

English Learning and its Relationship with Homework in Primary Education

M^a ELENA PARRA-GONZÁLEZ

Universidad de Granada

EVA M^a OLMEDO-MORENO

Universidad de Granada

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ABSTRACT: Many factors are involved in the learning of a language, and homework is one such example to be taken into account. The main objective of this descriptive and correlational study is to study and analyze variables that can be related to homework and the learning of English in Primary Education, to ascertain and analyze the situation and offer proposals for improvement. The study sample was composed of 747 students, 679 families and 57 teachers of 4th, 5th and 6th grade of Primary Education and the respondents answered three ad-hoc questionnaires. The perceived difficulty of homework, the need for help, the frequency, marks and the effort spent on homework, can be found among the analyzed variables. The main results show that students spent more time doing English homework, but that homework for this subject was also the most difficult and required more effort and help. These findings correlate with the difficulty that families have in helping their children and, in line with other studies, suggests that further guidance on homework from teachers is necessary to minimize difficulties. After having analyzed the results, the authors' general conclusion is that careful homework design is crucial for its optimal autonomous development.

Key words: English homework, English learning, effort, difficulty, study time.

El aprendizaje de inglés y su relación con los deberes para casa en educación primaria

RESUMEN: En el aprendizaje de un idioma intervienen muchos factores y los deberes para casa son una herramienta a tener en cuenta. Esta investigación de carácter descriptivo y correlacional tiene como objetivo estudiar y analizar variables que pueden tener relación entre los deberes y el aprendizaje del Inglés en Educación Primaria, para conocer y analizar la situación y ofrecer propuestas de mejora. La muestra de estudio ha estado compuesta por 747 alumnos, 679 familias y 57 docentes de 4º, 5º y 6º de Educación Primaria. Los informantes han respondido a tres cuestionarios contruidos ad hoc. Entre las variables analizadas están la dificultad percibida de los deberes, si hay necesidad de ayuda, la frecuencia, las calificaciones y el esfuerzo empleado en los deberes. Entre los principales resultados se ha obtenido que a los deberes de Inglés se les dedica más tiempo y son los más difíciles para los alumnos, concluyéndose que requieren de más esfuerzo y ayuda. Esto se correlaciona con la dificultad que encuentran las familias para ayudar, haciéndose necesarias orientaciones sobre los deberes por parte de los docentes para reducir esta situación de dificultad y en consonancia con otros estudios. Se concluye que es crucial cómo los deberes estén diseñados para su óptimo desarrollo de forma autónoma.

Palabras clave: deberes para casa, aprendizaje de inglés, esfuerzo, dificultad, tiempo de trabajo.

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, because of the global world in which we live, more importance is given to the teaching of English than a few years ago, so much so that the most recent Organic Law for the Improvement of Educational Quality (Ley Orgánica 8, 2013) announced an increase in the number of weekly hours for teaching this subject in Spain. Additionally, the setting of homework is a somewhat controversial topic (Regueiro, Suárez, Valle, Núñez, & Rosário, 2015), with its defenders (Corno & Xu, 2004; Wooten & Dillard-Eggers, 2013) and detractors (Murillo & Martínez-Garrido, 2013). Indeed, proponents, such as Cooper, Robinson and Patall (2006) defend the benefits of homework in terms of its usefulness as a tool for student learning, while others, including Kravolec and Buell, (2000), criticize the difficulties and large amounts of time involved in completing out of school tasks. In Spain, this situation has even been debated in the Congress of Deputies (Álvarez, 2016).

Due to the factors involved in homework performance, such as time, ability, motivation, social context, light, or resources (Cooper, 1989a) and the importance and promotion currently being afforded to the subject of English, this study analyzes the variables involved in English learning and homework in Primary Education in order to ascertain and analyze the situation and offer proposals for improvement.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Homework is generally regarded as a set of school tasks which are planned to be carried out after school hours; it is important to remember, however, that homework is a multidimensional educational phenomenon that is influenced by other situations and social factors. For authors such as Ramírez, García, and Sánchez-Núñez, (2011) families and educational institutions have a direct effect on the student's academic performance. Kohn (2013) also argues that the type of homework teachers assign is a reflection of the type of teaching they undertake.

