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Vocabulary learning and homework in the upper elementary EFL classroom.

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Abstract

Vocabulary homework is a common feature in the English subject in Sweden. Often the pupils are given a list of words they are to memorize for a pending test. In this literature review the author aims to analyze what the current research says about homework and how homework can be used effectively for EFL learners in elementary school, with a focus on both homework and vocabulary learning research. Cognitive linguistics has been used as a theoretical perspective to help answer the research questions. Results indicate that homework has limited effect on younger learners and should not be used, while, some researchers claim that it can be effective if introduced properly. Regarding vocabulary learning, it is important that vocabulary is relevant to the learner and that words are taught through a meaningful context. Therefore, vocabulary homework for EFL learners in elementary school should consist of words and phraseology which have a personal relevance to the learner, or key words for subjects taught in class. The conclusion of the study is that it is up to the teachers to determine if they should use vocabulary homework or not when teaching EFL, as long as the decision is based on current research.

Keywords: homework, EFL, vocabulary learning, elementary school, wordlist homework.

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1. Introduction

English became a mandatory subject in the Swedish compulsory school in 1956 and is, with Swedish and math, one of the three qualifying subjects for studies at upper secondary level (Skolverket, 2016). English instruction begins in elementary school and is often based on teaching materials which also provide homework.

Homework is a topic which many people have opinions about. According to Hattie (2012, p. 234), many parents judge the quality of the school based on the amount of homework the pupils receive, but they expect not to have to take any part in the homework. In addition, there are teachers who associate large amounts of homework with high quality learning and believe that a high status school is supposed to assign homework. These teachers argue that extensive homework leads to more knowledge (Westlund, 2004, 33). However, there have been no studies done in Sweden between 1993 and 2012 that investigate the effects of different types of homework (Skolverket, 2014, p. 15)

According to Hellsten (2000), there is no unanimous definition of homework in research. However, Hellsten defines it as school work which is done outside of scheduled lessons (2000, p. 120). Lundahl (2009) claims that homework for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners in Sweden usually consists of a list of words to learn and a related text to read and that his type of homework in English, and other language education in Sweden, has been common for a long time (2009, p. 264). I experienced this when I went to school, as did my mother, and so do the pupils I have met at my mentor schools and during my time as a substitute teacher. However, the teachers I have spoken to often cannot justify why they are using this method or why it has been around for so long. Therefore, I was inspired to investigate the subject further.

The aim of this study is to see what research says about homework in elementary school in general and about homework for ELF learners in particular. For this thesis the following questions are asked:

- What does research show about the use of homework in elementary school?
- How can vocabulary homework be used effectively for EFL learners?

2. Background

Historically, homework in Sweden has been greatly influenced by the US. During the 1920s homework was supposed to discipline the pupils and form good study habits and in the 1940s homework was a way to make pupil learn more. In the 1960s homework was criticized because it deprived the pupils of social interaction and during the 1980s the aim was to create more learning opportunities and help pupils obtain better results (Westlund, 2004, p. 34).

According to Hattie (2012) homework is most effective in math and least effective in the social sciences (2012, p. 235). It is also important that the teachers get to discuss the level and nature of homework so that it suits the pupils receiving it (Westlund, 2004, p. 33).

However, the value of homework in general ought to be questioned (Westlund, 2004, p. 36).

Research on homework is a complex subject and many variables have to be taken into account such as the pupil's age, personal backgrounds, demographic area, their parent's level of education and so forth. Therefore the results have to be interpreted with care. Teachers and adults in general often take the value of homework as a given, but the research results are not that clear. The fact that the Swedish steering documents, modern teaching materials and the Swedish teacher training programs do not mention homework is an indicator that it is difficult to know whether or not homework is effective (Westlund, 2004, p. 34, 40).

Studies from Hattie's meta analysis have shown that homework has twice as much of a positive effect on pupils in high school than those in junior high, and that it has twice as much positive effect on pupils in junior high than those in upper elementary school. For pupils in elementary school there was no correlation between the amount of homework and how well the pupils were doing in school. For elementary students, homework which is made to create deeper learning is less effective than homework which aims to train basic skills. However, homework without the involvement of a teacher does not lead to learning, according to Hattie (2012, pp.235-236).

