

Art. # 1462, 10 pages, <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v38n1a1462>**Homework policy review: A case study of a public school in the Western Cape Province** **Verbra Pfeiffer**Curriculum Studies Department, Faculty of Education, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa
vpfeiffer@sun.ac.za

There are three things to remember about education. The first one is motivation. The second one is motivation. The third one is motivation.
– Terrell H. Bell (cited in Covington, 2000:171)

Abstract

A key concern today is the question of homework in our nation's public schools. In this study, an investigation was conducted with the first no-homework policy, which has been introduced in one of the primary schools in the Western Cape. This study seeks to determine whether a no-homework policy will validate a positive or negative effect on school children and also intended to determine whether a no-homework policy would be beneficial to South African schools. An interpretive approach to a case study was in place, where an interview was conducted with teachers and the head of curriculum. This case study considered replacement exercises executed at the school to compensate for the homework no longer given to the learners. This study found that no homework has left a more positive effect on learners. However, this study argues that no homework will be a disadvantage in the future. To conclude, this study sought motivating factors that influence learners in becoming successful. Finally, this study proposes that some form of homework ought to be in place in order to help the learner in many aspects of their future life.

Keywords: homework policy; interpretive approach; motivation; negative effect; positive effect; replacement exercises

Introduction

“Homework” is generally defined as schoolwork brought home (Corno, 1996:27). However, if a homework policy is discussed, it is normally done in general terms, and different types of homework assignments are lumped together under the same policy (Lee & Pruitt, 1979). The Forum of Educational Organisation Leaders also reviewed this trend, recommending that teachers require a minimum of one hour of homework daily from elementary learners and at least two hours from high school learners (Roderique, Polloway, Cumblad, Epstein & Bursuck, 1994; Strother, 1984). The question thus remains, “has homework been proven to have beneficial effects on academic achievement (Walberg, Paschal & Weinstein, 1985) or do these effects remain equivocal or unsubstantiated?” (Check & Ziebell, 1980; Heller, Spooner, Anderson & Mims, 1988). The rationale for this study was that due to time constraints (notional hours for each learning area/subject), there is a need for teachers to assign homework. The assigned work is to consolidate what was taught during the class or to provide some enrichment tasks for learners.

South Africa, being a developing country, has lots of resource disparity, which leads to differences in our resources. One of these differences is our unstable family structures, where either one or both parents are not present. This can contribute to our children not receiving the home support that they need (Pfeiffer, 2014). When considering South Africa from an economic and developmental context, emphasis is placed on the unique context of our country and its socio-economic resources in our schools, where centrally developed policies like a no-homework policy can present problems (Felix, Dornbrack & Scheckle, 2008). A critical review of such a policy is an important perspective to include in research as it pertains to schooling.

It is important that teachers be given guidelines for prescribing and utilising homework as a teaching tool. While this may be true, this teaching tool has been removed from the teacher's guidelines for the Western Cape school on which this study is based. According to the provincial guidelines document of 2005, which serves as a framework for schools on homework supplied by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED, 2005), homework is managed effectively with thorough, co-ordinated planning, guidance and control by all role players. In addition, it should not be a burden for the learner, the educator or the parents. The WCED's (2005) rationale for the homework is that homework can strengthen the link between home and school by involving parents in a meaningful way in their children's education (Felix et al., 2008). There are important considerations that the WCED (2005) offers, including that the intention of homework should be to reinforce and extend classroom learning, to consolidate basic skills and knowledge, and ultimately to extend to developing a routine of independent home study. Learner's home responsibilities and extra-curricular activities ought to be taken into account when planning homework tasks, where learners ought to take responsibility for the completion of their homework tasks, and ought to be motivated and supported by their parents (Singh, Mbokodi & Msila, 2004).

The Department does suggest that a school-wide homework policy developed on the basis of effective school management ought to be implemented, and they do recommend that schools develop a homework policy by consulting with all the relevant role players by regularly monitoring the policy and by the principal and staff annually reviewing it. According to the WCED (2005), the homework policy should include the following:

purpose of the policy; goals and objectives; recommended time for each grade; types of tasks for each grade; monitoring and evaluation procedures; the role of the parents; the role of the other role players, e.g. the principal, the educator, the learner, the parents and the school governing body (SGB); and procedures and instructions to parents if learners do not cope with homework. Finally, the WCED (2005) suggests that all schools ought to strive to administer homework at a reasonable and appropriate level, so that it is not too difficult, too easy, too confusing, or too boring for the learners. Educators in different subject areas must ensure that homework tasks and other assignments are carefully co-ordinated so as to avoid overloading learners with tasks. Homework demands should not represent a disproportionate burden for children and parents, especially not for the poor and the disadvantaged (Felix et al., 2008). In this study, I considered other teaching tools that have replaced the no-homework approach, since the learners are no longer receiving homework.