Those responsible for the report of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA, consulted in del Valle, 2015) maintain that homework can be a supplement for learning. There are, according to INEE (2014; 2015), different reasons behind the assignment of homework, such as helping students who have difficulties or enabling low performing students to learn what has been covered in class or even to offer extra incentives to the highest performing students.

The above-mentioned reasons could be related to the autonomous learning of a language, and the teaching process could be reduced to teaching techniques and strategies (Burbat, 2016) in order to obtain improved student performance. Indeed, this is such an important aspect of learning that the European Commission (2006) identified autonomous learning as one of the key competences for lifelong learning. This autonomous learning could be fostered using some of the pedagogical principles proposed by Jiménez (2008), such as encouraging responsibility, choice and flexible control and providing opportunities for learning to learn and self-regulation, which could also be developed through homework completion.

In several countries, relationships have been found between school success and out-of-school learning habits, such as reading, musical training or language learning (see Gil-Toresano, 2001; Martínez, 2002). On the other hand, the development of certain habits and skills depend on political decisions and society. In Finland, for example, reading is encouraged from a very early age and the Government provides the families of new-born children with a package that includes books; a number of these are not translated into Finnish, but appear in the original English version, thus encouraging the reading of books in the language. Similarly, television broadcasters often screen original series and films, so people are immersed in the world of the foreign language. This situation reinforces the learning of English outside school while learning in a more relaxed way and occurs according to individual taste, and not as a result of obligations imposed by the school.

In contrast, Spain does not share the same immersive characteristics and, therefore, students and families work at another level with language learning (private classes, language schools, etc.). Homework, then, is often seen as a tool which, if used well, can help to foster language learning; conversely, however, if it is mismanaged, it could prove to have negative consequences for learners (demotivation, perception of English learning as something mandatory, without self-interest). Most criticisms labeled at homework refer to time spent and the difficulty involved. In the first case, several studies conclude that homework must be completed and the appropriate time spent on it (Cooper, 1989b; Cooper & Valentine, 2001; Paschal, Weinstein & Walberg, 1984; Piñeiro, Estévez, Freire, De Caso, Souto, & González-Sanmamed, 2019); they also indicate that time spent on homework does not necessarily lead to school success. As far as homework difficulty is concerned, Cooper (2007) suggests that academic performance was improved when tasks were not very difficult or completely unknown to the students.

Several authors also defend the importance of homework as a teaching and learning strategy (Cooper, Robinson & Patall, 2006; Rosário, Mourão, Núñez, González-Pienda & Solano, 2006; Trautwein, 2007).

Rosário et al. (2011) say that positive effects are seen in who analyzed the influence of homework on English in the 5th and 6th grades of Primary Education, and concluded that the effect of homework on performance is indirect (strategies of self-regulation of learning and self-efficacy), and that this effect could help the prevention of school failure.

This is linked to the results obtained by Pan et al. (2013) who attempted to ascertain whether there were significant differences between students with high, medium and low performance in Mathematics and English with homework, and a number of motivational variables related to homework. The results show that those students with a high level of performance were usually more involved with homework.

Using a sample of students attending the last three years of Primary Education, Valle et al. (2015) also investigated the relationship between homework and attainment in Mathematics and English, and concluded that the amount of homework and the effective use of time had a positive effect on academic performance. In this study, the amount of time spent doing homework was not identified as an important factor, but a better use of the time spent on them was relevant (Valle et al., 2017).

