

# Factors in Using Workbooks and/or Worksheets for English Classroom Assessment

Hsieh, Li-Hsueh

Classroom assessment can facilitate students' learning process by assessing their competencies, and using written forms is substantially more efficient than the alternatives, such as performance assessment or portfolio assessment. However, various factors, such as time and labor constraints, may encourage or hinder teachers' use of classroom tests. The aims of this paper are to explore the use of classroom assessment, including (1) to identify a favorable assessment form (workbooks (**WBs**) or worksheets (**WSs**)); 2) to discover possible factors underlying English teachers' decisions to use WBs or WSs in class; 3) to explore whether test takers' backgrounds influence their decision-making process; and 4) to justify the three most prevalent reasons for using WBs or WSs. For this study, 1,472 students taking a graduate school entrance examination wrote an English essay discussing whether they would use WBs or WSs if they were English teachers. Hand-written notes from 1,442 valid passages were collected and analyzed. The responses indicated a preference for teaching with WSs rather than WBs, and the candidates' reasons for using the forms were classified into 14 categories. Candidates interested in different graduate programs expressed varying preferences. Above all, pedagogy, practice and emotion emerged as the top three categories, and suggestions are offered to improve educational curriculum design.

Keywords: classroom assessment, English teaching, multiple assessments

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## **1.Introduction**

### **1.1 Background**

Children are often too young to understand the importance of learning a foreign language, and they require motivation to learn in a friendly atmosphere. Teachers play an important role in designing assessments for effective learning activities. Assessment of learning is defined as, “part of everyday practice by students, teachers and peers that seeks, reflects upon and responds to information from dialogue, demonstration and observation in ways that enhance ongoing learning” (Klenowski, 2009, p. 264), implying that assessment is part of the teaching process and helps teachers to understand students’ learning. Teachers can conduct assessments relevant to their teaching processes and can use assessment anytime and anywhere (Wu, 2002). Structured assessment activities/tasks, take-home assessment tasks, and portfolio assessment are methods that can preserve and enhance a positive learning atmosphere (Ioannou-Georgiou & Pavlou, 2003; Liu, 2003). However, there is no consensus on the effect of completing homework (HW) for students (Gill & Schlossman, 2003). Indeed, according to Trautwein and Koller (2003), it is unclear whether HW is related to achievement. Cooper (2001) pointed out a positive general effect for HW, but it is inconsistent across grades. HW is an instructional practice for teachers, and it may improve achievement with extended learning (Marzano & Pickering, 2007a & b).

Many teachers have negative attitudes toward the implementation of tests (Hong, 2007). For example, teachers often disagree with the significant influence of the Basic English Assessment in Taipei City on their teaching and testing strategies. Teachers’ opinions are correlated with their background factors, and some teachers propose reducing the frequency of classroom assessments, to reduce the pressure being imposed on students. Nevertheless, tests are inevitable; they continue to pervade students’ lives whether students and teachers like them or not. Recently, assessment methods have become more dynamic, individual, multi-dimensional, authentic, and contextualized because they assess both the process and cognitive aspects of learning (You, 2007). To ease the burden on students preparing for summative assessment, formative assessment provides a cumulative method of determining competency because achievement tests are designed to cover a long period of learning and may contain material that does not reflect everything that has been learned.

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The first language assessment standards are ineffective for testing young learners, and standardized tests may diminish students' self-esteem or lead to test-oriented teaching. Therefore, classroom assessment is advocated for young learners (Yang, 2008), which can immediately provide diagnostic feedback and enhance learning motivation (McKay, 2006). Teachers are encouraged to design classroom assessments in terms of students' needs and characteristics to promote learning (Yang, 2008). According to Heaton (1991), tests written by the teacher are the most useful because the teacher is familiar with his/her students' strengths and weaknesses as well as the skills and language areas on which the teacher wishes to focus. As a result, even the best-prepared tests are not ideal for the class.

Teachers should give students the freedom to experiment with language without making them aware that their competence is being judged. To promote learning, students should have opportunities to "play with" language in a classroom without being formally graded. Thus, teachers establish opportunities for language learning practice games that allow the students to listen, think, take risks, set goals, and process feedback from the "coach," and they recycle materials through the skills that students are trying to master (Brown, 2004). Classroom assessment, such as writing workbooks (WBs) or worksheets (WSs), can help to assess students' performance, improve teacher effectiveness, and benefit certain groups of individual students. However, WBs and WSs have received insufficient attention from education reformers (Liu, 2003). Teachers can observe students' performance and make evaluations during practice activities, and these observations are integrated into teachers' instruction (Brown, 2004). "Self-judgments of ability are related positively to the likelihood of future behavior, engagement, and positive expectations" (Beghetto, 2005, p. 379). Important insights into possible reasons and actions can be elicited by the examination of performance attributions (Beghetto, 2005), and this is why it is intriguing to study the use of both WBs and WSs in English classes.

### **1.2 Purposes and Questions of This Study**

Assessment should be conducted informally. According to Brown (2004), most informal assessment in the classroom is formative assessment, "evaluating students in the process of 'forming' their competences and skills with the goal of helping them to continue that growth process" (p. 6). In this case, WBs and WSs can be considered formative assessments in terms of the on-going learning process related to units of instruction. The teacher's delivery and students' internalization of feedback in performance help to form learning.

Because reading and writing practice are highly important, this study examined graduate student candidates' opinions about whether they would use WBs or WSs in teaching English classes. These students were pursuing further education in a teachers' college (where the graduate school curriculum at the university mainly related to teacher development at the time the study was conducted) and had shared similar experiences in learning English. The aims of this paper were four-fold: 1) to identify a favorable assessment form (WBs or WSs); 2) to discover possible factors underlying English teachers' use of WBs or WSs in classes; 3) to explore whether the test takers' backgrounds influence their decision-making processes; and 4) to justify the qualification of the three most prevalent factors.

Four questions arose to guide our understanding of this investigation. First, which practice modes, WBs or WSs, would the subjects prefer to use in English classes? Second, were there any differences in the subjects' answers in terms of their graduate programs? Third, what reasons did the subjects give for their answers, and finally, what are the dominant categories of reasons emerging from the data?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 The Implementation of Multiple Assessments (MA)**

Recent educational reform has opened multiple learning paths for teachers. These include prescribing MA as a focal guideline for assessing students' schoolwork performance and paying attention to three aspects (i.e., cognition, psychomotor skills, and affection) in students' learning processes (Lee, 2004, quoted in Her, 2006). In 1998, the Ministry of Education (MOE) designated 15 types of evaluation methods for junior high school students, among which HW was one type. All evaluation methods should be implemented in multiple ways, in terms of time (summative/formative), form (test-based/task-based), content (four skills), tools (paper-and-pencil/ computer), evaluator (teacher/student), students' learning process (portfolio), etc. (cited in Yeh, 2001). MA provide teachers with more options for evaluating students. They provide a comprehensive picture of students' competence and respect the individual development of knowledge and ability. However, according to Liu (2003), MA still lack reliability and validity, and barriers for their use exist (e.g., time, budget, and emotional attitudes).

There are a number of other problems in implementing MA: creating a standardized situation (Wu, 2002); large class size and teaching load (H.M. Chen,

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2003); traditional testing culture, students' complaints, lack of professional knowledge, overuse of worksheets (Chen, 2006); the need of assessment education, perceived assessment competency, teachers' beliefs (Yang, 2008); classroom management problems, parents' doubts about grading objectivity (Chen, 2003); lack of objective grading, uneasiness and fear among teachers, test design, implementation (Klenowski, 2002); teachers' unwillingness to conduct assessments, parental expectations and pressure, parents' and students' disagreements with policies, peers' or colleagues' cooperation and pressure (You, 2007), and lack of collegial and administrative support, low achievers, and mixed-ability classes (Hsu, 2003). Though varied, these problems can be grouped into five areas: policy decisions, conceptual confusion, practical problems, technical problems and tensions (Klenowski, 2002).

