

Exploring the Students' Perception of Home Assignments on Academic Performance at School Level Students in Nepal

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Abstract

Home assignments have been a controversial matter among students, parents, teachers and educational institutions in general and have raised serious concerns over the last few decades because home assignments restrict students from engagements in the out-of-class activities. Bodies of research present mixed views about the needs and effects of homework. Few reasons, why teachers and academic institutions assign homework to their students, entail; helping students to prepare for exams; develop good working habit; motivate students to learn; develop independent learning and critical thinking; and to improve and increase the writings of students. This qualitative study is conducted at few private and public secondary schools (covering classes 11 & 12) in Kathmandu, Nepal and the key intent was to explore major effects of home assignments on students. It was based on purposive sampling technique for primary data supported by Open-ended interview guidelines that helped to gather information about students' perception and their first-hand experiences regarding the effects of homework assignments on academic performance. 50 students consisting of 25 males and 25 females were interviewed with open ended questions. The study has come up with conflicting findings across individuals regarding students' perceptions on home assignments since the respondents in differing numbers accepted it to play a crucial role in supporting learning linking it with the key role to enhance writing skills, foster critical thinking, and promote independent learning because it serves as a valuable tool for reinforcing classroom learning from beyond the school environment engagement. On the contrary, the other side of the dual perspective entailed students' perception that portrayed homework as merely burdensome indicating a dichotomy or critical tension in educational practices however suggesting effectiveness of homework with proper workload and work having its relevance to learning objectives.

Key Words: Homework, Independent Learning, Critical Thinking, School Education

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Introduction

Home assignments have been an integral part of the educational process in different levels, and, particularly at the school level where students are expected to develop independent learning habits and critical thinking skills. These assignments serve not only to reinforce classroom learning but also to encourage time management, self-discipline, and deeper understanding of subject matter. However, the actual impact of home assignments on students' academic performance remains a topic of ongoing debate among educators and researchers. This study aims to explore the effects of home assignments on the academic achievement of higher secondary students, covering grade 11 and grade 12, assessing both their benefits and potential drawbacks in the context of contemporary educational practices in Nepal.

Home assignments have been a controversial issue among the students, parents, teachers and educational institutions since last few decades as it restricts the time for out-of-class activities (Letterman, 2013). Researchers have found mixed views about the need and effects of homework. Why do teachers and academic institutions assign homework to the students? The probable reasons are: to help students to prepare for exams; to develop good working habit; to motivate students to learn; to develop critical thinking; and to improve and increase the writings of students (Letterman, 2013). Cooper (1989) defined homework as the additional work provided by the educators for students to carry out during non-school hours. It is the ultimate students who should decide by using own discretion about whether, when and how to complete homework assignments.

Researchers and academicians have found both positive and negative correlation between doing homework regularly and students' academic achievements. Even though, educators assign homework for their academic supports and growth, it may cause conflict between school and parents due to difference in students' perceptions regarding to the purposes of assignment. Having a number of pros, students feel costs of assigning homework as: restricts the time available for sports and recreation; for leisure activities; need too much time and efforts; restricts the time with family friends, and relatives. Consequently, the time spent on homework probably carry

high opportunity costs as the students have to sacrifice more desirable activities while doing homework (Letterman, 2013).

Home assignments are one of the comprehensively debated key activities of students in academic institutions including teachers and parents. There are very limited arguments against the effects of homework on academic performance of students as it slashes the time availability of students with rest activities. However, numerous studies conclude positive opinion towards homework as homework is taken as an indicator of successful school students (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). Teachers and academic institutions assign homework in order to improve students study skills, linking school-work in away from school, linking their study towards their future work, to inform students that learning takes place both inside and outside of the school/college. It improves the learning habit of students outside the college as well. However, time constraints with the students may be its flaw as more time is provided for doing homework, less time is available for leisure.

