

A Study of Secondary School Teachers Practices Regarding Homework

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Abstract

The current study intended to find out the secondary school teachers' practices regarding homework. It aimed to explore the suitability and effectiveness of homework for educational attainment of the secondary level students. The study was qualitative in nature. All public and private secondary school teachers of District Lahore were the population of this study. Ten teachers, 5 from private and 5 from public schools were selected as the sample of the study by using purposive sampling technique. Semi-structured interview protocol was developed to gain in depth information from the study participants. After completion of data collection, thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Findings of the study revealed that secondary school teachers assigned homework that help students for their academic improvement and clarity of the content taught in the classroom. The major challenge for secondary school teachers while designing homework is to consider the individual differences of students and time required to give constructive feedback. Teachers in private school take homework more seriously as compare to public schools. The study suggested that the challenges to design effective homework can be overcome through proper training of the teachers, planning of the assigned homework and good time management from teacher part.

INTRODUCTION

Homework can be viewed as series of tasks that are considered to be a learning support (e.g., applying knowledge to new tasks, activating prior knowledge). Determining how much

students understand the lesson and have mastered required skills can be assessed through homework. It provides opportunity to students for utilization of their intellectual, creative skills and abilities to produce individualized and creative homework products (Horowitz, 2000 & Corno, 2000).

One of the objectives of assigning homework is to involve parents in the educational activities of the students to enhance learning achievement, study skills, work habits, and motivational dispositions (Bempechat, 2004 and Warton, 2001). Different stakeholders have different perceptions regarding effectiveness of homework (Brock & Fisher, 2007).

There is a debate among academician about quantity of homework, types of homework, design of homework. Many researches have been conducted to ascertain the effectiveness of homework during past two decades demonstrated that homework has positive influence on academic achievement of the students (Robinson & Patall, 2006). Design of the homework, age of the students, effect on grades, effect on achievement measured by classroom tests, effect on achievement measured through standardized tests, and student attitudes are the area of interest for researchers. Other factors include parental involvement, completion of work, and discrepancies between the perceived time it should take and the actual time spent (Marzano & Pickering, 2007).

Homework process begins with the selection of topics and tasks aimed to help students learn specific skills and learn certain content. Homework should not be used to teach complex skills, but should focus on the integration of skills already possessed by the students (Plato, 2000).

Some studies have suggested that students are more likely to complete homework successfully when assignments are matched to their preferred learning styles (Dierson, 2000). Teachers should also encourage and teach good study habits and kept some necessary points while designing homework, such as setting a regular time to study that fits in with the family schedule; removing distractions (television and telephone calls) and gathering necessary supplies (Paulu, 1998). Most researchers agree that teachers should avoid using homework as a punishment because it communicates to students that homework is a negative activity that should be avoided, instead of a challenging activity that increases learning skills (Silvis & Plato, 2000). Present research was designed to seek the practices of secondary school teacher regarding homework. It aimed to explore the teacher's belief about the alignment of homework with academic performance of the students and how homework instead of creating boredom become motivating factors for students, Additionally, the purpose was to learn how teachers with different years of experience viewed homework and determine the homework design experiences in their professional development.

Objectives of the Study

- To investigate the purpose of secondary school teachers to assign homework to secondary school students.
- To explore the amount of homework assigned to secondary school students.

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- To investigate challenges faced by the teachers while designing homework.
- To explore parent's role in completing home work.

Research Questions

Following were the research questions.

1. What is purpose of assigning homework to secondary school students?
2. How much homework is suitable for secondary level students?
3. What are the challenges faced by the teachers while designing homework for secondary level students?
4. What is the parent's role in completion of their children homework?

