

ENGLISH HOMEWORK: IS IT A BURDEN OR HELP FOR STUDENTS

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The project entitled **English Homework: Is it a Burden or Help to Students** was prepared by Jecqueline Gelau and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Education with Honours (Teaching English as a Second Language).

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ABSTRACT

English homework: Is it a Burden or Help to students?

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This study investigated the English homework practices whether it is a burden or help to secondary school students in SMK Agama, Sibuluhur. 259 participants from upper and lower form levels took part in the survey and responded to the questionnaires distributed. Results showed that students were given 3-2 times English homework and the amount was just right for them. Majority of respondents agreed that they often given textbook and workbook exercises completion tasks for their homework. Students valued the importance of homework and show positive reactions toward homework completion.

ABSTRAK

Kerja Rumah Bahasa Inggeris : Beban atau Faedah kepada Pelajar

Jecqueline Gelau

Kajian yang dilaksanakan bertujuan untuk menentukan sama ada kerja rumah Bahasa Inggeris merupakan bebanan atau faedah kepada para pelajar di SMK Agama, Sib. Sejumlah 259 responden yang terlibat dalam kajian ini dan memberikan maklumbalas terhadap soal selidik yang diedarkan. Hasil kajian mendapati bahawa para pelajar diberikan 3-2 kali kerja rumah Bahasa Inggeris dalam seminggu dalam jumlah yang mereka rasakan berpatutan. Majoriti responden mengesahkan mereka kerap menerima kerja rumah bahas Inggeris yang berbentuk melengkapkan latihan dalam buku teks dan buku kerja. Para pelajar yang terbabit menunjukkan tingkah laku positif dalam melengkapkan kerja rumah yang diberikan dan sedar akan kepentingan kerja rumah.

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List of Abbreviations

ERPD	EDUCATION PLANNING AND RESEARCH DIVISION
NAEP	NATIONAL AMERICA EDUCATIONAL POLICIES
MOE	MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
SMKA	SEKOLAH MENENGAH AGAMA
UNIMAS	UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the background of the current study. Besides that, this chapter explains the purpose of the study, which is to investigate the students' acceptance and reaction towards homework whether they perceive it as burden or help. Apart from that, the scope of the study and the key terms definitions will be provided as well.

1.1 Introduction

Homework is an important component part of teaching and learning process. Homework occupies a large part of students' lives from elementary to secondary school students. Homework practice is one of the ways to ensure that learning take place outside as well as inside the school. Student's homework is emphasized by the

curriculum designers since formal educations started (Kember & Leung, 1998). No matter what subject a teacher teaches, one goal in common is to maximize learning of each student. School teachers assign homework for various purposes such as for practice, preparation, participation and punishment in order to serve three main functions: instructional, communicative and political (Voorhis, 2004).

Homework can be classified by its amount; level of difficultness, purpose and choice of students. Different types and variations in amount of homework give influences in students learning and allow the teachers to determine which type would influence more over another (Skaggs, 2007).

Homework assignments have been one of the focus in educational reformation in 21st century. Gill & Schlossman (2004) claim that homework influences students in elementary grades and expected that homework as part of their educational experience. According to U.S Department of Education in its article What Works: Research on Teaching and Learning (in Gill & Schlosman 2004) supported homework and schools began to see the importance of homework starting from the early ages. Homework assignments influence students' educations. Henderson (1996), states that most recent surveys supported the extensive use of homework and educators agree that homework is an important supplement in school academic activities. However, it is varies for different students and relies on how frequent and how much homework is assigned and completed. Kouzma & Kennedy (2002) state that students consider the homework as the main source of stress in their lives(as cited in The Centre for Public Education, 2007) , students against homework and claim its takes away their leisure activities time (Coutts,2004; Kravolec & Buel, 2004) and complaint over the overload of homework given in school. But, not all perceive the same. Some find its help their learning which can lead to academic achievement.

Students' acceptance and reaction towards homework assign will give some understanding whether the aims of homework is achievable or vice versa. To ensure a meaningful and valuable homework practices among students, a study on the secondary school students' perceptions towards homework practices will be conducted. It is needed to find out how exactly secondary school students accept English homework particularly.

1.2 Background of the study

Many researches have been conducted on case over homework. Research findings show that to distinguish whether homework actually provides its benefits depend on the amount of task set for students. Many articles were published and researches were conducted specifically looking at the influences it has towards school children. Research has shown a different indication on the impact on homework towards students.