What motivates students to complete home assignments before or on due date? The probable factors may be affected by their thinking, belief, attitude and ability towards the homework (Yazzie-Mintz, 2006). Students' expectations regarding to success or failure, level of performance, ability of students, students' home and college environment and practices, their future aim, nature of the subject, its connectivity in higher level education are also determinants of doing homework.

The research question of this study is, "Does home assignments support for academic performance at school level students?" Thus, the objective of this study is to explore the effects of home assignments on academic performance of school level students of Nepal.

The rest of the paper is organized into different sections and sub-sections as follows: Section two is the review of literatures for the study; Section three shows research methodology including data and methods; Section four presents the findings; Section five is about discussion and section six presents summary, conclusion and recommendations.

Review of Literature

Researchers have mixed views about the effects of home assignments on their academic achievements. A study conducted by Letterman (2013) used the 180 undergraduate students at Robert Morris University as the research participants to explore students' perceptions of home assignments. By using the primary data collected from questionnaire, the study found mixed views about the student's

perceptions about homework. The result reveals that 50 percent students agree that doing homework on time is a good job as it supports for academic excellence. Rest 50 percent students replied that it is merely a busy work which creates negative perception on new college freshman.

Exploring the effects of homework by utilizing parametric and non-parametric technique, Eren & Hendersen (2008) found that homework is an important determinant of students' academic performance. The authors explored whether homework assignment support for academic achievement of secondary level students test performances. The study followed the theoretical model of homework effectiveness on test scores following Betts (1997) and Neilson (2005). These models have three common assumptions:

- i) Students have differences in abilities and thus require different amounts of time to complete the same assigned tasks.
- ii) Homework is beneficial, at least in small amounts.
- iii) Students have time constraints.

Whether extra amount of homework shall be provided and beneficial for the students or not, it depends upon third assumption. The study further claimed that the effects of homework are not equally beneficial to different academic level students. Academically very high-level students feel that more homework just kill their creative study time, and thus little impact on academic achievement. However, homework supports significantly for average to high level students. Relating to the effect of assignment on students' academic performance, Betts (1997) found that homework is a policy variable for the academic performance of students under the control of teachers. Betts found substantial effect of homework on Maths scoring.

Nunez et al. (2013) examined the relationship between different homework variables such as amount of assignment provided, time spent on homework, time management with academic achievement among the 145 participants. The authors employed multivariate analysis of variance and path analysis and found that amount of homework completed decreased when there is increase in schooling. When the students complete minimum amount of homework, it supports for study habit, and ultimately improves the academic goals.

Karabatak, Alanoglu and Karabatak (2020) conducted their study to explore the effects of homework on students' achievements and academic satisfaction. They conducted their study in a 12 – week training process. After completing 9 weeks homework performances, academic achievements tests consisting 26 questions were applied

on regular basis. The study found meaningful and positive support of homework on academic achievements of students.

Homework builds a connection between school and home of the students. Teachers provide homework to the students to develop them as independent learners which is assisted by doing homework. Even though, doing homework is an important part of school education, proponents and opponents both are making arguments in their supports (Haq, Shakil, & Din, 2020). The authors conducted their research work in Gilgit Baltistan public school to identify the impact of homework on the academic performance of students at secondary level. 100 students were randomly selected as the respondents and they administered Likert Scale questionnaires as research tool for data collection. The study found that homework supports for students' academic achievements. However, the effect of homework varies with the academic level of the students as well as nature of the assignment provided. Thus, it is the responsibility of the teachers to assign productive and creative assignments. Otherwise, students do assignments for the sake of submitting to the teachers (Paudel, 2012) which do not support for academic goal.

Completing homework at home displays a transition from instructor-led to student-led learning. Whether students submit their homework assignments timely or at the last minute is most probably influenced by their self-regulated learning (SRL) skills (Muljana, Dabas, & Luo, 2023). The authors employed structural equation modelling technique by using the data collected from survey and found that self-regulated learning strategies significantly influenced the homework timelines, and it ultimately affected students' academic performance positively. This study also found multiple effects of homework on different academic level of students.