The traditional assessment, which focuses on the paper-and-pencil (P-and-P) test, is not completely worthless; it can still be valued and used (Brown, 2004). For example, Liao (2007) compared beliefs about MA among pre-service and in-service teachers and found that 90% agreed that carrying out activities in English and interacting with others could facilitate English learning. Further, they also thought that the use of MA, singing, role-playing, multimedia equipment and teaching about culture was important. However, more pre-service teachers (55%) than in-service teachers (33%) agreed that P-and-P tests should be used widely in classes (Liao, 2007).

Under the influence of the Nine-Year-Joint Curriculum Guidelines (NYJCG), formative and activity assessments should be increasingly promoted in primary English classes. Primary English students should cultivate learning attitudes, methods and culture comprehension (Yeh, 2001) more than the content objectives of language learning, which can be postponed until the junior high level. Teachers should decide what to teach and should test the linguistic form or the communicative function, the two components in the communicative curriculum (Yalden, 1987).

The testing results under the NYJCG focus on understanding learning difficulties and progress, and therefore, multiple testing times should be provided in class. However, traditional testing, such as standardized tests that measure linguistic forms and language ability, is not conducive to multiple testing. Instead, formative assessment with various activities or games may be applied in classes (Yeh, 2001). Formative assessment, such as exercise assessments that include traditional HW, projects or activities, can be used to measure students' language ability, creativity, practicality, quality and diligence. Grading criteria for HW and exercises depend on

the features of the class, but various forms of activities can measure additional areas (Yeh, 2001).

Hsu (2003) listed effective MA for evaluating students in class, including portfolios, journals, activity-based assessments, oral tests, role-playing, group work observations, and student-teacher conferences. Among these assessments, the most frequently used (by six teachers out of nine) method was performance assessment. Three combined this with worksheets, two with workbooks, and one with portfolios; three used only workbooks. Hsu claimed, “Worksheets provided by the pre-packaged curriculum kits or developed by the teachers themselves were used to evaluate students’ English abilities in listening, speaking, reading, and writing” (Hsu, 2003, p. 44), which indicates the multiple functions of WSs.

In another study, elementary school English teachers positively perceived MA, but preferred using tests and peer assessment (Chen, 2003), followed by P-and-P tests, classroom observations, performance-based assessment, and task-based assessment (Chan, 2004). In Chen’s (2006) study, junior high students and their teachers were observed using MA in class. In each class unit, students needed to complete WBs and WSs, but the proportion of grading was very low (only 3% and 4%, respectively). Additionally, they had three traditional term examinations worth 50% of their final grade (Chen, 2006). Students were assessed based on their language skills, interest and confidence in using English, ownership of learning, extra-linguistic abilities, and critical thinking (Chen, 2006).

There are various levels of popularity of MA. In particular, different types of WSs can be autonomously collected or created and can become part of a portfolio of work. WBs and WSs should be creatively designed to reach the level and function of alternative assessments.

## **2.2 Language Learning Strategies in a Taiwanese Setting**

“Chinese learners do not see memorization as rote learning; rather, they would use understanding to help them memorize the materials.... [and] memorize the materials to help themselves understand” (Sachs & Chan, 2003, p. 182). Chinese students may develop the ability to memorize and understand according to contextual demands. They may also, “see meaningful and active memorizations as related to understanding and learning” (Sachs & Chan, 2003, p. 189). Assessment contributes to learning. In an overview of beliefs and practices about young children’s English learning (Rea-Dickins & Rixon, 2000), teachers working in EFL

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contexts felt that assessing learners was appropriate. Parents frequently demanded test results, and students needed to learn the content of the language objectives and develop an awareness of the nature of the foreign language (Rea-Dickins & Rixon, 2000). According to advocates of the Audio-Lingual Approach (ALA), teachers can use a variety of drills to substantiate and reinforce newly learned information, and the ALA has proven to be effective in the training of foreign language learners. Chinese learners, especially, are used to memorizing forms to learn a foreign language (Liao, 2002). If students are seldom required to remember information from a text, then their desire for understanding new knowledge will not continue.

Specific cultural variables, such as learning approaches, teaching methods and ideologies, and the context of different settings may result in learning techniques that are either effective or useless (Cheng & Dornyei, 2007). In Taiwan, the most important motivational macro-strategy is appropriate teacher behavior (Cheng & Dornyei, 2007). However, teachers in Taiwan do not focus on “making learning tasks stimulating,” nor do they use strategies for “promoting learner autonomy” in classes. Instead, they endorse effort and diligence as the most crucial criteria in Taiwan. However, teachers may have a completely different concept of “promoting learner autonomy” (Cheng & Dornyei, 2007). Furthermore, many teachers in Taiwan view entertaining or humorous activities as detrimental to learning and instead value effort, perseverance and diligence. They may overemphasize learning results rather than the learning process because of only using P-and-P exams to assess students’ performance (Cheng & Dornyei, 2007).

Under the new MOE policy that allows schools to choose their own textbooks, students often face with uncertainty, heavy burdens, and difficulty applying what they have learned to future standardized exams. Teachers are responsible for helping to promote learning motivation. At the same time, popularity of happy learning cannot sacrifice learning efficiency (Chen, S.W., 2003). Huang (1997) advocated that effective teaching should include reviewing the previous lesson, stating objectives, displaying materials in steps, distributing practice work, giving clear explanations, determining the lesson situation, guiding practice, giving and correcting feedback systematically, providing HW practice and monitoring progress, and reviewing lessons monthly. HW assignments such as WBs and Ws can be completed in class, which challenges teachers to create these assignments to promote student motivation and autonomy. It would be interesting to understand whether teachers would use WBs or Ws to help students practice ideas learned in class and the reasons for their adoption of particular methods.

## **2.3 Studies on the Implementation of HW**

### **2.3.1 Definition of HW**

HW is defined as, “work assigned to students by teachers that was intended to be done outside of school time” (Cooper, 1989). HW assigned daily is more effective than sporadic assignments (Paschal, Weinstein & Walberg, 1984).

However, the effectiveness of HW for instruction has been debated for decades. Most teachers consider daily foreign language practice through HW to be crucial to successful language learning, but there are many variables that contribute to HW effectiveness (Wallinger, 2000). Motivation has the strongest effect on HW, followed by academic coursework, gender, and quality of instruction (Cool & Keith, 1991). Which factor plays the most important role for HW effectiveness among students in Taiwan?

Little emphasis has been placed on HW because teachers do not want to punish students for errors made during practice. However, students are not motivated to do HW when it is not graded (Wallinger, 1997, cited in Wallinger, 2000). There has been little research on HW effectiveness in foreign language education (Wallinger, 1998), and the results for various subjects have often been inconclusive. However, it seems that HW is not harmful to student learning and achievement (Foyle & Bailey, 1988). Therefore, HW remains part of foreign language instruction, possibly because the public generally expects teachers to regularly assign HW (Wallinger, 2000).

### **2.3.2 Factors in Assigning HW**

A number of factors contribute to assigning HW, including practice, preparation, extension, integration, parent-child communication, directives, punishment, community relations (Lee & Pruitt, 1979) and creation (Thomas, 1992). Overall, practice is the most frequent reason, far ahead of extension and integration (Wallinger, 2000).

Xu and Yuan (2003) suggested that reasons for assigning HW included review, practice, and reinforcement of what was taught. Teachers and parents believe that it can develop personal responsibility and study skills, but students’ reason for doing HW is to meet the expectations of their significant others.

Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) identified 10 purposes of HW from the adults’ point of view: practice, preparation, participation, personal development, parent-child relations, parent-teacher communications, peer interactions, policy,



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public relations and punishment. However, it is important to explore whether students' perceptions of doing HW are related to their achievements. It is also important to understand the reasons why teachers assign HW to clarify teachers' role in the HW process. These 10 purposes are defined as follows:

Practice: "Some HW is designed to give students opportunities to practice skills taught in class, increase speed, demonstrate mastery, retain skills, review work, and study for tests" (p. 182);

Preparation: "Teachers may assign HW to ensure that each student is ready for the next lesson" (p. 182), by completing unfinished classroom activities and assignments and internalizing what has been learned in school;

Participation: HW may increase students' involvement in learning, applying specific skills and knowledge, and conducting projects (p. 182);

Personal development: HW is used, "to build student responsibility, perseverance, time management, self-confidence, and feelings of accomplishment; also to develop and recognize students' talents in skills that may not be taught in class" (p. 182);

Parent-child relations: HW may be designed to guide and promote positive communications between parents and children. Parent-child conversations may help reinforce the importance of schoolwork, HW, and learning and may promote students' understanding of how schoolwork is used in real-life situations (p. 182);

Parent-teacher communication: HW may be, "designed to enable teachers to inform and involve all families to become aware of topics taught in class, how their children are progressing, how to support their children's work and progress, and how to connect with the teachers" (p. 182);

Peer interactions: HW is used, "to encourage students to work together, and motivate and learn from teaching others" (p. 182);

Policy: The chief purpose is, "to fulfill school or district policies for a prescribed amount of HW" (p. 183);

Public relations: HW is used, "to demonstrate to parents and to the public that a school has a rigorous academic program and high standards for student work" (p. 183); and

Punishment: HW is used, "to try to correct problems with student conduct or productivity...or to punish students for inattention or poor behavior" (p. 183).

