How to Motivate Students to Submit the Homework Tasks on Time?

Dildora Gafurovna Ashurova

Academic lyceum of Bukhara Engineering Technological Institute, Uzbekistan

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Annotation: Completion of homework is a crucial learning process. Though it often takes place as an after-school activity, it presents multiple challenges for many students, especially for those who have got low level knowledge and lack of autonomous skills. In my exploratory action research I tried to explore the reasons of why do some of my teenage students at the academic lyceum come to the lessons without completing the homework. The data was collected from 24 students of both specialized and non-specialized groups in English, using quantitative and qualitative research. The findings show that, the reasons varied in those two groups. Accordingly, I implemented some changes in order to help my students to deal with those challenges and manage their homework more responsibly. My study offers new practical ways of motivating students in completion of their homework regularly.

Keywords: Students, skills.

INTRODUCTION – (word limit – 1000 words)

I am Dildora Ashurova, an English teacher at Academic lyceum of Bukhara Engineering Technological Institute. I have been teaching English for more than 20 years for teenagers. The lessons I conduct are mostly directed to improve students` four skills to achieve B1 level according to the state standard to enter higher educational establishment. In each of group I have no more than 15 students and mostly my students' level varies according to their specialty groups. The students' knowledge and motivation are higher at the English specialized groups comparing with the students' at non specialized groups. We have 10 hours of English in English specialized group which is quiet appropriate to achieve B1 level in 2 years of study at academic lyceum but with non-specialized groups it is quite hard as they have only 4 hours of English and most of their focus is directed to their main subjects like math, physics, chemistry , biology. That's why as an educator I have been interested in motivating students; improve students' autonomy in learning and finding the ways to make learning and teaching more effective and engaging. However, the syllabus and the textbooks that we have to use to conduct the lessons do not always coincide with the requirement of national standards. Most exercises are not relevant to the topics or the sequence of tasks is not appropriate to conduct effective lesson. The teachers spend too much time on adapting that textbook's activities. But that precious time could be effectively spend on self- development. Another problem we face is the lack of materials, though there is an internet connection teachers have limited access to that. There are 15 teachers in our English department but we have one computer with internet access. Despite all of these challenges I have always been trying to expand my knowledge and experience to know what will help students learn, and what makes students to be motivated to work independently and take charge of their education because I firmly believe that students' motivation can lead to master the content. But conducting motivational lessons did not always help my students to complete their homework in mastery level. I would become more disappointed to see even some of them without their homework in the next lesson. I would spend many class periods teaching concepts again and encourage my students to complete the homework. I really wanted to change the situation and bring the positive change by finding out the core of the problem. That's why for the exploratory action research I chose this problematic situation: «why do not my students always do their homework?'

After studying some research articles I found out that when homework is effective, it benefits many aspects of students' learning experience and that it is an important factor that increases student achievement (Cooper,

Robinson, & Patall, 2006; Keith & Cool, 1992; Keith et al., 1993; Paschal, Weinstein, & Walberg, 1984). Harris Cooper, a leading expert on the relationship between homework and achievement (2007) suggests that teachers should consider the broad benefits of homework. Three of the benefits he highlights are long-term academic benefits, such as better study habits and skills; nonacademic benefits, such as greater self-direction, greater self-discipline, better time management, and more independent problem solving; and greater parental involvement and participation in schooling (Cooper, 2007; Protheroe, 2009). Also in order to make homework effective teachers should be provided with the tools and knowledge necessary to create effective homework. Rather than ask whether or not homework improves learning, a better question is "How can homework be improved to be doable and effective?" (Voorhees, 2011)

But what makes homework effective? In order to increase homework effectiveness, teachers must understand what makes homework effective. Cathy Vatterott (2010) identified five fundamental characteristics of good homework: purpose, efficiency, ownership, competence, and aesthetic appeal. Purpose means that all homework assignments are meaningful. Teachers should give students assignments that are purposeful for them and methods that work for their learning styles. Homework should not be given on topics that have not been taught (Redding, 2000) Moreover, homework should not take an inordinate amount of time and should require thinking. Students who spend too much time on homework (more than 90 minutes at the middle school level) actually perform worse than students who spend less time (Cooper et al., 2006)

Besides that, students who feel connected to the content and assignment learn more and are more motivated. Connecting assignments with student interest is also essential for promoting ownership (Warton, 2001; Xu 2011Moore, 2005). Another hallmark of effective homework is that students should feel competent in completing homework. In order to achieve this, it is beneficial to abandon the one-size-fits-all model. Homework should be differentiated so that it is the appropriate level of difficulty for individual students. This can be achieved in a variety of ways: different rubrics, shorter assignments (Cooper & Nye, 1994), or more challenging requirements for gifted students. The last thing the teachers should pay attention to is aesthetic appeal of homework which is often overlooked by teachers the way homework looks is important. "Wise teachers have learned that students at all levels are more motivated to complete assignments that are visually uncluttered. Less information on the page, plenty of room to write answers, and the use of graphics or clip art make tasks look inviting and interesting" (Vatterott, 2010, p. 15).

