

## The Home Work– An Independent Work, Where is Evidenced the Teacher Ability as a Learning Trainer

Msc. Zenel Sina

Faculty of Education  
"Aleksander Moisiu" University, Durrës, Albania

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**Abstrakt** *The home work is an important aspect of the learning intervention. What impact has the homework? How does it affect in students achievements? Which is the mechanism of this impact? How do students react towards? Does homework express teacher's competencies to manage independent homework? How much affects homework on teacher's performance as a learning trainer? The paper is based on the research of techniques, models and variations of students homework's in the primary school level. Through observing teachers notebooks were evidenced the practices of different teachers. The teachers that worked in a more categorized way according to levels, and that apply homework aiming to promote the education of the long term learning abilities had higher results. The teachers that applied homework with a research character, mainly with project nature, demonstrated a collaborating spirit with students and implemented more creative works in class activities. The homework that requested even the involvement of third parties affected in the family - school affinity. Through teachers notes, communications with parents, and opinions get through the questionnaires with students, teachers and parents are evidenced the techniques and the elements of the teacher as a leaning trainer*

**Key words:** *homework, tutor teacher, near area, learning conditions, long term learning abilities, stakeholders, project, research.*

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### Introduction

Teacher's basic competencies are connected with his/her perception as a trainer concerning independent learning. Teacher's first task is to create the awareness of the need for life-long dedication to the learning process. (EU. 2003) During observations of teacher's performance as a trainer, the homework notebooks were observed and teachers were interviewed by means of a survey. Teacher's positioning as a trainer, gives him/her the attributes of the facilitator of the process and increases the attention to individual and whole class learning progress. The type of homework clearly demonstrates the teacher's techniques in promoting students' independent learning. Between the teacher and the students is created a strong reciprocal relationship during the learning process. (Ash & Levitt, 2003). This relationship must be reflected in concrete activities. Teacher's role as a trainer prevails in his/her high interactivity, in the relationship with learners as well as in the management of their learning through facilitating techniques and interventions. The learning process is a process that requires efforts and faces dilemmas of different natures. The psychosocial characteristics of students, the learning environment, experiences, expectations, the level of partnerships, as well as the capacity and performance of the teacher have an impact in the commitment of students to achieve good results. The trainer aims at supplying the subject with habits, for this reason he /she leads the students by acquainting them with the objective of the learning unit and constantly prompting and motivating subjects during the process of cooperation and decision-making as a group. Feedback and reflection over what has been done, both are very essential elements.

In his/her daily preparation, the teacher focuses on the text and not on the students (Sina.Z 2011). According to this practice, the teacher observes and assesses only those changes that the student reflects in relation to knowledge and patterns found in the text. Under the pressure of assessment conducted by the teacher, even the parents seem to rely on the text rather than on student's behavior. Based on the experience of successful teachers, it results that students learn by working. Active learning makes possible a steady and authentic acquisition of the learning material. They support the idea that student's autonomy starts in class. The teacher prompts the learner to think, to compare, to assess and arrange his ideas even when they challenge teacher's ideas. Textbooks are not the only source of information or the best model to provide learning. For this reason, the student should investigate and collect reliable information and use it creatively during the process of learning. Curiosity is a distinctive feature for young school children. The child himself/herself is curious to discover inner relations, to give meaning to unique features and manipulate them.

The teacher as a trainer has prepared the learner before he comes to class. Preliminary tasks, parental involvement, community resources, the identification of problems to be solved make students as busy as bees and when they arrive in class, under the teacher's guidance they work on the material and give the product. As we said, work does not start in class and does not end there; it goes beyond the limits of the class. Homework, as a form

of individual work, expresses this extension and identifies the ways in which the teacher involves parents, relatives or other actors from the community.

## Methodology

The problem investigated in this study relates to these issues: How does the homework reflect the model of the teacher as a trainer of learning and how does the Albanian teacher play this role? If the teacher in his interactive relation with the student acts as a tutor of learning, what are the conditions and factors that influence this role and which is their impact? In order to analyze and explore the answers to these questions, observations were carried out in 280 homework notebooks in 3rd and 5th grades of elementary education and were surveyed 93 teachers and 120 parents of these classes in Tirana, Durres, Kukës .. Meanwhile, five teachers were trained and the teaching process was supervised in three 3rd grade classes and two 5th grade classes, where these teachers gave lessons. They were acquainted with their role as trainers, the techniques for the organization of the lesson and the elaboration of teaching practices that lead students towards independent work and authentic learning. At the end, students' results and the identified changes were compared with the characteristics of students where observations were carried out.

