

Global Homework Practices Do Not Always Correlate with Performance

Do Students Have Too Much Homework?, 2012

Penn State Live is the official online news source for Pennsylvania State University.

Available international data indicate that there is no clear-cut evidence that increased [homework](#) leads to improved test scores. The impact of homework depends largely on the caliber of a country's educational program and attitudes within that country toward homework. Although discussions continue as to how best to raise achievement levels, governments and political groups would be wise to avoid creating blanket policies that could potentially do more harm than good.

A study of global homework patterns suggests that the benefits of more homework assignments to boost student test scores may vary widely according to the grade level, the quality of a nation's schools and the perceived value of homework. Therefore, researchers caution that government and [education](#) policymakers need to consider the appropriate grade levels and related impact before trying to create overall homework policies for schools.

"Over the past two decades, much of the policy discussion in the U.S. has focused on increasing national test scores to the level of international standards," says Gerald LeTendre, professor of [education policy](#) studies at Penn State [University] and lead author of the study. "More standardized testing drives educators to give more homework in order to prepare for these exams. Homework has moved to center stage in the debate over how nations can improve their economic competitiveness by boosting student scores. Yet, national policies aimed at simply increasing homework amounts are unlikely to produce increases in average student achievement scores."

Comparisons Are Difficult

Overall, the data show that U.S. [students](#) receive an average amount of daily homework, compared with other nations. But the percentage of U.S. elementary students with four or more hours per night has risen to 8 percent, well above the 1 percent reported in Japan and 5 percent in Taiwan, two countries considered benchmarks for U.S. students. Five percent of the U.S. middle school students in the survey reported four or more hours of homework per night, compared to 3 percent in Taiwan and 1 percent in Japan.

LeTendre, professor of education policy studies, and Motoko Akiba, University of Missouri, Columbia, analyzed data from the Third International Math and Science Survey (TIMSS) for 1995 and 2003, selecting 18 nations to examine overall trends. They presented their findings today [February 27, 2007] at the annual Comparative and International Education Society [conference] in Baltimore, Md.

For U.S. schools, the study shows a negative relationship between higher homework amounts and student achievement in elementary schools, and only a very small benefit in middle schools.

"An overlooked factor is the quality of the education in a nation's [public schools](#)," the researchers say. "Some developing nations with fewer resources may see an increase in student achievement with more homework because the homework helps student to catch up in their skills. Students in schools of well-funded nations may not need to spend as much time on homework."

For U.S. schools, the study shows a negative relationship between higher homework amounts and student achievement in elementary schools, and only a very small benefit in middle schools. At the middle school level, the students who did some homework, but not excessive amounts, seem to score the best. The U.S. falls into the "balanced" pattern of homework completion found in many nations where students who do modest amounts of homework (30 minutes to an hour and a half per night) have higher test scores than peers who do no homework or those who study more than four hours per night.

"We may need to know more about the specific relationship between national policies or practices related to homework," the researchers add. "The role of homework in a child's life and a nation's educational policies has been hotly debated, and there is now a significant backlash in the U.S. against homework."

Further Readings

Books

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Source Citation

Penn State Live. "Global Homework Practices Do Not Always Correlate with Performance." *Do Students Have Too Much Homework?* Ed. Judeen Bartos. Detroit: Greenhaven Press, 2012. At Issue. Rpt. from "Benefits of More Homework Vary Across Nations, Grades." 2007. *Opposing Viewpoints in Context*. Web. 3 Feb. 2015.

Document URL

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Gale Document Number: GALE|EJ3010796207