And now let's look at several procedures teachers can utilize to improve homework effectiveness. Teachers should assign homework at the beginning of class. Homework should be explained and directions should be posted on the board in writing (McNary et al., 2005). Students should be given the opportunity to start homework in class (Cooper & Nye, 1994; McNary et al., 2005; Patton, 1994) so that the teacher can check for understanding and provide students with assistance before they leave. Homework should be explicitly related to the class work. Finally, homework should be returned promptly with feedback (Redding, 2006). Students learn more from homework that is graded, commented upon, and discussed in class by teachers (Cooper & Nye, 1994)

After reading several articles on the above mentioned topic I started to comprehend the reasons of the problem and began reflecting on my teaching paying attention from 3 different perspectives; from my own, from my students' and from others' perspective.

My exploratory research questions (including action research question)

1. What do I think about the homework that I give to my students? On the basis of what do I create the homework?

2. Why do some of my students do not complete their home tasks?

3. What do my colleagues think of homework that I give to my students?

4. When (after which activities) do some of my students come to the lesson unprepared?

Action research question: How clear and differentiated instructions can help my students' to complete their homework?

I was interested in knowing would the new type of homework effect on the percentage of homework completion.

RESEARH METHODOLOGY – (word limit – 400 words)

Having been clarified with the topic area and exploratory research questions first of all I started to reflect on my own teaching and began writing a diary about my lessons; what activities engaged students most, what was the challenging part of the lesson ,what would I do differently next time , what excuses did the students provided for not completing homework. Also, I began to reflect on homework according to 5 criteria of effective homework. I analyzed the homework by the following questions:

1) Does homework I assign have purpose?

2) How much time does it require from the students to fulfill the tasks of homework?

3) Am I able to connect homework with students' interest?

4) Is the homework in the appropriate level of difficulty for individual students?

5) Does homework look inviting and interesting?

The second step was exploring the reasons for not completing the homework from students' perception. I decided to conduct online questionnaire with 26 students from 2 groups of the 1st year; (one specialized group for English with 10 hours of English per week, second non –specialized group (math –physics) with 4 hours per week).This is the link to the questionnaire which was created by me and was checked by my tutor Malika Mirvohidova https://forms.gle/61sH7xLKBgzEJEZr8 . Before sending the link, I asked my students` permission orally, explained the reason of this survey and asked them to be frank with their responses as it would serve to make positive change to their learning process. Through the questionnaire I wanted to explore whether they consider their homework difficult, boring or with unclear instructions. I also wanted to know if attending courses, lack of study skills or poor time management are the reasons for their unpreparedness.

Out of 26 students 23 filled in the questionnaire; 6 boys and 17 girls. After collecting data from questionnaires, it was statistically analyzed through Excel. The qualitative data that was collected from questionnaire was coded and thematically analyzed.

To explore my personal beliefs and practices about homework, I employed an information reflective conversation with my colleagues. We often get together in the teachers' room to share about our achievements and challenges we are facing in the teaching process. In this conversation, I reflected on the ways I chose the homework. I wanted to find out their opinions about the homework I was giving. Besides, we discussed various ways of how teachers can make homework preparation process easy and distressful.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION (word limit: 2000 words)

Exploratory level data findings

To explore the reasons of my students` unpreparedness for the lessons I first of all started to reflect on my own teaching. I asked myself the following questions:

➢ What do I think about the homework that I give to my students?

> On the basis of what do I create the homework?

> Do I follow all 5 criteria of effective homework?

For both groups that I conducted research the textbooks were chosen according to their group's direction; for specialized "Expert IELTS 5" band textbook, for non –specialized "New English File" elementary level textbook. Both textbooks are focused on developing 4 skills of the language. For non –specialized group the homework was given from the workbook according to the topic that was covered from student's book during the lesson. For example, learning new words of the lesson, doing additional exercises, getting ready for speaking by answering to the questions provided in the textbook. For specialized group I chose reading, writing, listening and speaking tasks from B part of the unit which topics and the level coincide with A part of the unit.

