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Analysis of Home Assignments of Students at the Primary Level: an Evaluative Study

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Abstract

Home Assignments (HA) are not meant to keep children occupied at home. These serve several educational needs which are essential to receive complete education. Practising home Assignments allow children to review what they have learnt in the class. Doing HA increases comprehension of a subject or topic by helping children retain it for a longer period of time. Extension of home assignments includes long term assignments such as small projects appropriate to the age and class of the children. If a teacher can create a desire to engage the children in activities and to participate in learning experiences, learning will become more functional and better designed to meet the objectives. An assignment denotes this aspect of teaching. To know, how far teachers in primary schools have realised the potentialities of the assignment as an important part of teaching, the present study was taken.

Introduction

Primary education is the first tender step towards planned and deliberately organised learning process with specific objectives, which constitute a very important part of the entire structure of education. It is to let children know their environment better and perform to the best of their abilities. Children should be able to read, write

and perform arithmetical operations whenever they need to. They should be able to express themselves orally as well as in writing. They should also be able to perform activities, and express their feelings to an extent children are expected to at the age of 10+.

Unfortunately children get very little time in school to work independently and do some of the

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learning activities on their own. In a classroom they either listen to the teacher or they copy the work from the blackboard. According to *National Curriculum Framework-2005*, “the concept of time on task is an essential reckoner for taking stock of the total time that children spend actively on learning. This would include time spent on listening, reading, writing, doing activities, discussing, etc. Total study time that is expected from students in both face-to-face and self-study/ home work needs to be accounted for while planning the syllabus or course of study for students”.

Home work or home assignment not only gives the opportunity to children to work independently but it is also an important tool to know the progress of the children. It gives children an opportunity to manage and organise their routine in such a way that they get time to revise the concepts and lessons learnt in the class. HA reduces the gap in terms of time span between teaching-learning processes and is used to encourage children to study outside the school also. It also helps children to develop the ability to take responsibility for their own learning.

Opinion and practices with respect to home work vary widely. Arguments are both for and against giving home assignments. There are some who vehemently criticise the quantum of home work given in schools while others think HA are necessary as practice makes one perfect. Parents sometimes complain that excessive home work retards the child's all-

round development, arouses rebelliousness, contributes to careless work habits and promotes unwholesome attitudes in children towards school and even towards life. Whatever may be the criticism parents, teachers and school authorities approve of home assignments as a measuring tool to know the progress of their children. Undoubtedly, if home assignments are skilfully planned, intelligently distributed and systematically checked, will result in meaningful progress.

Researches carried out in India, Australia and some other countries show a clear link between time spent by the children on study out of classroom and achievement. Home work helps bridge the gap between the home and the school. It should be seen by teacher, children and parents as a vital part of home-school partnership which supports children as they learn.

The purpose of the present study is to analyse home assignments in some of the primary schools of Delhi.

Terms Used in the Study

Home Assignment

It refers to tasks assigned to the students by their teachers to be completed outside the class. Home assignments may include reading, writing, problem solving, project work and other skills to be practised. In layman's language it is also known as home work.

Analysis

Analysis of home assignments has been done with reference to their

number, frequency, type, content, feedback, etc. It included quantitative and qualitative analysis of home assignments.

Objectives of the Study

The study was conducted keeping following objectives in mind:

- To assess assignments with reference to their type, periodicity (frequency), number and utilisation in feedback of teaching and learning,
- To analyse the strengths and weaknesses of assignments with reference to strengthening learning among learners, and
- To give suggestions, if required and to provide training to teachers, if needed.

Sample

Incidental sampling technique was used for selection of schools. All the MCD primary schools and primary sections of Sarvodaya Vidhyalayas of North-West District comprised the population. Schools selected for School Experience Programme by DIET Pitampura, comprised the sample of the study.

Procedure of the Study

Every researcher evolves a plan to tackle best the research problem on which she works in the best possible way. This makes the conduct of the research not only planned correctly to the last detail but systematic as well.

- All the course books of the students of Class IV were studied in order to

analyse the content of different subjects taught.

