

Meaning and Purposes of Homework: A Comparative Study of British- Pakistani and Pakistani Primary Schools in London and Lahore

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Abstract

The present qualitative study was planned to examine and compare the practices of homework in Pakistan and England in terms of importance, similarities and differences, the amount and type of homework given to pupils, and the importance of parental involvement in Primary schools of Pakistan and England. Questionnaires and interviews were used as basic tools to collect data from 12 primary schools, their head-teachers, 60 teachers and 100 parents from England and Pakistan by convenient sampling. The analysis of the data was presented mainly in an explanatory method. Only a few important questions were analyzed and presented in percentage to get a better understanding of the situation at a glance. The results revealed that in Pakistan education is more of a responsibility of children and parents rather than the schools and its teachers. As the teachers are under pressure to complete the required syllabus before the examinations so they give lots of homework to achieve their goals. In England homework is used just for practice and reinforcement of classwork and it is not compulsory for all. Further in Pakistan schools, majority of the parents complained about the homework being too much, while British Pakistani parents in London suggested that their children should bring more homework from schools.

Keywords: Homework, parental involvement, reinforcement.

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Introduction

In recent years homework has come to the fore, as a topic with new interests for educational institutions, teachers and parents. The study, reported was conducted in primary schools of London and Lahore, arose out of the teachers and parents interest in homework as an integral element of learning.

It's a well-known fact that homework is an important part of a good education. Therefore, emphasis was strong on the importance of homework in cultivating motivation and development of skills required through independent learning. Additionally, homework is an important tool for developing and using added skills which goes along way in helping pupils as they grow up.

The main sample of this study were British-Pakistani parents' attitudes, behavior, interests and responsibilities towards their primary school children's education, and their thoughts about the education and educational system in England. This was the original sample the author wanted to study basically; Pakistani parents in Pakistan were added only for the comparison and to make the picture clear.

Review

The author being in the education profession for the last 30 years, strongly believe in the home-school relationship/liaison and parental involvement in their children's schools. One of the many other ways of parental involvement in schools is through homework. British-Pakistani parents only know the parental involvement through homework, so the author decided to study the parental involvement and compare British-Pakistani parents in England with Pakistani parents in Pakistan.

Author being Pakistani herself, educated in Pakistani schools went to England for her higher education, found a great difference between the attitudes of British-Pakistani and Pakistani parents in their children's education. This motivated her to find out why it is so. This study focus on British-Pakistani parents of primary school children in England and Pakistani parents in Pakistan. This sample provide with the added opportunity to reflect on the interfaces between cultures and the responses of different societies towards parental involvement in schools.

The role of the study is a cross-cultural comparison of British-Pakistani and Pakistani

parents in the education of their children. As in Pakistan schools the most important parental involvement is confided to help with homework, the author decided to study and find out the differences of opinions between British-Pakistani and Pakistani parent towards assisting their children with homework.

Homework has been around us for as long as schools have, and over the years considerable research has also been conducted regarding the usability and practices of homework. Though the results of these researches are not uniform, but most experts draw some common conclusions regarding the importance of homework for children of different ages.

Researchers agree that it is also important that the homework should meet the needs of the pupils; the most and least able, those with special needs and those with challenging or unconventional home circumstances. Bastiani, J., (1997), Bailey, P., et al., (1997). It should also take account of parents' need to be fully informed of their capacity and willingness to be involved. They also emphasized the parental interests and involvement in their children's education. One particularly noteworthy conclusion made was that parental involvement should not merely be concerned with drawing parents into schools; it should also recognize the contribution made by parents at home by helping with homework or providing them with other facilities concerning education (Jowett et al., 1991). Bastiani (1996) also supported this study and emphasized the importance of well-planned homework with parental agreement and involvement.

In another study by David, et al (1998), it was found that children's education is directly related to parental involvement either by assisting with homework or arranging any other kind of help. Over eight out of ten parents said that they help children with their homework and also agreed that homework is helpful to improve their children's learning. Commercially produced workbooks were reported to have been used by around half of the parents in the sample. Private tutor had also been employed by over a third of the families.

It is generally agreed by almost all the researchers that homework is necessary as well as helpful in children's education if it is well planned and does not burden children and their families.

It is concluded through the above mentioned studies that homework is important but different researchers also have different points of views.

There is clear evidence that well-planned homework helps pupils—in particular those from disadvantaged backgrounds—reach higher standards. It also allows more effective use to be made of lesson times and improves pupils' study skills and attitude towards learning, e.g.

