

GEOGRAPHY HOMEWORK. STUDENTS' OPINIONS

MARIUS-ALIN NICOLAE

Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, Faculty of Environmental Science and Engineering, e-mail: marius.alin92@yahoo.com

LILIANA CIASCAI

Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, Faculty of Psychology and Sciences of Education, e-mail: liliana.ciascai@ubbcluj.ro

CONSTANTIN PREDESCU

Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, Faculty of Psychology and Sciences of Education, e-mail: coasera@yahoo.com

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Abstract

The topic of homework is constantly brought into discussion, not only by researchers or curriculum designers, but also by students, teachers and parents, its importance for learning quality being generally recognised. The present study aims to identify the views of a sample of 30 students from a high school with a vocational profile (economic). Their opinions are related to some aspects referring to the Geography homework: attractiveness, content (the types of tasks), the usefulness of homework in learning Geography, time spent by students in doing their homework, working methods, etc. Data were collected using a 30-item questionnaire. The responses received from the students acknowledge the importance of homework in the process of learning Geography.

Keywords: *survey, homework, pre-university teaching, Geography, students' opinions*

INTRODUCTION

In the literature, homework is defined as being an obligation or task prescribed to students by a teacher. That task needs to be done outside the class lessons and therefore without the direct supervision of the teacher

(Chen and Stevenson, 1989; Kidwell, 2004; Cooper, 1989). Homework is regarded as a tool which enhances the learning process and which helps to develop the appropriate study methods and individual working capacity (Cooper, 2011; Cooper *et al.*, 2006; Corno and Xu, 2004; Epstein, 2001, Epstein and Van Voorhis, 2001; Marques, 2001; Matei and Ciascai, 2015). The homework received by the student must be strongly related to the lesson plan (Vatterott, 2009).

The main roles of homework are that of increasing efficiency in learning, of developing a high level of intellectual skills and of helping students at tests (Epstein and Van Voorhis, 2000; Kidwell, 2004). Other important benefits are facilitating the retention of a school topic based on the students' cognitive skills, appropriating learning to the learning style of each student, and creating the opportunity of repeating the learning approach until the complete understanding of the lesson (Epstein and Van Voorhis, 2000; Kidwell, 2004; Painter, 2003). Moreover, by doing their homework, students enhance their will and skills to work along (Kidwell, 2004; Painter, 2003). Epstein and Van Voorhis (2000) underline that students who receive homework become more responsible, understand better time management, and have an increased self-esteem.

Not always do students understand the role of homework. It can often become a source of stress for the student (Painter, 2003), because of the high work volume demanded and by the high difficulty level of solving the task. In order to motivate students to accomplish their homework, it must be relevant and meaningful, accessible and challenging (Araújo, 2009; Marujo *et al.*, 2002; Meirieu, 1998; Silva, 2004).

Parents' involvement in students' work is very important (Villas-Boas, 2000a, 2000b). Parents should provide support to their children and should guide them when solving more difficult tasks (Marques, 2001). In addition, they should ensure the space and resources needed by students to accomplish their homework (Bryan and Sullivan-Burstein, 1997). Students have better academic outcomes if their parents have a positive attitude towards homework (Cooper *et al.*, 1998). If students are allowed to do it in their specific learning style, then they will change their attitude towards homework and will have better results (Bryan and Sullivan-Burstein, 1997; Hong and Lee, 1999; Hong and Milgram, 2000).

However, many students do their own homework without family guidance or support, which reduces educational modelling and learning interventions (Rosario *et al.*, 2005), but increases learning independence.

Rønning (2011) considers that homework can contribute to inequality in education, as students from disadvantaged families receive less support in doing their homework. Researchers from the U.S. underline that the amount of information the students need to assimilate at school and at home is greater than they are able to understand (Robinson, 2006).

Moreover, students, parents and researchers think homework, as additional learning tasks, overwhelms students (Monchinski, 2008).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The research based on the survey had as objective to study the efficiency of homework at Geography. The used questionnaire includes, besides demographics, two item categories: a) 5 items that had a multiple choice with the possibility of elaboration, b) 25 items with a Likert type answer with 5 points (total disagreement – total agreement).

The questionnaire was administered to 30 students from "Infoel" National College in Bistrița that were in the 10th grade, with the specialisation "Technician in economic activities". The participation was voluntary. The results were edited with the help of the Microsoft Office package, especially Microsoft Excel.

23 respondents were female, six respondents were male. 20 students were aged 16 (15 females and 5 males), seven pupils were 17 years old (six females and one male), two students were 15 years old and they were both females. One student did not answer about his gender or his age.

RESULTS

When asked about the average percentage of homework solving, 17 out of 30 respondents (56.67%) declared that they had solved their Geography homework 100%, 11 students (36.67%) said that they had solved it in a percentage of 75, one student answered that he had solved it in a percentage of 50. One did not answer.

