


Research Article

Homework – Necessity or Myth?

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Abstract: Throughout generations a question has been posed: do students benefit from writing homework and does homework fulfill its purpose? The debate about the usefulness of homework causes many doubts in the educational public. Learning outcomes and the importance of homework are different today than twenty or more years ago. Contemporary students are not very interested in this type of activity, showing a high degree of non-independence in performing tasks outside the school environment. The author discusses the expediency of writing homework and its impact on students' learning achievements in class. Accordingly, the author examines the positive and negative sides of this extracurricular activity. This article was created based on the analysis of previous research and knowledge about this subject. Some Croatian and Slovenian didacticists believe that homework should not be abolished, but it should be functional, comprising of various exercises aimed at encouraging students to be active. Tasks are justified if they expand the possibility of learning and serve to develop students' abilities and skills. The author states that homework is necessary in the mother tongue teaching, especially at the initial level of primary school education. The teacher must control the quality and quantity of the homework, taking into account the time the student needs to complete it and the type of goals he wants to achieve in relation to the linguistic and literary material. The article offers the examples of homework in the fields of mother tongue, literature, written expression, reading and media culture. Modern technology offers numerous possibilities for creating creative homework.

Keywords: classroom teaching; extracurricular activity; homework; mother tongue; student

1. Introduction

Homework is an integral part of the teaching process. The very term homework is very “elastic” and includes everything that the student has to do outside of classroom, at home. Yavich and Davidovitch (2020) define homework as a task that teachers assign to students at school, and students are required to complete it during extracurricular hours, and they consider it a common learning strategy. There is an eternal generational polemic about the (un)justified need of doing homework (Gill & Schlossman, 2004; Athienitis, 2022). Others also point to the conflicting opinions about the justification of carrying out this activity (Hattie, 2009; Holte, 2016; Hogan, 2021). Students often perceive homework as an additional effort after class.

In the context of modern educational trends, the conditions under which homework should be done have changed. Learning outcomes and the meaning of homework today are different than twenty or more years ago. For example, in Finland, teachers have complete autonomy in choosing teaching activities and work methods, homework is not mandatory and should not take up too much of the students' time. Finnish education experts believe that active work at school is sufficient and homework can burden students, taking away their free time.

Horvat (2020), researching different teaching activities and habits of eighth graders in Croatia and Slovenia, came to the conclusion that most students write homework for one hour a day or less. The 2014 Institute for Social Research report on learning indicates that as many as 60% of fourth-grade students write homework and readings almost always at the last minute, 40% of them also often copy homework, with the boys leading the way (Simeg, 2020). This data is worrisome because it shows the students' lack of interest in this type of activity and a high degree of non-independence in completing tasks outside the school environment,

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leading rightfully to the questioning of the purposefulness of homework. Teachers who use homework as punishment contribute to the students' negative attitude (Senekovič, 2007). When homework is used as a punishment or reward, it is not good practice (Jackson & Harbison, 2014).

So, should homework be abolished? This controversy causes many doubts in the educational public (according to *Fatberly.com*). The aim of this paper is to investigate the purpose of assigning and writing homework and whether it affects the educational achievements of students in classroom teaching. We will refer to the findings of the research conducted so far on this issue. The paper is a result of reading and analyzing the obtained data of the relevant literature. We will also offer examples of homework in the field of mother tongue and literature.

2. Purposefulness of Homework Practice and its Impact on Students' Educational Achievements

In modern teaching, the student is in the center of attention and it is very important that students develop an active approach and a positive attitude towards learning. The basic goal of the approach "to learn how to learn" is to train students to apply acquired knowledge and skills in different situations. The teaching process, which is based on a cognitive-constructivist understanding of learning, is a mental process in which the student realizes itself as a complete personality (Marentič Požarnik, 2003). How does the homework practice fit into modern learning and teaching strategies? In many European countries, there have been debates in recent years about the purpose of homework and whether it is useful for children's academic development.

