
Perceptions of Stakeholders, ELT Advisers, Teachers, and Learners Regarding Homework in Niamey District 5

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ABSTRACT

This study was carried out in the inspectorate of the 5th district of Niamey (Niger). The objectives of the study were to find out the perceptions of stakeholders, ELT advisers, teachers, and learners about homework and how they impacted students' academic achievement. To collect data, a quantitative method was adapted by setting a questionnaire in English for teachers and the ELT adviser, and another one in French for the 10th grade learners due to their low level in English language. Then, interview questions were set for qualitative research to two school administrators (a principal and a head teacher). The results showed that the learners' satisfaction in the teachers' assigned purposes that were related to the learners' needs which, according to this study, refer to the preferences, amount, frequency, deadline, and feedback of homework assignments. However, a great part of learners' attitude was negatively affected due to some difficulties such as the environment, the motivation, and the relevance of certain activities. Therefore, some suggestions were proffered to help improve the teaching and learning of English in Niger in general.

KEYWORDS: teaching, homework, tasks, family income, parental involvement, stakeholder

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INTRODUCTION

In Niger, just after independence in the early 1960's, the goal assigned to English teaching was to train interpreters and intermediaries. That purpose was to ease exchange with English speaking countries. Gradually, a change occurred, and the purpose of ELT turned into a new vision which was to train citizens so as to use the language as an international communication tool (Ousseini, 2013).

Niandou (1989, 28) reported that, in Niger, the English teaching/learning objectives are as follow: practical, cultural, and educational. First, in terms of practical objective, Nigerien students are to be taught English, as a communication tool, through its skills and subskills. Concerning cultural objective, students, by learning English through a communicative way, are supposed to deepen their language learning, and better get into contact with the culture of the English-speaking world. With regards to educational objective, students develop their abilities in the language, and accept to live with foreign or neighboring people as a part of our community.

To find out the perceptions of stakeholders and ELT teachers and learners about homework in Nigerien context, we took a sampling of 50 participants from the 5th district of Niamey (Niger). The study focused on views related to homework characteristics, learners' needs, interests, and attitude. In fact, concerning characteristics, we let participants prioritize the types of tasks that teachers assign and related purposes. ELT teachers mostly assign homework for practice of the taught materials. Next, preparation assignment is applied for learners to get ready for the upcoming class activities as well as the participation assignment which is generally aimed at enhancing learners' efforts in class. After that, extension homework lets learners put into application the taught skills. Finally, in Niger, assigning integration homework is very common for fourth year learners (3e) or Bac candidates to train them in writing. Here, students are asked to take into consideration all the studied skills in order to produce paragraphs and essays from given topics.

1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Homework remains a precious instrument to learning and achievement. It is an instructional technique that faces multiple challenges. As teachers of English as a foreign language, we notice that the teachers' teaching methods, the students' environment, their motivation and their attitude toward the English language, the academic resources, and the family incomes are some of the main factors that influence homework assignment. Many students fail to complete their homework assignments successfully due to several factors. In fact, many learners lack suitable environment for regular homework completion as they simply do not have access to resources like books or internet or any other support material. Also, as the first educators, many parents are not educated enough to supervise their children or are too busy to take care of this aspect of their children's education. Finally, many learners have not realized how important it is to study and learn English. Therefore, their attitude toward the learning English and their motivation need to be examined as many seem to neglect the English language particularly their homework assignments.

This study aims to collect the stakeholders', the teachers', advisers' and learners' views from the 5th district of Niamey regarding homework, identify the problems in order to analyze them and propose some possible solutions before proffering some recommendations.

Thus, the following research question has been addressed:

- 1- Which role does homework play in students' academic performance?
2. Why are students in Niamey District 1 neglecting homework?
3. What are the perceptions of stakeholders, ELT teachers, and learners about homework?