- Tools were developed by the coordinator.
- A workshop was conducted in which tools were got validated by the experts of the field namely, Professor M.C. Sharma (IGNOU) and Professor Anita Rastogi (JMI Univ.). Suggestions regarding the tools were incorporated and tools finalised.
- Just before the School Experience Programme, one-day orientation programme was organised to acquaint the pupil teachers of DIET, Pitampura regarding the administration of tools of the study.
- A set of all the tools were provided to the pupil teachers.
- Coordinator of the study visited maximum number of schools during the administration of tools in the sample schools.
- Data was collected and compiled.
- Analysis of the data was done.
- Conclusions and suggestions were made accordingly.
- Complete report of the research study was prepared.

Developments of Tools

A workshop was conducted for the finalisation of tools where Professor M.C. Sharma (IGNOU) and Dr. Anita Rastogi (Professor, JMI) were invited. They appreciated the first draft of the tools as maximum aspects of the study were included in the tools. They gave many valuable suggestions regarding the improvement of the tools further

e.g., proper classification of items of the tools in three categories namely, Questionnaire, Interview Schedule and Content Analysis.

Administration of Tools

All the three tools—Questionnaire, Interview Schedule and Content Analysis—were compiled in the month of October 2010 as School Experience Programme (SEP) was scheduled from 22 October to 22 December 2010. The pupil teachers were oriented about the study as well as about the administration of the tools before the start of SEP. The tools were administered during SEP by the pupil teachers of ETE first year in the MCD schools selected for SEP. Tools were administered to teachers and students of selected classes in all the fifteen schools selected for the study. Since the tools were to be administered in Class IV of the sample schools, all the sections of Class IV were selected for the study. This way the Interview Schedule was conducted on forty-four teachers and the Questionnaire and the Content Analysis were administered on 1923 students.

Delimitations of the Study

Each research problem has to be delimited to some extent, as the researcher cannot cover all aspects of any problem. In view of the resources available, the present study had the following delimitations:

- Student sample comprises students of Class IV in MCD schools and Sarvodaya schools of

North-West district of Delhi.

- Selection of the school sample is based on incidental sampling technique.
 - Tools are validated using content validity by the experts of the field.
- Data was collected during School Experience Programme, i.e. from 22 October to 22 December 2010.

Gender and socio-economic background have not been treated as significant variables in this study.

Major Findings

Type of Assignments

- (i) Nature of home assignments:
 - 2 per cent HA in English subject were repetition of the class work and all these HA were the answers of the questions given at the end of the lesson in the textbook.
 - 87 per cent HA in Hindi subject were repetition of the class work and all these HA were the answers of the questions given at the end of the lesson in the textbook.
 - 91 per cent HA in Mathematics subject were repetition of the class work and all these HA were the solutions of the problems given in the textbook. 9 per cent HA involved practice problems based on the class work and 10 per cent HA involved activities related to class work.
 - 93 per cent HA in Social Studies subject were repetition of the class work and all these

HA were the answers of the questions given at the end of the lesson in the textbook.

- 85 per cent HA in Science subject were repetition of the class work and all these HA were the answers of the questions given at the end of the lesson in the textbook.

(ii) Quality of home assignments:

- In English 85 per cent HA were mechanical and 7 per cent HA were interesting in nature. 8 per cent HA involved drawing and colour activity.
- In Hindi 77 per cent HA were mechanical and 8 per cent HA were interesting in nature. 10 per cent HA were related to specific objectives of the lesson. 8 per cent HA involved drawing and colour activity.
- In Mathematics 70 per cent HA were mechanical and 10 per cent HA were interesting in nature. 5 per cent HA were related to specific objectives of the unit. 15 per cent HA involved drawing and colour activity.
- In Social Studies 64 per cent HA were mechanical and 7 per cent HA were interesting in nature. 15 per cent HA were related to specific objectives of the lesson. 14 per cent HA involved drawing and colour and filling of map activity.
- In Science 55 per cent HA were mechanical and 12 per cent HA were interesting in nature. 15 per cent HA were related to

specific objectives of the lesson. 18 per cent HA involved drawing and colour activity.