Scientists cite numerous positive effects of writing homework: academic effects in the form of better understanding of educational content and retention of factual knowledge, learning at home, involvement of parents in the educational process, and improvement in students' attitudes towards school. Many teachers claim that homework is important both for learning educational content and for good work ethics (Šimeg, 2020). We can also mention some negative effects: primarily the saturation effect, because overdoing homework can result in general physical and emotional fatigue associated with the deprivation of free time (Škalič, 2016, Athienitis, 2022). The involvement and pressure of parents can also have negative consequences on the students' independence and can hinder their learning. Hattie (2009) opines that homework has almost no effect on children's learning in elementary school. Holte (2016) disagrees that this extracurricular activity encourages work ethic, claiming that it can also be counterproductive as students develop avoidance strategies and experience physical and emotional fatigue. He argues that the practice of homework in Norwegian elementary schools potentially threatens the quality of childhood. In her article „Should we ban homework?“ Frost (2020) states that the disadvantages of homework are beginning to outweigh the advantages.

Ivić (2017) conducted research on student assessments related to homework in the fourth and seventh grades of 13 elementary schools in the Republic of Croatia. 963 students who attended fourth (403 students) or seventh grade (557 students) participated in the research. Two aspects have been singled out in particular - usefulness (purposefulness) and interestness of homework. More than half of the respondents stated that they learn a lot from writing homework, but almost 30% of students do not find homework interesting. The research results point to a high percentage of respondents who believe that homework should be abolished (almost 50% of students), based exactly on additional reflections on the students' motivation for writing homework, and on the purpose and quality of the tasks intended for this activity. The results of the survey conducted by Ivić are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Presentation of homework aspect particles and their basic descriptive characteristics with regard to the gender of the students and the class they attend

Homework	Gender				Grade			
	Male		Female		4.		7.	
	X	sd	X	sd	X	sd	X	sd
Homework should be abolished.	3,35	1,604	2,99	1,622	2,79	1,651	3,44	1,541
I learn a lot writing homework.	3,52	1,301	3,76	1,160	4,14	1,079	3,28	1,221
Homework is interesting.	2,63	1,278	2,83	1,238	3,30	1,276	2,32	1,074

Source: Ivić, 2017.

There is a statistically significant difference in students' attitudes with respect to age as well: fourth graders think more than seventh graders that homework is interesting; younger students to a greater extent estimate that they learn a lot from writing homework. Ivić still emphasizes the need to find out why a significant number of students express the need to abolish homework. She believes that students should be included in the creation of subject curricula, including considering their suggestions regarding homework that they find useful and interesting, as well as the amount and scope of homework.

The most extensive analysis and study on the connection between homework and school success was made at Duke University in 2006. Neuroscientist Harris Cooper (2007) and colleagues conducted a study called *Battle over Homework*. The study did not show a direct cause-and-effect relationship between writing homework and school success (no significant differences were found between respondents who regularly wrote homework and those who did not), so many opponents of this extracurricular activity cite these results as an argument against homework. However, Cooper emphasizes that his research is being misinterpreted and that his papers actually proved that homework is very useful for students. Stating that many factors influence school success, he believes that regular tasks students need to perform at home teaches them to manage time, plan and structure. In addition, students are taught responsibility, self-regulation and independence.

In Poland, the ruling coalition's decision to limit homework in elementary school came into force in 2024. According to the new regulations, students in first to third grade will no longer write homework, while teachers can give homework to students in fourth to eighth grade, but students are not obliged to do so. However, exercises to improve fine motor skills, such as writing by hand, are still compulsory (Nolan, 2024).

In contrast to Poland, the Irish Ministry of Education does not provide schools with guidelines on the appropriate amount of homework. Schools decide at a local level the extent to which homework is included in lessons. In Ireland, many schools have a specific approach to carrying out this teaching activity. Students at the Gaelscoil Mhichil Elementary School in West Cork do not have to write homework for one month of the year. Instead, they are required to keep a diary of good deeds done during the day. On Fridays, students at school read the messages they put in the "kindness basket", with the intention of learning the importance of the meaning of support. In the final year of elementary school, however, homework is mandatory as a preparation for secondary school (O'Connor, 2019).