Analyzing the homework I provided to my students according to 5 effective homework criteria, I came to the conclusion that it was totally connected to the topic of the lesson and served as consolidation. The time required to fulfill that homework was 25-30 minutes for non-specialized group, 45-55 minutes for specialized group, which I believe is not too much for the students with average intelligence. Those two aspects of homework matched to the elements of effective homework. As Ridding (2000) suggested homework should not be given on topics that have not been taught. Also, homework should not take an inordinate amount of time and should require thinking. Students who spend too much time on homework (more than 90 minutes at the middle school level) actually perform worse than students who spend less time (Cooper et al., 2006;)

But I also learnt two more crucial aspects of effective homework I had not paid attention which might serve for students' low motivation in homework preparation process.

1) I did not take students' interest into account;

2) I did not differentiate homework according to learners' level (homework was not in the appropriate level of difficulty for individual students.)

Besides this I wanted to identify when (after which activities) some of my students came to the lessons unprepared. Again, I observed the students' behavior and wrote about it in the diary. I noticed from the answers that among all the tasks my students had more trouble with vocabulary learning. Mostly I found out that learning new words and pronouncing them correctly were the hardest part of language learning process for the students of non-specialized group. For specialized group remembering phrasal verbs was challenging. They said it was easy to mix those phrasal verbs up.

In order to identify the reasons for not completing the homework from students' perception I conducted online questionnaire. According to the results nearly 70 % of students did not consider homework as difficult, boring or including unclear instructions. More than 20% of them agreed that they had lack of study skills and did not see the benefit of it. 65% of them mentioned attending courses, and nearly 35% agreed having poor time management, 43% of them answered positively about forgetting doing homework.

Findings present that for most students homework completion process was not challenging but I had to think about the rest 30 % which was very close to the proportion of the students who came unprepared. When I asked them about the reasons for not doing homework they proposed different arguments. For example, on the 9th of November in groups 105 and 112, 10 students did not do their homework out of 26; 2 of them did not have time because of their extra classes, 2 of them did not feel well, 2 of them started but did not finish, 2 of them said did not understand, 1 did not say the reason, 1 of them was absent in the previous lesson. While collecting this data I noticed that most of the time unprepared students felt shyness and discomfort. They felt unhappy to receive low marks.

I also paid attention if the same students came to the lesson unprepared or not. The answer was 70 % the same students. Majority of those students were from rural areas where they did not have much opportunity to enhance their English in their schools. Moreover, they lacked self-study skills. But I did my best to motivate them to learn English by praising them for their even little effort.

I talked informally with my colleagues in order to get others' perception about the situation. I explained the challenge I was facing with my students regarding homework. My colleagues admitted the fact that they also had the same problem. Most of their unprepared student proposed the same excuses like they had extra courses and they could not physically cope with all of the pressure.

In terms of homework resource, they supported the fact that giving homework from workbook as consolidation was appropriate. It gives students an opportunity to revise and practice the topic at home independently. They agreed that most of the 1st year students lacked self -study skills. Low level students needed more teachers' guidance in order to complete the tasks. But the rest who were able to do it independently were overloaded with extra courses to enter universities.

Action research level data findings

After collecting all the data about research problem, the next step was taking an action to make some changes on the issue. My action research question is: «How clear instructions and differentiated homework can help my students' to complete their homework?

Based on my main findings and literature review I decided to take the following actions to improve the situation:

1) Design new homework tasks with clear instructions.

2) Write down the homework on the blackboard at the beginning of the lesson.

3) Explain and model the first sentences of the homework in class.

4) Differentiate homework according to the level of students or sometimes give two options to choose.

First of all I assigned homework at the beginning of class so they knew what is expected from them. It also helped them to stay focused in order to be able to complete the home task.

While explaining I gave short and clear instructions like dividing them into 2or 3 steps and modeled them the first sentence. After that I checked their comprehension asking CCQs (Comprehension check question). In this way I was able to provide assistance if needed before they leave the classroom. My students were happy about doing the first examples in the classroom, they also underlined the fact that it was connected to the theme we covered during the lesson. Also, we did more practice on vocabulary by playing various games like "Thinking cap"," Find the word". It assisted vocabulary learning process to be easy and fun.

While observing my student's progress I noticed that 4 of my students (to whom homework was difficult to do) became more engaged and confident both in completing homework and participating in the lessons too. They mentioned that explaining the homework with the help of examples made homework completion much easier and understandable for them. I haven't used differentiation strategy with my non- specialised group as most of their level was the same, elementary.