These purposes are not mutually exclusive. However, research is needed to examine whether the design and content of HW match the teachers' stated purposes and how different HW designs affect student outcomes.

### **2.3.3 Examples of HW study**

Exercises, grammar, vocabulary, and WBs are the most effective types of foreign language HW for beginners. For intermediate learners, creative writing, grammar, exercises, and readings are most effective, whereas for advanced learners, composition and writing, grammar, skits, and translation matter the most (Wallinger, 1997, cited in Wallinger, 2000). The above results showed that foreign language teachers consider grammar equally important for students of all levels, but exercises are crucial for beginners. "Exercises" seem to be another term for "WSs." Therefore, exercises/WSs should be emphasized for lower-level students' foreign language learning. Do students in Taiwan have similar perceptions of WSs (exercises) as the most useful type of HW?

HW is assigned unequally to students at different levels. For example, 98% of teachers who taught advanced courses assigned HW. In contrast, only 77% of students in vocational classes, 79% of special education students, and 83% of general education students were assigned HW. Increased HW cannot be assumed to lead to higher achievement, but teachers may naturally assign HW due to the nature of the courses they teach, and higher-level students may be more motivated to do it (Cool & Keith, 1991). However, in language skills classes, students would benefit from HW related to skill-based learning practice until they develop good study habits (Cooper, 1989, Thomas, 1992).

Tavares (1998) found that a majority of teachers (72%) considered HW as important as other class activities, and most teachers (64%) assigned HW in every class. HW is both part of and an extension of the class. Therefore, teachers should find an appropriate time to connect HW with an activity, especially when correcting it (Tavares, 1998). Bada and Okan (2000) found that 42.6% of students in Turkey preferred written tasks set by the teacher, but the majority (92.2%) liked using real-life situations to develop their language competence and performance. Communicative activities seemed more attractive to Turkish students. Do students in Taiwan prefer teachers' written tasks, such as WBs and WSs?

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“The HW tasks will have more in common with the assessment tasks underpinning school grades than with the standardized tests, so achievement links with HW more strongly when the teacher-determined grades achievement measure is used” (Warton, 2001, p. 157). If students are to be convinced of the value of HW and the need to invest their time and effort in it, then teachers and parents must be aware of the types of work most likely to lead to academic improvement. There are negative aspects to HW: it may increase social disadvantages due to the inequality of home resources, increase differences between high and low achievers, promote cheating, decrease motivation, increase anxiety and boredom and limit time for other activities (Warton, 2001, p. 158). However, Cooper (1989) argued that by increasing positive attitudes to school and encouraging student responsibility and autonomy, HW encourages intrinsic interest in learning.

Competent teachers are endowed with various qualities, such as theoretical knowledge, pedagogical skills, interpersonal skills, and personality (Brown, 2007). Appropriate administration of curricula, teaching and assessment are three daily activities for teachers. Under the influence of the NYJCG, teachers’ roles have been modified, and they now must act as curriculum designers, active researchers, and motivators for students while continuing their own professional development (The MOE, 2001). Designing appropriate assessments to improve teaching and learning is one aspect of this complex role. In an environment of multiple intelligences, teachers must pay attention to individual learning situations and students’ needs. The NYJCG lists important objectives for learning English: teachers should cultivate students’ interest and improve methods of learning English, and students should actively complete the HW assigned by teachers and access extracurricular English materials. How can the students fulfill these expectations?

A study of English teachers in Tainan City (Hsieh & Hsiao, 2003) showed that the majority of these teachers asked students to do WB exercises for practice in or after class, but very few English teachers used WSs. Subsequently, many English teachers complained that their students did not have the expected proficiency level in reading and writing. This situation may prevail at the beginning stage of English education.

Tsai (2005), the first to investigate junior college students’ perceptions of English HW in Taiwan, found the following motivating factors for HW: reasonable

quantity and comprehensibility, interesting content, expectations of tests/reports, usefulness, rewards for good work, individual choice (major), audio tapes/CDs, Chinese references, teacher's review of HW, group work, punishment for non-completion, study schedule, and teachers' verbal encouragement. Tsai found that the extrinsic force (requirement and evaluation) from teachers seemed to influence students to complete HW.

Moreover, Wu and Kuei (1997) investigated anxiety about and attitudes toward formative assessment among 233 fourth and fifth graders in a natural science class. A pre-test and a post-test revealed the following: 1) fear and anxiety were lowered; 2) peer relationships were improved, and confidence and interest were increased; 3) scattered practice helped in memorizing more information; and 4) some students liked the former way of testing. Another classroom assessment of fifth-grade science students revealed that performance-based assessment was more interesting, engaging, and intellectually challenging than P-and-P tests, but students cared about grades and in the end preferred P-and-P tests, "the form that they knew best and that they believed would help them achieve their grade" (Stefanou & Parkes, 2003, p. 156). Therefore, assessment types may influence goal orientation.

McCalman and Adeyemi (2001) examined the cross-cultural attitudes of pupils towards HW. HW was viewed as a crucial element in the process of improving pupils' attitudes to learning, bringing increased independence in learning and helping students achieve higher standards. Botswana's policy makers seemed to agree that public examination success depended on hours of HW, which should be encouraged at all levels. Translated into a HW agenda, this implies that schools should regularly evaluate their HW policies to ensure their efficiency and effectiveness. The amount of time pupils spent doing HW was seen as an important variable to ascertain whether more HW improved achievement. The results showed the correlation to be strongest when the schools imposed methods, such as rote learning and practice. Most HW activities depended heavily on the use of textbooks. However, the children in the sample displayed a positive attitude towards HW, with 57% of the British sample and 56% of the Botswanan sample stating that they enjoyed their HW. The overwhelming majority (91% of the British and 75% of the Botswanan samples) felt that HW helped them to learn, and 75% of the British and 65% of the Botswanan samples expressed the view that HW was useful for life outside school.

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Voorhis (2003) advocated a TIPS approach and found that: 1) well-designed and interactive HW affects family involvement; 2) instructions for family involvement increased HW completion and accuracy; and 3) TIPS students earned higher report card grades. These results alerted educators to the importance of implementing subject-specific strategies to increase family involvement and improve results for students.

Students with intrinsic reasons for doing HW were less likely to attend class with incomplete HW and earned higher grades, suggesting that high school students might benefit from family involvement in HW (Xu, 2005). Xu and Corno (1998) found that teachers and parents believed that HW helped to reinforce school learning and develop self-regulatory attributes, but children only thought it helped them to understand the lessons well.

“Students’ moods while doing HW were generally negative” (Xu, 2004, p. 1789). Requiring HW can create a tension between promoting achievement and developing good study habits because teachers put emphasis on achievement rather than students’ attitudes, ideas and behaviors (Xu, 2004). HW places high demands on students’ work habits and fills their daily lives with learning. Doing HW also helps students develop desirable work habits (Xu, 2004). There are five main features of HW management: arranging the environment, managing time, focusing attention, monitoring motivation, and monitoring and controlling emotion (Xu, 2004). Children from different backgrounds learn favorable autonomous strategies from their parents. Therefore, teachers are responsible for designing purposeful, engaging and high-quality HW (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001) and making it a fulfilling and enriching experience for children (which can promote both academic achievement and desirable study habits) (Xu, 2004).