Pupils' attitudes towards homework in Ireland become negative between grades 4 and 5, i.e. between ninth and eleventh grade. This is according to the *Children's School Lives* study, which was carried out on a sample of 4,000 Irish primary school pupils. However, the same study also showed that parents of students have a very positive opinion of homework (CSL, 2024).

Some Croatian and Slovenian methodologists (Lazzarich, 2022, Petek, 2012, Seneković, 2007) emphasize the expediency of fulfilling this extracurricular activity, arguing that homework should not be abolished, but it must be functional, with various tasks that will stimulate students to be active (Bogdan, 2018). Homework is justified when it expands the possibility of learning and serves to develop students' abilities, skills and attitudes (Šimeg, 2020).

2.1. The Role of Parents in Monitoring Extracurricular Activities

To encourage responsibility towards obligations and tasks, a good procedure to follow is finding common agreement with students on the rules for writing homework. Assigning homework has its justification because it encourages independence in work, while transferring the responsibility for learning to students. Independent training facilitates the transfer of knowledge to new areas (Vizek Vidović et al., 2014). Under certain conditions regular homework has a positive effect on learning outcomes (Gage & Berliner, 1998): that homework is related to the educational content and included in the grade of the class subject, that it encourages in-depth processing of the class material and enables success, that homework is of shorter scope and teachers review them regularly with feedback on their validity.

When we discuss the concept of the all-day classes, we should take into account the aspect of work and freedom outside the school walls, without teacher supervision. It refers to the possibility that the child is „left to himself“, choosing to work on something related to school in that situation. Consequently, the student gains insight into her/his own abilities and builds self-esteem. This is an important factor in growing up and maturing. In contrast, excessive supervision over the child's daily activities in the formative period of life can result

in unwanted consequences in the process of her/his psychophysical development (Mostarkić, 2023).

In addition to teachers, parents play a crucial role in influencing students' positive attitude towards homework (Athienitis, 2022). However, led by the desire to help their child and make his/her work easier, parents often overdo it, reducing his creativity and resourcefulness by doing tasks for them. In the manual for parents, *How to Motivate a Child to Write Homework and Achieve Success in School* (Canter & Hausner, 2002), authors list the most common problems associated with writing homework and ways to overcome them. If the child is not doing the best he/she can, the reasons for writing the homework should be explained to child, an agreed time for writing should be introduced, and support should be provided in the form of praise when the child correctly fulfills his/her obligation. If the child does not want to write homework, it should be clearly communicated to the child that certain disciplinary measures will be implemented in agreement with the teacher, but the child should also be praised every time he writes homework well. When a child needs the whole evening to complete homework, it should be necessary to ensure that the work is written during the daytime and in a suitable place. If the child is not independent in writing homework, it should be emphasized that he/she is expected to be independent, but can always count on the parents' support and help. Rewards for completed tasks are not prohibited, but it is good to confirm verbal support with actions.

Answering a question of *How to Encourage a Child to Write Homework More Successfully?*, Cooper (2007) advises parents to be their child's organizer, role model, motivator, supervisor and mentor. The role of the parents in monitoring the performance of their child's activity is to take care of the space within which this activity takes place, expressing an attitude about the importance of the school that the child will adopt, and an unburdened monitoring of his/her work - to be with the child in the time of need and leaving the child alone when he/she does not ask for help.

Parents are tasked with providing feedback on their child's school activities and of a degree of mastery of certain knowledge and abilities. In the first grade, parents are expected to assist children in completing this activity, but over time their supervision stops so that the child becomes independent in solving tasks. Students should be monitored in their school duties, especially at the very beginning of their education, so that they can adapt as easily and quickly as possible. Over time, parents should reduce their influence because they cannot replace teachers (Di Pietro, 2009).

