

## **Homework vs. In Class-Exercise: Means of assessment, Waste of time, or Punishment?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study investigated the aim of Teachers/Instructors when giving homework and In class-exercises (classwork), we also took a survey of students opinion regarding Homework and In Class-exercise. We study the factors affecting the academic performance of students at a Kwara State University, We also investigated different students with their GPA's and a major contribution of the study is it examines the impact of homework and classwork on academic performance of various students' subgroups such as: male vs. female students. Graded assignments had their strongest effects among male students. GPA and higher levels of teacher experience also positively affected performance.

The simple random system sampling technique was employed in selecting the sampling units (students) and each unit was given an equal chance of selection.

**Keywords:** Homework, academic performance/achievement

### **INTRODUCTION**

The impact of homework on students' achievement is a contested and polarizing issue and it has been a subject of controversy to education researchers for the past 75 years (Cooper & Valentine, 2001). It has been viewed by many as an inconvenience and intrusion into family life and as an impediment to a full and active social life for children (Cooper, 2001). Parents worry that their children have too little homework or too much and teachers get criticized for both.

In this study, we examine the impact of graded homework and In class-exercise on the performance of students. Recently, researchers have done extensive amounts of work on how to improve performance of students. These studies focused on factors such as class size, personality type, verbal abilities, sex differences. One of the least researched issues is the impact of In class-exercise on student performance. The logic is that students will be motivated to work on the graded In class-exercise and will learn from it. As for students, they may need to forgo other, more productive learning processes and methods to make the time to work on graded assignments. Thus, it is necessary to examine whether and to what extent homework assignments and In class-exercise benefit students.

Although many studies have examined the impact of homework assignments on student performance at the elementary and secondary education levels, only a few studies have investigated this important issue in a university-level setting. Cooper (1989) provides an excellent review of the studies on the impact of homework on student performance in elementary

and secondary schools. Over the years, Alfie Kohn, a critic of homework, recently wrote, "There was no consistent linear or curvilinear relation between the amount of time spent on homework and the child's level of academic achievement" (2006, 15). Other researchers claim that homework helps students develop responsibility and life skills and the ability to manage tasks and that it provides experiential learning, increased motivation, and opportunities to learn to cope with difficulties and distractions, and academic benefits (Corno and Xu 2004; Coutts 2004; Xu and Corno 1998). Many questions had evolved over the years, such as: does homework increase students' academic performance? Hence part of the questions that fuelled the course of this study is:

- ✓ Why assessing students with homework when you can conduct in-class exercises to know their performance?
- ✓ What type of homework is effective that will help in improving students' performance?
- ✓ Without excessive homework will students' scores (tests, exams) increase?
- ✓ How much homework should students do?

### **Definition of terms:**

**Homework:** This study requires a clear definition of 'homework.' The most common is Cooper's (1989) "homework can be defined as any task assigned by schoolteachers intended for students to carry out during non-school hours." Other definitions of homework are also available but this study used this because it is clear, concise, and well used.

Alanne and Macgregor (2007) define homework as "the time students spend outside the classroom in assigned activities to practice, reinforce or apply newly-acquired skills and knowledge and to learn necessary skills of independent study". Finally, the Bakersfield CitySchool District (2005) uses a definition of homework borrowed from Keith and DeGraff (1999) that contains an important difference from Cooper's, namely, "Homework may be defined as work assigned for completion outside of the normal class period whether completed at home or at school".

While many definitions of homework exist, this study adopts Cooper's because: a) it is the most commonly accepted definition; b) many other definitions simply adapt it; and c) it provides simplicity, inclusiveness and clarity.

**Academic performance/achievement:** For the purposes of this study, academic performance means student achievement. Student achievement can be measured in a number of ways, including standardized test scores, student grades or GPAs, and class-based tests or quizzes.

## **DATA AND METHODOLOGY**

### **Sample size**

Data for this study come from 70 students who were taking various levels of courses at Kwara State University, during the Harmattan Semester (August-December) of the 2014-2015 academic year.

### **Sampling technique**

Simple random sampling technique was used in selecting the students used in this study and the students were given an equal chance of selection.

### **Instrument of data collection**

This study employed the use of survey by administering well-structured questionnaires which elicit the aim of the study. Questionnaires were administered during the course of this study which takes into consideration an exploratory study of students perception to homework and classwork.

### **Study Population**

The author personally collected data from 6 different faculties of various courses during the 10th and 11th weeks of the semester. Students appeared to be enthusiastic about the survey administered as part of the study, and the author encountered virtually little difficulty in data collection.

Prior administration of the survey, the author explained and gave an in-depth explanation and purpose of the survey to the interested students; he gave room for questions and suggestions from the students so as to ensure the grasp the intent of the survey questions.