Because HW such as WBs or WSs usually occupies students in Taiwan for the majority of time after school, teachers should make the most of HW to create additional learning opportunities with strategies. Several strategies that may motivate students to learn can be applied to HW assignments. These include the following: 1) setting an appropriate level of challenge; 2) adapting tasks to students’ interests; 3) including a variety of elements; 4) incorporating game-like features into the exercise; and 5) including task appreciation (Lee, 2002). The last point indicates that, “Teachers need to help students appreciate the value of academic activities and

make sure that they can achieve success on these activities if they apply reasonable effort” (Brophy, 1987, p. 41). Therefore, teachers play important roles in promoting students’ learning progress in doing HW.

## **2.4 Forms and Reasons for Using WSs/WBs**

WBs are often commercially produced and may not contain appropriate practice for tests. Therefore, teachers may have to produce WSs for their own use. Conversely, WSs can be challenging drills for students. There are different types of WSs (Gower, Phillips, & Walters, 1995): sheets of paper photocopied from a master, cue cards or role cards to use in paired work and group work, or even homemade games. Additionally, there are four main reasons for teachers to use WSs: 1) to copy a text to which students do not have access; 2) to adapt published materials; 3) to write the teacher’s own exercises; and 4) to make cards for communication activities (Gower, Phillips, & Walters, 1995). In this paper, the first three uses were emphasized. In a speech given at Caves Books, Wolf (2003) also listed another three functions of WSs: mechanics, they can save time (Birdsall, 2003) and focus students’ attention; special needs, they can be adapted to various classes and can supplement textbooks; and educational value, they are new and interesting, help to organize information, and provide students with active learning.

Lee (2004) pointed out that the abundance of cognitive WSs contradicted WBs and P-and-P tests and suggested a means to create alternative WSs to extend the lesson from the central concepts of the textbook. There are six elements in the process of developing alternative WSs. Teachers should: 1) inform students of the learning objectives; 2) lead the learning process; 3) list assessment items; 4) accumulate teaching experience; 5) transmit WS files, and 6) cultivate reading habits (cited in Her, 2006). WSs are created as a product of teaching activities, so they should be designed with simplicity, integration, and understanding in mind. Additionally, they should contain the concepts of cognition, psychomotor skills and affection. Alternative WSs may help teachers create a more effective learning atmosphere (Lee, 2002, Lee, 2004, Yeh, 2001).

Teachers can benefit students in different groups of academic achievement in a large class by using WSs (Harmer, 1998). Students should be able to apply what they have learned instead of practicing rote learning. Thus, teachers should, “use different material covering the same language areas and different tests containing similar

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features or involving similar tasks” (Heaton, 1991, p. 10). WBs and WSs can show students each set of goals that they have reached on their way to fluency and thus are an effective means to guide students with practice. Indeed, students can complete daily quizzes and gradually amass information in an interesting format. If students are good at daily tasks, then they will develop an interest in learning English. Therefore, writing WSs and WBs is valuable when the teacher can provide feedback about students’ performance immediately after the daily tasks are completed.

The basic principles of the NYJCG aim are to cultivate students’ life-long learning abilities. Traditional WSs focus on the copying and cognitive stages, which make achieving these principles difficult. WSs should be designed in terms of process direction and the following four main points: informing learning goals, leading learning processes, determining main points of assessment, and recording the assessment results (Lee, 2002). The students’ abilities should be analyzed through cognitive, affective and psychomotor stages. In game-like assessments, WSs should be attractively designed to enhance students’ interest (Lee, 2002).

WSs should be the base on which assessment design is added, and assessment should be incorporated into WSs such that, “effective integration of teaching and assessment can be achieved” (Lee, 2004, p. 121). Some teachers doubt the suitability of HW and worksheets for their students because no measuring tools fit all students. The solution is to equip teachers with professional competency to examine the available measuring tools, assess their advantages and disadvantages and analyze whether they are suitable for their classes with modifications (Lee, 2004, p. 122).

Junior high students can be overwhelmed with WSs. “Using WSs to involve students in the pedagogical tasks and provide learning evidence is a common practice in the Grade 1-9 Curriculum...WSs were adopted for presentation and demonstration, not for improvement...WSs were given far more frequently than what students should and could undertake” (Chen, 2006, pp. 12-13).

Murphy and Decker (1990) surveyed Illinois high schools and found that answering textbook questions (50%) was the most commonly used HW, followed by WSs (25%) of teachers surveyed. It is rare to see HW related to critical thinking skills. For what purposes do teachers in Taiwan use HW and WSs?

In summary, knowledge about MA can be developed to help decide when and

how to determine teaching strategies and support student learning using testing. The best way to begin is to examine teachers' preexisting assessment beliefs (Beghetto, 2005). Compared with studies on teachers' beliefs, fewer studies of teachers' beliefs pertaining to testing have been conducted (Green, 1992), a fact that increases the importance of the current study.

### **3.Method**

#### **3.1 Subjects**

Of the 2,008 candidates who registered for the exam for admission to eighteen graduate programs at a teachers' college in Taiwan, 1,472 candidates actually completed the exam. Of these, 1,442 registered their opinions on the exam sheet of the English test for the essay question, and 1,437 indicated one of the four alternatives for the questions in this study. Table 1 lists the distribution of the number of subjects for each graduate program, which ranged from 267 subjects for Elementary Education to 23 subjects for Social Studies and Applied Math.

#### **3.2 Instrument**

English exams can be designed in different forms, such as questions and answer, and essay questions. The easiest form to elicit and analyze students' ideas is through writing composition. The written discourse from the English exam can be used as the base for content analysis in this study.

The English exam for admission into the graduate programs at the teachers' college consisted of two parts. The first part contained multiple-choice questions for reading comprehension, and the second part was an essay. The essay topic read as follows:

“A workbook (WB) is defined as a book to help you learn a particular subject, which has questions in it with spaces for the answers. A worksheet (WS) is defined as a specially prepared page of exercises designed to improve your knowledge or understanding of a particular subject (*Collins Cobuild English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*, 2001). If you were an elementary school English teacher (ESET), would



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you use self-designed WSs (**SDW**) or just use the textbook or WB for your students to practice in English class? There are advantages and disadvantages to using both. Which would you choose? Why?"

The written discourse elicited from the subjects' answers to the above question formed the basis of this study.

### **3.3 Procedure**

The researcher was assigned as a writer for the graduate examination English test at a teachers' college. A normal graduate exam often contains the subject English, and the researcher purposely included an essay question section in the English test. Candidates who attended the university's graduate exam were required to write their opinions about whether they preferred using WBs or WSs in English classes. According to the directions written on the exam sheet, candidates had to finish the English test, the essay question and other question items in 100 minutes.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

Content analysis using both a quantitative and qualitative approach was adopted for this study. After the exam was finished, the school administrators collected and processed the exam sheets, and the researcher was given the responsibility of scanning all of the answers to the essay questions and formulating fair and simple grading criteria. Due to the time constraint for announcing the exam results and security procedures for the exam sheets, key phrases recurring in answers related to the questions were jotted down privately in an office. The researcher typed the notes and sorted them into patterns, regardless of grammatical accuracy. After scanning the raw data and specifying the possible emerging themes and patterns with the assistance of two elementary school English teachers who had taken graduate studies at the school, the frequency and percentage of the use of WBs, WSs or both were calculated, with a comparison of variation in the participants' answers. Methods of quantifying qualitative data, such as frequency counts, ranking or rating of responses in a content analysis, and yielding categorical data, can be used for test conjectures or inference.

The names of the graduate programs addressed in this study are abbreviated as follows: Elementary (Primary) Education (**PE**), Childhood Education (**CHE**),

Counseling and Guidance (CG), Tests and Statistics (TS), Curriculum and Instruction (CI), Information (Computer) Education (CE), Visual Arts (VS), Athletics (AS), Drama (DS), Social Education (SE), Technology Development and Communication (TD), Taiwanese Culture (TC), Special Education (SP), Music Education (ME), Language & Literature Application (LL), Environmental Ecology (EE), Applied Math (AM), and Natural Science (NS). For the sake of convenient number clustering, some graduate programs with similar qualities were grouped. For example, EE, AM and NS were grouped into “**Science Study**,” SE, TC and LL became “**Language and Culture**,” VS, DS and ME became “**Arts and Humanities**,” and CE and TD were combined into “**Information Communication**.” The other graduate programs (e.g., PE, CHE, CG, TS, CI, AS and SP) remained individual.

