Educators' perceptions of a no-homework policy in South African Independent primary schools

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MAGISTER EDUCATIONIS

Department of Education Management and Policy Studies

in the Faculty of Education

at the

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

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JUNE 2022

Declaration

I declare this dissertation, which I at this moment submit for the completion of Master's in Education at the University of Pretoria, is my work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

yombo

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June 2022

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CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	CLEARANCE NUMBER: **EDU145/20**
DEGREE AND PROJECT	MEd Educators' perceptions of a no-homework policy in South African Independent primary schools
INVESTIGATOR	Ms Moyosoreoluwa Soyombo
DEPARTMENT	Education Management and Policy Studies
APPROVAL TO COMMENCE STUDY	26 February 2021
DATE OF CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	09 December 2021
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to God, my Beer Lahai Roi, my source of inspiration, my fortress, and my pillar of strength. He saw me through this journey and constantly helped me move into purpose. He makes all things beautiful in His time – Ecclesiastes 3:11.

A special feeling of gratitude to my loving parents, Mr Taiwo Soyombo and Mrs Mercy Soyombo, whose love, words of encouragement and support to keep striving for the best in whatever I do kept me moving.

To my siblings: Soyemi, Atilola, Olorunleke and Oluwasolabomi, who, through their words, have encouraged me to not give up on myself and my dreams. I cherish your emotional and financial support throughout this journey and for not leaving my side despite the distance between us; your presence was felt every day. I love you all.

Acknowledgements

This journey challenged me and completing this milestone required self-trust, motivation, and commitment. I want to acknowledge my sincere gratitude to the following people for their support in my academics:

- Thank you, Abba, Father, who gave me the strength, knowledge, and perseverance to complete this study.
- My sincere appreciation to Dr Nevensha Sing, my supervisor, for her constant priceless advice, guidance, input, encouragement, financial and moral support, and motivation during difficult times to ensure I complete my master's in due course.
- I would like to especially thank my uncle, Dr SK Soniyi, who has supported and encouraged me throughout my study in South Africa. Also, his wonderful wife, who took me in as her daughter - Mrs Afolake Soniyi, and my precious cousins Abiola, Segun & Dipo, who were my rock.
- My education journey would not be complete without my sweet friends turned sister - Mrs Aisha Jimoh & Mrs Moji Musa.
- To the beautiful best friend UP blessed me with - Mrs Bridget Asonglefac, and my guardian angel - Dr Agbaje and my Joy girl, we finally made it. May God always bless you.
- I am grateful to all the participants from the two selected schools where this study took place. I am thankful to the principals and the literacy teachers. Thank you for obliging me to partake in this study despite the state of work and the current pandemic.

Abstract

In recent years, homework has been in the spotlight, seen as an essential tool in making teaching and learning smoother for stakeholders (educators, learners, and parents). The literature, however, suggests that there is little relationship between homework and learners' performance in primary schools. Therefore, some schools believe that eliminating homework and adopting a no-homework policy can create better relationships and the achievement of improved learning outcomes. In South Africa, a homework policy is usually adopted within each school's stated guidelines; nonetheless, there is, as yet no nationalised policy document that institutes a no-homework policy. With the changing context of the nucleus family structure and the evolving nature of schooling, there is a shift from assigned traditional homework to that of no-homework in some primary schools. There are limited studies on educators' perceptions of such a no-homework policy and its influence on learners' academic performance.

The study aimed to investigate educators' perceptions of a no-homework policy and its influence on learners' performances in two no-homework independent primary schools. A total of ten educators were purposively selected in the Gauteng province. Data was gathered using a qualitative case-study design with semi-structured interviews and document analysis in conjunction with the student engagement theory of Alexander Astin. A thematic data analysis procedure was used to analyse the collected data. The researcher elicited responses from the participants based on their perceptions of the adoption of a no-homework policy and its influence on learners' performances in the respective schools. The study's findings revealed the adoption of a no-homework policy as a non-academic content-based task. It further revealed differences in educators' perceptions of adopting a no-homework policy. Most educators, however, would like homework to be used to reinforce learning. The study highlights how the department of education and independent schools may revisit the homework policy to better implement homework in schools.