Homework observation was concentrated on language and mathematics homework. The data were collected according to a preset format. The indicators of the data were about type, quantity, adaptation and homework control, correction and evaluation.

The survey was about the meaning of homework, teacher's attitude, the relationship with course material and the way it is used during the teaching process. The survey implicitly revealed the features of a teacher who facilitated learning. The quantitative and qualitative data were processed by using statistical methods.

## Results of the study

Teachers of elementary education unlike those of the secondary education are less focused on the text, 2.9% of them admit following step by step the pages of text, because their creativity takes most of the space during the teaching process. According to Petersen, in interactive classes the ratio between teacher's talk and student's talk should be balanced. The questionnaires reveal the following data: 41.2% of teachers admit that their talk takes 40% of the class time, 20% of them say they share the class time 50% to 50%, 21% think that their talk takes 60% of the lesson time, 5.8% admit that teacher's talk takes 80% of the lesson and 11.8% declare they talk only 20% of the time because they leave most of the time (80%) to their students.

The highest frequency is included in the interval between 40 - 60% and this fact indicates that, at least verbally, the teachers know the time limits in which a skilled trainer organizes interactive sessions. Teachers express their interactivity throughout the questionnaire questions. In this way the teacher does not follow classic instruction lines, but constructs the situation and learning environment based on students' experience and the nature of their learning styles. Another element that comes out during the teacher's performance as a trainer is his effort to strengthen students' team spirit by using group work, creative projects etc. 32.4% of the teachers admit that learners who are more correct than others with their assignments, have an inquisitive and creative character. They also have an impact in the lesson and become objects of assessment.

Homework has historically been a questionable topic ranging from becoming a myth to being completely ignored. (Conrath, 1992) During the academic year, children receive their assignments and parents are engaged with them by copying or facilitating these assignments as much as they can. Parents are very sensitive to homework, because it enables them to keep in touch with the process of education of their child. The qualitative data collected by parents in relation to homework, indicate that they want responses on the following questions:

How can individual features of children be harmonized with the requirements and lesson objectives determined by the teacher?

In what way are independent assignments adapted with children's age and level?

How to structure and manage more efficiently home assignments?

How and in what way are they as parents, engaged in helping their children with homework?

The questionnaire indicates that 90% of parents that were surveyed admit that they help and follow day after day the progress of their children at school including here home assignments during the years of elementary education. This fact makes parents a very important factor in achieving the objectives of assigning homework. If the teacher takes on the role

of the trainer, this role focuses not only on the student, but also on training parents to play the role of facilitator in homework completion. Based on the analysis of this relationship and also affected by CORNO's study (CORNO, 1996) regarding five misconceptions about homework, we found out no compliance between teachers' attitudes and parents' attitudes. Whereas teachers know the general principles upon which homework is assigned and managed, parents express the same conceptual errors mentioned by Corno.

From parents' point of view, good teachers give assignments regularly, correct and assess them on a regular basis. Actually, the best teachers give assignments that comply with lesson objectives, teaching style and methodology and learning conditions. From the observation it was noticed that the quantity of homework is not a variable that influences students' achievements. The amount of homework that lacks variety of forms or types and includes an excessive number of exercises, exhaust students and reduce their desire to learn. The teacher in the role of trainer gives the right amount of homework. A given task, is demonstrated, controlled, assessed and used in the process of learning. It is not simply a procedure. Most of the teachers share this same attitude, despite the observation which indicates that the homework assigned is far from what teachers declare. Teachers estimate that they give the right amount of homework in compliance with the standards provided by Cooper (Cooper, 1989, a, b).

However, according to the survey, parents want their children to have a considerable amount of home assignments, as they think homework can build work habits. Most of the parents surveyed are concerned when their child has few or no home assignments at all. It is important to highlight that in most of the cases parents consider homework as an element of forging long-term habits in education rather than as an element that has an influence in the reinforcement of knowledge obtained in class. On one hand, we have parents of pupils in the 5th grade (in 67% of cases), who want their child to work at home until he/she completes the homework assigned and on the other hand there is the teacher who controls the amount and level of homework. This element strengthens teacher-parent communication. 75% of parents ask for a weekly report from the teacher and 25% of them prefer communication notebooks. None of the parents prefer communication by phone or being notified by the child.

