

DIFFERENCES IN HOMEWORK INVOLVEMENT DEPENDING ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this work was to check if there are differences in homework involvement depending on the different levels of academic achievement of students. Due to the possible effect that gender, course and intrinsic motivation can have, their effects were controlled by incorporating them as covariates in the design. The sample is integrated by 388 students of Secondary Education of public centers of A Coruña (Spain). The results indicate that as the levels of academic achievement of the students are higher, there is a progressive increase in the amount of homework done and in the use of time. In addition, another outstanding result is that as the grade progresses, not only decreases the amount of homework, but also the use they make of time is becoming less and less. All this should be taken into account for the educational practice: a greater intrinsic motivation will imply a better management of time, a greater amount of homework and, consequently, a better academic achievement.

Keywords: Homework; academic achievement; secondary education.

Diferencias en la implicación en los deberes escolares en función del rendimiento académico

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este trabajo fue comprobar si hay diferencias en la implicación en los deberes escolares en función de los distintos niveles de rendimiento académico de los estudiantes. Debido al posible efecto que pueden tener el género, curso y la motivación intrínseca, se controlaron sus efectos incorporándolas como covariables en el diseño. La muestra está integrada por 388 estudiantes de Educación Secundaria de centros públicos de A Coruña (España). Los resultados indican que, a medida que los niveles de rendimiento académico de los estudiantes sean más altos, hay un aumento progresivo en la cantidad de deberes realizados y en el aprovechamiento del tiempo. Además, otro resultado destacado es que, según los alumnos van avanzando de curso, realizan una menor cantidad de deberes de los prescritos por el profesor y aprovechan peor el tiempo que dedican a esos deberes. Todo ello debe tenerse en cuenta para la práctica educativa: una mayor motivación intrínseca implicará una mejor gestión del tiempo, una mayor cantidad de deberes realizados y, consecuentemente, un mejor rendimiento.

Palabras clave: tareas en casa; rendimiento académico; Educación Secundaria.

Diferenças no envolvimento em tarefas escolares dependendo do desempenho acadêmico

RESUMO

O objetivo deste trabalho foi verificar se existem diferenças no envolvimento em tarefas escolares dependendo dos diferentes níveis de desempenho acadêmico dos alunos. Devido ao possível efeito que gênero, curso e motivação intrínseca podem ter, seus efeitos foram controlados incorporando-os como covariáveis no design. A amostra é integrada por 388 alunos do Ensino Secundário de centros públicos da Corunha (Espanha). Os resultados indicam que, como os níveis de desempenho acadêmico dos estudantes são maiores, há um aumento progressivo na quantidade de tarefas desempenhadas e no uso do tempo. Além disso, outro resultado marcante é que, de acordo com os alunos que estão avançando, naturalmente, o número de deveres feitos daqueles prescritos pelo professor diminui e também o uso que eles fazem do tempo que dedicam a eles. Tudo isso deve ser levado em consideração para a prática educacional: uma maior motivação intrínseca implicará em uma melhor gestão do tempo, maior quantidade de tarefas realizadas e, consecuentemente, melhor desempenho acadêmico.

Palavras-chave: Lição de casa; desempenho acadêmico; ensino médio.

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INTRODUCTION

School homework is defined as tasks assigned by teachers to be performed outside of school hours in order to extend the abilities and knowledge acquired in the classroom to other contexts (Cooper, 1989).

The prescription of homework generates and has generated a large number of debates over the past few years, becoming a highly controversial topic between home and school. In fact, parents protest the amount and difficulty of homework, teachers complain about the lack of support from families, and students complain about the lack of leisure and anxiety caused by them (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006).