3. Homework in the mother tongue teaching

Homework in the mother tongue teaching is very much necessary, especially at the initial level of primary education and in all areas of language teaching. If we expect students to be creative in the domain of written expression, for example, then they must practice writing essays at home as well. Lugomer (2001) vividly explains a manner in which students progress in language creation - if they want to learn to write quality works, then they must write compositions, not watch others do it. Even football cannot be learned by surfing the internet, but by playing. The more students practice, the better their skills become.

At the beginning of the processing and interpretation of the teaching content, students should be clearly informed about the expected educational outcomes in a particular class. It is also important to define what they should do at home, so they can, in the following classes and in collaboration with teachers, practice the application of the covered content. From their side, teachers need to determine the goals they want to accomplish by assigning certain homework - whether to strengthen the language knowledge and spelling abilities of their students (reproduction function) or encourage creative expression (productive function). Motivation to perform a certain activity is very important (Jurišević, 2012). Students should be assigned homework during the language, literature, language expression or media culture lessons. If homework is given after the school bell rings, many students will not register teachers' instructions due to the noise.

Teachers need to control the quality and quantity of homework, with an awareness of the amount of time necessary to complete it and the type of goals they want to achieve in relation to the language and literature materials. Homework must be a means of practice, and not just a formal obligation; the emphasis is not on whether a particular student wrote the homework, but rather how he/she wrote it and whether he/she managed to do what was expected. The amount of homework does not matter either, but how meaningful the assigned tasks are. With well-targeted questions, students can master the spelling rule of writing

punctuation at the end of a sentence in a short time. It is better to offer two or three constructive questions than a bunch of tasks that the child cannot solve conscientiously because it requires too much time.

Budinski (2019) investigated situations in which teachers assigned their first grade students homework related to certain initial reading and writing materials that they could not cover in class due to the lack of time, although they are methodically more appropriate for teaching in the classroom. In a sample of 323 teachers surveyed, it was shown that such contents most often assigned for homework compared to all other contents are the following: independent inventing and writing words and sentences, reading sentences, texts and primers and rewriting words made up of learned letters. Teachers estimated that the students needed an average of 30 minutes to understand the content and write the homework.

Teachers may occasionally offer students a choice of exercises to practice at home, but without sanctioning them for a failure to do so, aiming to encourage student activity. Each student approaches learning and tasks differently, each child learns in his/her own way, at his/her own pace (Jurišević, 2012).

We shall list some possibilities for assigning homework in the mother tongue teaching:

- teaching of language and communication (workbook, teaching sheets, language-methodical template, spelling check);
- teaching of literature (questions and tasks from textbook, workbook, dramatization of the text, memorizing the poem);
- teaching of literature and creativity (composition writing, creative expression, retelling, auto-dictation);
- teaching media culture (making a picture book or comic book, analyzing a puppet show, etc.);
- teaching reading (reading diary, dramatization of the text, etc.).

Here are examples of homework according to the planned curricular learning outcomes and domains of the Croatian language subject in the 4th grade (with the use of the textbook *Zlatna vrata 4* by Krmpotić and Ivić (2021). Tables 2 and 3 provide examples of homework.

Table 2. Example of homework from the domain Croatian language and communication, spelling

Lesson:	Names of peoples, inhabitants, countries and geographical entities - capital letter
Domain/concept:	A. Croatian language and communication
Outcome:	HJ A.4.4. The student writes texts according to a simple structure. HJ A.4.1. The student talks and speaks in accordance with the communication situation
Elaboration of outcomes:	HJ A.4.4. Writes with a capital letter: the names of peoples, inhabitants, countries, geographical units HJ A.4.1. Uses new words in a communication situation Homework Choice: a) Uses a map. Write the names of two cities of our homeland that you would like to visit and the names of the geographical units to which they belong. Geographical units should be distinguished. Next to them, write the names of the inhabitants of those geographical units. b) Write an invitation to an unknown friend. Invite him/her to your place. Don't forget to write the geographical entity to which it belongs and the name of your homeland. What other places will you visit? <i>Potentially gifted students</i> Be a teacher. Come up with tasks with which you will check the content we learned about in today's class. <i>Students with difficulties</i> Answer the questions in complete sentences. What is the name of your place? What do we call the inhabitants of your place? In which country is your place located?
	<i>Source:</i> Author's own development.

