

Classroom Teachers' Opinions about Homeworks *

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Abstract

This study is aiming to establish the training teachers get regarding homework and how/how much it is to be given, and ascertain their views on this subject. The study has been conducted with 56 classroom teachers who have newly graduated in the 2014-2015 academic year and were currently teaching. A questionnaire was designed in order to accumulate the teachers' opinions on homework. The questionnaire was prepared with questions designed to keep the participants from veering away from the subject without constraining their views. These questions have been formed as “the teachers' views on homework,” “the necessity of homework,” “the effectiveness/importance of homework,” “courses taken on homework,” “how the teachers learned how much/how homework should be given” and “what disturbed the teachers about the homework they were given as students.” At the end of the study it was seen that teachers were of the opinion that homework was necessary for students to repeat and reinforce their learnings, and to gain a sense a responsibility. Yet they have also pointed out that excessively and pointlessly given homework frustrates students, makes them feel unsuccessful, alienates them from school and even decreases their self-esteem. In addition it was found that they were not taught any lessons about how to give homework and how much of it, and that they have had to learn through their own experiences and observations.

Keywords: homework, teacher training, teacher

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Sınıf Öğretmenlerinin Ev Ödevlerine İlişkin Görüşleri

Öz

Bu araştırma, öğretmenlerin ödevler ile ilgili ve ödevlerin nasıl / ne kadar verileceğine ilişkin aldıkları eğitimi belirlemeyi ve bu konudaki görüşlerini saptamayı amaçlayan bir çalışmadır. Araştırma, 2014-2015 eğitim-öğretim yılında, yeni mezun olmuş ve halen öğretmenlik yapan 56 sınıf öğretmeni ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Gönüllülük esasına göre görüşlerine başvuru alan öğretmenlerin 37'si kadın, 19'u ise erkektir. Öğretmenlerin ödevlere ilişkin görüşlerini toplamak amacıyla görüşme formu kullanılmıştır. Görüşme formu katılımcıların görüşlerini kısıtlamadan konunun dışına çıkmasını engellenmeye çalışan sorulardan oluşturulmuştur. Bu sorular; öğretmenlerin “ödev hakkındaki görüşleri”, “ödevin gerekliliği”, “ödevin etkililiği/önemi”, “ödevlerle ilgili aldığı dersleri”, “ne kadar/nasıl ödev verileceğini nereden öğrendiği” ve “öğrencilik yıllarında ona verilen ödevlerden en rahatsız eden şeyin ne olduğu” biçimindedir. Araştırmanın sonunda öğretmenler; ödevlerin öğrencilerin öğrendiklerini pekiştirdiği, tekrar etmesi açısından gerekli olduğu, öğrenciye sorumluluk duygusu kazandırdığı yönünde görüş belirtmişlerdir. Ancak sayfalarca ve amaçsız verilen ödevlerin öğrenciyi yıldıran başarısızlık duygusu yaşamasına, okuldan soğumasına hatta kendisine saygısının azalmasına kadar götürebileceği görüşünde olduklarını belirtmişlerdir. Öğretmenler ödevlerin; bunaltıcı ve sıkıcı olmaması gerektiği, çocuğu yormayacak şekilde olması gerektiğini söylemişlerdir. Verilen ödevlerin veliler tarafından yapılmaması gerektiği de dile getirilenler arasındadır. Ev ödevinin gereksiz olduğu düşüncesi en az ifade edilenler arasında yer almaktadır. Bununla birlikte öğretmenlik eğitimleri boyunca ödevlerin nasıl ve ne kadar verileceği konusunda her hangi bir ders almadıkları, kendi deneyimleri ve gözlemleri ile ödev vermeyi öğrendikleri sonucuna ulaşmışlardır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: ev ödevi, öğretmen eğitimi, öğretmen

Introduction

Homework is generally described as “any task assigned by schoolteachers intended for students to carry out during non-school hours” (Cooper, 1989). Homework is an extension of the learning process and consists of tasks to be done outside of classroom hours, either by themselves or with the help of their families, in order to help reinforce the learnings they acquire at school and prevent them from forgetting (Arıkan & Altun, 2007; Cooper, 2001, Walberg, 1985). Alternatively, homework has been defined as, studies students do either individually or as groups outside of class times, in order to improve scientific thinking, problem solving and accessing sources (Şahin & Altınay, 2008).

