



## Homework in EFL Classes: Lithuanian University Students' Perceptions and Opinions

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### Abstract

Homework in the EFL context has not received much attention, especially when it is assigned to adult learners in higher education. Therefore, this article will attempt to fill in the knowledge gap in the field and provide insight into the topic from the point of view of Lithuanian university students studying English as a foreign language. The present study aimed to investigate students' opinions on their homework assignments by addressing the following research question: How do Lithuanian university EFL students perceive their homework assignments? The data were collected through an anonymous online questionnaire consisting of open-ended and closed-ended questions. The findings reveal that Lithuanian university EFL students perceive their homework assignments as beneficial, but they are not always interesting. The most useful assignments are the ones that are related to grammar. Yet, as the students pointed out, EFL homework in general should help them revise the studied materials and in addition to various language competences and skills involve the practice of other 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

**Keywords:** EFL, homework, students' perceptions and opinions, university students

### 1. Introduction

Assigning homework to students studying at primary and secondary level of education seems to be a natural part of the learning process. However, adult learners enrolling in universities hope for freedom from various rules, regulations and restrictions. The days of doing homework are often hoped to be long gone as well. This holds true for quite many study subjects where students need to attend lectures (at Vytautas Magnus University, attendance is not obligatory), seminars, midterm tests and exams, even though the necessary reading still might need to be done at home but is not considered to be homework. However, homework in EFL classes at university level is quite common, as, unlike many others, the subject of English is not really a theoretical but rather a practical class, and students study little by little. Despite the existing research on the subject of homework, information about students' perceptions is lacking (Khonamri et al., 2022). Therefore, it is a good idea to explore how adult university students perceive their homework.

According to Cadime et al., "Homework includes the set of prescribed tasks to students by teachers to be held outside school hours" (2018, p. 1). Such tasks are seen as "a learning tool for all students" (Schrat Carr, 2013, p. 169), but they increase teacher workload, too. This is the reason why modern technologies

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are now quite frequently integrated into the learning process with the aim to decrease it but at the same time motivate students (Yalçın & Şevik, 2020). Homework as such consists of the following three phases: prescription of homework, completion of homework activities outside the classroom, and feedback on the completed homework activities upon student return to the classroom (Cadime et al., 2018). However, only the second phase is often incorrectly understood as homework, since it is associated to studying individually (Ozyildirim, 2022).

Opinions on homework have always differed among teachers and students. The proponents believe in benefits of homework while the opponents hold the view that the amount of it should be reduced or homework should not be used at all, as the need to assign homework is perceived as a sign that the class time is not used efficiently and effectively (see more on effective homework in Cheraghi & Rahimi, 2024). Scholars researching homework also present conflicting findings, as some point to positive while others to negative effects of homework (Akiota & Gilmore, 2013; Kim, 2005). Quite often it is perceived as a “necessary evil” (Harmer, 2001, p. 338), once again emphasising the two sides of homework. Of course, if there are any benefits, only the students who do their homework receive them. There is a general belief that only strong or bright students are interested in doing their homework (Yalçın & Şevik, 2020), which may or may not hold true. In addition, sometimes it is a challenge for teachers to motivate their students to do it, as it happens that even the students who are active in class are not necessarily as active outside of it (Panahandeh & Chalak, 2020). As Cooper and Valentine (2001) note, throughout history, the relationship to homework has always been shifting from seeing it as a source of faster knowledge acquisition to student torture.

Homework related to various study subjects has been studied for quite some time, but in the EFL context it has not received much attention so far (Kim, 2005). Therefore, this article will attempt to fill in the knowledge gap in the field and provide insight into the topic from the point of view of Lithuanian university students studying English as a foreign language, an obligatory study subject to undergraduate students at Vytautas Magnus University (VMU). It aimed to investigate Lithuanian university EFL students' perceptions of homework assignments. Therefore, it addressed the following research question:

1. How do Lithuanian university EFL students perceive their homework assignments?

## **2. Literature Review: Homework in EFL**

Prior studies have focused on some specific aspects related to EFL homework: the use of social media (e.g. Facebook) (Datko, 2021) and ICT tools (Yalçın & Şevik, 2020), homework follow-up practices (Rosário et al., 2015), homework materials (Rodriguez-Fuentes & Swatek, 2022), student motivation related to homework (Akiota & Gilmore, 2013; Nakagawa & Leung, 2021; Panahandeh & Chalak, 2020), flipped/inverted classroom in relation to homework assignments (Djamàa, 2020; Mehring, 2016; Webb & Doman, 2016), self-regulation and homework (Cheraghi & Rahimi, 2024), online versus traditional homework (Magalhães et al., 2020) to name but a few. Most of them were experiments to some extent in order to see if specific means or methods would help to achieve certain learning outcomes through homework tasks.

