignment integration. On the basis of results, some recommendations have been drawn at the level of teachers' understanding which is later on reflected on their teaching quality.

Keywords: homework assignment; perspectives; questionnaire; teaching quality

ملخص

تعتبر وجهات النظر حول الواجبات المنزلية متناقضة، هناك الكثير من الجدل حول اهمية مثل هذا النشاط التعليمي على مستوى الجامعة. تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى الحصول على بيانات تجريبية حول اعتماد الواجبات المنزلية من قبل الأساتذة للتوصل إلى توصيات وخطط عمل لدمج هذه الوسيلة التعليمية على المستوى الجامعي. للوصول إلى هذا الهدف، فإن المجتمع المستهدف من الدراسة الحالية هم مدرسو اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة باتنة 2 الذين أجابوا على الاستبيان. يكشف تحليل النتائج عن عدم اتفاق جميع المعلمين على أهمية تكامل الواجبات المنزلية كطريقة فعالة ومفيدة لدعم تعلم الطلاب. بناءً على النتائج، تم وضع بعض التوصيات، من أجل جذب انتباه كل من المعلمين والطلاب حول الدور الذي يحققه الواجب المنزلي على مستوى فهمهم ووعيمهم والذي ينعكس لاحقًا على جودة التدريس

الكلمات المفتاحية: وجهات نظر؛ واجب منزلي؛ استبيان؛ جودة التدريس

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Introduction

Improving the performance and achievement of the student is the responsibility of all members involved in teaching and learning. This is consistent with being student at tertiary level that demand students with academically good and high learning skills. Various sides of achievement being evaluated with different tools of learning will enable teachers to produce students that are highly competent and qualified. Homework assignment has upheld an important role in doing that goal and improving the quality of teaching and learning process.

At university, there are complexities involved in integrating homework assignment, and it will continually arise to be perceived as controversial. The lines of conflict are drawn up in ever different ways, as some teachers rally around its effectiveness, while others declare its disadvantaged. In any case, the effective practice of any instructional tool in higher education has an impact on student performance, and certainly, inappropriate homework may give little or no benefit, and may even decrease students' productivity of the learning.

1. Literature Review

The importance of homework assignment on student performance is a highly debated concern. With our current educational system being affected by coronavirus pandemic, homework assignment considered the only form of reinforcement and retention, and assessment of the work done in class.

The word "homework" is commonly used to describe the activity which is doing outside regular school classes; it can be defined as learning which takes place outside the context of formal classroom teaching, which is primarily the responsibility of the student; It is defined by Cooper (2007), is "any task assigned to students by school teachers that is meant to be carried out during non-school hours" (p. 86).

According to Keith (1993), homework is associated with the time spend on it, he defines homework as "the amount of time students spend studying outside of class" (p. 248). However, in dealing with assigning homework, many aspects should be taken into consideration. This multifaceted quality covers a diversity of topics, for example: teachers' attitudes, behaviors and beliefs about the various aspects of homework for example: homework behaviors of when to give it, how much, what

kind and what to do with the homework once completed, (collect it, mark it, return it?).

Various survey data and evidences stated that homework assignment is often associated with greater academic performance; According to MacBeath and Turner (1991); Warrington and Younger (1996), homework assignments increasing independent learning skills, and promote perseverance and self-discipline. Homework assignment permits for more time to practise the task. University hours are not always enough time for students to really complete and process various concepts and issues, and homework can counter the effects of time shortages (Dettmers,2009). Teachers provide homework not only to help students understanding a given concept, but also to improve their responsibility, and time management. (Epstein and Van Voorhis, 2001)

Students benefit from homework as they are able to use their knowledge through application, being an ongoing formative assessment used by teachers to evaluate student learning performance, and giving students a chance to review their class materials. Paulu (1998, p, 8) stated a number of benefits which listed as:

- To give students a chance to review and practise what they are being taught
- To prepare students for the next lesson
- To encourage and allow students the opportunity to explore and use outside Resources