Keywords: No-homework policy, educators, homework, perceptions, independent schools

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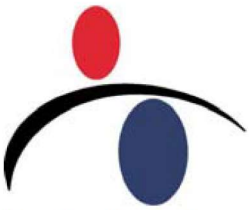

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List of abbreviations

CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
DoE	Department of Education
NEPA	National Education Policy Act
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SASA	South African Schools Act
SIT	Student Involvement Theory
SEL	Social Emotional Learning
SET	Student Engagement Theory
SMT	School Management Teams
TIMMS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
TIPS	Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WCED	Western Cape Education Department

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1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Homework is known to act as a connection between the school and home (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2012). Still, from the various studies that have been examined, some research is in favour of supporting homework, and some argue that it does not matter and should be eliminated (Fernández-Alonso et al., 2017). Hence, this study explored how educators perceived the potential adoption of a no-homework policy in independent primary schools in South Africa and its influence on learners' academic performance within each school.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996b), according to the Department of Education (DoE), stipulates that homework is a stated requirement for all schools in South Africa (DoE, 1998). In other words, South African schools recognise that educators should have outlines that guide the use of homework (Pfeiffer, 2018). Hence, this provides opportunities for educators to become involved in the stages of teaching and learning of their learners. The participants in this study were a combination of teachers and school principals who formed part of the school management teams (SMTs).

In this regard, the South African Schools Act (SASA), under the Guidelines for the Consideration of Governing Bodies in adopting a Code of Conduct for Learners, specifies that learners should dedicate time for schoolwork and completion of homework given to them (Republic of South Africa, 1996b). The Code of Conduct also states that parents should monitor their children's schoolwork and assignments (Republic of South Africa, 1996b). The Department of Education (DoE, 1998) prescribes that homework should create skill reinforcement, knowledge, and attitudes based on what they learn. Learners should create meaning and understand the relevance of assignments to prepare them for future work ethics.

Kunene (2016) states that homework is an essential aspect of teaching and learning in schools regarding curriculum and policy. However, the narrative changes regarding the nature of homework, the amount of homework, and the negative and

positive impacts of homework in today's schools. Ndebele (2018) explains that the controversies about the importance of homework at the primary school level open debates by scholars on its advantages and disadvantages to parents, learners, and educators.

Moreover, parents are continuously raising concerns over their children not getting adequate sleep as they fear the consequences of punishment or embarrassment for incomplete homework at school (Ndebele, 2018; Vlok, 2015). Parents have taken to social media on numerous occasions to voice their unhappiness about the excessive assignments given to their children. The worry increases when many subject teachers allocate assignments, projects and homework tasks on the same day, and most often than not, they are also due at the same time. Hence, the concern from educators when learners fail to complete their assigned homework tasks. This inaction of the learners to complete assigned homework tasks results in either accumulated demerits, detention or warnings being issued by the respective teachers. The time taken by teachers to meet out the necessary consequences or punishment of non-completion of homework tasks also negatively impacts the time that could be better utilised for actual teaching and learning. Thereby, the issue of incomplete homework may create an avenue for anxiety and unease, thus testing or breaking the bonds of trust and relationship established between the educators, learners, and parents (Farai et al., 2018).

Meanwhile, homework issues constitute a significant problem in both public and independent schools in South Africa. Nevertheless, this study investigated homework issues and concerns at two independent schools. Section 45 of the South African Schools' Act of 1996 (SASA) stated that "any person may establish and maintain an independent school at his or her own cost". Therefore, in South Africa, private schools are known as independent schools, as they are privately owned. However, this study was aware that homework guidelines should only be given according to the instruction expressed in the South African Schools Act of 1996, to which South African schools were expected to adhere, rather than homework policies which further sanctioned that educators should plan homework activities according to the schools' own guidelines (Republic of South Africa, 1996b).

The focus on homework, according to research, has not only brought about a positive influence but also had attributes negatively impacting educators, learners, and parents (Bedford, 2014). Homework has been argued to help learners grasp concepts and topics learned in class and enable them to work independently. Still, despite the merit, aspects such as learners' health, social life, and grades have also been negatively affected by homework demands. Educators understand that young children have basic needs aside from homework, and homework robs these children of their social existence, outdoor fun, and sleep (Bedford, 2014).