2.1. The Swedish Education System

Compulsory school in Sweden starts in the fall of the year a child turns 7, which is when they start first grade. The compulsory school consists of nine grades, until the pupil's 16th year, which are divided into two terms, one in the fall and one in the spring. The grades are divided into three stages, commonly referred to as *lågstadium* (grade 1-3), *mellanstadium* (grade 4-6) and *högstadium* (grade 7-9). In this review elementary school and upper elementary school will be used to indicate grades 1-3 and 4-6 respectively.

2.2. Swedish perspectives on homework

The use of homework is mentioned as early as the 16th century in Sweden. At this time it was mandatory that everyone learned to read Martin Luther's small catechism, which is a summary of important sections of the Bible, before their confirmation. Therefore everyone had to study it outside of church, before they had their test (Skolverket, 2014, p.7).

Hellsten (2000) found in his dissertation study that homework seems to be an axiomatic phenomenon in the Swedish school. When he asked a Swedish teacher whether she used homework or not she seemed offended. Homework is such a standard in the schools, and has always been, that it is almost beyond investigation (2000, p. 119). There has been very little Swedish research done on homework and its effects, but Hellsten found that most researchers find a positive correlation between homework and the students' academic achievements. However, Hellsten claims that the researchers often are very invested in their area of expertise and that this might affect the results of the research done on homework (2000, p. 30). Hellsten also says that there is no general definition of the concept of homework and that often research is conducted without mentioning the size, context, structure, etc of the homework whose effects are being analyzed. Furthermore, homework in itself has such high status that it is not questioned, despite

“the fact is that it does not lead to results” (Hellsten, 2000, p. 31; author’s own translation).

Furthermore, the use of homework is not mentioned in the curriculum for the Swedish compulsory school today (Skolverket, 2011), but it is a common feature in schools. However, according to a report by the Swedish National Agency for Education, homework should not be dependent on the pupils’ socioeconomic background or on the education level of their parents or guardians (Skolverket, 2014, p. 5). This is crucial in Sweden, where over 211,000 children seeking asylum have arrived since the year 2000 (Migrationsverket, 2016). Every child in Sweden has the right to attend school, even during the time their family is seeking asylum (Migrationsverket, 2013). Parents of newly arrived children may have trouble helping their children with their homework if they do not yet speak Swedish. It is also important that the content of the homework is thoroughly presented before it is handed out and that it is followed up afterwards. Following up the homework with a test or quiz works as an incentive for the pupils to do the homework (Skolverket, 2014, p. 19-20). According to the Swedish National Agency for Education, homework should be interesting to the pupils and have to do with the area they are studying in the classroom, so that they find the homework meaningful (Skolverket, 2014, p. 17).

2.3. Vocabulary learning and homework in Sweden

Vocabulary learning is barely mentioned in the Swedish steering documents, but it is very common in the Swedish EFL classroom. In the syllabus, focus lies on communication and on which abilities the pupils are supposed to develop (Skolverket, 2011, pp. 30-33). Yet, vocabulary is incredibly important. It is key to oral communication and a prerequisite for effective reading. There is also a correlation between the size of the pupil’s vocabulary, reading ability and academic achievements (Lundahl, 2009, p.259). If the first two increase, chances are higher that the achievement will be higher. However, the pupils not only need to learn separate words but also how to put them into a context. They need to know which words go with which in a correct way. This can be taught effectively by using collocations or “chunks”, and therefore, it is crucial that the vocabulary learning is not isolated from reading and working with texts (Lundahl, 2009, pp. 259-260).

Vocabulary learning through homework with a subsequent test has a long tradition in Sweden, and has a positive effect on pupils’ short time memory. However, the long term effects are questionable. Usually the words are forgotten right after the vocabulary test, because they are no longer essential to the pupil (Lundahl, 2007, pp. 264, 269). It is common that the pupils receive a homework assignment every week consisting of 15-20 words and a text which is supposed to be translated. Learning approximately 20 new words per week would give the learner a very big vocabulary after a few years. However, many Swedish ELF learners experience that their vocabulary is limited (Tornberg, 2015, p. 124). The words are often presented in isolation, taken out of context, and therefore they lack relevance. It would be better to use chunks or phrases for this type of homework, and even though it occurs it is not standard for this kind of homework (Lundahl, 2007, p. 270). For vocabulary training of this type to be effective Lundahl (2007, p. 270) presents a check list of how the words should be used:

1. Only a few central words or concepts are used.
2. The words or phrases are presented in a context so the meaning is evident by the context.

3. The words are examined thoroughly in class. To only give definitions and read the words out loud is not enough.
4. The pupil encounters the new words often.