Secondary questions were developed while interview protocol was based on these questions.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research approach was used to conduct this study. The design of the study was case study where schools were taken as a unit of analysis. The reason for selecting this design was because researchers were interested to explore this phenomenon in depth while directly interacting with research participant. This type of approach demands close interaction between researcher and researches that is helpful in exploring deeper inside of those variables in natural setting. Qualitative research is typically used to answer questions about the complex nature of phenomena, often with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomena from the participants' point of view. Case studies emphasize detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships. It can be considered a robust research method particularly when a holistic, in-depth investigation is required. Recognized as a tool in many social science studies, the role of case study method in research becomes more prominent when issues with regard to education are studied. Data were collected via interviews with ten teachers in District Lahore. Interview protocol was developed on secondary questions. Semi-structured interviews protocol was used to collect the data of secondary school teachers practices regarding homework and strategies they used while designing homework and challenges regarding homework.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

The study intended to explore the secondary school teacher practices regarding homework. The study also desired to identify the challenges teachers faced while designing homework.

What type of homework do you assign to your students?

Majority of the teachers replied that they assigned homework usually based on what has been taught in the classroom. Some of the teachers shared that homework is assigned while keeping in view the examination perspectives. Because at the end students grade matters. One of the participants said that,

“I assigned a kind of homework that enhanced learning and develop creativity”.I preferred concept-based homework to my students ‘

Another teacher from private school said,

“I do not assign that type of homework in which student just copy paste the content. I prefer to focus on the basic conceptual understanding of the students”

It was found that teachers of public school and private school have different perspectives regarding homework. Private school teachers usually assigned homework to enhance students understanding and improve their content knowledge.

What purposes do you have in your mind while assigning homework?

While responding to above mentioned question, majority teachers stated that they assign homework to improve the writing and learning skills of the students.

One of the respondents focuses on understanding of the concepts and said that,

“The purpose I kept in mind while giving task is not only to improve the writing and just indulged students in repetitious task, I tries to assign homework that enhance students’ conceptual understanding and creativity.”

Teachers from private school emphasized that they assigned homework to increase the problem-solving skills and independent learning habits of their students. One of the teachers claimed that,

“I want my students to become independent learner. I assigned a homework that helped them to become an independent learner”.

One of teacher from public school said,

“I assigned only with the purpose of covering syllabus because we do not have enough time to cover syllabus in classroom”.

It was concluded that teacher from public and private schools have different purposes while assigning homework, private schools assign homework with the purpose related to the topic and constructive nature enhancing students’ capability. Private school teachers emphasized that homework improve writing skills of the students.

Do you regularly assign homework? If so, why? If not? Why not?

The researchers asked teachers about regularly assigning homework and most of secondary school teachers from public school said that they assigned homework

“Yes, we assigned homework regularly to engage students in academic activities at home because this is a way to involved parents into their child academic activities”.

Furthermore, respondents said that they just assigned homework because school administration demands and it is a routine matter. While few teachers of private school answered that they do not assign homework regularly because students have very tough routine in school. One of the teachers added that,

“I don’t assign homework on daily basis because my first and foremost intention is to keep students at ease because they have tough routine in a school”.

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It was indicated that teachers from public school assigned homework regularly to their students as compare to private teachers who focused only on the students ease and believed on quality rather than quantity.

How do you give feedback to your students on their homework?

When researchers asked teachers about, how they give feedback to their students on homework. Most of the secondary school teachers claimed that,

“I prefer to give frequently feedback to my students during teaching and also give feedback on their homework, so that they can do better than their previous work by knowing their mistakes at right time”.

Some teachers said that they give both positive and negative remarks on notebook as feedback to students. One of teacher said that,

“Positive Feedback motivates the students to do better in the next and sometimes negative feedback demotivate them. So, I tried to give positive feedback”.

Teachers from private schools emphasized on descriptive feedback and they believed on constructive feedback.

“Appreciation is the only thing that brings motivation and capable the child to do better in next work and descriptive feedback is important for academic improvement”.

It was found that secondary school teachers from private school give feedback to prompt student thinking, assess each student’s progress, and provide individual relevant feedback.

How can you explain the importance of feedback on homework?

