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Professional paper

AVOIDING STUDENT OVERLOAD THROUGH TEACHER COORDINATION IN HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

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Abstract

Effective learning extends beyond school activities, requiring students to continue lessons outside the classroom, where homework plays a critical role. Given that students often engage with multiple subjects in one day, a lack of coordination among teachers in assigning homework can lead to student overload. To mitigate this, teacher coordination is essential. This research aims to explore the extent to which teachers coordinate when assigning homework. We hypothesized that no significant differences exist between teachers regarding such coordination. The study surveyed 57 primary school teachers using an 11-item questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale. The instrument demonstrated strong reliability ($\alpha = .87$). Data analysis, conducted with SPSS, included chi-square tests to assess variable correlations. Our findings reveal that 80% of teachers discuss students' workload, 75% oppose the formation of a coordinating body for homework assignments, and 46% report frequent instances of students copying assignments. A medium, statistically significant correlation was found between the need for teacher coordination and the frequency of task copying ($r = .404$, $p = .02$). The study concludes that significant differences exist among teachers concerning the need for coordination when assigning homework. Increased coordination could reduce student overload and enhance the completion rate of assignments.

Keywords: homework, coordination, overload, copying, student workload

Introduction

In today's teaching environment, individual student development is clearly prioritized by adapting educational and training activities to be student-centered. However, this focus can appear one-sided. The rapid development across all spheres of life places significant demands on students, often hindering their harmonious physical and emotional growth. Curricula have become overloaded with new subject areas, requiring frequent revisions to meet contemporary needs.

To fulfill curriculum requirements, certain activities and tasks are relegated outside the classroom. Among these, homework holds a significant role and has been the focus of various pedagogical discussions. Research offers differing perspectives on the impact and efficiency of homework (e.g., Cooper et al., 2006; Hallam, 2004).

A defining characteristic of homework is that it requires independent student work, without teacher supervision. This functional aspect is as crucial as the acquisition, reinforcement, or expansion of knowledge. The quantity of homework assigned should align with students' age and abilities. For younger students, it is reasonable that homework remains minimal and carried out in collaboration with parents.

Previous research indicate that homework can positively affect student success (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2005; Cooper et al., 2006). However, other studies argue that quantity does not necessarily equate to quality (Hallam, 2004). Based on existing data and current teaching practices, homework remains an irreplaceable component for achieving curricular goals and ensuring optimal learning outcomes. Nonetheless, the issue of appropriate homework load must be carefully addressed and planned. Students' extracurricular activities and free time should be

taken into consideration to avoid an overwhelming workload. Although much has been said about reducing excessive homework, no sustainable mechanism currently exists to ensure a balanced approach.

This issue is more manageable in primary education but becomes increasingly complex in subject-specific and secondary education. Subject teachers often lack accurate information regarding assignments given by their colleagues in other subjects. Consequently, they rely on student feedback or informal coordination with colleagues to gauge homework load. Schools are tasked with fostering the physical, emotional, and academic development of students. However, teachers often face challenges in making balanced decisions without compromising students' interests. To address this, schools employ qualified staff to collaborate with teachers, coordinating actions to resolve challenges encountered in daily school life.

Curriculum developers continue to seek new approaches for selecting age-appropriate learning content while equipping students with essential knowledge in alignment with societal changes. However, the responsibility for practical implementation lies with schools and teachers. Effective teacher coordination regarding homework is critical to ensuring an appropriate workload. Excessive homework often leads to negative consequences, such as decreased motivation, loss of interest, and the development of negative attitudes toward homework, learning content, and school in general. Addressing teacher coordination should therefore be treated as a priority.

When students are unable to complete homework successfully, some teachers may impose punitive measures, such as assigning additional tasks or requiring students to rewrite assignments multiple times. Such practices often yield negative outcomes, further discouraging students and undermining the intended benefits of homework.

When students are burdened with excessive homework for the next day, they often resort to completing tasks in ways that fail to support the acquisition, reinforcement, or expansion of knowledge. For younger students, the amount of homework can have particularly negative effects. After a full school day, children are already tired, and homework adds additional pressure and fatigue.

Educational authorities have, at times, recommended or even mandated that homework not be assigned to children in the initial grades of primary education. These decisions are grounded in research findings indicating that homework has minimal impact on learning outcomes for this age group. In the upper grades of primary education and in secondary education, assigning homework is more appropriate, but the workload must be carefully managed. Research suggests that the time spent on homework should ideally not exceed 90 minutes. Importantly, studies confirm that quantity does not necessarily ensure quality (Trautwein, 2007; Cooper et al., 2006; Kralovec & Buell, 2001).