Based on the literature reviewed, specifically Epstein and Van Voorhis’s (2001) ten purposes of HW and the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (1995), the following definitions were adopted for the 14 categories elicited from the data in this study: (1) **interpersonal**, involving relationships between people; (2) **pedagogical**, concerning teaching methods or the practice of teaching; (3) **socio-cultural**, concerning Taiwanese society and its culture; (4) **technological**, relating to knowledge about scientific or industrial methods or the use of these methods; (5) **emotional**, entailing strong feelings or opinions; (6) **empathetic**, understanding someone else’s feelings, problems, etc., especially on the basis of similar experiences; (7) **pragmatic**, dealing with problems in a sensible, practical way instead of strictly following a set of ideas; (8) **temporal**, relating to or limited by time; (9) **parental**, relating to one parent or both parents; (10) **assessment**, judging a person or situation; (11) **practice**, completing regular activities in order to improve a skill; (12) **economic**, related to trade, industry and the management of money; (13) **competence**, having enough skill or knowledge to do something to a satisfactory standard; and (14) **ambivalent**, being unsure about whether something is desirable or not.

A coding system for the data in this study is illustrated in the following three students’ responses regarding reasons for using the WBs and/or WSs, with keywords, underlined phrases and the four cases, (A) “WBs,” (B) “WSs,” (C) “both,” or (D) “neither,” specified. Example 1 is a “both” case, with five reasons. Examples 2 and 3 are self-designed WSs (SDW) cases, with four and 10 reasons, respectively.

### **3. 5 Students' Responses**

(1). If I were an ESET, I would use both self-designed WSs (SDW) and textbooks or WBs (C) for my students to do practice. However, I would not use them in each English class (14). I believe WSs have their functions, and they can help students to know what they have learned (2). When I am in English class, I want to let them learn through playing games, and they will learn happily (5). Sometimes, I will use WSs or some assessment to evaluate them (10), and this can improve my teaching (2) in English class.

(2). If I were an ESET, I would use the SDW (B) for my students because it can develop, encourage, and motivate the students' interests (5) and keep them from being bored in class (6). The SDW can make changes according to the curriculum that I taught (7). Hence, I believe it would be interesting (5).

(3). The WSs can encourage students to like studying (5) and research, but it is difficult to design (13) good WSs. If I were an English teacher, I would use the SDW (B) for my students to practice (11) for each English class. The SDW has many advantages, for example: 1. It can help my students to learn (2). 2. If students learn more, likely their educations will be more useful in life (11). 3. I can understand what types of students need to learn (2). The textbook is very easy to teach (13) in class. I think that would be very boring (7) and not useful (7). SDW is my first choice.

### **3.6 Ethics, Reliability and Validity of the Study**

The data for this study was collected using purposive sampling, which did not reveal the subjects' roles and backgrounds. Because the sample was a standardized test, the participants did not give formal consent. However, the data was collected and analyzed objectively and carefully and was described faithfully and uncritically. The results were used academically, and no intrusion of privacy or commercial benefit was imposed or obtained.

#### **3.6.1 Reliability**

Researchers often use the role of the researcher, selection of the informants, social context, collection and analysis of data to enhance reliability and validity (Chen, 2005). Reliability refers to the precise and stable degree of testing tools, which depends on three factors: evaluation tools (objectives, sampling, items,

answers, instruction, format, testing questions, and length), situation (light, sound, tables, and noise), and personal factors (physical and mental) (Cohen, 1994). Wallinger's (2000) study confirmed other researchers' findings that a high degree of reliability rarely appears in HW study because it is difficult to control or document all of the variables that affect the assignment and completion of HW. Furthermore, a more serious problem is that researchers must rely on self-perceptions from teachers and students, making reported information questionable and potentially inaccurate.

In this study subjects were not tested with English knowledge, but the experience of using HW or WSs, a familiar topic to all the subjects in their learning process. In 100 minutes, students were clearly instructed to answer one familiar type of essay question with other multiple-choice questions. The study had concrete, stated objectives with three options. The testing situation was optimal, and the participants' academic ability was acceptable. No definite answer was required, so students could feel free to answer. Grading depended on the holistic impression of a self-perceived narrative of simple factual knowledge. Students did not need deep understanding or higher ability to access the information. Under these conditions, the evaluation tool should be reliable (Cohen, 1994).

Cuba (1990) claimed that the dependability of the study can be enhanced by clear description and reasonable explanation, and low generalization, which was adopted for the analysis of this study. A qualitative study often contains external reliability and internal reliability. Internal reliability refers to the degree to which different researchers reach the same interpretive conclusion using the same perspective. The consistent result helps to reduce errors and ensure that future researchers achieve similar outcomes. The most frequently used method is intercoder reliability for the content analysis, which is .81 in this paper. The researcher attempted to describe clearly the background major fields of the subjects and the relationship between the subjects and the researcher, as well as the selection of the subjects and the social context, such as the time, place, and situation. The framework of data analysis, as well as the collection of the data and the analysis method, was established carefully. Besides, in this study, the researcher tried to describe the findings with minimal generalization. As a result, the reliability of this study was increased.

### **3.6.2 Validity**

According to Wu and Lee (1995), validity can be obtained through the triangulation of methods (i.e., interview, observation, and document analysis), data (different formats), investigators (professors, interviewees, and peers), and theory (using the collected data) in order to determine consistency within different data. The researcher attempted to create a clear framework of themes and collect the data of the subjects objectively. Although triangulation of methods and data in this study was not possible, she invited two English teachers to examine and discuss the data, which might increase the validity of the study.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

The answers to the four questions of interest in this study are presented as follows. First, what types of practice modes, WBs or WSs, would the subjects prefer to use in English classes? Second, were there any differences in the subjects' answers in terms of their graduate programs? Third, what categories of reasons did the subjects give for each category of answers, and fourth, what are the most obvious categories of reasons appearing in the data?

### **4.1 The Practice Form the Subjects Prefer to Use in English Class**

From Table 1, we find that most subjects (59%) would use WSs in English classes, some (23%) would employ both WBs and WSs, and a few (17%) would use WBs only. The findings for the first research question are consistent with Hsieh and Hsiao's (2004) study that English teachers in Kaohsiung County used more WSs than WBs. However, the findings are contrary to Hsieh and Hsiao's (2003) study on English teachers in Tainan City, showing that a majority of English teachers asked students to complete WB exercises in/after class for practice but that very few English teachers applied WSs. WBs and WSs were both used in various proportions. Contrary to Hsu's (2003) results, more subjects used WBs in class than WSs, but her study only included nine subjects. Murphy and Decker's (1990) subjects also used more textbook questions than WSs. Bada and Okan (2000) found that Turkish students preferred written tasks constructed by the teachers. Exercises were considered the most useful assessment for low-level students (Wallinger, 1997, cited in Wallinger, 2000). The inconsistency between the teachers' use of HW modes in different studies may indicate that teachers have their own instructive choices for practice.

