

## **TEACHERS' INSTRUCTIONS AS A FACTOR FOR SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF HOMEWORK**

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### **Abstract**

Throughout the school practices, homework has always presented an integral part of the lesson. Usually at the beginning of a lesson, teachers check and clarify the unclear homework, while at the end of the lesson they assign the homework related to the finished lesson. The goals of homework are many and diverse, they help to better memorise the newly acquired material, reinforce, and expand the acquired knowledge and skills. The purpose of this paper is to find out the relationship between the period when teachers give instructions related to the completion of the homework and the time necessary to clarify uncompleted, respectively unclear, homework. Our assumption was that: There is a significant difference between the time spent for homework instructions and the successful completion of the homework. This research included thirty-six primary education teachers. The research showed that teachers devote little time to the instructions when assigning homework (64% of respondents spend less than 10 minutes) and as a result students have uncertainty in completing them (61% of respondents spend more than 10 minutes) to clarify unclear tasks to students). The statistical significance in the comparison of this pair of variables was  $p=.010$ , which proves the set hypothesis. Based on the results of the research, we conclude that if teachers were to give more instructions related the tasks that should be completed by students at home, then the tasks/homework would be completed with a greater success.

*Keywords:* homework, instructions, checking, clarification.

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### **Introduction**

Homework includes various activities that students must complete at home. There have been divided opinions on this matter, especially on the efficiency of tasks and their impact on the progress and expansion of knowledge.

This paper deals with the issue of students' engagement with written homework assigned by teachers. The so far research in this direction speaks of positive and rarely negative effects of homework. According to Cooper (Cooper et al., 2006) the positive effects of homework are: more effective memorization of facts and knowledge, development of critical thinking skills, ability to process information and the opportunity to expand it, development of positive attitude towards school and learning, organization and more effective time management, training for independent work and problem solving, etc. Regarding the issue of the negative impact of homework on students, there is the possibility of losing interest and motivation, students can copy tasks from other students, or they can describe from different books, not have enough time to complete them, etc. Hallam (Hallam, 2004) suggests that homework can result in conflict between students and parents and can also encourage students' refusal to complete homework because of the violation of their free time.

Regarding the classification of homework, there are different opinions in the pedagogical literature. They can be collective for all students; they can be individualized or as different tasks for each student. In general, according to the nature of the tasks, LaConte (1981) classifies them into:

- *Practical tasks*, which are aimed at strengthening the acquired skills.
- *Preparatory tasks*, aimed at providing the basis for the topic to be developed.

- *Expanded tasks*, that aim practicing and expanding the developed material, encouraging students for further research related to the elaborated topic.

The engagement of students with homework also has other purposes, the following ones can be emphasized as most important: completion of the tasks started in class, development of self-discipline, development of self-study and research skills, reinforcement of the material developed at school, etc. The type of homework is guided and influenced by the goals, which are usually defined by the teacher based on the curriculum.

In general, the purpose of homework is to help students learn. This finding has been the object of study by many researchers, who have set the efficiency of homework as their goal. The complexity of these dilemmas remains current, the research results are unclear, because the effects of homework on the general results of students, that is, on their success, are influenced by several other factors.

The amount of homework, their checking by teachers, the type of homework, the successful completion of homework, etc., remain not very clear of their impact on student success. Some research (Zimmerman and Kitsantas, 2005) talk about the positive impact of homework on student success. They conclude that successfully completed homework have also influenced the achievement of higher student success. In contrast to these results, (Hallam, 2004) reaches different results. She finds that in some research, the efficiency of homework has positively influenced the success of students, while in some of her research, the efficiency of homework has no significant impact on success.

Different effects are also confirmed by international data (PISA research) on the results of secondary education students in mathematics. According to Detmers (2009), there is a positive correlation between the time spent on homework and the results achieved in mathematics, at the school level (schools that give more homework result in higher success), but this has not resulted the same with individual cases (students who spent more time doing homework did not turn out to be more successful than students who spent less time writing assignments).

Teachers should allocate time from the lessons to clarify the homework, with the aim of creating a serious overview about the tasks, because otherwise the interest in effective implementation of the homework would be questionable. This means that assignments must be integrated into the lesson, and if the assignment results in too much ambiguity for more students, it forces the teacher to steal time from the lesson that has other purposes. This phenomenon occurs because of not properly implementing the preliminary material or not providing the clarifications necessary to solve a problem, for successful implementation of the homework. This phenomenon represents the need to set a time interval from the lesson, to give the necessary instructions to the students regarding the homework assigned to them. In this case, the time planned to be spent on assigning homework and checking is evident, a phenomenon that causes dilemmas about the remaining part of the lesson, which aims to acquire the new teaching material. This issue has led teachers to implement different ways to save time, while also being effective in assigning homework and checking or clarifying them. Some teachers, prefer checking assignments by collecting students' notebooks at the end of a given topic and checking them outside the class, as a more positive and popular practice. This activity enables the teachers to recognize the eventual omissions or ambiguities of the students, planning more rational clarifications in the next lesson, usually with an exercise or repetition.

For more accurate recognition of students' progress, teachers are usually up to date with the completion of homework. Almost at the beginning of every class, there is a discussion about homework, about difficulties in implementation or ambiguities. This helps teachers to intervene early on students' setbacks and difficulties.