(iii) Skills and Levels of learning involved in home assignments:

- No HA was given in language subjects i.e., English and Hindi for the development of listening skills in students.
- No HA was given in language subjects, i.e. English and Hindi for the development of speaking skills in students.
- Nearly 20 per cent HA in language subjects i.e., English and Hindi involved improvement of reading skills in students.
- Rest 80 per cent HA in language subjects i.e., English and Hindi involved writing skills of the students.
- In Mathematics, 20 per cent activity-based questions were given as HA.
- In Social Studies, 8 per cent activity-based questions were given as HA.
- In Science, 19 per cent activity-based questions were given as HA.

Frequency of home assignments

- The frequency of HA in Mathematics (50 per cent) was found to be the maximum and in English (18.75 per cent) and Social Studies (12.5 per cent) was the minimum.
- In a few schools (6.25 per cent) no HA were given in any subject.

- In a few schools (6.25 per cent) HA were given once a week in all the subjects except English.

Periodicity of home assignments

- 43.75 per cent students required on an average one hour or more in completion of HA in English.
- 37.5 per cent students required on an average one hour or more in completion of HA in Hindi.
- 37.5 per cent students required on an average one hour or more in completion of HA in Mathematics.
- 43.75 per cent students required on an average one hour or more in completion of HA in Social Studies.
- 62.5 per cent students required on an average one hour or more in completion of HA in Science.

Utilisation of Feedback

- (i) Evaluation of home assignments:
- In 20 per cent of the sample schools HA in English were never checked.
 - In 28 per cent of the sample schools HA in Hindi were never checked.
 - In 20.5 per cent of the sample schools HA in Mathematics were never checked.
 - In 27.3 per cent of the sample schools HA in Social Studies were never checked.
 - In 22 per cent of the sample schools HA in Science were never checked.
- (ii) Nature of Feedback:
- In most of the sample schools

the HA were checked by ticking right or wrong in English (48 per cent), Hindi (45 per cent), Mathematics (44.3 per cent), Social Studies (47.3 per cent) and Science (42.6 per cent).

- In a few of the sample schools the HA were checked with remarks in English (10 per cent), Hindi (10 per cent), Mathematics (8.6.3 per cent), Social Studies (11.4 per cent) and Science (12.6 per cent).
- In nearly one-third of the sample schools the HA were checked by highlighting the errors in English (31.4 per cent), Hindi (23.3 per cent), Mathematics (30.3 per cent), Social Studies (25 per cent) and Science (32.9 per cent).
- In nearly one-sixth of the sample schools the HA were checked by correcting the errors in English (10 per cent), Hindi (12 per cent), Mathematics (16.3 per cent), Social Studies (15.7 per cent) and Science (10.6 per cent).
- In a very few schools (negligible in number) of the sample schools the reinforcement was provided after checking HA in English (6.6 per cent), Hindi (1.3 per cent), Mathematics (0.6 per cent), Social Studies (0.6 per cent) and Science (1.3 per cent).

(iii) Frequency of Correction Work:

- The maximum number of students in sample schools did

- correction work regularly in Mathematics (43.4 per cent) and the minimum number of students in sample schools did correction work regularly in Hindi (20 per cent).
- The maximum number of students in sample schools did correction work sometimes in Hindi (53.3 per cent) and the minimum number of students in sample schools did correction work sometimes in Mathematics (20 per cent).
 - The maximum number of students in sample schools never did correction work in Mathematics (46.6 per cent) and the minimum number of students in sample schools never did correction work in Hindi and Science (26.6 per cent).
 - In Mathematics either students did correction work regularly (43.4 per cent) or they never did correction at all (46.6 per cent). The proportion of students who did correction work sometimes in Mathematics was just one-tenth (10 per cent) of the total sample.
 - In Hindi, Social Studies and Science most of the students (53.3 per cent, 40 per cent and 46 per cent respectively) did correction sometimes.
- (iv) Follow up of Correction Work:
- Follow up of correction work was done regularly by the maximum number of teachers (60 per cent) of the sample schools in Mathematics.
 - Follow up of correction work was done regularly by the minimum number of teachers (13.7 per cent) of the sample schools in Hindi.
 - Follow up of correction work was done sometimes by the maximum number of teachers (53.3 per cent) of the sample schools in English and Hindi.
 - Follow up of correction work was never done by the maximum number of teachers (40 per cent) of the sample schools in Social Studies and Science.
- Support required in doing the home assignments**
- Nearly 25 per cent of the students in the sample schools did HA independently.
 - Nearly 50 per cent of the students in the sample schools did HA with the help of others.
 - Nearly 25 per cent of the students in the sample schools did HA with the help of sibling/parents.
- Keeping record of the defaulters**
- Nearly 25 per cent of the teachers in the sample schools maintained the record of defaulters.
 - Nearly 50 per cent of the teachers in the sample schools never maintained the record of defaulters.
 - Nearly 25 per cent of the teachers in the sample schools

maintained the record of defaulters sometimes.

Status of Home Assignments

- Nearly one-third students of the sample schools completed their HA in Hindi, Mathematics, Social Studies and Science.
- The negligible number of students (6.25 per cent) of the sample schools completed their HA in English.
- The maximum number of students (47.25 per cent) of the sample schools not completed their HA in English at all.
- The maximum number of students partially completed HA in Hindi (50.5 per cent) and Social Studies (62.5 per cent).
- The maximum number of students (39.8 per cent) of the sample schools did not have notebooks for attempting HA in English.
- The minimum number of students (6.25 per cent) of the sample schools did not have notebooks for attempting HA in Social Studies.

Conclusions

Based on findings of the present study and the experience gained while conducting study, the coordinator has come to the conclusion that the planning and assigning of Home Assignments (HA) in Class IV of the selected Primary Schools is a much neglected area of school teaching. Teachers are not aware of the importance and utility of HA in

teaching-learning process. No efforts are being put by the teachers to plan HA in such a way that extension of classroom teaching can be done. Students' interests are not taken care of while assigning work to the students. Answers to the questions given at the end of the lesson/unit are written on the blackboard and the same questions are given as HA for the practice of the students. Other uses of HA like confirmation of the concepts taught in the class, better understanding, improvement in students' learning, providing appropriate to the students and the application of the concepts taught in the class are being ignored. The whole process of assigning HA, their checking, correction work, follow up of correction work, maintenance of record of defaulters etc., are being taken in a routine way. Many students in the sample schools are not doing their assignments due to the reason that they do not have notebooks to work on. Those students who are not very regular in attempting HA given to them either due to the reason that they are not regular in schools or sometimes they do not bother to complete their HA, are not motivated effectively to make them regular in doing HA. It has been felt by the coordinator that by the implementation of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation in classroom teaching, it is necessary to improve the status of Home Assignments in schools. If well organised and systematic HA are planned and checked by providing

need based feedback to the students then it will not only help in improving learning in students but it also in assigning appropriate grades for Formative Evaluation i.e., FA-I, FA-II, FA-III and FA-IV to the students as well.

Implications of the Study

Based on the various findings and conclusions of the study, the following implications have been formulated:

Type of Assignments

(i) Nature of home assignments

The importance of home assignments as extension and enrichment of class work may be realised by the teachers. Efforts may be put into prepare those assignments for the students which confirm their classroom learning, develop their interest in class room teaching and explore concepts related to class work.

(ii) Quality of home assignments

Home assignments at the primary level should be more interesting, joyful and related to specific objectives of the lesson/unit. Assignments should be planned in such a way that students complete them on their own without any feeling of burden and boredom. Students' interest may be taken care of while planning assignments for them as at the primary level they are at the take on stage of developing the habit of self-learning and working independently. Students usually take more interest in drawing and colour work, so more assignments involving drawing and colour work may be planned. Assignments involving cross-

words, puzzles, riddles, matching, exploring, collecting objects, locating on map etc., should be planned more. Students may be motivated to perform activities mentioned in the textbook along with the activities given as assignments by their teachers. One thing should also be taken care of those activities given as assignment must be discussed the very next day and positive reinforcement is provided otherwise students would not take interest in assignments.