Metropolitan Life Insurance Company (MetLife, 2007) conducted a survey to explore the need and importance of homework to around 2000 students of school level. The objective of the study was to explore whether homework helps students to improve their overall learnings? In this survey, 77 percent of research participants replied that homework is important for their learning and they have enough time for doing homework. Consequently, 23 percent students have answered homework do not support for better academic achievements.

What motivate students to complete homework assignments before or on due date? The probable factors may be affected by their thinking, belief, attitude and ability towards the homework (Yazzi-mints, 2006). Students' expectations regarding to success or failure, level of performance, ability of students, students' home and college

environment and practices, their future aim, nature of the subject, its connectivity in higher level education are also determinants of doing homework.

Whether homework is a “benefit or burden” for students is a quite debatable issue among the students, parents, and academic institutions in Nepalese perspectives as well. Students have pointed out that assignments with the parental involvements provide more benefits to the students while others have argued against it. Connecting this issue, Poudyal (2023) concludes that a balanced and thoughtful homework according to need of students, engagement and motivation support for academic achievement and well-being. The existing homework practice in the schools and colleges mostly rely on traditional way and text-book based. So, the study suggests that there is need of improvements in homework practices including recent technologies, designing and engaging students in web-based and real-life based assignments.

Parental engagements and their socio-economic status also affect on the academic performance and improvements of students (Rajeswari & Usha, 2014). Consequently, families with lower economic status have lower potential involvement in academic activities of children and there is low academic improvement. On the contrary, parents with higher economic status have relatively higher potential involvement in academic activities of children, and it helps to improve the academic performance and goal.

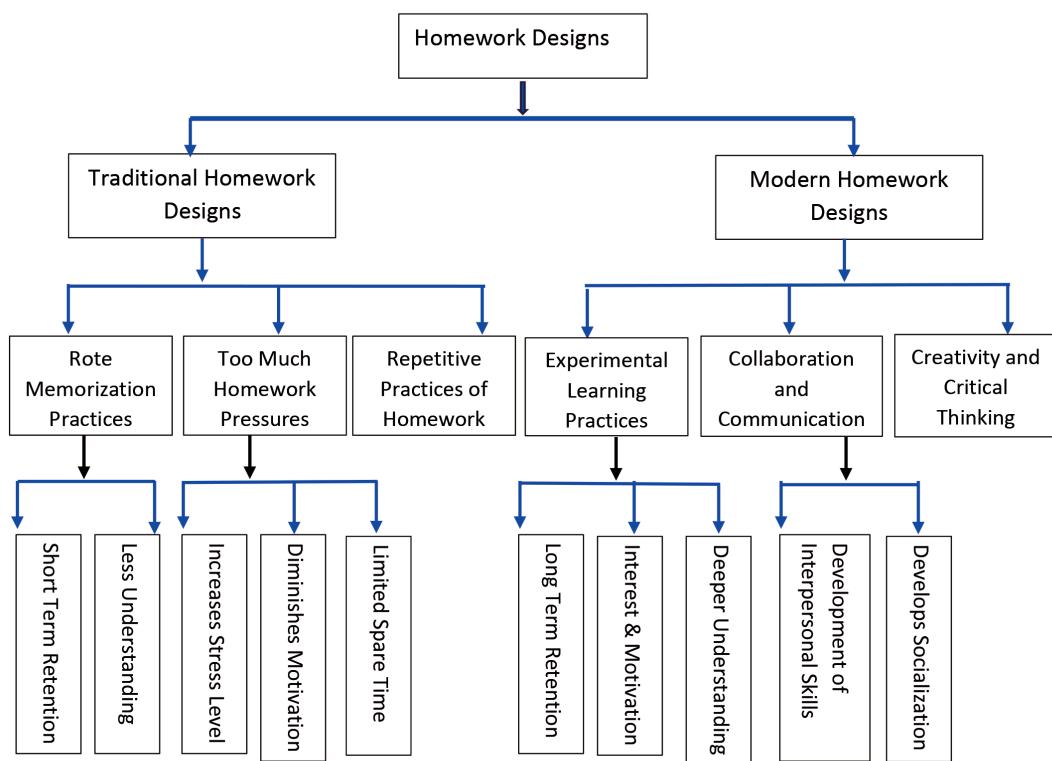
Connecting to the relation between parental engagement and academic progress, Li et al. (2020) found that families with high-socioeconomic status tends to improve parental homework support for children, parent-child communication and parental time with children, while it is difficult for low-socioeconomic status parents. The study concludes that children of high-socioeconomic parents improve their academic performance due to more parental engagements and the case is different in case of low-socioeconomic parents and students.