Family environment and support are two important aspects that can also affect the factors of time and difficulty. According to Gómez (2004), improving the quality of tasks and knowing how to help their children are among the main benefits of family participa-

tion in school, and, the author suggests, this relationship should be encouraged. This aspect is highlighted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2016) that in the socio-cultural questionnaires for the PISA reports, families must complete in relation to the individualized evaluation of the 6th year of Primary Education students are asked, on one hand, to state the days they spend doing homework, along with the time they spend on it. On the other hand, parents are also asked about how many hours per week their children spend on homework, how many days a week, how often they help their children with homework planning, how often they help their children and how often they check that it has been done.

Taking into account the above-mentioned findings on the influence of school homework for English learning, this study aims to establish possible relationships between variables that have been treated independently in previous studies, including: perception of difficulty of the homework, time spent, type of homework, and family help with homework. This study will examine correlations between these variables, and, in a second level of analysis, a further exploration will examine the influence of these on the school performance in the learning of English as a foreign language.

3. THE STUDY

3.1. Research questions

This study aims to analyze the current situation of homework practices and to explore several correlations between related variables. Specifically, we will attempt to determine whether or not there is a positive correlation between English homework performance with family help and performance in the subject. The study also aims to find out whether there is a relationship between difficulty when doing English homework, time spent completing tasks at home, and academic performance. These objectives are detailed in the following specific objectives and variables:

1. To ascertain the level of frequency of English homework.
2. To analyze the type of English homework and its relationship with students preference for doing it.
3. To analyze the relationship between the time spent on English homework and the perceived difficulty.
4. To analyze the relationship between the perceived difficulty by parents, the need for help and help received, taking into account who helps, what kind of help is given, the difficulties parents may face in providing help.
5. To ascertain and analyze the relationship between the frequency of doing English homework and performance in the subject.

3.2. Method and Sample

A descriptive and correlational study was carried out for this research paper; this has been conducted in natural educational and social situations. The sample was selected from

the educational community, and 4th, 5th and 6th grades of Primary Education were chosen, because these are the school levels where homework is most commonly assigned at this particular educational stage; additionally, these groups have more social and school relevance because of the age of the students (Pan et al., 2013; Valle et al., 2015; Rosário et al., 2011).

The Ministry for Education, Culture and Sport in Ceuta provided the study with census data on student enrollment. A random multistage stratified sampling of units or conglomerates was carried out according to the academic year and type of school with proportional allocation of the sixteen Pre-Primary and Primary Education state schools and the six state-subsidized schools in Ceuta which teach the 4th, 5th and 6th levels of Primary Education. A sample of one third of the population was selected in each stratum.

Once permission from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport was obtained, the data collection process was carried out. The real sample of the students was $n = 747$, and is considered representative of the population with a confidence level of 99% and an acceptable sampling error of 4.21%. The selection of the families was also carried out from the conglomerates and their students, with the sample consisting of 679 fathers or mothers ($n = 679$ questionnaires). In some schools, since the first language of the parents was not Spanish, the head teacher facilitated the intervention of a social worker as a translator of the questionnaire with the families, thus avoiding a loss of informants. The number of participating teachers was $n = 57$, which were all the teachers who taught in the participating classrooms.

3.3. Instruments

Three questionnaires (Parra-González, 2017) were constructed ad hoc (one for each reporting group). They were designed using different types of questions (closed, multiple choice, open ended), which were aimed at answering the research objectives; they were then organized into dimensions and variables extracted from the literature review and attending to the potential sample of respondents. These questionnaires were validated with construct validity by five expert judges, who hold PhDs in educational research, and who analyzed the relevance and the adequacy of dimensions on an item by item basis. An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was then applied, with which the dimensions in which the items are grouped were extracted: Dimension 1. Socio-family characteristics (or context), Dimension 2. Reality of homework, Dimension 3. Opinion about homework and family help with homework.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

A descriptive statistical analysis was carried out for the description of each variable on an individual basis, and the correlation matrix was subsequently extracted, with which the connections between variables were determined (type of homework, time, help, difficulty, marks). In addition to the descriptive analysis, inferential statistical tests such as ANOVA have been carried out.