In line with the homework benefits mentioned by Paulu (1998), Center for Public Education (2007) also listed some of those benefits as:

- To extend what students have learned to new contexts
- To have students work incrementally and in depth on a project

Assigning homework is a multifaceted activity affecting many sides of students' life, including responsibility, independency, and self-discipline. According to MacBeath and Turner (1996); Warrington and Younger (1996), homework assignments improving promoting independent learning, and develop perseverance and self-discipline. Doing homework is also recommended by teachers for many reasons; those reasons are listed by Coutts (2004) as; to help students practise

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skills, to support students to improve good study habits, to motivate students, and simply to get students prepared for examinations.

Starting the discussion of anti-homework researches. Vatterot (2010) stated that homework assignment should be provided only to older students. By providing too much homework assignment, a child can become overexposed to academic tasks. "This can damage a positive attitude or motivation to achieve" (Cooper 2007, p. 11).

According to Wiesenthal et al (1997), The issue of homework assignment at tertiary level has been widely researched although the results are far from unanimous. There has always been a debate among the teachers about homework. The most common reason could be whether homework assignment effect students' academic achievement in university or not.

Good quality of learning became a requirement for every teacher in getting a learning environment that permits every student achieve better productivity. To create a quality learning environment required good teaching strategies. Homework assignment would be discussed as an instructional tool to develop the students' learning outcomes and increase the quality of learning.

The question of whether homework assignment affect educational outcomes has not been definitively answered through myriad of studies; homework assignment is being left behind by an educational system that some teachers believe is in not of importance. Developing students' educational outcomes will require efforts on many fronts, but a central premise of this concern is that one part of a suggestion includes helping students to better learning through the integration of effective homework assignments.

Every student has the potential to learn and become a successful student if given a conducive learning strategy. Therefore, it is worth mentioning that assigning homework can lead to students' success as it is a positive experience which help students to deepen their understanding of content and practice skills in order to become more proficient.

Problems encountered during the teaching and learning process when various subjects were delivered to the students, most students have difficulty, it is shown by the results of their examinations which is still largely below the standard expected completeness. From the experience

of the researcher herself is known that the cause of that difficulty is delivered learning is not enough, the learning process is limited because teaching and explaining the concepts in the classroom is time restricted that is of not practicality to encourage independency.

Since attitudes are seen differently across the research, perspectives of the effectiveness of homework assignment can be differentiated. More importantly, the different ways in which homework assignment are given can help answer two important questions:

- How do teachers perceive the relationship between homework assignment and students' learning?
- What are the teachers' practices in EFL classes?
- To what extent do homework assignments affect students' achievement and performance?

2. Method and Tools

2.1 Participants

Regarding the choice of population, some teachers from the department of English at Batna 2 University are chosen. The sample will comprise a group of teachers since they are supposed to have more than five years of experience in teaching. The sample is selected randomly. An online questionnaire was administered to thirty-five (35). But this number has been reduced to thirty-two (32) responses. The rest (3 questionnaires) were disregarded for two main reasons: first, some teachers did not finish answering their questionnaire. Second, some respondents did not return the questionnaire at all. All teachers were contacted via email.

2.2 Instrument and data analysis

A questionnaire was opted for as a way to acquire comprehensive understanding of teachers' practices and beliefs, "Questionnaires are useful to find patterns of occurrence and to investigate phenomena that are not easy to observe" (MacKey and Gass, 2005, p.22). Moreover, it is easier for the researcher to collect more respondents if the questionnaire is used since it is not that time-consuming, and it is a very practical as it aids researchers to receive some large quantities of responses in a short period of time.

To address the quality of any research, reliability and validity concepts should be discussed. "All researchers aspire to produce valid

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and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner; and both producers and consumers of research want to be assured that the findings of an investigation are to be believed and trusted” (Creswell, 2009, p. 22). It is also about providing readers with trusted and creditable results that can be published in any institution.