Feedback is the means by which teachers enable students to ‘close the gap’ in order to take learning forward and improve their performance. For feedback to be effective, children need to know how to take action on it. All teachers provide feedback to children, which can either be oral, written, or in more practical subjects’ feedback through demonstration.

It was asked from teachers about the importance of feedback about homework. One of the teachers answered,

“Teacher feedback encourages and motivates students to further excel in academics. Effective feedback is about finding the best way of communicating to learners what they have achieved and what they need to work on next”.

Some teachers added that feedback marked out the shortcomings of students.

One of respondent stated that,

“I think importance of feedback can be identified in such way that feedback that helps student to identify strength and weakness in various content areas. Feedback is most effective when it focuses on the task, is specific in its nature. It opens the opportunity for mistakes to be viewed as learning opportunities when time is provided for students to take action.

Another teacher from private school answered,

“Feedback provides a foundation for student and teacher relationships. By providing appropriate feedback, the students realized that the teacher is genuinely concerned about them and their education. This component also enhances a student’s self-efficacy and provides an avenue for motivation”.

It was concluded that teachers from private school explained the importance that it improves a student's confidence, self-awareness and enthusiasm for learning. Feedback can encourage all students to believe that they have the ability to improve their work if they are not compared with others and they are allowed to build on their previous performances. Feedback that supports learning involves choice for the learner in deciding what and how to receive that feedback. It can come from the teacher to a student, student to a student, or student to a teacher.

If your student has any difficulty to complete your assigned homework, how do you guide them for its completion?

Teachers need to take special care when assigning homework. If the homework assignment is too hard, is perceived as busy work, or takes too long to complete, students might tune out and resist doing it. Never send home any assignment that students cannot do. Homework should be an extension of what students have learned in class. To ensure that homework is clear and appropriate. Researchers asked teachers about difficulties of students as far homework is concerned.

One of the respondents said,

“I write the homework on the chalkboard, explain homework clearly, assign work that the students can do.”

Some teachers show concern about parent’s negligence towards their children academics

One of respondent said,

“I help the students in following ways.”

Provide additional one-on-one assistance to students, monitor students' homework more closely, adjust the length of the assignment and provide a peer tutor or assign the student to a study group.

It was found that private secondary school teacher give assistance through update material as well as suggest books and internet sources to overcome difficulty regarding homework.

How you made assign work more creative?

A first step toward creating meaningful homework is to take a look at daily life of students and assign homework. Researchers asked teachers about creative homework. Many respondents share diverse thinking about creative homework and one of the respondents said,

“Self-driven projects, creative tasks are more exciting than standard comprehension tasks and might encourage students that find sitting and writing dull or hard to complete the homework set – give students the freedom to learn and be creative in their home study.”

One of respondents stated that,

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“When students know why they’re doing something, they’ll be able to tell on their own when they’ve successfully completed their homework assignment. Give them choices on how they express themselves or present information.”

It was inferred that teachers from private school considered creative home assignment that stimulate creativity and imagination in the application of skills.

Approximately how much time do you think appropriate for spending on the completion of homework?

Many teachers and parents believe that homework helps students build study skills and review concepts learned in class. Others see homework as disruptive and unnecessary, leading to burnout and turning kids off to school. Decades of research show that the issue is more nuanced and complex than most people think: Homework is beneficial, but only to a degree. Students in high school gain the most, while younger kids benefit much less. One of the teachers said that,

“There must be 30-45 minutes for homework”

Some secondary school teachers recommended about 4 hours. As one of teacher from private school replied,

“Student study eight subjects and every subject teacher assigned individually assignments to them so I think 4 hours should be given to all over homework.”

It was concluded that homework is important as one of several influential factors in school success. However, other variables, including student ability, achievement, and motivation teaching quality influence the time students spend with homework tasks.

Is there any specific homework policy in your school? If yes please discuss.