A number of studies conducted by researchers claim that students completing homework on time achieve better academic performance than their peers who do not (Cooper, 2009; Cooper & Valentine, 2001; Bang et al., 2011; Fan et al., 2017). Their findings indicate that last minute homework submission has significant negative effect on academic performance of students at secondary level.

Having gone through a number of previous studies and author’s own institution, the conceptual framework diagram of homework designs is outlined in Figure 1. This figure presents a comparative analysis of traditional and modern homework designs, highlighting their respective components and outcomes. Traditional homework designs emphasize rote memorization, excessive workload, and repetitive tasks,

often resulting in short-term retention, increased stress, limited free time, diminished motivation, and reduced understanding. In contrast, modern homework designs focus on experimental learning, collaboration, and fostering creativity and critical thinking. These approaches lead to long-term retention, increased interest and motivation, deeper understanding, enhanced interpersonal skills, and greater socialization. The Figure 1 sketched below underscores a shift from quantity-based to quality-driven homework practices, advocating for methods that support holistic development of students.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework of Homework Designs



Source: Adapted from Poudyal, 2023

Research Methodology

In order to explore students' perception on the effects of home assignments on their

academic progress, we employed qualitative research design using purposive sampling techniques to collect the primary data from a few higher secondary schools (covering classes 11 & 12) in Kathmandu. Open-ended/semi-structured interview guidelines were used to capture first-hand and in-depth descriptions of students' perceptions on the effects of homework (HW) on academic performance. The authors held in-depth interview with 50 students among which 25 participants were boys and 25 girls. Participants were selected in equal number from the top level, medium level and low-level students on the basis of their academic performances. The qualitative response collected from research participants were thematically coded. For the trustworthiness of qualitative data, we ensured double checking with key informants' interview (KII) and data triangulation including top-level, medium-level and low-level students in two phases. Ethical values have been fully considered during our entire research work.

Findings

We have formulated open-ended interview guidelines to collect the first-hand qualitative data from research participants. The findings from interview with research participants as well as KII are recapitulated here.

Perception on Effects of Homework on Students Learning

Relating to the perception of homework assignments on students learning, more than 80 percent students believed that doing homework and assignments away from school/college ultimately supports on students learning and to achieve better academic goal; but 20 percent students denied it. Here are a number of backings for this argument. Firstly, doing homework fosters the habit of revising all the topics learned in class and students know undoubtedly about the subject matter taught in the class. It maintains regularity in the academic work and shows the disciplined work. As the students do their work regularly in school and at home as well, it boosts up the remembering as well as exploring habit of the students. Secondly, doing assignment not only increase the writing speed of the students but it also improves students' language and vocabulary power. Some of the research participants said that "*we cannot attempt all the questions in specific hours provided during exam due to sluggish writing speed*". In such situation, habit of doing homework supports to increase writing speed. Thirdly, doing homework regularly assists to utilize the time effectively. It keeps students busy and prevents from destructive thinking. Moreover, it develops the habit of independent learning; assists in developing critical thinking; develops hard work and concentration in study. Finally, homework improves writing skills and thus, supports to achieve better academic goal through students learning.