It is generally accepted that homework should be assigned with a particular aim or aims in mind. Knowing about the aims and objectives helps students achieve expected results more easily (Mejía Alvarado et al., 2023). The study findings by Azizah indicate that EFL teachers at schools usually assign homework in order to “broaden knowledge, sharpen skills, and inculcate values” (2018, p. 48), whereas Kim (2005) found that English teachers at school mainly aim to teach communicative skills but do not possess enough knowledge and skills to provide appropriate tasks to achieve their aim. Loder Büchel (2016) points out that EFL teachers assign homework because of the following three reasons: they lack time to do all the planned activities in class; they want to encourage independent learning; or they wish their students would repeat

and revise what they have studied in class. In other words, EFL homework tasks may be assigned in order to achieve certain aims, but the aims themselves may differ depending on the teachers.

Nevertheless, not all homework assignments are effective (Kim, 2005). There may be a variety of reasons for this. One of them is related to study materials. Rodriguez-Fuentes and Swatek (2022) studied the impact of corpus-informed (CI) and non-corpus informed (NCI) EFL materials for the learning of grammatical constructions in the Colombian context. The corpus-informed materials indeed had a more significant effect, so the study concluded that they had a great advantage over non-corpus informed textbooks and should be used as supplementary materials for homework (Rodriguez-Fuentes & Swatek, 2022). Another reason might be related to the learning environment. The study by Datko (2021) demonstrated students' higher levels of participation in EAP homework assignments given on Facebook, as it was seen as more convenient to the students, since the platform was known to them and thus they saved a lot of time using something that they were familiar with. This kind of homework can be referred to as "e-homework" (Datko, 2021, p. 325). In other words, study materials and the environment in which those materials and tasks are placed may have a considerable effect on the usefulness of homework.

Web-based tools have recently increased in popularity in in-class and out-of-class learning, including homework provision. In the research by Panahandeh and Chalak (2020), Kahoot, as a tool for homework, increased EFL students' motivation to do homework assignments. In a different study, Yalçın & Şevik (2020) used Edmodo (which was shut down on September 22, 2022) for homework assignments with their experimental group at a vocational school. The results showed that both pen-and-paper and online homework assignments had a positive effect on EFL students' success (reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar) but the latter tasks (in electronic format) had the effect that was too times stronger (Yalçın & Şevik, 2020). Moreover, it has been suggested that the use of visual aids and the Internet in order to search for examples and ideas helps to complete EFL homework writing activities and do them at individual student's pace (Nakagawa & Leung, 2021). In fact, it has been noticed that online homework tasks are effective in the development of both writing and reading skills (Cheraghi & Rahimi, 2024). Yet, a systematic review study by Magalhães et al. (2020) revealed that there was no difference in student performance in relation to the format of homework (whether it was assigned online or not).

Furthermore, if homework is meaningful and challenging, it is more effective as well (Kim, 2005; Loder Büchel, 2016). Nevertheless, as Amiryousefi (2016) demonstrates, sometimes EFL teachers provide only grammar and vocabulary assignments as homework activities, not listening or speaking tasks, which in turn does not allow their students have any meaningful interaction and practice of these skills. Barrantes Torres et al. (2012) used communicative tasks to encourage intermediate level EFL students to do their homework for a course on conversations. After the treatment, the number of students doing homework tasks increased as opposed to textbook tasks. In addition, students seem to prefer the type of homework that helps them review what they have studied in class (Kim, 2005), but the amount of assigned homework is important, too (Harmer, 2001).

In general, studies show that students prefer to receive homework on various learning management systems, but students have some complaints, too: the interface is not user-friendly, the environment is unappealing, and other aspects are at fault (Datko, 2021). Thus, homework may be harmful if not assigned carefully (Kim, 2005). Then some other studies revealed that the effect of homework differed in relation to gender and age. For example, Cadime et al. (2018) noticed that it had a greater positive effect (in terms of grades) on girls at school, but in general younger students, such as those in elementary schools, received higher grades than older children (attending middle schools) because of homework activities they did.

As previously noted, homework does not end with students doing the assigned tasks, as they need to receive feedback on it. Rosário et al. (2015) point out that, according to their study, when Portuguese students' EFL homework at school is followed-up in some way, for instance, by correcting, discussing or even grading it, it has a positive effect on student progress, even if this is done for the time-period as short as six weeks.

However, not all homework follow-up practices affect student performance in the same way, as only checking homework orally, checking homework on the board, and collecting and grading homework had a positive impact on student performance (which was also affected by students' prior knowledge), all of which emphasise that teachers are important in the homework process (Rosário et al., 2015).

Quite some benefits of EFL homework have been reported. It increases student autonomy and independent learning (Harmer, 2001; Kim, 2005), helps to reinforce learning (Schrat Carr, 2013) and monitor students' progress at the same time (Kim, 2005). Akiota and Gilmore (2013) emphasise that over time students get used to the demands related to homework in several study subjects, including English, at school, and when they become competent in doing it, their intrinsic motivation to do it decreases. Yet, individualised homework increases EFL student motivation (Mojdehi & Bazargani, 2018).

