

Dealing with Homework in English Language Teaching: A Case of Dadeldhura District

Jagadish Paudel

Abstract

Homework is a good means of reactivation; it helps students to practice language items and consolidates learnt knowledge and skills at their home. It is an indispensable tool for students to step forward in the subject. But if we glance at homework dealing situation at school level education in Nepal, the role of homework is hardly talked about in the majority of the schools, especially at government aided school. Similarly, if we look at researches and papers that are talked about on homework dealing situation at school level education, we will rarely find. For this reason, I have strived to explore homework dealing situation of English language teaching at grade eight in Dadeldhura District through survey questions to the students and the teachers, such as when do students feel difficult to do homework, why do they do homework, how much time do they spend to do homework, who does help them to do homework at home, how do they like their homework to be corrected, how do the teachers correct homework, and the like. It also suggests some strategies for increasing homework completion rates and making homework meaningful for the students.

Key words: Homework, Assessing Homework, Nepalese Public Schools, English

Introduction

Homework is assignment that students are required to complete at their home. Homework has been defined as “tasks assigned to students by school teachers that are meant to be carried out during non-school hours” (Cooper, 1989, p. 86). Cooper points out a number of benefits of homework such as improvements in factual knowledge, understanding concept, attitudes to learning, study skills, self-discipline, and problem solving skills. He, in his research findings, concludes with clear evidence that homework improves academic achievement for high school students. Homework develops study habits and makes learners autonomous

in language learning. It also encourages learners to consult various resources such as dictionaries and grammar reference books.

Homework helps students develop good 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 (Center for Public Education, 2007b). Homework serves as a diagnostic tool that allows teachers to regularly monitor their students’ progress (West Allegheny School District, n.d.).

It is commonly accepted that it is necessary

to assign homework because it is helpful to consolidate their learnt knowledge and skills, and to ensure and reinforce the students to work harder as well as increasing their general understanding of the language. Homework is good for students, -because they spend more time working with English, and they become better at it. Yet it is often a dispiriting work. Sometimes students do not enjoy doing homework when teachers give them disinteresting tasks (Harmer, 2008). For this reason, teachers should let students decide what homework they wanted to do (Painter, 1999; as mentioned in Harmer, 2007, p.399). Teachers can assign different types of homework, as per students interest and ability, such as question answer, drawing activities, handwriting, substitution, using worksheets, matching halves, gapped texts, multiple choice and true-false items, parallel writing, guided writing, free writing/ easy writing, task reading, fill in the blanks, speaking on a given topic, listening tape, memorizing vocabulary, project work, making report and many more depending on the language items that are given in the text.

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. (p. 180)

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.

It has some drawbacks also. Homework overload can cause students to lose interest in the academic material and become physically and emotionally fatigued, denial of access to leisure time and community activities, parental interference, copying and increases differences between high and low achievers (Skaggs, 2007; Cooper, 1989).

Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

- To explore homework dealing situation of English language teaching at grade eight in Dadeldhura district.
- To suggest some pedagogical implications in English language teaching at school level.

Methodology

For the questionnaire survey, I Sampled one hundred and twenty students of grade eight, thirty students from each school from four government aided schools of Dadeldhura district, to get the required information on homework dealing

situation of English language teaching. The population was sampled using purposive random sampling procedures. I asked sixteen close ended survey questions to the students and five close ended survey questions to the teachers. I also conducted focused discussion among the students and the teachers of the respective schools.

Interpretations of results

The data obtained through questionnaire survey have been interpreted descriptively below.

Descriptive analysis of questionnaire results from the students

From the study it was shown that 18.33% students feel difficult English subject homework when they do not understand teacher's instruction; 81.66% students feel difficult English subject homework when they do not know word meaning and grammar. 95.83% students like their written homework to be checked by the teacher. Very nominal students like their homework to be checked by peers, and by self correction technique. 52.5% students always do homework. 53.33% students do homework because they think that it helps to practice the language items; 4.16% students do homework because they think that if they do not do homework the teacher becomes angry with; 42.5% do homework because they think that if they do homework the teacher loves to them. At the students' home only 5% students are helped to do homework by their parents; 20.5% students are helped by their brother; 5.83% students are helped by their sister; none of the students are helped by the tuition teacher since they do not have tuition teacher. Majority of the

students (68.33%) are not helped i.e. they have to do homework themselves at their home. 84.16% students are encouraged to do homework by their guardians at their home. There is no provision of reward for the student who does homework regularly and correctly. 81.66% students do not enjoy doing English subject homework they just do homework forcedly. None of the students have homework diary; there is no provision of homework diary system in their school. 66.66% students have only rough copy for English subject. 96.66% students do not enjoy homework from out of the textbook. 84.16% students expect their homework be checked daily. None of the students prefer lots of corrections and suggestions in their written homework. They feel shocked if they get their copy back with full of correction with red ink. 80.83% students pay less than thirty minutes to deal with English subject homework; 19.16% students pay thirty minutes to one hour to deal with English subject homework and none of the students pay more than one hour time. Similarly, none of the teachers assign spoken homework. Spoken homework is neglected by the teachers.