Table 1 Distribution of Subjects' Use of WBs and WSs in All Graduate Programs

| Graduate Program | A <sup>1</sup> | B <sup>2</sup> | W <sup>3</sup> | %   | W <sup>4</sup> | %   | Both <sup>5</sup> | %   | Neither <sup>6</sup> | Total <sup>7</sup> | %      |
|------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----|----------------|-----|-------------------|-----|----------------------|--------------------|--------|
| (PE)             | 267            | 240            | 28             | 12% | 147            | 61% | 65                | 27% | 0                    | 240                | 16.70% |
| (CHE)            | 147            | 147            | 15             | 10% | 114            | 78% | 13                | 9%  | 5                    | 147                | 10.20% |
| (CG)             | 131            | 131            | 17             | 13% | 81             | 63% | 31                | 24% | 0                    | 129                | 9.00%  |
| (TS)             | 109            | 109            | 21             | 20% | 60             | 57% | 25                | 24% | 0                    | 106                | 7.40%  |
| (CI)             | 108            | 108            | 10             | 9%  | 62             | 57% | 35                | 32% | 1                    | 108                | 7.50%  |
| (CE)             | 105            | 105            | 26             | 25% | 59             | 56% | 20                | 19% | 0                    | 105                | 7.30%  |
| (VS)             | 72             | 70             | 16             | 23% | 41             | 58% | 12                | 17% | 2                    | 71                 | 4.90%  |
| (AS)             | 32             | 32             | 13             | 41% | 17             | 53% | 1                 | 3%  | 1                    | 32                 | 2.20%  |
| (DS)             | 55             | 55             | 8              | 15% | 29             | 53% | 16                | 29% | 2                    | 55                 | 3.80%  |
| (SE)             | 23             | 23             | 7              | 30% | 13             | 57% | 3                 | 13% | 0                    | 23                 | 1.60%  |
| (TD)             | 27             | 27             | 5              | 19% | 14             | 52% | 8                 | 30% | 0                    | 27                 | 1.90%  |
| (TC)             | 85             | 85             | 10             | 12% | 55             | 65% | 19                | 22% | 1                    | 85                 | 5.90%  |
| (SP)             | 68             | 68             | 8              | 12% | 35             | 52% | 24                | 35% | 1                    | 68                 | 4.70%  |
| (ME)             | 62             | 61             | 15             | 25% | 25             | 42% | 19                | 32% | 1                    | 60                 | 4.20%  |
| (LL)             | 62             | 62             | 15             | 24% | 33             | 53% | 12                | 19% | 2                    | 62                 | 4.30%  |
| (EE)             | 56             | 56             | 16             | 29% | 29             | 52% | 10                | 18% | 1                    | 56                 | 3.90%  |
| (AM)             | 23             | 23             | 1              | 4%  | 17             | 74% | 4                 | 17% | 1                    | 23                 | 1.60%  |
| (NS)             | 40             | 40             | 11             | 28% | 19             | 48% | 10                | 25% | 0                    | 40                 | 2.80%  |
| Total            | 1472           | 1442           | 244            | 17% | 850            | 59% | 331               | 23% | 17                   | 1437               | 100%   |

1%

Note. A1 means those who took the exam. B2 means those who answered questions on the English exam sheet. T3 means WBs. W4 means WSs. Both5 means both WBs and WSs. Neither6 means neither WBs nor WSs. Total7 means those who indicated one of the four alternatives.

## **4.2 Differences in the Subjects' Answers in Terms of Regrouped Graduate Programs**

Table 2 displays the distribution of graduate programs grouped into four new domains. For example, "Science Study," "Language and Culture," "Information Communication," and "Arts and Humanities" groups were constructed to balance the population for comparison (see the definition on p. 17). Subjects from AS (41%), Science Study (23%), and Information Communication (23%) are likely to employ WBs. Most subjects from CHE (78%), CG (63%), PE (61%), Language and Culture (58%), TS (57%), and CI (57%) are more likely to use Ws. Conversely, several subjects from SP (35%), CI (32%), PE (27%), Arts and Humanities (25%), CG (24%) and TS (24%) use both WBs and Ws (24%).

The reasons that subjects from the Institutes of Athletes, Science Study, and Information Communication would employ WBs may be related to the tendency for these teachers to assign various practice modes, such as hands-on training or tactual tasks such as fieldwork, experiments, and computer operation. Students must complete activities and construct answers in different contexts. Comparatively, more students of Childhood Education, Language and Arts, and Athletics used Ws. The rest of the institutes related to educational areas tended to use Ws or both Ws and WBs. Cool and Keith (1991) contended that teachers may naturally assign HW due to the nature of the course, and students may have more motivation to do it. It is assumed that these courses may require students to flexibly practice their learning tasks in terms of various objectives. Access to Ws and WBs may not be difficult for the subjects of particular fields, or the subjects may have deep memory of the use of the HW type. Ws and WBs of appropriate difficulty, designed well in advance and covering skills scheduled to be practiced, can contribute to a positive atmosphere by showing teachers' consistency with course objectives. Moreover, students' learning motivation can be enhanced by a growing awareness of the objectives and the focal areas in the course.

Table 2 Distribution of Subjects' Use of WBs and WSs in Regrouped Graduate Programs

| Graduate program     | T <sup>1</sup> | %   | W <sup>2</sup> | %   | Both <sup>3</sup> | %   | Neither <sup>4</sup> | Total | %    |
|----------------------|----------------|-----|----------------|-----|-------------------|-----|----------------------|-------|------|
| (PE)                 | 28             | 12% | 147            | 61% | 65                | 27% | 0                    | 240   | 16.7 |
| (CHE)                | 15             | 10% | 114            | 78% | 13                | 9%  | 5                    | 147   | 10.2 |
| (CG)                 | 17             | 13% | 81             | 63% | 31                | 24% | 0                    | 129   | 8.9  |
| (TS)                 | 21             | 20% | 60             | 57% | 25                | 24% | 0                    | 106   | 7.3  |
| (CI)                 | 10             | 9%  | 62             | 57% | 35                | 32% | 1                    | 108   | 7.5  |
| (AS)                 | 13             | 41% | 17             | 53% | 1                 | 3%  | 1                    | 32    | 2.2  |
| (SP)                 | 8              | 12% | 35             | 52% | 24                | 35% | 1                    | 68    | 4.7  |
| Science Study        | 28             | 23% | 65             | 54% | 24                | 20% | 2                    | 119   | 8.2  |
| Language and Culture | 32             | 18% | 101            | 58% | 34                | 20% | 3                    | 173   | 12   |
| Communication*       | 31             | 23% | 73             | 55% | 28                | 21% | 0                    | 132   | 9.1  |
| Art and Humanities   | 39             | 20% | 95             | 50% | 47                | 25% | 5                    | 191   | 13.2 |
| Total                | 244            | 17% | 850            | 59% | 331               | 23% | 17                   | 1437  | 100  |
|                      |                |     |                |     |                   |     | 1%                   |       |      |

Note: Communication\* means Information Communication. T<sup>1</sup> means WBs. W<sup>2</sup> means WSs. Both<sup>3</sup> means both WBs and WSs. Neither<sup>4</sup> means neither WBs nor WSs.

### 4.3 Reasons Given by Subjects for Each Category of Answers

To group the 2,337 reasons into similar patterns, the following 14 categories were assigned to the reasons synthesized and paraphrased from examinees' responses.

**The interpersonal category.** Students can work with others to increase friendships. Teachers and students will be closer if teachers ask students to join in the design of WSs. Additionally, teachers and their pupils will have greater interaction because more dialogue will occur between them. Because students are a large group, teachers should follow the school schedule to design competitive group



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work. Playing games is better than only recording responses.

***The pedagogical category.*** Students have different levels of proficiency. Teachers can determine students' problems, abilities, and interests and can understand students' levels or previous experience to promote the learning and knowledge of informational content. Teachers help students study well, e.g., by using WSs for high-level students and using WBs for low-level students. Teachers can teach well or improve their teaching if they prepare beforehand.

***The socio-cultural category.*** Students should understand national culture and possess social skills. Hard work is important to Chinese people. Parents can know that teachers are hard working by looking at the WSs the teachers design.

***The technological category.*** Teachers may find different ways to design WSs using computers (e.g., surfing the net library or surfing the Internet) and compile computer-based resources.

***The emotional category.*** "I just like it." It is interesting, motivating, or entertaining for students to do the work by themselves, and it increases their confidence.

***The empathetic category.*** Children are young, and they should have an interesting life. For example, they need to play and study. They should be taught to enjoy learning. Students do not need tests because they have the power to learn. We should not introduce trouble or cause confusion at the beginning of their learning. They should be able to finish the WB quickly and do other things.

***The pragmatic category.*** WBs are like taking another exercise and are designed for foreigners, not for students here, so they cannot be adapted. Textbooks cannot be changed; we need texts with basic ideas. The texts are bad, difficult, uninteresting, boring, ugly, or useless. We need to use words and pictures. The lines in the WB are too small. Communication using the four skills is important. Children do not learn by writing; they learn by listening, speaking, and reading first and writing later. Moreover, students learn listening and speaking in school step-by-step, not reading and writing. Students need listening and speaking life experiences for natural learning, even though they lack various choices. If teachers insert student life experiences into the WS and change the text, then WSs will be more useful because students will learn English from books and that related to daily life.