In addition to motivation, perception of homework is important. The study by Chang et al. (2014) suggests that study outcomes are greatly affected by the students' attitude towards homework. They provide evidence that when native speakers of English study some other foreign language, their positive attitudes towards homework have a positive effect on their study outcomes, but the time spent on doing homework assignments does not seem to have the same impact (Chang et al., 2014). In Amiryousefi's (2016) research, the students believed homework could help them learn English, prepare for examinations, do revision of what they have learned, improve their accuracy, point to strengths and weaknesses, and develop both receptive and productive skills. In other words, if students believe homework is useful, it does actually become useful. On the other hand, the context of science and mathematics revealed slightly different results, as time spent on homework had low but significant effect (Ozyildirim, 2022). Thus, Ozyildirim has rightly noted that "Homework is a universal phenomenon, but all students experience it differently" (2022, p. 18). Indeed, Loder Büchel (2016) suggests that in early foreign language learning the types of provided homework assignments matter more than the time spent on them. Nevertheless, it happens that EFL homework is done just before the class and in a rush (Amiryousefi, 2016), which does not make it very meaningful.

In general, at school level, foreign language homework is seen as more important than that of other study subjects, especially because of time constraints and learning mostly in the classroom context, but both teachers and students believe that students do not always take their homework assignments seriously because they do not see their value (Kim, 2005). This may or may not apply to the university context that the study to be described in the following sections focuses on.

### **3. Methodology**

This study was conducted at Vytautas Magnus University (VMU) in Lithuania in spring 2024.

#### *3.1 Participants*

As the study employed random sampling, two randomly selected English upper-intermediate level classes were approached. The students were informed about the study and invited to participate. The participants were 32 students whose age ranged from 18 to 22 years old or older: 50% were 19, 28.1% – 20, 18.8% - 22 or older, and 3.1 % included those who were 21. The students were enrolled in general English classes, which, according to the university regulations, are obligatory to all university students until advanced level proficiency is achieved. 71.9% were female students and the rest of the sample (28.1%) consisted of male students. Gender imbalance may vary in separate classes, since VMU students make their own schedules and choose the time, place and teacher of their classes. Both classes of the participants were taught by the same teacher in a physical classroom in the mornings four times a week. At the same time, it is important to emphasise that VMU is the only liberal arts university in Lithuania and mostly focuses on the humanities and social sciences but also has study programmes in the hard sciences, sports and agriculture. The students in the English classes were from different study programmes. 87% of the students were first year students (freshmen), studying at university level for the second semester. All of the participants were Lithuanians.

### *3.2 Instruments*

In order to obtain information about students' attitudes towards EFL homework, based on the literature review, an anonymous online questionnaire was compiled on Google Forms. The questionnaire included both open (8) and closed (16, including the questions on demographic data) questions and statements to help to reflect on students' perceptions and opinions on the topic.

### *3.3 Procedure*

#### *3.3.1 Data collection*

The online questionnaire was distributed to the students by providing a link to it on Moodle during one of their English classes. First, they were explained about the purpose of the study and that the questionnaire was completely anonymous and would not have any effect on their course grades. Their participation was voluntary and they could opt against filling it out if they did not want to answer the questions. As the students were able to use their cell phones to fill out the questionnaire (only some used their laptops or tablet computers, but quite many VMU students usually carry several devices to their classes, as some use electronic rather than paperback books), everyone was eager to participate, since it was perceived as an interesting in-class activity. There was no time limit given. Usually ten to fifteen minutes was enough.

#### *3.3.2 Data analysis*

The data collected through the questionnaire were processed using MS Excel (for quantitative data) and thematic analysis (for qualitative data), as students' comments were read numerous times, recurrent (salient) themes were identified, grouped and/ or quoted and generalised. It was believed that open-ended questions and thematic analysis would help to explain or provide more insight into some of the answers to closed-ended questions and/ or show a bigger picture of students' perceptions towards and opinions on EFL homework that closed-ended questions may fail to reveal. The received data are discussed not necessarily in the same order in which the questions appeared in the questionnaire, as some data obtained from different questions turned out to be related, and thus it was deemed useful to discuss them together. The data were also compared to the findings of other studies. However, at times this was not applicable, as the present study focused on EFL students' opinions and perceptions, while numerous other studies in the field often employed particular treatment in relation to EFL homework. Thus, the nature of such studies was experimental and the data appeared incomparable.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

To begin with, the participants were asked to indicate what, in their opinion, homework as such involves. 34.4% thought it was related only with the completion of homework activities outside the classroom, while the rest of the sample – 65.6% – understood homework in a broader sense, as it includes giving homework, completion of homework activities outside the classroom, and feedback on the completed homework. That is, from the students' point of view, homework is not really homework unless it is done and/ or checked and feedback on it is provided. It is also important to note that there were no students believing that homework is the act of giving homework. This means that without the active involvement of students, homework assignments cannot be seen as homework. This is in line with the definition of homework provided by Cadime et al. (2018).



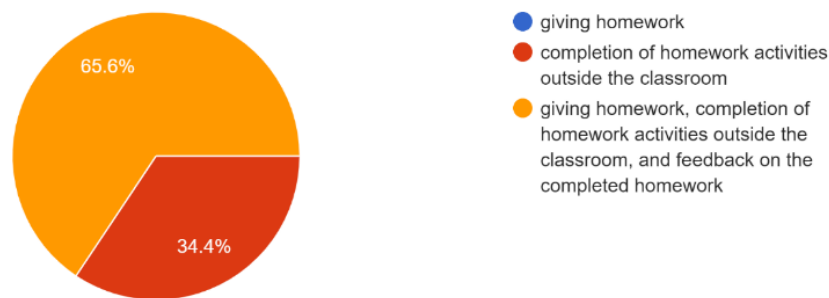


Figure 1. What students consider to be homework (Q4)

These students had studied English for quite some years: previously at school level and later one semester at the university, as most of them started their English studies at VMU at intermediate level (according to the CEFR), not as beginners. Thus, their experiences and opinions reflected in the study findings further will be related to their learning of English mostly before their enrolment at university.