### **Method of data presentation and analysis**

Mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) and standard deviation (SD) were the statistical tools used for the analysis. The mean value of 3.00 was used in taking decision. Any item with a mean value of 2.50 and above was taken as an index of agreement while a mean below 2.50 was taken as an index of disagreement. Chi-square was used to test the hypothesis at 5% level of significance and appropriate degree of freedom.

**Table 1.0.0: Gender of respondents**

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	37	52.9	52.9
Female	33	47.1	100.0
Total	70	100.0	

As shown in the descriptive statistics in Table 1.0.0, 37 (52.9%) of the sampled students were male and 33 (47.1%) were female;

**Table 1.0.1: Faculty of respondents**

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
CPAS	31	44.3	44.3
HMSS	11	15.7	60.0
EDU	12	17.1	77.1
AGRIC	4	5.7	82.9
ENGIN	5	7.1	90.0
ICT	7	10.0	100.0
Total	70	100.0	

From table 1.0.1, of the sampled students 31 (44.3%) are from College of Pure & Applied Sciences, 11 (15.7%) from College Of Humanities and Management Sciences, 12 (17.1%) from College Of Education, College of Agriculture 4 (5.7%), College of Engineering 5 (7.1%), College Of Information and Communication 7 (10%).

**Table 1.0.2: Academic level of respondents (Year of stay in the University)**

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
100	8	11.4	11.4
200	24	34.3	45.7
300	32	45.7	91.4
400	6	8.6	100.0
Total	70	100.0	

Table 1.0.2 reveals that 8 (11.4%) were 100 level (freshman), 24 (34.3%) 200 level(sophomore), 32 (45.7%) 300 level (junior), 6 (8.6%) 400 level (senior).

**Table 1.0.3 Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Information**

	Gender	student's faculty	student's CGPA
N	Valid	70	69
	Missing	0	1
Mean	1.47	2.46	2.6559
Std. Deviation	.503	1.708	.62150

From table 1.0.3 above, we can conclude that the average Students' Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of this study is 2.65 on a 4 point scale while the standard deviation of 0.503 shows there is little variation in their CGPA.

**Table 1.0.4: Mean and standard deviation of statements made by the students**

Statement	X	SD	Remark
HW is good for advanced classes	3.06	0.853	Agree
HW encourages students to cheat	2.74	0.852	Agree
CW and HW are equally important	3.29	0.819	Agree
CW is the most important part of studies	3.07	0.903	Agree
HW should be given in courses that requires practical	3.37	0.635	Agree
HW should be used in teaching	3.10	0.894	Agree
CW help me learn better than HW	3.12	0.932	Agree
HW encourages students to copy and paste directly from the internet	3.10	0.871	Agree
I retained what I learned mostly from CW than HW	3.27	0.700	Agree
HW should be used as a teaching method for courses that require project	3.10	0.819	Agree
CW helps me to do well in school than HW	2.14	0.944	Disagree

Table 1.0.4 shows that the students agreed CW helps them to learn better than HW but they still prefer HW to CW because more time and time for research is being given to HW than CW. All the variables in the table were accepted by the mean range used for decision which is 2.50 and above except "CW helps me to do well in school than HW". Table 2.3 reveals that "HW should be given in courses that requires practical" has on the average the highest mean ( $X= 3.37$ ,  $SD= 0.635$ ) i.e. the respondents indicated strong agreement to the question statement; followed by

“CW and HW are equally important” (X= 3.29, SD= 0.819); this is followed by “I retained what I learned mostly from CW than HW” (X= 3.27, SD= 0.7); “CW help me learn better than HW” (X= 3.12, SD= 0.932); “HW encourages students to copy and paste directly from the internet” (X= 3.10, SD= 0.871); “HW should be used in teaching” (X=3.10, SD=0.894); “CW is the most important part of studies” (X=3.07, SD=0.903); “HW is good for advanced classes” (X=3.06, SD=0.853); “HW encourages students to cheat” (X=2.74, SD=0.852); while the respondents were disagreed on “CW helps me to do well in school than HW” (X= 2.14, SD= 0.944).

**Table 1.0.5: Responses of students based on statements**

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree%
Homework is good for advanced classes rather than lower classes	37.7	33.3	26.1	2.9
Homework encourages students to cheat	18.8	43.5	30.4	7.2
Students learn better doing homework than when given classwork	44.3	43.5	30.4	7.2
Classwork and homework are equally important	48.6	34.3	14.3	2.9
Classwork is the most important part of the studies	38.2	36.8	19.1	5.9
Homework should be given in courses that requires a lot of practice e.g., Maths, etc.	51.4	37.1	8.6	2.9
Homework should be used in teaching	40.6	33.3	21.7	4.3
Classwork help me learn better than homework	40.6	39.1	11.6	8.7
Homework encourages students to copy and paste materials directly from the internet directly	37.1	41.4	15.7	5.7
I retained what I learned mostly from classwork than in homework	40	48.6	10	1.4
Homework should be used as a teaching method for courses that requires students doing a project work	34.3	45.7	15.7	4.3
Classwork helps me do well at school than homework	11.6	17.4	44.9	26.1

