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AN INVESTIGATION ON THE VIEWPOINTS OF STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND PARENTS ABOUT HOMEWORK IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Case Study

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Abstract

The study aimed to scrutinize the viewpoints of primary school teachers, students, and parents about homework in various parameters such as types, frequency, subject and functions of homework. In the study, the case study design based on the qualitative research method, was utilized. The participants comprised 32 teachers, 36 fourth-grade students and 28 parents from different primary schools in Erzurum, in the east of Turkey. The data were collected via semi-structured interview forms, and were processed using the content analysis method. The findings of the study released that although all participant students, most teachers and parents said homework increased the academic success, a closer look in to their responses to different interview questions illustrated that all of the participant groups also had some negative opinions about the homework in primary schools. The students reported that the most homework covered problem-solving tasks, and the least was practice with musical instruments. The majority of students stated that they were given sufficient amount of homework every day. It was also found out that the most popular subject of the participant students was math and the least favored one was music.

Keywords: homework, teacher, student, parents, primary school, school subjects

1. Introduction

Education is a process involving several complex and interrelated variables. One of the main objectives of this process is to attain successful outcomes. These outcomes may be cognitive, affective, or behavioral. However, in terms of educational curricula, the main objective is to obtain some pre-determined academic achievements, which are expected to be reflected via student's work. As a consequence, teachers tend to use many different methods to improve the academic success, including homework. "Homework" is generally defined as "the schoolwork brought home" (Corno, 1996).

The answers to the question of whether homework improves academic achievement are quite controversial. While some studies argue that homework increases success, others claim that it does not or does only at certain grade levels. Farrow, Tymms, and Henderson (1999) point out that giving homework once a month from each basic course in primary schools improves the homework results. Also, it has been found that homework is effective in increasing success, provided that it does not take too much time. This leads to what they called the 10-minute rule: with each increase in grade level, a ten-minute increase can be made, but even in the top grades, no more than two hours of homework should be assigned (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006). Cooper (2007), state that homework should be limited to 15 minutes

for the first years of kindergarten and primary school. In some studies, conducted at the primary level, similar results have been obtained relative to the studies conducted at other levels. Eren and Henderson (2011) have determined that homework increases success, particularly in Math and Science, but did not have a significant effect on other subjects. Some meta-analysis studies have revealed that homework given in various courses increases academic success (Ciğerci,& Şentürk, 2016; Fan et al, 2017). Also, it was seen that there are relationships between homework purposes, course achievement and homework quality (Rosário et al, 2018).

Cooper, Lindsay, Nye, and Greathouse (1998) report that parents' estimates of the amount of the time students spent on homework are not significantly correlated with school achievement. In a similar study, although the correlation between parents' predictions of their children's mathematics performance and their children's actual mathematics performance is significant, parents significantly overestimate their children's performance. (Pezdek, Berry,& Renno, 2002). These results also show that the work of children cannot be observed correctly by their parents. The need for a more comprehensive and multi-dimensional examination of the effects of homework on academic achievement has emerged. The versatile relationships of many variables, including the amount of homework and time spent, have been put forward. Valle et al (2016) reveal that academic achievement is positively associated with the amount of homework completed; the amount of homework completed is related to the homework time management; homework time management is associated with the approach to homework; and the approach to homework is related to the student's academic motivation (i.e., academic goals).

It may not be correct to make one-way evaluations about homework. It will be useful to examine the impact of homework not only on students' academic achievement, but also on affective characteristics and behavior. Cooper, Lindsay, Nye, and Greathouse (1998) note that a high amount of homework negatively affected students' attitudes towards lesson in certain classes. Apart from this, there are also studies that examine students' attitudes towards homework of a particular lesson. Akçöltekin and Doğan (2013) examined students' attitudes towards homework in biology lessons and in their study, it was determined that 9th grade students have a positive attitude towards biology homework. In the study of Sarıgöz (2009), 9th grade students state that when they do their homework about chemistry lessons on their day or time, they reinforce the subjects they are working in the school, understand the subjects better, understand and motivate the lessons better. Some studies have examined the motivation of students towards homework and concluded that it differed in terms of internal and external dimensions. Yıldız and Kılıç (2019) conclude that students' internal (autonomous) motivations for homework are higher than their external (control centered) motivations. This situation is desired when it is evaluated in terms of self-determination theory. In some studies, the opinions of students, parents, or teachers about homework have been gathered. In these studies, it is stated that homework improves students' success, can contribute to students' self-cognition, homework can work in daily life, and that students' positive attitude towards their teachers can encourage them to do homework (Özer & Öcal, 2013; Matei, & Ciasca, 2015; Duru & Çöğmen, 2017; Gedik, Altıntaş, & Kaya, 2018). In the study of Hong, Milgram and Rowell (2004), a model with many stakeholders of education ss proposed in order to carry out this process efficiently. The current research is important as it deals with the views of all three groups in terms of different dimensions. In addition, this study is important because it evaluates the thoughts of these groups regarding homework in terms of both academic achievement and affective processes.