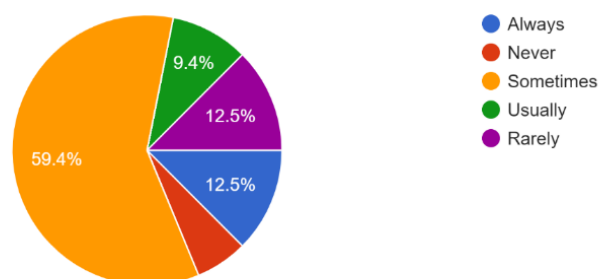


Figure 2. How often do you find your EFL homework interesting? (Q5)

While reflecting on their overall experience on EFL homework (Figure 2), 59.4% found it interesting sometimes, 12.5% - always, and 9.4% - usually, whereas 12.5% found it useful only rarely, and 6.3% had never had EFL homework tasks that would be interesting.

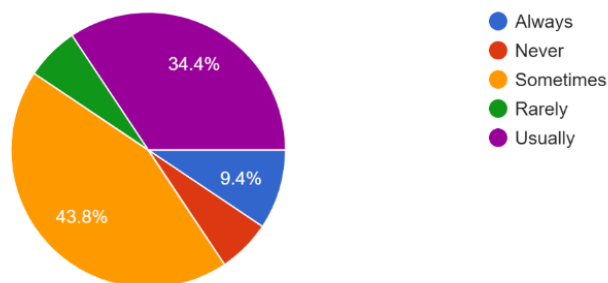


Figure 3. How often do you find your EFL homework boring? (Q7)

The previous question was asked in a different way once again to cross check students’ opinions (Figure 3). Then only 9.4% always found their EFL homework boring, 34.4% - usually, 43.8% - sometimes, 6.3% rarely, and the same amount never think it is boring. In other words, it seems that EFL students believe that their EFL homework is somewhat boring sometimes, but at the same time, more students perceive it as sometimes interesting. Thus, student opinions may depend on the way a question is asked.

It was expected that if many students find EFL homework boring, they would like to create homework tasks for their peers that are not boring. Interestingly, 68.8% of the students would not wish to do it (Figure 4). As thematic analysis of open-ended explanations revealed, these students doubted their creativity and/ or their English skills and were worried it would be time-consuming and difficult to create such tasks. 18.8% were not sure. This may be due to the fact that the participants were not teacher trainees and might not know how to create tasks well, even though none of them indicated so. On the other hand, in upper-intermediate level English classes, the students make presentations and are required to create activities in relation to their presentation topics to engage their audience after the delivered presentations. Some students create true/ false activities on Kahoot, some others create crosswords with some key words from their presentations or other interesting activities, usually using online tools. Thus, they would be able to create similar tasks, but the tasks would be done at home, not in class. Only 12.5% would like to create homework tasks for their peers or the whole class to do. Their provided examples (Q24) mostly involved group/pair work or online activities (without specifying them). One student suggested interviewing a peer and filming it as a prospective task (Student 9, subsequently S9).

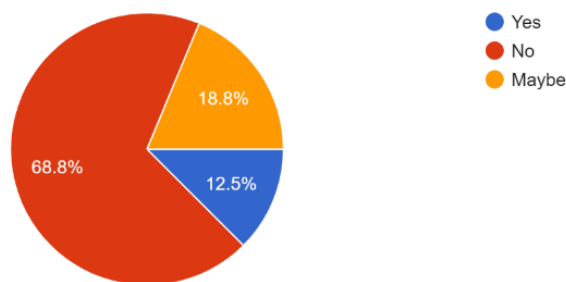


Figure 4. Students on creating EFL tasks for other students (Q23)

On the other hand, there were no students who thought they had never found EFL homework useful (Figure 5). Thus, even if students may find homework not always interesting, it is seen as useful to greater or lesser extent. 15.6% of the students find it always useful, 28.1% - usually, and 37.5% sometimes benefit from it. That is, in one way or another EFL homework is beneficial for 81.2% of the students. Yet, 18.8% rarely have had experience of useful homework, and there could be a variety of reasons for this.