Educators expect parents to support their children at home by working together on given assignments to ensure that learners return the homework within the stipulated timeframe. However, the excess tasks have led to learner fatigue, incomplete homework, a lack of parental interest and support, less family fun times, and poor academic achievements (Ndebele, 2018).

The debate on no-homework alongside homework has been widely researched in the educational context. From an international perspective, Cordova et al. (2019) asserted that both Finland and the Philippines adopted a no-homework policy in their education system as it aided better teaching, learning and academic performance of their education system. In Finland, the Department of Social Affairs and the Department of Health supervise the well-being of children, youth, and their families to maintain and develop family policies to guide them. However, these two departments work together with other departments to oversee the welfare of their citizens (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012). Määttä and Uusiautti (2012) disclose that the Finnish family policy is balanced by being founded on three contexts: firstly, a child-oriented society; secondly, encouraging thriving families with children; and thirdly, the vision of preventing social exclusion. Moreover, Määttä and Uusiautti (2012) state that the Finnish early education phase is characterised by the EDUCARE model, which means the interconnectedness of education and care and learning as the foundation of pedagogical action.

In the Philippines, no homework was given on weekends only. In the literature review in chapter two, additional clarification on the merits of both countries policies regarding the concept of a no-homework policy is presented.

When such an international lens is used to view the context of South Africa, some school leaderships are moving with the need for change to the no-homework policy. A new generation of leaders tends to consider that the potential adoption of a no-homework policy may be suitable to improve the structure of education in the country. However, the context of adopting a no-homework policy in Finland and the Philippines, cannot be compared so easily with the South African context. According to Cordova et al. (2019), a no-homework policy means learners do not receive or do homework after school hours at home to aid their academic performance in school. Because homework is part of the adopted framework of teaching and learning in South Africa, a no-homework policy is not in existence in the South African education system. Thus, some schools in South Africa are shifting the narrative from the traditional homework to embracing a no-homework modus operandi despite the absence of a no-homework policy in the South African education system (Pfeiffer, 2018).

Therefore, against the background of this discussion, the study focused on investigating educators' perceptions concerning the potential adoption of a no-homework policy in selected South African independent primary schools in Pretoria. The findings of this study may help independent primary school educators to gain insight into how a no-homework policy could influence learners' academic performance.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

The proposed purpose of homework is to help learners better understand and reinforce the lesson content taught in the classroom (Pfeiffer, 2018). Homework helps learners understand what has been taught and allows educators to know if learners have grasped the day's content, reinforce an appreciation of their vital knowledge areas, and help with improvement in understanding where they are lacking. Also, parents are envisioned to monitor their children's work to ensure that homework is complete, but such cases are rare. As much as educators conveniently assign homework to learners, their experience teaching new academic content portrays learners' inadequacy in completing or comprehending homework (Bedford, 2014).

Another issue is parents' criticism about homework. Parents' protests about too much homework for their children based on their unavailability to assist them with homework cannot be overlooked. It appears these parents want to be able to spend ample time with their children, especially during leisure hours (Swanepoel, 2015). Likewise, homework might add substantial strain on all stakeholders, such as parents, learners, and educators (Pfeiffer, 2018).

When educators assign homework to learners; learners may return their homework as incomplete or hastily attempted, or with no effort. In that light, educators are concerned with learners' incomplete homework. The educators often provide feedback on learners' homework, and the feedback is frequently ignored and considered a waste of time as there is no learner interest (Bedford, 2014).

Another issue is that learners and parents are worried about the homework overload because of its adverse impact on family and fun time (Bedford, 2014). Due to some parents' and learners' family dynamics, they may have been missing out on spending quality time with their children as homework has to be completed and presented by their children to the teachers. It appears that learners and their parents want to be able to bond, and it can only be done during leisure hours, but homework overload may deprive them of good family time (Bedford, 2014).