Based on the aim of this study, the following research questions are generated:

1) What are the viewpoints of teachers, students, and parents about the influence of homework on their children's school success?

2) What do teachers, students, and parents think about homework?

3) What do students think about the homework types as well as its frequency, amount, and the subjects?

4) What are the parents' observations like about their children's attitude towards homework?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

The study utilized the case study design as one of the models in the qualitative research method. Case studies are defined as an in-depth analysis of one or more events, environments, programs, social groups, or interconnected systems (McMillan, 2000). A single unit is examined in a case study. This unit may be an individual, group, site, class, policy, program, process, institution, or community (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2010). Since the concept of homework was examined in depth, the study could be conducted as a case study.

2.2. Participants

The participants of the study consisted of 36 primary school students; 32 primary school teachers in different primary schools, and 28 parents of the students in Erzurum, a large province in the east of Turkey. Participants were determined by simple random sampling model (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Simple random sampling involves the random selection of individuals from the realistic population as a whole (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2006).

Certain criteria and limitations were taken into consideration in the selection of the participant students of the 4th grade with the equal number of girls and boys. The parents were selected among those whose children were in the same school. Teachers were teaching in the same schools. They were between 22-50 years old and they had 1-21 professional years of experience (1-21). Class sizes were in the range of 10-48. Schools were selected from different socio-economic environments.

2.3. Data Collection Process

Interview technique has strong features in terms of being suitable for measuring features, providing the opportunity to obtain in-depth information and being continuously monitored (Teddlie, & Tashakkori, 2019). Semi-structured interviews were prepared in order to gather the opinions of the participants about homework. This format is well suited for investigating participants' perceptions and views on complex and sometimes sensitive issues. This technique also allows for further research and clarification of answers (Barriball & While, 1994). During the process of creating interview forms, expert opinions were taken and updates were made via a pilot implementation. Pilot scheme should be done for many processes such as testing the adequacy of measurement tools and collecting preliminary data (Van Teijlingen, & Hundley, 2010). In addition, validity and reliability analyses were administered. Interviews were conducted face to face by the researcher, and were recorded giving a nick name to each interviewee.

In the data collection process, firstly the individuals to be interviewed were identified and informed about the research. Volunteers were determined for the interview and the meeting time was determined. Family consent forms were collected before the interviews, then the students were informed about the content of the questions and the interviews started with some relaxing questions. In addition, all the interviewees were assured about the confidentiality of the study.

2.4. Analysis of Data

The responses were processed using content analysis. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), content analysis is a research technique consisting of editing, summarizing, comparing, and interpreting texts and is reproducible, observable, and systematic. The main task of content analysis is to collect and interpret similar data in a comprehensible manner (Yıldırım,& Şimşek, 2016). In the analysis of the data, member checking was done with the people determined from each group and the codes obtained were updated. Thus, reliability was tried to be increased.

3. Results

The results obtained in the study are presented as the answer to each research question.

3.1. Thoughts on Whether Homework Increases Success

The thoughts of students, teachers, and parents on whether homework increases success are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Thoughts on whether homework increases success*

	Thought	n	%
Students	Increases	36	100
	Does not increase	0	0
Teachers	Increases	22	68.8
	Does not increase	10	31.2
Parents	Increases	25	89.2
	Does not increase	3	10.8

As seen in Table 1, all students (n=36), a majority of the teachers (n=22), and a majority of the students' parents (n=25) think that homework increases success.

3.2. Thoughts of Teachers, Students, and Parents about homework

The responses obtained from the interviews are categorized as positive and negative separately for each sample group. Although the students, teachers, and parents have many different thoughts, the most frequently mentioned opinions are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Most frequently mentioned thoughts about homework*

	Positive Thoughts	Negative Thoughts
Teachers	Students gain responsibility and task awareness.	It causes the student to cool down from school and education.
	It gives students a sense of accomplishment.	If given too much, it causes the student to get tired.
Students	I think homework is fun.	It takes a lot of time.
	I'm satisfied with homework	Homework makes me tired.