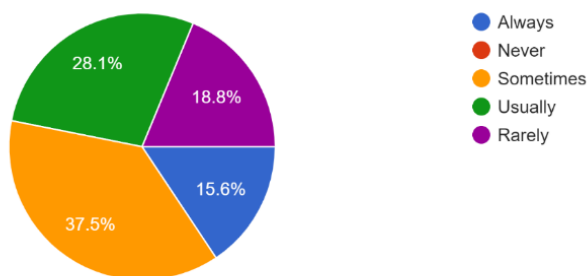


Figure 5. Usefulness of EFL homework (Q6)

The participants were asked to provide examples or describe the kinds of EFL homework tasks they believe are beneficial for them (Q9). Having read and grouped the answers to this open-ended question, thematic analysis revealed that grammar tasks were indicated most frequently, but tasks related to other competences and skills were mentioned as well, for instance, reading, writing, and vocabulary. However, some students believe their EFL homework tasks should involve more than the acquisition and practice of particular language skills. The examples are provided below (the language here and elsewhere is not corrected):

*In my opinion, I find it useful when homework tasks are associated with world-wide news or phenomena like global warming or politics. Also, I think homework should be given to learn more about a subject that we were learning at lecture. (S9)*

*EFL homework tasks should aim to enhance various language skills, promote active engagement, these tasks not only reinforce language skills but also encourage independent thinking, creativity, and cultural awareness. (S24)*

This demonstrates that EFL homework should be related to the world outside the classroom, topics important in contemporary society, but at the same time, in addition to language skills and competences, it should be engaging and promote various 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, such as creativity, cultural awareness, critical and independent thinking. Similar findings were observed in the Turkish EFL context in relation to examinations, as students believe their exam tasks do not promote creative thinking but should (Uzun & Ertok, 2020). Only then homework would satisfy students' expectations and needs. This idea is in line with the conclusion drawn in the study Barrantes Torres et al. (2012) that suggests that only the homework that fulfills students' needs complements learning.

Not beneficial tasks (Q10), on the other hand, were different for individual students, as some students identified grammar (which some others had previously pointed out as beneficial) and reading tasks, while some others indicated that gap filling, presentations, speaking scenarios or tasks that do not affect their grade directly are among such tasks. There were also some students who could not point out any EFL homework tasks that would not be beneficial, as they said that all the tasks they are given are useful.

As receiving feedback on the tasks done at home is a part of homework, the students were enquired about it as well (Q8), as it is related to the previously discussed usefulness of homework. It is interesting that 28.1% of the students rarely receive such feedback. As a result, their homework tasks may not seem to be useful, as they are not sure if they do the tasks correctly and cannot improve if they do not. Moreover, 3.1% never receive feedback. Thus, 31.2%, which means, almost a third, of the students often or never know how successful they are in EFL homework. However, 15.6% of the students always receive feedback on the tasks done at home, 21.9% - sometimes and 28.1% - usually. As feedback is an essential part of every homework task, it was expected to receive very different answers than those that the students provided. Yet, such answers mean that quite a substantial part of the students was not able to benefit fully from their homework, which may be one of the reasons why it could be seen as boring, since they did it for the sake of doing it. In contrast, qualitative results by Khonamri et al. (2022) showed that homework tasks were perceived as boring because they were not creative, repetitive, lacked meaning and were time consuming or there was a lot of homework and thus it was boring to do it.

When the study participants needed to reflect on their feelings in relation to their previous experience of EFL homework (Q11), 81.3% of them indicated homework as being neither easy nor difficult, that is, its difficulty could be seen as just right. This is probably natural, since homework tasks should usually focus on something covered in class, so that the students could have more practice outside the classroom. Nevertheless, 9.4% found it easy and 3.1% - too easy, which probably did not make it interesting, while 6.3% had experience of too difficult homework, when the given tasks were too hard. The causes of difficulties in homework were quite different in the study by Khonamri et al. (2022), in which the students perceived their homework as difficult (35 %, which is more than five times more than in the present study)



when they did not pay attention in class, did not understand what they needed to do, did not learn what they should have, were anxious or stressed because they needed to do homework.

If they had a chance, slightly more than one half of all the study participants (53.1%) would still choose to do their EFL homework (Figure 6), while others (46.9%) would choose just the opposite. In general, students may have some graded homework tasks, while some other homework tasks would not be graded, only checked in class. It is pleasant to see these particular students would do them no matter whether they are to be evaluated by providing grades or not.

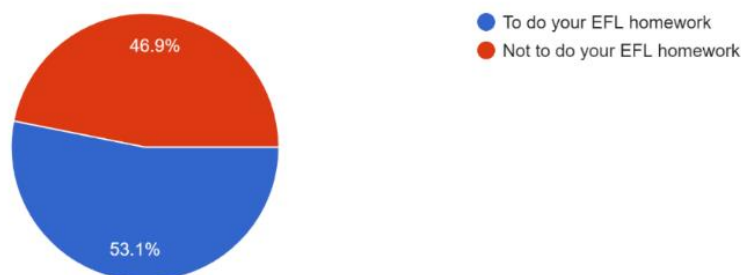


Figure 6. If the students had a chance, they would choose (Q12)

The motivating factors to do their EFL homework (Q13) would be different for individual students. Here are the four categories that could be identified, having analysed open-ended answers through thematic analysis: drawing on personal experience, creative tasks, interesting activities/ topics/ facts, and tasks involving YouTube videos or Kahoot. In other words, the students would be motivated by the tasks that would interest them in learning rather than those that would bring some external gain. This does not agree well with some of the results by Khonamri et al. (2022) that suggest that students' motivation was caused by teacher or peer approval, a prospect of getting a good grade or preparing for examinations in little time.