Hughes, M., (1996) and Topping, K., et al (1996). Parents and guardians should know what homework their children are expected to do and the support they themselves should give. The school's approach to homework is expected to be one of the key elements of its home-school contract. (Bastiani, J., 1996); Mills, J., 1996; Chavkin, N., 1993).

Well-

planned and balanced homework is not an optional extra, but an essential part of any good educational system. There is clear evidence that it helps pupils, in particular those who need extra help and are from disadvantaged background, reach higher standards. As for example, Alexander, et al. (1995), Bastian, J., (1997), Wolfendale, S., (1996).

The present study is an attempt to find out the importance and practices of homework in primary schools and comparing the parental attitudes towards their children's homework in England and in Pakistan. This study will also help to find out the cultural differences in educational practices concerning homework, schools and parental participation in their children's education.

Methodology

Research Design

This study was a qualitative in-depth study. This research approach is carried out using 'case study' design. As the aims of the study are to reveal results about a certain case, the results obtained are not generalized to different cases. It is a comparative study between British-Pakistani parents and pupils in London and Pakistani parents and pupils in Lahore of primary schools, the way they feel about the homework given by the schools.

12 schools, their head-teachers, 60 teachers and 100 parents from the same schools, were included in this study, from England and Pakistan by convenient sampling.

It is important to explain why I made an effort to keep the sample size constant. There were two main reasons for this: firstly, though this is a qualitative research, I have strived to base my analysis on the frequency of the answers given by the respondents. Therefore, had I not given consideration to the size of the sample within the two groups of parents, teachers, and headteachers, it would have created an imbalance and I would have become unsure of how accurate the comparison between the various subsets would come out to be. Secondly, the sample size was already limited in number (100 parents, 60 teachers, and 12 headteachers, in Britain and in Pakistan) and I did not intend to further reduce it. Because of the factors I deliberately endeavored to ensure that if I did not receive any input from a respondent or if he/

she dropped out at the last moment, I would have adequate back-up support.

In this paper, the research questions were:

What are the similarities and differences in homework systems in Primary schools of Pakistan and England?

What is the importance of homework and how do teachers design homework for their primary school pupils?

How much homework do they give to primary school children and how much parental views and involvement is encouraged/allowed (regarding homework) by schools?

Who should do homework? How much should they do? What kind of tasks should be included? And above all, how can it help children to make progress?

The findings are intended to reflect and take account of best current practice and to be of direct use to schools and parents anywhere in the world, especially in Pakistan, because in that country, the homework has absolutely different meanings in schools.

Data Collecting Tools

To collect data for this study semi-structured interview guides were developed by the researcher composed of 20 open-ended questions for primary school teachers and a questionnaire containing 16 questions for parents to get their viewpoint on homework. Head-teachers were also talked to get information about the homework policies and parental involvement in their schools.

Six primary schools in London were nominated with British-Pakistani children and six primary schools were selected from Lahore.

Data Collection and Analysis:

The researcher arranged to meet the teachers and parents in their convenient time. Before starting the interview the researcher explained the importance and scope of the study and also confirmed the confidentiality. After this small talk teachers and parents felt comfortable in answering all questions freely.

The data collected from both the questionnaires and interviews were then analyzed and presented in an explanatory method.

Results

In Pakistan it is more of a responsibility of children and parents rather than the school and its teachers. The main concern of teachers seems that the syllabus should be completed before the examinations. For them it is not important whether it was done in the class or at home, whether it is beneficial to the child or just futile exercise, as long as the teacher manages to complete the required topics in the given time period.

In Pakistan schools almost all the parents complained about the homework being too much. The Pakistani parents generally said that, “The teachers give lots of homework” and were of the opinion that “school teachers do not teach children at school, instead they ask them to study at home, which is an added burden on parents”.

Many Pakistani parents interviewed had arranged private tuition for their children for one reason or another. Children, who do not take private tuition, consume lots of their parents’ time, seeking help for their homework.

This was one of the reasons why British-Pakistani parents in London suggested that their children should bring more homework from schools, probably because they were used to this practice in Pakistan.

Table 1: Responses of Parents about the amount of Homework.