(iii) Skills and Levels of learning involved in home-assignments

For teaching languages like English and Hindi, home assignments which strengthen skills of listening and speaking in students, may be given. Teachers may chalk out certain activities like giving a list of programmes on radio or television to the students for listening and a discussion regarding the same may be held the very next day. Students who have listened to these programmes must be appreciated and others may be motivated for the same. Likewise students may be given opportunities to speak about their school, any successful event or celebration that has taken place in the school to their family members and friends and discuss with other students of the class for a period or two in a week. This will help in developing the speaking skills of the students.

For teaching at the primary level more activity based assignments may be given so that students' interest be created in doing home assignments.

Teachers may plan activities to be given as home assignments, related to the concept or lesson they are teaching in such a way that students not only feel joy in performing them but their interest in learning is also developed. If possible group activities may be planned for the social development of students. Group activities also help in developing the feeling of cooperativeness and respect for others in the group.

Frequency of home assignments

Teachers may be advised to design assignments according to the nature of the topic/subject. The assignments should be provided to the students as they facilitate better understanding and clarity of the subject matter. Coordinated policies on HA may be formulated at the district, schools and classroom levels by the consensus of the concerned authorities and teachers.

A clear and broad rationale for assigning homework, as well as general guidelines for the amount of how much HA should be assigned may be prepared at the District level. Schools need to provide more specific time requirements, coordinate assignments between classes, and describe the role of teachers and principals.

Periodicity of home assignments

No home assignment should require more than half an hour for completion because if students get home assignments in two subjects then these would require more than one hour to complete them which may become a burden for students, rather than

learning process. While assigning home assignment students' age group, mental level and their concentration span must be taken care of, otherwise the purpose of assigning home work will be defeated.

For development of good study habits, learning on one's own and to enrich/revise the concepts taught in the class learners may be assigned tasks which require about one hour of inputs at home. Since, the five subjects are being taught in the class, the teachers may develop a HA time table. They may also decide upon a minimum number of assignments at class level to be given from each lesson. It would be certainly better if this activity is done by consensus of all the concerned teachers before the beginning of the session.

Utilisation of Feedback

(i) *Evaluation of home assignments*
Regular evaluation of the home assignments has always motivated the students for doing their home-assignments for all the subjects. Teacher should plan their work in such a way that regular evaluation may be done by them in the class.

(ii) *Nature of Feedback*

Not only regular checking of home assignments motivates the students to work assigned to them but the way the checking is done, has deeper impact on their motivational level. Checking with mark of right/wrong neither makes them aware of their errors nor motivates them to work better. Very few teachers checked the assignments with remarks or by correcting their errors.

Number of teachers provided reinforcement while checking/evaluating was negligible. Teachers may provide positive reinforcement wherever possible as it motivates students not only to work but to work to their best. Also errors may be highlighted and corrected, otherwise the very purpose of giving and checking home assignments of the students fails.

(iii) Frequency of Correction Work

One of the benefits of giving assignments to students and checking them is that teachers and students come to know the errors, difficulties and bottlenecks of learning. These errors and difficulties may be overcome by doing correction work. In correction work the practice of the correct spellings, meanings of difficult words, correct method of solving problems, correct diagrams, exact location on the map etc., are done and repeated three to five times, thereby reducing the chance of committing the same mistake again to a great extent. Therefore, students need to do correction work regularly for every home assignment.

(iv) Follow up of Correction Work

Every home assignment may be followed by correction work. Teachers may develop a habit that before evaluating any assignment they turn back the pages of the notebook to see whether correction work of the previous assignment has been done or not. Adopting this practice by the teachers will definitely help to develop the habit of doing correction work by the students.

The support required in doing the home assignments

It was informed by the teachers that a significant number of students who sought others help had joined private tuitions. The students therefore may be given adequate inputs in the class so that they may complete the home assignments on their own. Moreover the assignment may be explained well in the class by the teachers and if still students have some difficulty then they should be motivated to ask the teachers for help rather than joining private tuitions.