Then the students reflected on why they think EFL teachers provide them with homework (Q14). All the open-ended answers involved such verbs as "improve," "revise," "practice," "learn," "gain," "develop," "understand," and "help." As a result, it is possible to claim that the students realise that homework is given with a particular aim that is related to their learning process and should help to achieve their learning outcomes. This is in line with the results obtained by Khonamri et al. (2022) that revealed the students opinion that homework helps to learn better (49.2% indicated so), practice (90.8%) and review (85.8 %). On the other hand, the findings by Barrantes Torres (2012) suggest that only 16% of the students have a wish to review materials through homework tasks. The difference may be due to the context of the study that focused only on communicative tasks in homework assignments in order to increase the number of students doing their homework. Thus, communicative opportunities outside the classroom were valued more rather than a possibility to revise or review various linguistic aspects covered in class.

On the other hand, despite them knowing the reasons why homework is assigned, not all students do it every time (Figure 7). 21.9% do it sometimes and 40.6% - usually, but a quite significant number of students, involving the rest of the sample, work on it always when they are given such tasks. Thus, even if they find it boring, EFL students are quite likely to do it. Similar results were demonstrated by Khonamri et al. (2022), as 94.1 % of the students said they did their homework: 40.8 % of students always did it (in comparison to 37.5% in the present study) and 35.8 % usually did it (in comparison to 40.6% in the present study).

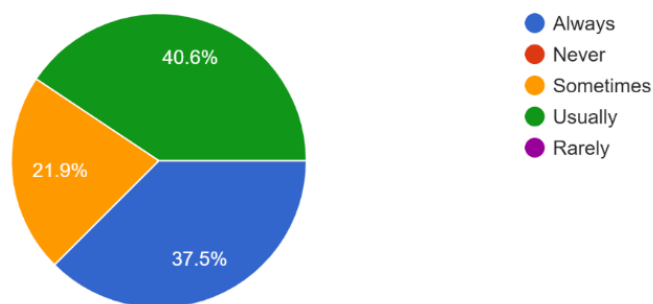


Figure 7. Frequency of doing homework (Q15)

The amount of time they usually spend on their EFL homework (Q16) differs greatly depending on individual students and their skills. The options were not indicated in the questionnaire, so the study participants were able to write what was true for each of them. The allocated time varied from 10-15 minutes to 1-2 hours, but as some students pointed out, the amount of time greatly depends of the actual tasks assigned to students.

Yet, more than a half of all the study participants (53.1%) believe they get enough (or the right amount of) homework in their EFL classes (Figure 8). That is, they would not prefer to have more of such tasks and practice English outside of their classroom more. In that case, they would spend more time doing it. Other answers were a lot smaller in numbers: 18.8% - receive much homework, 15.6% - not much, 9.4 – too much, and 3.1% receive no homework. The results agree well with those of Khonamri et al. (2022), especially the ones reflecting on the right amount of/ enough homework, as 50 % of the students in their study believed so.

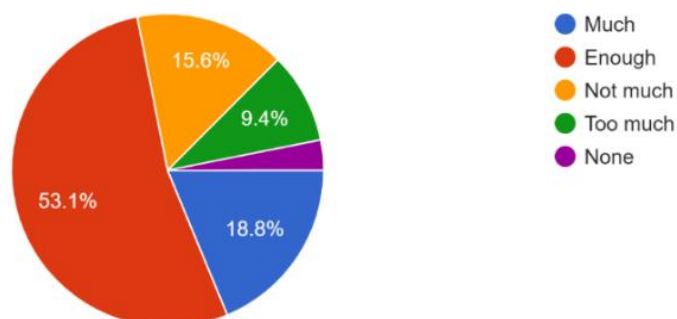


Figure 8. The amount of EFL homework (Q17)

Thematic analysis of the reflections on why it is or it is not a good idea to provide EFL homework (Q18) included such reasons as: 1) it is good when there is not enough time to do all things in class (which is usually the case), when students can practice, revise and learn more; 2) it is not good when students already have a great workload or a lot to do for other study subjects. In this case, uninteresting homework activities are mentioned only by several students. In the first case, it seems that EFL homework definitely helps the students revise what they have learned in class (Figure 9): 65.6% indicated so, and the rest of the sample (34.4%) indicated it may be true. There were no students believing EFL homework does not help them revise.

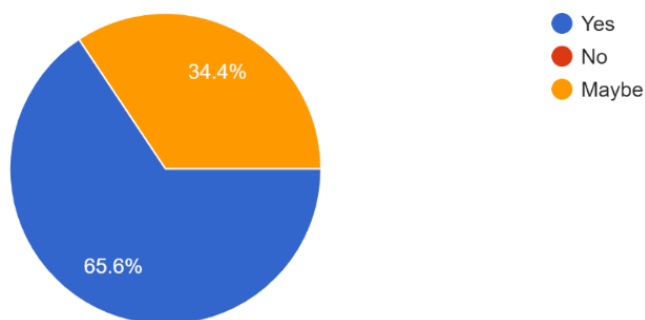


Figure 9. EFL homework is helpful for revision (Q19)

As Figure 10 reveals, 40.6% believe there may be and an equal number that there is a relationship between their knowledge or grades and them doing or not doing their EFL homework tasks. This is, in a way, consistent with the previously discussed questions on homework being helpful for revision, practice, development and improvement of their skills. However, 18.8% of the students could not agree about the existence of such a relationship.