The reasons why students did not do their homework at Geography were the following: lack of time (60%), the fact that they did not understand the task (26.67%), different family obligations (6.67%), and other reasons (6.67%). Five students chose no to answer this question.

In terms of typology of homework required in Geography, most students mentioned essay writing, completing activity sheets or performing laboratory activities (Table 1). Two students (6.66%) did not answer to this question.

The time spent on solving homework varied between 20 minutes and 1 hour (Figure 1), but the percentage of students who gave their homework 30 minutes and the percentage of students who gave their homework 1 hour were equal (43.33% respondents).

Most students solved their Geography homework at home (83.33%), only 2 students (6.67%) did their homework at school and at home and only one did his homework at home and at a friend's house. 2 students (6.67%) did not answer this question. There was also a high percentage of

students who agreed that they copied their homework at school (76.67% of the respondents).

The subjects were asked to assess their Geography homework according to difficulty, interest, likeability or challenging features. 73.33% of the students agreed that Geography homework should be easy. 66.67% students agreed that Geography homework was difficult, 30% were undecided on this subject. 100% of the respondents agreed that the given homework was interesting, 90% found it pleasurable and 76.67% of the respondents agreed that it was stimulating.

Table 1. The typology of homework at Geography

| Homework type | Respondent percentage |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Problem | 3.33% |
| Essay | 70.00% |
| Activity sheet | 63.33% |
| Laboratory activity | 56.67% |
| Making a product | 10.00% |
| Poster | 10.00% |
| Other (e.g. project, article) | 23.33% |

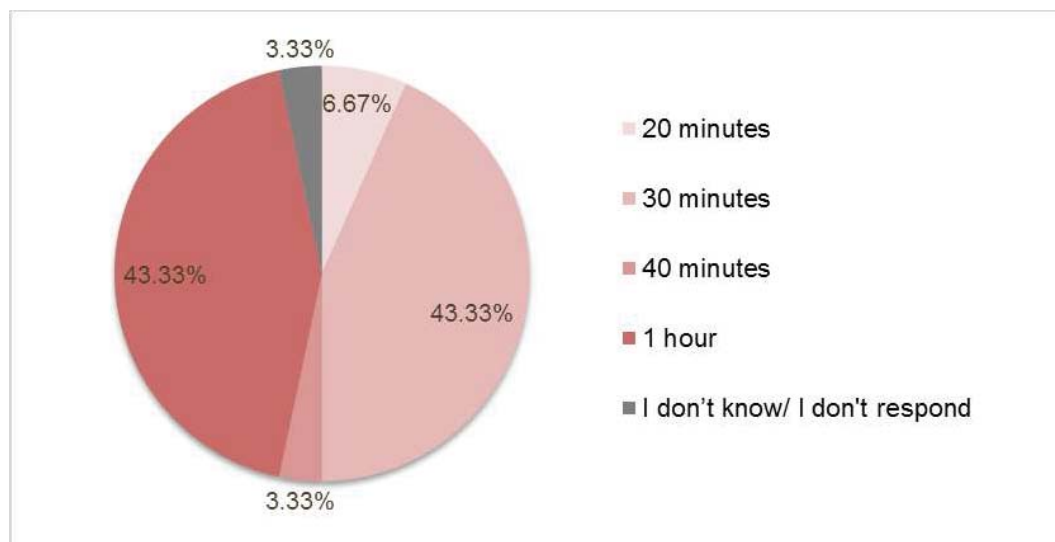


Fig. 1. Time reserved for homework

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40% of the respondents were unsure about the compulsory character of the homework, 26.67% of them considered that they should be compulsory, and 33.33% disagreed.

The respondents were asked about the importance of the homework for them. The majority (86.67%) disagreed that "Geography homework is useless", no respondent agreed that the affirmation was true, 13.33% were undecided.

The subjects answered regarding the benefits of doing their homework. Answers showed that they acknowledged the fact that home tasks had to be correlated with obtaining good grades at this subject (93.33%). The vast majority agreed that homework helped them understand the lessons (96.67%), deepen their knowledge (96.67%), expand their knowledge on the subject (100%), organise knowledge (93.33%). Respondents also agreed that doing homework contributed to obtaining some attitudes specific to a geographer (90% respondents) and that it helped them understand the evolution of Geography (93.93%). A smaller respondent percentage (63.33%) agreed that the received homework helped them put in relation their Geography knowledge with knowledge from other fields or everyday life.

The students' opinions referring to the content of their homework are presented in Table 2. The vast majority of respondents (93.33%) agreed that the homework tasks had to be related to the content of the lesson.

The subjects considered that homework that included laboratory work was exciting (88.33%). Only 66.67% of them agreed that Geography homework should include only problems. Half of the respondents considered that Geography homework had to contain tasks that required a long time to be solved (1/3 out of respondents disagreed).

