
Synthesis

Homework (Secondary)ⁱ

Moderate impact for very low cost, based on limited evidence



+5

Homework refers to tasks given to pupils by their teachers to be completed outside of usual lessons. Common homework activities in secondary schools include completing tasks assigned in lessons, preparing for tasks in future lessons, routine coursework, and revision for tests and examinations. Our definition also includes activities such as 'homework clubs' where pupils have the opportunity to complete homework in school but outside normal school hours, and 'flipped learning' models, where pupils prepare at home for classroom discussion and application tasks.

How effective is it?

The evidence shows that the impact of homework, on average, is five months' additional progress. However, beneath this average there is a wide variation in potential impact, suggesting that how homework is set is likely to be very important.



There is some evidence that homework is most effective when used as a short and focused intervention

There is some evidence that homework is most effective when used as a short and focused intervention (e.g. in the form of a project or specific target connected with a particular element of learning) with some exceptional studies showing up to eight additional months' positive impact on attainment. Benefits are likely to be more modest, up to two to three months' progress on average, if homework is more routinely set (e.g. learning vocabulary or completing practice tasks in mathematics every day).

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

Some studies indicate that there may be an optimum amount of homework of between one and two hours per school day (slightly longer for older pupils), with effects diminishing as the time that students spend on homework increases.

Latin American evidenceⁱⁱ

Most of the empirical studies carried out in Latin America and the Caribbean on homework consider the strategies students use, as well as the level of motivation they have in relation to homework. Therefore, the objective of many studies tends to relate more to understanding how homework is conceived, than to exploring its effects on learning. Other approaches also try to associate the student's homework with the role of the family.

In general, studies about this type of intervention in the region are correlational and descriptive. While most of the evidence refers to how homework is conceived, there are some studies that focus on the impact of this type of intervention on students' learning. These results show that homework in Math and Reading are related to improvements in students' academic achievement. However, there are some considerations to take into account; performance tends to be higher when homework is reviewed in the classroom and also when students with lower performance receive homework adapted to their needs.

Although studies in the region tend to show that homework is beneficial, more research in the region is needed to analyse not only the costs associated with this intervention, but also teachers' time needed to prepare homework, review it in class and provide proper feedback. Research using more sophisticated methodological approaches is also needed to establish which homework interventions actually improve learning outcomes.

How secure is the evidence?

Homework has been extensively researched. There is a relatively consistent picture that pupils in schools which give more homework perform better. However, there are only a small number of studies which have investigated whether this relationship is due to the homework itself, rather than other school factors. These studies compare classes where homework is introduced to similar classes where homework is not given. They tend to show that homework can be beneficial, but this finding is less secure than the first, because of the smaller number of studies and the quality of the evidence.

What are the costs?

There are few costs associated with homework, though there are implications for staff time for preparation and marking. Overall costs are estimated as very low.

What should I consider?

Before you implement this strategy in your learning environment, consider the following:

1. Planned and focused activities are more beneficial than homework which is more regular but may be routine or not linked with what is being learned in class.
2. The broader evidence suggests that homework should not be used as a punishment or penalty for poor performance.
3. A variety of tasks with different levels of challenge is likely to be beneficial.
4. The broader evidence suggests that the quality of homework is more important than the quantity. Pupils should receive specific and timely feedback on homework.
5. Have you made the purpose of homework clear to children (e.g. to increase a specific area of knowledge, or fluency in a particular area)?

ⁱ **Copyright** © [2016] The Education Endowment Foundation. All rights reserved.

ⁱⁱ **Some rights reserved.** This text is available under a Creative Commons 4.0 Attribution - NonCommercial - Share Alike license. This means that it is possible to copy, distribute, and make derivative works of the content provided that its original authors are credited. The commercial use of the content is not allowed. In case of making derivative works (such as a translation, for example), you must use an identical license for them. The full text of this license can be found at creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/deed.es