Like many methods in teaching, homework has at times become very popular, and at other times lost its popularity. At the beginning of the 1900s homework was seen as an effective way of increasing mental discipline, whereas in the 1940s it was criticized for consisting of too much repetition of similar kinds and achieving only a low level of learning. In following years, similar waves of opinions continued since a consensus could not be reached on the subject (Woolfolk Hoy, 2015).

Experts in favour of the idea that homework is helpful for student learning, express that the relations between homework and success strengthens with age, and that effort counts for more than the time spent doing homework. They emphasize, in addition, that homework improves students’ decision making abilities, helps them gain a sense of responsibility, and leads to better parent-teacher relations (Yılmaz, 2003). The opposite camp, claims that no matter how interesting homework is, students will always find it tedious and boring, and that students get exhausted from learning. Another criticism is that it takes away from the time reserved for communal work and leisure time activities, both of which are important for raising individuals well adapted to their community. It is also seen that there is a constant global increase in homework given to primary school students (Woolfolk Hoy, 2015) despite the view that homework has little benefit for students of younger ages (Woolfolk Hoy, 2015; Cooper, Robinson & Patall, 2006; Kapkıran & Kıran, 1999).

In this context, it is more important to think on how to determine the most effective and beneficial homework designed for the right age, the right purpose, given in best way and at the right amount, rather than discussing whether or not homework has effect on students’ learning. Yet when it is kept in mind that homework needs to be suited to the age, learning speed and interests of the student as well as in service of the purpose of information transfer (Yılmaz, 2003), it is seen that most homework does not fulfil these objectives. Although it is suggested that children shouldn’t be given homework before third grade, it is seen that teachers give out homework to students from first grade; and that students become overwhelmed trying to complete their workload.

With the structuralist approach and the changes it brings to forms of homework, the main problems have become that parents tend to do homework intended for parent-student cooperation by themselves, without including the student; most

parents do not know how to help their children with their homework; they tend to outright give the answers instead of providing clues for the student to reach the answer; and inability of families of low socio-economic status to help their children with schoolwork.

It is expected that teachers help raise parent awareness about homework, listen to the parents views, and learn about the students studying habits outside of school and give out homework accordingly. Keeping in mind the issues stated above, the effects of homework has been a point of much debate for parents, teachers, and students alike. When it is considered that teachers need to study on homework in a way that encompasses all types with regard to the students' levels and the learning objectives (Hizmetçi, 2007), the lack of clarity on how homework should be given and how much of it, leads to many mistakes in application. Whether these teachers receive professional education on the subject during their bachelor's education becomes an important point of focus in the centre of these issues.

Apart from being mentioned by instructors due to individual interest or effort, effective homework assignment is not included in the curriculums of teacher training programmes within educational faculties. Also, when the general qualifications of the teaching profession are examined, it is seen that no information on homework assignment is included in the qualifications and sub-qualifications of the teaching and learning process, monitoring and assessing learning and growth (<http://otmg.meb.gov.tr/>, 2008).

When the literature on this subject is examined, it is seen that most studies examine the attitudes and views of students (Benli & Sarıkaya, 2012; Gedik & Orhan, 2013; Yücel, 2004; Sarıgöz, 2011; Özer & Öcal, 2012; Aydın, 2011), teachers (Kütükte, 2010; Deveci & Önder, 2014), and parents (Keskin & Özer, 2016; Şen & Gülcan, 2012; Tüysüz & etc., 2010) toward homework. Yet no research findings on how and how much homework should be given by teachers were discovered. It's thought that examining this subject that is relevant to teachers, students and parents alike will contribute to the literature as well as vocational courses, such as principles and methods of teaching, in educational faculties and that revisions will be found necessary.