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Purposes of homework

Homework has been a subject of controversial debate throughout the world for over one hundred years. Many educators agree that it involves two main purposes that are instructional and noninstructional ones. As an instructional purpose, it includes practice, preparation, participation, and personal development. A focus is particularly put on 'practice' which is the most important and related to a learned skill (Cooper, 2007) whereas an assignment which targets new materials, is used to prepare learners for the coming classes. Further, some assignment aimed to teach responsibility and personal development through learning and completing homework (Van Voorhis, 2004). Besides, Cooper (2007) added two more instructional goals which are 'extension homework' where learners apply the learned materials to new situations and 'integration homework' where learners use the learned skills to create a product. As for the non-instructional purposes, they include communicative and political purposes of homework. Van Voorhis' (2004) communicative purpose establishes parent-teacher communication, parent-child relation, and peer interaction. By assigning homework regularly, parents are supposed to know their child's learning progress. Sometimes, homework intends to punish learners in a positive way by changing their behaviors or manage their free time for studies. Briefly put, homework allows learners cooperate with parents or peers.

Van Voorhis (2004) argues that it can assigned for the political purposes as a school administration needs to come up with homework policy containing high standards. Also, school administration needs to inform parents about school high expectations for their children's achievement.

2.2. Benefits of homework:

There are many benefits related to homework. Academic benefits come from school activities whereas non-academic ones are linked to community interactions. Cooper (2007) distinguishes within homework completion immediate academic effects and long-term academic benefits. Immediate effects allow learners gain from the material being taught by understanding and retaining the information at hand. As for nonacademic benefits of homework, he realized that homework is not only for academic improvement but also it teaches learners ways to manage their time and be more responsible. In one word, homework lets learners acquire self-discipline and autonomy in learning. However, taking into account Piaget's theory, Kralovec & Buell (2001) demonstrated that homework assigned to learners before their normal cognitive development, can be destructive to their growth as well as their learning process. Furthermore, Corno & Xu (2004) declared that homework is a kind of job for childhood. It lets children acquire positive 'work habit and self-control'. Also, they realized that, once regular homework is supported by parents, it provides opportunity to learn management skills and work habits. Additionally, pacing is another skill and non-academic benefits. By providing weekly homework, elementary grade children learn how to focus their attention on the assignment demands.

However, Kohn (2006) has difficulty to believe on these non-academic benefits because, in general, it's up to parents to have children do their homework before moving to something else. By nature, completing chores and other family occupations can be more suitable for the acquisition of these skills rather than homework.

2.3. Effective homework

Several elements characterize an effective homework. First, it needs to be related to learning objectives, not just a routine or busy work. According to Marzano, Peckering, & Pollock (2001), homework should be relevant to students' learning instead of useless repetitions. In that case, a teacher needs to assign tasks with clear purposes to avoid confusion about what they are supposed

to do (Marzano, Gaddy & Dean, 2000). The assignment tasks should match learner's ability and maturity. In fact, a teacher should consider the learner's grade level, the right amount. Also, the instructional level needs to cope with their learnt skills. Then, a teacher should get aware of learners' preferences and their learning styles when designing a proper assignment task (Cooper, 2007; Hong Milgram & Rowell, 2004). After that, homework should be regular to let a learner develop a certain discipline and a habit of completing tasks. At last, a teacher needs not only to check but also provide constructive comments as feedback (Cushman, 2010; Macbeth, 2003; Marzano et al., 2001).

2.4. Factors influencing homework

A particular focus concerns parental involvement, socio-economic status, environmental issues, influence of culture, community support, and homework policy, etc. With regard to parental involvement, they are supposed to take part in their children's learning process at least when the teacher gives homework. Cooper (2007) described three types of parental involvement: direct participation, providing guidelines, and supervising homework.

2.5. Socio-economic factors influencing homework

Cooper, Jackson, Nye, & Lindsay (2001) explained that, when assigning homework, teachers need to consider learners' preparedness on the completion and the follow-up, their differences and socio-economic factors. Even though the parents want to participate in homework completion, they should create suitable environment which includes well-lit place, and material supplies. Another factor is the community, which may include pairs, group work, or siblings, can provide motivation and enjoyment in executing the homework (Cooper, et. al., 2001). Indeed, the family incomes can be taken as a factor determining the success of homework completion.

2.6. Influence of environment on homework completion:

According to Corno (1996), to do homework assignment apart from home environment, there exist various places such as: on the bus, at work, in library, etc. Therefore, the most important thing is the commitment. Even though the home economic status is low, parents need to support their children, at least, by checking what is going on, encouraging, complimenting them, and removing distracting objects. In addition, siblings can be an opportunity for completing homework. In fact, they can play the role of either competitors, or helpers. Many children are conscious that it doesn't honor a family to get the lowest performance. Others are responsible enough to help their younger brothers and sisters. Another issue is that the more the number of children increases, which is the case in many Nigerien families, the more quietness and parental support time per child decreases. Anyway, parents need to support children as far as they can so as to acquire good study habits and ability to complete their tasks.

