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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme leading to the award of the degree of Professional Master of Education, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work. I further declare that this dissertation has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this Institute and any other Institution or University. I agree that the Marino Institute of Education library may lend or copy the thesis, in hard or soft copy, upon request.

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Abstract

Although homework is not mandatory, the practice of assigning homework is, and has always been, commonplace in the Irish education system. However, homework has begun to provoke strong passions and opinions throughout the past decades, making it a topic at the root of worldwide research for some time. It has been both commended and denounced by past studies, yet it remains a topic of immense importance to students, teachers and parents. The ever-changing opinions of parents and teachers towards homework, paired with the scarcity of research conducted in an Irish context were the justification for the present study. Thus, the focus of this dissertation was to investigate the attitudes of teachers and parents towards homework at primary school level.

A mixed-method approach was selected for the study, with questionnaires that contained open-ended and closed-ended questions chosen as the instrument for data collection. This is a small-scale study which obtained responses from forty-two parents and thirty-eight primary school teachers.

The study investigated several elements of homework such as the participants views of homework's importance, its effect on academic achievement and participants' perceived advantages and disadvantages of homework. Other matters that this study sought to investigate included the question of parental involvement in homework, teachers' reasons for assigning homework and finally, homework's contribution to stress in the household.

The researcher analyzed the data through data tabulation and thematic coding approach and the findings show that the majority of parents and teachers believe that homework is still an important part of primary school life, however it is a complex topic. These findings were used by the researcher to make a number of recommendations for future practice and research.

Abbreviations

BERA	British Educational Research Association
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NPC	National Parents Council Primary

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Research Aim

The aim of this research question is to investigate the attitudes of parents and teachers towards homework in modern-day Ireland. From this, it is hoped that their motives for holding such attitudes towards homework will be expressed and in turn, will offer a uniquely Irish perspective on this complex topic.

Background

The homework debate has been at the root of worldwide research in which attitudes of parents and teachers have been explored. Having conducted some preliminary research, it was ascertained that the prevailing public attitude towards homework has bounced back and forth between positive and negative over the past decades (Cooper, Lindsay, Greathouse, & Nye, 1998). Some research has underpinned homework as a cause of friction in the household (Cooper et al., 1998), while others state that it is a vital link between home and school (Jackson & Harbison, 2014). Overall, the findings are varied and complex and much of the research is outdated and conducted outside of the Irish context. The conflicting findings and mixed opinions of past research bring educators no closer to a firm understanding of the impact of homework. However, if educators are investing time and effort into homework and asking parents and students to do the same, then it is essential that they are aware of the arguments for and against homework, the role parental involvement plays and the current feelings of parents and teachers towards homework. This then, formed the impetus for the present study: a better understanding of the attitudes of parents and teachers in modern-day Ireland toward homework in primary schools.

Chapter Outline

The researcher's interest in this topic is triggered by her desire to broaden her knowledge on the area of homework, which will be an imminent feature throughout her future teaching career. Chapter 2 reviews the pertinent literature, which the researcher explored in order to deepen her knowledge on the topic of homework. The literature explored formed the basis of this present study, which investigates a wide range of elements associated with homework.

The methodology undertaken to complete this study is outlined in Chapter 3, including a review of the limitations of the study, alongside the ethical considerations. The findings are analysed and presented in Chapter 4, where they are discussed in reference to the key literature. Finally, the main findings that emerge in the study are outlined in Chapter 5, where the researcher also makes some recommendations based on the conclusions.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter will examine and evaluate pertinent national and international literature on homework and related issues. Homework and its position in the Irish education system will be explored, alongside some advantages and disadvantages of homework. The attitudes of both teachers and parents will also be reviewed, specifically looking at their opinions of the importance of homework and its effect on academic achievement. In addition, the study will investigate teachers' reasons for assigning homework and the impact homework has on home life. Finally, arguments for and against parental involvement in homework will be explored.

Homework and the Irish Education System

Although the curriculum does not mandate that all teachers distribute homework on a regular basis, it does mention that “homework has a particular part to play in helping children to learn” (NCCA, 2000, p. 41). Homework is acknowledged as a useful assessment tool used to “take account of the breadth and variety” of learning offered by the curriculum (NCCA, 1999, p. 18). The benefits and purposes of homework are outlined in a variety of Irish documents, with the very existence of such documents signifying that homework still holds a firm place in Irish primary schools (NCCA, 2000; NCCA, 2006; NPC, 2013).

In addition to documents that outline the benefits and purposes of homework, a collection of Irish literature exists in which parental involvement in homework is encouraged (NCCA, 2000; NCCA, 2006; NPC, 2013). Tips and guidelines are offered to parents, so that they can help with homework “in the most useful way” and maximum learning can be achieved (NCCA, 2000, p.22). However, despite the existence of these documents that advocate homework, “serious concerns” have been raised in regard to homework in Irish primary education (Oireachtas, 2010, p.4). In a discussion on the primary school curriculum, the issue of homework was debated and,

although benefits were mentioned and acknowledged, it was agreed that the role of homework in the Irish education system needs considerable research and possibly even to “change the nature of it and how it is done” (Oireachtas, 2010, p. 4).

Advantages of Homework

Homework and academic achievement. The relationship between homework and academic achievement has been the basis of much past research, however with results yielding “inconsistent findings” (Rudman, 2014, p. 14). A synthesis of 15 Canadian and American empirical studies found that significantly higher academic achievement occurs when homework is assigned (Walberg, Paschal and Weinstein, 1985). It was found that academic average is raised further when teachers offer feedback on the students’ homework (Wahlberg et al., 1985). More recently, a synthesis of research was carried out in the United States and found that, with only rare exceptions, there was generally consistent evidence of a positive influence of homework on academic achievement (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006). Although the evidence from these showed a much stronger correlation in grades 7-12 than in K-6, the researchers felt it “would not be imprudent” to conclude that doing homework causes improved academic achievement (Cooper et al., 2006, p. 48).

A shadow was cast over these findings by Cooper (1989) who found that homework has significant effects on the academic achievement of high school students, but very little effect on the achievement gains of elementary school children. Furthermore, a British study found that children who completed homework once a month in the core areas of mathematics, English and science had higher test scores than those who reported doing homework more frequently (Farrow, Tymms & Henderson, 1999). Similarly, it was found that lower grades show little or no positive correlation between time spent on homework and academic achievement (Cooper et al.,

1998; Cooper, 2001). Overall, there is substantial research to suggest that homework has weaker academic benefits for younger children as opposed to older children (Cooper, 1989; Cooper et al., 1998; Cooper, 2001).

In an Irish context, it was found that the type of homework administered is important in determining its usefulness (Jackson and Harbison, 2014). It is believed that “homework is only valuable if it benefits children’s learning and if, in addition, it supports home school links” and has a clear purpose that shows its usefulness (Jackson & Harbison, 2014, p. 60).

Other benefits of homework. In addition to academic advantages, homework has numerous other benefits, which can have a positive impact on the nonacademic spheres of life as well as the academic ones (Cooper, 2007). Homework will have an immediate impact on a pupil’s retention and understanding of the material covered by it (Cooper, 2001). Furthermore, Cooper (2001) claims that homework can improve students’ study skills, their attitudes towards school and “teach them that learning can take place anywhere, not just in school” (p. 34). Homework is generally completed under less supervision and with fewer time-constraints, therefore homework is seen to promote greater personal attributes such as self-discipline, improved time-organization and greater independent problem-solving (Cooper, 2007). This argument is supported by Bempechat (2004) as she shows that homework, if developmentally suitable, can help develop a self-concept that will help the children grow into life-long learners. Some research has found that the development of personal attributes in children through the completion of homework can subsequently promote positive behaviours (Cooper et al., 2006). In addition to the development of personal attributes, homework is viewed as beneficial as it extends learning beyond the school day, thus potentially enhancing academic achievement (Marzano and Pickering, 2007; Cooper, 2001, Cooper, 2007). Homework can provide an

opportunity for students to participate in learning and demonstrate their understanding and knowledge of particular skills and ideas (Van Voorhis, 2004).

