

“UNIVERSITY STUDENTS’ ATTITUDE TO HOMEWORK AND THE EFFECT OF HOMEWORK ON SUCCESS”*

S. Aslıhan İleri

Abstract

Present study aims to investigate students’ attitude to language homework and find if there is a relation between homework completion and academic & TOEFL ITP success, so three subjects have been searched: 1.What is the students’ attitude to language homework?; 2. What is the effect of homework on academic success (students’ success in quizzes and mid-terms)?; 3.What is the effect of homework on TOEFL ITP success? To this end, a research was conducted at TOBB University of Technology and Economics (TOBB ETU) Preparatory School in 2011-2012 academic year. First, to learn about students’ attitude to homework 286 students answered a questionnaire. Additionally, to answer the second and the third questions a linear study was conducted throughout 2011-2012 academic year and 450 students’ homework completion grades (AP grades), quiz and midterm grades, and TOEFL ITP grades have been collected. Then statistical analyzes were done and students’ attitude to homework and the effect of homework on academic success and TOEFL ITP success were calculated.

Key words: *Student attitude, language homework, success.*

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“ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİN ÖDEVLERE KARŞI TUTUMU VE ÖDEVLERİN BAŞARIYA ETKİSİ”

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı öğrencilerin ödevlere karşı tutumunu araştırmak ve ödev yapma durumu ile akademik & TOEFL ITP başarısı arasında bir ilişki var mı bulmaya çalışmaktır. Bu bağlamda üç konu araştırılmıştır: 1. Öğrencilerin ödevlere karşı tutumu nedir?; 2. Ödevlerin öğrencilerin akademik başarılarına (ara sınav ve vize sınavlarına) etkisi nedir?; 3. Ödevlerin TOEFL ITP başarısına etkisi nedir?. Bu amaçla 2011-2012 akademik yılında TOBB Ekonomi ve Teknoloji Üniversitesi (TOBB ETU) Hazırlık Okulu'nda bir araştırma yürütülmüştür. İlk olarak, öğrencilerin ödevlere karşı tutumu hakkında bilgi sahibi olabilmek amacıyla 286 öğrencinin katıldığı bir sormaca kullanılmıştır. Ayrıca, ikinci ve üçüncü sorulara cevap bulabilmek için 2011-2012 eğitim öğretim yılı süresince doğrusal bir çalışma yürütülmüş ve 450 öğrencinin bir yıl boyunca aldıkları Ödev Yapma Notları (AP notları), ara sınav notları, vize sınavı notları ve TOEFL ITP sınavı notları derlenmiş ve hesaplanmıştır. Daha sonra istatistiksel analizler yapılmış ve öğrencilerin ödevlere karşı tutumu ve ödevlerin öğrencilerin akademik ve TOEFL ITP başarılarına etkisi hesaplanmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Öğrenci tutumu, dil ödevleri, başarı.

Introduction

“Does homework have a positive effect on students’ success?” is a question having been searched by many scientists for a long time. However, a clear answer has not been found yet because homework has many different components like teachers, students, time, type of the homework, type of the questions, given feedback etc.

The following article presents results from a survey conducted with university level preparatory school students in 2011-2012 academic year. The survey was prepared to find out students’ attitude to language homework and question if language homework has a positive effect on students’ success at university level. First, the review of the literature on homework will be presented. Second, the methodology of the study will be explained. Finally, the results of the survey will be discussed.

1. Relevance of the Study

There have been many research on the effect of homework, however, studies focused on the positive effect of language homework at university level are quite few. Therefore, as homework and success relation at university level was questioned in this study, it is believed that it may be a beneficial contribution to the field. To this end this study aims to answer the following questions.

- 1. What is students’ attitude to homework at university level?*
- 2. What is the effect of homework completion level on academic success (students’ success in quizzes and mid-terms)?*
- 3. What is the effect of homework completion level on TOEFL ITP success?*

2. Review of The Literature

There have been several studies in the field of homework for many years, so there are many findings and articles about homework. This section offers a literature review about the effect of homework on students’ success and studies on the effect of language homework.

2.1. Studies about the Effect of Homework on Students’ Success

In the last century, a lot of research was conducted on the positive effect of homework on students’ success. Among these studies, the ones conducted by Cooper (1998), de John (2000), Farrow (1999), Keith (1982) and Trautwein (2002) are outstanding. However, even those studies could not give clear and obvious answers to the question: “Does homework bring success?”