Questions:	British-Pakistani Parents		Pakistani Parents	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Are you satisfied with the amount of homework given to your child by the	03%	97%	01%	99%
Do you think that more homework should be given to your child	97%	03%	0%	100%
Do you think that less homework should be given to your child	00%	100%	99%	01%
Have you made any arrangements for private tuitions for your child?	02%	98%	99%	01%

Table 2: Parental Opinion about Homework:

Questions:	British-Pakistani Parents	Pakistani Parents
Does your child bring home any work from school?	Yes, but not always	Yes always
What sort of work does your child bring home	Usually a story book for reading	All sorts of work, reading, writing, maths and learning by heart.
What do you feel about the homework given	It is very less, more homework should be given	It is too much, less work should be given
Have you ever discussed it with the teacher concerned?	No, never. Because the teachers in London think that it is not fair to give a lot of work.	No, never. Because teachers in Pakistan do not like when parents interfere with school matters.
Are you satisfied with the overall education your child is receiving at school?	No, we are not satisfied. Because the teachers in England are not teaching enough as we used to study when we were in schools in Pakistan.	No, we are not. Because in Pakistan school teachers are overburdening children with extra work because of which we are stressed

Most parents answered the questions like this:

Most of the British-

Pakistani parents, in London (about 97%) were generally unsatisfied with the amount of work their children bring home from school, and thought that the schools should give more homework in order to make their children do extra study after school hours and also to keep the children busy at home. They do not always help their children with the homework, usually because of the lack of time, but also because sometimes they do not understand how exactly to help them. This is mainly because of inadequate knowledge of the English language and also because they are unfamiliar with the education system in England and so they are unable to help their children. The education they themselves had received in Pakistan (if any) was quite different from the education their children were now acquiring. They followed the rote-memory system and had very basic and simple English and different mathematics now outdated in England. They were used to a lot of homework which teachers in Pakistan still practice to avoid teaching in the class and also to save time.

As British-

Pakistani Parents are used to the private tuition system practiced in Pakistan, they force their children to take private tuition in England. According to these parents, they are under pressure to take part in their children's education which, for them, is that their children

should complete their daily homework and get better grades in the examinations. In other words parental participation in British-Pakistan parents is only to help the children to complete their homework and obtain good marks in the monthly tests and final examination.

Parents whose children attend tuition centres feel that they are helping their children in education and so their children will get good marks and grades in exams. They also feel that this is a part of their responsibility that their children should get good marks no matter how hard they have to work for it. They do realize the burden on young children's minds and the physical exertion; but they feel that it is necessary for their children's future. British-Pakistan parents feel that this is their participation in their children's education.

Parents do what they feel is the best for their child within the parameters of expectations set by the schools. If the schools want this type of parental participation then parents give them what is required by the school. If, at some stage, parents wish to pull their child out of a school whose academic policies and strategies they are dissatisfied with—they may not have a choice—for they might find an alternative school but not a different system. Some schools appear more progressive by virtue of the academic opportunities they offer, but scratch the surface and the core remains the same.

In primary schools of Pakistan, reading to children or listening to read are new concepts, as this is not a common practise in Pakistan. They only know of the homework in terms of 'learning lessons and timetables by rote-learning, writing (which usually comprises of copying the teachers' writing, to improve the script) and doing sums'. The British-Pakistan sample want to help their children with their homework, as for them this is the most important part of parental participation, and so they buy or borrow books from libraries for their children to read at home (usually fictional, historical, cultural and religious books) only because this is required by the schools, but don't think that it is of any use to the children.

As said before, British-Pakistan parents in my sample were not used to reading or listening to the books or stories and they found this part of homework very difficult, use less and time consuming. Another commented that "it is a waste of time. Reading any story book will not improve their study skills and also will not help them to get good marks in their final examinations. The homework should be solid work and comprised of practicing mathematics sums, English grammar, essay writing, and learning history and geography etc."

British-Pakistan parents complained of homework being less probably because they

were used to the homework given in Pakistani schools. They were also against story books because they themselves were not used to reading story books as homework. For them reading books are a waste of time because most of the stories do not have a moral ending. As one mother said that, “the purpose of a story is to teach the difference between good and evil and to show what happens if one strays from the straight and narrow path”. They found most stories pointless because “most of the stories were not teaching the child anything of value”, said another mother. They thought that the stories using rhymes were hard to follow and that they couldn’t always understand the humour and ‘play on words’ in certain books, and for them this is only to pass time and not a part of homework. For them homework consists of rote memorisation of lessons spreading over several pages from various books, or learning by heart the timetable and improving writing only but not the writing skills. They are used to copy pages upon pages to make their writing ‘look better’ without understanding what they were writing and this was especially true for the English language.