Homework is an essential part of the school’s learning program. Assignments vary in accordance to the needs of the class and relate to classroom instruction. The idea of a homework policy is for the school to officially document and communicate their process for homework. The policy should outline what is expected of teachers when setting homework and from students in completing home learning tasks. It is a constructive document through which the school can communicate to parents, teachers, governors and students the learning objectives for homework.

Researchers asked from secondary school teachers about school policy regarding homework that in this case most of respondents have the homework policy. One of respondent said,

“Yes, our homework policy based on conceptual learning about homework with proper maintaining of notebooks that’s why we are giving homework daily basis.”

Another teacher from private school said,

“I checked homework daily as i am teaching biology so we have different policy for biology students. I ask them to make and explain diagram.”

One teacher from private school stated,

“Our motive is that child done most of the work in the front of teacher and there is not any compulsory policy regarding schools of assigning task of every subject on daily Basis our first and foremost motive to kept student ease and comfort.”

While few of teachers from public school don't have specific policy regarding homework. One of the respondent replied,

“We don't have specific homework policy in our school, just assigned the teacher a responsibility to checked out student's weekly progress about homework and informed to principal of school. We just focus on summer vacation work”

It was inferred a good homework policy will determine how much homework is appropriate and what type is most effective for achieving a school's learning objectives. Publishing the homework policy – although it might not unify everyone's views on the matter – fosters good communication across the school, sets out expectations for teachers and students, and makes that significant connection between parents and their children's education.

Do you assign homework according to the learning abilities of students?

Homework is assigned to students, by teachers to be completed outside of the school. It is used as an instructional supplement to classroom teaching. Teachers must carefully plan and assign homework in a way that maximizes the potential for student success. Not all students learn the same way. Students may be visual, verbal, or logical learners. Teachers need to be aware of the different learning strengths of their students and vary the types of homework they assign to include all types of learning styles.

Researchers asked respondent that, do you assign homework according to mental ability. One of teacher from private school said that,

“No, we don't assign according to mental ability as they don't follow pattern in addition some respondents said that due to shortage of time, they don't assign homework according to mental ability.”

Another teacher replied,

“I try my best to assigned them with according to their learning abilities but sometimes it not so just because of different topics and content that I neglect sometime their capability and just assigned the task frequently for sake of completion of syllabus”

Few of respondent narrated,

“Yes, we considered the learning abilities and assigned task to them according to his or her mental abilities.”

It was concluded that homework teaches the values of responsibility, good work-study habits, time management, initiative, and motivation. Teachers need to take in to account their students logical and mental capabilities.

How can you justify the effective criteria of homework?

The goal of Learning is to ensure that students acquire the most essential knowledge and skills they will need to succeed in school, higher education. To achieve a positive impact on student learning, homework assignments must be well-designed and carefully constructed. However, giving an assignment on material that was taught the same day is not as effective. It is most effective when it is used to reinforce skills learned in previous weeks or months.

Researchers asked respondent about effective criteria of homework. One of respondent narrated that,

“Students which interpret their mental abilities considered as an effective homework” because it led the students to reinforce their skills for the accomplishment of the task.”

Some of teacher called effective homework as like if it is done on the time. One of respondent answered,

“Effective criteria would be considered if homework assignments should be relevant, educationally purposeful, and driven by clearly defined learning objectives for a unit or lesson.”

It was concluded that Teachers should explain the purpose both of homework in general and of individual tasks. Tasks should be relevant, interesting and varied. Students should see the usefulness of homework. Homework is more effective when the focus is on quality as opposed to quantity. More is not necessarily better, particularly when students are just beginning to understand a concept.

What is parent’s role in homework completion?

Supporting children doing homework is one of the most common forms of parental involvement as most parents assume that they should be involved with their children on homework. Although they may vary in their intentions, strategies, and actions, parents generally believe that helping their children with their homework is a parental responsibility.