***The temporal category.*** Teachers have a heavy load with too many classes, so they are tired and have no time to make WSs.

*The parental category.* Some parents will help with HW, but some parents cannot.

*The assessment category.* It is difficult to grade students because there is no standard or no reliability and validity. We need different tests to make students work hard and study more. Self-study is important to increase ideas and self-efficacy. WSs help develop intelligence, thought and growth. Students cannot think or develop by themselves and need to learn words. Students may get good grades by using textbooks.

*The practice category.* English is difficult, and students need practice to identify their problems. Verbal practice is important. Students have different levels, which makes it difficult to control the teaching process and students' learning speed. Hence, they require more practice doing HW in different ways. They need increased freedom to combine words into sentences for reading. WSs are often designed by teachers, so students cannot buy or copy the answers. Students can gain a sense of achievement by doing easy WSs.

*The economic category.* It takes money and time to design WSs. WBs are designed by experts and are systematic, beautiful (with colorful pictures), convenient, simple, and timesaving. Students can learn basic principles from WBs, and WBs have models to improve students' writing. Because they are not professionals, teachers need to find effective ways (e.g., choosing a nice textbook and WB for practice) so that they have more time to do other things. If students learn by steps, then teachers do not waste paper because children often lose WSs. Teachers' accountability is important.

*The competence category.* The teachers' English is not good and making WSs is difficult, challenging and stressful. However, questions are concise/easy/flexible/creative (cut and paste, not just writing)/no pressure/relaxing, so students can learn more easily. Teachers should have the ability to design WSs, but one said, "I haven't learned it yet." Students need to develop self-discipline to complete WSs.

*The ambivalent category.* WBs or WSs each have their own advantages, so teachers will do them according to activities, students' learning conditions, text standards, and curricula. Teachers do not use them all of the time. At ordinary times, teachers use WBs; on holidays, teachers use WSs. Teachers can also use WBs in class and WSs at the end of class. If we highlight advantages and avoid disadvantages, both WBs and WSs can help develop accountability in teaching.

**Discussion.** Our data differed from Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001). “Parent-child relations” and “parent-teacher communications” were grouped into “parental;” “peer interaction” into “interpersonal;” “preparation,” “participation” and “personal development” into “pedagogical;” “practice” into “practice;” and “policy” and “public relations” into “socio-cultural.” No data could be placed into the “punishment” category. “Personal development” seems to be a special category for the subjects’ data. “Emotion” seems to be culturally specific. Furthermore, “technological,” “empathetic,” “pragmatic,” “temporal,” “economic,” and “competence” are reasons why the subjects would prefer not to make WSs.

The above evidence reveals that subjects as teachers have different preferences and styles concerning assigning HW. Understanding these factors can lead to a situation where insights that are more relevant can improve the application of WSs and WBs and help to improve the use of practice modes. Practice helps to develop genuinely useful language skills that are appropriate to the students’ needs. Therefore, teachers should be encouraged to use WBs or make their own WSs because different motivating approaches can help students become effective learners.

Many courses have similar skill objectives. Teachers may select the structure and tasks for participation, which are interrelated features in classrooms, according to the language learning objectives they want students to work on. Therefore, teachers’ characteristics (e.g., teaching experience and teaching English as a foreign language training backgrounds), perceptions of the instructional context (e.g., administrative, collegial, student, and setting factors), perceptions of the instructional task, planning decisions, tasks and participatory structure decisions (e.g., time, participation structure, language skills, and input materials) affect the decision-making process (Smith, 1996, p. 207) of assigning HW.

#### **4.4 The Predominant Categories of Reasons of Using HW Elicited from the Data**

The distribution of the reasons (token N = 2337) for the 14 categories is presented in Table 3, in which we can see that the highest frequency is the pedagogical category. Most subjects (29.6%) chose to use WBs or WSs for their pedagogical function. Practice is the second priority for the subjects (17%), and the emotional category is the third item that the subjects (12.8%) consider in the application of WBs or WSs. The competence category accounts for different qualities in making the materials (11.1%). Some subjects (8.2%) also consider the

real life situation when applying WBs or WSs, as illustrated in the pragmatic category. Efficiency is another concern for the subjects (6.8%), as found in the economic category.

It is natural that “pedagogical” and “practice” were the most frequently chosen reasons to use WBs or WSs in Taiwanese culture. Most literature on effective teaching combines teaching and assessment, as Lin (2000) claimed, to seek the best teaching activities, establish curricula and instruction, and implement effective teaching assessment to conduct successful learning and effective teaching. Practice makes perfect, and teachers try to improve student learning by designing practice activities. In Wallinger’s (2000) study, practice was ranked as the most frequently chosen purpose, and extension was the second, which seems close to the pragmatic reason (the fifth position in this study). Xu and Yuan (2003) considered review, practice and reinforcement to be the most important functions for HW. However, it is surprising to find that an “emotional factor” dominated the data. Some subjects would say, “I just like it” or, “It is interesting, motivating, and entertaining for students to do the work by themselves, and it increases their confidence.” This increase in confidence may be related to subjects’ particular subjective emotional writing style in their responses. Another reason may be that teachers are responsible for designing purposeful, engaging and high-quality HW (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001), making HW a fulfilling and enriching experience for students, which can promote both academic achievement and desirable study habits (Xu, 2004). Therefore, during the educational process, students may be conditioned to accept the classroom situation; assessment of learning as motivation had the strongest effect on HW, followed by academic work, gender, and quality of instruction (Cool & Keith, 1991). According to Hsu (2003), the teachers’ reasons for implementing assessment included monitoring and diagnosing students’ learning, informative teaching, and documenting students’ learning development. Student characteristics have the greatest impact on decision making, because student language learning goals and needs influence teachers’ decisions about tasks and materials.

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Table 3 Distribution of the Reasons for the 14 Categories.

| Reasons |   | Interpersonal |    | Pedagogical |       | Socio-cultural |      | Technological |      |
|---------|---|---------------|----|-------------|-------|----------------|------|---------------|------|
| F       | P | 23            | 1% | 692         | 29.6% | 7              | 0.3% | 10            | 0.4% |

  

| Reasons |   | Emotional |       | Empathetic |      | Pragmatic |      | Temporal |      |
|---------|---|-----------|-------|------------|------|-----------|------|----------|------|
| F       | P | 300       | 12.8% | 35         | 1.5% | 191       | 8.2% | 108      | 4.6% |

  

| Reasons |   | Parental |      | Assessment |      | Practice |     |
|---------|---|----------|------|------------|------|----------|-----|
| F       | P | 37       | 1.6% | 60         | 2.6% | 399      | 17% |

  

| Reasons |   | Economic |      | Competence |       | Ambivalent |      |
|---------|---|----------|------|------------|-------|------------|------|
| F       | P | 158      | 6.8% | 259        | 11.1% | 58         | 2.5% |

Note. Token N = 2,337, Percentage = 100%, F: Frequency, P: Percentage.

## 5. Conclusions and Suggestions

Several findings are evident in this study. First, WSs were a commonly used practice method for the subjects. Second, subjects from different graduate programs had their own preferences in adopting practice modes. Third, 14 recurring types of reasons emerged in the written discourse. Fourth, pedagogy, practice and emotional factors accounted for most subjects' choice of employing practice modes. Based on these findings, three limitations and four suggestions emerge.

### Limitations

It is advisable to treat these findings with caution because there are possible problems with this study. First, this study was based on written discourse elicited from participants' answers to an essay question. As a result, the participants' interest and knowledge may have constrained their perceived ideas during the exam. Further, the college students' educational experience might affect their decision to apply WBs or WSs and may lead them to rank HW differently. The results might not be generalized to teachers directly, but synthesized broad surface patterns (types) were still inspiring. Future research should include both pre-service and in-service teachers as respondents.

Second, the open-ended essay questions in English may constrain respondents' interpretation and might lead to incomplete answers, especially for those lacking in English writing proficiency. Other methods such as interviewing or questionnaires may yield comprehensive ideas about the respondents' decisions to apply WBs and WSSs.