Regarding the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach’s alpha is the most habitually used reliability statistic to get internal consistency reliability (Trochim 2001; DeVon et al. 2007). It was calculated as it is found 0,85. With regard to the validity of questionnaire, it was achieved by conducting a pilot study. eight teachers were given the questionnaire to complete. After slight adjustments, a total number of 35 questionnaires were distributed among teachers at Batna 2 University. After that, the data was collected and the questionnaire was reported as valid. In the end the data was analyzed, the results were discussed and supported by literature, and some recommendations were suggested.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections i.e. Section one, which contains personal information like pre-teaching work place and work experience and section two contains series of questions aimed at investigating teachers’ attitudes and perspectives on the statues of homework assignment in EFL classes.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Teachers’ Background Information

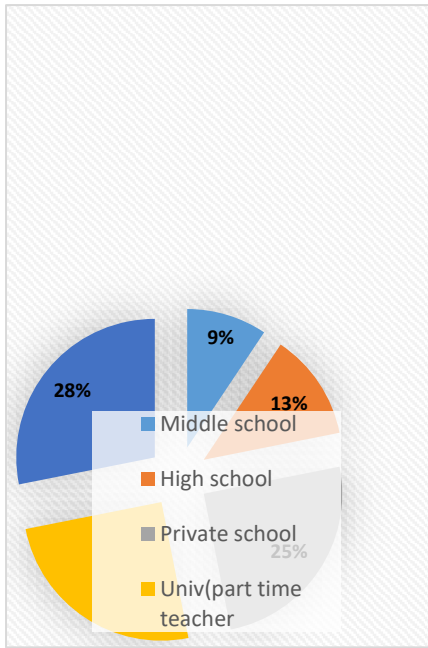


Figure (1): Teachers' pre teaching work experience

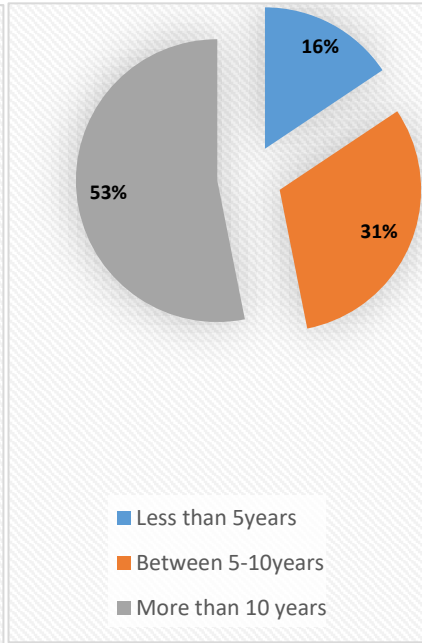


Figure (2): Teachers' work experience

As figure 2 shows, 72% (25+25+13+9) of teachers have experience the teaching profession before which can reflect their belief that homework is an essential part and an active area of study among all learning levels; the main aim of homework, as a part of the teaching and learning process, is to develop student production by giving an opportunity to review learned material (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006)

Regarding teachers' work experience, 53% of them are highly experienced which permit us to consider their contribution as very reliable and especially when it comes to deal with certain controversial topics as homework assignment as Goldhaber (2002) stated the development of students' learning greatly depends on the knowledge and skills of teachers

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3.2. Teachers' Attitudes and Perspectives

Thematic analysis adopted to find out teachers' attitudes and perspectives towards the status of providing homework assignments for students at higher education; findings were categorized under themes; the importance of homework assignment, and homework assignment between promise and practice. Findings of each theme were interpreted with regards to the questions that were asked in the questionnaire and shared below.

Table 2.