In Malaysia, study conducted by North and Pillay (2002) on the English homework stated that the Language teachers setting homework 2 or 3 times a week for each class. The study showed this figures are high because they consider that a student has at least 7 other core subjects to deal with. Research shows that the amount of homework is piling up. Malaysia among the countries that put a heavy emphasize on homework with the average of 3.8 hours a day time spent on homework; (Department of Education and Art (Queensland), 2004). Excessive homework has become a sore point with many parents as well who are puzzled by the huge workload their children are expected to complete (New Straits Time, 2005). In the realm of Malaysia education, the homework controversy and makes a significant part of workload to language learners.

This survey is conducted in order to investigate the English homework subject whether it is a burden or help to the Form 1, Form 2 and Form 4 secondary school students in SMK Agama Sibul. It concerns the students' responses on it practices which hopefully will provide useful information to the researchers, teachers and school authorities regarding the homework practices.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Homework might be one of the good practical in language learning but school board member struggle with dilemma either homework hinder or help students in their learning. Little attention is paid to the topic of homework in teacher education (Cooper, 2001). Educators generally agree more research on homework should be conducted from the points of students' perceptions because lots of researches are seen from the parents and teachers' perspectives (Coutts, 2004; Xu, 2005).

Limited study is done in Malaysia and most of the studies regarding the homework issues are done mostly in United States and Australia. Besides the study done locally based on the Malaysian teachers' views from secondary schools. So, a study on the homework practices among our local secondary school students is needed.

1.4 Research Objectives

This study aims:

1. To find out how frequent English homework is given to high and lower form students.
2. To find out types of English homework assigned to secondary school students.
3. To find out the students' behavioral attitudes towards homework.
4. To find out whether homework is a burden or help to students.

1.5 Research Questions

Research questions are designed with the aim of clarifying what the study is supposed to reveal (Flick, 2006). There are four research questions identified in order to attempt the aims of this study. The research questions in this study are:

1. How often the English teacher gives homework to students?
2. What are the types of English homework assigned to secondary school students?
3. What are the students' behavioral attitudes towards English homework?
4. Is homework is a burden or help to students?

1.6 Significance of the study

Most significant aspect of the study is that the study on the research problem findings results will determine whether students accept the English homework given is a burden or benefits them. The findings will give a better understanding how secondary school students accept homework practices and how they react to the homework given.

The findings will be useful for further research, information for educators and teachers the considered amount and types of homework given to secondary school level. Teachers might be able to come up with a more meaningful and purposeful homework assignments. It is hope through this study schools will have homework policies so that students can get the exact amount of homework necessary for their levels and to avoid counterproductive load.

1.7 Operational Definition of Terms

English Homework

Cooper (2007) defines homework as tasks assigned to students by school teachers that are intended to be carried out during non-school hours (as cited in Skaggs, 2007).

In this study, English homework is tasks given by the English teachers to the students to be completed outside the school hours weekly.

Secondary school students

In this study, secondary school students refer to those who are currently studying in Form 1, Form 2 and 4 students age thirteen to sixteen years old in one of the public school in SMK Agama, Sibuluhur both low and high achieving students.

Amount and Task types

Skaggs (2007) categorizes amount as the length of the assignment and frequency with which it is assigned. It also covers the time spent in homework completion. This study will only be focusing on the frequency of the English homework; how often assigns by the teachers per week.

Task types refer to the form of exercises often given by the English Language teachers such as grammar exercises, writing exercises and completing workbook and additional exercises.

Behavioral Attitudes

In term of operational definition, Gagne (1985) describes behavioral attitudes as the state that influences one's action and can be observed in overt behaviors. In this study, secondary school students' behavioral attitudes indicate aspects of like-dislike and how they react toward the amount of English homework assign and the type of tasks given by the English teachers.

Burden

Burden refers to the negative effects homework can give to students particularly in English homework. For the purpose of this study, burden considers when the students are giving too much of it, level of difficulty which leads to demotivation towards the completion of English homework.

Help

Gill and Schlossman (2004), state homework is a help if it assisting the students in learning; the benefits of homework. In this study, homework helps when they accept positively the homework given and meaningful for them in learning.

1.8 Scope of Study

Upon realizing the problem, the study is only focus to find whether English homework is a burden or help to secondary school students from non exam classes in the selected school. In view of that, students' behavioral attitude towards the acceptance of English homework will also be covered by the researcher.

This study will not cover the purposes of homework and the time spent on homework and the samples not included the parents and teachers.

