

KINDS OF MATERIALS TO USE AS HOMEWORK

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As our environment is basically monolingual, there is an absence of an adequate linguistic context, except for some music in English, cable TV or internet. In order to reinforce what students learn in English class, teachers try to assign extraclass exercises in order to complement students' learning, but these exercises or homework must be attractive and interesting for them. It is clear that the kind of material used as homework is important to motivating students to do it.

Introduction

Based on the students' environment, the aim of this research was to find out what kind of homework students like to do, taking into account their materials and activities preferences, because as Paulu (1995) says, the value of homework extends beyond the school and it can help children to develop wholesome habits and attitudes. At the same time, homework allows the teacher to see students' progress and weaknesses (Shockley: 1968); this constitutes a great help to him in planning new activities or methods in English teaching.

Looking at some materials investigations (such as Wright: 1987 and Swales: 1980) it could be noted that most of them were related to materials activities in the English class. Meanwhile investigations like Bread

and Candlin's (1987) help teachers to choose homework materials based on aspects like the aim of the material content, skills development, learners' needs and interests and materials level according to the students knowledge. On the other hand, McDonough and Shaw (1993) mention some important aspects in choosing materials for students such as the learners' age and interests, their personality, their academic and educational level, the role of English in the school, the resources available, the socio-cultural environment and the teacher status and training. All these aspects, which are important when the teacher wants to choose English class material, help him to make decisions at the time of choosing homework materials.

Procedure

The first step to follow in the research was to choose some methods to help develop the investigation. The first was a questionnaire which had some items or statements with a range of possibilities to choose from related to homework activities and materials; it was applied at the beginning of the investigation and again at the end. According to the initial results, the homework began to be assigned by the teacher and each student began to keep a diary in which he/she wrote opinions,

feelings, reactions, observations and reflections about homework. This was the second method of data collection. The third method was teacher observation in which she observed students' reaction to different kinds of homework material, such as gestures of approval and disapproval, comments and questions. This homework material included activities like filling in crosswords, writing compositions and writing and answers based on a specific topic. Some of these activities were accompanied by pictures that in some cases helped students to do the homework more easily.

Results analysis

The first results were obtained from the questionnaire which was the basis for finding out students' preferences in activities and materials so as to assign the homework; the results showed a great preference for crossword puzzles and materials with pictures.

The students showed great cooperation with the analysis of their diaries, writing positive commentaries on homework in which they had to do crosswords, sometimes with pictures; at the same time homework involving filling in gaps based on a topic made students feel bored and sometimes they did them mechanically without thinking of the sense of what they are doing. Finally, students wrote about their difficulties and fear of writing in English due to their English level being basic.

On the other hand, the teacher observation demonstrated that homework given by the teacher, such as photocopies,

were more attractive for students than homework elaborated on paper or in a notebook. Students also reacted positively to homework with pictures in which they could understand a concept graphically. They found those tasks interesting and stimulating. At the same time material with crosswords aroused students' curiosity and they were a challenge for them to solve. Students were scared of writing but those who did it showed and proved to themselves that they could express their ideas by writing in English.

As regards the final questionnaire, that was applied to the sample (26 students), and in which there were three additional questions with respect to the first questionnaire, these were the results:

- Students think that English homework helps them to review and practice class topics.
- Students do not do English homework when they do not understand it and when it is too long.
- There was an increase in the percentage of students doing homework activities like puzzles (from 36% to 46%) and crosswords (from 30% to 35%).
- Assigned homework had helped students to improve their English knowledge.
- Students liked homework with pictures and which could be done quickly.

Discussion

The results obtained from the data collected clearly showed important aspects

for choosing activities and materials for homework; for example, they showed a great student preference for materials with pictures and with quick activities. At the same time, homework has to be enjoyable and easy to understand for them; moreover, it has to test their creativeness. On the other hand, and according to the English level of students, homework could be assigned to make them express their own ideas and feelings; this aspect is special for them because they feel important in the English class and it motivates them to value and practice the English language outside of class.

Conclusions

To summarise, the investigation has suggested the kind of activities and materials to use as homework and how to choose them in order to motivate students to do it and so practice and reinforce what they are learning in class. Based on this, it can be concluded that students work and enjoy homework materials that generate curiosity. On the other hand, students prefer homework materials with puzzles and crosswords due to their speed and because they help them to use their ingenuity.

Another important conclusion of the study is that pictures in homework material make

it more attractive to students, compared to material without them, because they help students to understand and practice concepts learned in class. Finally, it can be said that homework material varies according to the age of the learners, their interests, and their environmental resources; for this reason, this research only tries to show one option to motivate students to practice and reinforce English language outside of class by using homework.

References

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