Perception on Need of HW varies with Students Level

The reply of participating students on the model or types of homework to be provided for different grades/level (such as: for primary level, lower secondary level, secondary level, higher secondary level and university level students) are quite realistic and practical. They said that the level of maturity and problem-solving skill differs in different age and different level of students. No homework should be provided for the students of primary level as there is no development of problem-solving skills. Reading and remembering assignments could be better option for the students of lower secondary level. However, the need of homework might be more for the students of high school level to prepare for SEE examination. According to the perception of students, the types and nature of homework should be based on practical based; real life based; critical thinking; research based; mostly group work and digital homework for the students of higher secondary level students to develop their critical thinking skills which is necessary in University level.

Perception on Effects of HW on Time Management

Most of the students feel problem of time management while doing their homework. The perception of students on effects of homework on their personal time management are quite realistic and noteworthy. More than 90 percent students are sacrificing their daily extra activities while doing daily homework and only around 10 percent students do not face any time management problem as they use every moment effectively. The students are compelled to sacrifice the time for social media; sports time; mobile and friends' time; sleep time; quality time with their family and friends. The students sacrifice their personal time available for other purposes while doing homework. Some students said that "*sometimes we cannot go in party with parents due the pressure of homework which has very limited deadline*". Due to the pressure of more homework, students are also found copying their homework from their friends work and even from social media such as google and Chat GPT. They try to complete their assignments rather than seeking knowledge.

Perception on Effects of HW on Independent Learning and Critical Thinking

The perception of students on effects of homework on independent learning is almost positive ignoring the pressure of assignment for meanwhile. The participating students commonly agreed that doing assignments away from school and college in absence of teacher at our home develops their independent learning habit. Doing homework regularly foster the creativity of students by increasing their problem-solving ability at home. Moreover, research-based questions and practical based questions and finding

their solutions significantly increases the independent learning as well as critical thinking of students. Some participants said that the extent to which it develops the independent learning depends upon the nature of subject – is it theoretical or numerical subject. Consequently, copying homework from friends' note ruins independent learning.

Perception on Effects of HW on Examinations

The perception of students on the effects of homework on examination is positive as doing homework supports for exam preparation. All the research participants strongly agree that doing homework by themselves obviously supports for examinations for their academic goal. The habit of regularly doing homework clarifies all the doubts related to topic taught in the class. For example: it develops basic concepts; reminds major points to remember; increases the memory power of the student; builds the higher level of confidence among the students; develops the problem-solving ability, critical thinking and struggling habit among most of the students. Finally, these qualities with concerned students help to achieve better score in each examination and for their academic goals.

Perception on Benefits of Doing HW

One of the major explorable issues among the researchers, academicians, school/college owners, teacher, parents and concerned students is "*Whether doing homework is beneficial for students or it creates only burden for them?*" Around 50 percent research participants believe that doing homework has a number of advantages for the students and rest 50 percent take homework as huge burden for the students. They have realized a number of advantages of doing homework. Firstly, homework develops hardworking habit, problem solving skills, and enhances memory power. It is quite useful for better and productive utilization of free time of students which prevents from distraction and increases creativity. It boosts up knowledge and learning interest among the students, which supports in examinations to achieve better scores and grades. Secondly, being engaged in homework reduces the screen time of the students, it increases writing speed and creativity of students. Thus, homework develops independent learning. Thirdly, habit of doing homework enhances time management skills, and involves the students in study at home – which is away from college.

Perceptions on Burden of doing HW

Data collected from students and its result show that 50 percent students perceived doing regular homework as huge burden for them rather than any advantages. Most

of the participants argue that homework is unnecessary burden for the students, and thus reduces the personal time of the students. Firstly, it gives the mental pressure to complete assigned work on time, there will be pressure of homework and tiredness, anxiety and procrastination, and thus, it might take towards the depression and stress. Secondly, HW disturbs the sound sleep and original life style of students. It reduces the quality time of students with family and friends and elimination of social life. Thirdly, HW reduces the quality time for extra readings, lack of time for skill development and exploration as well as isolation from social activities. It is noteworthy to mention the view of a student "*We had an assignment of Nepali subject to describe how we celebrate Dashain; interact with relatives and neighbours and prepare a report. When relatives and neighbours were at my home, they were talking about social festival, I was trying to complete my assignment alone in my study room*". Thus, HW had limited my interaction in society because I had very limited deadline to complete my assignment.