Another important point to consider is that for the parental participation is probably confined to helping children at home with homework and other educational activities. When they were asked about parental participation they all mentioned helping in one way or the other with homework. However, in Pakistan, the parents were against the policy of giving too much homework because the teachers give lots of homework, which consumes most of their children’s time. It also hinders in the parents’ social life and even forces them to change their life pattern, whereas British-Pakistani parents wanted schools to give more homework.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article mainly aimed to explore the scope and purpose of homework, as seen by the schools in England and in Pakistan. It is apparently fairly easy to get an agreement at a general level from parents and teachers on the ‘value’ of homework and this has perhaps encouraged the view that its nature and purposes are understood, shared and non-problematic.

The recent growth of homework in schools and colleges has highlighted less familiar aspects of the agenda: for example the part which homework can play in developing ‘home-school-relations’, informing parents about the curriculum and teaching methods and thus encouraging their more active involvement and collaboration.

The amount and type of homework pupils do cannot continue to be left to chance. The enormous inconsistencies between schools mean that hundreds of thousands of primary school

children are missing out on opportunities to build on what they learn in the classroom. The agenda addressed by the study ranges in a number of topics and areas:

- Schools' homework policies and their implementations
- The amount of homework set, and the time spent by pupils
- The type of homework set (including issues relating to differentiation)
- Homework assessment and feedback
- Resource implications of homework
- Integration of homework with classroom learning
- Use of homework clubs and study support centres
- Pupil motivation for homework

Schools in London plan and issue national guidelines on homework, covering the following points:

- How much homework pupils of different ages should do
- How much time pupils of different ages should spend on homework
- What sort of tasks and activities make homework effective
- How schools can develop and implement successful homework policies
- What is expected of both schools and parents

This study was also expected to provide evidence on the contribution which an effective homework routine can make in:

- Promoting positive pupil attitudes to school
- Enhancing pupil achievement
- Promoting positive parental attitudes and involvement.

Homework is not an end in itself and it is important to evaluate the extent to which any strategy or programme contributes to the improvement of learning and achievement.

There might be a discussion on the type and range of work involved. Some school guidelines make it clear to the parents that, since the time when they themselves were at school, there have been major changes in the kind of tasks which might be set for homework. One challenge for those providing guidance is that not all homework is done at home, in fact, for some pupils who find it hard to work at home, or some tasks which may require resources, such as books, software, equipment etc., more readily available at school, it is necessary or desirable

to carry out the task at school, libraries or friend's home.

One school solved the problem by replacing the term 'homework' with 'personal study'.

Forms of Homework

Learning, reading, writing, research (a very important part of education/homework, but unfortunately overlooked in most Pakistani schools), interviews, watching/observing, drawing, tape-recording, word-processing and so on.

What is it for

Most of the school teachers agree that homework is mainly for Independent learning, consolidation, practice-learning by doing, completion of coursework assignments, self-discipline, research, parent-teacher-pupil partnership, work not suited to classroom situation.

Homework is essentially an independent study, carried out by the students outside the timetable lesson, without the direct support of the teacher and that in most cases will be done at home, with parental help but not direct involvement.

Some schools distinguished explicitly between what they called 'formal homework' of this kind and the ongoing regular learning and practice tasks expected of school and college students of all ages: reading, writing, spelling, number bonds and multiplication tables. Others started from a very different viewpoint, focusing on the entire learning children do out of school, often with their parents and seeking to strengthen and reinforce this. For younger children homework could be any activity which will encourage the social skills of sharing and cooperation.

One school of London offered a clear definition in their policy, again coming up with a new label as well:

'Homework is work which is set to be done outside the timetable curriculum but not necessarily at home. It does contain an element of independent study in that it is not usually directly supervised or controlled by a teacher and it represents an extension of the learning activities provided and organized in accordance with the objectives of the school curriculum. Since one of the purposes of schooling is to enable pupils to learn independently of the school, the term 'home learning' or 'personal study' is more appropriate than 'homework' (School C).

This raises a question about how independent the work at home should be. As homework is a partnership between teacher, parent and the child, so it is essentially a cooperative venture.

For example, some schools of London in my sample provided simple games which parents or other siblings could play with the child to encourage counting and classifying skills. For some, this kind of activity was certainly 'homework'; others would have seen it as 'normal parental activity'. While it was widely agreed that the parental role changed as the child got older, with more encouragement and less direct involvement. As said before that homework is a partnership between teacher, parent and the child, so it is essentially a co-operative venture.