4.1. The existence and the doing of English homework

Table 1 shows the levels of frequency of English homework completed by students.

Table 1. Frequency of English homework

Variable	Category	STUDENTS N = 747	FAMILIES N = 679
Frequency of English homework	Never	3.2 % (24)	3.2 % (22)
	Sometimes	47.8 % (357)	45.7 % (311)
	A lot, most days	30.3 % (226)	25.8 % (175)
	Always	18.7 % (140)	25.2 % (171)

As can be observed, English homework was assigned “a lot, most days” by 30.3% according to the students and 25.8% according to the families. According to students and families, English homework is “sometimes” assigned on weekends (49.3% and 51.1%).

There was significance relationship ($p < .001$) in the responses of students and families with the “some days / never” answers to English homework being more frequent in the state-subsidized schools (between 63.7% and 69.2%) and the “many days” and “always” answers that were more common in state schools (between 22.2% and 29.8%).

The percentage of students who repeated the level is significant compared to those who did not, who “always” did English homework ($p < .001$) which stood at 66.9% (no repetition), compared to 50.7% (repetition). In addition, there is also a significant relationship ($p < .05$) to the extent that girls tend to do more English homework than boys.

4.2. Type of English homework

Regarding the type of English homework and its relationship with student preference for doing it (Table 2), the type of English homework can be observed with (non-exclusive) categories such as: studying / revising; finishing tasks for which there was not enough time in class; practicing/ doing revision exercises; reading and searching on the Internet / expanding on information. Significance relationship has been detected ($p < .05$) in students who have more preference for English homework as study (68.9%), and when it involves extension through the Internet (73.7%). There is significance relationship ($p < .05$) such that the greatest preference is associated with a greater presence of English homework for practice and/or revision and review exercises (70.8%).

Table 2. Relationship between the type of English homework and student preferences

		They like doing English homework		Chi-Square test	
Type of English homework:	Category	No	Yes	χ^2	p
Study / review	Never / Sometimes	40.7 % (46)	59.3 % (67)	4.06	.044 *
	Always / A lot	31.1 % (197)	68.9 % (437)		
Finish the task which did not have enough time to do in class	Never / Sometimes	29.8 % (75)	70.2 % (177)	1.33	.249
	Always / A lot	33.9 % (168)	66.1 % (327)		
Practice / do review exercises	Never / Sometimes	39.0 % (101)	61.0 % (158)	7.45	.006*
	Always / A lot	29.2 % (142)	70.8 % (345)		
Read	Never / Sometimes	35.7 % (123)	64.3 % (222)	2.85	.092
	Always / A lot	29.9 % (120)	70.1 % (282)		
Search on the Internet / expand information	Never / Sometimes	36.5 % (167)	63.5 % (291)	8.34	.004*
	Always / A lot	26.3 % (76)	73.7 % (213)		

* = significant to 5% ($p < .05$)

Based on the analysis of answers from the families, there is significance relationship ($p < .001$) detected in students who have more preference for English homework when it involves studying, practicing and reading; and ($p < .05$) when it involves using the Internet.

4.3. Time and difficulty of English homework

Regarding the frequency of study, it seems that English is the least-studied subject (almost 30% state they only do it “sometimes”); it is also the subject on which they spend the least time (close to 60%). The relationship between time and the perception of difficulty of English homework has been analyzed (Table 3), and there is a positive correlation ($p < .001$) for students who spend more time doing English homework when English homework is “difficult” or “very difficult” (36.2%) than when it is “easy” (18.3%) or “very easy” (14.3%).