Keeping record of defaulters

Teachers should maintain a record of students who do their home assignments regularly and those who default. Students who are regular and punctual should be given some credit in the form of badges etc., or stars on their assignments so that defaulters may also be motivated.

Status of Home Assignments

The present status of HA shows that little attention is paid to them in schools. It may be due to the reason that during most teachers education courses, prospective teachers discuss home assignments or home work in relation to specific subjects, but receive a little training to devise good assignments, how to decide how much home work is to given, and how to motivate students for attempting work assigned to them? Attention may be paid on “how to make effective assignments?” during in-service and pre-service teacher trainings.

Demand on the part of Teachers

Mostly home assignments are written without any novelty. This is one of the many reasons why to most of the students home assignments are not a challenge or joyful activity but a burden. Some other reasons may be:

- Assignments may be mechanical and repetition of class work;
- Assignments may not be interesting and students get bored in doing them;
- The teaching methods may not fit the student's learning style;
- The expectations from the students may be unclear or unreasonable;
- The students may have poor social skills;
- The students may not be able to communicate well;
- The students may have low self-esteem.
- The students may not have note books for attempting HA.

It has been suggested in *NCF-2005* that in primary classes, no home work should be assigned up to Class II and two hours assignments may be assigned a week from Classes III to V.

General Policy Guidelines

Based on results of various researches, articles, and findings and conclusions of the present study the coordinator felt the need of following general policies to be adopted for improving the status of home assignments in schools-

1. Coordinated policies on HA may be put into practice at district, school and classroom levels by consensus of the concerned persons.

2. A clear and broad rationale for assigning home work, as well as general guidelines on the quantity of HA be assigned, may be prepared at District level. Schools need to provide more specific time requirements, coordinate assignments between classes, and describe the role of teachers and principals.
3. Examples of various motivational strategies may be provided to the teachers to make use of in their classrooms.
4. Some underlying philosophical points regarding the policies are:
 - i. Primary school students should be assigned home work, even if it does not improve their achievement, as home assignments help young students develop good study habits, promote positive attitudes toward school and communicate to students that learning takes place outside as well as inside school. The assignments to elementary students should be brief, involve materials commonly found in the home and should not be too demanding.
 - ii. The academic function of HA as a motivational tool should not be ignored.
 - iii. Teachers should *never* use home work as punishment.
 - iv. Teachers should view the home work as an extension of the classroom. Home work that

involves practice and review of lessons previously taught and simple introductions to material prior to its coverage in class is desirable. Assignments that require students to integrate skills or differing parts of the curriculum should also be involved in HA.

- v. Regardless of students' ages, the formal role of parents in home work should be minimal.
- vi. It is also advised that teachers should individualise few assignments within the class. However, developing individualised home work demands considerable teacher time and has few benefits.
- vii. Finally, teachers should not view home work as an opportunity to test the students. Almost all students may complete assignments successfully; thus, teachers should not differentiate much among performance levels. Having students do home work out of fear of negative consequences turns a situation ideal for building intrinsic motivation ("I must enjoy this; I'm doing it and the teacher isn't standing over me") into one that implies that the teacher believes students need rewards or punishment in order to

complete assignments. Teachers may collect home work, check it for completeness, and give intermittent instructional feedback. This procedure shows that the teacher takes home work seriously and that it is purposeful. The major purpose should be to identify individual students' learning problems.

Suggestions for the Follow up of the Study

Teachers should be well oriented about the purpose, importance and implementation of assignments.

In the beginning of the session a meeting to develop assignments may be organised so that standard assignments may be developed according to the need of the learners and nature of the subject and may be provided to the learners.

Special attention may be paid to sensitise the teachers about the remarks/comments made on the assignments while correcting the assignments.

Follow up action of correction/improvement to be carried out in the assignments is needed. This will reinforce the better understanding of the subject matter to the learners.

An indepth study on home assignments for one or two sessions on various subjects at the elementary level may also be taken.

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