Homework is also advantageous for the link it creates between home and school (Cooper, 2007). Results from an Irish study found that parents welcomed homework for “ensuring parental involvement in their child’s learning” (Jackson & Harbison, 2014, p. 54). Homework helps parents to keep in touch with their child’s learning in school and to monitor their child’s progress, noticing any problems that they may be experiencing (NCCA, 2006). Teachers can use homework to increase parents’ appreciation and involvement in schooling (Cooper, 2007), while also giving children the chance to showcase their knowledge (NCP, 2013).

Disadvantages of Homework

While several studies commend homework, others have labelled it as a “significant drain” on families (Corno, 1996, p. 29). Amongst the reported disadvantages of homework are “children’s frustration and exhaustion, lack of time for other activities, and possible loss of interest in learning” (Kohn, 2007, p. 35) The lack of time for activities has frequently surfaced in the literature around this topic, and homework has been found to take away from family-time and restrict their time outdoors, which can be damaging to a child’s health (Kalish & Bennett, 2007). The damaging effects of homework’s restriction on leisure-time and community-time have been further supported by other studies (Warton, 2001; Coutts, 2004).

The stress caused by homework is also a commonly cited disadvantage, with one study describing it as “the source of considerable friction between teacher and student, child and parent, and teacher and parent” (Cooper et al., 1998, p. 72). Parents persistently described homework as a contributor to family stress and problems (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Burow,

1995; Kralovec & Buell, 2000). One study found that this was due to the parents' lack of skills to help with the homework and feelings of inadequacy (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1995).

The quality and quantity of homework has been widely criticized (Jackson & Harbison, 2014; Kalish & Bennett, 2007; Kohn, 2007). It was found that if students are given too much homework or required to spend too much time on one task they will grow bored of it, even going as far as causing it to "diminish its effectiveness or even become counterproductive" (Cooper, 2001; Cooper et al., 2006, p. 53). In Irish education, concerns were raised about the impact of homework both on teaching time and the erosion of quality time between the parent and child at home (Oireachtas, 2010, p.4).

Homework has been found to have a negative influence on attitudes towards school (Chen & Stevenson, 1989), in addition to general physical and emotional fatigue (Cooper et al., 2006; Kalish & Bennett, 2006). Homework has also been named as a possible means for accentuating social inequalities, as students from low-income homes will have more difficulty completing homework assignments than their middle-class peers (Cooper, 2001; Kralovec & Buell, 2000). Economically disadvantaged students are inadvertently penalized because their environments often do not facilitate the completion of homework (Kralovec & Buell, 2000).

Attitudes towards homework

Teachers' opinions of homework. The literature around teachers' attitudes towards homework is sparse, particularly in an Irish context.

In a cross-cultural study on homework, American teachers were found to consider homework significantly less important than teachers from Japan (Chen & Stevenson, 1989). When asked to explain the negative effects of homework, 34% of American teachers stated that they believed homework had no negative effects, while the same was for 28% of Beijing teachers

and 40% of Taipei and Sendai teachers (p.559). In a study carried out on primary teachers in Romania, 82% of respondents were of the opinion that homework contributes to the students' school success (Matei & Ciascai, 2015, p. 32).

However, it is not uncommon for teachers to dislike homework (Jackson & Harbison, 2014). Coutts (2004) quotes a teacher, who states that they "hate" giving homework, marking homework and even supervising homework (p. 183). Similarly, while the majority of teachers in one study had positive opinions of homework and its effectiveness, not all teachers interviewed shared these opinions (Brock et al., 2007, p. 365). One teacher shared her belief that she didn't "really think homework is that effective", placing particular uselessness on worksheets (p. 365). Another teacher reports a lack of evidence to support homework improving students' grades as she claims, "some of my smartest kids never return their homework and they are my top kids" (Brock et al., 2007, p. 366).

Parents' opinions of homework. According to Corno (1996, p. 27), "the whole game of homework is extremely complex", and so too are the attitudes of parents towards this topic. In Ireland, it is common for Irish parents to expect homework and often "teachers who give a lot of homework are deemed to be better than those who don't" (Oireachtas, 2010, p. 4). One Irish study involving parents of primary school children found that there was almost unanimous agreement (98%) that homework was valuable (Jackson & Harbison, 2014). Many respondents wrote about the importance of homework as helping "the parents to get involved in the kids' education" (p. 54). Furthermore, parents commended homework for providing quality time for parents and children to work together and allowing them to identify their child's weaknesses and strengths (Jackson & Harbison, 2014).

In an American study, all parents expressed beliefs that homework was a normal part of their children's lives and 97% of parents described some form of involvement with homework tasks (Hoover-Dempsey et al, 1995). However, research has shown that parents often see homework as the only way to be involved in their children's school life (Rudman, 2014).

A positive view of homework is not always held by parents, with reports from one study showing that parents felt they lacked the knowledge and skills necessary for offering effective help, in addition to feeling unprepared to help with certain subjects (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1995). Similar responses were shared in an Irish study, in which 65% of parents revealed that they do not feel in a position to fully support their child with their homework (Jackson & Harbison, 2014, p. 55). In addition to this, two-thirds of parents described homework as a contributor to stress in the household (p. 57). Warton (1998) found that one-quarter of mothers in one study did not accept that homework was beneficial. If the perceived purposes demonstrate no personal benefit to the child, it is difficult for the parents to have a positive attitude towards homework and "convey positive messages to the child about homework's importance" (Coutts, 2004, p. 183).

The attitudes of parents towards homework have been proven as highly influential over their child's attitude (Cooper et al., 1998). The relationships between students', parents' and teachers' attitudes towards homework were examined and it found that students' attitudes were influenced by parental attitudes more than by teacher attitudes (Cooper et al., 1998). Similarly, positive parental attitudes towards homework are said to relate to students' development of positive attitudes about homework and school learning (Hoover Dempsey et al., 2001).

Teachers' Reasons for Assigning Homework

A number of studies have been carried out in which teachers' reasons for assigning homework have been explored (Brock et al., 2007; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). The most common reason reported by teachers for assigning homework is to give students time to practice skills learned in class (Epstein & Becker, 1982; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2004; Polloway, Epstein, Bursuck, Jayanthi, & Cumblad, 1994). In addition, teachers discuss the use of homework for developing study skills, developing time management skills (Muhlenbruck, Cooper, Nye, & Lindsay, 2000, p. 313) and "in order to establish a routine" (Coutts, 2004, p. 187). Furthermore, Brock et al., (2007) interviewed several primary-school teachers, most of whom stated that in addition to seeing homework as an opportunity to practice skills, homework serves as "an opportunity to teach the students discipline and responsibility (p. 359). It is evident that teachers have a variety of purposes for assigning homework, and the main seven purposes of homework were identified in a survey of elementary school teachers' practices (Epstein & Becker, 1982). Included in these are practice, participation, personal development, parent-child relations, policy, public relations and punishment (Epstein & Becker, 1982). School policy is listed as one purpose for homework distribution, and teachers report assigning homework because their school policies require it (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Van Voorhis, 2004).

In addition to these reasons, another significant motive for assigning homework, is that teachers who give a lot of homework are deemed to be better than those who don't (Oireachtas, 2010, p.4; Corno, 1996). Many teachers assign homework because parents expect it and "the school community will judge them harshly" if they do not (Coutts, 2004, p. 184; Brock et al., 2007; Jackson & Harbison, 2014). Teachers also tend to believe that homework improves

students' academic achievement and that it is a useful link to communicate with parents about their child's learning (Cooper et al., 1998; Van Voorhis, 2004).

