Homework: Perspective of Students, Guardians and Teachers of the 1st Cycle of Primary Education

Fiona Monteiro[1], Conceição Pereira[2], Gema Sánchez[3]

IPL: Lisbon School of Education, Portugal[1,2]
UCLM: Toledo School of Education, Spain[3]

Abstract

Learning doesn't only happen inside a classroom. One of the most popular but controversial tasks in education that establishes a link between learning during curricular and extracurricular hours is homework. The present research was developed within the scope of this subject and aimed to study the perspectives of students, guardians and teachers of the 1st Cycle of Primary Education. The study included 201 subjects – 115 students, 79 guardians and 7 teachers – from 1st cycle primary schools in the Greater Lisbon area. The pupils being studied have different methods of homework prescription: by the teacher, by themselves or through a mixed system in which the prescription is done by the teacher and by the student. The students have also different methods of homework correction: by the teacher collectively with all the students, by the teacher individually in the student's presence and by the teacher individually without the student being present. A mixed research methodology (quantitative and qualitative) was used. The data was collected through questionnaire surveys and was processed using content analysis and Statistical Package for Social Sciences v.25 software. The results of the study show that the way homework is prescribed and corrected influences the subjects' opinion about it, particularly in the group of students. Greater the autonomy and responsibility of the student in homework prescription and the more individual and in person the homework correction is, greater the students' agreement about it but not on the effort they apply to do it. Regardless, guardians and teachers are more favourable to homework when it is prescribed by a mixed methodology.

Keywords: *Homework; Self-Regulation in Learning; Differentiated Instruction; Autonomy; Accountability;*

1. Introduction

Learning stimulates internal processes of development in students [1] (Vygotsky, 1988) and it occurs beyond the classroom. It develops not only through academic experiences but also through personal experiences. Managing the time we spent on the different types of learning has become a matter of interest in the field of science education.

Homework is a task that starts in the classroom context but goes beyond it and is far from unanimous, not only in the educational community but in society in general. There is an increasing number of studies confirming its usefulness but it is also proven that homework can be inefficient and unproductive if it is in excess [2] (Cooper, Robinson & Patall, 2006). Although Cooper, an American researcher, has conducted two significant investigations with students from the United States of America showing that there is a positive relationship between homework and student success there are several authors who believe that homework is not healthy for students and that school work is overvalued in detriment of personal and family well-being [3] (Marzano & Pickering, 2007).

In Portugal, research on homework is scarce and poorly publicized [4] (Silva, 2009) but there is discussion between schools, the scientific community and society in general about homework's advantages and disadvantages for students. In most discussions, people are either for or against homework.

The truth is that it is not a matter of being in favor or against homework. It's reflecting about what it is, how it is used, its effects on the students, how it adapts to the circumstances and differences such as age/schooling cycle, family schooling level, among other ones [5] (Morgado, 2018).

Each teacher follows the pedagogical method they consider most appropriate. Regarding homework, there are those who prescribe homework for all students equally, others grant full autonomy to students and others prescribed homework through a mixed system, where the homework prescription is made by the teacher and also the student. The practices of homework correction by teachers in the classroom can also be diverse: by the teacher collectively with all students; individual correction by the teacher in the student's presence and individual correction by the teacher in the absence of the student.

This study analyzed the perspectives of students, guardians and teachers about homework in the 1st Cycle of Primary Education, taking into account three types of prescription, by the teacher, by the student or by a mixed methodology (teacher and student).

The specific objectives of the study were:
  i)   Characterize the subjects' perspectives on homework;
  ii) Characterize the subjects' perspectives on the type of homework prescription;
  iii) Compare the subjects' perspectives on the type of homework prescription;
  iv) Characterize the subjects' perspectives on the type of homework correction;
  v)   Compare the subjects' perspectives on the type of homework correction.

2. Methodology

Taking into account the object of study a mixed research methodology was opted, that is, a methodology of quantitative and qualitative nature. The quantitative approach allowed comparing the global responses of different social categories and analyzing the correlations between variables [6] (Quivy & Campenhoudt, 1998). The qualitative approach sought to interpret and understand individual issues from the subject's point of view [7] (Coutinho, 2014).

2.1. Characterization of the subjects

For this study 201 subjects were interviewed: 115 students, 79 guardians and 7 classrooms teachers of the students interviewed. The students were enrolled in 4th grade (55,0%), 3rd grade (35,0%) and 2nd grade (11,0%). They were between the ages of 6 and 13, 51,3% were male and 48,7% were female. Of the students interviewed 73,0% attended a private institution and 27,0% attended a public institution.

Concerning the guardians, 82,3% were female and 17,7% were male and their ages ranged from 26 to 52. In terms of consanguinity with the student, 81,0% were mothers, 17,7% fathers and 1,3% had other kinship relationships.

The teachers interviewed were all female and were between 27 and 45 years of age. Their professional experience varied between 2 and 22 years, with 3 having a bachelor's degree and 4 a master's degree.

2.2. Data collection methods and technics

Data was collected through the application of questionnaire surveys as they originate a set of individual speech that is possible of interpretation and generalization [8] (Ghiglione & Matalon, 2001). For this purpose, three surveys were carried out with opened-ended (qualitative nature) and close-ended questions (quantitative nature). Each survey consisted of the same questions but adapted to the respective groups of respondents — students, guardians and teachers — in order to respect the standardization conditions for comparison purposes [9] (Ketele & Roegieres, 1993). The surveys were elaborated based on the questionnaires used in [10] Dantas' (2014) study *Perspectives and practices on the realization of homework*.