2.7. Psychological influence of homework on students:

Corno & Xu (2004) realized that, by nature, learners show negative attitude toward homework, but many experienced ones come up to understand the significance of self-commitment to work and how important it is to prepare oneself for the future. In addition, some students are able to help themselves when facing a difficult task, control their motivation or avoid frustration through positive self-talk. Learners, by getting good grades and academic advancement, can find out that homework leads to satisfaction and reward.

Finally, Corno (1996) reminds us that, naturally, learners are influenced by universal principle of motivation, looking for pleasure and avoiding pain. Therefore, he suggested teachers, on designing an assignment, to let tasks be positive experiences. Further, parents and teachers, in common understanding, can work together to tackle any problem which may arise to hinder the fulfilment of assignments. Here, the purpose is to make homework include expected effects matching learners' interest and motivation.

2.8. Influence of amount of time spent on homework:

According to Cooper (2001), on 50 studies comparing the amount of time spent on homework by learners with their level achievement, 43 of these studies revealed that learners who spent more time on homework had a higher level of achievement whereas the other 07 studies displayed a poor performance. Additionally, grade levels were a strong indicator showing that the amount of homework helps increase the learners' achievement.

3. METHODOLOGY:

3.1. Research design and approach:

This research used both a qualitative and a quantitative approach. Interview questions and questionnaires were used to collect data. These were next analyzed, interpreted, and discussed.

The study took place at two main sites i.e. in CES/RD 1, a secondary school located in 5th district of Niamey where questionnaires were used to gather the ELT teachers and learners' views concerning homework and in the stakeholders' offices where responses were either recorded or managed by taking notes. The participants included 7 ELT teachers, 40 10th grade level students (3^e), the principal of the mentioned school, its head teacher and an ELT adviser.

3.2. Data collection:

Since the research model is both qualitative and quantitative, we set interview questions. The questionnaire for students is in French whereas the second one for teachers is in English. The questions in the questionnaires can be classified into three sections: section A concerns views related to homework purposes; section B is linked to teachers’ and learners’ perceptions with regard to homework needs whereas the section C deals with the teachers’ and learners’ views about attitude towards homework. The next step consisted of using structured interviews with mixed open- and closed-ended questions to allow the different stakeholders to tell their perceptions about homework assignments. However, some respondents answered the questions as if they were all open-ended instead of “yes” or “no”. Following many steps, office excel was used to manage the collected data. First, since the questionnaire has MCQ form, we set dropdown list from the participants’ answers. Second, we let excel process and validate the list to get a counting table. Then, we let excel create a pivot table and this allowed us to see clearly the views of both teachers and students concerning an issue.

4. RESULT AND INTERPRETATION:

4.1. Questionnaire result:

Section A: Purposes of homework

Table 1. Purposes of homework

Purposes of homework	student	teacher	Total
to practice what was taught	28	6	34
to prepare oneself for an exam	10	1	11
to punish students	2		2
Total	40	7	47

Practice plays a very important role to master any language. In Niger, like in other countries using English as a foreign language, students are interested in that language not only for practice but also for good grades. According to the table above, 34 out of 47 participants including 6 teachers believed that the purpose of homework is mostly for practicing what was taught. Such purpose is welcomed as far as the country needs this expanding language not only for academic and diplomatic purposes but also to improve science and technology. However, one teacher was backed by 10 students to recognize that the purpose of homework can also be a preparation for a test or an exam which is mainly a struggle for getting good marks. Finally, only two students considered the purpose of homework as a means of punishment.

Table 2. Purposes of homework

Purposes of homework	student	teacher	Total
to better participate in class	12		12
to be responsible for one's learning both to participate & be responsible	28	7	35
Total	40	7	47

This table shows that most participants (28 students and all the teachers) chose “both” (participation and responsibility). Students’ class participation is crucial for any learning process to meet educational expectations. They can get involved in class activities through various ways such as individual, pair, group work etc. By making efforts, a student’s participation can be one of the ways for being responsible of one’s learning.