The Aim of the Research

The aim of this study is to ascertain the training teachers' receive on homework during their education and their views on this subject.

Method

The Model of the Research

This is a qualitative study aiming to identify teachers' views regarding homework and the education they receive on how to give homework and how much

of it they should give. The research has been conducted suitably to the phenomenological design. This design was chosen because it focuses on phenomena we are aware of yet we do not yet have a deeper and detailed understanding of (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008).

The Research Group

The study was conducted with 56 actively working classroom teachers that have graduated from the department of classroom teaching in the 2014-2015 academic year. These teachers consulted for their views, chosen on a voluntary basis, consist of 37 females and 19 males. The age distribution of the participant teachers is given below, in Table 1.

Table 1

Age Distribution of Teachers in Research Group

Age	n	%
20-24	20	36
25-30	7	13
31-39	8	14
40-49	13	23
50-65	8	14
Total	56	100

The Measuring Instrument

The researchers designed a questionnaire in order to determine the views teachers have on homework. The questionnaire consists of six questions. The questions are; ‘What are your thoughts on homework?’, ‘Is giving homework necessary? Why?’, ‘Do you think homework is effective/important?’, ‘What bothered you the most about homework you were given in your time as a student?’, ‘Did you receive any lessons on how to give homework during your education?’, and ‘Where did you learn how to give homework and how much of it to give?’ The questionnaire prepared was presented for consultation to and approved by two experts in educational sciences and two classroom teachers.

Data Analysis

The research data was collected via email. The teacher views were collected in virtual space through the questionnaire. The data collected through questionnaires was analysed using the descriptive analysis technique (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). The frequencies and percentages the views collected in writing were calculated. All findings were supported with examples from the teachers’ discourses. The teacher discourses have been coded using (T) and the number assigned to the teacher. For example, teacher number one has been coded as (T1).

The data coding reliability was checked in order to calculate the reliability of the person doing the coding. To assure the internal reliability of the study, two separate people conducted the coding and data analysis. Experts in the field came together to compare the analyses conducted, and identified the items they reached consensus on and those that lead to difference of opinion. In addition, for external reliability the the same people conducted the coding twice, with a month in between, and these codings were compared. In this operation, concluding the data analysis, the percentage of concordance was found to calculate the reliability (Türnüklü & Şahin, 2003). The calculations resulted in a concordance coefficient of .90, and the study was accepted as reliable.

Findings

The findings reached by examining and evaluating the answers given by teachers are presented in this section.

Table 2

Frequencies and Percentages of Views on Homework

Views	f	%
Necessary, should be given, important and beneficial	66	28
Should be given for reinforcement	37	16
Should be given for repetition, children should repeat	34	15
Homework is needless (Thinking it is not productive, it isn't needed if there are enough exercises in class, because it is given as a punishment)	21	9
Shouldn't be excessive, shouldn't be oppressing or boring, Shouldn't tire the child	22	6
Quality is important	11	3
Should be given as preparation to class	6	3
For endurance	6	2
Shouldn't be done by parent	6	2
For sense of responsibility	5	2
Effective if on purpose	5	3
Should be research oriented, creative	5	3
Should be checked, feed back should be offered	3	3
Should be functional	2	1
Shouldn't be given to complete subjects	2	1
Isn't always necessary, should be given occasionally	2	1
Total	233	100

To determine their views on homework, the teachers were asked "What are your thoughts on homework?" In addition the questions "Is giving homework necessary? Why?", "Do you think homework is effective/important?" were asked, and because close answers were given for these three questions, they have been grouped together and interpreted through a single table. According to Table 2, 28% of teachers think giving homework is necessary, that homework should be given and is beneficial. They have expressed that homework should be given for enforcement