Since the wordlists in the teaching material are based on the related text, there is a good chance that the words in the lists are rather uncommon words, which the pupils are not likely to encounter to any great extent in the future. This makes the learning redundant based on the checklist above, since the pupils should encounter the words often. Instead it would be better to focus vocabulary training on common and more basic words. The 100 most common words in the English language make up 50% of all the words in oral and written communication, and the 1000 most common words make up 75% (Lundahl, 2007, p. 272). Another factor that ought to be taken into account is the pupils' own interests. It is easier to learn words which have meaning for the learner and for a pupil to be able to talk about his or her interests can be a big motivator. Hereby the pupils can make their own wordlists, which benefits learning (Lundahl, 2007, p. 274).

3. Theoretical perspectives

For this review a theoretical perspective has been used when conducting the analysis to help see the results of the analysis more clearly. In this section the theory of Cognitive linguistics will be explained.

3.1. Cognitive linguistic perspective

Cognitive linguistics (CL) is a way of learning that focuses on general cognitive abilities and on how motivated one is to use the target language. In CL-pedagogy it is common to use associations when learning vocabulary and to learn idioms or phrasal verbs by putting them together with other similar idioms or phrasal verbs. For example to be "hot under the collar" or to be fuming both indicate that the person's body temperature rises when he or she is angry (Boers, 2013, pp. 211-212).

When teaching vocabulary the goal is to have learners save the words in their long term memory and therefore the CL-style of teaching often involves pictures. This will make the words easier to remember since one can associate the word with the memory of a picture (Boers, 2013, p. 213).

Studies have shown that words which are similar to each other, in terms of category, are harder to learn. It is easier to confuse strawberry and cherry than water and cherry, because the former are both berries, which can lead to confusion. Instead, Boers suggests that one should learn vocabulary by using words that can make a story together, but are not from the same category. For example the words strawberry, sandwich, sunshine, grass and blanket can make a story about a picnic, but are not directly related to each other (Boers, 2013, p. 217).

One's language proficiency is directly tied to the size of one's vocabulary. The vocabulary can grow through extensive reading and noting difficult words and looking them up. However, this is a time consuming activity and can lead to confusion since many words have different meanings in different contexts. So vocabulary learning is not only about learning many words, but also about learning which words fit together with others, for example in multiword verbs and idioms. Therefore it can be beneficial to learn words in chunks instead of separately, so the pupils get an ear for where the words belong in a sentence straight away (Boers, 2013, p. 209).

4. Material and methods

This section will demonstrate the steps taken for finding studies and how the analysis has been conducted. Furthermore, the ethical aspects of writing a systematical review are explained.

4.1. Selection strategies and criteria

This thesis is a systematic literature review and the data presented has been collected through various search engines. The ones most frequently used were ERIC, Google Scholar and Summon, which is the search engine found on the library website at Dalarna University. Summon is connected to a vast number of other academic databases where books, journal articles and theses can be found. In addition, sources were recommended by the thesis supervisor.

During the search for literature, search words in both Swedish and English have been used. The search words used are: “glosläxor”, “läxor + engelska”, “språkinläring + läxor”, “läxor + mellanstadiet”, “engelskdidaktik + läxor”, “homework + elementary school”, “homework + effectiveness”, “EFL + homework”, “ESL + homework”, “language learning + homework”, “language proficiency + homework”, “lexical homework” and “phraseology”. First the titles of the studies found were read and a few titles of interest were selected, and then the abstracts were read. For the studies to be interesting the titles had to contain one or several of the search words. If the abstract suited the questions of this thesis the first sections of the study were read. Then the entire text was read to see if the material may be able to help answer the research questions. In the end, five sources were selected for the analysis.

4.2. Method of analysis

Since this is a systematic review there has to be a systematic analysis. The analysis should aim to identify and show the core of the work which is being studied (Eriksson Barajas, Forsberg, & Wengström, 2013, s. 146). There are many different methods of analysis and for this review a “content analysis” was undertaken, which is common for literature reviews. The content analysis uses categories, in a systematic way, to detect central concepts, ideas and themes in the text (Eriksson Barajas, et al. 2013, p. 148).