Methodology

The purpose of this research is to explore how well teachers coordinate with each other when assigning homework to students, specifically addressing the question: To what extent do teachers coordinate with each other when assigning homework? The research was conducted with a random sample in the regions of Tetovo and Kicevo in North Macedonia, consisting of 57 primary school teachers. Respondents answered the survey questionnaire, which contained 11 questions, using a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 represents "Strongly Disagree" and 5 represents "Strongly Agree." The instrument's reliability was found to be $\alpha = .87$, which is considered very good (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Data were processed using SPSS. The chi-square test was employed to examine the correlation between variables.

Results

The research included primary school teachers[1] with the structure as shown in the following tables.

Table 1. Structure of the respondents by gender

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	male	14	24,6	24,6	24,6
	female	43	75,4	75,4	100,0
	Total	57	100,0	100,0	

Table 2. Structure of the respondents by work experience

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	1-10 years	12	21,1	21,1	21,1
	11-20	21	36,8	36,8	57,9
	21-30	14	24,6	24,6	82,5
	Over 30	10	17,5	17,5	100,0
	Total	57	100,0	100,0	

Among educators, although the issue of student workload with homework is often discussed, it remains insufficiently addressed. The next question asked respondents to share their opinions regarding the time students need to complete written homework assignments specifically for their subject. On this question, the teachers stated:

Table 3. Time needed by students to complete homework assignments only for your subject

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	10 minutes	8	14,0	14,0	14,0
	20 minutes	17	29,8	29,8	43,9
	30 minutes	23	40,4	40,4	84,2
	40 minutes	9	15,8	15,8	100,0
	Total	57	100,0	100,0	

From the table, it can be observed that the majority of surveyed teachers stated that students need approximately 30 minutes to complete homework for a single subject. This was reported by 40.4% of respondents. The expected time for completing homework for a single subject was predetermined at 15 minutes, based on numerous ergo-didactic and psycho-physiometric measurements (Zylfiu, 2001). A one-sample test, through which we sought the mean and statistical significance, resulted as shown in the following tables.

[1] The research involved subject teachers. This phenomenon does not apply to lower cycle teachers, as the class teacher assigns homework for all subjects.

Table 4: Average time needed to complete homework for a single subject

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
To complete homework assignments only for your subject, students need (minutes)	57	2,5789	,92480	,12249

The average response from teachers is 25.78 minutes, which is 10.78 minutes more than the predetermined expectation (15 minutes).

Table 5: Statistical significance regarding the time needed for a single subject

	Test Value = 15					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper
To complete homework assignments only for your subject, students need about (minutes)	-101,402)	56	,000	-12,42105)	-12,6664)	-12,1757)

Based on the Mean Difference of 12.42 and Statistical significance p=.00, we conclude that students are overloaded with homework more than necessary. Considering that there are several subjects each day, the overload of students remains indisputable. To verify this, the next question asked respondents whether they discuss with colleagues about the students' homework load. The responses to this question were as follows:

- 38.6% discuss frequently;
- 57.9% discuss occasionally; and
- 3.5% never discuss with their colleagues about students' homework engagement, specifically regarding students' overload.

In response to the question, "Should teachers coordinate with each other to avoid overload?", the respondents answered as follows:

- 80.75% believe coordination is necessary, and
- 19.3% believe there is no need for coordination.

The issue of coordination has been discussed in pedagogical circles, and the idea of forming a coordinating body in schools is currently a topic of discussion. Regarding this issue, the surveyed teachers responded as follows:

- 24.6% stated that the formation of a coordinating body is necessary,
- 75.4% stated that forming a body to coordinate teachers regarding students' homework engagement is not necessary.

As a result of overload, students become demotivated and seek alternative ways to complete their homework, with copying being one of the most common methods. Regarding this issue, the surveyed teachers expressed their views as shown in the following table.

Table 7: Copying or describing assignments as a phenomenon

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Often occur	26	19,0	7,0
Rarely occur	30	19,0	11,0
Never occur	1	19,0	-18,0)
Total	57		

According to the teachers' statements, it appears that copying assignments is a concerning phenomenon, as 26 teachers, or 45.61% of respondents, stated that copying is a frequent occurrence, 30 teachers, or 52.63%, stated that copying rarely occurs, and only one teacher stated that copying homework never occurs. The Chi-square value was found to be 26, which is greater than the critical value for degrees of freedom, which in this case, with three response categories, should have a maximum value of 5.99. In this case, the statistical significance is p=.00. Based on these results, we can also conclude that there are significant statistical differences within this representative group, and a concerning fact is that almost all teachers have stated that copying or describing assignments continues to be a phenomenon in schools. In the following table, we present the correlation between the variables.