Table 3. Purposes of homework

purposes of homework	student	teacher	Total
to involve parents	7	3	10
to show the students' progress	31	4	35

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others	2	7	2
Total	40	7	47

Parental involvement is one of the key factors impacting students' academic progress and achievement. This table gives the participants to prioritize one of these purposes (either parental involvement or students' progress). 35 out of 47 participants pointed out "to show the students' progress" while 10 ticked "to involve parents". At last, by selecting "others", two students indicated that the purpose of homework was to please parents.

Section B: Needs for homework

Table 4. Frequency of homework

Frequency of homework per week	student	teacher	Total
twice	10	6	16
three times	15	1	16
four times	13		13
more than four times	2		2
Total	40	7	47

Determining a reasonable frequency of homework is one of the indispensable aspects to avoid an overload which may lead a learner and even his/her family to stress. This table shows that 32 out of 40 students and all the teachers (7) recognized the moderate frequency to be "twice" or "three time" per week. 15 other participants thought that it may reach four times or more.

Table 5. Homework amount of time

Amount of time per assignment	student	teacher	Total
10 to 20 minutes	3		3
25 to 35 minutes	4	6	10
40 to 55 minutes	2	1	3
more than 55 minutes	31		31
Total	40	7	47

Normally, the more time is allocated to learners, the more they feel at ease in completing assignment tasks. In fact, this table shows that 6 out of 7 teachers thought that 25 through 35 minutes could be enough to finish the mostly given assignments whereas 31 out of 40 students believed that it might take more than 55 minutes. Therefore, the table shows that students need 20 minutes more to complete an assigned task. Also, the table displays the difficulties that students face when dealing with given tasks.

Table 6. Homework tasks

Homework tasks	student	teacher	Total
fill-in-the-gaps	6	1	7
reading-based tasks	10	1	11
both filling gaps & reading tasks	24	5	29
Total	40	7	47

Reading-based task may consist of reading a passage, and executing tasks such as explaining vocabulary words, answering comprehension questions among others. Fill-in-the-gaps may refer to the fact that learners have to fill blanks within sentences with appropriate words or phrases. Fill-in-the-gaps seems easy to learners, but it requires a certain mastery of the taught material. Even though, reading a text and answering related questions remains a challenging exercise, it leads to acquisition of deeper knowledge and understanding of the language. According to the table above, 11 respondents including that of one teacher marked "reading-based tasks" whereas "fill-in-the gap" received only 7. Also, it is encouraging to see that teachers were backed by 24 students for

“both listening & MCQ”. In fact, it is less difficult for learners to read a given text, and fill gaps instead of answering questions by making full sentences.

Table 7. Homework tasks

Homework tasks	student	teacher	Total
listening task	1		1
MCQ	33	4	37
both listening & MCQ	6	3	9
Total	40	7	47

. In this table, only one student selected “listening tasks” whereas 37 out of 47 participants including 4 teachers marked “MCQ”. Students prioritize “MCQ” because it looks like a simple task (just choosing an answer); yet it is sometimes hard because it requires the understanding, or even the mastery of the taught material. The table confirms the views that listening tasks are less used in our secondary school classroom practices.

Table 8. Homework tasks

Homework tasks	student	teacher	Total
matching tasks	20	3	23
writing paragraphs	8	2	10
both matching task & writing	12	2	14
Total	40	7	47

The table above shows that “matching task” received the best score of 3 teachers backed by 20 students whereas writing had only 10 voices including that of 2 teachers, and 14 other voices were for “both matching tasks and writing”. Matching seems to be simple in its procedure, but it may remain more complex for low achieving students and those devoting less time on studies, for it demands the mastery of the concerned course. With regard to writing, it can be an advanced exercise for higher level students.

Table 9. Homework preferred tasks

Homework preferred tasks	student	teacher	Total
Translation Fr-En/En-Fr	28	3	31
Video-based tasks	5	3	8
Both translation & video-based tasks	7	1	8
Total	40	7	47

In this table, 31 out of 47 checks including those of 3 teachers prioritized French-English translation instead of video-based tasks which recorded only 8. Also, 8 respondents chose “both” which includes the use of video for innovational purpose. Translation is a rendering from one language to another by converting the meaning of written message whereas video-based tasks can be defined as one of the components of listening classes. For example, after watching a video clip, learners are supposed to either answer comprehension questions, to transcribe the watched material or write a summary. This exercise is rarely used in our middle and high schools.