(16%) and repetition (15%). The sentences on this subject are as such: one of the teachers expresses that;

“Homework is definitely needed. If they don’t repeat the things they learn through the day they cannot reinforce them.” (T9)

Other sentences supporting this are;

“Homework is the hands and feet of teachers. It is important for their to be repetition of wherever we have left off.” (T10)

“... It helps to reinforce subjects taught, and are found difficult to learn, it helps to make them practical and easier to understand. There can’t be a lesson without homework!” (T36)

As can be seen from the sentences, it is thought that there cannot be repetition and reinforcement without homework, and it is emphasised that reinforcement is effective in learning.

In addition, the view that homework shouldn’t be excessive, shouldn’t be oppressing or boring, and shouldn’t tire the child is one of the most common, with a proportion of 9%. The thoughts on this are given by;

“Students should be given a density of homework they can do. For example, I think it is unnecessary to give pages and pages of to a student that is 5 and a half, six years old. If enough practice is done in class then giving homework is needless.” (T18)

“Homework should be given, but not too much. If too much is given the student may become tired of the lesson, can start having negative thoughts about the lesson.” (T24)

“I think students shouldn’t be smothered with homework given too much, especially in the primary school stage. For primary school students, the sense of responsibility should be reinforced by giving fewer project works.” (T29)

The teachers have emphasised that too much homework can have negative effects on students, isn’t needed for younger ages, and that homework given should be more to the objective of reinforcing a sense of responsibility.

That homework given should not be done by the parents is also among the views expressed (3%). A teacher expresses thoughts on this subject:

“There is a possibility that the parents might do the homework. I think homework that can be directly monitored should be given.” (T23)

In addition to being effective and important, that the quality of homework is also important is among the views expressed (3%).

"The quality of homework is important. I think it is effective." (T16)

There are also expressions that suggest giving homework suitable to an objective will be more efficient.

"If homework is suitable for the target, and is designed to contribute to the child's psychomotor and mental development (not by rote), it makes learning easier. It increases preparedness." (T25)

Views that homework is not necessary, that it isn't needed if enough practice is done in class, that it is not productive and that it is given as a punishment have a ratio of 9%.

Table 3

Frequencies and Percentages of Things that Bothered Teachers most about Homework They were given as Students

Views	f	%
That it was too much, that it took up time	23	27
Writing and summarising	13	15
That it was long and unnecessary	11	13
Homework that was off-topic	5	6
That it is impracticable and without purpose	5	6
That homework isn't examined	4	5
That it is given on subjects where examples weren't given and that haven't been studied in class	4	5
Repetition of the same test	4	5
Not suitable for student's level	4	5
Not leaving any free time	3	3
Given as punishment	2	2
Being done by parents	2	2
Other (project homework, group homework, dependent on grades, being expensive, requiring handiness)	6	7
Total	86	100

27% of the teachers have said that the homework they were given were too much and too time consuming in response to the question "What bothered you the most about homework you were given in your time as a student?" T20 complained about the excess of homework, saying;

"Doing homework that went on for pages and pages. Having no time left for playing games."

15% of the teachers have expressed that they did not like homework that consisted of writing and summaries. T39 has expressed thoughts on this matter;

“... Example: Write the same thing five times. Being given homework on and being held responsible for subjects we did not learn about, like writing summaries, solving problems, coming up with questions.”

13% of the teachers said that they did not like homework that they thought was too long and unnecessary.