The principal of this school (where data was collected) appears to be a strong no-homework promoter and believes that the home-work practices of the school impacts the academic performance of the learners negatively (Meyer, 2016). Homework has been used as a way to check what learners know and understand from what they have been taught in class. The purpose of this research is to identify the meanings that emerge under the no-homework policy experiences and to examine previous theory and research on achievement motivation.

Literature Review

Purpose of homework

Epstein (1988:3) believed that the purpose of homework is: a) to practice skills; b) to increase the learning experience; c) to increase responsibility, self-confidence, and time management; d) to establish and maintain communication between schools and parents; e) to comply with districts' mandates about homework; f) to inform parents about activities in the school and the classroom; and g) to maintain classroom policies. In light of this, Cooper and Valentine (2001) view homework as having positive effects by enhancing retention, increasing the understanding of course material, increasing study skills, increasing positive attitudes toward school, increasing beliefs about the importance of learning outside the classroom, increasing independence and responsibility, and facilitating parental involvement and appreciation of the children's school-related work.

It is possible that sometimes the purpose of homework may be lacking from the view of learners and parents, and once this is clarified or understood, the importance of homework as a teaching tool should be acknowledged. Following

this logic, there are different purposes of homework at different grade levels which is mentioned by Cooper (2007:92):

- For learners in the earliest grades, it should foster positive attitudes, habits and character traits; permit appropriate parent involvement; and reinforce learning of simple skills introduced in class.
- For learners in upper elementary grades, it should play a more direct role in fostering improved school achievement.
- For learners in the 6th Grade and beyond, it should play an important role in improving standardised test scores and grades.

In addition, reasons given by teachers for assigning homework include, 'to help students practice skills,' to encourage students to develop good work habits,' to motivate students to learn' or simply 'to help students prepare for examinations' (Maharaj-Sharma & Sharma, 2016:146; Pytel, 2007). It is still unclear as to whether the intended outcomes are made known to students as well as whether these outcomes are being truly achieved.

Defining homework as tasks assigned

Focus has mainly been on the academic benefits of homework in extant research. The advantages behind the motivation associated with this ordinary daily experience has not been overlooked (Bempechat, 2004; Bempechat, Li, Neier, Gillis & Holloway, 2011; Corno, 2004). Homework can be defined as tasks assigned to learners by schoolteachers that are meant to be carried out during non-instructional time (Bembenutty, 2011; Bempechat et al., 2011). That said, it appears that the national discussions on homework reflects strain on how homework is perceived, with scholars arguing that homework is a burden for children and parents, family time has declined, and undermining of learning interest (Bempechat et al., 2011; Kohn, 2006; Kralovec & Buell, 2000). In addition, a few landmark studies have suggested that homework does impact upon family life, in some cases in a negative way (Dudley-Marling, 2003; Xu & Corno, 1998); yet in general, it is positively associated with academic achievement (Carmichael & MacDonald, 2016; Cooper, Robinson & Patall, 2006). However, in this study, it has come to my attention that the school viewed homework as being burdensome for the parents. These are aspects that I will address in this article.

There appears to be disagreements at play, where researchers share an understanding that appropriate development and the support of homework tasks strengthens academic achievement, particularly in senior primary school and high school (Bempechat et al., 2001; Cooper et al., 2006; Keith, Diamond-Hallam & Fine, 2004; Trautwein, 2007). There is an increase in research showing that there is evidence that the practice of homework can serve to promote "adaptive achievement-related beliefs, motivational skills,

including positive self-efficacy, self-regulation and academic delay of gratification” (Bembenutty, 2009; Bembenutty & Zimmerman, 2003; Bempechat et al., 2011:252; Kitsantas & Zimmerman, 2009; Pomerantz, Ng & Wang, 2006; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2005).

Homework motivation

In a study conducted by Trautwein, Lüdtke, Kastens and Köller (2006:1095), an applied expectancy-value theory was in play to demonstrate that expectancy for success, utility, and cost value are centrally implicated in learners’ homework behaviour. Researchers argue that there is achievement through aspects of homework assignments (e.g. teacher monitors the completion of homework and quality of tasks); learner characteristics (e.g. conscientiousness and cognitive ability); and influence of parents (e.g. expectancy and assistance) (Bempechat et al., 2011:255; Trautwein et al., 2006). In turn it has been suggested that these above-mentioned achievements ought to be related to homework motivation, which ought to be related to homework behaviour (effort and time) and, ultimately, academic achievement (Trautwein et al., 2006). With this research, Trautwein and his colleagues found that when students made an effort in their homework they were motivated to complete their homework. In my study, considering where no homework is given to the learners, I was curious to investigate how the learners’ characteristics are monitored since they are no longer engaged in homework.

