HOMEWORK



COST	*EVIDENCE*	*IMPACT*	*EFFECT*
		**+5**	**0.36**

High impact for very low cost based on very limited evidence.

WHAT IS IT?

Homework refers to tasks given to pupils by their teachers to be completed outside of usual lessons.

Homework activities vary significantly, particularly between younger and older pupils, including but not limited to home reading activities, longer projects or essays and more directed and focused work such as revision for tests.

Our definition also includes activities such as ‘homework clubs’ where pupils have the opportunity to complete homework in school but outside normal school hours, and ‘flipped learning’ models, where pupils prepare at home for classroom discussion and application tasks.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Homework has a positive impact on average (+ 5 months), particularly with pupils in secondary schools.

2. Some pupils may not have a quiet space for home learning – it is important for schools to consider how home learning can be supported (e.g. through providing homework clubs for pupils).

3. Homework that is linked to classroom work tends to be more effective. In particular, studies that included feedback on homework had higher impacts on learning.

4. It is important to make the purpose of homework clear to pupils (e.g. to increase a specific area of knowledge, or to develop fluency in a particular area).

HOW EFFECTIVE IS THE APPROACH?

The average impact of homework is positive across both primary and secondary school. There is, however variation behind this average with homework set in primary school having a smaller impact on average (see below).

The quality of the task set appears to be more important than the quantity of work required from the pupil. There is some evidence that the impact of homework diminishes as the amount of time pupils spend on it increases. The studies reviewed with the highest impacts set homework twice a week in a particular subject.

Evidence also suggests that how homework relates to learning during normal school time is important. In the most effective examples homework was an integral part of learning, rather than an add-on. To maximise impact, it also appears to be important that students are provided with high quality feedback on their work (see Feedback).

Arab World Research

Evidence of homework in primary schools for students learning outcomes has rarely been investigated in the Arab world. Studies in Jordan, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia focused on the value of homework as a tool to increase parental involvement. However, these same studies showed that homework became less beneficial whenever parents are doing it on behalf of their children.

Researchers have highlighted some barriers for parents when supporting their children homework such as, parents level of education, the degree of difficulty of the curriculum, lack of communication channels and limited parents-teachers relationship.

To date, research on homework in primary schools is absent in this region despite the general belief of its importance in improving the learning process. More research is needed in this area and investigate ways to improve the quality of the homework and the best means to support constructive parental involvement with their children learning at home.

Evidence of homework in secondary schools for students' learning outcomes has rarely been investigated in the Arab world. There is some evidence that 'flipped learning' approaches in which students learn content at home and interact with teachers in the classroom may be an effective type of homework and a modern teaching strategy to help teachers shift from the traditional learning towards implementing the student-centered approaches.

Studies in UAE, Oman, Sudan, and Saudi Arabia focused on the value of flipped learning as a tool to improve students' understanding in subjects like math, science, and English increase parental involvement. However, these same studies showed that flipped learning benefited high achieving learners more than the other students.

To date, research on homework in secondary schools is absent in this region despite the general belief of its importance in improving the learning process. More research is needed in this area and investigate ways to improve the quality of the homework and the best means to support teachers implementation in flipped classroom and design in instructional materials.

BEHIND THE AVERAGE

Studies in secondary schools show greater impact (+5 months) than in primary schools (+3 months).

Similar positive effects are found for reading, mathematics and science.

Most homework set is individual, studies involving collaboration with peers have higher effects (+6 months), though the number of studies is small.

Studies involving digital technology typically have greater impact (+ 6 months).

CLOSING THE DISADVANTAGE GAP

Disadvantaged pupils typically receive additional benefits from homework. However, surveys in England suggest that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to have a quiet working space, are less likely to have access to a device suitable for learning or a stable internet connection and may receive less parental support to complete homework and develop effective learning habits. These difficulties may increase the gap in attainment for disadvantaged pupils.

Homework clubs can help to overcome these barriers by offering pupils the resources and support needed to undertake homework or revision. Broader evidence suggests that homework should not be used as a punishment or penalty for poor performance.

HOW COULD YOU IMPLEMENT IN YOUR SETTING?

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WHAT DOES IT COST?

The average cost of homework is expected to be very low with the cost to schools largely based on teacher training and resources. Implementing homework will also require a small amount of staff time for planning and feedback.

Alongside time and cost, school leaders should consider how to maximise the effectiveness of homework through teacher professional development to promote the use of well-designed tasks to complement learning in the classroom and high-quality feedback to improve pupil learning. Schools should monitor the impact of different approaches to homework – such as the frequency, purpose and variety of tasks - on pupil engagement and attainment.

HOW SECURE IS THE EVIDENCE?

The security of the evidence around homework is rated as low. 43 studies were identified that meet the inclusion criteria of the Toolkit. The topic lost additional padlocks because:

- A large percentage of the studies are not randomised controlled trials. While other study designs still give important information about effectiveness of approaches, there is a risk that results are influenced by unknown factors that are not part of the intervention.
- A large percentage of the studies were not independently evaluated. Evaluations conducted by organisations connected with the approach – for example, commercial providers, typically have larger impacts, which may influence the overall impact of the strand.

As with any evidence review, the Toolkit summarises the average impact of approaches when researched in academic studies. It is important to consider your context and apply your professional judgement when implementing an approach in your setting.

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