Third, although many subjects participated in the writing process, information on their undergraduate backgrounds was unavailable, which may result in a vague and surface division in terms of graduate programs. Furthermore, it is not clear from our data exactly whether the subjects would implement WBs or WSSs to assess their students in the future.

## **Suggestions**

### **5.1 Teaching and Learning Appropriate Ways of Making WSSs**

In this study, most subjects' favored practice mode was using WSSs, but some subjects were lacking the time and strategies (economic and competence factors) of making WSSs. The following steps may help the subjects create professional and attractive WSSs: 1) writing legibly and neatly; 2) avoiding typing errors; 3) cutting and pasting a copy of published material (i.e., using it as a master); 4) leaving enough space around the edge of the paper; 5) including simple line drawings; 6) adding color or using colored paper; and 7) enclosing the WSSs in plastic for protection (Gower, Phillips, & Walters, 1995). Moreover, retain the master WS for repeated use. Teachers should take notes and file them in a classified list and in chronological order. It should also be noted that, "Teachers should not waste time or money producing WSSs if they can obtain the same effect by using the board or the OHP," and they should be careful of copyright restrictions (Gower, Phillips, & Walters, 1995, p. 73). Besides making WSSs, teachers are encouraged to design good communicative assessment with positive effects for learning and teaching, resulting in improved learning habits (Heaton, 1990).

### **5.2 Paying Attention to Teachers' Decision-making Processes**

In class, three factors influence teachers' decision making: 1) planning decisions (e.g., instructional curriculum, lessons, and tasks) and organization (participation); 2) implementing decisions (e.g., lesson tasks and participation structure, language learning focus, teacher roles, time frame, time, task type); and 3) individual perceptions of institutional features (e.g., type of students, administrative expectations) and theoretical knowledge (Smith, 1996). Fourteen factors emerged in

this study to affect the subjects' use of WBs or Ws. When learning a language is perceived as the process and not the product, the tasks should focus on the communication of meaning rather than on the accuracy of language use. Assigning HW naturally will involve the goals of understanding the meaning and/or structure of the target language.

Teachers' beliefs about the nature of the target language learning are a critical factor in determining whether practice modes have a structural or a communicative focus. Students' affective state also has an impact on interactive decisions. However, negative self-judgers tend to doubt unspecified assessment, which blunts their judgment and leads to incorrect and harmful choice of mode to evaluate students' performance. Consequently, a complex network of decisions is evident because teachers' decisions reveal an eclectic use of theory but an internal consistency between individual beliefs and practices (Smith, 1996). Therefore, training in assessment should convey the advantages and disadvantages of tests and enhance teachers' appropriate decision-making on using assessment.

### **5.3 Carefully Conducting Classroom Assessment in and after English Class**

Past experience with testing seems to shape self-judgments of testing ability and affect beliefs about testing (Beghetto, 2005). Doing HW is essential for preparing most exams, and HW should be regarded as an integral part of the learning process (May, 1997). The most frequently cited factors, pedagogy, practice and emotion, elicited in this study might affect the subjects' use of WBs or Ws. In a context where students lack exposure to the target language, most teachers use a wide range of assessment that reflects authentic experiences in the outside world. Teaching and practicing tests helps familiarize students with exam formats, but their overuse can be detrimental and demoralizing for weaker students and may contribute little to the development of language skills. Consequently, the teachers may need to gradually adopt the practice of classroom testing. Because students require a record of what they have achieved, they need tests, and teachers need to improve the practice of testing. It is believed that, "giving learners tests at regular intervals would not only encourage learners to be more responsive but would also help provide them with a sense of purpose" (Nunan, 1987, p. 31).

Emotions also play important roles for assigning assessment, and teachers should enjoying doing the assessment and hold correct ideas of assessment for educational purposes. Teachers should be flexible and assign lower minimum work

levels for weaker students. In a class with quicker or more skilled students, an additional, related task can be done while they work or when they finish it (May, 1997). When assigning classroom assessment, teachers may consider the following points: setting an appropriate work environment, managing the time spent, and controlling attention, motivation and potentially interfering emotions (Xu & Corno, 2003). If students do significant amounts of paired and group work, then they will exchange ideas and develop a sense of cooperation and mutual concern for progress (May, 1997). In addition, students will be benefitted with feedback from the teacher to understand the right answers for assessment.

#### **5.4 Promoting Strategies of Implementing MA**

HW (WBs and WSs) is only one part of MA, the main stream in the current educational system in Taiwan. Promoting MA may increase effective teaching, but it confronts several problems. Some scholars (Chen, 2006; Guo, 2002; Hsu, 2003; Lee, 2002) promote the following strategies: First, obtaining public consensus and communication of ideas about MA to insist on the right educational beliefs, beginning with reflection and progressing to assessment checklists. Second, enhancing teachers' abilities in professional training programs (e.g., activities, study groups, action research, journals, observations, and sharing ideas) to help teachers gain confidence and enthusiasm in using teaching assessments. Students should have effective guidance and the support of critical self-reflection and evaluation. They should be trained in assessment purposes, criteria, and procedures for better assessment and should understand that assessment is learning. Third, the fixed notion of implementing assessment in school should be revised so that teachers can autonomously and flexibly conduct assessment practices. This approach will attract willing members to participate in implementing MA under less pressure. Fourth, school scores should be included in the total grades of MA, but the public should trust teachers' professional ability to give fair grades. They can share reflections and ideas with others to encourage more participation and support, and increase tolerance of errors of increasing weight in MA for total grading. Fifth, educational resources, websites, assessment-driven learning communities, and support networks can be established. Designs and strategies can be adjusted and modified to overcome problems, providing necessary information and samples to increase awareness and reflection for enquiry and reference. Teachers should promote growth and enhance commitment. Confidence and achievement must be cultivated so that more teachers can be influenced to try the approach.



## **5.5 Carrying Out More Studies on Exploring HW**

This study focused on one particular area of MA, HW. HW studies have interactive effects between instructional variables (e.g., HW characteristics) and individual students' characteristics (e.g., prior knowledge), class level, HW variables (e.g., HW frequency, HW length, number of tasks typically assigned, and grading complemented by teaching styles) and moderator variables (e.g., school subjects and grades). It is evident that subjects are aware of different factors related to using WBs and WSs as practice modes for English class. Further analysis of the data is required to determine the extent to which these different factors are sufficiently distinguished in the implementation of WBs and WSs. Educational institutes need to cover HW topics to train teachers. Studies on perceptions of effects (types) of applied HW, HW problems, how contrasting HW designs affect specific students' outcomes across grades can be conducted in the future. Other topics can also be explored, for example, alternative assessments may be related to gender, language proficiency and test performance (Chen, 2006).

This paper suggests the need to explore the factors involved in different subjects. Furthermore, it suggests methods for teachers to develop their own skills, to facilitate greater involvement in designing HW, and to equip them with choices about how to implement HW assessment. Knowledge of the meanings of HW assessment and an understanding of the students themselves are essential for modifying practices to make the tasks more attractive and motivating, to clarify understanding about HW purposes and maximize benefits for students.

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## 英語課堂評量中作業本與學習單的使用因素

謝麗雪

依據學生能力所設計的課堂評量能促進學習，而使用書面評量又比其他方式更有效率。但是不同因素，例如時間、人力等限制，可能會影響老師課堂使用的評量方式。因此本文之研究目的為探討教室評量使用的情形，包括：1.作業本或學習單是否為受試者喜歡的評量方式；2.英文老師是否使用作業本或學習單作為課堂評量；3.受試者背景是否影響其決定使用作業本或學習單的過程；4.三個最明顯影響使用作業本或學習單的因素。研究情境及方式為要求 1472 研究所考生寫一篇英文作文，題目為：如果他們是英文老師時，是否會使用作業本或學習單，原因為何？作者收集及分析 1442 有效受試者之答案。結果顯示：1.比起作業本，受試者較喜歡使用學習單；2.共 14 種理由可解釋受試者使用的作業評量因素；3.欲就讀之不同研究所的考生表達喜歡不同的作業評量方式；其中 4.教學、練習及感覺為最明顯的作業評量因素。有鑑於此，作者提出一些英語教學上之建議。

關鍵字：教室評量、英語教學、多元評量

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