Parents	It improves success because it reinforces the subjects learned in school and solidifies them into memory.	It does not increase success; a hard-working student is already successful at school.
	Taking responsibility and spending spare time on homework increases success.	Too much homework makes the student tired and bored, which is useless.

In addition to the aforementioned views, teachers express other positive and negative thoughts. While positive thoughts are generally related to the studying process, the negative thoughts were related to the affective structure of the students.

T3: *"Homework gives students the habit of planned work and increases the permanence of learning."*

T11: *"Giving too much homework limits the creativity of the students and may encourage them to lie."*

The students provided shorter answers about homework and evaluated it in terms of affective aspects, such as liking it or not and the difficulties posed by the assignments. Students generally expressed negative thoughts about their homework.

S23: *"Too much homework is given."*

S16: *"I'm having a hard time while doing homework alone."*

Parents' thoughts were generally related to the attitudes and behaviors expected from the students.

P23: *"The assignments help the students to work independently, taking responsibility and gaining working discipline and self-control."*

Parents also stated that the homework must be checked, and when the assignments are not checked by the teachers, this has negative implications for the student.

P2: *"The assignments should be checked; otherwise students do not care about them."*

3.3. Thoughts of the Students on the Assignment Type, Frequency, Amount, and Subject

The students' responses about the type, frequency, and amount of their homework are given in Tables 3, 4, and 5.

3.3.1. Type of homework given by teacher

Table 3. *Thoughts the students on the type of homework*

Homework Type	n
Problem solving homework	31
Tests as homework	28
Writing homework	27
Project research homework	23
Reading and summarizing homework	19
Memorizing homework	10

Interview-observation homework	8
Painting and designing homework	7
Activity-ability homework (dancing, sport, etc.)	3
Music homework (playing an instrument)	1

As can be seen above, the most frequently assigned homework type is problem solving. In addition, it is observed that the homework type least frequently given is music. In general, it is seen that students are given homework related to the basic subjects such as math, Turkish, and Science. It is observed that homework is rarely given in artistic and sports fields.

3.3.2. Thoughts of students on the frequency of assignments

Table 4. *The frequency of homework given by teachers*

Frequency of Assignments	n	%
Homework is given every day.	25	69.4
Homework is given 2-3 times a week.	10	27.8
Homework is given rarely.	1	2.8

The table shows that the majority of teachers (n = 25) give homework every day. This is followed by the teachers who give homework 2-3 times a week (n = 10). There is only one teacher who gives homework rarely.

3.3.3. Thoughts of students on the amount of homework

The students' responses on how they evaluate the amount of homework given by their teachers are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. *Amount of homework given by teachers*

Amount	n	%
Adequate	28	77.8
Little	4	11.1
Much	4	11.1

As shown in Table 5, the amount of homework given by teachers is considered sufficient by most students (n=28). The number of those who think that the amount of homework given by teachers is either more or less than adequate is quite low (n = 4).

3.3.4. Popular and unpopular homework subjects

The students' answers about their favorite lesson assignments are illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6. *Popular and less popular homework subjects*

Subject	n
Mathematics	31
Religious culture and moral knowledge	30
Turkish	28
Sciences	25

Visual arts	20
Social studies	19
Foreign language (English)	18
Traffic safety	17
Human rights, citizenship, and democracy	15
Music	14

Table 6 shows that the most popular assignment for students is math. In addition, the less popular subject for students is music. It is seen that these findings overlap with the findings in Table 4.

3.4. Student Homework Behaviors as Observed by Parents

The parents' list about the behaviors of their children while doing their homework is given in Table 7.

Table 7. *Student homework behaviors observed by parents*

Behaviors	n
Doing it in a pleasant and eager way.	15
She/he does not want to do it alone.	12
She/he is bored and tired of it.	10
She/he does it cheerlessly and reluctantly.	8
She/he does not want to do the homework.	6
She/he says she/he does not understand the homework.	4
She/he states that homework is very easy.	4

As is seen, several negative thoughts are expressed, e.g. that the students do not want to do it alone (n = 12) and are bored and tired of it (n = 10), although the main observation is that the students do their homework in a pleasant and willing way (n = 15). Apart from these, there are also thoughts expressed by a single parent. Parents also report that their children think generally homework is very difficult and takes a lot of their time, they cannot finish homework, they prefer to use the computer, etc., they get bored because there is no time to play, they do not play without doing their homework, and their teachers do not check their homework (n = 1).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study presents the thoughts of parents, teachers, and students about homework in primary schools. The results show that all three groups believe that homework increases success but they have certain negative perceptions about it as well. The meta-analysis by Ciğerci and Şentürk (2016) report that homework assignments has a small but positive effect on students' academic achievement. In another meta-analysis study, it is determined that homework increases academic success in Math and Science courses (Fan et al, 2017). In terms of groups, students (Brenner, 2018); teachers (Tam, & Chan, 2016; Rosario et al, 2019) and parents (Lukerstuen, 2019) are found to express their views on the positive impact of homework. It can be said that these results conform with the thoughts of the participants in this research. The stated opinions indicate that the result may be due to the types, quantity, and content of the assignments.