There was also the issue of whether homework should be an essential part of the learning programme. The great majority of primary schools in Pakistan in my sample expected it to "apply to all pupils on the grounds that if it was valuable for some then it was valuable for all". But in British schools there was a less inclusive approach, with homework apparently given to supplement learning for those seen to need it as extra input. For example, when a child would benefit from extra practice, had been absent or needed resources not found in school.

The Purpose of Home Work

Most policies start with a rationale, setting out the aims and objectives of homework, the reasons for doing it and its place in the broader teaching and learning policy. The underlying argument is that effective homework would help to raise attainment. The purposes listed below tended to focus on several main aspects, such as:

- Consolidation/reinforcement: learning facts/concepts, practicing skills
- Creating more time: to finish off work, read around, draft
- Homework as discipline: time/self-management, independent work
- Home-school links: to involve/educate parents, two-way channel, home-school partnership
- Enrichment: learning is fun, worthwhile, part of real life, chance to develop new skills.

The main purpose of homework is to contribute to 'better performance'. Another purpose is to promote home-school partnership, and indeed help parents to become more closely involved in their child's education. It was concluded in the interview that "teachers generally recognize that homework has greater success when it is valued by pupils and parents". We believe that it is important that children bring 'work' home from a fairly young age so that they get in the habit of doing some sort of study at home as well as links between home and school can be developed and enhanced.

As discussed before, one of the school's aims is to promote a close liaison between

home and school. As one head-teacher said, “By setting homework for our pupils we hope to involve parents more in their children’s education, to increase parents’ understanding of the work being done in school, to improve the feedback for parents about their children’s progress and to extend and reinforce work covered in school. At school, homework enables parents and other interested parties to become closely involved with children’s learning and school work”.

According to the teachers of the schools interviewed in England and Pakistan, the purposes of homework are as follows:

- Homework develops skills needed by the schools
- Create partnership with parents
- Parents become more involved
- Students learn to research
- Students learn revision skills
- Help child to reach potential
- Develop self-discipline
- Consolidation of learning
- Develop organizational skills
- Develop good study skills
- Practice skills
- Learn how to broaden learning
- Consolidates skills
- Develop self-motivation

Homework has its aims, meanings and purposes, which need serious thinking, planning and implementation. It should be planned in accordance with helping children improve and overcome their weaknesses, and not wasting their time. Therefore, it is best to tailor to the needs of the individual pupil so as to push the bright and pay more attention to the weak.

This means that it is not helpful to set homework which just asks pupils to “finish off what we started in class...” as this results in the most able pupils getting an easy ride, and the slowest finding themselves slumbered.

According to one of the schools in London, homework is important to:

- To develop further good work habits and independent study skills
- To develop further a self-disciplining and self-motivating attitude to study

- To practice and reinforce skills learned in the classroom
- To consolidate and extend work begun in the classroom
- To enhance study by making greater use of materials and sources of information which may not be available in the classroom, for example visits to the local library, museum, zoo, parks, shops etc.
- To involve parents and other adults in children's work

Overall there was a strong emphasis on the role of homework in developing the motivation and skills needed for independent learning. Homework is not just for practicing and reinforcing what had been taught, but actually for developing and using additional skills which would become increasingly important as pupils grew older. Visits to schools as part of the study confirmed these priorities but also raised new issues. For example, one primary school in London had a very clear policy document, the head-teacher stressed that the main purpose of homework was to get the parents involved so that they know what work their child was covering, while class teachers see homework as mainly supporting work in class and reinforcement. For teachers the most important purpose is, to extend the learning week, to assess pupil's knowledge and to complete classwork.

The issue of 'finishing off classwork' shows up most clearly the tension which can arise between the official goals and classroom practice. It is also one of the approved purposes of homework to allow slower pupils to complete classwork. In some schools it was seen as legitimate as they think that homework gives time to pupils to think better in their own time and thus complete work not finished in class.

In most schools of London, school staff members are required, where appropriate, to tailor homework to the needs of the individual pupil so as to stretch the brightest and support the weakest. Whereas in Pakistan schools, regularly setting work which just asks pupils to 'finish off what we started in class' along with usual same homework for all, is a common practice, which usually results in the most able pupils getting a very easy ride, and the lowest being well and truly lumbered. For many Pakistani teachers, however, using homework to complete classwork was both acceptable and indeed necessary. The research noted a common practice routine in Pakistan schools 'finish off your classwork' approach which seemed to be the staple diet in most subjects, and which pupils found unmotivated.