To my specialised students I also gave clear instructions of homework and did the 1st example sentences on the blackboard which students found very helpful in completing the homework especially in writing tasks. Most of them agreed that it was their first paragraph writing. I also tried differentiation method with them. I differentiated the tasks for homework e.g., when I asked for the higher-level students to write topic sentence, I asked lower-level students to identify topic sentences from the given choices; or when I asked to write the whole paragraph from

higher-level students, lower-level students had to write only topic sentences. While checking their homework I graded their writing by giving constructive feedback.

I think this strategy worked well, especially lower-level students became more confident in completing the task but it had caused some misunderstanding and disagreement among other students. They thought it was not fair. They also wanted short and easy homework. I think we have to work on this method and explain the benefits of differentiated approach. The other aspect is that besides appropriate knowledge and skills teachers should be provided with textbooks containing differentiated tasks. Otherwise, it requires much effort and time from teacher to plan the differentiation steps .

After the action part it was visible that students had changed their attitudes towards homework completion. Almost all of them tried to be ready (still 2-3 had an excuse like being overloaded with their courses but they also tried to be active in answering the questions). After this research I came to the conclusion that in order to make the homework more understandable for students, the lesson stages should be well organised beforehand. Students` interest should be taken into account too. In this way both learning and teaching would become effective.

Planned schedule (action plan)			
Details	**Date/Time**	**Tools/Materials**	**Tick (done)**
Make the homework more structured and write down it on the blackboard at the beginning of the lesson .Explaining and modelling the 1st sentences.	Day 1	New English File (Textbook for non specialised group) Internet materials Unit 3 Lesson 1	☑
Make the homework more structured and write down it on the blackboard at the beginning of the lesson .Explaining and modelling the 1st sentences.	Day 2	Expert IELTS – Band 5, From Great Paragraphs to Great Essays (textbooks for specialised group)Unit 1 "What is a Paragraph " page 7-10	☑
Differentiate the home tasks according their level.	Day 3	Differentiated homework : To Do exer.4-6 1) They had to recognize effective topic sentences 2) Write topic sentences to the given example paragraph	☑
Make the homework more structured and write down it on the blackboard at the beginning of the lesson .Explaining and modelling the 1st sentences.	Day 4	The same differentiation with supporting sentences	☑
Differentiate the home tasks according their level	Day 5	The same differentiation with concluding sentences	☑
Show to colleagues	Day 6	Colleagues supported this way of differentiation but mentioned that it takes much time to prepare and check	
Differentiate the home tasks according their level	Day 7-8	Building better sentences (exercise from Appendix1 p218)1)Practice ex. 2)editing ex.	☑

MY REFLECTION (word limit – 500 words)

My attitude towards teaching has changed after conducting exploratory action research. I realized that there is no problem without solution and exploratory action research is the best way to find the answer to your questions in teaching process. I remember myself being frustrated and sad seeing unprepared students. But it helped me to change the situation. The first thing I have learnt is that reflecting on each problem from three different perspectives. This gives vivid picture of the situation. The entire information collected serves to take appropriate steps. Especially, the one which is mostly neglected is asking students opinion on the issue.

Before exploratory action research I didn't know about 5 elements of effective homework. After implementing them I saw a positive change in my lessons. They were really beneficial in making the homework completion process productive. My students became more motivated in doing homework. Their interest boosted in learning English, as they felt more confident to do the homework. Now I know that if you give enough scaffolding by giving clear instruction and modeling the task it would be much easier for students to finish up the homework, even low level students would be more engaged. I can say that with the help of this exploratory action research I was able to make homework completion process less stressful and give confidence to students who lacked self – study skills.

I also assume that for our lyceum students the requirement of IELTS in the entrance exams makes English learning much more motivational for them. That's why they try to do their best to achieve progress in all 4 skills of language. This is one aspect that helped me to motivate them to do their homework.

Another aspect that makes lesson special is care that teacher gives to student. When I informed my students about the research I was conducting and I chose them as participants they felt special and different from others. Therefore, during the lesson, especially while checking their homework they tried to do their best, they were very helpful and supportive, which made them as the best group not only for me but also for other teachers as well.

CONCLUSION (word limit - 100 words)

To sum up, homework completion is significant part of learning process which can assist in language acquisition process. During this short period of action research with small number of participants I saw significant change in my teaching process. I can say that homework completion is not as stressful and hard as before for my students. But as a teacher I faced some challenges while differentiating the assignment. I felt lack of experiment and materials. That's why in the future more studies should be conducted on how differentiated task can be implemented in the lessons.

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