Currently, there is still no consensus on how, when and how many tasks should be prescribed, thus showing that it remains a highly relevant issue for the educational field with important repercussions and social implications.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE PERFORMANCE OF HOMEWORK AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

One of the variables with the greatest burden when studying homework is the number of tasks that students carry out of those prescribed by the teacher. Thus, in the investigations carried out in this regard, on the one hand, it was found that there was a positive relationship between the amount of homework performed and academic performance (Valle, Pan et al., 2015). However, there are differences depending on performance. Thus, a progressive increase for homework performed by students has been observed as their academic performance levels were higher (Regueiro, Pan, Sánchez et al., 2014), this relationship being much clearer in the case of Secundaria¹ and Bachillerato students (Cooper et al., 2006). The reason for this may be the purpose of the tasks. In Primaria the tasks are assigned so that the students learn to manage their study time reviewing the class material, while in the Secundaria they are assigned to enrich and perfect the lessons taught in class (Muhlenbruck, Cooper, Nye, & Lindsay, 2000).

On the other hand, the time variable has also generated a lot of interest, but despite this, the results today are contradictory (Rosário, Mourão, Núñez, & Solano, 2008). On the one hand, an excess of time can sometimes mean low competence in this matter (Regueiro, Suárez, Valle, Núñez, & Rosario, 2015) or, conversely, a short time can be synonymous with high competence in it. Therefore, we should not affirm that by spending more time there will be an improvement

in the performance of students, but that, when we talk about time dedicated to homework, we must differentiate between the quality and quantity of that time.

Another important aspect in the homework process is time management (also called taking advantage of homework time or using that time). A good use of it has positive effects on academic success (Valle, Regueiro, Rodríguez et al., 2015), on the completion of homework (Xu, 2005) and on academic performance (Eilam, 2001).

Motivation is considered an essential part of the school homework process. In the same way, to carry them out, students are required to participate and persist in the task. This level of persistence and participation will be determined by their personal goals, their value beliefs, the interest and the importance of achieving these goals for them (Regueiro, Pan, Valle et al., 2014).

Furthermore, the type of motivation is also related to the quality of student involvement (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In fact, it has been observed that the type of motivation that students have to do homework, together with the degree of interest and the perceived usefulness, affects their degree of involvement (number of homework performed, time spent on them and taking advantage of that time) and, consequently, in their academic performance (Pan et al., 2013).

Specifically, it is the intrinsic motivation that is associated with a higher performance, a greater perception of utility, a greater number of homework performed (Regueiro, Suárez, Rodríguez, & Piñeiro, 2014), as well as a better use of time dedicated to them (Regueiro et al., 2015). Therefore, it seems that engaging in tasks for pleasure and enjoyment is a good predictor of academic performance.

In short, the motivational profile of the students will clearly influence not only the performance of homework, but also performance. Depending on the type of motivation that the students choose; the intensity, effort and persistence in learning will be different, and consequently, their academic performance as well.

On the other hand, the course and gender can also influence academic performance when performing homework. Thus, the fact that students are more or less involved in the performance of homework may be related to the course in which they are.

Regarding gender, there are wide varieties of works that show that girls have shown more positive attitudes towards homework. Furthermore, women use more strategies to manage their work time, space and motivation, as well as to control negative emotions that arise when doing homework (Xu, 2005). In fact, not only doing they make better use of their time, working

¹ Educational System in Spain – Educación Infantil; Educación Primaria (6 years); Educación Secundaria Obligatoria – ESO (4 years) and Bachillerato (2 years).

constantly, but they also show a greater effort and interest in carrying out homework.

Based on these approaches, the main objective is to know the differences that exist in the variables related to the involvement in homework (number of homework performed, of those prescribed by the teacher; amount of time used in said performance and use of time) based on the academic performance of Educación Secundaria students. Since these differences can be modulated by the effect of other variables, the course, gender and intrinsic motivation towards homework will be taken as covariates. In the event that the covariates are significant, specific analyzes will be carried out to determine their relationships with the dependent variables linked to involvement in homework.