Table 6: Correlations between variables

		Is there a need for coordination among teachers regarding students' engagement with homework?	Is the formation of a body necessary to coordinate teachers regarding homework assignments?	Copying or describing assignments is a widespread phenomenon.
Is there a need for coordination among teachers regarding students' engagement with homework?	Pearson Correlation	1	.279*	.404**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.036	.002
	N	57	57	57
Is the formation of a body necessary to coordinate teachers regarding homework assignments?	Pearson Correlation	.279*	1	.297*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.036		.025
	N	57	57	57
Copying or describing assignments is a widespread phenomenon.	Pearson Correlation	.404**	.297*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.025	
	N	57	57	57

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From the table, it can be observed that the variable “Is there a need for coordination among teachers regarding students’ engagement with homework?” has a low and statistically significant correlation with the variable “Is the formation of a body necessary to coordinate teachers regarding homework assignments?” ($r = .279$ and $p = .036$). This variable also shows a moderate and statistically significant correlation with the variable “Is the formation of a body necessary to coordinate teachers regarding homework assignments?” ($r = .404$ and $p = .002$). Between the variables “Is the formation of a body necessary to coordinate teachers regarding homework assignments?” and “Copying or describing assignments as a phenomenon,” there is a low and statistically significant correlation ($r = .297$ and $p = .025$).
Based on these results, it can be concluded that there are significant differences among teachers regarding coordination in assigning homework and the copying of assignments by students.

Discussion

This research sheds light on the coordination practices among teachers in assigning homework and its impact on students’ workload and behaviors. The findings suggest that while a majority of teachers recognize the importance of coordination, practical implementation remains inconsistent. The study reveals that students often spend more time on homework than the predetermined 15-minute standard per subject (Zylfiu, 2001). On average, students require 25.78 minutes to complete homework for one subject, significantly exceeding the standard. This discrepancy highlights the need for better homework management to prevent student overload. When asked about discussing homework assignments with colleagues, only 38.6% of teachers reported frequent discussions, while 57.9% engage occasionally, and 3.5% never discuss this matter. The lack of consistent communication among teachers may contribute to excessive homework loads, emphasizing the need for a structured approach to coordination. Despite the apparent need, only 24.6% of respondents supported forming a coordinating body to manage homework assignments, while 75.4% deemed it unnecessary. This resistance may stem from logistical challenges or a lack of perceived urgency among teachers. Nevertheless, the statistical correlations found in this study (e.g., $r = .279$, $p = .036$) indicate a modest but significant relationship between teachers’ views on coordination and its perceived necessity.
The phenomenon of students resorting to copying assignments is another critical issue linked to homework overload. Nearly half of the surveyed teachers (45.61%) stated that copying is frequent, while 52.63% reported it occurs rarely. Copying often arises as a coping mechanism for students overwhelmed by the volume of homework, as confirmed by the Chi-square analysis showing significant differences ($p = .00$). Existing literature underscores the importance of collaboration among educators in managing homework loads effectively. Cooper et al. (2006) argue that excessive homework can undermine its intended benefits by fostering student disengagement and counterproductive behaviors. Additionally, Epstein and Van Voorhis (2010) emphasize that coordinated homework policies can enhance students’ academic and social outcomes.
To address these challenges, schools should explore initiatives fostering collaboration among teachers, such as creating coordinating committees or implementing school-wide homework policies (Kiewra et al., 2009). Such measures could mitigate overload, reduce copying, and enhance students’ learning experiences. Finaly, the findings indicate a pressing need for improved coordination among teachers regarding homework. While teachers acknowledge its importance, significant gaps in implementation persist, warranting targeted interventions to support both educators and students.

Conclusion

This research underscores the critical issue of homework overload among primary school students, driven largely by inadequate coordination among teachers. While most teachers agree on the importance of collaboration, a structured approach to implementing it is lacking. The absence of a coordination mechanism results in inconsistent homework practices, particularly when teachers are unaware of their colleagues' assignments. This contributes to student overload, diminished motivation, and the frequent phenomenon of copying assignments. To address this challenge, it is recommended that schools establish a coordinating body tasked with managing homework distribution. This body could develop and enforce a homework scheduling strategy, ensuring balanced workloads. For example, specific subjects could alternate homework days to avoid excessive assignments on any given day. Implementing such a system requires the involvement of education experts and targeted training for coordinating group members within schools.

Limitations

A key limitation of this study is its focus on a relatively small sample within two regions, potentially limiting generalizability. Future research should expand the sample and explore long-term impacts of coordinated homework strategies on student outcomes.

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