The teacher in these reports informs parents about the weekly progress of the class, group and individual assignments, their roles and fields of involvement and invites parents in taking their responsibility. For this reason, the teacher plays the role of the leader and is responsible for time management at home.

According to teachers' statements (47% of the respondents), they give homework after previously discussing with students and are convinced that home assignments support what is learned in class. Teachers maintain that giving more homework does not affect positively learning reorganization and reinforcement, as too much homework is demotivating and discharges the burden to the parents or elder sisters and brothers. However the most important thing for teachers remains the quality of homework. The observation of homework notebooks revealed that the amount of homework, especially in the ABC-book is beyond psychological and pedagogical reasoning. Parents say that their children get tired and make up numerous justifications for not finishing their homework. In many cases, prompted by compassion, parents do the homework themselves.

Another finding is related to the fact that homework is a routine activity, as mathematics and language teachers assign exercises that are at the last part of the lesson, since it is evident that exercises in the text are ranked based on their level of difficulty. The question raised here is: "What is the acquisition level of materials in different students? The homework notebooks of mathematics and language in the same class have definitely the same exercises. Yet, as Cooper (Cooper 1994) and Bruce and Singh (Bruce & Singh, 1996) maintain, qualitative management of homework affects positively learning results, and more specifically pupils' grades on tests. This is demonstrated even by parents' orientation towards courses or private teachers chosen by parents in order to assist their children's learning. Whereas teachers admit that assigning homework aims at reinforcing the knowledge of learners in class, parents emphasize the fact that homework strengthens discipline and children's personal responsibility, therefore teachers should always assign homework. The analysis of this paradigm shows that parents should receive information about the proper techniques needed to be involved in homework completion. They should know what happens in class and what the cognitive reason for assigning this homework is. Parents should be trained for the education of social skills through academic work and should take their role in this process. What is the teacher's role in training parents to support their children with homework completion? According to a study on teacher-parent meetings (KKP, 2011) it results that teachers meet with parents only to give them their children's grades and to report on their school progress. Very rarely the teacher takes the responsibility of parents' training.

Homework is related to students' independent work, when he/she is learning and applying the knowledge acquired during the lesson. Good teachers consider homework as a coordination of planned activities about learning objectives. Many researchers regard homework not only as a routine process that should keep students busy after school, by not allowing them to be involved in harmful actions, but also as a strategy focused on strengthening the level

of understanding and deepening their thinking of cognitive concepts. The teacher as a trainer must assess the connections between these environments, starting with the recognition of the aims for assigning homework in accordance with lesson's objectives and the level of learners. Of course, teachers should be able to answer questions like: How much time will be needed to complete the homework? During which time interval will the pupil be working? Who will help him to complete the homework? To what degree are teachers able to provide a strong relationship between the level of understanding of what happens in class and the long-term memorization of concepts, knowledge and skills required? To what degree do the selected practical activities affect habit formation?

The teacher as trainer focuses on the learner, the educational level of the class and the conditions in which learning occurs. Reflection on homework changes with age. According to Cooper's study "the impact of homework on the increase of expected results depends on class level. (Cooper, 1989)". While first grade pupils of elementary education receive homework in order to create the habits of work, in students of higher grades, homework affects their qualitative growth. Therefore, in this age students must be involved in home assignments of inquisitive character that include habits of high level thinking. Such activities are: the projects, problem-solving tasks, tasks that require constant observation, collection of data, facts various objects, etc.

The teacher trainer will provide appropriate tasks for different levels of students in order to confront pupils' skills with positive consequences of homework completion (Rademacher, Deshler, Schumacher, & Lenz, 1998; Rosenberg, 1989). Assigning homework in one format, one type of exercise or level does not indicate that the teacher is based on learners' individuality in achieving objectives.