In addition, job demands, lack of content knowledge, single parenting, and poor socio-economic backgrounds may influence parents' ability to cope with the demands of homework projects or assignments. For instance, a single parent may have little or no time to supervise their children's work, or if both parents are working nine to five jobs and are always busy, they may not find time to monitor their children's work either. Such scenarios demonstrate educators' continuous frustrations about homework and therefore ratify that these homework or no-homework gaps need to be addressed (Bedford, 2014; Ndebele, 2018).

Previous research has been done on homework studies from the educator's participation perspective, parental involvement, positive and negative effects of homework, or homework achievement (Rønning, 2011; Ndebele, 2015). Hence, there are limited studies in South African literature on educators' perception of a no-homework policy in independent primary schools. Therefore, this study sought to

address this gap by investigating the perspective of educators concerning the potential adoption of a no-homework policy in South African independent primary schools and how no-homework may or may not have influenced learners' academic performance in schools.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to investigate educators' perceptions concerning a no-homework policy and its influence on learners' academic performance at independent primary schools.

1.3.1 Research Objectives

The following were the objectives of this study:

- To determine educators' perception of a no-homework approach regarding better academic performance;
- To find out how educators engage learners in the classroom with the absence of homework,
- To explore why school principals decided to adopt a no-homework policy in independent primary schools; and,
- Lastly, to investigate the possible influence of no-homework on learners' academic performance.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

With regards to the research gap in the literature, it was proposed that the following main research question and the sub-research questions would direct the research process:

Main Research Question

How do educators perceive the influence of adopting a no-homework policy in improving learners' academic performance?

The following sub-research questions offered further insight into answering the main question.

Sub-research questions

a. How do educators perceive the absence of homework on their learners' academic performance?
b. How do educators engage learners by adopting a no-homework policy in independent primary schools?
c. What is the motivation of the school management behind adopting a no-homework policy?

1.5 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

This study's motivation was to understand why schools were shifting the narrative from traditional homework and adopting a no-homework policy to facilitate better learning. The study was based on the identified gap in the literature, which portrays that there are many homework reports but limited debates on a no-homework policy in South Africa (Ndebele, 2018). According to Bempechat et al. (2011), the influence of homework on academic achievement at the primary school level is unclear. A few researchers indicated that homework in primary schools revealed a slight relationship between assigned homework and learner performance (Bempechat et al., 2011; Cooper, et al., 2006; Ndebele, 2018). In addition, Kohn (2006) and Ndebele (2018) argued that reducing or eliminating homework in primary schools does not make any difference.

Ndebele (2018) and Pfeiffer (2018) argued that homework is problematic in South African public primary schools, especially in the foundation phase. These scholars explained that assignments were replaced with a no-homework policy in a primary school in the Western Cape. In these contexts, issues surrounding the concerns raised about the excessive homework workload, posed a bigger strain on teacher-learner and parent-children relationships and resulted in less family time, which made the importance of homework on improving learners' academic performance questionable (Ndebele, 2018 & Pfeiffer, 2018).

Consequently, from personal experience as a one-time primary school learner, homework was not done to comprehend the content taught but rather to avoid corporal punishment and embarrassment in the classroom. As I became an aftercare teacher, I realised that most learners do not do homework by themselves because their parents often did the assigned homework for these children.

Therefore, learners from an early age, tended to not take homework seriously, and I kept asking myself what if homework was scrapped? Will this make a difference in learners' performance? This constant curiosity spurred me on to learn about other educators' viewpoints on a no-homework approach. Therefore, this study's motivation was to consider the repeated questions and debates in the literature on the advantages and disadvantages of homework (Cordova et al., 2019). Should homework be scrapped? Hence, the researcher further investigated educators' perceptions of the potential adoption of a no-homework policy and its influence on learners' academic performance in independent primary schools.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Bempechat et al. (2011), and Cooper et al. (2006), amongst other scholars, have researched the merit of homework, from educators' involvement to parental involvement in homework. However, the debate on the no-homework approach in a public primary school in the Western Cape in South Africa prompted this study (Dry, 2019; Ndebele, 2018). There is limited research on educators' perceptions about "a no-homework policy" in South African independent primary schools reported in the South African literature. This study, therefore, explored educators' perceptions of "a no-homework policy" in independent primary schools in South Africa. This study investigated how educators engaged with learners inside and outside the classroom. It also investigated the potential usefulness of adopting such a no-homework policy and how it may influence learners' academic performances. The findings may be used to address the debate between assigning homework or applying a no-homework policy to learners in primary schools and its theoretical relevance in teaching and learning. This study may lead to schools embracing the adoption of a no-homework policy and doing away with traditional homework. Also, this study may be informative regarding the influence of a no-homework policy on learners' academic performance in independent primary schools. Lastly, this study may help inform the debate on how the education department may resolve homework or no-homework problems in South Africa.