There are different views about the positive effect of homework. While, Goldstein (1960), Austin (1979), Pascal, Weinstein and Walberg (1984), Foyle (1984), Pendergrass (1985), Keith and Cool (1992), Keith et al. (1993) have found that homework has a positive effect on students' success, Barber (1986), Farrow et al. (1998) have precipitated that it does not. Moreover, Otto (1950), Coulter (1979), Friesen (1979), Harding (1979), Knorr (1981), Marshall (1983), Epstein (1983), Bents-Hill et al. (1988) said that homework does not have a significant and meaningful effect on students' success (as cited in Cooper and Valentine, 2001).

Pascal et al. (1984) carried out some studies on the effect of homework with primary and secondary school students. After reviewing all those studies, they have claimed that students who get homework have a more persistent learning than those having no homework. Moreover, regularly given homework is considerably more effective than randomly given one. Additionally, they have stated that when the homework is checked and a positive feedback is given, learners become more successful and have a more positive attitude to the lesson.

Unfortunately, there are very few studies on the effect of homework in Turkey and those studies were mostly conducted with students and teachers at primary school level. Therefore, any research on this topic is a great need in Turkey.

2.2. Studies on the Effect of FL Homework

There are many components of learning a foreign language. According to Krashen and Terrel, the time that students are exposed to the language is one of the most important factors to be a successful language learner (1983, as cited in Villas-Boas, 1998). That time is not only limited to hours spent at school. Out of school activities also help learning. Homework is one of these activities; however, there are not enough research on the foreign language homework and its effect on students' achievement (Wallinger, 2000, 484).

Foyle and Bailey conducted some research on foreign language homework and found that language homework have different effects at different levels and these effects may not be really positive, but they are not at least negative and harmful (1988, as cited in Wallinger, 2000, 484). Grounding his studies on Foyle and Bailey's studies (1988), Wallinger (2000) led some research. He found that by the passing time the number of assigned foreign language homework is doubled and 96% of language teachers have been giving homework regularly. However, those studies do not show if that given homework has brought success or not.

In 2011, Ronning undertook research with primary school students who were learning Dutch. As a result he found that homework has a positive effect on success, however, this effect is really small and unimportant (Ronning, 2011, 62-63). As his research was conducted at the same school with the same teachers, the objectivity of his findings might be high.

In Turkey there are few studies to show the effect of foreign language homework on students' success at primary school level, however, there are nearly no scientific studies on language homework at university level.

3. Method

At TOBB ETU students attend the Preparatory School for three periods. Each period lasts nearly 14 weeks. Therefore, present study lasted ten months. It started in September 2011 and finished in July 2012.

First, to be able to learn the students' attitude to homework, a questionnaire was prepared and it was answered by 286 preparatory school students. Second, to be able to find if there is a relation between homework and academic success and TOEFL ITP success, students' grades were collected and calculated.

At TOBB ETU, students have to take TOEFL ITP exam to be successful at preparatory school and pass to their departments. To be able to get TOEFL ITP a student's average has to be 65 +. There are three components that effect students' averages. First one is students' quiz grades, second one is students' mid-term grades, and the last one is students' Assignment and Project (AP) grades. AP grades only show the percentage of completed homework. The number of quizzes, mid-terms and given AP grades for each period is shown in table-1.

Table-1

The number of	AF (beginner)	A (elementary)	B (intermediate)	C*(upper-intermediate)
Quiz	3	3	3	3
Mid-term	3	3	3	3
AP grades	2	2	2	2

*They attend the school only in the first period.

** There is also D level for repeat students, but those students were not included in the study because they do not attend the school regularly.

Having 10 points from AP is very important for the students because their averages have to reach 65+ to take TOEFL ITP. To calculate students' AP grades, instructors keep grade lists and each completed homework brings students one plus. In each period these plusses are calculated twice and are given as AP grades.

As stated above, there are three periods at TOBB ETU. The number of the exams for each period is shown in the table-2. The percentages of the calculated grades for each period are also given in table-2.

Table-2

Name of the Grade	Percentages for each period	Explanation
Quiz*	30 %	3 quizzes for C levels, 4 quizzes for AF, A and B levels
Mid-Term Exam	45 %	3 Mid-Term exams for all levels
AP	10 %	2 AP grades for all levels
Reader Exams**	10 %	2 Reader exams for all levels
Portfolio Homework***	5 %	1 Portfolio homework grade for all levels

**7th and 12th quizzes for all levels were speaking quizzes. Because of the objectivity matters they were not added to the calculation.*

***In this study reader exam grades were not calculated because they were used as bonus grades.*

****Assigning and grading portfolio homework started in the second period, so portfolio grades were not calculated.*

In this study to calculate academic success, students' quiz and mid-term grades were used. In order not to affect the result AP, reader exams and portfolio grades were not added to the calculation. Therefore total percentages of quizzes and mid-terms which were equal to 75% were converted into 100 % and calculated so.