METHOD

Participants

The sample is made up of 388 students (40.1% men, 59.9% women) of Educación Secundaria Obligatoria² (ESO) belonging to various public centers in the province of A Coruña, which 50% of the centers are public and the other 50% arranged. Of these, 101 are in 1st ESO (26%), 89 are in 2nd ESO (22.9%), 98 are in 3rd ESO (25.3%) and 100 are in 4th ESO (25.8%).

Measuring instruments

In order to measure the variables related to motivation and involvement in schoolwork, the Encuesta sobre los Deberes Escolares (EDE)³ will be used, a scale that evaluates different dimensions related to the effectiveness of homework for learning and academic performance of students (see, eg Núñez, Suárez, Cerezo et al., 2015; Núñez, Suárez, Rosário et al., 2015; Pan et al., 2013; Rosário et al., 2009).

The estimation of the *number of homework performed* by the students, *the daily time dedicated and the use of time* was obtained by responses to an item related to each of them, using a Likert-type scale with five alternatives (1 = none, 2 = some, 3 = half, 4 = almost all, 5 = all).

To evaluate those reasons related to the enjoyment, satisfaction and benefits produced by the homework for learning, information was collected on the variable *intrinsic motivation towards homework*, which is made up of eight items ($\alpha = .79$) with a typical response scale Likert with five alternatives ranging from "1 = totally false" to "5 = totally true". This variable is also part of the School Homework Survey (EDE) mentioned above.

Academic performance was evaluated by the average of the grades obtained by students in the subjects of Mathematics, Spanish, English and Social Sciences.

² Compulsory Secondary Education.

³ School Homework Survey.

Process

Data collection was carried out, with the prior consent of the management team and the teachers and parents of the students, at a single point in time during school hours. Participants answered confidentially and individually and without a time limit to the questions raised.

Data Analysis

In order to respond to the objectives of the work, a Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) was carried out, taking as a factor the academic performance of the students (with three levels: low, up to the 33rd percentile; medium, from the 33rd percentile to 66; high, starting from the 66th percentile) and as dependent variables each of the three variables related to involvement in schoolwork (number of homework performed of those prescribed by the teacher, amount of time used in said performance and use of that time). Course, gender and intrinsic motivation towards homework were taken as covariates. Subsequently, in the event that these covariates are significant, a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) will be carried out taking gender, course and intrinsic motivation as independent variables and thus knowing in which sense the changes in the dependent variables occur (quantity of homework, dedicated time and use of time).

To measure the size of the effect, the partial eta-square coefficient (η_p^2) was used, taking the criteria established in the classic work of Cohen (1988), based on which, an effect is small when $\eta_p^2 = .01$ ($d = .20$), the effect is medium when $\eta_p^2 = .059$ ($d = .50$) and the effect size is large if $\eta_p^2 = .138$ ($d = .80$).

RESULTS

Differences in involvement in homework depending on the level of academic performance (controlling the effect of intrinsic motivation towards homework, grade and gender)

Once the effect was controlled of *the intrinsic motivation towards homework* ($\lambda_{Wilks} = .77$, $F(3,364) = 36.28$; $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .230$), of the course ($\lambda_{Wilks} = .98$, $F(3,364) = 2.80$; $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .023$) and gender ($\lambda_{Wilks} = .97$, $F(3,364) = 3.95$; $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .032$), the results indicate that there are statistically significant differences in the set of variables linked to involvement in homework, depending on the different levels of *academic performance* ($\lambda_{Wilks} = .89$, $F(6,728) = 6.95$; $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .054$). The size of the effect is large in the case of intrinsic motivation, medium in the case of academic performance and small to medium in the case of course and gender.

Taking into account the data referring to each dependent variable considered individually, there are statistically significant differences depending on the

level of academic performance of the students in the amount of homework performed ($F(2,366) = 18.81, p < .001; \eta_p^2 = .093$) and in the use of time dedicated to homework ($F(2,366) = 3.94, p < .05; \eta_p^2 = .021$). There are no statistically significant differences in the variable time dedicated to homework ($F(2,366) = 0.74, p = .479; \eta_p^2 = .004$) based on academic performance. The size of the effect is close to large in the case of the amount of homework performed and between small and medium in the case of the use of time.