Table 3. Example of homework from the domain Croatian language and communication, linguistic expression

Lesson:	Storytelling – practice and repetition
Domain/concept:	A. Croatian language and communication
Outcome:	HJ A.4.2. Student listens to different texts, extracts important information and recounts the content of the listened text.

	HJ A.4.3. Student reads the text and recounts the content of the text using notes.
Elaboration of outcomes:	HJ A.4.2 Retells the listened text based on the notes.
	HJ A.3.4. Connects the graphic structure of the text and content.
Homework	a) Interview with one of the older members of your family. Topic: My elementary school (memories).
	b) Create a mind map. Report orally.
	<i>Potentially gifted students</i> Research what the schools your great-grandmothers and great-grandfathers attended looked like. Create a mind map. Report orally.
	<i>Students with disabilities</i> When are you happiest at school? Report orally. What elementary school do you go to? What is your favorite subject? Why?
<i>Source: Author's own development.</i>	

We can also cite an example of homework from literature for the fourth grade of elementary school. The basis of this field is the reading and reception of literary texts, which are an expression of the artistic, linguistic and cognitive understanding of the world and reality (Petek, 2012). Personal development and building of attitudes and opinions about the read work is encouraged in students, and they are stimulated to read for pleasure and to be creative. In the first grade, picture books are often interpreted because the students are just learning letters. Students can recognize certain elements of the text and express their opinion after reading or listening to the text. A very interesting task for students would be to create their own picture book, as with this activity they can express their own creativity and creative ability. The task is to come up with the look and design of the picture book, and then the story that accompanies the photos (Figure 1).

Making your own picture book

At the very beginning, think about the topic of your picture book.
Before you start creating, think about the sequence of events and make a sketch of the picture book.

Accessories:

- scissors, glue, crayons
- decoration material
- cardboard and colored paper
- twine / ribbon

Steps in making:

1. Cut the cardboard to the desired size and glue colored paper over each cardboard.
2. Arrange the cartons on top of each other, in the order in which you want them to be arranged.
3. On one side, punch two holes through all the cardboard and thread a string or ribbon through the holes and tie it.
4. Paint the cover and add the title and author's name.
5. Edit each page according to the sketch and draw the illustrations, then write the text of the picture book.
6. Mark the page numbers with numbers.

Figure 1. Instructions for making a picture book by yourself.
Source: Težak et al., 2021.

Creating your own picture book is a very stimulating and creative homework task. In addition to causing students' immediate interest in the task, it also leads to their creative expression which develops their imagination (Vuk, 2022).

Students often dislike activities related to reading, and the reason may be that the methods used to interpret the work are often outdated and not creative and stimulating enough. However, when digital games are used for the purpose of interpretation of reading works, this activity becomes attractive to students and offers them various opportunities for

learning and receiving new information. Moreover, the digital way of analyzing a reading work can be done either at school or at home as homework.

The internet is a source of a multitude of simple computer tools, very useful in classes, which provide students with the opportunity to express their creativity (Blažič, 2010). Pixton, Comix and StoryboardThat are just a few of the interactive online tools that make creating comics possible. They are free, easy to use, and very interesting to students (Lazzarich & Čančar, 2020). These tools with a pre-prepared content repository offer a wealth of ready-made characters and objects. The readings can be used in a way that the favorite chapter is turned into a comic book. Students need to justify their choice (using the method of working on the computer and the method of oral presentation). Before starting work, teachers show the students examples of comics created in the mentioned programs. During the creation of the comic, they will follow their work, and after completion, watch the created comics together on the projection screen.

We will present an example of a comic strip motivated by an episode from the novel *The Adventures of Arno and Gigi*, written by Nada Mihelčić (*Pustolovine Arna i Didija*, 2010).



Figure 2. Example of a comic in the Pixton program.
Source: Author's own development.