Teachers' perspectives and attitudes towards homework assignment at tertiary level

| The me | Example | t eachers |
|---|---|--------------|
| | | % |
| The e Importan ce of Homewor k Assignme nt | Do you think students at university should receive homework assignments? | 8 |
| | yes | 4 |
| | no | 1 |
| | | 6 |
| | what are some of the benefits for giving homework assignments? | 6 |
| | to practice what students learned in class. | 2,5 |
| | to learn time management skills. | 6 |
| | to take responsibility for students learning | ,25 |
| | other | 3 |
| | | 1,25 |
| | | 0 |
| | Students are more likely to do well on their exams if they have provided with homework? | 4 |
| | yes | 6 |
| | no | |

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| | | |
|---|--|--|
| | | 3 4 |
| Homework Assignment between Promise and Practice | Do you assign your students homework? Yes no | 4 7 5 3 |
| | Do you think that students' preferences (learning styles) have an effect on the way of designing homework? yes no | 5 9 4 1 |
| | Do you feel that your students have positive beliefs about homework? yes no | 4 4 5 6 |
| | How important for you do you think it is to complete homework? a- Very important b- Important c- Moderately important d- Of little importance e- Not important | 6 ,25 2 5 4 3,75 1 8,75 6 ,25 |
| | Do you usually assess homework? yes no | 4 7 5 3 |

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The first part of the questionnaire represents the first theme, the importance of homework assignment. Several important conclusions can be drawn from the data on teachers' attitudes and practices. Most importantly, the results indicate the interrelationship which teachers recognize between homework assignments and developing good study skills. Because teachers play an important role in the homework process, their perspectives toward homework may certainly affect student learning production (Trautwein, Niggli, Schnyder, & Ludtke, 2009)

As shown in the above table 84% of teachers supported the idea of giving homework assignments for university students. This appeared to indicate that teachers saw homework assignments as beneficial because it helped make students practice what they learned in class which could enable them to perform better in class and/or in exams. This goes in line with (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001, p. 191) "When teachers design homework to meet specific purposes and goals, more students complete their homework and benefit from the results"

To explore this further, teachers' beliefs and their responses were correlated, resulting in 46 % of positive teachers' responses regarding the effect of homework assignments on students' achievement in their exams. This appeared to indicate that most teachers acknowledged that homework assignments at tertiary level could be a practical tool to help in getting better learning production. Overall, the participants responded with positive attitudes towards the significance of homework assignments.

The second part presents the findings concerning the second theme, homework assignment between promise and practice. Although the above table indicates a consensus between teachers with respect to the importance of homework assignment, and they all held a strong belief in that issue, 53% of them do not assign homework. Noticeably, the results indicated that homework assignments were not given on a regular basis,

The table above shows some disparity of opinion in response to the momentousness of students' completion of homework assignments; 43,75% of them states it is "Moderately important" which deemed as a low average compared to their attitudes and beliefs towards the role of homework assignments at higher level. Only teachers who have stronger

homework commitments with higher academic learning achieved major success in their teaching process.

Although the importance of homework assignments in classes is known to any teacher and anyone who has something to do with language teaching and learning, providing homework assignments is somewhat limited and is not optimally fulfilled. The primary reason behind this is some practical issues including lack of time to provide feedback, the issues of addressing the objectives of each homework assignment and choosing appropriate techniques and, finally, the designing of an effective homework assignments related to the teaching materials.

To extend this aspect further, the teacher's highest priority is student learning. All rules, activities, and actions are addressed at student learning. Homework assignments should be intentional, assessed, and are meant to promote student learning; seeing 37, 5% of teachers use of praising expressions when it comes to overlooked their feedback on homework assignments can interpret their answer regarding students' attitudes towards homework assignments. Although teachers held a strong belief in the importance of the way they responded to homework tasks. It can be hard to provide homework assignments without seeing a positive response from students. This finding implies that students in the present study generally think negatively about homework and its effects on their practices. This negative attitude towards homework can, unfortunately, arise at all levels, especially in university.