It has been researched that among older learners the learner motivation for school tasks declines (Hong, Peng & Rowell, 2009; Hong, Wan & Peng, 2011; Regueiro, Suárez, Valle, Núñez & Rosário, 2015; Wigfield, Eccles, Yoon, Harold, Arbretton, Freedman-Doan & Blumenfeld, 1997). Negative attitudes toward homework are therefore frequently observed in older learners, and the decrease in their motivation to complete homework does not seem to be surprising (Good & Brophy, 2003; Hong et al., 2011; Warton, 2001). On the other hand, it has been reported that a good portion of middle and high school learners think that homework is necessary and it helps them develop academic skills and increase their achievement (Xu, 2005). In view of this, while homework is a ubiquitous part of education and in many other educational systems, critics have challenged its role and merit in student achievement (Charles, 2013; Maltese, Tai & Fan, 2012). In this paper, I will consider the views given on how the learners reacted and how they viewed the no-homework policy that has been introduced.

Rethinking the value and format of homework

Researchers like Kralovec and Buell (2000) assert that homework in the American culture overvalues work to the detriment of personal and family wellbeing. Their study focussed on the harm to economically disadvantaged learners who were penalised because their environments often made it almost impossible to complete assignments at home (Marzano & Pickering, 2007:3). Similarly, Bennett and Kalish (2006) have criticised the quantity and quality of homework. They found that too much homework affected the learners’ health and family time and that the teachers were not well-trained in assigning homework (Marzano & Pickering, 2007:3). Bennett and Kalish (2006) suggest that individuals and parents ought to insist that teachers give less homework, design more valuable assignments, and avoid homework altogether over breaks and holidays.

Kohn (2006) found that research fails to demonstrate the effectiveness of homework effectiveness as an instructional tool. Teachers should only assign homework that is “beneficial” to the learner (Kohn, 2006:166). Kohn (2006:166), proposes activities where learners can participate, and that they involve activities that are appropriate for the home, such as performing an experiment in the kitchen, cooking, doing crossword puzzles with the family, watching good TV shows, or reading. Finally, Kohn (2006:166) urged teachers to involve learners in deciding what homework, and how much, they should do. In light of this, I agree with Kohn that there is logic to only assign homework to the learners that they can benefit from and not assign homework for the mere sake of fulfilling policy.

Methodology

This case study is an interpretive form of research producing qualitative data, by way of an interview with a Grade Four teacher, Grade Seven teacher and the head of curriculum. Only one individual interview was conducted with my participants. In other words, I wanted to know the reasoning behind the introduction of a no-homework practice.

The site of analysis is a primary school in the Western Cape Province, which is among the first schools in South Africa to have introduced a no-homework policy. At present, the no-homework policy is a trial run at the school, and I have taken the liberty to follow this trial and determine the outcome of this policy, which has been introduced recently. This study elaborates on previous research conducted by other researchers, which I considered in determining the importance of homework. I focused on determining why a no-homework policy was introduced at the school and to conceptualise how the homework tasks have been replaced.

Research Questions

- Why was a no-homework policy introduced?
- How will the learner benefit from the no-homework policy?
- Should a no-homework policy exist in our schools?

Instead of asking the students about the effectiveness of a no-homework policy, my emic approach allowed me to explore the characteristics of the no-homework policy from the teachers' perspective. The informal and semi-structured interview took place with the head of curriculum and the teachers. The interview was used to probe teachers' strategies at the school and the participants were informed that I am only interested in the no-homework policy that was introduced in the school in 2015. The participants were made aware that I am interested in their ideas and experiences regarding the no-homework policy. I had explained to the participants that their answers are confidential and that their answers will not be shared with the parents. I was interested in the recall of the participants and their willingness to identify the components of information that contributed to the themes of the phenomenon with reference to the lived experiences of human beings (Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub, 1996). What I am implying here is that I was interested to hear the views of my participants on the no-homework policy and the effect it is having on them and the learners. An inductive analysis procedure was in place to analyse and interpret the data. This procedure involved coding, categorising into themes, and determining relationships among the themes (Huberman & Miles, 1994; Litchman, 2013). I used this method to determine the relationships among the themes and attempted to find the specific trends, patterns, and consistencies among any outstanding factors that emerged (Saam & Jeong, 2013:121). Initial reliability was ensured by member checking; I discussed and confirmed responses and my understanding of the responses with participants at the interview stage. Reliability was in place with the analysis of my data as I compared my data to what other researchers have discovered on homework and possible homework practices that will not disadvantage a child mentally and emotionally.

An ethical clearance application has been approved by Stellenbosch University to conduct this research. Furthermore, a letter of ethical clearance was supplied by the Western Cape Education Department.

Results

Using an inductive analysis procedure to categorise my data into themes, I was able to identify connections among the themes, and I attempted to see if there were any trends, patterns, and consistencies among the significant factors that emerged, as mentioned earlier. The interview data was transcribed, and I reviewed the transcriptions

before the data was coded and themed (Bailey, 2007). It should be noted that I have not included all the answers given by the teachers and the head of curriculum, due to wording restriction and consideration of relevance to the research. I will now consider the answers given by the teachers and the head of curriculum (HOC) on the interview questions. The identity of the respective respondents are kept confidential, and for the sake of authenticity their responses are transcribed verbatim.