Students must receive feedback for their homework. Student achievement may differ in accordance with the type of feedback provided by the teacher. (Waberg, 1999). From the observation of notebooks it was found that teachers in 87% of the cases have corrected one in four or five notebooks, as this was the directive issued by the school principal. The teacher makes these kinds of notes: "seen", a tick, a grade, "You have not done the homework". "bad", "good" etc. As long as homework reflects class work, the teacher should assess this process and check each homework.

Assigning homework to students of elementary education classes aims at developing work habits, whereas in secondary school classrooms it is done to reinforce the material taken and to improve qualitatively their performance in periodic tests. Regardless of the age and type of task, homework is an important element in student's education and formation. The teacher should recognize its effects in this process. The influence of homework has rapid academic impacts, long-term learning effects, and long-term effects on social skills and other non-academic skills. Immediate effects are expressed through reinforcement and memorization of theoretical knowledge, facts, algorithms, grammatical categories, etc. By practising through independent work, but mainly by prompting students to engage in assignments that require the use of high level thinking, improves critical thinking, deepens understanding and enables students to analyze and process information and enrich learning material with new information.

Long-term academic effects from homework are expressed through students' commitment to learn even when they are not at school. Helping students develop the skills of learning independently is best reflected in homework. Being an active student and presenting the product of one's learning to the class, the student improves his attitude towards school by increasing diligence and motivation to learn.

Along with mastering academic competencies, by means of homework, the student empowers qualities such as self-management of time and discipline, increases their zeal and curiosity to discover hidden connections in different situations and phenomena. The learner is trained to solve problems and gains the independence to make right decision.

Knowing these effects, the teacher trainer knows how to mould in students the diligence that, on its part, is related to self-discipline, correctness and a correct management of working time.

The data of this study indicate that when homework is not planned as an integral part of the lesson and is not treated effectively, it affects negatively students' behavior and attitudes. Based on the comparison of effects in experimental classrooms with teachers of other classes, we notice that from the homework we can distinguish between teachers who structure their work with standards and teachers who work with intuition. In teachers who do not plan or adapt homework to students' characteristics are noticed negative consequences. Excessive amount of homework, aiming to train and making perfect, causes fatigue, weakens trust and reduces the desire to learn. The pupils of elementary education classes are still children and the game is an important activity of their life. Deprivation of game time affects the child's emotional world. At first he/she may be subdued because of his/her fragility, but with the passing of time he/she will start to revolt. It is already known that adolescents' attitude towards school deteriorated compared with attitudes at the elementary education classes

## Recommendations

Based on the findings shown in this paper, we can address some recommendations to teachers and parent.

### For the teacher:

- The teacher in role of the trainer should be aware that learning is not a product of his hard work, but of all the factors that affect learning. Among these factors, students' diligence is crucial.
- When the teacher plans and designs the development of the lesson, he/she should provide some alternative exercises that match the conditions and opportunities for students.
- Teachers should encourage the active involvement of students through their experiences and perceptions.
- The teacher should create the idea that learning extends beyond the class. Teaching material is not the only source of learning, therefore teachers should encourage students to look for, find and bring to class materials, information, facts and objects before the lesson starts. After the lesson, students provide feedback on what they have achieved constructively during the lesson.
- The teacher should give appropriate amount of homework, without taking children's time for games or family activities. The weekend must be considered as free time, without homework. However, for students who know how to use different sources of information, television programs, diaries on activities, albums, herbaria, collections or projects are indicators of independent learning effects.
- The parent is an important factor in child education; therefore, the teacher should predict and design his /her commitment as an observer, supporter and information provider even outside class.

### For parents:

- Despite parent's experience, culture or certain stereotypes, he/she should be recruited into the teacher's project. Homework must be evaluated and restructured under the teacher's guidance. He/she is a professional in guarantying homework positive effects.
- The parent should be involved in training, consulting and instructing sessions, in order to help the child with homework. Parent's interventions often affect negatively the formation of the child, as they may convey misconceptions or cause disorientation.
- Helping in the completion of homework is a task for the whole family, therefore, the same way parents declaim their daily activity, the child should present his impressions on the school day in general and on homework in particular. If the child demonstrates difficulties, the parent helps in homework completion and the next day communicates with the teacher concerning what is happening with the child.
- Parental pressure influences teachers' performance, as a result, parents should make good use of this performance in view of the effectiveness of the process and children' progress in learning. Cooperation with the teacher is a key element of the child successful performance at school.

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