2.3. Data analysis methods and techniques

The data from the surveys was analyzed in different ways, depending on its nature. Quantitative data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences v.25 software to obtain the descriptive statistics of the results, while qualitative data was analysed through content analysis, according to the assumptions suggested by [11] Bardin (2011).

3. Results

Based on the data analysis, it was possible to verify that:

3.1. Agreement and usefulness of homework

The majority of the subjects agree with homework (76,6%), however, students revealed a more favorable view of it (90,4%) compared to guardians (82,3%) and teachers (57,1%). Of the students who don't agree with homework (9,6%) the majority (90,9%) are students whose homework is prescribed entirely by the teacher.

Most of the subjects consider that homework promotes students' autonomy and sense of responsibility (36,2%) as well as to develop students' learning (29,4%). Regarding the group of students, these believe that homework promotes learning (28,8%) and develops autonomy and sense of responsibility (21,0%). They also believe that it is used to evaluate their knowledge (24,6%) and involve parents in

their schooling (19,8%). On the other hand, parents consider that homework is mainly used to develop students' learning (41,3%) and to promote their autonomy and sense of responsibility (33,2%). With regard to the group of teachers, they believe that homework primarily promotes autonomy and a sense of responsibility (54,5%).

3.2. Type of homework prescription *versus* opinion about homework

The greater students' autonomy on homework prescription more favorable they are about it. Regarding guardians and teachers, these are more favorable to homework when it is prescribed using a mixed methodology.

3.3. Type of homework prescription *versus* performing frequency

Regarding the frequency with which students do their homework, they are more compliant in performing this task when it is prescribed by the teachers (61,5%). They do it less frequently when it is prescribed by a mixed methodology (55,3%) and do it even less when the prescription of this task is of their own responsibility (50,0%).
In short, the greater the autonomy of the students their homework prescription the less they do it.

3.4. Type of homework prescription *versus* student's effort

The greater students' autonomy on homework prescription the less effort they apply to do it (12,5%).

3.5. Type of homework correction *versus* homework implementation

When homework correction is more in person and individualized by the teachers more the students comply with its prescription (32,8%).

3.6. Type of homework correction *versus* student's effort

When the correction of homework is more in person and individualized by the teachers the bigger students efforts (67,3%). When homework correction is done in the absence of the students less effort they apply to do it (51,4%).

3.7. Type of homework prescription *versus* type of homework correction

When the students are autonomous in homework prescription the correction is done individually by the teacher, without the student's presence (100%).
When teachers share the homework prescription with students or when they are prescribed only by the teacher the homework is corrected either with the entire class (50,0%) or individually in the student's presence (50,0%).

4. Conclusion

The results indicate that the majority of the subjects interviewed agree with homework. Regarding the usefulness of homework the study subjects agree that it develop students' learning and promotes students' autonomy and sense of responsibility. Students also believe that homework is used as a tool for teachers to assess their knowledge and is a way for their parents to become more involved in their schooling.
When asked about the method of prescription and correction of homework used by the teacher, the students' perspectives stand out from the other groups under study. The greater the autonomy and the students' responsibility in the homework prescription the greater their agreement about it but less effort and commitment they put in it. It would be interesting to deepen these results. Do teachers ask for student's responsibility but not monitor enough their autonomous work? How can students learn to better self-regulate their homework?
For their part, guardians and teachers are more favorable to homework when it is prescribed using a mixed methodology (teacher and student responsibility).
Regarding the type of homework correction, students are more compliant when this correction is in person and individualized by the teacher.
These results are not in the same perspective of the results obtained by [10] Dantas (2014) in his study.

References

[1] Vigosky, Vygotsky, L. (1988). Aprendizagem e desenvolvimento intelectual na idade escolar. Linguagem, desenvolvimento e aprendizagem, 10, 103–117.

[2] N. Cooper, H., Robinson, J. C., & Patall, E. A. (2006). Does Homework Improve Academic Achievement? A Synthesis of Research 1987-2003. Review of Education Research, 76(1), 1–62. Obtido de http://rer.aera.net

[3] Marzano, R. J., & Pickering, D. J. (2007). Special Topic / The Case For and Against Homework The Case for Homework. Educational Leadership, 64(6), 74–79.

[4] Silva, R. (2009). Etapas Processuais do Trabalho de Casa e Efeitos Auto-regulatórios na Aprendizagem do Inglês: Um estudo com diários de TPC no 2.o Ciclo do Ensino Básico. Universidade do Minho. Obtido de
   https://repositorium.sdum.uminho.pt/bitstream/1822/9759/1/tese.pdf

[5] Morgado, J. (2018). Trabalho de casa ou trabalho em casa. Visão. Obtido de http://visao.sapo.pt/opiniao/bolsa-de-especialistas/2018-05-08-Trabalho-de-casa-ou-trabalho-em-casa

[6] Quivy, R., & Campenhoudt, L. Van. (1998). Manual de Investigação em Ciências Sociais. Lisboa: Gradiva.

[7] Coutinho, C. (2014). Metodologia de investigação em ciências sociais e humanas: Teoria e prática. Leya.

[8] Ghiglione, R., & Matalon, B. (2001). O Inquérito - Teoria e Prática. Oeiras: Celta Editora.

[9] Ketele, J.-M. de, & Roegieres, X. (1993). Metodologia da Recolha de Dados - Fundamentos dos Métodos de Observações, de Questionário, de Entrevistas e de Estudo de Documentos. Lisboa: Instituto Piaget.

[10] Dantas, A. (2014). Perspeticas e práticas sobre a realização dos trabalhos de casa. Lisboa: IPL - Escola Superior de Educação de Lisboa.

[11] Bardin, L. (2011). Análise de conteúdo. São Paulo: Edições 70.