The most important factor in the successful impact of homework is the teacher. Teachers not only assign homework, they also design homework. Designing homework requires teachers to consider the purposes, format, and other elements of assignments that will engage students and help them succeed (Epstein, & Van Voorhis, 2001). This process includes the type, amount, structure and frequency of the assignment. Farrow, Tymms, and Henderson (1999) stated that if homework is given once a month in each basic course, success will increase, while at higher frequencies it will fall. Besides, using homework in a positive manner to improve educational achievement is a challenge for teachers (Hong, Milgram, & Rowell, 2004). Nevertheless, a significant number of students stated that their teachers give homework every day. This was followed by those who stated that homework was given several times a week. Therefore, the question of how high quality and effective these homework is given and how effective this process was carried out came to mind. The view expressed by parents that teachers do not control homework points to an important problem. In a study, it was asserted that teachers' control of homework helps students give more importance to homework and improves student-teacher interaction (Aladağ, & Doğu, 2009). Therefore, this may be an important reason for the negative attitudes and behaviors observed in students about homework. Because, it was concluded that teachers' being more sensitive about homework, caring about students, and evaluating students' work by checking homework regularly will improve positively students' attitudes towards homework (Akçöltekin, & Doğan, 2013).

The most frequently assigned homework type is problem solving. However, it is doubtful whether the problem-solving assignments are given in accordance with the “problem solving” method. In the study by Öztürk (2004), very few teachers state that they used this method. Our study shows that the least often assigned type of assignment was music. This is thought to be due to the lack of teachers’ playing skills. Researches show that elementary school teachers do not receive a sufficient level of music education at university (Altun, & Uzuner, 2018) and do not consider themselves sufficient in music lesson practices (Kocabaş, 2000). An important result of the research is that the type of homework given by teachers is in line with the lesson homework that students like and dislike. Students’ favorite course assignment is mathematics, and the most disliked subject for homework is music. Therefore, it can be concluded that the preferences and tendencies of the teachers affect the students' perspectives. This issue can be investigated in future studies.

The amount of homework and the time the student spends on homework are factors related to student performance and the desire to do homework (López et al, 2013). In the research, the majority of the students stated that the amount of homework given was sufficient. This result is supported by the results of similar studies (Cooper, Lindsay, Nye, & Greathouse, 1998; Farrow, Tymms, & Henderson, 1999). In general, it is important that the amount of homework remain low and that the homework not limit the time allocated for students’ personal development and entertainment.

Parents often report negative opinions regarding the behavior of students in the most homework process. Opinions come forward as students are bored and do not want to do it alone. In a study, most of the parents state that homework created a power struggle with their students (McIntyre, & Marion, 2019). However, parents also have responsibilities in eliminating the negative attitudes and behaviors of students about doing homework. Cooper (2007) provide parents with five suggestions: "Be a stage manager, be a motivator, be a role model, be a monitor, be a mentor". These five tips will perhaps turn children's learning habits into a positive one. The reasons why homework turns into a problem must be deeply investigated.

5.1. Recommendations

Under the guidance of adults who challenge their intellectual growth, homework provides students with the training needed to develop adaptive achievement beliefs and behaviors (Bempechat, 2004). It is important that the parents provide the necessary guidance for the students in doing their homework and help them cope with the difficulties they face during this process. It may be useful to inform parents and support their contributions to the process. Apart from this, it can be recommended that teachers be advised to check assignments, provide feedback on the homework. An investigation indicates that students felt more confident on tests, felt they are better independent learners, and have stronger study skills when they are graded on their homework as a result of feeling the necessity to complete it (Brenner, 2018). It is important that the teacher is sufficient and equipped in this process. The fact that teachers are ready for the educational process in terms of cognitive and affective, and being ready in all aspects of the school environment will contribute to an effective education process (Yıldız, 2020). Also, it can be recommended that teacher assign small amounts of homework, takes into account the interests, abilities, and expectations of the students.

6. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

7. Ethics Committee Approval

The authors confirm that the study does not need ethics committee approval according to the research integrity rules in their country.

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