## Methodology

The research was conducted in April 2023 with a random sample, consisting of 36 respondents-teachers in primary education (grade four, grade five and grade six). We used the survey as an instrument for data collection. The purpose of this paper is to find out the time that teachers allocate from the lesson to give instructions for homework, the time they allocate to check and clarify homework, as well as to prove the existence of the relationship between the successful completion of homework with the efficiency of the instructions for carrying out assignments. Our hypothesis was that: There is a significant difference between the time that teachers allocate for instruction when assigning homework and the successful completion of tasks by students.

## Research results

The structure of the teachers included in the survey, according to gender, work experience and according to the field is presented through the following three tables.

**Table 1.** Structure of respondents by gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	12	33,3	33,3	33,3
	Female	24	66,7	66,7	100,0
	Total	36	100,0	100,0	

**Table 2.** Structure of respondents according to work experience

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-10 years	8	22,2	22,2	22,2
	11-20 years	13	36,1	36,1	58,3
	21-30 years	9	25,0	25,0	83,3
	above 30 years	6	16,7	16,7	100,0
	Total	36	100,0	100,0	

**Table 3.** Structure of the respondents according to the field

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Languages	12	33,3	33,3	33,3
	Natural Sciences	6	16,7	16,7	50,0
	Arts	2	5,6	5,6	55,6
	Social sciences	3	8,3	8,3	63,9
	Grade school	13	36,1	36,1	100,0
	Total	36	100,0	100,0	

Depending on the type of lesson and the teacher's work methodology, in most cases, the first part and the last part of the class are related to homework. This phenomenon is permanent and takes considerable time from the lesson. In the survey of teachers on these two questions, we reached the results as in tables number 4 and 5.

**Table 4.** For instructions related to homework they need

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	More than five minutes	13	36,1	36,1	36,1
	Less than five minutes	23	63,9	63,9	100,0
	Total	36	100,0	100,0	

**Table 5.** To check and clarify homework they need

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	More than ten minutes	22	61,1	61,1	61,1
	Less than ten minutes	14	38,9	38,9	100,0
	Total	36	100,0	100,0	

The tables clearly show that most teachers surveyed (63.9%) stated that they need less than five minutes to give instructions, while assigning and engaging students with homework, while 61.1% stated that, to check and clarify the homework they need more than ten minutes from the lesson. According to these results, it seems that teachers do not provide enough guidance when assigning homework. In many cases, they only specify the page number where the homework can be found. As a result of the lack of proper instructions for completing the homework, students have uncertainties in their implementation, therefore, in the next lesson, the teachers need more time to clarify the unclear homework. In the comparison of group averages between these variables, we reached the result shown in the following table:

**Table 6.** The level of statistical significance between the pair of variables

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	For homework instructions they need - To check and clarify homework they need	,25000	,55420	,09237	,06248	,43752	2,707	35	,010

These results show that they are statistically significant ( $p=.010$ ), which also proves that there is a significant difference between the time teachers allocate for instructions when assigning homework and the successful completion of tasks by students. If teachers give few instructions when assigning homework, then in the next lesson, when checking the homework, they need more time to clarify the unclear tasks, i.e. the number of unfulfilled or incorrectly completed tasks will be greater.

Since teachers of different subjects were included in the research, in the following table we present an overview of the differences between groups of teachers according to subjects.

**Table 7.** Differences between groups of teachers according to the field

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
To check and clarify homework they need	Between Groups	1,786	4	,447	2,045	,112
	Within Groups	6,769	31	,218		
	Total	8,556	35			
For homework instructions they need	Between Groups	1,812	4	,453	2,163	,097
	Within Groups	6,494	31	,209		
	Total	8,306	35			

The results from the above table show that there are no significant statistical differences between the groups of teachers according to the field, since  $p=.112$  (for checking and clarifying homework) and in the second case  $p=.097$  (for instructions).

Significant statistical differences do not exist between the groups of respondents according to gender ( $p=.239$  and  $p=.340$ ), nor according to work experience ( $p=.231$  and  $p=.888$ ). Regardless of their grade, gender or work experience, most teachers do not give the necessary instructions when assigning homework, and as a result, a significant part of students are unable to complete homework.

## Discussion

Homework has an impact on completing and expanding knowledge. The results of the research show that most teachers do not give proper instructions and clarifications when assigning homework, and as a result, in the next lesson, they spend more time clarifying unrealized or unclear tasks. To have a more positive effect on the acquisition of knowledge, when assigning homework, teachers should make sure that the students have clear tasks that they must complete, and as a result, the effect will be more positive. In this way, they would also compensate the time for instructions with the time for clarifying unclear tasks. The time planned for homework would remain the same, while the students would benefit from the appropriate instructions, in which self-confidence and interest in completing homework and learning in general would increase.

## Conclusion

Students perform various activities in school and outside it, as part of the educational process. The part of the activities that are carried out outside the school premises affects the overall success of the students. According to the results obtained through the research, teachers do not pay enough attention and time to the final part of the lesson, in particular to giving instructions on the tasks that the students must carry out at home (around 64% of respondents do not give enough instructions). As a result of this phenomenon, the number of students who cannot complete homework is considerable. In this case, it should be emphasized that apart from the overload, the ambiguity of the homework and the inability of some students to complete them, remains as a permanent and negative phenomenon. This does not help the teachers in benefiting from the time within the lesson, because they spend the same to clarify the unclear homework in the next lesson.

To overcome this situation, teachers should give more instructions when assigning homework, in particular for tasks that they consider requiring higher levels of intellectual engagement, in some cases even releasing some students who do not have the capacity to solve and complete some tasks and engaging them with other differentiated tasks. This would motivate students to develop interests in completing homework, increase self-confidence and gradually include them in the classroom as a fair and equal community.

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