Questionnaire results from the students

The study showed that all the teachers most often correct students' written homework making correction on the blackboard i.e. the teacher writes the correct answer on the blackboard and students correct answers on their copy if their answers are incorrect. Regarding homework dealing it was found out that, in all the four schools, there is no monitoring system by the school administration. All the teachers ask homework to their students randomly. This study clearly showed that no teacher assigns

different homework to different students i.e. teacher gives same type of homework to all students. Similarly, the study showed that the teachers do not assign homework in pair and group.

Discussions

One of the English teachers who participated in this study asserted “students do not do homework due to the lack of awareness and coordination between the teachers and guardians, most of the guardians do not encourage their children to do homework and even they do not buy notebook and textbook on time. They only think that we have sent our children to school it is the job of teachers to encourage them to do homework and make them do homework and check out homework. Guardians do not want to take responsibility.” He added that especially lower caste children do not come school regularly and they do not do homework. He further said that some boys do not do homework due to their negligence- they think that even if they do not do homework the teacher will not do anything to them since punishment is not allowed. According to him most of the students do not enjoy homework just they do homework forcedly. They do homework just to show teacher and make him satisfy. He added that to encourage students to do homework there should be provision of reward, teacher-guardians coordination and guardians should be ready to take responsibility. He further added that school administration should pay attention to it. School administration should ask the students’ report from the teacher who does homework daily and who does not do.

Another school’s teacher also added that

to encourage all students to do homework there need to be the provision of reward as well as there should be coordination between the teacher and guardians.

All the four teachers from four different schools emphasized that correcting individual students’ written home assignment is time consuming which is almost impossible in large classes. Further, they added that they cannot check all students’ homework when they are over loaded, for example, seven periods in a day. They opined that to be checked homework individually and daily there should be small number of students and English teacher’s load should be reduced. A questions was asked to all the four teachers –*what reasons do you often find not doing homework by your students?* The teachers said that students do not do homework due to various reasons. If they ask them-*why didn’t you do homework?* students responses will be like that-not knowing how to do homework, I forget, I was sick, I lost my pen, copy finished, being busy in housework, there was wedding ceremony in my village, I have only one copy that has been taken by another subject teacher for homework checking and the like.

Most of the students have misconceived homework. They think that only writing and reading is homework. It is also found that most of the teachers only assign reading and writing homework. They have neglected speaking skill from homework.

Recommendations

On the basis of the results we can draw some recommendations for the enhancement of English language teaching in general and homework dealing situation

of English subject at school level education in particular. Teachers can suggest some strategies for increasing homework completion rates and making homework meaningful for the students.

There is the highest frequency of the students who feel English subject homework difficult due to lack of word power and grammar. Hence, it is suggested that all teachers should teach word meaning and grammar properly while assigning homework. Similarly, a clear instruction makes the students easy to do homework. If the students are given clear instructions they may show their interest to do homework. Hence, the students need to be provided comprehensible instructions to do homework (Harmer, 2008).

Teacher should assign different tasks for homework on the basis of students' interest and ability. If the students are assigned homework tasks on the basis of their ability and interest then they can be motivated to do homework. For example, some students like question answer exercises, some students like free writing, some students like fill in the blank exercises, some students like homework from out of the text, some students like drawing activities and the like. There should be variety, from one day to the next. Teacher should ask the students what is interesting, enjoyable and relevant for them so that he or she can assign homework as their interests and usefulness. To make homework interesting and funnier, for example, teacher can give out homework tasks in envelopes or send them in e-mails, if possible. Teacher can give them some crazy tasks. Then,

homework will become something that students want to be involved in. Similarly, individual learning styles should be taken into account. Moreover, teacher can ask the students their views on homework (Harmer, 2008; Cross, 1992). But while assigning homework all language items and skills should be kept in balance.