- 1) Why have you decided to introduce the no-homework policy at the school?
 - The headmaster visited lots of conferences overseas. The headmaster discovered that in Finland and America, they have a no-homework policy.
 - The majority of the parents work till late and the children are waiting until 6pm for the parents to collect them at school. When the kids come home late in the evening, kids are in an emotional state. Parents are teaching their kids the wrong things. Parents are not helping the child.
 - Parents complained because they were struggling to teach their kids the homework given and they are not trained to teach. Parents are teaching kids methods that the teacher is not teaching, thus homework was not beneficial.
 - This is a more sports-orientated school.
- 2) How did the parents react to this policy?
 - There were some negative responses – about 10 percent.
 - Mainly, positive input from parents.
 - As a school, we were nervous when we conveyed this message to the parents.
 - We received emails from parents stating “home is not a battle zone.”
 - Saw change in the children because there was less stress and anxiety in their homes.
- 3) Do you see any challenges with this new policy?
 - There are multiple ways of teaching.
 - Teachers had to alter their teaching.
 - Don't give mass quantity teaching but rather ensure quality teaching.
 - Teachers had to make sure their planning is intact.
 - Teachers worked towards goal and what output is expected.
- 4) What are some of the positive outcomes of this policy thus far?
 - Grade Six boys did not love reading. Because they had to read for 20 minutes in place of homework every day, the students had now started a book club at school.
 - Get a lot of support structure. For example, receiving input from their own high school.
 - There is no decline in results. Paid close attention to results to see if policy has been affecting results thus far.
 - Children are sleeping better. Grade Sevens are less exhausted. Lots of management in class.
 - In classroom lots of motivation. Kids know what's happening the next day. Everything done in class is independent learning.
 - More family time, stress off parents and learners. Reading is bonding time. Families are relaxed and read together.

- 5) How will the learners cope at high school when they have to do homework?
 - Waiting to hear from high schools. Parents whose child is now in high school are quick to give feedback that is “well-developed.”
 - The learners are taught to meet deadlines.
 - Kids are prepared for assessment. Do revision. Peer teaching and teacher teaching.
 - Homework doesn't make child independent. Even though they are in a group, they are independent.
 - They manage their time.
- 6) Would you like this policy to be introduced at other schools in South Africa?
 - Not sure if they can get that right. CAPS [Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements] is a problem – due to amount of work, teachers are struggling. Teachers are nervous about CAPS. There are schools that want to start the no-homework policy.
 - This policy affects the children emotionally. They are better off not having homework.

Results from the analysis of the head of curriculum and teachers revealed specific information regarding learners' and parents' views of the no-homework policy. The following are a few of the main themes emerging from the analysis:

- 1) Parents, teachers and learners perceive homework to be somewhat burdensome.
- 2) Learners were more relaxed.
- 3) Learners are reading more.
- 4) Learners had more free time to play more sports and do things that they enjoy.
- 5) 10% of the parents were not satisfied with the no-homework policy being introduced.

We can gather from the answers given by the participants that certain answers were rather biased, which I will discuss later. I found that there was no significant contribution to the homework condition, which I will consider in my discussion of the results. It appears that the no-homework policy has not made any independent or interactive contribution to the learners at this point, since it is still relatively new at the school.

Discussion

The research question related to the current study was to find out why a no-homework policy was introduced, identify whether a learner will benefit from no homework, and determine whether such a policy should be introduced in our schools. Contextualising the themes and findings that emerged from the current study in terms of the existing literature from educational research, certain implications were perceived and tentative conclusions were conceived (Saam & Jeong, 2013:122). The results of the present study provide some support for the theoretical framework given earlier. It appears that not only should it be proven that variation in homework time is fundamental to the explanation of differences in achievement associated with students' demographics or their educational histories; but the direction of these variations in achievement are linked to demographic and educational variables explaining differences in

homework practices and achievement independently (Bowd, Bowles & McKenzie, 2016). Although there is an overall difference between a homework and no-homework approach in the literature, we can see that from the answers supplied, a no-homework approach at the school seems to be favoured. One of the educators mentioned that the school is a sports school. We see that some more positive outcomes of the no-homework policy given by the educators are that the learners are emotionally a lot more stable and their family lives are going very well according to a response from one of the educators: “more family time, stress off parents and learners. Reading is bonding time, family is more relaxed and they read together. Parents saying that their home is no longer a battle field.” The educators claim that the learners are sleeping better. This response given by the educator is in coherence with what Marzano and Pickering (2007) mention in their study, as considered in the literature review.

We see that homework is replaced by learners reading 20 minutes a day. Reading is managed with a reading card, which parents sign. We also discover that the Grade Six boys have started a reading club. According to one of the educators, due to the no-homework policy, the learners appear to be reading more. In addition, the educator asserts that they also get to read about the latest news.