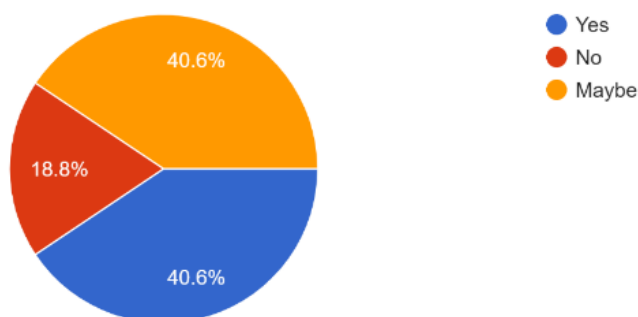


Figure 10. Relationship between English knowledge/ grades and homework (Q20)

Here are some examples from students reflecting the positive answers (positive effects attributed to homework) in terms of the relationship between homework and English knowledge or grades (Q21):

*If you don't do your homework, you not spend enough time to make sure your grades will be fine. (S6)*

*Well, as a student, I believe there's a connection between putting effort into homework and improving my understanding of English. Grades often reflect the dedication I invest in my studies. (S14)*

*If I do not do my homework, then I might not remember some things I have learned so there is a higher possibility for me to fail on tests or exams. (S26)*

Here are some opposing opinions:

*I would say sometimes, cause most of the time I do homework just because I need them to do and not because I want to so it doesn't have a big impact to my grade. (S23)*

*There are other much better ways to learn a language than homework. (S28)*

The latter opinions are not supported by other studies, for example, by the one of Khonamri et al. (2022), which revealed that the older the students, the more association could be seen between homework (including its amount) and student achievements. In addition, by doing a quantitative synthesis of research, Cooper and Valentine (2001) concluded that learners who did their homework generally performed better than those who did not.

The study was also interested in learning about the students' preferred homework follow up practices. The questionnaire provided a chance to choose as many EFL homework follow up practices as needed to reflect on the students' experience (Figure 11). It appears that the most popular ones are checking homework for completion (46.9%), answering questions about homework (37.5%), and checking homework orally (31.3%). The use of blackboard/ whiteboard or collecting and grading homework were seen as less popular, as each of these options made up 18.8%.

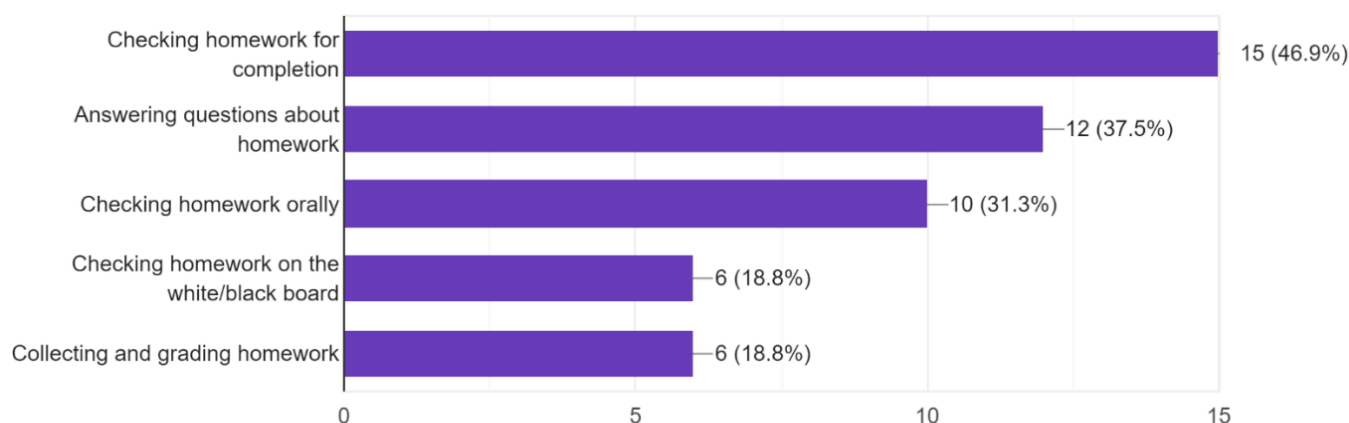


Figure 11. EFL homework follow up practices (based on Rosario et al, 2015) (Q22)

It is important to note that, since the students were able to choose more than one option, usually they preferred several follow up practices to be used at the same time or particular ones depending on the task(s) they did for their homework. Other reviewed studies did not research EFL students' preferences in this respect.