It also allows more effective use to be made of lesson times and improves pupils' study skills and attitudes to learning. Parents need to know what homework their children are expected

to do and the support they should give, and to what extent. The school's approach to homework is expected to be one of the key elements of its home-school contract.

The amount and type of homework pupils do cannot continue to be left to chance. The enormous inconsistencies between schools mean that hundreds of thousands of primary school children are missing out on opportunities to build on what they learn in the classroom.

The Scope, Meaning and Purpose of Homework

First of all the most important thing is that there should be consensus at the general level between parents and teachers on the value of homework. This will encourage the view that its nature and purpose is understood and shared. The recent growth of homework in Pakistani primary schools has highlighted less familiar aspects of the agenda: such as the part which homework can play in developing home-school relations, informing parents about the curriculum and teaching methods which are being used in school thus encouraging their more active involvement and collaboration, and planning different homework for children of different caliber.

Most of the Pakistani schools, where homework is a long-established tradition, tend to assume, understandably, that no definition of homework is needed. Whereas schools visited for this study in London provided a definition for homework for parents: 'Work set to be done outside the classroom and not under staff supervision'. It was more common, in homework policies and guidelines for parents, to launch straight into the reasons for setting homework and the procedures for managing it. There might be a discussion of the range of homework involved. Some school guidelines made it clear to parents that there had been major changes from the time when they were in school, in the kind of tasks which might be set for the homework.

There is a checklist which might be useful for pupils, parents and teachers while doing or designing homework. Though, each school is required to produce its own more detailed policy to comply with these criteria:

Within the primary school years we see homework embracing a wider range of activities, occasions and events which includes many of the following at various times:

- Weekly learning of timetables
- Weekly learning of spellings
- Reading to family members or listening to a family member read

- Family visits to local museums, zoo, farm etc., reinforcing aspects of current classroom studies
- Completion of assignments during weekends or holiday periods in relation to topic studies
- Involvement in activities such as sports clubs, dancing, music instrument practice etc.
- The school's programme of wide-ranging extra-curricular activities.

One of the school's aims is 'to promote a close liaison between home and school'. By setting homework for our pupils we hope to involve parents more in their children's education, to increase parents' understanding of the work being done in school, to improve the feedback for parents about their children's progress and to extend and reinforce work covered in school. At school we believe regular homework enables parents and other interested parties to become more closely involved with children's learning and school work.

There was a strong emphasis on the role of homework in developing the motivation and skill needed for independent learning. As some staff and policies explained, the demand of coursework meant that it was essential for pupils to develop the self-discipline and study skills for sustained work from young age onwards. In other words, homework was not just for practicing and reinforcing what had been taught, but actually for developing and using additional skills which would become increasingly important as pupils grew older.

In London at primary level the purpose of homework is mainly to get parents involved so that they know what work their children were recovering, and in Pakistani schools it is mainly to support and reinforce work done in class. It is also helpful to prepare children for secondary school and college and using homework as an opportunity for some pupils to finish off work they had not completed in class. In short it is mainly to extend the learning hours, to assess pupils' knowledge and to complete classwork, although often 'finishing off' was restricted to 'occasional' use.

What emerged from all the evidence on the purpose of homework was seen by the school staff, who often had a broad and strategic view on this matter, as an opportunity to develop and broaden learning skills and even to lay the foundation of lifelong learning. This involved, especially in the early years, the closest partnership with parents; indeed, a number of schools defined them formally as 'co-educators'. For senior managers this meant that homework could be a valuable secondary purpose of 'educating' parents about the curriculum and teaching methods. For many class and subject teachers, the purpose of homework was likely to be seen in more practical terms.

- **Clear Leadership and Consultation by the Senior Managers**

The homework policy has been actively developed in full consultation with the rest of the staff and indeed with parents, often over a sustained period.

- **Homework as Part of the Overall Mission**

Homework is presented as part of overall learning strategy, 'embedded' in classroom practice, and in line with the school ethos.

- **Consistency**

The purposes are known and understood by all teachers, pupils and parents; and observed in practice.

- **Reinforcement**

Many methods are used for getting the message home, especially to parents and pupils, e.g. simple guidelines appropriate to their audience, workshops, term letters, in-service training, monitoring of practice.