When asked why a no-homework policy was introduced at the school, the answer given was that the principal attended conferences in the United States and in Finland, both of which have a no-homework policy. It should be noted that in a small country like Finland, having a no-homework policy is possible because the schools are small enough for teachers to know every student. This means they are able to give every learner the attention they need (Hancock, 2011). If Finnish schools do provide homework to learners, it is under half an hour (Day, 2015). There is plenty of teacher interaction with learners in classes in Finland, as there are only about 12 learners per teacher (Ashton, 2013).

When it was announced in school to the learners and parents that a no-homework policy would be introduced, participants claimed that the parents and learners had a positive response, and that only 10% of parents had a negative feeling about this policy. The parents sent emails expressing the positive attitude to the no-homework policy introduced.

As seen in the data, it is important that the learner is able to present themselves in front of a class. Some of the responses given were: “oral practice in the classroom”; “teach the kids how to do orals in class”; “their focus is on how to present a good oral”; and “teach them to present properly and teach them to present a proper keynote.” In retrospect, being able to present is a very good

quality for the child, but it is not the only quality the child will need to survive in a tertiary institution.

Considering the answers provided by the participants, this policy never presented any real challenges, except that the teachers had to manage their time in covering the syllabus. When asked about whether they predict any challenges with the no-homework policy that had been introduced, no direct answer was given. My understanding of the answers given on this matter is that there are multiple ways of teaching and that the teacher has to alter their teaching in such a way that the teacher ought to ensure they provide quality teaching and not quantity teaching. This means that the only challenge for the teacher was their teaching style. Furthermore, they are working on the actual policy, which ought to be included on their website by the end of this year. This implies that the no-homework policy is no longer on trial according to the participant.

When asked how learners would cope at high school where they are given homework, once again there was no definite answer given by the participants. Some of the responses to how learners would cope at high school were: “waiting to hear from high school”; “kids are prepared for assessment”; “homework doesn’t make a child independent”; “even though they are in a group, they are independent”; and “they manage their time.” From the answers given, I believe that these are important factors that every child ought to learn. If they do not have homework, they will not develop skills of proper time management on their own. They may also fail to work independently on their own at home, where they might learn to come up with possible answers or solutions to a problem presented to them in their homework.

South Africa is, as noted, a developing country that continues to extend a great deal of resource disparity. One of these differences is unstable family structures, where either one or both parents are not present. This may contribute to our children not receiving the home support that they need. It does appear when referring to the data that the parents from this school seem to be a part of their children’s lives. However, this is not the reality for most of South Africa. As mentioned earlier, when considering South Africa in an economic and developmental context, emphasis is placed on the unique context of our country, specifically the socio-economic resources in our schools, where centrally developing policies like a no-homework policy can present problems. This leads to a critical review of such a policy as an important perspective to be included in research pertaining to schooling in South Africa. With this purpose in mind, homework practices should either reflect or contribute to students’ achievements in relation to their socioeconomic and cultural

background, which in turn ought to identify the demographic and other variables associated with students’ homework practices. This could be a useful tool in developing and targeting effective pedagogical strategies around homework (Bowd et al., 2016).

Despite different beliefs about and approaches to homework, I know that perceptions of teacher warmth and care are essential to learners’ engagement in school (Wentzel, 1997). When analysing the answers given by the participants, I do believe that the educators have the learners’ best interest at heart, because they are convinced that no homework is to the child’s advantage.

In contrast an interesting research-based homework guideline were created, which teachers could follow as given by Marzano and Pickering (2007:7–8):

- Assign purposeful homework. Legitimate purposes for homework include introducing new content, practicing a skill or process that learners can do independently, but not fluently, elaborating on information that has been addressed in class to deepen learners’ knowledge, and providing opportunities for learners to explore topics of their own interest.
- Design homework to maximise the chances that learners will complete it. For example, ensure that the homework is at the appropriate level of difficulty. Learners should be able to complete homework assignments independently with relatively high success rates, but they should still find the assignments challenging enough to be interesting.
- Involve parents in appropriate ways (for example as a sounding board to help learners summarise what they learned from the homework) without requiring parents to act as teachers or to police learners’ homework completion.
- Carefully monitor the amount of homework assigned so that it is appropriate to learners’ age levels and does not take too much time away from other home activities.

Teachers and parents need to focus on what homework means to learners. Corno (2000:539) argues that “if learners could be helped to view even some homework as closing critical gaps in their academic experience, they stand to see the value of injecting meaning into daily work.” Therefore, they are more likely to use self-regulatory strategies to do homework more engaging and interesting for themselves. Learners should also plan their time spent on preferred activities and homework on a weekly basis. In this way, they will realise that they still have opportunities for other attractive activities during the week, which means they will be less conflicted and side-tracked by thoughts of competing activities while doing daily homework, which usually results in them viewing homework tasks in a less favourable light (Núñez, Suárez, Cerezo, González-Pienda, Rosário, Mourão & Valle, 2015; Regueiro et al., 2015; Xu, 2008).