## 5. Conclusion

Most Lithuanian university students, participating in the study, perceive their EFL homework assignments as beneficial, but the tasks are not always interesting and, at times, they find them boring. This experience might be related to the fact that some students claim such tasks are not always checked or are never checked and, in turn, feedback on them is not provided. In addition, some students have experience of receiving easy or too easy homework tasks, which probably are not very beneficial. However, the students would not wish to take initiative to contribute in making their homework tasks more interesting by creating them themselves. This is related to their self-perceived lack of creativity or proficiency in the English language. Another set of reasons is their lack of time and possible difficulty in preparing such tasks.

As the research participants rightly noted, EFL teachers provide them with homework tasks in order to help them practice English outside the classroom and in turn achieve their study outcomes. This may be one of the reasons why over a half of the students would still do their homework tasks even if such tasks were optional. On the other hand, in reality, less than a half of the students usually does EFL homework. Thus, the results seem to be contradictory, as the students claim they would do their homework assignments by

choice, but, in fact, fewer of them actually do. Moreover, over a half of all the students pointed out that they do not get enough homework tasks to practice English outside the classroom. In other words, even though the students do not receive enough EFL homework, they do not always do the homework assignments they do get.

As far as the most beneficial homework assignments are concerned, grammar tasks are seen as the most useful ones. Nevertheless, at the same time, students believe that English homework should not be only about various language competences and skills, such as reading or speaking, even though they do agree on their great importance. Their English homework assignments should also be about other, for example, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, that need to be practiced in addition to language skills and competences. This means that the most beneficial EFL homework tasks are those that help to practice grammar and other, not necessarily language-related, skills.

Around two thirds of the students believe homework helps them to revise what they have studied and/ or learned. This means revision tasks are seen as beneficial as well. Furthermore, quite a significant number of students has a belief that there is a relationship between their gained knowledge and skills in English and/ or received grades. That is, when students do their homework, they can learn more and in turn later receive higher grades, while it is just the opposite when homework is not done. EFL homework assignments are not beneficial if they do not help to revise the studied materials and practice various skills, but in general, not beneficial tasks are different for different students. The preferred EFL homework follow up practices include checking homework for completion, answering questions about homework, and checking homework orally.

## 6. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This study offers promising, yet limited evidence that homework is useful for adult EFL students at university level. The discussed findings may help EFL teachers to assign more effective and meaningful homework to Lithuanian university students and follow-up on it in order to help them to have positive learning experience, master learning objectives and achieve expected study outcomes. The results may also help to organise teacher training on the subject of homework or assist in institutional policymaking. Nevertheless, the study is limited in the number of its participants and the context in which it was carried out. Consequently, a different context with, for instance, higher or lower proficiency students of English, may produce different results.

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## Appendix

### Questionnaire on EFL Homework (on Google Forms)

#### 1. Gender

- M
- F

#### 2. Age

- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22 or older

#### 3. Year of study

- Year 1
- Year 2
- Year 3
- Year 4
- Master's degree studies

#### 4. What do you think homework is?

- giving homework
- completion of homework activities outside the classroom
- giving homework, completion of homework activities outside the classroom, and feedback on the completed homework

5. How often do you find your EFL homework interesting?

- Always
- Never
- Sometimes
- Usually
- Rarely

6. How often do you find your EFL homework useful?

- Always
- Never
- Sometimes
- Usually
- Rarely

7. How often do you find your EFL homework boring?

- Always
- Never
- Sometimes
- Usually
- rarely

8. How often do you get feedback on your EFL homework?

- Always
- Never
- Sometimes
- Usually
- Rarely

9. What kind of EFL homework tasks do you see as beneficial? Please provide examples or describe the tasks.

10. What kind of EFL homework tasks do you see as not beneficial? Please provide examples or describe the tasks.

11. In general, do you find your EFL homework:

- Too easy
- Easy
- Neither easy nor difficult
- Difficult
- Too difficult

12. If you had a chance to choose (probably you usually choose to do or not to do it anyway), you would choose:

- To do your EFL homework
- Not to do your EFL homework

13. What kinds of tasks would motivate you to do your EFL homework more? Please provide examples, describe them, mention materials or tools, etc.

14. Please provide any reasons why you think your EFL teachers give you homework.
15. How often do you do your EFL homework?
- Always
  - Never
  - Sometimes
  - Usually
  - Rarely
16. Please indicate the approximate amount of time you usually spend on your EFL homework. (for example, 15minutes, 1 hour, etc.)
17. How much homework do you get in your EFL classes?
- Much
  - Enough
  - Not much
  - Too much
  - None
18. Why is it a good/ not a good idea to give EFL homework to students? please provide your answer.
19. Do you think your EFL homework helps to revise what you have learned in class?
- Yes
  - No
  - Maybe
20. Do you think your knowledge of English and/ or grades are related to you (not)doing homework?
- Yes
  - No.
  - Maybe
21. Please explain your answer to the previous question in the box in more detail.
22. Which of these homework follow up practices (based on Rosário et al., 2015) do you prefer? Choose as many as you need.
- Checking homework for completion
  - Answering questions about homework
  - Checking homework orally
  - Checking homework on the white/black board
  - Collecting and grading homework
23. Would you like to create a homework task for your peers (to follow up the material covered in class)?
- Yes
  - No
  - Maybe
24. Please comment on your previous answer in the box below (e.g. if you said yes, what type of task would you create? Would it be an online task?, etc.)