Table 4

Frequencies and Percentages of whether Courses were taken on How to Give Homework

Views	f	%
Yes	13	24
No	42	76
Total	55	100

When asked whether or not they received any courses on how to give homework, it is seen that 76% of the teachers said “No.” The teachers that replied affirmative (24%) that how to give homework was touched upon directly or indirectly in courses such as classroom management (n=3), assessment and evaluation (n=3), principles and methods in teaching (n=4), material development (n=1), programme development (n=1), educational psychology (n=1), developmental psychology (n=1), and teaching science and technology (n=1). A teacher says as an explanation that information was given on homework in the assessment and evaluation class;

“Our teacher mentioned it as an extra in the Assessment and Evaluation class.”
(T17)

Table 5

Frequencies and Percentages of Where They Learned How to Give Homework and How Much of It to Give

Views	f	%
Through experience/through doing and living	29	39
Through students’ reactions, the students situation	8	11
Hasn’t learned	8	11
Through instructors at university	5	7
During interning	5	7
Through observation	4	6
From their own education	4	6
From courses in university, books	4	6
From bad examples	2	3
From colleagues	1	1
Total	70	100

To the question “How did you learn how to give homework and how much of it to give” 39% of the teachers answered that they learned through their own experiences. One of these teachers puts the situation as such;

"I've come up with a sort of homework system of my own, through the homework given to me throughout my time as a student, the effects these had on me, and now as a parent observing the effects homework has on me and my child." (T54)

11% of the teachers, come up with a way of giving homework, through the reactions they get from students and depending on the situation of the students. On this subject, a teacher voices opinions about indicating that the ideas of colleagues was also took part in learning how to give homework;

"Negative types of homework from my own time as a student, already formed an idea. In addition, when I started the profession the ideas of the colleagues I worked with, and most importantly the reactions I got from the students were very informative."(T3)

11% of the teachers say that they did not learn how to give homework, 7% that they learned from lecturers in university. The sentences uttered the rarest are that they learned through colleagues (1%) and from bad examples (3%).

Conclusion and Discussion

The research examines teachers' views regarding homework. As result of the analyses, the views expressed most frequently by teachers are that homework is necessary, important and beneficial; and that homework should be given with the objective of reinforcement and repetition. Considering that learning should not be confined to school life and should continue in the process beyond school hours the results are as expected. In their research, Özer & Öcal (2013), have found that teachers have the views and suggestions that "homework should definitely be given for it reinforces learning." Babadoğan (1990) describes homework as a series of tasks following education in order to reinforce learnings, thus expressing that homework creates settings for knowledge and skills to be reinforced. In line of this information, another finding often cited by teachers is that homework should not be excessive and should be given in a way that doesn't overwhelm and tire the students. Yet it is known that the amount of homework given is increasing every year. One study shows that there is a significant increase in the amount of homework given between the years 1981 (52 hours a week) and 1997 (128 hours a week) (Cooper, Robinson & Patall, 2006). It can also be said that teachers emphasise that homework should be functional, that homework given to keep students busy or detain them creates weariness, and that excessive amounts of homework limits time for their social, psychological and moral development (Cooper, 2006; Kralovec & Buell, 2000).

To the question "Is giving homework necessary? Why?" the most common answer given by teachers is that, "yes, it is necessary." The reasons it is necessary are said to be repetition and reinforcement. It can also be said that the most common type of homework these teachers have encountered in their own educations have been repetition homeworks. That this kind of homework tends to be more towards memorisation, contains low level information, is easier to forget and is more

effective for students of younger ages is in line with the fact that the participants are primary school teachers. In the research by Epstein (2001), it was found that homework was given to reinforce the learnings of the classroom, helping the students come to class prepared, achieving parent participation, supporting individual improvement, creating a homework policy, and to improve public relations (informing parents of activities and operations taking place at school. Also Ersoy & Anagün (2009) as well as Muhlenbruk and co.'s (2000) findings similarly show that teachers give homework more to the end of reinforcement of learnings.