Conclusion

With regards to the importance of homework, it was surprising to learn that the Western Cape Education Department has not updated its homework policy since 2005. I believe that my findings revealed the complexity and nuance of my understanding of how teachers perceive and approach the no-homework policy. While there are advantages to not giving homework as presented in the literature review, I argue that homework has a legitimate place in our schools. Despite the obvious disparities, my most reasonable conclusion appears to be that homework is advantageous in terms of school achievement (Cooper, 1989). Ergo, I argue that when combined with the literature supporting the increased usage of homework as an instructional tool, it is apparent that learners will need to have the academic muscle to successfully complete homework. Furthermore, the commitment to homework logically requires the establishment of a clearly defined school policy that is explained to learners and parents (Roderique et al., 1994:481–482). The different approaches to homework that I observed cannot be viewed independently of the school context (Bempechat et al., 2011).

This study offered practices used by the teachers in the primary school that proved to be successful on the academic side of cognitive and emotional student performance, as well as the collegiality side among teachers, parents and learners (Saam & Jeong, 2013). When I view my data, I understand to some extent why a no-homework policy had been introduced at the school. I hope that my data presented is self-reported and hopefully not subject to misrepresentation. The prominent contributing factors of the no-homework practice that were identified were: “learners were sleeping better”; “less family battles at home”; “learners were happier; and motivation of not doing homework, perception about homework.” These findings were discussed for their theoretical and practical applicability.

I acknowledge that this study on the practice of no homework has its limitations. This current study was not a typical research study that attempted to explain in detail the “relationship between variables or to measure the magnitude of treatment effects in an impersonal and quantitative scientific way” (Saam & Jeong, 2013:124). This study ought to be viewed with the goal of developing a new way of evaluating homework practices in a personal, contextualised, and naturalistic way. I was more interested in the wealth of information I gathered from the teachers and the head of curriculum than the ability to generalise the current findings to other studies, or to test my study against specific hypotheses driven by particular theories of education. With this in

mind, I did not examine a particular theory based on literature on homework. This current study ought not be viewed as non-scientific, but rather the construction of a different process of qualitative science. However, this qualitatively designed study might guide us to a better understanding about adequate and effective homework practices, supplementing homework research managed by means of a traditional quantitative approach (Saam & Jeong, 2013:124).

Finally, I argue that if a school discards homework altogether, it will be throwing away a powerful instructional tool (Marzano & Pickering, 2007). Examining the noteworthy factors of effective homework practices of a well-performing school in the Western Cape gave me a glimpse into at least one variable among many to attempt to fully comprehend the complexities of a school system (Saam & Jeong, 2013). In a study conducted by Cooper and his colleagues (2006), a comparison of homework with no homework was conducted and it showed that the average learner in a class with appropriate homework scored 23 percentile points higher on tests on the knowledge addressed in that class than the average learner in a class in which homework was not assigned. In addition, although the relationship between homework and achievement is often the subject of much dispute, there is evidence of a positive relationship between homework time and achievement for secondary students is more generally supported than for primary school students (Bowd et al., 2016; Cooper, 1989; Daw, 2012; Hattie, 2009; Horsley & Walker, 2013). With this in mind, it appears that the relationship between homework and achievement is still not clear, despite studies indicating a positive relationship. However, I argue that the most important advantage of homework is that it can enhance achievement by extending learning beyond the school day. When considering the methodology of studies conducted by Cooper et al. (2006), this study highlights the need for ongoing research in this field. The findings of this study underscore the significance of putting support in place that provides learners with assistance and guidance, both academically and motivationally.

Acknowledgements

This study was conducted as part of a project titled “written discourse with multilingual implications,” funded by the National Research Foundation - <https://doi.org/10.13039/501100001321>. I hereby would like to acknowledge Professor Chris Reddy in his guidance during the fashioning of this article.

Note

- i. Published under a Creative Commons Attribution Licence.