Table 10. Homework equipment

Homework equipment 1	student	teacher	Total
computers			
tab - bk - ch - bb	32	5	37
all	8	2	10
Total	40	7	47

In this table, the word “computer” is used to represent ICT (Information and Communication Technologies). Then, “tab-bk-ch-bb” are used to represent respectively tables, books, chairs, and blackboard. Therefore, “all” is used to put together both the mentioned ICTs and facilities. Most participants (5 teachers backed by 32 students) marked “tab-bk-ch-bb” considered as common facilities. Surprisingly, nobody chose “computer”. This shows that ICTs are not used in our middle and high schools. However, choosing “all” lets us suppose that there is an expectation for the future full integration of ICTs.

Table 11. Homework equipment

Homework equipment 1	student	teacher	Total
computers			
tab - bk - ch - bb	32	5	37
all	8	2	10
Total	40	7	47

In this table, the word “computer” is used to represent ICT (Information and Communication Technologies). Then, “tab-bk-ch-bb” are used to represent respectively tables, books, chairs, and blackboard. Therefore, “all” is used to put together both the mentioned ICTs and facilities. Most participants (5 teachers backed by 32 students) marked “tab-bk-ch-bb” considered as common facilities. Surprisingly, nobody chose “computer”. This shows that ICTs are not used in our middle and high schools. However, choosing “all” lets us suppose that there is an expectation for the future full integration of ICTs.

Table 12. Homework degree of choice

Homework degree of choice	student	teacher	Total
mandatory	30	6	36
optional	2		2
either mandatory or optional	8	1	9
Total	40	7	47

In this table, 36 participants including 6 teachers thought that assignments need be mandatory. Assignments are rarely optional; that is probably why only 2 students marked it “optional”.It can be a sign of rigor to let students know that the completion of assignment is compulsory. Nevertheless, a teacher may alternate mandatory and optional assignments now and then. Also, some teachers may decide to let questions be optional within a mandatory assignment. This may let low achievers get motivated and committed to improve their learning and meet their interests. Selecting “ether mandatory or optional” refers to hope requiring teachers to be innovative and let assignments be optional from time to time. This is to help learners meet their needs because not all of them share the same pace in the learning process.

Table 13. Degree of individualization

Degree of individualization	student	teacher	Total
group work	6	3	9
individual work	15	3	18
either group or individual work	19	1	20
Total	40	7	47

This table obviously prioritizes individual work with 18 voices including those of 3 teachers while “group work” scored only 9. “Either group or individual work” recorded the best score of 20. However, group work can be more beneficial for it allows exchanges among members who are supposed to come up with useful contributions. A teacher is supposed to take into account at least the level and the ability of the learners when setting assignment tasks. Likely, tasks given to high achievers may be different to those assigned to low achievers in terms of difficulty. Therefore, assigning individual, pair, or group work need be related to these mentioned variables.

Table 14. Homework completion deadline

Completion deadline	student	teacher	Total
after 24 hours	13	2	15
after 48 hours	14	3	17
after 72 hours	11	2	13
after 1 week	2		2
Total	40	7	47

A successful completion depends on factors such as the level of students, amount of time (frequency per week & duration per assignment), purposes assigned to homework, etc. However, allocating one or two days seems to be enough. The table above illustrates the case since the idea was supported by 32 students and 5 teachers. 2 teachers backed by 13 students hope to have an expansion of the deadline from 3 to 7 days.

Table 15. Community involvement

Community involvement	student	teacher	Total
Parents	1		1
Siblings	10		10
Tutor	10		10
All	19	7	26
Total	40	7	47

In our community, parental involvement in homework completion is less effective. As indicated by 10 students' voices in the table above, an educated family is an opportunity for exchange and learning. Further, other 10 respondents show that parents mostly allow tutors to supervise their children. Also, 26 participants including all teachers selected "all". This may show that each knowledgeable family member should contribute to a successful homework completion.

Section C: Attitudes toward homework

Table 16. Attitudes toward homework

Attitudes toward homework	student	teacher	Total
easy	4	6	10
very easy	6		6
hard	27	1	28
very hard	3		3
Total	40	7	47

This table displays an alarming opposition between teachers and students. In fact, when 6 out of 7 teachers thought the assigned tasks are easy ones, the majority of students (30 out of 40) believed that they were rather hard to complete. This can be explained in many ways. Nevertheless, the efforts toward any learning depend on the ability, interests and aims that individuals expect to meet.