Table 3. Relationship between time spent on English homework and its difficulty

		STUDENTS (N = 747)				FAMILIES (N = 679)			
Variable <i>Difficulty</i>	Category	<i>Spend more time</i>		Chi-square Test		<i>Spend more time</i>		Chi-square Test	
		<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	χ^2	P	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	χ^2	P
<i>English homework</i>	<i>Very easy</i>	14.3% (37)	85.7% (221)	34.80	.000*	14.1% (20)	85.9% (122)	4.85	.089
	<i>Easy</i>	18.3% (53)	81.7% (237)			18.1% (64)	81.9% (290)		
	<i>Difficult/ very difficult</i>	36.2% (72)	63.8% (127)			23.5% (43)	76.5% (140)		

* = significant to 5% ($p < .05$)

4.4. Perception of difficulty and help from families

In terms of perception of difficulty, 22.5% of the families believe that the English homework is “difficult” and 4.4% of them that it is “very difficult” for their children. In addition, students express that they occasionally need help, although 11.2% of them “always” need help and 14.5% of them need it “many times” (Table 4).

Table 4. Need help for doing English homework

Need help	Category	STUDENTS N = 747	FAMILIES N = 679
English homework	Never	41.5 % (310)	34.8 % (236)
	Sometimes	32.8 % (245)	43.0 % (292)
	Many times	14.5 % (108)	12.8 % (87)
	Always	11.2 % (84)	9.4 % (64)

Regarding the relationship between the perceived need for help and the received help with English homework, according to the students’ answers there is a significant association ($p < .001$) in all data analyzed in the relation to this aspect. The relationship draws attention

to the fact that those students who “never” need help (18.7%) tend to do English homework alone (73.7%). From this data it can be inferred that there are cases of students who need help (“sometimes” / “a lot” / “always”) and do it alone. In fact, there are 81% of students who say they “always” need help with English homework and 19% of them do it unaided (Table 5).

Table 5. Relationship between the need of help perceived and received to do English homework

		STUDENTS (N = 747)				FAMILIES (N = 679)			
Help with	Category	Do homework on their own		Chi-square test		Do homework on their own		Chi-square test	
		No (need help)	Yes	χ^2	P	No (need help)	Yes	χ^2	P
English	Never	18.7 % (58)	81.3 % (252)	208.69	.000*	26.3 % (62)	73.7 % (174)	211.95	.000*
	Some-times	66.9 % (164)	33.1 % (81)			82.9 % (242)	17.1 % (50)		
	A lot	75.0 % (81)	25.0 % (27)			83.9 % (73)	16.1 % (14)		
	Always	81.0 % (68)	19.0 % (16)			81.3 % (52)	18.8 % (12)		

* = significant at 5% ($p < .05$)

The relationship between doing English homework unaided and the year group in which the students were enrolled was also analyzed. A significant relationship has been found ($p < .001$) in English to the extent that while in the 4th year there are more cases of children who do not do their English homework alone, in the 5th grade the percentages are balanced and in the 6th grade there are more cases of students who do their English homework unaided.

Regarding student preference as to who helps with English homework, siblings appear in the first position, at 11.4%; English is one of the subjects with most preference for help, and academies and private classes are often used (12.2%) for this purpose. Additionally, according to 18.9% of students, those who actually help the most with English homework are mothers; but the percentage rises to 28.9% according to family responses. Here, the most commonly used type of help is “to explain to the children the task they have to do

in order to understand it” by 50.7% according to students and 50.2% according to families.

The textbook is the most frequently employed resource for helping with English homework (59.7%), followed by the Internet (22.3%). Other support resources are used less frequently, although 10.7% of them use dictionaries.

According to students, in relation to the level of difficulty that parents have in helping with English homework, is high as 22.1% say they find English homework “difficult” / “very difficult”). This is confirmed by families themselves, who say that English homework is the most difficult subject in terms of providing help (30% “difficult” / “very difficult”).

There is significance relation ($p < .05$) in the relationships between the help offered by parents consisting of explaining English homework so that they know what they have to do (Table 6).