The research literature recognizes a number of established reasons why teachers assign homework (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Coutts, 2004), however, the studies around teachers' attitudes toward homework are outdated and scarce (Brock et al., 2007).

Parental Involvement in Homework

Why parents get involved. There are a variety of reasons why parents become involved in their children's homework. Parents' sense of efficacy, perceptions of their child and attitudes toward school all play a role in whether or not they become involved (Ames, Khoju, & Watkins, 1993). Parents' own education is also a factor in parental involvement with homework, as parents with less education are less likely to demonstrate involvement (Stevenson & Baker, 1987). Parents reported getting involved if they felt that their activities would help make a positive difference on their child's success (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001; Eccles & Harold, 1993). Research also reports that several studies state parents' beliefs that involvement in schooling is a normal requirement and responsibility of parenting (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1995; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001).

Effects of parental involvement. Parental involvement is widely encouraged in Irish primary education (NCCA, 2000; NCCA, 2006; NPC, 2013). According to the NCCA (2006), "research studies in Ireland and abroad show that when parents read to and with their children at home, children make better progress in reading" (p. 6). Similarly, in an Oireachtas discussion around primary education, the benefits of parental involvement in homework were discussed, with one member claiming that "where parents engage with schools, be it through a parents' association in whatever format or in some other way, benefits are gained in that the parents will

have a greater knowledge of what is happening, the family will benefit and, most importantly, the child will benefit, which is what we are all trying to achieve” (Oireachtas, 2010, p.4).

According to Patall et al., (2008), the most commonly cited benefit of parental involvement is that it increases the amount of time students spend studying which in turn accelerates their learning and makes their use of homework study more efficient, effective and focused (p.1040). However, the level of autonomy associated with the involvement can be a determining factor in the child’s potential academic success (Cooper, Lindsay, & Nye, 2000). This study found that parental involvement that was experienced by the student as controlling had little or negative impact on their motivation and academic achievement. Parental involvement in homework has also been described as having an influence on long-term achievement as the student’s ability to engage in adaptive self-regulation is promoted (Patall et al., 2008).

Research has shown that if a parent displays positive attitudes towards homework, this can develop positive attitudes about homework and schoolwork in the child (Cooper et al., 1998). Furthermore, in a review of 59 studies related to parental involvement in homework, it was concluded that overall, homework involvement seemed to support achievement improvements as well as student’s attention to homework and homework completion (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001).

However, parental involvement with homework can also lead to a number of negative consequences, ranging from children being placed under too much stress by the parents and also parents creating confusion as a result of being unfamiliar with the homework topic (Cooper et al., 2006). One study warned of the negative effects if parents pressure children too much about

their homework or if the parents themselves are confused about how to help them (Baumgartner, Bryan, Donahue, & Nelson, 1993).

Conclusion

In summary, it is evident that previous research on the topic of homework has yielded varied and conflicting findings, and that such research in an Irish context is sparse.

Homework continues to be a recognized part of primary schooling in Ireland (NCCA, 1999; NPC, 2013; NCCA, 2000), however, the topic of homework is as “complex” as ever (Corno, 1996, p. 27). Despite the advantages of homework being recognized in numerous studies (Cooper et al., 2006; Walberg et al., 1985; Cooper, 2001; Van Voorhis, 2004), the results of these studies have been disputed by others, who highlight the damage caused by homework (Farrow et al., 1999; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1995; Kralovec & Buell, 2000; Kalish & Bennett, 2007).

Studies around the attitudes of teachers, although limited, highlight the main reasons that teachers assign homework (Brock et al., 2007; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). In addition to academic achievement, expectations of parents and school policy are listed as reasons for teachers’ distribution of homework (Epstein & Becker, 1982). This perhaps questions whether teachers are assigning homework for the right reasons or because it is a “requirement” or “expectation” from so many schools and parents. However, it is fair to say that further research on teacher’s attitudes towards homework is required (Brock et al., 2007).

The attitudes of parents towards homework remain conflicted, with certain parents “expecting” homework (Oireachtas, 2010), while others see it as unbeneficial (Warton, 1998). In addition, research around whether parents should be involved with homework or not have generated inconclusive results, leaving room for further research (Patall et al., 2008; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001; Cooper et al., 2006).

Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter outlines the design and methodology employed in this research study. The aim of the research will be presented here, in addition to the researcher's philosophical worldview and positionality, the research strategy and the process of data collection. The researcher will discuss the questionnaire and its merits, alongside the sampling strategy and pilot study. Finally, the study's validity and reliability, ethical considerations and the limitations of the research will be outlined.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this study was to investigate the attitudes of parents and teachers towards homework in primary school. More specifically, the research focused towards completing the following objectives:

- To acquire information in relation to teacher's attitudes towards homework and opinions of parental involvement in homework.
- To acquire information in relation to parents' attitudes towards homework and investigate whether they are involved in their child's homework.
- To acquire information on teachers' reasons for assigning or not assigning homework.
- To identify the extent to which homework causes arguments and tension in modern households.

Strategy of Inquiry

The researcher has chosen the survey as the strategy of inquiry that best serves this piece of research. As this research investigation aimed to identify the contemporary attitudes of teachers and parents towards homework, surveys proved to be the best suited research strategy as they "attempt to provide a screenshot of how things are at the specific time at which the data are

collected” (Denscombe, 2007, p. 7). In addition, “surveys are associated with getting information straight from the horse’s mouth” which the researcher felt would be pivotal to this study (Denscombe, 2007, p. 31).

The researcher felt the questionnaire was the most suitable instrument for data collection. Questionnaires are advantageous as they can be given to large numbers of people to get a broad set of responses about attitudes, perceptions and behaviours (Kane & O’Reilly-de Brún, 2001). Due to the limited time of the researcher, questionnaires were also appropriate as they “are a good way of collecting certain types of information quickly and relatively cheaply” (Bell, 1993, p. 76). Furthermore, a questionnaire is often a more truthful way for participants to respond rather than collecting data in a face-to-face interview (Wellington, 2000). However, it can be difficult to obtain sufficient responses when using questionnaires as they rarely generate a hundred-percent response rate (Baruch, 1999).

The questionnaires created by the researcher adapted mixed methods as they included both open-ended and closed-ended questions, thus providing quantitative and qualitative data.

Mixed Method Approach

The researcher chose a concurrent mixed methods approach for this study, which is explained by Creswell as merging “qualitative and quantitative data in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem” (Creswell, 2009, p. 14). The concurrent mixed methods approach involved the researcher collecting both forms of data at the same time and integrating these in the results in order to “broaden understanding” (Creswell, 2009, p. 204). The researcher aimed to get a true insight into the attitudes and opinions of the participating teachers and parents which, according to Morse (2003), is obtainable when more than one method within a research study is used.

The researcher has conducted this mixed methods research from a pragmatic worldview. When conducting research, it is important that the researcher identifies their philosophical worldview in relation to the research as this can influence “what you choose to read, what you research and how you research it” (Newby, 2010, p. 33). Pragmatism affords the individual researcher the freedom of choice for selecting methods, techniques and procedures, so as to best answer their research question (Creswell, 2009). A key idea of pragmatism is that “knowledge is provisional” (Denscombe, 2007, p. 117). Thus, the researcher understands that the opinions of parents and teachers towards homework expressed in this research study may not be reiterated in future studies, as cultural contexts will change and consequently affect opinions.

Positionality

Having been assigned homework throughout her own education, the researcher has some experience with this practice. Similarly, while on teaching practice, the researcher gained first-hand experience of the act of assigning homework. However, these experiences are limited and narrow, therefore the researcher does not have adequate experience with homework to have an informed opinion on the topic.