1.7 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Creswell (2013) explained that delimitations set boundaries and help the researcher develop the exact scope of a study. The study was delimited to only one school

district, the Tshwane-South District of Gauteng Provincial Education and participants were chosen from teachers teaching Literacy as a subject. The ensuing analysis of rich data gathered from the two primary schools that formed part of this study was enough to contribute to the knowledge of how educators perceived the potential adoption of a no-homework policy in independent primary schools.

1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The data collected represented a small number of educators in School F and School G. It was focused on only one district, and thus the findings might not be generalisable because of the sample size. It was also based only on two independent primary schools, forming a small sample size. However, the uniqueness of both schools is explained accordingly in Chapter 4.

1.9 DEFINITION OF TERMS

For this study, the following terms are defined:

1.9.1 No-homework policy

A no-homework policy involves learners having to do without homework, and this is said to help focus more on learners' academic performance (Cordova et al., 2019). This study focused on investigating a potential adoption of a no-homework policy and how it has helped learners' academic performance in schools.

1.9.2 Homework policy

Homework policies are designed based on time spent, learner achievement and the different homework tasks given for other subjects (Horsley & Walker, 2013). According to SASA, homework policy is a set of guidelines that schools abide by to smoothly support learners' educational performance (Republic of South Africa, 1996b). In this study, the researcher sought to have a better understanding of the homework policy in the education system of South Africa.

1.9.3 Educators

The South African Schools Act of 1996 defines an educator as "any person, excluding a person who is appointed to exclusively perform extracurricular duties, who teaches, educates or trains other persons or who provides professional educational services, including professional therapy and education psychological

services at school," (Republic of South Africa, 1996b). In this study, the educators referred to are the principals and teachers. The principals were chosen as part of this study because they serve as managers and oversee the professional management of school affairs. The teachers are regularly involved with learners, teaching and learning activities in the classroom. Therefore, the two stakeholders (teachers and principals) helped the researcher establish proper knowledge of a no-homework policy.

1.9.4 Perceptions

Qiong (2017) defines perception according to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English as "the way you think about something and your idea of what it is like." Also, in psychology, "perception is the process of attaining awareness or understanding of sensory information" (Qiong, 2017). Therefore, this study sought to determine what educators' may be thinking concerning the potential adoption of a no-homework policy in South African schools.

1.9.5 Independent schools

According to the South African Schools Act of 1996, independent schools are known as private schools because they are privately governed and not state-controlled. According to Section 29 of the Constitution of South Africa, everyone has the right to establish, at their own expense, independent educational institutions (Republic of South Africa, 1996a). Similarly, Section 45 of SASA (1996) stated that "any person may establish and maintain an independent school at his or her own cost." Therefore, this study focused on independent schools practising a no-homework policy in their schools.

1.10 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1 narrated an overview of the introduction and background of the study, discussed the research problem as well as the research questions and purpose of the study. The chapter also explained the rationale, limitations of the study, significance of the study and definition of terms used in this study.

Chapter 2 unpacks the literature from the global and local scholars' perspectives on homework and no-homework. This was to aid the researcher in discovering the

thoughts and discussions, literature gaps and the various debates about homework and no-homework practices internationally and locally.

Chapter 3 elaborates on the research methodologies used in the study. It highlights the research tools used for data collection which include interviews and document analysis as well as the data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations used throughout the study.

Chapter 4 presents the findings that emerged from qualitative data analysis and an interpretation of the study.