When analyzing the studies for this review the reviewer first wrote an overview of each study using different categories. The categories were: “theory used”, “main findings”, “attitude towards homework”, “quality”, “strengths” and “weaknesses”. By analyzing a text using all of these categories the reviewer gets a clearer image of what the text says, and therefore it is easier to present the results. The next step was to write an overview of each text while having the aim of the thesis and the theoretical perspective in mind. When the overviews were completed the researcher made a table of categories and patterns found in the texts, which have been included in the results section. The overviews were then read again to see what could be used to answer the two research questions and two documents were created in which each question has been answered separately.

4.3. Ethical aspects

According to Eriksson Barajas et al. it is important to consider ethical aspects before writing a systematical review. Aspects to take into consideration are that the results should be unbiased and never changed in any way to better support the author’s own opinion of the subject. In addition, all articles used in the review must be presented and studies where ethical aspects have been considered should be chosen. These aspects

should be taken into consideration to ensure the quality of the results (Eriksson Barajas, et al. 2013, p. 69-70).

5. Results

In this section there will be a short presentation of the sources used for the analysis and the research questions will be answered through these sources. The questions will be answered separately.

5.1. Presentation of articles

Brock, Lapp, Flood, Fisher & Han. (2007). *Does homework Matter? An Investigation of Teacher Perceptions About Homework Practices for Children From Nondominant Backgrounds*.

Does homework matter? is a study where the authors questioned teachers teaching kindergarten to grade 5 in the United States, in areas where many pupils have nondominant backgrounds about their views on homework. A survey was sent to 133 classroom teachers and 27 of these teachers attended a more extensive, individual, interview.

Cooper. (2008). Homework: What the Research Says. Research Brief. *National Council of Teachers of Mathematics*.

The aim of the brief is to determine the effectiveness of homework. Cooper presents both experimental studies and studies conducted from looking at the results of standardized tests in the United States.

Kohn. (2006). *The Homework Myth*.

In the book *The homework myth* the author systematically investigates the existing research on homework. By finding differences in the research and by using logic and experience Kohn answers questions about homework such as “Does homework improve learning?”.

Lundberg. (2007). *Teachers in action: att förändra och utveckla undervisning och lärande i engelska i de tidigare skolåren*.

Teachers in action is a Swedish research project based on an in-service course led by Lundberg for English teachers who do not have qualifications to teach English. During this course she answered her research questions about teachers’ views on the English subject. Parts of the study discuss homework and vocabulary learning in primary school.

Marzano & Pickering. (2007). *Special topic: The case for and against homework*.

The case for and against homework is an article on homework which brings up both sides of the argument about homework. The authors examine research which claims that homework does promote learning and research which does not. They also present a summary of how teachers can use homework in the most effective way.

5.2. Content analysis

This subsection will consist of the findings in the sources regarding the aim and research questions. Each answer will begin with one or two tables of the main ideas and patterns found in the texts.

5.2.1. What does research show about the use of homework in elementary school?

Table 1. Attitudes towards homework

	Brock, et. al	Cooper	Kohn	Lundberg	Marzano & Pickering
Positive		x			x
Neutral	x				
Negative			x	x	

Table 2. Does homework improve learning?

	Brock, et. al	Cooper	Kohn	Lundberg	Marzano & Pickering
Yes	x	x			x
No			x	x	

Cooper (2008) found that homework has less effect on pupils in elementary school and that this could be a result of bad study habits or an inability to concentrate for longer periods of time. According to Cooper the more time spent on homework the bigger the academic benefits will be. However, Marzano and Pickering (2007) state that time spent on homework is irrelevant and that the most important thing is that the homework is completed. Marzano and Pickering continue by pointing out that homework should not be removed from schools because that would mean that more time has to be spent in school, but that the quality of the homework needs to improve. A piece of homework handed out because of school policy or out of habit will not improve learning and poorly introduced homework may have negative effects on learning. (2007, p. 74-79). Cooper recommends homework which is small and aims to teach the pupils different learning strategies.

Kohn, on the other hand, claims that there is no evidence that homework improves learning and that researchers have confused learning with test results (2006, p. 40). Homework may have a small effect on test results if the subject is studied right before the test but it has no lasting effects on learning (2006, p. 47). According to Kohn there is one type of pupil which may appear to benefit from homework and that is the very ambitious pupil. This is because the pupil spends a lot of time on thoroughly learning the content of the homework and may sometimes ask for more extensive homework, either from personal interest or pressure from highly educated parents (2006, p. 37).

5.2.2. How can vocabulary homework be used effectively for EFL learners in elementary school?

Table 3. What should homework focus on to be effective?