Similarly, we can see in Figure 2, that the percentage of subjects who agreed that homework could be done in a group was 13.33% higher than that of the respondents who thought that homework should be individual work.

Regarding the support of the teacher and family during solving their homework, half of the respondents considered that the teacher should check their homework, 26.67% were undecided and 20% disagreed with that affirmation. A student did not answer. The majority of respondents (60%) disagreed with the affirmation that "At home I am helped and checked during my homework time at Geography", the percentages of the undecided and of those who agreed were approximately equal (16.67%, 13.33%). 10% of the students did not answer.

Table 2. Students' opinions about the content of Geography homework

| Item | Agree % | Undecided % | Disagree % | No response % |
|--|---------|-------------|------------|---------------|
| Geography homework must be correlated with the studied content during the lesson | 93.33 | 6.67 | 0.00 | 0 |
| Homework which includes laboratory work is exciting | 83.33 | 10.00 | 3.33 | 3.33 |
| Geography homework should not include only problems | 66.67 | 26.67 | 3.33 | 3.33 |
| Geography homework should include tasks that are meant to be solved in a longer time | 50.00 | 16.67 | 30.00 | 3.33 |

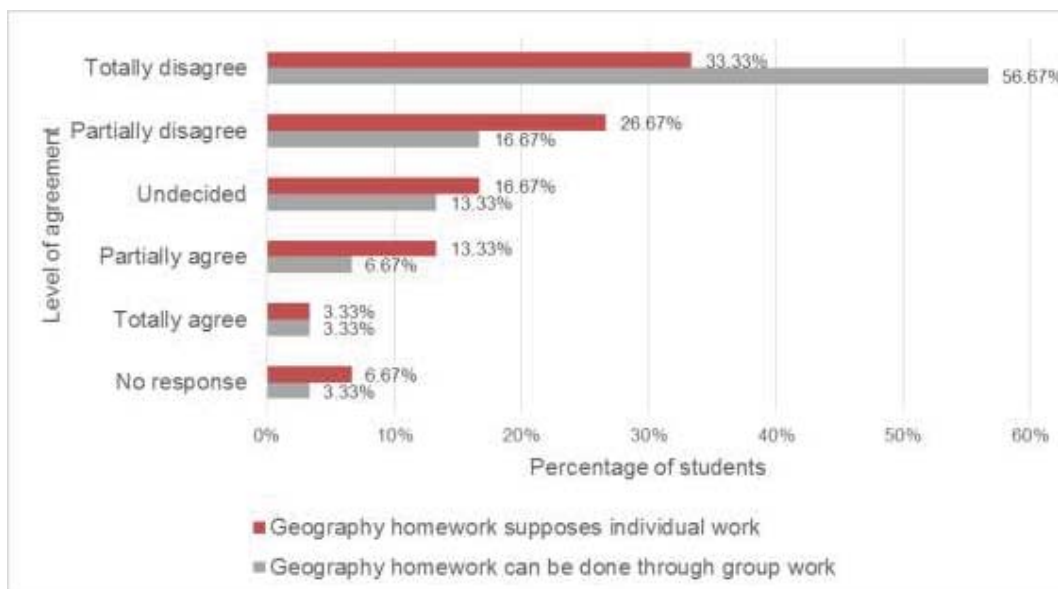


Fig. 2. How students organise for their homework

DISCUSSION

The advantages of homework doing are fully understood by the respondents. Therefore, they were in agreement with Epstein and Van Voorhis (2000) and Kidwell (2004) who argued that homework developed a series of intellectual abilities. Moreover, the majority of respondents agreed that by solving their Geography homework they could develop their creativity, ambition, scepticism, attitudes that are specific to geographers and shaping experimentation and investigation abilities that are needed in their future careers and life.

Their responses showed that the respondents were also aware of the fact that homework helped them expand their knowledge that was acquired during the lessons and it also helped them relate with their own experience and other interdisciplinary information. Thus, they agreed that by solving their homework they were closer to getting a good grade at this subject.

Despite them being in agreement with the formative role of the homework, just a quarter agreed that Geography homework should be compulsory and three quarters recognised that they copied their homework at school.

Even though researchers like Bryan and Sullivan-Burstein (2007) and Villas-Boas (2000a, 2000b) consider that family implication is essential in the process of homework-doing the majority of students answered that they were not helped by their family.

Students' answers were in agreement with the idea expressed by Vatterott (2009) that the homework received by the student should be strongly related to the taught lesson.

The obtained results were limited because this research was realised including students from a single class and the number of respondents was small.

CONCLUSION

The obtained results show that the participants considered homework a necessity; they understood its importance for the quality of learning at Geography and valued the self-effects of doing their Geography homework.

Based on this acknowledgement of the importance of homework for learning at a school subject, we can consider that educating every involved part is important: teachers – to propose consistent and attractive homework, students – to understand the importance of homework and to

treat it with seriousness, and parents – to give their children at least the required conditions to do their homework, if not their support.

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