Chapter 5 is the concluding chapter which encompasses the findings, recommendations, suggestions for future research and the comprehensive conclusion of the study.

1.11 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

For this introductory chapter, the researcher outlined the general overview of the study, which includes a rundown of the background, a short discussion of the research problem, research questions, rationale, significance of the study, limitations of the study, delimitation of the study, as well as the definition of terms that underpins the study. In the next chapter (Chapter 2), the researcher will unpack literature discussions and debates that pertain to the merit of adopting either a no-homework policy or that of adopting a homework policy at a school.

2. CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The researcher established the background of this study in the previous chapter. It was essential to show an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon of this study; therefore, this chapter discusses the relevant literature surrounding the debates about homework and no-homework, which includes the theoretical framework used in this research. The key issues from the literature explored the arguments about homework and no-homework policy in educational contexts, both internationally and locally. Adopting a homework or a no-homework policy in schools continues to be a contentious and provocative topic of discussion in South Africa and other countries (Gill & Schlossman, 2000). The literature discussions below are used to better understand the homework and no-homework debate.

2.2 THE NO-HOMEWORK AND HOMEWORK OVERVIEWS

The concept of no-homework and homework in the educational system is widely debated by researchers. The controversy around homework in education stems from different points of view, including the amount of time learners should spend on homework. In addition, the advantages and disadvantages of homework, the appropriate grade levels for homework, the effect of homework on learners' academic performance, and whether homework should be assigned at all are controversial issues (Gant, 2016). The outcome of these debates is important from the perspectives of educators, learners, the parents, the administrators, and the schools, who are all stakeholders in the homework debates (Ortiz, 2018).

2.2.1 Homework

What is to be regarded as homework and what is not, inform critical discussions at staff meetings when there are complaints from learners or their parents. To avoid such scenarios, Horsley and Walker (2013) argue that for schools to have grounded policies guiding the academic achievement of learners, the amount of time spent on homework and the level of the assigned homework, a homework policy is imperative, and it should be carefully clarified and designed. Harris Cooper, a known

researcher on this topic, defined homework as "tasks assigned by educators meant to be done during a non-instructional time" (Bembenutty, 2011, p. 185). Homework is also defined as "the job of childhood" if it changes learners' accountability and attitude and develops their future profession (Corno & Xu, 2004). In addition, homework is known as "the tasks assigned by educators to learners which should be completed during non-school hours" (Cooper et al., 2012).

2.2.2 Homework Overview

Kunene (2016) describes that homework has always been destined to play a key part of the school curriculum and policy; however, the different arguments on homework inclusion remain unresolved and debatable. In South Africa, Kunene (2016) believes that homework is a requirement for schools. Therefore, educators in schools must design and assign homework to learners. Although schools in South Africa have embraced homework as a standard pedagogy, educators do not have a strong understanding of its use (Kunene, 2016) and sometimes just ask learners to complete classwork at home.

Khan et al. (2015) recognise that a limited amount of homework should be given to learners, which they should complete at their respective homes. This viewpoint implies that homework should be significant to learners and doable. Khan et al. (2015) stated that homework is assigned to learners for a variety of reasons that comprises “completing the course in time, preparing learners for assessment, and letting parents know about their children’s academic performance”.

Vatterott (2018) attests that homework came about when teaching comprised principally of reading, writing and mathematics and remote learning primarily dominated education during the time. Simple tasks such as memorisation were easy for learners to do at home (Vatterott, 2018).

Homework has been a general practice and was not questioned for a long time. Hanratty et al. (2019) indicated that some countries like the United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK), Australia, Singapore and China had stated homework policies used in their education system had embraced homework to foster learners' academic achievements. In the USA, homework started changing from simple tasks

such as memorising mathematical formulas, writing, and spelling words to more strenuous tasks (Vatterott, 2018). Therefore, parents and teachers in the American educational system identified that children were experiencing too much stress due to difficult homework being given to them (Cooper, 2007). In the 20th century, homework was used to manage children's well-being, particularly their mental health and battle the education problems faced by the American public school system (Cooper, 2007; Vatterott, 2009; Lowe, 2017). This simply means that homework was given to engage and discipline learners' minds. Lowe (2017) suggests that during the 19th century, remote learning was a major drive in most schools; therefore, spelling and memorising mathematical concepts were the homework activities done. However, the attitude towards homework has changed as it is now used as an additional tool to enhance learning (Murillo & Martinez-Garrido, 2014).