Perception on HW is Wastage of Time and its Limit

Students have mixed perception about HW is wastage of time. 40 percent participants said that doing HW is just like wastage of time due to unnecessary work load and overload, copying from others, time management problem. HW is mostly wastage of time specially in theoretical subjects, it reduces the sports and quality time with family and friends. However, 60 percent participants said that HW is not wastage of time. HW develops confidence among the students; regular practice supports for exams; develops critical thinking level of students; develops hardworking habit. HW is more supportive for practical subjects such as Mathematics, Economics and Accountancy; it reduces scrolling reel; good for average level students and thus supportive in exams. A controversial issue concerned with mass students and other stakeholders is that how much HW should be given to the students? How much work and what types of assignments should be assigned to the students? In this context, all the research participants said that the HW should be provided at limited quantity, i.e., the limit of HW is necessary. On the one side limited assignments should be given, and on the other hand, the deadline of HW submission should be flexible as per the time and capacity of the students. Participants said that all the students should not assign same HW. It means, quantity and level of HW should be based on students' level. Some of the participants said that teacher should provide enough deadline for HW submission particularly to the students whose writing speed is very slow. Hence, majority of the research participants believe that unlimited HW with limited deadline results in to pressure to the students.

We have conducted two round member checking for the trustworthiness of qualitative data. The same interview guideline was used with KII group consisting different academic levels of students. The data collected from KII was also similar with the views of research participants. They said that doing regular HW supports for students learning; the need of HW varies according to the level of students; some students are sacrificing their leisure time and time with family and friends to complete HW on time. It has certainly reduced the sleep time of students. However, they agree that HW supports for independent learning at home, which ultimately supports in examination. Today's students feel more burden and fewer benefit of doing HW. Students should get enough deadline for completing HW. Finally, the constructive use of gadgets is supportive for academic purposes and excessive use could be harmful for the students.

Discussion

This study has been conducted to explore the students' perception of homework/ assignments on their academic performance. Primarily international researchers and a few Nepalese have studied cases to explore the extent to which homework/ assignments affects on the academic performances of the students, and the correlation between them is always debated. The findings of this study are similar with a number of researchers.

More than 80 percent participating students claimed that HW supports on students' learning through supporting in remembering capacity; develops exploring habit; increases the writing speed and helps to improve handwritings; utilizes the time effectively and develops the habit of independent learning, research and critical thinking; and thus, supports on students overall learning and to achieve academic goals.

Likewise, research participants suggested that homework should be based on age and level of students; practical based homework for secondary level, real life based, critical thinking and research-based homework for higher level students. Most of the students have common voice about the effects of homework on time management. They perceived that they sacrifice their personal time, time with friends and family, and reduce the quality sleep time to complete homework on limited deadline. The participants fully agreed that homework supports for independent learning and critical thinking depending upon the nature of subject as well as supports for examinations. More than 50 percent participants found that homework has supplementary benefits and rest 50 percent perceived homework as burden for them. 40 percent participants said that homework is waste of time and rest 60 percent found that homework increases the critical thinking, confidence level, it more supportive especially in

numerical subjects such as Mathematics, Accountancy and Economics. All the participants strongly felt that homework should be provided in limited quantity and enough deadline should be provided by the teacher. Finally, 70 percent participants found use of gadgets supportive while doing homework and 30 percent felt that use of gadgets while doing homework is waste of quality time.