References

- Ashton D 2013. *There is no homework in Finland*. Available at <http://neomam.com/blog/there-is-no-homework-in-finland/>. Accessed 15 December 2016.
- Bailey CA 2007. *A guide to qualitative field research* (2nd ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Bembenutty H 2009. Self-regulation of homework completion. *Psychology Journal*, 6(4):138–153.
- Bembenutty H 2011. The last word: An interview with Harris Cooper-research, policies, tips, and current perspectives on homework. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 22(2):340–350. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1932202X1102200207>
- Bembenutty H & Zimmerman BJ 2003. *The relation of motivational beliefs and self-regulatory processes to homework completion and academic achievement*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, 21–25 April.
- Bempechat J 2004. The motivational benefits of homework: A social-cognitive perspective. *Theory into Practice*, 43(3):189–196. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4303_4
- Bempechat J, Li J, Neier SM, Gillis CA & Holloway SD 2011. The homework experience: Perceptions of low-income youth. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 22(2):250–278. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1932202X1102200204>
- Bennett S & Kalish N 2006. *The case against homework: How homework is hurting children and what parents can do about it*. New York, NY: Crown.
- Bowd J, Bowles T & McKenzie V 2016. *An exploratory analysis of the personal, school and demographic variables affecting the homework effort of Australian secondary students*. Paper presented at the AARE Conference, Melbourne, 27 November – 1 December. Available at https://www.aare.edu.au/data/2016_Conference/Full_papers/725_Justin_Bowd.pdf. Accessed 28 November 2017.
- Carmichael C & MacDonald A 2016. Parental influences on primary school children’s mathematics achievement: Insights from the longitudinal study of Australian children. *Education 3-13*, 44(2):197–211. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2014.939684>
- Charles AM 2013. *Homework problems and remedies: Academic instruction for students with disabilities*. Lynchburg, VA: Lynchburg College. Available at <https://www.lynchburg.edu/wp-content/uploads/volume-10-2014/CharlesAM-Homework-Problems-Remedies-Students-Disabilities.pdf>. Accessed 6 December 2017.
- Check JF & Ziebell DG 1980. Homework: A dirty word. *The Clearing House*, 53(9):439–441. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.1980.9959263>
- Cooper H 2007. *The battle over homework* (3rd ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Cooper H, Robinson JC & Patall EA 2006. Does homework improve academic achievement? A synthesis of research, 1987–2003. *Review of Educational Research*, 76(1):1–62. <https://doi.org/10.3102%2F00346543076001001>
- Cooper H & Valentine JC 2001. Using research to answer practical questions about homework. *Educational Psychologist*, 36(3):143–153. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15326985EP3603_1
- Cooper HM 1989. *Homework: White plains*. New York, NY: Longman.
- Corno L 1996. Homework is a complicated thing. *Educational Researcher*, 25(8):27–30. <https://doi.org/10.3102%2F0013189X025008027>
- Corno L 2000. Looking at homework differently. *The Elementary School Journal*, 100(5):529–548. <https://doi.org/10.1086/499654>
- Corno L 2004. Introduction to the special issue work habits and work styles: Volition in education. *Teachers College Record*, 106(9):1669–1694. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1111/j.1467-9620.2004.00400.x>
- Covington MV 2000. Goal theory, motivation, and school achievement: An integrative review. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 51:171–200. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.51.1.171>
- Daw J 2012. Parental income and the fruits of labor: Variability in homework efficacy in secondary school. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 30(3):246–264. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2012.01.004>
- Day K 2015. *Eleven ways Finland’s education system shows us that “Less is more.”* Available at <https://fillingmymap.com/2015/04/15/11-ways-finlands-education-system-shows-us-that-less-is-more/>. Accessed 15 December 2016.
- Dudley-Marling C 2003. How school troubles come home: The impact of homework on families of struggling learners. *Current Issues in Education*, 6(4). Available at <https://cie.asu.edu/ojs/index.php/cieatasu/article/view/1681>. Accessed 9 October 2017.
- Epstein JL 1988. *Homework practices, achievements, and behaviors of elementary school students* (Report No. 26). Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED). Available at <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED301322.pdf>. Accessed 6 December 2017.
- Felix N, Dornbrack J & Scheckle E 2008. Parents, homework and socio-economic class: Discourses of deficit and disadvantage in the “new” South Africa. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 7(2):99–112.
- Good TL & Brophy JE 2003. *Looking in classrooms* (9th ed). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Hancock L 2011. *Why are Finland’s schools successful?* Available at <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/why-are-finlands-schools-successful>. Accessed 9 September 2016.
- Hattie J 2009. *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Heller HW, Spooner F, Anderson D & Mims A 1988. Homework: A review of special education practices in the southwest. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 11(2):43–51. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F088840648801100201>
- Hong E, Peng Y & Rowell LL 2009. Homework self-regulation: Grade, gender, and achievement-level differences. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 19(2):269–276. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2008.11.009>