One challenge in developing such agreement was the feeling that pupils' circumstances had to be taken into account in the rationale for homework, including their age ability and home context. The primary school heads stressed the need to strengthen reading skills and build greater parental involvement in the early years, with more independent, 'research-oriented' work in later years. Some also felt that the main purpose of homework was to prepare pupils for secondary school routines.

What seems to be emerging is that schools have defined a large number of purposes for homework, with priorities shifting mainly in relation to age and stage. The shift in priorities is mainly related to the relative roles of parent and child at each stage, and in the range of tasks which the children are expected to undertake 'independently' as they get older.

Thus we can say that the three key purposes of homework are:

- Raising achievement,
- Improving home-school links,
- Enhancing the reputation of the school.

Raising achievement and home-school partnership would be found in almost all London schools, but the strategies for achieving these goals might receive different emphasis, depending on the school context. The third, enhancing the reputation of the school, is an often implicit, but significant purpose, certainly for senior managers. From each of these purposes it

would be possible to derive a large number of more specific objectives, and this is where the differences between sub-groups could be identified and discussed. Whereas in Pakistan schools the 'improving home-school links' was mostly ignored whereas the third one was most popular.

The Status of Homework

One of the issues that have emerged from this discussion of the perceived purpose of homework is its status: how important do schools consider homework, and just why is it important? Is homework a useful extra, or an integral and essential part of the learning programme? If it is essential, does it follow that it is an entitlement?

Almost all school policies and guidelines which I saw, stressed the importance of homework and the contribution it makes to enhancing achievement. Some other indicators are, therefore, needed to assess how schools apply this principle in their practice.

These indicators relate to the school's expectations about homework and its integration into the learning strategy.

Setting Expectations

The indicators needed here are about access and compliance. If homework is to have high status, then it is essential that all pupils are enabled and required to complete it effectively. In other words, they all need access to the appropriate materials and conditions, which will vary according to the age, ability, special needs and home circumstances of the pupil. Once this challenge has been addressed, schools can be rigorous in applying rules about when and how the work should be completed.

Some London primary schools felt that one of the best ways of helping pupils to manage their homework effectively was to put a major effort into strategies for enabling all parents to support and work with their children, which includes providing guidelines and workshops on reading, spelling and writing, and also ensuring all had the basic materials.

One school of London (school F) provided details of community-based projects to provide homework clubs for less able pupils. Teaching study skills was another way of equipping all pupils to tackle independent learning more effectively. Providing sufficient resources, particularly books or internet facility was often mentioned as a problem, whereas in general most schools could supply what was needed; perhaps another interpretation is that homework tasks were designed to fit the available resources. For example, it is not feasible to give assignments to pupils from very poor backgrounds (government primary schools in Pakistan) that require the use of the computers or other expensive materials. However, problems

persisted, with some schools unaware of how many pupils faced difficulties at home, without books, access to computer or internet, support from parents, space for homework, or of the times some of them spent on extended tasks.

Then there was the issue of compliance. If homework is to be accepted as important by staff, pupils and parents, the school has to make the ground rules clear, apply them clearly and consistently and also see that they are respected. This proved more difficult in those primary schools which defined homework as a valuable but essentially voluntary activity, or left it to the class teacher to decide the rules. Parents in particular appreciated clear, easily understood instructions about deadlines and requirements, and many London primary schools provided these, often concentrating on the tasks and the schedule (when homework would be set and handed in or tested), rather than strict time allocations. These schedules often included short-term tasks, to be completed over a few days, and (for older students) occasional long tasks, scheduled to last several weeks. Many schools made the requirements clear and explicit, often recording them in school planners.

Integrating Homework into the Learning Programme

It is an accepted principle that homework should be fully integrated into the learning programme, and that staff should not set ‘one-off’ tasks unrelated to the work in hand simply in order to satisfy the homework timetable. In what ways could this idea be demonstrated in practice? The three key ideas concerned here are:

- Assessment,
- Planning and
- Evaluation.

The school’s view of the status of homework may show up in how it is assessed. For example, some primary schools graded homework partly to show it was important and must be done, while others assessed it equally with classwork as part of the formal programme to demonstrate that it was indeed integral. One of the strategies they encouraged staff to use to ensure that homework was completed was to make homework as essential a part of pupils’ assessed work. By contrast, some refused to assess work done at home because the standard was lower than classwork, or parents had intervened too much. Others felt that the high status for homework was quite compatible with a more informal approach, especially on assessments. The planning and making of homework is a contentious issue in many schools. Without clear guidance, it

produced a burden of work for conscientious teachers which often resulted in slow and therefore less effective feedback to pupils. This could reduce the status and value of homework in the eyes of pupils. The assessments should be such which ensure that the results help pupils to make progress in the classroom.