Questionnaire Design

Two questionnaires were designed for this study in order to obtain the data needed to determine the attitudes of participating parents and teachers towards homework. Both questionnaires comprised of ten questions, made up of open-ended and closed-ended questions. The questions investigated opinions on the importance of homework and its impact on academic achievement, alongside respondents’ perceived benefits and disadvantages of homework. In addition, parental involvement with homework and the impact of homework on family-life were investigated by the questionnaires. Most questions contained a yes/no element which provided

quantitative information that could be “easily analysed” and “quantified and compared” (Denscombe, 2007, p. 166). Additionally, an open-ended aspect was also provided in each question so that “the full richness and complexity of the views held by the respondent” could be identified (Denscombe, 2007, p. 166). Careful consideration was given during the drafting, piloting and re-drafting stages of the questionnaire to remove any leading or ambiguous questions so that “the degree of precision necessary to ensure that subjects understand exactly what you are asking” was achieved (Bell, 1993, p. 76).

Sampling Strategy

As this study required two different sample populations, two sampling strategies were used. Firstly, stratified sampling was used to recruit teachers for the study. Stratified sampling was suitable for this sample as it adhered to the principle of randomness but allowed the researcher to add “some boundaries to the process of selection” (Denscombe, 2007, p. 14). In this case, participants were invited to partake in the study but had to fulfil the criteria of being a fully qualified primary school teacher. An internet survey was created and shared by email and on social media platforms, explaining the target population it was seeking. This sample comprised of thirty-eight teachers from a variety of schools around the country.

For the recruitment of parents, the researcher employed convenience sampling. This involved choosing “the nearest and most convenient persons to act as respondents” (Robson, 2011, p. 275). Convenience sampling was selected for this study due to the limited time-frame allowed for the research to be conducted. In addition, the researcher was working in a school at the time of the study, therefore distributing questionnaires to children to bring home was practical and efficient. Nevertheless, convenience sampling has been described as one of the “least satisfactory methods of sampling” due to the possibility of bias (Robson, 2011, p. 275).

However, although the researcher was working in the school in which the questionnaires were distributed, no parental contact was ever made with the researcher, therefore the parents remained anonymous to the researcher, thus decreasing that risk of bias. The researcher invited all one hundred and eleven families in the school to partake in the study, with the end sample of parents comprising of forty-two parents.

Piloting the Questionnaire

According to Mertens, “pilot testing your questionnaire means that you try it out with a small sample similar to your intended group of respondents” (2010, p. 191). It is essential that all data-gathering instruments are piloted to ensure that all questions and instructions are clear and to establish how long it will take participants (Bell, 1993). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) also contend that pre-testing questionnaires is crucial to their success. By piloting the instrument, the likelihood that subjects in your main study will experience difficulties with its completion are greatly minimized (Bell, 1993). Both questionnaires in this study were piloted. The questionnaire directed at teachers was piloted by a small group of student-teachers known to the researcher. Similarly, a small group of five mothers piloted the questionnaire for parents. The researcher encouraged the participants of the pilot study to relay feedback and comments on each questionnaire. This enabled the researcher to identify areas of ambiguity and doubt and improve those accordingly.

Data Collection

Data was collected from parents in the form of a hard-copy questionnaire. Permission was granted by the principal of the participating school for questionnaires to be distributed to all pupils and subsequently given to parents. Questionnaires were returned by children and given to class-teachers, who were notified about a ‘drop-box’, where the completed questionnaires were

to be returned. These were collected by the researcher every day. Parents were given three weeks to return the completed questionnaires.

The data collection for teachers involved creating an online survey and sharing it through e-mail and social media. The online questionnaire was closed after three weeks, with a total of thirty-eight teachers completing the questionnaire. No time-limit was placed on either questionnaire, which allowed participants to spend as long as they desired answering the questions and provided them the opportunity to give in-depth answers.

Data Analysis

Due to the mixed method approach implemented by the researcher, the data was analysed in two different ways. The quantitative data was produced by questions where participants were asked to tick the most appropriate answer, while the qualitative data was produced using open-ended questions or comment boxes. As suggested by Robson (2011), spreadsheet software such as Excel can be effective for small-scale studies as such, which the researcher used to analyse the quantitative data and create simple descriptive statistics and tables.

The qualitative data was analysed using the thematic coding approach, which the researcher felt was appropriate as it is “very flexible”, “a relatively easy and quick method to learn and use” and “it is accessible to researchers with little or no experience of qualitative research” (Robson, 2011, p. 477). The approach involved the researcher becoming very familiar with the qualitative responses of the participants, before coding the data, which Gibbs (2007) explains as “how you define what the data you are analysing is about” (p. 38). These codes were then grouped together under appropriate themes and subthemes, which served as the foundation for further data analysis. The data was then presented in the form of tables as this is a “simple

and useful technique” for displaying information and comparing the data of two varying samples (Robson, 2011, p.485).

Reliability and Validity

It is fundamental to any research that the data is “accurate, reliable and valid” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 43). One way of ensuring the validity and reliability of research is by identifying “potential threats” to the validity of a study (Creswell, 2009, p. 162). One threat to this study’s internal validity is the selection of participants. Having selected parents from a disadvantaged school in Dublin, there is a possibility that these participants “have certain characteristics that predispose them to have certain outcomes” (Creswell, 2009, p. 163). If the researcher included a wider range of school-types in differing area, this could have increased the validity of this study. This limited setting is also a threat to the study’s external validity as the researcher cannot generalize the findings to include opinions of parents and teachers from other schools and areas (Creswell, 2009).

Nevertheless, the researcher strove to collect data from reliable sources and remained aware of the limitations and potential threats to validity. Thus, the researcher accepts that the results found are not representative of parents and teachers of primary school children in all of Ireland.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was the short time-frame that was provided for the research to be completed. The lack of time meant that the researcher’s instrument of choice and method of data collection had to be practical and efficient. The minimal time also meant that the sample size had to be restricted as a larger sample would not be practical in the given time-frame.

In addition, the sample size was a limitation of this study. With a total of eighty respondents, it makes it difficult to generalize the findings from the questionnaires. A larger sample size would allow “some balance between the proportions within the sample and the proportions which occur in the overall population being investigated” (Denscombe, 2007, p. 25). As discussed, time was a factor in the limited sample size, but the selected research instrument could also have contributed to this limitation, as “a low response rate is a serious and common problem with self-completion questionnaires” (Robson, 2011, p. 246).

The use of the internet in order to elicit responses from teachers could also be seen as a limitation. As stated by Denscombe (2007), “although an increasing proportion of the population in the developed world has access to the Internet, it would be premature to say that everyone is online” (p. 32). Having limited teacher responses to online only, the researcher may have prevented respondents without internet from engaging in the study, therefore limiting the sample.

Ethical Considerations

The issue of consent is paramount to any research study. BERA (2011) advises that in order to have voluntary informed consent, participants must understand and agree to their participation without any duress. Adhering to this, the researcher included an explanatory cover letter and a consent form with the questionnaire distributed to parental participants. As advised by Denscombe (2007), the consent form and cover letter included the purpose of the research study, the identity of the researcher, the right of all participants to withdraw from the research at any time, and an assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. The participants were required to sign the consent form before engaging in the research, which acted as the acknowledgment “that the participant has been advised about the requirements of the research and understood what is involved (Denscombe, 2007, p. 147). Internet-based research was used to elicit responses from

teachers, and the researcher followed the same principles of research ethics throughout this data collection. Despite the researcher providing a description of the study and an assurance of confidentiality alongside the survey link, it was difficult to confirm “that the would-be participant has read the information, and understands it” (Denscombe, 2007, p. 148).