1.9 Chapter Review

Thus, this chapter covers the background of the study and further explanation on the purpose of the study which the researcher attempt to achieve. The objectives and the scope of the study also presented as well. The next chapter will further discuss the literature review related to the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Preview

This chapter discusses the literature reviews related to the studies carried out by past researchers to determine the students' responses on the homework assignment and discussion regarding the purposes of homework, policies, and arguments for and against homework especially in English homework, students' attitudes towards homework as well as reviews on homework throughout the centuries.

2.1 Introduction

Homework has been an ongoing debate for all to concern in education since 1920s. Coutts (2004), states that the issue of homework is controversial and complex. Critics and supporters of homework assignments argue over the values of homework regarding its important and question its practices in school. Cooper (2001) defines homework as tasks designed to students by school teachers that are to be done during the non-school hours but not included the school guided study, home study courses and curriculum activities. Subject teachers trying to get the most out of students' learning and one of the ways to do it is English Language teachers try to make most of the English homework (Galina, 2005). Yet, homework experiences have a significant impact on students long term attitudes towards schools (Hong,2005).Study after study has been conducted on homework and most of the findings indicated that homework has a positive correlation with students' achievement (Simplicio, 2005).

Reflecting the Malaysian education, in North & Pillay (2002), teachers viewed the purposes of homework should be more encouraging creativity and advocated individual development rather than focuses on the mechanical tasks such as textbook completion and grammar exercises.

2.2 Homework reviews

Over the centuries, the homework issues overwhelm the school systems especially in the United States. From elementary to tertiary level, educators and educational researchers view and accept homework assignment differently. O' Rourke- Ferrara (1998) states that homework in the upper grades level is a must. Many researches have been conducted on homework ranging from various variables and most of the studies focus on the students attitudes towards homework and the

relationship among homework and student achievement (Swank & Greenwood, 1999).

According to Walberg, in the twentieth centuries a strong consensus supports homework as an important requirement in American schooling (as cited in Swank & Greenwood, 1999). From past reviews many educators agree that the more homework given, the better it is. In the earliest part of the century homework was opposed because it allowed children to practice too many mistakes, burden them with drill practice type of tasks and children (Ferrara,1998) and as cited in Swank & Greenwood (1999), during this time homework was very repetitious and focus merely on the drilling, memorization and recitation (Gill and Schlossman,1996). Students were over burdened with homework such as memorizing math facts, presentation of history and lengthy literature passage which was assigned to be recited in class (Swank & Greenwood 1999). In 1930s, homework was accepted. Cooper (1989) indicates that homework works at it best as an effective tool for memorization that could stimuli the mind from mental exercises and can be done at home (as cited in Ferrara,1998).

As education becomes important in the next decade, the homework was opposed again. The homework was assigned for punishment and became lengthy. Amount of homework assigned was lightened because it is claimed to be interfered with the after school activities and other matters (Cooper et al, 1998). In middle of 50s, homework was accepted as one of the ways to enhance the knowledge acquired that prepared students for the upcoming technology era after the launch of Sputnik by the Russians.

Studies were carried out soon after that as homework issues became topic of debate once again. Homework burdens the children and parents complaint over too little time for their children for recreational activities and the school workload and workday was too long (Kravolec & Buell, 2001). In 1980s, the emphasis on

homework declined and made drastic changes in American schoolings. According to the U.S. Department of Education, academic achievements were failing if compared to other nations (Ferrara, 1998) and the amount of homework given was increasing soon after that and schools soon demanded for more homework of it (Gill & Schlossman,2004).

2.3 Amount and Frequency of Homework Distributions

NAEP data shows that high school students' in America schools receive homework load that considered light if compared to the elementary school students. This situation is proven when most studies conducted on homework load focus on elementary level students shown that high school students do less homework if compared to younger children. Do high school students really given the right amount of homework? In a survey conducted by the Public Agenda Foundation among the parents of K12 students concerning their children's homework load, almost two thirds, 64% described the amount of homework were just right. The rest, 35% said there was too little and too much of it. The findings show that most parents are satisfied with the amount of homework given to the children (Brown Center Report on American Education, 2003).

One of the major interests in relation the homework issue is on the amount of English homework set by teachers. Skaggs (2007) classifies the amount of homework by its lengths and frequency with which it is assigned. Muhlen and Colleagues (2000) indicates that the amount of homework increase as students age. American students get the lightest homework loads in the world compared to other countries such as Japan (as cited in Good & Brophy, 2003) . While according to May & Lin, students from Asian backgrounds spent more time on homework than the other ethnic groups (as cited in Hallam, 2004). Homework researchers claimed that amount of homework assigned nowadays does not appear inline with the homework assigned in the past (Brown Center Report on American Education, 2003). Amount and the type of