Guidance on planning homework and more especially on evaluating its quality also helped to indicate how seriously homework was taken by schools as a key element of their learning policy. Schools could demonstrate their commitment to integrating homework into the curriculum by making clear that homework had to be explicitly linked to the scheme of work and indicating how that might be done. In some cases, this meant planning in advance a set of homework tasks to complement classwork for each module or topic.

The meaning and purpose of homework is not always made explicit, and that there may be differing interpretations, between and within schools. To some extent this is because the nature of homework tasks and the purposes they serve, change and develop as children get older. There are also some indications that senior managers tend to see homework as serving a strategic purpose while other teachers may stress more pragmatic goals, such as expending the time available for learning or allowing slower learners to catch up with the rest. There was greater consensus in schools which had taken the trouble to consult parents and others.

The status of homework in the school was indicated by the seriousness with which the school communicated and enforced its policy, and the practical strategies for realizing the goal of integrating homework into the learning programme. This meant ensuring all pupils were given an opportunity to complete relevant and appropriate homework that every effort was made to see that they did it and that their work was valued through the quality of teachers' response to it.

It has become clear that the scope, purpose and status of homework programmes and policies depend on the contribution they make to broader school goals and strategies. Homework may also be presented as part of one or more of the following:

- A wider home-school policy, including home-school contracts, communication with parents, parental support;
- Programmes to promote key skills including supported self-study, individual action planning, independent learning;
- Strategies to promote community links, including mentoring, links with libraries, parent and community groups, study centres.

It shows that homework contributes to the overall strategy to raise achievement, through these channels, rather than presenting homework almost as an end in itself.

Homework is a unique aspect of school policy because it so clearly bestridesthe dividing line between home and school. It therefore requires the active involvement of both parties; pupils and parents, collaborating with the school staff. Schools seem to have a better chance of achieving this involvement if their staff members are clear and united on how homework can contribute positively to the broader goals of the school, particularly for more effective learning.

Suggestions

This study started with a single question, which was then divided and subdivided into many more. The question was ‘what role homework plays in the education of children in Pakistani and British primary schools?’ This was then studied with regard to the Pakistani parents in Lahore and British-Pakistani parents who have migrated to England from (mostly) small villages of Pakistan. As the British-Pakistani parents were the main actors of this study, they were explored in all directions, such as their background, religious thinking, education, customs, traditions and ways of living, to find out the reasons, causes, and explanations of the behaviour of these parents in regard to their children’s education. Many questions arose when the British-Pakistanis were studied in detail, and in finding the answers to a question many more questions came instead, and then their answers gave rise to more questions. This is how it became a lengthy in-depth study from the simple question where it started from.

It is interesting to note that the patterns of parental involvement in their children’s education in the two groups of parents were quite different from each other: It was found that the British-Pakistani group wanted more homework for their children and Pakistani parents demanded that the school should give less homework.

What needs dire attention is the entire system. Quality should become a priority and corrupt practices should be ruled out. The approach has to be in the form of multiple commitments instead of a single intervention. Teachers need a stimulating environment with maximum parental support. They can import some of the structures that have proved workable in the private sector.

The connections between families, schools, and communities are not yet seen as vitally related to the premier social task of breaking the link between poverty and social and academic failure for so many poor children—the task of reforming the education process so that all children (not just some of them) can succeed.

Parental involvement should be viewed as one of many needed connections between schools, families, and communities that might contribute to social and academic success for all

children. In addition, all of these connections should be viewed as only one part of an overall effort to reform educational structures and attitudes. Not a task in itself. But creating more and better connections between all the parts of the child's world is one promising place to start, and it is something we know how to do if we have the political will to do so.

One of the key findings of this study is that real partnership between parents and schools depends on mutual respect and trust between the partners. This means that each needs to recognize what the other is bringing to their collaboration. Building partnerships in this way takes time and commitment but can transform the atmosphere and effectiveness of a school.

Now I have come to know that parents in Pakistan need to be taught how to take part in the education of their children and how helpful it could be. The teachers in Pakistan, especially in government schools, know that the parents are not allowed to investigate about or 'interfere' in the school matters. That is why they feel free to do whatever they want to.

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