The above table presents the responses of the surveyed students on different statements. Majority (62.3%) of the students indicated that they believe homework encourages students to cheat, 78.5% revealed that it encourages students to copy and paste materials directly from the internet directly. Furthermore, 75.7% indicated that students learn better doing homework than when

given classwork, while 88.8% revealed homework should be given in courses that requires a lot of practice e.g., Math's, and 80% indicated that it should be used as a teaching method for courses that requires students doing a project work.

Interestingly, 80.6% of the students indicated that though they prefer homework to classwork, they retained what they learned mostly from classwork than homework and 79.7% revealed classwork help them learn better than homework.

**Table 1.0.6: Which of these do you prefer as a means of assessment of a subject matter you have being taught in the class?**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Classwork	33	47.1
Homework	37	52.9
Total	70	100

From table 1.0.6, it is obvious that 47.1% of the surveyed students revealed they prefer classwork as a means of assessment to homework.

## RESULTS

Table 1.0.5 illustrates the proportion of Students who rated the degree of their belief on their preference of homework assignment to In-class exercise and vice versa. The opinion of the students was diverse as majority of the students revealed they prefer homework to classwork but they did not retain what they learnt from homework than classwork. Students also indicated that classwork do not help them to do well at school than homework. Results from this study also revealed homework should be given more to courses/subjects that require practice like mathematics and other practical courses that involves manufacturing or creativity.

Hence, Teachers should endeavor to give more of classwork to students than homework as this in turn helps student learn better and which increases their GPA's. Results from this study shows that students prefer In class exercise (classwork) as a better means of testing their knowledge about the subject matter taught than homework, also, students tend to prefer homework in cases where the subject/course involves practical or has real-life application.

More so, results from this study reveal that there is an association between classwork and homework as a means of assessment and students' academic performance. Hence, there is a positive significant relationship between classwork and students' academic performance.

### **Implications for Further Research**

Additionally, the following implications may be suggested for further research:

1. A larger scale study which covers all the levels from primary through secondary schools may be conducted, so that more comparative data can be gathered.
2. Qualitative data gathering procedures can be used in order to eliminate the weaknesses of the questionnaire, which was also used for the present study, and to gather in-depth data.
3. Along with students and parents' opinions, teachers' opinions need to be identified, since they are the key figure in homework procedures.
4. Finally, experimental or quasi-experimental designs can be used in order to assess the effect of doing homework on students' academic achievements and their attitudes toward schooling.

Future research should utilize a larger set of criteria to determine the effectiveness of homework on achievement. Researchers should not only look at performance on evaluations, whether teacher developed or standardized, but also at other outcomes that can be viewed as successes. Some of these other outcomes are improved motivation, better study habits, and improved critical thinking skills. Homework is a universal practice in many areas of education. It is a variable of manipulability. Teachers and administrators control whether to assign homework, what homework to assign, and how much to assign. Its design and purpose should be clearly understood. The research on homework has been limited, specifically at the elementary level, thus future studies should examine a larger population across different grade levels to assist in the determination of amount, design, and purpose of homework assignments.

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## APPENDICE

**Dear respondent,**

This questionnaire is aimed at investigating whether in class-exercise (class work) is better than Homework; we are taking a look from students' perspective. Kindly tick the correct answers as your matric number or name is not needed hence your responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality, therefore answer all questions appropriately, sincerely and express yourself clearly and freely wherever necessary. Thanks for sparing your valuable time and participation in order to make this research a success.

**Section A: Demographic Information**

Age\_\_\_\_\_ Sex\_\_\_\_\_ Level\_\_\_\_\_ College\_\_\_\_\_ CGPA\_\_\_\_\_

Which of these do you prefer as a means of assessment of a subject matter you have being taught in the class?

(a) Classwork (b) Homework

**Kindly rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the questions below**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Homework is good for advanced classes rather than lower classes				
Homework encourages students to cheat				
Students learn better doing classwork than when given homework				
Classwork and homework are equally important				
Classwork is the most important part of the studies				
Homework should be given in courses that requires a lot of practice e.g., Maths, etc.				
Homework should be used in teaching				
Classwork help me learn better than homework				
Homework encourages students to copy and paste materials directly from the internet directly				
I retained what I learned mostly from classwork than in homework				
Homework should be used as a teaching method for courses that requires students doing a project work				
Classwork helps me do well at school than homework				
Homework does not help me in anyway at all				

What could your teachers do to make homework easier and less stressful?

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**Thanks for your sincere answers.....**