Table 6. Relationship between academic performance and the type of help received

Variables	Explain homework		ANOVA 1 FEF		Tukey post-hoc test
	Yes	No	F	p	
English marks	5.90 (1.82)	6.25 (1.80)	4.17	.042 *	No > Yes

* = significant to 5% ($p < .05$)

4.5. English homework and marks

The variables for analyzing the possible effect of the frequency of doing English homework on academic performance (marks) were studied and compared through ANOVA and Tukey tests. It has been found that if students do the assigned English homework, they will get higher academic performance, as the average marks of those who “always” do it are significantly higher than the average mark of students who do it “a lot”. This is significantly higher than the marks of students who “sometimes” or “never” do it (Table 7).

Table 7. Relationship between academic performance (marks) and doing English homework

Variables	Do English homework			ANOVA 1 FEF		Tukey post-hoc test
	Sometimes / Never	A lot	Always	F	p	
English marks	4.89 (1.72)	5.66 (1.60)	6.65 (1.79)	51.98	.000*	S > MV > AV

* = significant to 5% ($p < .05$)

The analysis of the average marks for English and the time dedicated to homework, specifically on whether students spend more time on English homework, reveals significant differences ($p < .001$). The surprising finding here is that the scores obtained by students who do not spend more time doing English homework are higher than the scores obtained

by those who do spend more time on it (Table 8). However, this potential discrepancy may have an explanation if it is connected with the significant relationship found between the degree of difficulty perceived by students with English homework when they are doing it and academic performance. The average marks of students who say English homework is “very easy” is higher (6.98) than the average marks of those who say they are “easy” (6.32), which in turn are higher than the average marks of those who profess that English homework is “difficult” or “very difficult” (5.22). Therefore it is appreciated that the time spent doing homework depends on the perception of difficulty of the English homework by students. Those ones who think that English homework is “very easy” perform it in a short period of time. Meanwhile, children who think it is “difficult” or “very difficult” spend a lot of time trying to do it.

Table 8. Relationship between academic performance (marks) and the time spent on English homework

Variables	Spend more time		ANOVA 1 FEF		Tukey post-hoc test
	Yes	No	F	p	
English marks	5.76 (1.72)	6.33 (1.87)	12.25	.000*	No > Sí

* = significant to 5% ($p < .05$)

The effect of the perceived effort when doing English homework and the average mark has also been analyzed. A significant relationship in English has been found ($p < .05$) where the average mark of students who work “very hard” is higher than the average marks of the rest of the students who work less (there is no difference between those who work “a lot” “little” or “no”).

Furthermore, student preference for doing English homework has an effect on school performance, the difference is significant ($p < .001$); that is, the average mark of students who like doing English homework is higher than that of those one who do not.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

One of the conclusions of this study is that the existence of homework is reality in the academic lives of primary school children and that several aspects should be taken into consideration as they are important in relation to homework.

It has been found that students prefer doing practice and review exercises when they have to do homework.

Students spend more time doing English homework with significance relationship between the degree of difficulty students perceive and the time spent on it. In other words, students who spend more time doing English homework are the ones who find it more difficult. How homework is designed has an influence on this perceived difficulty (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001) and both the design and difficulty need to be taken into account by teachers when

assigning homework, as success may depend on these conditions. Learners require guidance and explanations about homework and tasks should be understandable and attainable in order to avoid negative effects and obtain the maximum benefits of homework. In this study, students who did not spend more time on homework achieved better results. This finding may be linked to what we have previously mentioned about homework difficulty, and it could bear a relation to what Bryan, Nelson and Mathru (1995) call the negative effect of satiation. In other words, if students are overexposed to many tasks, their interest decreases and their fatigue increase. This potential situation should be taken into consideration by teachers when assigning and designing homework.