The USA education board does recommend a 10-minute daily homework routine for learners in primary schools (Hanratty et al., 2019; Walker, 2017). The University of Michigan conducted a national survey on more than 2400 children in 2004, finding that the time children spent doing homework has increased by 51% since 1981 (Bennett & Kalish, 2006). Cooper proposed that schools should go by a "ten minutes per grade per school night rule" (Cooper, 2007), which means, according to this recommendation, that a learner should have only two hours of homework each night by the time they are in high school. However, children in elementary school in America complete up to two hours of homework per night. The National Education Association of the USA further acknowledged that the hours children devoted to homework exceeded the research recommendations (Bennett & Kalish, 2006). It is, therefore, evident that scholars' suggestions on homework are being ignored in schools in the USA.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in early 2009 conducted research in some parts of the world and realised that there was little connection between the amount of homework learners did and their test scores in a particular country (Hechinger Report, 2015). Singapore and China were among the top achieving countries that assigned much homework to learners compared to Finland, where learners succeed without assignments. Finnish learners continuously score at the top in reading and mathematics subjects globally in the

OECD international test known as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Hechinger Report, 2015). PISA serves as a tool used to measure young learners' ability to read, solve mathematical questions and develop scientific knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges. However, they changed this notion five years later after more research was done, and they found that homework had a significant role in learner achievement.

However, in Singapore and China, homework is also used as an academic tool. The two countries are known to be high achievers when it comes to the education of learners. The learners in Shanghai, China, lead the world in scores on their PISA test even though 14 hours of homework a week is assigned (Hechinger Report, 2015). In Singapore, homework is also given to learners, and they spend long hours each week completing it. It is fascinating that despite the long hours spent on homework by learners in both countries, they are highly ranked in the PISA test scores. Also, Singapore and China assign a lot of homework, and they achieve good results in learners' academics as both countries are ranked as high achievers in the world of education compared to USA and other countries who are ranked low in the test score, meaning the homework approach has yielded good outcomes (Hechinger Report, 2015).

The Australian schools are also leading contributors to homework allocation. The state policy permits the school principal to decide what constitutes a realistic amount of homework (Rudman, 2014). The policy states that the focus should not be on the time duration used by learners to complete homework, but rather on the quality and aim of homework delivered by educators, which are the top priority (Hanratty et al., 2019; Victoria State, 2018). In this context, it appears that policies may differ in various schools in Australia, but there is a stated guide on how homework should be allocated. Also, the Australian Primary Education Department allows educators to design, assign, and give feedback to learners based on the guidelines developed as their school policy (Hanratty et al., 2019).

Furthermore, in Hong Kong, the Curriculum Development Council emphasises the setting of meaningful homework to meet the essential functions by stressing its quality and not quantity (Tam & Chan, 2016). It indicates that the historical up-and-

down status of public attitudes toward homework shows that understanding the role of homework in children's learning is far from comprehensive and clear (Zhu & Leung, 2012).

Bempechat and Kralovec (2017) have contradictory opinions towards homework. Bempechat agrees that homework pays off, but Kravolec sees homework as a waste of time for learners. The suggestion from Bempechat and Kravolec (2017) was that educators' focus should be more on designing quality and enjoyable homework for learners in school.

Although Bennett and Kalish (2006) state that from kindergarten to twelfth grade in the United States, homework is assigned to all age groups but learners with disabilities were found not to finish specific tasks, and educators needed to recognise their learning needs. Some psychologists are worried as many children develop homework anxiety because homework does not only take away from them academically but socially and emotionally as well, as learners are given homework that takes many hours to complete (Bennett & Kalish, 2006).