As we know respect is vital in solving every problem. It has a great role for encouraging the students to do homework. Every student expects respect from teacher, not disparage. The teacher should respect the students; he or she should never ridicule them even if they do unplanned things, but instead should use a respectful professionalism to solve the problem. Both teacher and students should have a sense of respect towards homework; students should take it as for their betterment and teacher should take it as their professional duties and responsibilities. The students need to know that the effort they have made in doing the tasks will be reciprocated by the teacher (Harmer, 2008). Teacher should not be mean to provide praise and encouragement if the students do homework. If they do homework the teacher should praise saying or writing on note copy- *very good, good, excellent, absolutely correct, well expressed, good use of words*, and the like. Teacher should make the students look at homework when they get back their homework; and feedback should be given to them. Teacher should encourage them to look at comments and feedback, left on their own, they cannot improve their ability. Teacher needs to change this behaviour by ensuring not only that the feedback he or she gives on homework is useful, but also that students

are encouraged to correct their mistakes and learn from them before putting the returned homework away. Teacher needs to provide opportunities for the students to react to suggestions teacher make on their homework or to discuss the task that was set in the light of teacher comments (Harmer, 2008). Teacher should not criticize on the students' mistakes even if they have committed mistakes rather he or she should follow gentle correction. Most students glance at the returned work, if they find their corrected homework with full of red marks then they might put the homework away feeling despondent. Hence, while correcting mistakes teacher should ask them how they like to be corrected. Teacher should not make them feel humiliation. Similarly, while dealing with the students homework teacher should not discriminate them; every student should be treated fairly and frankly so that they will not feel biased and unpleasant.

Teacher should assign homework in pairs and group so that the students can do homework by discussing, sharing their ideas, experience and knowledge. Introducing pair work and group work can multiple students' opportunities for creative tasks and for practice. That makes them confidence to do homework. It is also good for teacher if the number of students is very big. It saves teacher's time to check out the homework.

As shown by the research data, most of the students do not seem interested in self correction and peer correction techniques. Hence, it is recommended that to make the learners autonomous teachers should encourage all the students in self correction and peer correction of their homework.

Correction is best done by the students themselves, especially where the classes are large (Cross, 1992). This also reduces load on the part of teachers.

As we know reward is a key to success, teachers should make provision of reward (pen, copy, dictionaries) to those students who do homework regularly and correctly. If teacher provides rewards to them they will be motivated more to do homework. And it can be the source of inspiration to others, too. Similarly, teacher should make the students understand the usefulness of homework; he or she should tell them the advantages of doing homework. Individual counseling is very helpful to find out the true causes of not doing homework. Teacher should ask the students' causes of not doing homework and should counsel accordingly. It helps the students to be motivated to do homework.

All guardians should encourage their children to do homework at home. They should be ready to take some portions of responsibility to make their children do homework. Coordination between guardians and teachers help to gear up academic gains on the students. Effective teaching practices and guardians' involvement as well as appropriate environmental supports and contingencies are essential for homework dealing. If a student does not do homework teacher can ask guardians, *what does he or she do at home? Why does not he or she do English subject homework?* Teacher- guardians' coordination helps to know the causes of not doing homework. Homework should also be manageable in terms of time. Teacher should know how much time the students have at their home, how much homework

has given in other subjects. Hence, there is need of coordination among the teachers to avoid homework overload. For this, there should be the provision of homework diary, kept by the students, so that teachers can check the diary and assign homework in proportion to other subjects. Homework diary can be equally helpful for the parents to check whether the teachers have given homework or not.

Consistent schedule is also helpful to make the students do homework. It helps them to be habituated to do homework. Sunday for drawing, Monday for essay writing, Tuesday for handwriting, Wednesday for drawing, for example. Likewise, guardians should develop a consistent schedule for homework time; ensure the space is adequate for learning; and provide the necessary materials needed for homework.

Students often complain they cannot relate to assignments involving events that took place in the distant past. Assignments should be relevant and interesting to students and allow them to draw on their family, cultural, and community experiences (Coutts, 2004). Contextualized and communicative homework play a major part in English language teaching.

Regarding homework dealing, there should be provision of monitoring system by the school administration.

Checking out all students' homework in a big class is time consuming which seems almost impracticable. So, the concerned schools and authority should reduce class size, if possible. Moreover, teachers' load should be reduced so that they can check out students' homework in their leisure time. It should not put a heavy workload on

the teacher's own shoulders. If possible, the teacher should assign homework that can be checked quickly in class (Cross, 1992).

About the author

Jagadish Paudel is a faculty at the Department of English Education, Dadeldhura Campus (T.U.), Dadeldhura. He has M.Ed. and M. A. from Tribhuvan University. He has been associated in the field of teaching for six years. He has published a couple of articles in ELT and literature. His professional interests include ELT, linguistics, and literature.