It was also found that families think that helping with English homework is difficult. This finding should be taken into consideration by teachers when they assign or design English homework to students so that students or their families could find explanations and solutions to this homework. Another option could be to make homework more interactive, thus making the task easier for both parents and students, and ensuring that homework is more motivating. In addition, these solutions or interactive activities would serve as written and oral models, which are fundamental for language learning. In this sense, it is important that teachers have specific training on homework designing and its possibilities, given its great importance in the teaching-learning process (Parra-González & Sánchez-Nuñez, 2017). As it has been found that it is difficult for parents to help with English homework. This study confirms the conclusions of Suárez et al. (2012), who claim that many parents know how to and can help with homework, sometimes following the advice of teachers, while other parents do not help or do not know how to help. Support strategies should be proposed by schools in this regard to minimize the effects of this difficulty in providing help. This conclusion is also in line with that obtained by De la Guardia and Santana (2010), who said that teachers perceive the lack of training that families have and this aspect should be taken into account by teachers.

Students say they would rather receive help with English homework from siblings and academies or private classes, but actually mothers are the ones who help the most with English homework. The study confirms that this is the subject they find more difficult, requiring more effort and help. This information is very relevant and should be considered by teachers and schools in order to design and develop appropriate homework.

In relation to this last aspect, the Organic Law for the Improvement of Educational Quality (Ley Orgánica 8, 2013) says that parents should motivate their children to do their homework and should be part of this aspect of school life. Thus, schools could also offer extracurricular support (extracurricular classes) or provide other types of strategies so that there would be no differences among students due to lack of opportunities or help when they need it, thus supporting this family duty, creating, for example, family guidelines to be able to help their children with homework without difficulties.

The resources used at home for helping with English homework are the textbook, the Internet and dictionaries; therefore, access to a computer and internet connection can facilitate the provision of help, but only if they know how to use such resources. This point is related to the growing importance of the Internet and computers, especially in the lives of students (World Health Organization, 2016). Teachers can guide families through web pages, blogs, etc. that may contain explanations or orientations in addition to interactive activities or videoblogs that can help and motivate students, as well as encourage the writing and oral practice of the language, which can be reduced at home without the presence of the teacher.

Platforms or resources that aid repetitive writing or reading practice can also be used, since this may help Primary Education students to improve their pronunciation, especially through the production of oral language (Riquelme, Roca, & Coyle, 2017).

In relation to this, Suárez et al. (2012) believe that homework should be planned in a way that parents are involved with their children. Since help can be related to the sociocultural-economic level of families, as Ronning (2011) indicates, there is a need for the development of strategies that remove difficulties from parents when helping their children with homework. In this sense, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2016) states that homework is a burden, especially for students who have socio-economic disadvantages, and it is therefore an aspect to be taken into account by schools. Kidder (2013) argues that communication, collaboration and strong relationships create essential links between schools and families, which teachers should take advantage of for better student development.

Finally, it has been found that students who spend more time doing English homework obtain lower marks than those who spend less time doing it. This is explained because those who have a better English level think this homework is easy and therefore use less time doing it. In contrast, those students who have less academic performance in English and English homework perceive it as “difficult” or “very difficult” and spend a lot of time doing it. This explanation is accompanied by other findings (Trautwein, Lüdtke, Schnyder, & Niggli, 2006), which show that it is also one of the most difficult issues for students with lower levels of English competence and who require more help.

Thus, the time spent on English homework is not a determining variable in the academic performance; the variable of “doing the homework”, however, is important, as students who always do English homework, get better marks in this subject, they like doing it, and they also spend less time doing this homework. As an explanation for this, Gutiérrez and López (2014) say that “Spending more than 4 hours per week on homework is useless”, as more time spent on homework does not always, mean better results. It is important at this point to mention the contribution of Cooper (2007), who says that homework could lead to the achievement of better results when the task is not very difficult or completely unknown to the students. Thus, it would appear to be the case that students who enjoy doing English homework also obtain better academic results..

The conclusions obtained in this study should be taken into account to foster the positive factors of English homework in order to improve English learning and avoid situations that make it difficult and potentially demotivating.

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