In this way, it is observed that the time dedicated to homework does not undergo significant changes depending on performance, but the amount of homework and the use of that time do. As can be seen in Figure 1, the results indicate that students with high academic performance perform a greater number of homework assignments and make better use of their time (see Figure 1).

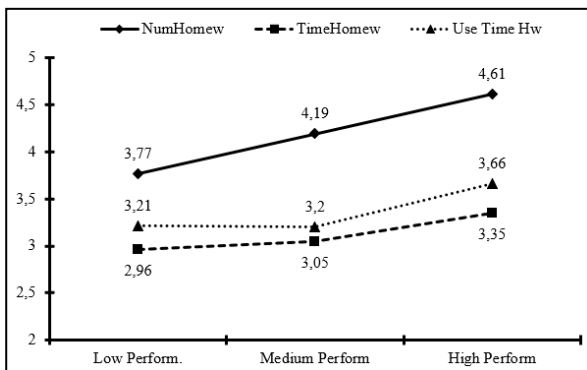


Figure 1. Graphical representation of the mean values of the variables related to involvement in homework (amount of homework done – **Amount Homew.**–, time spent on homework –**Time Homew.**– and use of time dedicated to homework – **Use Time Hw.**–) according to the levels of academic performance.

DIFFERENCES IN INVOLVEMENT IN HOMEWORK ACCORDING TO GENDER

According to the gender variable is significantly related to the involvement in school homework, as reflected in the previous analyzes, a MANOVA has been carried out taking this variable as an independent variable and as the dependent variables the amount of homework, the dedicated time and the use of time.

The results indicate that there are statistically significant differences in the set of variables related to the involvement in homework, according to gender ($\lambda_{Wilks} = .96, F(3,370) = 4.49; p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .035$). The effect size is close to medium.

Taking into account the results referring to each dependent variable considered individually, it can be seen that there are statistically significant differences according to gender in the time dedicated to homework

($F(1,372) = 9.50, p < .01; \eta_p^2 = .025$). The effect size is between small and medium. On the contrary, there are no statistically significant differences according to gender in the number of homework performed ($F(1,372) = 3.22, p = .074; \eta_p^2 = .009$) or in the use of time dedicated to homework ($F(1,372) = 0.58, p = .447; \eta_p^2 = .002$). In both cases, the effect size is small.

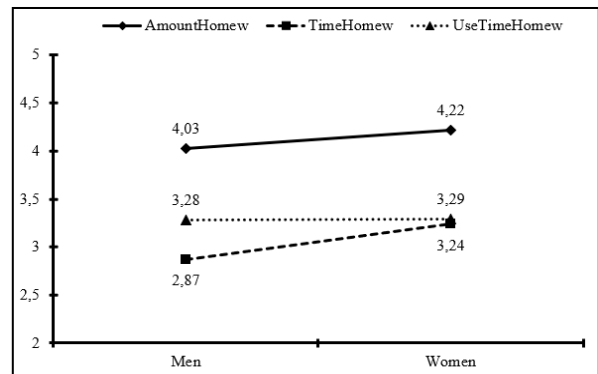


Figure 2. Graphical representation of the mean values of the variables related to involvement in homework (amount of homework done – **AmountHomew.**–, time spent on homework – **Time Homew.**– and use of time dedicated to homework – **UseTimeHomew.**–) according to gender.

As can be seen in Figure 2, the results indicate that women spend more time doing homework.

DIFFERENCES IN INVOLVEMENT IN HOMEWORK DEPENDING ON THE COURSE

Given that the course variable also appears to be significantly related to the involvement in homework, a MANOVA has been carried out taking this variable as independent variable and as dependent variables the amount of homework, the time spent and the use of time.

