

Individualized English Assignment in Primary School

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Abstract

English assignment could embody several functions: consolidating language learned in class, extending students' horizon and developing students' key competence which is required in a new era of information evolution. This paper aims at raising principles as well as approaches to realize individualized English assignment in Primary school in the hope of endowing students' chances to develop as an all-round developed individual.

Keywords: English assignment; Principles; Primary school.



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1. Introduction

New Curriculum Standards (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2011) stipulates that teaching activities should not be confined just in the setting of classroom; instead, it is reasonable to extend and relate to learners' social and daily life. And primary school English assignment could be carried out in various ways with the purpose of developing students' comprehensive competence required in the *New Curriculum Standards*. And in the process of designing individualized tasks, teachers ought to consider taking consolidation of language learned in class and developing students' key competence, as the objectives of the English class under the guidance of scientific language teaching notions. Currently, challenges of giving a reasonable assignments are everywhere and it is emergent to arm primary school English teachers with a right notion of effective principles toward assignment.

2. Problems of Current English Assignment

2.1. Mechanical Drilling

The main purpose of giving assignments is to consolidate what have learned in class, and enhance students' performance after class and it is acceptable to give them some amount of multiple choices to train their deriving and guessing abilities in taking exams (Ying, 2007). While many teachers find it time-consuming to check homework, compared with the assignment of copying words or passages simply from the textbook; due to their basis of professional knowledge in terms of educational theories, teachers could not understand the conception that assignment is an essential way to complement language learned. Teachers just give assignments for the sake of assignments without a notion that assignment is a part of normal class teaching. While some teachers know the importance of assignment, they do not want to be bothered in searching materials and checking the performances of the students.

2.2. Excessive Exam-Oriented Exercise

Most teachers in China are still under the influence of exam-oriented exercises, stressing on grades. Even in primary school, tender age students still suffer from doing a lot of exercise without experiencing the joy of language learning, instead, they start to learn English in the way of demanding too much cognitive drills in the way of a high school or middle school students do immersed in endless exercises (Zhang, 2017). For instance, after a structure or a grammar point has been taught, the students are required to finish a lot of multiple choices to consolidate. Proper practicing is of no problem, but it cannot be counted as the first choice to drill the language in terms of English learning in primary school. This form of assignment imposes on students' great pressure and it is a waste of time. Before giving this sort of assignment, teachers at least are supposed to do some modification and collection as to the contents of the exercise, instead of simply giving students a piece of exercise without checking. Obviously, not all exercises are the best choice for all the individuals in class, and not all students need to finish the same repetitions of drills, let alone to say the quality of the exercise in market because of the loose supervision of related administrations.

2.3. Lack of Individuality

All the time, what and how the assignment to be done is decided by teachers, which never satisfies students' perspectives. Students, as the subjects of language learning, are supposed to have a saying in choosing what to do and how the task performance to be carried out as long as they can demonstrate they have mastered the language points and the related skills required. No doubt, they are all required to finish the same tasks like copying words, or filling blanks, neglecting each student's learning pace. *Curriculum Standards* stresses on learning process, emphasizing practice and application of language learning. And it makes that the assignment encouraging students to carry out tasks is not only beneficial to students intelligence development, helping students form a tender humor, and tough willpower and humble integrity, but also useful for cultivating students' meta-cognition.

3. Principles

3.1. In Accordance With Teaching Objective

3.1.1. Under the Guidance of Scientific Language Theory

The effectiveness of assignment could be decided by teacher's notion are: what is his/her definition of language and the functions of languages? What the structure of an English assignment and the challenges of each student in the process of doing homework? If a teacher views language learning process as a practice of communication for future social life, he/she is likely to encourage students to finish tasks in the developmental zone in a personalized way. Because of different steps of cognitive processing, most students will learn in a distinctive way; this means that teachers need to consider students' learning style, and young learners are willing to learn more if teachers can see their learning preferences. Nowadays, many teachers get various training, but they are not patient to absorb any theories as guidance, they just move it to their class without considering the target students' English competence or why teachers in the cases design the task that way. Once they give out the tasks in a raw way, and receive the imperfect results from the real students, they will drop this teaching method and complain that it is inefficient. So the first step to design a good individualized assignment is to change their views of language learning.

3.1.2. Preparations at the Stage of Teaching Planning

For instance, in the process of teaching planning, teachers should bear in mind what the assignment, as a complement and consolidation of English class, should be about, in what way it can best help students preview the contents of the next class, whether it can arouse students leaning interest as that in class even when students are not in the classroom, what's the relationship of the assignment with the class contents, is it interesting enough for students to finish in a creative way, is there a better way to check this language point, or practice this sentence structure compared with copying words for several times. It is unlikely to teach all the aspect of one structure or a set vocabulary, so teachers need to make use of the after-class activities, and design a learning project suitable for most of the students. For instance, after learning *-ing* structure, students can be asked to describe what is each member doing at 7:00 in the evening, and make sentences. It can prompt students to invite their family into the process of learning English, and the family can also be involved as well.