A study conducted by Letterman (2013) found mixed effect of home assignments on academic performance of students. Half of the students realized that homework improves their academic level, while rest 50 percent found no any significant effect of homework on academic progress. The findings of our study align with Letterman (2013). Likewise, Hendersen (2008) claimed that the ability of students is different in each classe. So, less homework should be assigned with sufficient deadline especially for weak students; which is similar with the findings of the study. Betts (1996) found that regular homework supports especially for numerical subjects such as: Maths and it aligns with our study. The findings of Neilson (2005) also similar with this study. Nunez et al. (2013); Karabatak, Alanoglu and Karabatak (2020); Haq, Shakil and Din (2020); Muljancs, Dabes and Luo (2023); Met Life (2007); Poudyal (2023); Rajeswari and Usha (2014) and Li et al. (2020) have found that regular homework supports for students' academic performance at high school and other levels. Teachers should provide productive and quality homework which develops the independent learning and critical thinking supported by improved writings. These findings are similar with the findings of our study.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study aimed to investigate the effects of homework on students' academic performance, focusing on its impact on learning outcomes, student perceptions, and the role of technology. Through the use of open-ended interviews and purposive sampling, insights were gathered from 50 research participants, revealing diverse perspectives on the role of homework in educational settings.

The findings of this study underscored several key points regarding the perceived benefits and drawbacks of homework. A significant portion of the participants acknowledged that homework plays a crucial role in supporting student learning. Specifically, it was found to enhance writing skills, foster critical thinking, and promote independent learning. These outcomes align with existing literature suggesting that homework serves as a valuable tool for reinforcing classroom learning and extending students' understanding beyond the school environment. Interestingly, the study also highlighted a dual perspective among students regarding the utility of

homework. While 50 percent of the participants viewed homework as advantageous, citing its benefits in preparing for examinations and enhancing academic performance, the remaining 50 percent considered it burdensome. This dichotomy reflects a critical tension in educational practices, where the effectiveness of homework may vary depending on factors such as workload and perceived relevance to learning objectives.

Moreover, attitudes towards the quantity and flexibility of homework assignments emerged as crucial considerations. A substantial majority of participants (60 percent) expressed support for limited homework with flexible deadlines, advocating for a balanced approach that considers students' academic responsibilities and extracurricular commitments. This finding suggests a consensus among students regarding the importance of maintaining a manageable workload to optimize learning outcomes without overwhelming learners. Furthermore, the integration of technology in homework completion yielded mixed responses from participants. While 70 percent of students recognized the benefits of using gadgets for homework, such as access to information and digital resources, 30 percent viewed them as potential distractions and time-wasting tools. This highlights the need for educators to provide guidance on responsible technology use and leverage digital platforms effectively to enhance learning experiences.

In conclusion, this research contributes valuable insights into the multifaceted impacts of homework on students' academic performance and learning experiences. The findings emphasize the nuanced perspectives of students regarding the benefits and challenges associated with homework assignments. Moving forward, educators and policymakers are encouraged to consider these findings when designing homework policies and practices that promote effective learning, cater to diverse student needs, and foster a positive academic environment. By acknowledging the varied viewpoints expressed by students, this study advocates for a balanced approach to homework implementation one that prioritizes educational goals while accommodating individual learning styles and preferences. Ultimately, the goal remains to harness the potential of homework as a supportive tool in educational settings, ensuring that it serves its intended purpose of enhancing student learning and academic achievement.

Depending upon the findings and conclusions, the following policies are recommended. Homework should serve as a tool to enhance students' learning rather than burden them. To achieve this, it is crucial that students first understand the objectives behind each assignment. Schools and colleges must limit the quantity of homework to prevent it from becoming overwhelming, while also ensuring flexibility in submission deadlines to accommodate the varying capacities and circumstances of students. Rather than assigning excessive individual tasks, educators should focus

on group-based homework that encourages analytical thinking, critical reasoning, and research skills. Homework should be closely connected to real-life practices to make it more relatable, engaging, and easier for students to complete. Furthermore, assignments should be tailored to the students' academic levels and capacities, with a strong emphasis on quality over quantity. Incorporating digital tools and practical learning elements can also enhance the relevance and effectiveness of homework. It is essential for educators to be mindful of students' time constraints and challenges when assigning tasks. Socially interactive group assignments not only promote timely completion but also foster collaboration. Ultimately, homework should motivate students, promote self-directed learning, and cultivate independent thinking skills, ensuring that it becomes a meaningful part of their academic journey.

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