The results indicate that there are statistically significant differences in the set of variables related to the involvement in homework, depending on the grade ($\lambda_{Wilks} = .90, F(9,929.84) = 4.70; p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .035$). The effect size is close to medium.

Taking into account the results referred to each dependent variable considered individually, there are statistically significant differences depending on the course in the amount of homework performed by students ($F(3,384) = 10.93, p < .001; \eta_p^2 = .079$) and in the use of time dedicated to homework ($F(3,384) = 4.28, p < .01; \eta_p^2 = .032$). The size of the effect is medium in the case of the amount of homework and rather small in the case of the use of time. On the contrary, there are no statistically significant differences depending on the course in the time dedicated to homework ($F(3,384) = 1.51, p = .211; \eta_p^2 = .012$). The effect size is small.

In Figure 3 it can be seen that as the course progresses, students perform fewer homework assignments and

make less use of the time they spend performing them.

DIFFERENCES IN INVOLVEMENT IN HOMEWORK BASED ON INTRINSIC MOTIVATION TOWARDS HOMEWORK

Taking into account that the intrinsic motivation towards homework is significantly related to the involvement in school homework, a MANOVA has been carried out taking this variable as independent variable and as dependent variables the amount of homework, the time dedicated and the use of the weather.

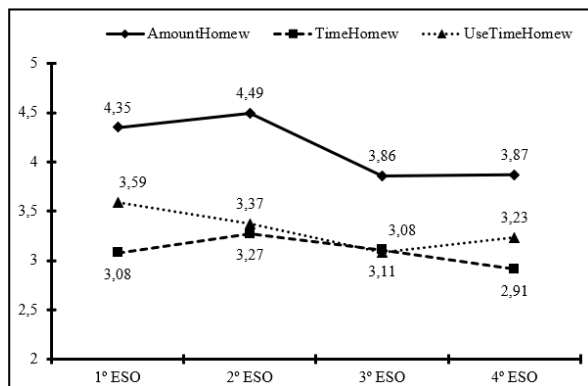


Figure 3. Graphical representation of the mean values of the variables related to involvement in homework (amount of homework done – **AmountHomew.** –, time spent on homework –**Time Homew.**– and use of time dedicated to homework –**UseTimeHomew.**–) according to the course.

The results indicate that there are statistically significant differences in the set of variables related to the involvement in homework, based on the intrinsic motivation towards homework ($\lambda_{\text{Wilks}} = .80, F(6,762) = 15.15; p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .107$). The effect size is close to large.

Based on the results referred to each dependent variable considered individually, there are statistically significant differences, based on the intrinsic motivation towards homework, in the amount of homework performed ($F(2,383) = 30.28, p < .001; \eta_p^2 = .137$), in the use of time dedicated to homework ($F(2,383) = 25.25, p < .001; \eta_p^2 = .115$) and in the time dedicated to homework ($F(2,383) = 13.47, p < .001; \eta_p^2 = .066$). In the amount of homework, the effect size is large, in the use of time it is close to large and in the time dedicated to the homework it is medium.

As can be seen both in Figure 4, the greater the intrinsic motivation, the greater the involvement in the homework. That is, the number of homework performed, the time and the use of it, is greater as the level of motivation is higher.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

After the results, it can be said that the present study has several important contributions to research about homework. On the one hand, it is observed that

there are differences in some variables related to the involvement in school homework depending on the levels of academic performance of the students. In spite of the fact that, it is also shown that there are statistically significant differences in some of those variables in function of the academic course, gender and intrinsic motivation.