3.2. Developing Students' Activeness

3.2.1. Multiple Intelligence

Gardner has made it that each person is born with at least nine intelligences, including visual-spatial intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, musical-rhythmic intelligence, verbal-linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, naturalistic intelligence and existential intelligence. These are interactive with each other and can be combined to promote each other as an approach. Consequently, students in a classroom are born with different strong intelligence and poor ones, and they will be interested in the activities that cater for their strong intelligence and they will achieve the tasks better if given with a chance to choose from the ways to do the homework. If teachers can encourage students to finish assignment in a multiple intelligence way, no doubt the active engagements from students are to be expected. This is a good way to make English fun, for there will be endless fun in encouraging them finish the homework in different ways. In process, teachers, as guide, partners, cooperators, need to stimulate students' activeness and cultivate their sense of responsibility in learning and doing assignment. For example, students are encouraged to reflect their learning and understanding by giving themselves stars or stickers.

3.2.2. Layer Teaching

Beside, as for the same task to all students, they can be allocated with different levels of finishing standards progressively, providing them with encouragement to be well prepared and encouraged. We have to take into consideration of each individual's abilities of language learning. For instance, after learning numbers, students who find it easy to remember the words can be required to write the words, while some slow learners are encouraged to sing a number song, and some students can be required to recognize one to five, or some can be required to draw the numbers in shapes they like so as to increase their feeling and touch with the forms of the words. This is a good way to train students in different ways, and teachers can track a student's habit forming and performance on a task with a portfolio. The teacher only needs to understand and do a survey of a group of students and assign them different tasks, for those who are easy learners, they do not have to copy the words, however, for those whose handwriting is obscure to read, it is truly necessary to assign them additional tasks of hand writing samples of good handwriting on each piece of the paper, and it can be sustained until there appear traces of improvement,

3.3. Variety and Novelty

3.3.1. Multi-Modal Teaching

Multimodality refers to that the kind of communication on the basis of applying more than one sense, that is, audio, visual, touching, etc. through medias of images, voices, actions or languages (Royce, 2002). Written texts are bountiful in multi-modal messages with a lot of clues and it is advisable to involve students to read by applying multi-modal hints (Wang, 2010). Primary school students are active and curious about all the new things, they mostly learn in an imitating approach and tend to give a shot before they are well prepared, but lack for long term attention. So the multi-modal teaching is necessary here, because it can activate their sense in accomplishing tasks in

class, so does assignment; for instance, after learning a text, they can be encouraged to act out the story with singing, drawing, dialogues or drilling, instead of reciting the text tediously. After class learning activities can be embodied in various ways, like providing students with a short video of the language structure, or provide them with a mind map of knowledge of the whole module, and students are also encouraged to learn a song related to the unit, then they can be guided to read a story about the subject in the module. In Unit 2 of Grade five, textbook of the first semester, published by Shanghai Education Press, the topic is *Going to School*. There are a lot of pictures about transportations and communications between the characters. One review task can be designed as: students are to write and draw how his /her families go to work, or guess what are the characters saying in each picture. With helps from pictures, students will find it more acceptable to finish the homework.

3.3.2. Task-Based Learning

Varieties of assignment will, to some extent, make it fun to do homework and develop students' innovation. Only applied in daily communication, English, as a language, can be really taken as a tool for us to transmit messages. Only with novelty and features of function, will languages can be felt and absorbed as a natural way to the students, and students will be equipped with a sense of interaction, individuality and a real human instead of a machine to spit out words mechanically. For instance, group work can be an ideal way to practice students' sense of cooperation and responsibility, in which process they will learn to negotiate and respect others when there come conflicts. After learning the structure "how about you?" students can be encouraged to make a dialogue at the zoo talking about their preference of the animals or at a fruit shop doing a survey on the topic of choosing fruit. Implementing task-based learning in assignment can give students a sense that language learning can be fun, and it can be consolidated in communication with people around, and it can be fun in daily life, English is everywhere and we solve problems with knowledge learned in English and other class.

3.4. In-Time Assessment

Compared with signs of A-F, assessment in words can be more encouraging to motivate a student to be involved, for it can raise their sense of achievement. Students are supposed to do the assignment in a relaxed and enjoyable way, keeping their passion for learning and to review actively. Therefore, teachers need to come up with different sorts of solutions to sustain their engagement.

Secondly, forms of assessment can be various like peer assessment, self-assessment and teacher's assessment; and forms can be as creative as the approach of multiple intelligence, encouraging students to show their understanding in their own way, without just one single standard, as long as they can show their feelings of the language points or understanding of the knowledge. Although it is only a minor part in language class, it plays an essential role in giving students' motivation and implication that his/her performance is seen and appreciated as long as they can spend time on it.

4. Conclusion

English assignment, as a necessary part in English learning, should be stressed in terms of consolidating knowledge learned in class, practicing language and automatic learning, and it is a way to reflect how students are doing with teaching in class to teacher. However, neglecting of the significance of individualized assignment could be a huge barrier in an effective language teaching setting. Only teachers exert effort in learning more about teaching as well as students' learning styles, will they be able to design effectively personalized assignment and offer students in-time assessment, so as to establish a healthy environment for a sense of life-long language learning.

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