Table 17. Attitudes toward homework

Attitudes toward homework	student	teacher	Total
disturbed	7		7
motivated	12	7	19

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nothing	21		21
Total	40	7	47

Through this table, all teachers and 12 students admitted that homework assignments are planned not only to keep learners busy but also to motivate learning progress and academic achievement. Then, there were 21 students who maintained neutral state by marking “nothing”. 7 other students get disturbed once homework is assigned. However, learners should bear in mind that the backbone of any community development relies on hardworking which may involve homework as a learner’s job.

Table 18. Homework feedback

Homework feedback	student	teacher	Total
exactitude of work	4	1	5
completeness of work both exactitude & completeness	36	6	42
Total	40	7	47

According to this table, 42 out of the 47 participants believed that both correctness and completeness are inseparable. While “correctness” received 5 checks, no respondent chose “completeness”. “Completeness” only is not important without “correctness”.

4.2. Interview findings:

This part of the study aims at interpreting the interviewees’ responses per question.

-Is homework fundamental in the students' learning process?

Homework reinforces the learning of material that had already been presented in class (Cooper, 1994) quoted by Wallinger (2000). In alignment to the mentioned statement, the head teacher, talking about the importance of homework replied with the following words: “... It is very important because it has a positive effect in the students' cognitive development and learning process. By completing homework, students deepen their knowledge as well as obtaining good grades.” Yet, to answer the same question, the principal of CES/RD 1 said, “Homework is so fundamental in the students' learning process. A teacher can assign homework because students are supposed to do at least one or more extension exercises to further their knowledge through research.” Homework is a key topic of interest in foreign language teaching and learning since it enables learners better their English (Okaz & Sabuncuoglu, 2022). The interviewed EFL adviser backed this idea as he thinks that homework allows learners to deepen their knowledge by making further research.

- What should be the purposes of homework?

According to the ELT adviser, “Socially, the students have the opportunities to meet others and request a help. Another advantage of homework is that the students are free to check into dictionaries or on internet to get more information.” Turkoglu et al. (2007) referred by Ogur et al. (2022), homework is used to offer an opportunity to students to apply their new knowledge or reinforce, repeat, and review their skills. It can be used to prepare the student to acquire basic knowledge of the next lessons. Moreover, homework lets students develop personal characteristics such as independence and self-discipline so that they can plan their time effectively, keep learning even during extracurricular time, and develop regular study habit. Homework, then, allows students to create a study style, increase creativity and good feelings which contribute to the socialization.

- Which tasks should be assigned by EFL teachers?

The ELT adviser replied with the following words: “Several kinds of tasks can be assigned by ELT teachers depending on what has been taught, or planned for the coming class. A task can be about reading, grammar, vocabulary, etc. These tasks can serve as an expansion which allows students to better their knowledge on a specific taught or coming material.” In alignment to this answer, Okaz & Sabuncuoglu (2022) believed that a teacher can assign a task to let learners develop skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing). They may focus on specific tasks such as grammar worksheets, vocabulary, extensive reading, reading comprehension, etc. and assign exercises such as right or wrong, completing past exam papers, writing diaries, and tasks from textbooks.

- What should be the frequency of homework?

Homework enables learners to build a good study habit. To acquire this quality, teachers should assign homework regularly to students. Talking about homework frequency, the ELT adviser said: “The frequency of homework depends on the teacher’s purposes that can be for practicing or preparation of something necessary. It also depends on the amount of the skill area; Therefore, a teacher may decide whether his students may need twice, three times, or more to improve their learning.”

- How do you help your children complete their homework?

The stakeholder in CES/RD 1 stated: “We do not directly complete the homework to our children. Sometimes, we seek for a tutor who can help them complete their homework, sometimes, we help them ourselves.” However, the principal added that supervising children is related to the availability of parents: “As a parent of pupils, I don’t have much time to help them directly, but I commit a tutor to support them. Sometimes, when I find a free time, I get involved to supervise them dealing with a given assignment.” This goes in line with Cooper’s thought (2006) who contended that homework has other purposes such as establishing parent-child/parent-teacher communication, peer interaction, or fulfilling directives from school. Furthermore, regarding homework completion, parent-child communication can refer to parental involvement which can be described as direct participation, providing guidelines, supervising homework.