	Brock et al.	Cooper	Kohn	Lundberg	Marzano & Pickering
Basic skills	x	x	-		x
Repetition	x	x	-	x	x

Brock et al., (2007, p. 359), Cooper (2008) and Marzano and Pickering (2007, p. 74-79) all state that homework should focus on basic skills and Lundberg agrees with the latter (2007, p. 94). However, Lundberg only writes about the importance of repetition when learning vocabulary and not about homework in general.

Lundberg found that many of the teachers in her study claim that instruction based on teaching materials and getting a text and wordlist as homework is the reason why many Swedish pupils are unmotivated to learn English. However, Lundberg comments that it may be difficult for pupils used to this type of instruction to enjoy other methods of instruction since there is a comfort in knowing what the lessons will look like and what is expected of the pupil. One of the teachers interviewed argues that it is important that the vocabulary is relevant to the pupils to make them more eager to learn (2007, p. 121). Brock et al. found in their study that homework in basic skills, such as spelling, is very common (2007, p. 359). However, Kohn presents research which states that homework in spelling has no long term effect on good spelling (2006, p. 34).

Marzano and Pickering found that even though there are many studies about homework, very few of them present concrete ideas for how homework should be instructed. Therefore, they made a list of “research-based homework guidelines” which states that quality homework should be meaningful for the pupil and focus on new content and repetition on methods learned. The homework should be at an appropriate level for the pupil and maximize the chances of completing it without taking too much time out of the pupil’s free time; also parents should be involved to an appropriate extent (2007, p. 74-79). However, the last part is something Brock et al. oppose and instead they claim that homework should be conducted in a manner which makes it possible for the pupils to complete it without the involvement of parents since many pupils’ families may not be able to help them with their English homework (2007, p. 367).

6. Discussion

6.1. Method discussion

According to Eriksson Barajas et al., the systematic review aims to present all the evidence for the area which is being studied (2013, s. 28). However, for a study as small as this one it impossible to find and include all studies done on the subject. The original aim of this thesis was to look at studies about the wordlist homework but there were no studies on this subject so the aim changed into investigating homework in general and focusing on the Swedish elementary school. Therefore, this thesis attempts to combine the research in homework with vocabulary learning to find out if there is a more effective way of using homework. Homework is a quite large research area, but it was difficult to find recent studies which focused on elementary school without being focused on a subject other than English as a second or foreign language.

The next step was to find a theoretical perspective which could be related to both language learning and homework. Many different perspectives were examined yet cognitive linguistics was the one which seemed relatable to both subjects. The theoretical perspective made it a bit easier to know what to look for when doing the analysis of the sources more focused on homework. By reading the sources with cognitive linguistics in mind it was easier to find patterns which could be related to language learning.

Writing a literature review for the first time with limitations such as short time frame, a small pool of research as well as the difficulty finding a suitable theory has been challenging. However, the biggest challenge has been to write it in a foreign language. In the beginning it did not seem like such an ordeal when searching for sources and reading them but to write an extensive text in academic English proved to be very difficult. On

the plus side, it has made this author more aware of the difficulties of learning a language which may be an asset when teaching English in elementary school.

6.2. Main findings

From this review it becomes evident that there are many different opinions when talking about homework and homework for EFL-learners. The results from the analysis of the studies sometimes oppose each other, which creates questions. Are the results from all studies reliable and valid? If they are, why do they differ so much? Are the studies conducted in a way which makes for different outcomes or are pupils simply different?

All of the above questions are valid since, according to Westlund, it is difficult to make any general conclusions from the research results since they have been conducted in a certain setting (2004, p. 34). Cooper (2008), Kohn (2006, p. 34) and Hellsten (2000, p. 31) all agree that most studies are flawed and both Kohn and Hellsten claim this is because most research does not take other factors into account, nor do they define what they mean when they speak about homework or what it consists of, in the particular study. Kohn states that it is a well-known fact within the field that homework does not lead to learning (2006, p. 48), but according to Cooper and Marzano and Pickering homework does have a positive effect on learning. Here, the question becomes whether or not the research is valid. In addition, Hellsten claims that experts usually are very invested in their field and this might color their results (2000, p. 30).

Only the Swedish sources (Hellsten, Lundahl, Lundberg, Tornberg and Westlund) bring up the existence of the wordlist homework and they are all negative towards the use of it. Lundahl mentions that its ineffectiveness comes from the fact that the knowledge is not stored in the long term memory, a fact which Boers also brings up. Since it probably lacks meaningfulness to most pupils to learn isolated words like “torch”, “cliff” and “cucumber” the knowledge quickly will be forgotten and the time learning it has been wasted.