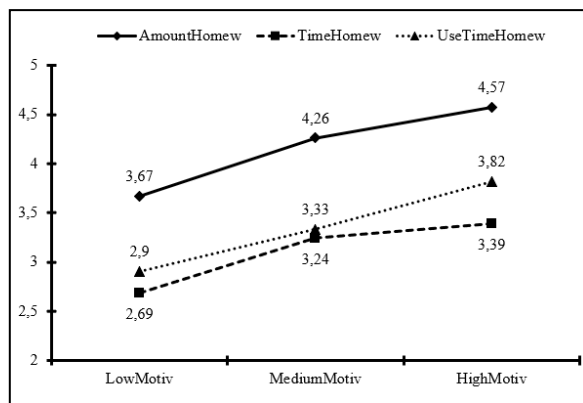


Figure 4. Graphical representation of the mean values of the variables related to the involvement in homework (amount of homework done – **AmountHomew.** –, time spent on homework –**TimeHomew.**– and use of time dedicated to homework –**UseTimeHomew.**–) depending on the degree of intrinsic motivation.

Firstly, and based on the academic performance levels of the students, the results of the present study confirm that as the performance levels are higher, a greater amount of homework is performed and the time spent is better used to them. This result coincides with the results of other studies (Valle, Regueiro, Estévez et al., 2015) thus corroborating that the amount of homework that Secundaria students do is positively related to their academic performance. Regarding the time variable, no significant differences were found, demonstrating that the use made of time is more decisive than academic success for time itself (Rosário, Mourão, Núñez, González-Pienda, & Solano, 2006).

Other factors that were considered to influence homework and academic performance were gender, grade, and intrinsic motivation.

Regarding the gender and the course, it can be seen that the girls spend more time doing their homework than the boys and that with the passing of the courses, both boys and girls perform less amount homework and make less use of the time they dedicate to them, which coincides with other works carried out (Valle, Pan et al., 2015). This may be due to the type of motivation that this Secundaria school student chooses, since it has been proven that intrinsic motivation is related to greater involvement (Regueiro, Suárez, et al., 2014; Regueiro et al., 2015) and with higher performance. Therefore, Secundaria school students may see the insignificant and boring homework (Regueiro et

al., 2015), using extrinsic motivation that prevents them from using strategies that involve reflection, interpretation and reasoning. Precisely, and in relation to this, the results of this study also indicate regarding intrinsic motivation that the greater this is, the greater the involvement in homework. That is, the number of homework performed, the time and the use of it is greater as the level of intrinsic motivation is higher, as indicated by Ryan and Deci (2000).

Among the limitations of the present study, it is worth highlighting the reduced number of items to measure some variables, being able to increase them for future research, in addition to the evaluation through self-reports obtaining only responses from the students.

Educational implications

From the analysis of the results of this work and despite the previous limitations, a series of conclusions can be drawn that may have important implications in the educational field, both for research and for classroom practice.

Thus, it is important that teachers are aware of and use homework as a tool that can help not only in content acquisition, but also in study and learning strategies. This is a very important aspect that has been forgotten in the school, especially in university and Secundaria education, since in this area students are considered to have mastered the instruments necessary for effective learning.

We know that not all students are equally involved in school assignments and that they have different causes or reasons for persisting in what they set out to do. Taking into account that Secundaria students perceive more costs than benefits when performing homework, they should be attractive to them, with the aim of maintaining their intrinsic motivation. It is certainly a difficult job, it is easier to say than to carry out, but with the help of the school community, as well as with creativity and teacher involvement, we can ensure that students never want to stop learning.

With regard to involvement in homework itself, it can be deduced that what is important is not quantity but quality. In other words, homework should be motivating tools adapted to the age of each student.

In this way, teachers will have to schedule tasks and time, since the same design for everyone can be harmful, especially for those who have less performance. Therefore, it is urgent for educational practice that there be more research on school homework that makes it possible to develop more precise guidelines on the criteria to be followed for prescribing them (Pan et al., 2013).

Finally, and following the title of this work, both the involvement in the performance of homework and the positive consequences seen on academic performance

must be taken into account for educational practice. Thus, a student who is intrinsically motivated, he/she will carry out a more meaningful learning and his/her time management will be better, performing a greater number of homework and consequently, achieving better performance.

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