What are your suggestions about homework?

In terms of effectiveness of homework, the head teacher said: “Teachers should assign homework because it helps students practice and prepare for the coming class. It also helps them get good grades. Homework has also the advantage to maintain students in the framework of their studies even during non-school hours. So, when teachers assign students homework, they will spend enough time on their studies instead of playing games, watching TV, fruitless walks, etc.”

- *What do you do to let teachers understand the importance of homework?*

To point at the importance of homework, the principal of CES/RD 1 said:

“As usual, we draw teachers’ attention on the importance of monitoring the work that has been done in class. In other words, any lesson taught in class should normally be accompanied by a homework assignment that will allow students to assimilate the course content. By sensitizing teachers to set homework, we allow parents, siblings and relatives to fully get involved in the student's learning process.”

- *Should teachers assign homework as a punishment?*

The principal of CES/RD 1 said: “For these teachers who consider homework as punishment, I will not say directly that it's bad, but the main idea is to give this in the form of assistance to students so that they can better understand the course that has been delivered in class.” He believed that the homework must be a follow-up and non-punishment tool. He added that:

“Homework can be a punishment for those who neglect their duties and that if some students do not complete the homework, the teacher can give them a second chance. But if a student refuses to do it, the homework can then be viewed as a punishment. However, if the teacher usually uses homework as a punishment tool, the student may lose interest in learning. In short, the teacher must bring the student to understand the importance of homework.”

- *What do students need to complete their homework?*

The principal asserted:

“Responsible parents must seriously take the success of their children’s studies. For that reason, they should provide their children with the minimum facilities such as blackboard, notebooks, manuals and a good learning environment. In short, the parents have to be ready on challenging needs imposed by homework.”

- *What are your suggestions about homework?*

The educational district is supposed to come up with policy, and permit principals to schedule homework activities to avoid overload which may affect learners psychologically and physically. That was the reason why the principal said:

“Our suggestions for educational experts are to draw the teachers’ attention on the importance of homework. They should explain to the teachers that homework is a very vital tool in the learning process. We also advise them to involve the UPs (Unités Pédagogiques) leaders who should not only show the importance of giving homework at the end of the class sessions, but also to check and correct it in class.”

Homework should also be explained to the students and once they are assigned a homework task, the teacher should provide them with all necessary guidelines about completion procedure. To support this idea, the ELT adviser said:

“My suggestions go toward EFL teachers who should make sure that they give students the basis on the topic that the homework will deal with because if the topic is not clear in their mind, it will be very difficult for them to explain it to someone in order to get information. So, to avoid this misunderstanding, teachers should give and explain the key elements about the topic and tell the students what they expect from them. Therefore, they should give the students enough time to do further research on the topic, and set a deadline to complete the work and give them feedback afterwards.”

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Homework is part of the teaching/learning process. Therefore, teachers, parents, students, school administrators, decision makers and all the stakeholders should be aware of their respective roles and fulfill them in order to enhance the English education in Niger. Each of them should be constantly reminded of their respective responsibility in order to reach the educational goals assigned to homework. As for the ICTs which are supposed to be fully incorporated in the Nigerien educational system in the upcoming years, they should be accelerated. Also, more support should come generally from group work, siblings, parents and tutors’ supervision.

CONCLUSION

As an instructional technique, the study showed that homework may be influenced by several factors such as the teacher's experience and his training as well as the parents' socio-economic status. It is also affected by community involvement, students' awareness, motivation, and responsibility about their own learning. Regarding attitude toward learning, it was found that learners complained about the difficulty of homework. In fact, most learners found that tasks were mostly hard to complete due to the amount of time spent on them, the difficulty level and the workload. Therefore, their motivation was deeply affected. The study also reveals that learners prioritized options such as filling blanks, matching words, and multiple-choice assignments, including translation from English to French, and vice versa. Finally, the research discloses that homework does play an important role in students' academic performance in the 5th District of Niamey despite their negligence about it. Stakeholders', ELT advisers' and teachers' perceptions of homework were generally favorable to homework, but more commitment is needed to help fulfil the purposes of homework and enhance the English education in Niger in general and in the 5th district of Niamey in particular.

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