Before starting to write this review the author asked teachers in her region if they used this method of instruction to get an idea of how common it is. Everyone asked answered that they used the wordlist from individual texts in textbooks as homework. When asked why, the most common replies were either that it was the only way they could think of or that it saved time when planning lessons. In fact, only one of the teachers knew of a teacher at her school who did not use the wordlist from the textbook. This particular teacher did not hand out vocabulary homework very often, but when she did the homework consisted of chunks and phrases related to the area instructed in class. Perhaps this teacher has a background in education research.

Boers (2013) and Tornberg (2015) argue that to store new words in the long term memory the word must have meaning and value to the learner. Boers also mentions the importance of motivation when learning a new language and Lundberg (2007) states that many pupils find the instruction based on teaching materials boring and that they lack motivation, yet, it may be difficult for pupils to change the way they learn. Perhaps teachers who experience that their pupils are dependent on the teaching material can combine the textbook with cognitive linguistics and the results from this review. Instead of using the wordlist in the textbook to create homework, the homework could consist of chunks, idioms and phrases found in the related text. This way, the only change will be the

structure of the vocabulary homework, but the content and type of instruction will be familiar to the pupils.

Marzano and Pickering (2007) present guidelines for how homework can be structured and instructed in a way which is supported by research, and one of the ideas is to focus on new content. After reading these guidelines the author of this review thought that perhaps this can be used as something similar to the instruction model called “the flipped classroom”. This author has never tried this model but has come across it in many Swedish blogs and articles about instruction and it seems to be gaining popularity. The flipped classroom reverses the more common way of instructing, where new content is presented in class and then given as homework for the pupils to learn thoroughly. When flipping the classroom the pupils get to familiarize themselves with the content before the lesson. By doing this the pupils have already been introduced to the content and the lesson can focus on a more thorough understanding. Perhaps this is a method which can be introduced into the EFL classroom. Instead of working with a text in the textbook during class and then learning the vocabulary afterwards as homework, the vocabulary can be introduced first through a homework introduction. By flipping the EFL classroom the instruction may be able to focus more on a deeper understanding of the text. The model of the flipped classroom could also be used to learn vocabulary by creating stories, which is suggested by Boers. If the vocabulary is introduced as homework beforehand the lesson can focus on creating the stories in class.

6.3. Suggestions for further research

When researching this topic it became evident that there is very little Swedish research on homework, especially in the English subject in elementary school. In fact, no studies on the subject were found. Therefore, it would be interesting to see research done on this; wordlist homework in particular since it is so common. It would be interesting to investigate what teachers believe are the benefits of this type of instruction and why they use it. It would also be interesting to investigate what the pupils think about instruction which is focused on textbooks and getting wordlist homework each week.

Further research could focus on the teachers own childhood experience of English instruction and if their experience was positive or negative, to see if they have changed the instruction or if they do what their teachers did. This can also be connected to the question whether there are differences between the way pupils learn today and a generation back. Is it feasible for teachers to use the same methods of instruction today?

Another area for future research could be to focus on which factors play a role in the effectiveness of homework in elementary school, if the effectiveness is more dependent on, for example, socio-cultural background than age. These factors could include time spent on homework, grades, socio-cultural backgrounds, parents’ level of education, methods of instruction and pupils’ ambition.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this study is to see what research says about homework in elementary school in general and about homework for EFL learners in particular. For this thesis the following questions are asked:

- What do studies show about the use of homework in elementary school?

- How can homework be used effectively for EFL learners?

The conclusion of this review is that there is no unanimous conclusion about homework. The research shows that there is effective homework and that there is ineffective homework. However, it can be said that if teachers are to use homework in elementary school the homework should be short, at an appropriate level and consist of repetition of basic skills. The wordlist homework has little support in the research; however, it can be improved by using chunks, idioms and phrases which are meaningful to the pupils and can be understood through context instead of isolated words.

Since the research about homework is inconclusive it has to be up to each teacher to decide to use homework in the EFL classroom or not. However, the decision should always be supported by current research. Even though the studies in this review sometimes contradict each other the review may help the reader to make their own opinion about homework in EFL instruction. It is important that instruction is based on research and documented experience, not simply because it is the way it has always been done.

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