The results generated via the present study demonstrate that teachers attach great importance to homework assignments, and that they are definitely aware of its potential for developing students' learning. Yet, although there was a firm accord among teachers with regard to homework assignments effectiveness, practicing that belief seemed not to be that much easy task.

Conclusion

Whether homework assignments should be integrated as an integral part in EFL classes is a controversial issue in the field foreign language education. Another equally important question is what the main aims of assigning homework are. Regarding the importance of providing homework tasks in foreign language classrooms, many teachers today believe that homework task and students' learning achievement are

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correlated and providing homework tasks must be an integral part of any language learning level.

Talking about teaching and learning process, the word homework is directly associated with what, how, or when the learning is supposed to occur. It is beyond reasonable doubt that homework can play a significant role in improving students' learning. However, there is need for teachers to revise the procedures for carrying out homework assignments in order to enhance the quality of learning. As a result, it is hereby recommended that:

- When teachers believe in the significance of homework tasks, they will create a classroom of students who also believe in the importance of homework assignment. Teachers should try hard to give home assignments to their students after any new concept learned in classroom.

- The present study does show how homework assignment is actually practiced; It is provided only to fill certain criteria in the syllabus. It is proposed that homework should be tailored to be aligned to the teaching aims. Ideally, homework can even have a bigger function for students' academic learning if teachers can skillfully set it. It is clear that not all teachers have as a goal to really assign homework tasks,

- The present study would therefore, recommends that tertiary teachers should make a consorted effort to provide homework assignments that would enhance student performances in universities and also facilitate their self-development efforts

- It is of importance for teachers to provide appropriate support to students according to their homework assignments practices. It is obvious that not all of students shared the same strengths and weaknesses and therefore needed varied levels of support, guidance and feedback.

- Teachers should ensure that their homework tasks are reviewed and provided with feedback to achieve certain results. Dealing with the academic achievement, it could be seen that the implementation of praise when providing feedback on homework assignments in learning English could enhance students' motivation.

•All in all, providing students with effective homework assignments to get acquainted with and develop their skills is just the beginning; homework assignments could be much more valuable. A typical homework assignment involves the repetition of class content taught that day. Coutts (2004) and Simplicio (2005) would say that this kind of homework is “tedious, repetitious, and boring, which causes students to lose interest” (p. 139).

The limitations of the present study were observed as it was restrained to only one field and region, English Language –Batna 2 University. It is recommended that future studies should include other field and regions.

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Appendix: Questionnaire

Dear Colleague,

The present questionnaire is designed to identify the teachers' attitudes and practices of homework assignments in their EFL classes. I would be grateful if you could answer the questionnaire. Please, tick (×) the appropriate answer or make a full statement when necessary.

Section One: Background Information

1. Pre teaching work
institute/place.....

2. Work Experience:
 Less than 5 year
 Between 5-10 years
 More than 10 years

Section Two: Teachers' attitude and perspectives

3. Do you think students at university should receive homework assignments?

Yes No

4. What are some of the benefits for giving homework assignments?
 to practice what students learned in class.
 to learn time management skills.
 to take responsibility for students learning
 other.....

.....;
 5. Students are
 more likely to do well on their examinations if they have provided with homework?

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6. Yes Do you assign your students homework? No

7. Yes How often do you usually assign homework? No
Every session
Once a month
Never

8. Do you think that students' preferences (learning styles) have an effect on the way of designing homework?
Yes No

9. Do you feel that your students have positive beliefs about homework?
Yes No

10. How important for you do you think it is to complete homework?

- a- Very important
- b- Important
- c- Moderately important
- d- Of little importance
- e- Not important

11. According to you, students' homework assignments' incompleteness may be the result of:

- The questions are too hard to understand
- The forgiveness of their teachers
- The belief that it is pointless; it is just for kids

Other.....

..... Do you usually assess homework?

Yes No

If yes, how is homework assessed?

completion correctness

other.....

12. If your students overlooked your feedback on homework, what would you do?

.....
.....
.....