Nonetheless, participating teachers were provided with an electronic consent statement in which “clicking the box below” confirmed their agreement and understanding at participating in the study.

Chapter 4 Findings, Analysis and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings of the data collected using a mixed method approach whereby questionnaires were distributed to parents and teachers. Both questionnaires contained open-ended and closed-ended questions, therefore gathering both quantitative and qualitative information. This chapter will outline the findings emanating from these questionnaires and these will be presented in the form of tables.

Questionnaire Response Rate

Convenience sampling was used in order to gather respondents for this research study. For the parental sample, questionnaires were distributed to one hundred and eleven families in the co-operating school, representing one hundred and thirty-six pupils. This study focused on parents of second to sixth class boys in a Catholic, DEIS band 1 school in North Dublin. A total of forty-two families responded, giving a parental questionnaire response rate of 38%.

Teachers were invited to participate in an online questionnaire which was shared through social media and email. Thirty-eight teachers responded to the survey.

Presentation of Findings

The researcher carefully pre-composed and selected questions for the research questionnaires so as to best elicit information that would answer the research question. The findings will be analysed under headings that represent each key question of the questionnaires.

Opinions of Homework

Table 1

Responses from Parents and Teachers on the Importance of Homework

Answer	Number of Parents	% of Parents	Number of Teachers	% of Teachers
Yes	34	81%	30	79%
No	8	19%	8	21%

Note. Participants were asked “In your opinion, is homework an important part of primary school life?” For teachers, n = 38 and for parents, n= 42.

Importance of homework. The findings demonstrate that the vast majority of parents and teachers view homework as an important part of primary school life, evident in Table 1 above. Some reasons cited by parents for their view of homework as important included homework as a way to reinforce and “to revise the school day’s work”, in addition to “a way to give my child responsibility”. Parents also praised homework for its role in preparing children for secondary school, as well as helping “parents understand what they are currently doing in school”. These reasons were reiterated in the responses given by teachers, with many also mentioning homework’s part in consolidating information learned during the day, in addition to creating a link between home and school. The usefulness of homework for highlighting areas the child may be struggling with and for preparing children for further education were also reported. These given reasons correspond with a list of benefits of homework that have been provided in the NPC’s report on homework (2013). The responses to this question given by parents in this study and those of a past Irish study were very similar, however only 2% of parents in this past study viewed homework as not valuable (Jackson and Harbison, 2014). This was significantly

lower than the 19% of parents in this present study who reported placing no importance on homework. The opinions expressed by this 19% included comments such as “children do enough work in school” and “playing and exercising are more important”. One respondent felt strongly about homework’s lack of importance and had “grown up in Finland, where kids don’t have any homework at primary level”. This mother claimed homework “doesn’t encourage learning and instead becomes a thing children hate”.

Similar reasons were cited by the 21% of teachers who shared this view, including comments such as “I don’t think they are learning anything from homework” and “I think being well rested, well fed and healthy coming into school ready to learn is more important”.

Table 2

Responses from Parents and Teachers About Homework and Academic Achievement

Answer	Number of Parents	% of Parents	Number of Teachers	% of Teachers
Yes	34	81%	32	86%
No	8	19%	5	14%

Note. Participants were asked: “Does the homework you assign/your child receive have a positive effect on their academic achievement? For teachers, n = 38 and for parents, n= 42.

Homework and academic achievement. Evident in Table 2 above, the common belief amongst parents and teachers in this study is that homework does have a positive effect on academic achievement. This belief is supported by past research which has consistently shown a positive correlation between time spent on home-work and academic achievement (Cooper & Valentine, 2001; Cooper, Lindsay, Greathouse & Nye, 1998). Comments from parents mentioned homework as having “improved reading” and helping to “reinforce information

learned during the school day”, while those of the opposing opinion cited homework as “tedious and boring” and having “not seen an improvement in my child from doing homework”.

Comments from teachers further praised homework’s effect on academic achievement, with statements including “practice makes perfect” and reports of seeing an “obvious difference” between children who do and do not complete the homework, “particularly with spellings, tables and reading”. These teachers’ opinions are supported by a Romanian study which found 83% of teachers believed homework contributes to a student’s school success (Matei & Ciascai, 2015). However, 14% of teachers believe that there is no link between homework and a child’s academic achievement and some report that this is because the homework “does not correlate with what they are learning in class” and that it is given “for the sake of it”. This reiterates the findings of Jackson and Harbison (2014) who found that homework is only valuable if it has a clear purpose that shows its usefulness.

Benefits of Homework

Table 3

Comparison of Teachers’ and Parents’ Responses to the Benefits of Homework

Theme	Number of Parents	% of Parents	Number of Teachers	% of Teachers
Reinforces and revises information learned during the school day	23	54%	17	45%
Home/School link; Parental Involvement	14	33%	11	29%
Development of skills and personal attributes	11	26%	6	16%

Note: For teachers, n = 38 and for parents, n= 42. This question allowed for multiple benefits to be provided by the respondents, therefore the total number of answers exceed the number of participants who answered this question.

Both questionnaires sought to identify some of the benefits of homework, if any, that are perceived by parents and teachers of primary school children. Unstructured parental comments regarding homework were analysed using the thematic coding approach and subthemes were identified (Robson, 2011). The comments contained five broad subthemes: (a)reinforces/revises information (b)gives insight into child's strengths and weaknesses (c)develops personal skills such as self-discipline/self-confidence (d)allows for one-to-one learning (e)no perceived benefits. The most commonly occurring subthemes are presented in Table 3 above.

Homework as a reinforcer of school work. Evident in Table 3 above, the most common subtheme that arose for both parents and teachers was the view of homework as beneficial for reinforcing and revising information learned during the school day. Many parents reference homework as beneficial for “keeping work fresh in children’s heads” and helping to “re-cap on what they have already learned”. Similarly, teachers mention that homework “reiterates what is being taught in school”, “reinforces learning from the day, particularly in English and Maths” and is beneficial as “revising topics at home or after school allows information to be stored in the children’s long-term memory”. These statements are supported by Cooper (2001), who contends that homework has an immediate effect on a pupil’s understanding and retention of the topic on which the homework focuses. Furthermore, two Irish documents discuss the reasons why homework is assigned and how it helps, with both maintaining that homework practices and reinforces work already done in class and strengthens knowledge and skills (NCCA, 2006; NPC, 2013).

Homework as a link between home and school. This study’s findings show that parents and teachers both welcome homework and the link it creates between home and school. Parents believe that homework provides them with an awareness of the topics being learned in school

and is a “great insight for parents to see strengths and weaknesses of their child’s progress”. In addition, parents mention that homework helps them to “get involved” and “supports the parents in participating in their children’s education”. These responses mimic those of parents in a previous Irish study, in which parents similarly praised homework for its creation of a home/school link (Jackson & Harbison, 2014). The comments from teachers resemble those from parents, with many describing homework as “a way to allow parents to become more involved in their child’s school life” and allowing “parents to see their child’s ability level”. The NPC report on homework (2013) further supports these comments, stating that homework helps parents to “engage you as partners in your child’s education”, in addition to giving parents insight into their child’s progress (p. 2). The opportunity for parents to keep in touch with their children’s learning through home/school links created by homework is also acknowledged in a number of NCCA documents (2000; 2006).

Homework for developing personal attributes. The third most common theme that arose in both parents’ and teachers’ responses was the benefit of homework for developing skills such as self-discipline, time management, self-confidence and independence. Parents noted the usefulness of homework for “teaching discipline in sitting down and spending time doing homework” and “building confidence” as the children learn to work independently. Teachers’ responses mirror those of parents, with comments describing that homework “teaches children responsibility for bringing books home and doing work independently”, in addition to the development of confidence and time-management skills also being named. These opinions correlate with past research literature, which recognise that one purpose of homework is to “build student responsibility, perseverance, time management, self-confidence, and feelings of accomplishment” (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001, p. 182). Research also shows that teachers

assign homework with the purpose of developing these skills in their students (Muhlenbruck et al., 2000).