As C level students did not continue the second and the third terms, they answered the questionnaire in December and their academic success was calculated according to their first term grades. On the other hand AF, A, and B level students had three periods, so they took the questionnaire in May. Percentages of the grades that affect levels' academic success are different for each period. The percentages are shown in table 3.

Table-3

Level	The Effect of Each Period on Academic Success			Total
	1 st Period	2 nd Period	3 rd Period	
C	100 %	-	-	100
AF-A-B	20 %	30 %	50 %	100

For this research preparatory school students' all grades were recorded till the end of MT-9. Then the students whose grades were 65+ were chosen. The number of those students was 450. First, those 450 students' AP grades' effect on their academic success was calculated. Second, 270 students out of that 450 students who got 500 + from TOEFL ITP were chosen and finally their AP grades' effect on TOEFL ITP grades was calculated.

3.1. Model

In order to analyze the questionnaire relational screening model's correlation type was used. Structural validity of the questionnaire was tested with factor analysis and to make the factor analysis Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Barlett Test of Sphericity were used. Table - 4 shows the statistical results of KMO and Barlett Test of Sphericity.

Table-4 KMO and Barlett Test Results

KMO		.770
Barlett Test	Chi-square	1062.547
	Sd	171
	P	.000

To see the reliability of the questionnaire Cronbah Alfa value was calculated. Cronbach Alfa reliability value was defined as 0.801. Finally, in order to identify the correlation between attitude to homework and AP grades Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used.

4. Results

4.1. Relation between Students' Attitude to Homework and AP grades

Results about students' attitude to homework and AP grades are based on Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient analysis and those findings are shown in table-5

Table-5 Relation between Students' Attitude to Homework and AP grades

Variables		AP Grade	Attitude to homework
AP Grade	Pearson coefficient of correlation	1.000	0.250
	N	286	286

According to table-5 there is a positive correlation between students' attitude to homework and AP grades, but this relation is low ($r=0.250$ $p<0.01$). Observing a low relation statistically makes it difficult to interpret meaningfully in practice. According to these findings, there is not a significant rise in AP grades as there is a rise in positive attitude to homework.

4.2. The Effect of AP Grades' on Academic Success

Multiple regression analysis results about students' attitude and AP grades' effects on academic success are shown in table-6.

Table-6 Multiple regression analysis on academic success

Variables	B	AR ²	B	T	P
AP grade	2.177	0.375	0.660	13.980	0.000
Attitude to homework	-0.206	0.034	-0.191	-4.050	0.000
Invariant	33.044			10.875	0.000
F _(2, 283) = 97.882 p= 0.000 R=0,64					

Multiple regression analysis which was formed to define the effect of homework on students' academic success was found statistically meaningful ($F_{(4,239)} = 97.882$, $p < 0.01$). According to multiple regression analysis results, multiple regression coefficient which predicts the relation between the variables that effect students' academic success was defined as $R = 0.64$. Students' attitude to homework and AP grades explain 40 % of change in the students' academic success. When standardized regression coefficient (β) is taken into consideration, variables' order of importance which predicts the students' academic success is as follows:

- Students' AP grades,
- Students' attitude to homework

When this order of importance is taken into account, multiple regression analysis can be interpreted as follows:

AP grades have a meaningful effect on students' academic success ($p < 0.001$). Students' academic success increases as their AP grades increase. This result shows that students who complete their homework have higher academic success.

When students' attitude's effect on academic success was analyzed, it was seen that there is a negative meaningful relation between attitude to homework and academic success ($p < 0.001$). So according to the obtained result, one can say that weak attitude to homework brings higher academic success and stronger attitude to homework brings lower academic success, however, this relation is so insignificant.

4.3. The Effect of AP Grades' on TOEFL ITP Grades

Students' AP grades' effects on TOEFL ITP grades are shown in table-7.

Table-7 Multiple regression analysis results about TOEFL ITP grades

Variables	B	AR²	B	T	P
AP grade	2.323	0.034	0.216	3.088	0.002
Attitude to homework	-0.181		-0.056	-0.798	0.426
Invariant	501.014			35.423	0.000
$F_{(2,209)} = 4.767$ $p = 0.003$ $R = 0.209$					

Multiple regression analysis have shown that variables predicting TOEFL ITP grades are statistically meaningful ($F_{(2, 209)} = 4.767, p < 0.01$). According to table-7 there is a low relation ($R = 0.209$) between variables that predict the TOEFL ITP grades. When standardized regression coefficients were taken into consideration, it was seen that only AP grades' effect on TOEFL ITP grades were found meaningful ($p < 0.01$). Students' AP grades explain 3,4 % of the change in TOEFL ITP grades. Higher AP grades mean higher TOEFL ITP grades, but their effect is very low and trivial.