To ensure that learnings are permanent, for students to gain a sense of responsibility and to achieve a level of preparedness before class; are less cited reasons for giving homework. When it is considered that raising students' awareness of the subject before their participation in class is instrumental for effective learning, that the frequencies are low is unexpected. Also, at a time when information changes rapidly, it is very difficult for educational objectives to be fulfilled in the limited classroom time with the limited information that can be given. As a result it becomes mandatory that the learners bear the responsibility of their own learnings. Even though homework plays an important role in developing the student's responsibility of learning, and responsibility of carrying out a given task very few of the teachers have expressed views on this matter. Also in the literature, the findings of Johnson and Pontius's (1989) study, support the view that teachers give out homework in order to develop a sense of responsibility in their students.

The answers most frequently given to the question "What bothered you the most about homework you were given in your time as a student?" were that it was too much, that it was time consuming, that it was long and unnecessary, and homework focusing on writing and summarising. That the homework given is not suitable to the students' age, it is aimed to keep the students busy and does not contribute to the student academically is an indication that it is given by teachers that are not well equipped and knowledgeable enough on the subject of homework. It's possible to say that teachers have encountered similar problems in their own educations and that these problems continue to persist at the current time. There are a number of different learning strategies for students' learnings to become permanent and for them to gain the habit of studying regularly. Summarising, taking notes, repetition, interpretation, gathering attention are some of these strategies. Homework creates opportunities for these strategies to be put to use. Yet when homework containing these strategies is given to the students aimlessly, in a way that inconveniences students can lead to students developing negative attitudes towards the use of these strategies.

When asked if they received an education on how to give homework during their training, 76% of teachers replied "no." Those who replied affirmative, said that how to give homework was mentioned in the courses; classroom management (n=3), assessment and evaluation (n=3), principles and methods in teaching (n=4), material development (n=1), programme development (n=1), educational psychology (n=1), developmental psychology (n=1), and teaching science and technology (n=1). 76% of the teachers not receiving any education on how to give homework can be explained

with the lack of this subject on teacher training curriculums. In the explanations given on which classes the subject of homework was touched upon, the fact that the names of courses varied indicates that the mentioning of the subject directly or indirectly depends on the lecturer's individual efforts. The variety of courses and the implication that the lecturers may touch upon the subject of homework approaching it from their own field of expertise also makes it difficult to say that lecturers themselves have received a similar training on the subject.

To the question, "Where did you learn how to give homework and how much of it to give?" 30% of teachers have replied that they have learned from their own experience, and 11% replied that they learned through the reactions of their students. Another 11% have again expressed that they have not learned. It is a known fact that homework that lacks quality does more harm than good to students. That teachers give out homework without any foundation for such an important subject is a matter of consideration.

According to the research findings, it is seen that how to give homework and how much homework should be given, how homework can be given effectively is not given a sufficient place or indeed any place at all in teacher training or in the learning and teaching process and monitoring learning and development proficiency fields that are within the general proficiencies of the teaching profession. In this light, it is thought that revising classroom teaching programmes in education faculties and making changes to this end will be beneficial. That candidate teachers do not receive any systematic education on how to give homework, and that teachers are left to rely completely on their experiences – good or bad – on the process, quality and volume of giving homework indicates that issues in this matter will persist. It is necessary for both professional and trainee teachers to be equipped with a scientifically based knowledge on a matter that plays such a significant role in the learning and teaching process. It is not enough that only trainee teachers receive education, and it is necessary also for all teachers and administrators in active duty within the educational system to receive additional vocational training.

In addition it is important for homework not to be given when not in accordance with regulations, for teachers to consider whether or not the homework will benefit students before giving it, and not give homework as a form of punishment. How much of a student's time a certain homework will take up needs to be considered. Students need to be given homework suited to their ages, interests and development. The time homework consumes should not pass 10-20 minutes for primary school, and one hour for secondary school and highschool (Woolfolk, Hoy, 2015). Repetitive homework should be preferred with students of younger ages, and as age increases more place should be given to homework that encourages the student to structure information, solve problems, think scientifically, and learn how to find and access sources of information.

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