Researchers asked respondent about parents’ role for the completion of homework one of respondent said that,

“Parent’s role mostly we found 50% towards performances of their child because when mostly I assigned the homework, not done by the child just due to lack of attention towards their task.”

Some teachers also said that some parents in PTM even not know about the regular studies and schedule of their child.

Few respondents suggested,

“Parents should check or cross checking the child work, they have major role in homework completion and overall studies, parents should attend PTM, they should give proper time to their child recapitulate their work for them put them to suggest and listen them and listen homework properly for the good results.”

One of respondent replied,

“If parents are stepping away from their responsibility, it can be tough for teachers to handle at least a few of the students.”

It was concluded that Parents often become involved in their children’s education through homework. Whether children do homework at home, complete it in after school programs or work on it during the school day, homework can be a powerful tool for letting parents and other adults know what the child is learning, giving children and parents a reason to talk about what’s

going on at school, and giving teachers an opportunity to hear from parents about children's learning.

What challenges do you faced while designing homework?

Classroom challenges are one of the adequate problems faced by teachers. Some of the common classroom challenges faced by teachers include lack of teamwork, minimal personal time, working towards long term goals, arguments and student excuses, etc. Addressing these common classroom challenges can not only help to improve teacher retention rate but also enhance success rates of student and the ultimate quality of education.

This study also identified the challenges while designing homework and one of respondent stated that,

“A big challenge is to design flexible homework. All the type of students in a classroom has diverse learning needs. Satisfying all of them in the same way while approaching a particular curriculum is a serious challenge for me.”

Some respondents added that, *we* do not assign homework according to the mental abilities of the students not evenly bother their difficulties that they faced while accomplishment of the task.

Another respondent supported that,

“As I am teaching history so it is considered as a boring subject and mostly students not even take interest in this subject and not participate and give pathetic feedback so for me it's a big challenge to develop their interest towards this subject and able them to do task.”

Very few respondents said that time management is a big challenge for them that they have faced while designing homework.

It was concluded teachers face a hard time in getting students to be more self-directed. They are looking for ways to reduce the pressure of students by evoking interest and curiosity in young minds. They cross-check whether lessons are taught in a convincing way, homework is delivered systematically and is accessible anywhere, etc.

Conclusions

The following conclusions are drawn on the basis of findings drawn from the current research.

It was also concluded that secondary school teachers focused on purpose to assigning homework that help student towards their concept development and give them proper guidelines to overcome difficulty regarding homework completion. Furthermore, the study concluded that secondary school teachers assigned homework on regular basis for the sake of in time course completion.

This study also concluded that the secondary school teachers considered 3-5 hours of homework in a week is quite suitable for students. It was also found that secondary school teachers give frequent feedback to the students on their homework. So that students remained aware about their weaknesses of learning.

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It was also concluded that parents should cross check the secondary level student's homework and most of schools have their defined homework policy. Furthermore, concluded that the big challenge faced by secondary school teachers was to consider the individual difference of secondary level students. The study also concluded that, the effective criteria for designing good and creative homework can be introduced through proper planning and good time management.

Discussion

The study aimed to investigate the secondary school teacher practices regarding homework; it was found that secondary school teachers regularly assign homework to improve the writing and learning skills of the students. According to past studies homework has been perceived as an important part of education aiming to build a foundation for learners to succeed in the future (Vooris, 2004 & Warton, 2001). In this study teachers suggested 30 to 45 minutes for completion of homework for the secondary level students. According to (Maltese et al., 2012). one to two hours spent on daily homework result highest grades and test scores. In present study individual difference was found a big challenge for secondary school teachers, in past studies environment was found big challenge for students (Xu & Corno, 2003).

According to findings of this study that parents showed lack of attention towards the performances of their child. While in previous study, parents who did not participate often had lower education levels (Tam & Chan, 2009). A major reason that parents' involvement has been considered beneficial for children's achievement is that it emphasizes the value of school to children (Hill Taylor, 2004).

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