No perceived benefits. A total of five parents (11%) and two teachers (5%) explicitly expressed their belief that homework has no real benefits at primary school level, with some branding it as “tedious”, “boring” and “de-motivating”. Warton (1998) also found that mothers do not always support homework, however the percentage from his study was significantly higher (25%). Similarly, past research has shown that it is not uncommon for teachers to dislike homework (Jackson & Harbison, 2014; Coutts, 2004). One teacher reported that there are “no benefits in extra written work” which is similar to statements made by teachers in a past study, where particular uselessness was placed on written worksheets (Brock et al., 2007, p. 365).

Disadvantages of Homework

Table 4

Comparison of Teacher’s and Parents’ Responses to the Disadvantages of Homework

Theme	Number of Parents	% of Parents	Number of Teachers	% of Teachers
Too much /Too difficult	14	33%	14	37%
Loss of socialising/play/family-time	9	21%	7	18%
Children are too tired	8	19%	4	11%
Parents lack time and skill/knowledge	6	14%	6	16%
No perceived disadvantages	6	14%	2	5%
Causes tension/arguments	4	10%	3	8%

Note: For teachers, n = 38 and for parents, n = 42. This question allowed for multiple disadvantages to be provided by the respondents, therefore the total answers exceed the number of participants who answered this question.

The participants were asked to report their perceived disadvantages of homework, which were recorded and analysed through subthemes. The subthemes that arose most frequently amongst the comments regarding perceived disadvantages are presented in Table 4 above. All thirty-eight participating teachers responded to this question, however of the forty-two parents who participated, nine left this question blank.

Homework as a source of stress. The subthemes listed in table 4 above were all reported as disadvantageous due to the stress and tension imposed by them. In this study, parents' responses included that homework "creates tension at home because the children are too tired" while another parent described homework as "a battleground for parents and kids". Parents were explicitly asked whether homework causes friction in the home and the study found that 68% of participating parents stated that homework causes some level of friction.

Similar to the findings of Jackson and Harbison (2014), many parents are dissatisfied with the duration of time spent on homework and the stress this can create. One parent explains that "too much homework can lead to a lack of concentration and a strong dislike and resentment toward the school work", which supports past findings where too much homework has been proven to "diminish its effectiveness or even become counterproductive" (Cooper et al., 2006, p. 53). Teachers' responses mirror those of parents, making further reference to the negative perception developed by children when too much homework is assigned. The strain that can be caused from large quantities of homework is also referred to in comments from the respondents, with one parent stating that "the volume of homework should not stress the kids out like it does". These experiences of stress and physical and emotional fatigue as a result of large quantities of homework have been similarly expressed in past studies (Cooper et al., 2006; Kalish & Bennett, 2006).

In addition, many parents described the homework as being “too difficult” for the child which can be “discouraging” and “damaging to a child’s self-esteem”. Similarly, one teacher reported that “homework is particularly arduous on weaker children who take twice as long to get their homework done which is very stressful on parents”. Research argues that homework must be realistic in difficulty and quantity to allow for each student to complete it independently and at their own ability (Good & Brophy, 2003, p. 394). The need for homework to be suited to each child’s capabilities is also broadly recognized in Irish literature (NCCA, 2000; NPC, 2013)

The issue of parents’ inadequate skills and knowledge to help with their child’s homework has arisen in this study, similar to a number of past studies (Jackson and Harbison, 2014; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1995). Parents’ lack of competency was cited as a disadvantage of homework in this study, with one parent stating they “wouldn’t know the answers to some maths and it can be awkward”, while this was echoed by another parent who voiced the stress caused when “I myself don’t understand what the child is learning”. Teachers also recognized these difficulties, with one teacher recognizing that parents “may not have the time to sit down with their child to do homework or may not be able due to illiteracy and so this could potentially cause embarrassment and/or arguments at home”. Past studies have yielded similar findings, where stress and tension have been reported by parents due to a lack of skills and feelings of inadequacy to help with the homework (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1995).

Parents and teachers in this study also identified tiredness as a disadvantage of homework, which is a featured complaint of past studies (Jackson and Harbison, 2007). Some parents argued that children “have spent enough time working during the school day” and report their tiredness as a contributor to tension and stress in the household. Similarly, teachers

acknowledge that “tiredness is a factor” when it comes to homework and its completion, with one teacher sharing that “in my experience of homework children can be tired which leads to frustration for all parties involved – parents, student, teacher”. It has been advised by past researchers that teachers avoid “lengthy homework assignments that lead to fatigue” as this will affect homework completion and interest (Cooper et al., 1998, p. 82).

Homework’s erosion of leisure and family time. The task of completing homework can diminish time spent exercising, playing, socializing and with family, which repeatedly arose as a reported disadvantage of homework. This is an issue that past research has argued can be damaging to a child’s health (Kalish and Bennett, 2007). Complaints that surfaced frequently from parents included that homework “can take too much time and the kids don’t have time to play”, and it “takes up a lot of valuable family time”, while another stated the necessity of socialising as “it is very important for the mind”. Teachers equally recognise that homework can erode valuable time, with one teacher arguing that “evenings should allow time for play”, while another condemns the lack of “time spent on physical activity and family time” as a result. These feelings and complaints are not unwarranted, rather this issue has already been acknowledged and “serious concerns” have been raised (Oireachtas, 2010, p.4). Many participants expressed children’s feelings of “resent” towards homework as it “stops them from doing the things that they would rather do”. Kohn (2007) reiterates this statement, extending it to include parents’ resentment at “having to play the role of enforcer”, thus impacting their relationship with their children (p. 35).

Parental Involvement in Homework

This research study also aimed to discover the views of parents and teachers on parental involvement with homework. Results are displayed in Table 5 below.

Table 5

Responses from Parents and Teachers on Parental Involvement with Homework

Answer	Number of Parents	% of Parents	Number of Teachers	% of Teachers
Yes	36	86%	37	97%
No	6	14%	1	3%

Note. Parents were asked: “Do you help your child/children with their homework? N= 42; Teachers were asked: “Should parents be involved with their children’s homework?”: N= 38

Parents’ reported involvement. When asked whether they help their child/children with their homework, parents provided a variety of reasons to explain their involvement. These included “offering guidance and helping to explain the work”, while several parents mentioned being involved to “make sure they are doing the homework correctly”. One parent explained that they “supervise so his writing is neat. If it’s not laid out properly he gets lines”. Studies have shown that while parental involvement in homework is important, if parents put too much pressure on children this can have potentially negative effects (Baumgartner, Bryan, Donahue, & Nelson, 1993). Other explanations provided by parents for helping their children included, homework taking too long if parents don’t help, the importance of showing an interest in their child’s learning and also the importance of pointing out and helping their child correct mistakes while also encouraging them. Similar findings have been found in past studies, with parents reporting homework as a way to be involved in their child’s learning in addition to allowing

them to see their strengths and weaknesses (Jackson and Harbison, 2014, p. 57). The comments from those parents who reported not being involved in their child/children's homework included comments such as "it is good for them to make mistakes and learn from them" and some mention the importance of developing independent learning.