- Hong E, Wan M & Peng Y 2011. Discrepancies between students' and teachers' perceptions of homework. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 22(2):280–308. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1932202X1102200205>
- Horsley M & Walker R 2013. *Reforming homework: Practices, learning and policy*. South Yarra, Australia: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Huberman AM & Miles MB 1994. Data management and analysis methods. In NK Denzin & YS Lincoln (eds). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Keith TZ, Diamond-Hallam C & Fine JG 2004. Longitudinal effects of in-school and out-of-school homework on high school grades. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 19(3):187–211. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1521/scpq.19.3.187.40278>
- Kitsantas A & Zimmerman BJ 2009. College students' homework and academic achievement: The mediating role of self-regulatory beliefs. *Metacognition and Learning*, 4(2):97–110. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11409-008-9028-y>
- Kohn A 2006. *The homework myth: Why our kids get too much of a bad thing*. Cambridge, MA: De Capo Lifelong Books.
- Kralovec E & Buell J 2000. *The end of homework: How homework disrupts families, overburdens children, and limits learning*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Lee JF Jr & Pruitt KW 1979. Homework assignments: Classroom games or teaching tools? *The Clearing House*, 53(1):31–35. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00098655.1979.9957112>
- Litchman M 2013. *Qualitative research in education: A user's guide* (3rd ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Maharaj-Sharma R & Sharma A 2016. What students say about homework – views from a secondary school science classroom in Trinidad and Tabago. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 41(7):146–157. Available at <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1116406.pdf>. Accessed 7 January 2018.
- Maltese AV, Tai RH & Fan X 2012. When is homework worth the time? Evaluating the association between homework and achievement in high school Science and Math. *The High School Journal*, 96(1):52–72. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hsj.2012.0015>
- Marzano RJ & Pickering DJ 2007. Special topic / the case for and against homework. *Educational Leadership*, 64(6):74–79. Available at <https://www.linnet.org/cms/lib05/MA01001239/Centricity/Domain/108/Homework.pdf>. Accessed 15 November 2017.
- Meyer M 2016. Should we put a stop to homework? *Fairlady*, 52(6):26–29.
- Núñez JC, Suárez N, Cerezo R, González-Pienda J, Rosário P, Mourão R & Valle A 2015. Homework and academic achievement across Spanish compulsory education. *Educational Psychology*, 35(6):726–746. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2013.817537>
- Pfeiffer V 2014. An investigation of L2 expressive writing in a tertiary institution in the Western Cape. PhD thesis. Cape Town, South Africa: University of the Western Cape.
- Pomerantz EM, Ng FFY & Wang Q 2006. Mothers' mastery-oriented involvement in children's homework: Implications for the well-being of children with negative perceptions of competence. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98(1):99–111. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0022-0663.98.1.99>
- Pytel B 2007. *Homework – what research says?* Available at http://educationalissues.suite101.com/article.cfm/homework_what_research_says. Accessed 5 January 2017.
- Regueiro B, Suárez N, Valle A, Núñez JC & Rosário 2015. Homework motivation and engagement throughout compulsory education. *Revista de Psicodidáctica*, 20(1):47–63. Available at https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Bibiana_Regueiro/publication/280305295_12641-48496-2-ingles/links/55b0cb2108ae32092e072e35.pdf. Accessed 14 November 2017.
- Roderique TW, Polloway EA, Cumblad C, Epstein MH & Bursuck WD 1994. Homework: A survey of policies in the United States. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 27(8):481–487. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F002221949402700803>
- Saam J & Jeong T 2013. In search of the epiphany of homework assignments: A model of evaluating local schools' homework practices. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 1(2):119–127.
- Singh P, Mbokodi SM & Msila VT 2004. Black parental involvement in education. *South African Journal of Education*, 24(4):301–307.
- Strother DB 1984. Homework: Too much, just right, or not enough? *Phi Delta Kappan*, 65(6):423–426.
- Trautwein U 2007. The homework–achievement relation reconsidered: Differentiating homework time, homework frequency, and homework effort. *Learning and Instruction*, 17(3):372–388. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2007.02.009>
- Trautwein U, Lüdtke O, Kastens C & Köller O 2006. Effort on homework in grades 5–9: Development, motivational antecedents, and the association with effort on classroom. *Child Development*, 77(4):1094–1111. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2006.00921.x>
- Vaughn S, Schumm JS & Sinagub J 1996. *Focus group interviews in education and psychology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Walberg HJ, Paschal RA & Weinstein T 1985. Homework's powerful effects on learning. *Educational Leadership*, 42(7):76–79. Available at http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed_lead/el_198504_walberg.pdf. Accessed 10 November 2017.
- Warton PM 2001. The forgotten voices in homework: Views of students. *Educational Psychologist*, 36(3):155–165. https://dx.doi.org/10.1207/S15326985EP3603_2
- Wentzel KR 1997. Student motivation in middle school: The role of perceived pedagogical caring. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89(3):411–419. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.89.3.411>
- Western Cape Education Department (WCED) 2005. *Provincial guidelines for the management of homework in public ordinary schools* (Circular 0045/2005). Cape Town, South Africa: Author. Available at https://wcedonline.westerncape.gov.za/circulars/circulars05/e45_05.html. Accessed 13 December 2017.

- Wigfield A, Eccles JS, Yoon KS, Harold RD, Arbreton AJA, Freedman-Doan C & Blumenfeld PC 1997. Change in children's competence beliefs and subjective task values across the elementary school years: A 3-year study. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89(3):451–469. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0022-0663.89.3.451>
- Xu J 2005. Purposes of doing homework reported by middle and high school students. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 99(1):46–55. <https://dx.doi.org/10.3200/JOER.99.1.46-55>
- Xu J 2008. Models of secondary school students' interest in homework: A multilevel analysis. *American Educational Research Journal*, 45(4):1180–1205. <https://doi.org/10.3102%2F0002831208323276>
- Xu J & Corno L 1998. Case studies of families. *Teachers College Record*, 100(2):402–436.
- Zimmerman BJ & Kitsantas A 2005. Homework practices and academic achievement: The mediating role of self-efficacy and perceived responsibility beliefs. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 30(4):397–417. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2005.05.003>