Chapter 20

Integrating a Learning Management System into a Writing Course: Achievement, Attitudes, and Strategies

Mehrák Rahimi
Shahid Rajaee Teacher Training University, Iran

Seyed Shahab Miri
Middle East Technical University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

In this chapter the impact of using a leaning management system (LMS) to manage homework assignments on students’ achievement in a letter writing course was investigated. Additionally, the relationship between students’ attitudes toward the online system and their motivated strategies for learning was investigated. Two groups of students participated in the course. The experimental group used the LMS as the homework assistance to submit their homework for one semester. The control group did and delivered their homework using paper-and-pencil approach. The result of the data analysis revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in the writing post-test. Further, the students were found to have positive attitudes toward using technology to manage their homework and this attitude was found to be related to their motivated strategies for learning. The motivated strategies were found to be related to achievement in writing, while attitudes towards the system were not.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of any educational system is to promote teaching effectiveness to guarantee a better learning outcome. Teachers, teaching approaches and styles, individual and contextual factors, and instructional materials are among the variables that have been the foci of the mainstream education research in the last decades for their possible effects on promoting learning outcome.

One contentious issue in the domain of teacher policy is homework (Falch & Rønning, 2011) and its role in students’ learning. On the one hand it is believed that homework is a key element
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in students’ learning as “homework is the main intersection between home and school” (Falch & Rønning, 2011, p. 2). On the other hand, it is suggested that homework is ineffective in raising achievement due to the fact that most of the time it is boring and/or too demanding (Sharp, 2002).

The moderate version of this stand, however, seems to focus on the way homework is assigned to students; and how it is done and delivered back to the teacher. Where to do the homework (e.g., home or school) and how to do it (e.g., individually or in pair/group) are among the important issues the experts consider when they underscore the educational values of homework. Further, students’ ability, their motivation towards the mastery of the subject matter, the quality of instruction, and amount of instructional time, especially time spent on doing homework, are key factors to be considered when the effect of homework on achievement is examined (Keith & Benson, 1992).

One way to make homework more beneficial and helpful is using technology to ease the whole process of doing homework, delivering it and receiving the teacher or peers’ feedback on it. It is suggested that students’ constructive engagement in doing the assignments and teachers’ appropriate feedback heighten students’ attitudes towards and willingness to do the homework (Keyvanpanah & Sharifi, 2011). Further, students’ self-efficacy and self-regulation beliefs and strategies play an important role in increasing their sustained effort and motivation to do the homework and learning outcome (Bembenutty, 2009). In other words “assignments [which are] completed on regular basis are expected to result from student’s higher academic self-efficacy which eventually leads to higher academic achievement” (Mehmood, Ahmed, Sultana, & Irum, 2012, p. 700).

Self-efficacious students believe that homework completion would lead to successful learning outcomes. High self-efficacy and high expectations of success would lead to persistence, using different strategies, or seeking help when faced with difficult homework tasks. Self-regulated learners monitor their work, which provides internal feedback on progress (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011, p. 198).

In the same vein, there are certain reasons why students lose their interest in doing homework and subsequently they do not continue delivering assignments. This happens when the homework is cognitively difficult for students; the students do not have any support but their parents at home to help them do the homework; the instruction for doing homework is not clear; the students are under the pressure of time to do and deliver the homework; and after homework submission they do not received any feedback from their teacher (e.g., Sharp, 2002; Trautwein, 2007; Patall, Cooper, Robinson, 2008). Many teachers and experts have shown interest to ease the whole process of homework completion and submission and arising students’ interest in completing their homework.

Some studies have emphasized the educational advantages of using computer-supported homework in comparison to traditional paper-and-pencil homework. Using technology-supported homework can promote students’ interest and motivation to do the homework, ease grading the homework for the teacher, and save time for both teachers and students (Mendicino & Heffernan, 2009). Further, as technology-supported learning environments promote self-regulation beliefs and skills of students, it is logical to assume that managing the whole process of homework completion will be done more efficiently by the help of technology. It is known that doing homework and self-regulation are related as “during homework completion, students engage in self-regulation by motivating themselves, inhibiting distractions, using strategies to complete home-work, managing time, setting goals, self-reflecting on their performance, and delaying gratification” (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011, p. 195). Technology provides the perfect opportunity for the realization of students’ self-regulatory strategies/skills in completing their homework assignments.