Teachers' opinions on parental involvement. Teachers' most commonly mentioned reason for agreeing with parental involvement in homework was that "it's good for parents to see what their children are doing in school!" and for parents to show an interest in their child's learning. Teachers also reported that if parents show an interest in their child's learning, the children are more likely to value homework themselves and this "shows the child the importance of education". This argument has been proven true in a number of past studies that determined that attitudes of parents towards homework are highly influential over their child's attitude (Cooper et al., 1998; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). In addition, multiple teachers mention that homework gives parents the "opportunity to engage on a one-to-one basis with their child and enrich their child's learning through discussion". This is supported by the Primary school Curriculum which argues that a close co-operation between the home and school is essential "if children are to receive the maximum benefit from the curriculum" (NCCA, 1999, p.21). Although thirty-seven of the thirty-eight participants mention the importance of parental involvement, a common feature of these answers is the mention of involvement "to an extent", with teachers expressing the importance of parents helping "only when necessary" or when specifically asked for help. One teacher stated that "if parents do their child's homework for them then the whole purpose of homework is gone!". This is also the main argument for the one participant who answered "no" to this question, as they argue that "parents shouldn't complete tasks the children have difficulty with". This argument reflects past research in which the level of

parental involvement has resulted in negative consequences for the student (Cooper et al., 2000; Cooper et al., 2006).

Teachers' Reasons for Assigning Homework

Table 6

Teachers' Reasons for Assigning Homework

Theme	Number of Teachers	% of Teachers
To reinforce, revise and practise topics	17	45%
School policy mandates the assigning of homework	10	26%
To keep parents involved in their children's learning	6	16%
Good routine and preparation for secondary school	5	13%
Parents expect homework	3	8%
Teachers want something learned off-by-heart/familiarized	3	8%
Helps with assessment and to identify strengths and weaknesses	2	5%

Note: This question allowed for multiple benefits to be provided by the respondents, therefore the total number of answers exceed the number of participants who answered this question. n=38

Participating teachers were questioned about their main reasons for assigning homework and these comments were then divided into a number of subthemes, evident in Table 6 above.

This study's findings show that the majority of teachers assign homework to reinforce and practice work covered in class. Similar findings emerged from a past study in which this reason was also the most commonly cited (Epstein & Becker, 1982). Teachers' responses

included assigning homework “to reiterate what is being taught in class”, “practice new skills learnt in school” and “revision of what has been taught in school”.

Some teachers identified school policy as one of the main reasons for assigning homework, with one teacher explaining that it is “part of my school’s policy is to assign homework Monday to Thursday, so I must follow this”. It is not an unconventional occurrence for teachers to assign homework purely to fulfil school policy, as research shows that school policy has influenced teachers’ distribution of homework for decades (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Burow, 1995; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Van Voorhis, 2004).

Many teachers highlighted that they assign homework to satisfy parents, both because homework offers a link between home and school, and also because parents expect homework. Teachers’ comments included that “homework keeps parents informed” and “helps parents become involved in their child’s learning and where their child might need extra help”. One teacher explains that “parents generally expect homework and the other staff in the school assign it, therefore I feel that I must assign homework” which has been proven to be a common feeling of teachers as past studies have found that teachers who give a lot of homework are deemed to be better than those who don’t (Corno, 1996; Coutts, 2004, p.183; Oireachtas, 2010, p.4).

In addition, teachers’ other motives for assigning homework included the need to “get the curriculum areas covered, and books completed, which parents have paid a lot of money for”, to help the children get into a “good routine” which will help prepare them for secondary school and also to “help the children to get into practice of learning spellings off by heart”. Many of these purposes correlate with the list of the ‘main seven purposes of homework’, as identified in a survey of elementary school teachers’ practices (Epstein & Becker, 1982).

Chapter 5 Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Findings

This research study has examined the attitudes of parents and teachers towards homework in primary school in modern Ireland. This chapter will present an overview of the key findings along with associated recommendations and suggestions for further research opportunities.

Overall, the majority of parents and teachers share the view of homework as an important part of primary school life and regard homework as having a positive effect on a child's academic achievement. However, these views were not unanimous, with some participants sharing the belief that homework's isolated content and lack of correlation to class-learning results in the absence of any academic achievement improvement.

The study found that the most commonly cited benefits of homework include its role in reinforcing information learned during the day, the creation of a home/school link and the development of personal skills in students. However, amongst the disadvantages reported, it can be concluded from this study that homework is placing stress on children and parents and contributing to tension in Irish households. Included in the causes for this stress is homework being "too difficult", "too much" being distributed, children being "too tired" and parents' lack of skills and knowledge to help.

The study established some common reasons for teachers' distribution of homework, which included consolidating and practicing skills and knowledge, in addition to school policy mandating it.

The findings also show that parents and teachers both place importance on parental involvement with homework. However, the study shows that there is an inconsistency between parents' perceptions of the purpose of homework and teachers' perceptions of its purpose

Teachers reported assigning homework as a form of assessment and to identify a child's understanding and success around certain homework tasks. Meanwhile, some parents described helping their children with homework to "make sure they are doing the homework correctly" and to supervise.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Re-evaluate school policy. Having reflected on the findings listed above, it is recommended that schools re-assess and re-evaluate their school policies. When questioned on their reasons for assigning homework, a number of teachers cited school policy as the main motive for so. This highlights the obsolete practice of assigning homework as it is routine and suggests that teachers are assigning homework for the wrong reasons. As suggested by Marzano and Pickering (2007) "schools should strengthen their policies to ensure that teachers use homework properly" (p. 76). If homework is mandated, school policies must ensure that teachers assign homework that is necessary and useful, well explained and motivated, and has a clear learning outcome (LaConte, 1981).

In addition, school policies must ensure that they explicitly state the expected outcomes and purposes of homework. If schools make it clear that homework is used as a form of assessment, this may help parents get involved in a way that does not "do the homework for them", thus allowing teachers to get a true report of each child's ability.

Differentiation of homework. This study has shown that homework is causing stress in Irish households due to the amount and difficulty-level of homework assigned. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers differentiate homework to suit the variety of learning abilities found in primary school classrooms. By differentiating homework, the "ability and maturity of the students" is matched to the homework assigned, thus decreasing the burden and stress placed on

them and their parents, while increasing the benefits gained from the homework's completion (LaConte, 1981, p.19).

Parental workshops. As a means of addressing the reported lack of parents' skills to help with homework, it is recommended that programs or workshops are offered to parents in an attempt to train specific skills that will improve their knowledge of the primary school curriculum. It is hoped that such programs will increase their self-efficacy beliefs and contribute to "their own sense of being able to influence their child's success in school" (Ames, 1995, p. 22). Teachers should provide parents with online resources, for example, that could act as assistance for them on certain topics that their child's homework assignments will entail. Workshops and academic assistance as such could minimize feelings of inadequacy and stress experienced by some parents while helping their children, while also boosting their self-confidence and willingness to be involved in their child's education.

Teacher Workshops. Finally, it is recommended that workshops are held in which teachers are provided with the training and knowledge to ensure that the best homework practices are implemented. By presenting teachers with some of the more recent findings around the topic of homework, it will allow them to make informed decisions on the assigning of homework and assess their own practices.

Recommendations for Future Research

Due to the limited research around homework that has been conducted in an Irish context, it is recommended that further research is carried out so that the Irish perspective on the topic can be determined. It is also recommended that future studies include a larger sample size, thus providing additional power for analysis. A larger sample would allow for the results to be generalized to represent the opinions of primary school teachers and parents across Ireland. In

addition, further studies should consider rural and urban schools, DEIS schools and fee-paying primary schools to broaden their sample and findings.

It is recommended that future researchers conduct interviews, in addition to the distribution of questionnaires. After reviewing the data gathered by the questionnaires, the use of interviews at a later stage would strengthen the study's validity, as well as providing a further depth of information from another source (Newby, 2010).

Conclusion

Overall, the findings of this research show that the majority of parents and teachers still place importance on homework in primary school education and agree with the NCCA (2006), who contend that homework has many benefits for both children and parents. Nonetheless, the feelings of dissatisfaction amongst parents and teachers have also been voiced in this study, and it is clear that homework has been a source of stress and tension in many Irish households. Therefore, the need for further research around this topic, particularly in an Irish context, is undeniable, while school policies are encouraged to re-evaluate their homework practices to ensure that children are gaining the maximum benefit from this ever-present practice.