Results in table-7 showed that students' attitude to homework does not have a meaningful effect on TOEFL ITP success ($p > 0.01$). This indication implies that students' attitude to homework does not change TOEFL ITP grades.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1. Students' Attitude to Homework

When the relation between students' attitude to homework and AP grades is examined an inverse proportional relationship has been observed, however, this relation is not strong but weak. This means as students' AP grades rise their positive attitude to homework decreases and as their' academic success gets lower their positive attitude to homework strengthens. In another word, while successful students' attitude to homework is weak, less successful students' attitude to homework is strong. This finding may be explained with cognition. Trautwein and Köller (2003) use "cognition level" as a factor which effects doing homework. If this factor is taken into consideration, successful students who generally have high level of cognition do their homework despite having low attitude to homework. Because those students know doing homework will bring them ten points and ten points help them to reach 65+. On the other hand, students having low cognition level possess positive attitude to homework, but they do not do their homework because they may not realize the importance of doing homework. However, these are all assumptions. Further studies on the relation among homework, cognition and success can be done to reach solid explanations.

5.2. AP grades' Effect on Students' Academic Success

When the effect of homework on students' academic success was analyzed, it was seen that students who have higher AP grades have higher academic success at 40

%. This result can be interpreted in two ways. First, at TOBB ETU homework tasks are prepared by Curriculum Unit and those tasks are shaped according to the items in the course books. Testing office prepares their exams in accordance with Curriculum Unit, books and worksheets which are assigned to the students. Thus, students become familiar with grammar topics, target vocabulary, listening exercises etc. As a result it can be claimed that as students become familiar with the content and the type of the questions that they face in their exams beforehand, they get higher grades from the exams. Second, by doing their homework students do not only become familiar with the content and the questions, but they may also enrich their knowledge and as a result get higher grades from their quizzes and mid-terms. That's why one can conclude that doing homework has a really positive effect on students' success. This inference shows parallelism with the findings of Goldstein (1960), Austin (1979), Pascal, Weinstein and Walberg (1984), Foyle (1984), Pendergrass (1985), Keith and Cool (1992), Keith et al. (1993) (as cited in Cooper and Valentine, 2001).

5.3. AP grades' effect on TOEFL ITP grades

The results of the study showed that students who had higher AP grades got higher TOEFL ITP grades, but that highness is very trivial. It is only 3,4 %. That result has a parallelism with Otto (1950), Coulter (1979), Friesen (1979), Harding (1979), Knorr (1981), Marshall (1983), Epstein (1983), Bents-Hill et al.'s (1988) findings (as cited in Cooper and Valentine, 2001). By looking at that result it can be said that doing homework does not have a meaningful effect on TOEFL ITP success.

Findings of the present study revealed that doing homework affects academic success and TOEFL ITP grades at different degrees. While it affects academic success at 40 %, its effect on TOEFL ITP is only 3,4 %. There might be some explanations to clarify this high discrepancy.

First, at TOBB ETU quiz and mid-terms are prepared by Testing and Evaluation Unit. Unit members use students' course books and Curriculum Unit's worksheets to prepare their questions, so as it has been stated above students become familiar with the vocabulary and grammar topics beforehand. Therefore, students who do their homework are expected to get higher grades from their quizzes and mid-terms. On the other hand, TOEFL ITP exams are prepared by educated and experienced testers of Educational Testing Service (ETS). Hence, one can say that ETS - TOEFL ITP exams test language more effectively than TOBB ETU Preparatory Schools'

quizzes and mid-terms, so the effect of homework on TOEFL ITP score might be more meaningful to interpret.

Acquired result can also be interpreted as the inadequacy of Preparatory School course books, worksheets, quizzes and mid-terms. They may not be correct materials to get ready for TOEFL ITP. Therefore, revising the sources and the materials can be recommended.

Next reason for that high discrepancy between the effect of homework on academic success and TOEFL ITP success can be the difference between tested skills. In quizzes and mid-terms students answer listening, reading, grammar, and vocabulary questions and they complete a writing part. However, in TOEFL ITP students have only three sections which are listening, reading and writing. This means, throughout the year students complete five parts which are partially different from TOEFL ITP. Different exam compositions might also be a reason to explain why students get lower grades from TOEFL ITP. In order to overcome that difference and prepare parallel exams quiz and exam formats can be revised. Regarding this Curriculum Unit should update their worksheet and homework materials as well. By doing so TOBB ETU Preparatory School might increase the positive effect of the homework on TOEFL ITP success.

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