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Appendix I

Survey questionnaire results from the student

Questions	Options	'A' school (30 students)	'B' school(30 students)	'C' school(30 students)	'D' school(30 students)	TS (120)	O A %
1. When do you feel English subject homework difficult?	a. when you do not understand teacher's instruction	a.9	a. 6	a.0	a. 7	a. 22	a. 18.33
	b. when you do not know word meaning and grammar	b. 20	b. 26	b. 33	b. 19	b. 98	b.81.66
2. How do you like your English subject written homework should be checked?	a. by teacher correction	a. 28	a. 27	a. 30	a. 30	a.115	a.95.83
	b. by peers correction	b. 0	b. 1	b. 0	b. 0	b.1	b.0.83
	c. by self correction	c. 2	c. 2	c. 0	c. 0	c.4	c.3.33
3. How often do you do English subject homework?	a. always	a.15	a.13	a.25	a. 10	a.63	a.52.5
	b. sometimes	b.15	b. 17	b. 5	b. 18	b.55	b.45.83
	c. never	c. 0	c. 0	c. 0	c. 2	c.2	c.1.66
4. Why do you do English subject homework?	a. it helps to practice language items	a.- 15	a. 17	a.- 18	a. 14	a.64	a.53.33
	b. if you don't do teacher becomes angry with you	b. 2	b.3	b. 0	b. 0	b.5	b.4.16
	c. teacher loves you if you do homework.	c. 13	c. 10	c. 12	c. 16	c.51	c.42.5
5. Who does help you to do English subject homework at your home?	a. parents	a. 0	a. 2	a. 3	a. 1	a.6	a.5
	b. brother	b. 5	b. 8	b. 7	b. 5	b.25	b.20.5
	c. sister	c. 2	c. 3	c. 1	c. 1	c.7	c.5.83
	d. tuition teacher	d. 0	d. 0	d. 0	d. 0	d.0	d.0
	e. no one	e. 23	e. 17	e. 19	e. 23	e.82	e.68.33
6. Do your guardians encourage you to do English subject homework at home?	a. yes	a.25	a. 28	a. 29	a.19	a.101	a.84.16
	b. no	b. 5	b. 2	b. 1	b. 11	b.19	b.15.83
7. Does your English teacher give reward (pen, copy) if you do English subject homework regularly and correctly?	a. yes	a. 0	a. 0	a. 0	a. 0	a.0	a.0
	b. no	b. 30	b. 30	b. 30	b. 30	b.120	b.100
8. Do you enjoy doing English subject homework?	a. yes	a. 4	a. 8	a. 7	a. 3	a.22	a.18.33
	b. no	b. 26	b. 22	b. 23	b. 27	b.98	b.81.66

9. Do you have homework dairy?	a. yes	a. 0	a. 0	a. 0	a. 0	a.0	a.0
	b. no	b.30	b.30	b.30	b.30	b.120	b.100
10. Do you have fair copy and rough copy for English subject?	a. you have both rough copy and fair copy	a. 4	a. 11	a. 25	a. 0	a.40	b.33.33
	b. you have only rough copy	b. 26	b. 19	b. 5	b. 30	b.80	b.66.66
11. Do you like English homework out of the textbook?	a. yes	a. 0	a. 1	a. 3	a. 0	a.4	a.3.33
	b. no	b. 30	b. 29	b. 27	b. 30	b.116	b.96.66
12. Do you expect your English subject homework checked	a. daily?	a. 26	a. 23	a. 30	a. 22	a.101	a.84.16
	b. twice a week?	b. 4	b. 7	b. 0	b. 2	b.13	b.10.83
	c. once a week?	c. 0	c.0	c. 0	c. 6	c.6	c.5
13. Do you prefer lots of corrections and suggestions in your English subject written homework?	a. yes	a. 0	a. 0	a. 0	a. 0	a.0	a.0
	b. no	b. 30	b. 30	b. 30	b. 30	b.120	b.100
14. How much time do you pay for doing English subject homework at your home?	a. less than thirty minutes	a. 23	a. 25	a. 22	a. 27	a. 97	a.80.83
	b. thirty minutes to one hour	b. 7	b. 5	b. 8	b. 3	b. 23	b.19.16
	c. more than one hour	c. 0	c.0				
15. If you do not do homework	a. your teacher says-do it and show me tomorrow	a. 30	a. 30	a. 30	a. 30	a.120	a.100
	b. he punishes you physically	b.0	b.0	b.0	b.0	b.0	b.0
16. Does your English teacher assign spoken homework also?	a. yes	a. 0	a. 0	a. 0	a. 0	a.0	a. 0
	b. no	b. 30					

Appendix II

Survey questionnaire results from the teachers

Questions	Options	'A' School's teacher	'B' School's teacher	'C' school's teacher	'D' school's teacher
1. How do you check your students' homework most often?	a. checking individual copy in classroom b. taking copy to office c. making correction on the blackboard	c	c	c	c
2. Regarding homework, is there monitoring system by your school administration?	a. yes b. no	b	b	b	b
3. To whom do you ask homework at first?	a. to bright students b. to average students c. to weak students d. to the students who sit in the front e. to the students who sit at back d. randomly	d	d	d	d
4. Do you assign different types of homework to the different students?	a. yes b. no	b	b	b	b
5. Do you assign homework in pairs and/ or group?	a. yes b. no	b.	b.	b.	b.