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Appendix I

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Ashling Gilboy and I am a student at Marino Institute of Education, studying my final year of the Professional Masters of Education. As part of my final year coursework, I am conducting a research project entitled '*An investigation into the Attitudes of Parents and Teachers towards Homework at Primary School Level*'. This study aims to look at the various attitudes and opinions of parents and teachers in a selection of Dublin schools, and examine the individual reasons behind these attitudes. I am very interested in this area and hope that my work will bring me to a better understanding of this significant topic.

I am writing to you to ask your permission to conduct some of my research with your help. This would involve taking part in a short questionnaire. The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect data and information from parents/teachers and invites them to share their attitudes and opinions towards the distribution of homework. The questionnaire will take 15 minutes approximately and can be conducted at your own convenience.

Strict confidentiality is central to my research and, in order to protect participant confidentiality, several steps will be taken to protect your anonymity and identity. I will ensure that no identifying details will be revealed in my project. Inclusive in this is the removal of the participant's name, the school or any geographical details that may make the participant identifiable. The questionnaires will be kept in a place that will only be accessible to the researcher and all information will be destroyed 13 months after the study has been completed.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. If you do choose to withdraw, all information from you will be destroyed.

The results from this study will be presented in writing in a dissertation read by education professionals at Marino Institute of Education. If selected, the dissertation may be published to the Marino Library, where it will be accessible to other students. At no time, however, will participant names be used or any identifying information revealed.

If you require any further information about this study, or would like to speak to the researcher, please email Ashling Gilboy at XXXX.

I appreciate that the lives parents/guardians are very busy, therefore I would be deeply grateful if you could find the time to accommodate me in my final studies towards becoming a primary school teacher.

Yours Faithfully,

Ashling Gilboy

I have read the above information regarding this research study on the attitudes of parents and teachers towards homework at a primary school level, and consent to participate in this study.

_____ (Printed Name)

_____ (Signature)

_____ (Date)

Appendix II

***An investigation into the Attitudes of Parents and Teachers
towards Homework at Primary School Level***

- Please take time to read each question carefully.
- Questionnaire response sheets will be read by the researcher **only**.
- Anonymity and confidentiality is assured.

Part 1:

- 1. Please tick (✓) the box beside the type of school that your child is currently attending:**

Catholic school

Educate Together

Community National School

Gaelscoil

Other (Please Specify):

- 2. Does this school have a DEIS band status? (Please tick (✓) the box beside answer)**

Yes, DEIS band 1

Yes, DEIS band 2

No

Part 2:

Please tick (✓) the box beside the most appropriate answer to each of these questions:

3. Do you believe that homework is an important part of primary school life?

Yes

No

Why/Why not?

4. How often, if ever, does your child receive homework?

Every day (except Fridays)

2/3 times a week

Once a week

Never

Other (Please

Specify):

5. Do you think that the homework your child receives helps to improve his/her academic performance?

Yes

If yes, how?

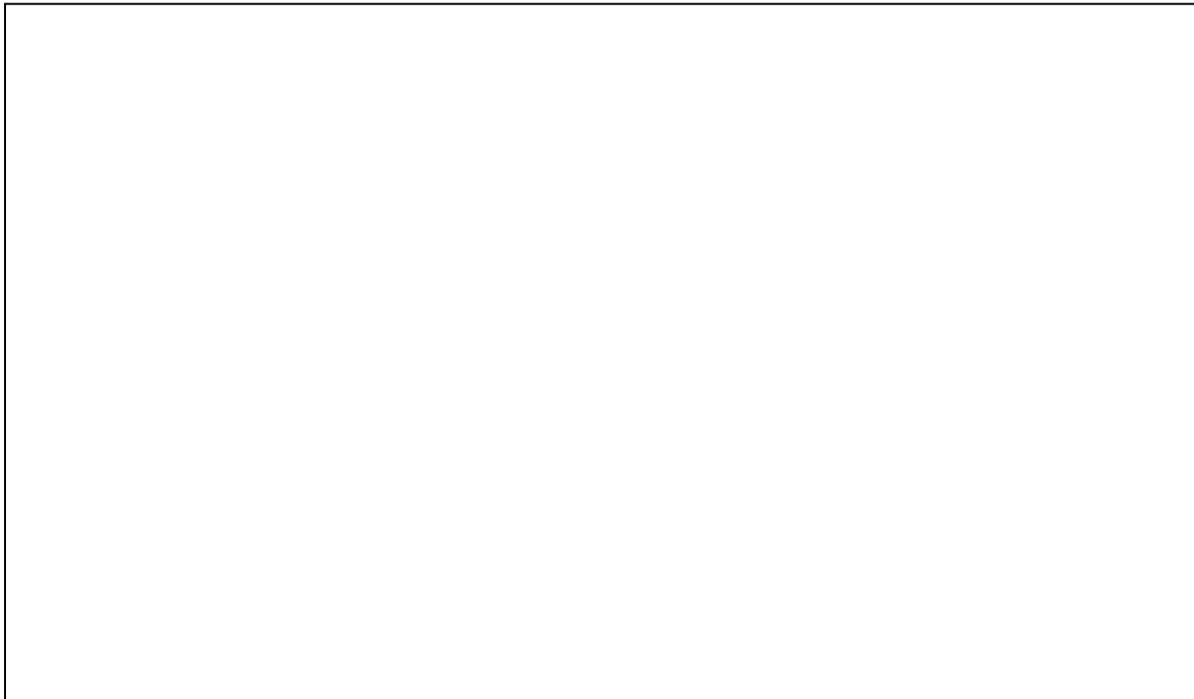
No

If no, why not?

6. In your opinion what are the benefits, if any, of homework?



7. In your opinion what are the disadvantages, if any, of homework?



Part 3:

Please tick (✓) the box beside the most appropriate answer to each of these questions:

8. Do you help your child/children with their homework?

Yes

No

Why/ Why not?

9. In your opinion, is homework an effective way to communicate with teachers?

Yes

No

Why/ Why not?

10. Does homework cause upset or arguments in the house?

Yes

If yes, how?

No

If no, why not?

Appendix III

1. Please tick the box beside the type of school that you are currently teaching in:

- Catholic School
- Educate Together
- Community National School
- Gaelscoil
- Other (please specify)

COMMENT BOX

2. Does this school have a DEIS band status?

- Yes, DEIS band 1
- Yes, DEIS band 2
- No

3. Do you believe homework is an important part of primary school life?

- Yes
- No

Why/ Why not?



4. How often, if ever, do you assign homework?

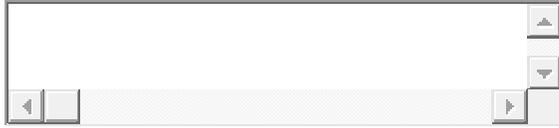
- Everyday (excluding Fridays)
- 2/3 times a week
- Once a week
- Never

5. Do you think that the homework you assign has a positive influence on students' academic performance?

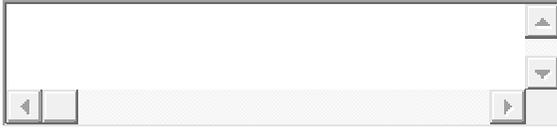
- Yes
- No

Why/Why not?

**6. In your opinion what are the benefits, if any, of homework?****7. In your opinion, are there any disadvantages to homework?**



8. What are your main reasons for assigning homework?



9. Homework is a good way to communicate with parents:

Yes. How?

No. Why?

10. Should parents be involved with their children's homework?

Yes. Why?

No. Why not?