3.1. Individualization and evaluation of Student Achievements in Extracurricular Work

Homework can also be used to check knowledge - teachers determining whether students have completed the homework independently. To determine the grade, the teacher can ask a supplementary question to an individual student. Students will surely approach writing homework if they are motivated by curiosity and challenging tasks. The following procedures could contribute to a more positive students' attitude towards homework: the possibility of doing homework in pairs or groups, differentiation of tasks, variety and involvement of students in the tasks' design, reference to different sources of knowledge and timely feedback, as well as joint evaluation of the work (Ivić, 2017). Integrated homework that corresponds in content to related subjects, such as language and art (literature, music and visual arts), are particularly stimulating. If we perceive homework as independent work that is assigned to students in a stimulating atmosphere, the child is likely to develop positive emotions towards homework.

Everything that applies to regular classes also applies to distance learning. „Working on homework in the organization of distance learning does not differ in any way from teaching in the classroom. If the student solves the homework and does not receive any feedback from the teacher about the success of his/her work, it has no purpose. If the teacher is unable to review the homework for any reason, it is better not to assign it.“ (Rukljač & Jurjević Jovanović, 2021, p. 6).

For teachers, checking and grading homework is an extra effort. In an increasingly demanding profession, new technologies can help to reduce the pressure on teachers. Several Swiss schools in the canton of Zurich have successfully used artificial intelligence to check and grade students' homework. This took place as part of a five-month pilot project with the aim of scrutinising the effectiveness of the technology in the classroom. The teachers involved expressed their satisfaction with this way of monitoring the success of tasks, as they had more time for other teaching activities.

To avoid causing students' aversion to writing homework, it should not be the result of improvisation, formalism or punishment for indiscipline. It is necessary to carefully determine

the amount of assigned homework in order not to overdo it, without exceeding students' capabilities, because then the parents write the homework, or the student copies it, or he/she comes to school without homework. Additionally, homework should be adapted to the student's age and individual characteristics. Homework also plays an important role in developing work habits, thereby the individualization of assigned tasks is important, although objective circumstances (work commitments and the number of students in the class) may prevent its implementation. Individualization is very necessary when the aim is to help a child with permanent difficulties or encourage a gifted student to work.

It is essential to achieve as active a relationship as possible among students in class, but also towards extracurriculum obligations, to guide them towards evaluating their own work so that they accept personal responsibility for the achieved success in the subject area. The point is not to make homework fun, and students must be aware of that. Homework should primarily be a means of developing self-regulation and work habits in students, affecting their general well-being and academic success (Rukljač & Jurjević Jovanović, 2021). In this context, this extracurricular activity should by no means be considered useless.

4. Conclusions

In this paper we tried to discuss the functionality of homework in the teaching process. The focus was on the initial level of education – classroom teaching. By analyzing previous researches, we tried to once again examine the meaning and purpose of writing homework and its influence on the level of students' knowledge. Although we still lack a direct confirmation that the execution of this extracurricular activity affects the educational achievements of students, we nonetheless believe that the positive effects prevail in the practice of homework. With homework, students additionally practice and learn the covered content, more easily achieving the planned learning outcomes. The most important goal of assigning homework, along with its regular checking and evaluation, is to encourage students to study independently outside of school, in their own environment. Homework is a good opportunity to repeat the material heard in class. Functional teaching of language and literature requires purposeful methods and forms of work.

The quality and abilities of teachers are visible precisely in the organization of classes which is stimulating for all students. The role of the teacher is to present this activity to the students in an appropriate way. Teachers should not overdo the amount of assigned tasks, but should keep them in line with the students' capabilities. Teachers have various motivational methods at their disposal, as well as tools that students can use when doing homework, without perceiving it as an additional effort. Students should be given a choice of tasks that will serve their purpose, primarily in mastering the educational field and practicing the material. Modern technology provides many opportunities for designing creative homework, requiring that teachers are trained to work with digital tools. The involvement of parents in the educational process is also important, but so is that parents do not carry out activities instead of students.

In finishing, we can answer the title question: homework is not just a myth, but a legitimate need. Homework shows students that they can practically apply the content they learn in class outside of school in their everyday life.

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