According to research, Kohn (2007) reiterates that homework assigned in primary schools does not provide educational benefits. He further explained the relation between homework and achievement, especially for learners, at that young age. Secondly, in high schools, homework was shown to be of less importance for learners' academics which is why homework cannot be used to determine academic performance because these learners had more homework to deal with after school hours (Kohn, 2007).

Kohn (2007) mentioned that educators assume that learners' moral standards are raised as more homework is assigned, especially in this 21st century. However, Kohn further expressed that no research exists to strengthen the argument that homework builds learners' moral standards, which was not found to be true. He also stated that "you cannot reinforce learners' knowledge; you can only reinforce their behaviours." Kohn (2007) then proposed that educators may only assign homework if learners benefit from the homework given.

In an interview by Katie Reilly from Time Magazine (Reilly, 2016), Cathy Vatterott, a professor of education, argued that "correlation does not equal causation." She questioned if homework enhances academic achievement or if higher achievers do more homework. She, therefore, encouraged that younger learners should not receive homework until the 4th or 5th grades because there is no adequate evidence that homework helps learners in primary schools (Aguirre, 2020).

Another point that surfaced from literature, is that there is no clarity regarding policy pertaining to issuing homework. Kunene (2016) asserts that the homework policy differs from school to school, and there are still controversies on different evidence that support the broad practice of homework in schools. According to Pfeiffer (2018), the South African Department of Education stresses that homework is a requirement, but schools should implement their own homework policy. However, a homework policy is discussed and done in a general term, and various homework types are designed under the same policy. Khan et al. (2015) note that teachers do not have the proper skills and expertise for designing and giving homework which affects schools having properly designed homework policies. In the USA, for instance, California banned homework because schools had variations of homework policy. Despite banning homework in that part of the USA, they understand that homework helps learners grow their minds positively, even if schools' homework policies continue to differ (Lowe, 2017).

In the above-mentioned paragraphs, the overview on homework includes discussions on homework, a short history of homework and comments on the homework policies from different countries such as the USA, Australia, China, Hong Kong, and South Africa. It is evident that there are various opinions on homework and its usefulness according to different contexts.

2.2.3 Homework and Parental Involvement

The parents are part of the homework process with educators and learners. Parents expect their children to get homework from their educators (Cordova et al., 2019).

Hughes and Greenhough (2002) discovered different opinions on homework for children from seven to eleven years of age. Some parents have immense support

for homework and see value in it. Still, others see homework as demanding on their children's time and energy. They further ascertain that many parents and educators see homework as a sign of sending their children to good schools rather than a form of a learning experience.

Deveci et al. (2013) studied parents' opinions on homework and did not find any significant difference in their attitude and behaviour relating to gender, educational background, occupation, and salary. On the other hand, Aguirre (2020) mentioned that some homework required supervision from parents, and learners without such support were disadvantaged compared to learners who had sufficient support from their parents. This finding concurred with a study by Erlendsdóttir (2010) study in Namibia, who proved that parental involvement in children's homework improves academic achievement. Ndebele (2018) conducted a study in South Africa on parental involvement in homework. The educators participating in the study asserted that parents did not supervise learners' homework. The lack of parental involvement stemmed from some parents being illiterate and some foreigners having language barrier problems that limited communication. In a similar vein, Abraham (2013), who conducted a study around a disadvantaged primary school in Cape Town, revealed the negative response of parental engagement in learner's homework originated from underlining problems such as lack of employment, impoverishment, inequity, and other issues. Educators expressed that they received a positive response when the no-homework policy was introduced to learners and parents. Still, only ten per cent of the parents questioned the new development (Pfeiffer, 2018).

2.2.4 Homework and Socioeconomic Background

The state of inequality, the type of economic resources, and socioeconomic background of families in South Africa could affect the inclusion of a no-homework policy in the education system (Ndebele, 2018). The objective of the South African curriculum is to secure learners' acquisition and application of knowledge and skills to draw meaning for their lives and future (Motshekga, 2011). This could mean that regardless of learners' social statuses, race, gender, physical or intellectual abilities, learners can acquire the necessary knowledge, values, and skills for self-fulfilment and become successful individuals in society (Motshekga, 2011). The following

discussion exhibits scholars' views about the difference homework connections and social status bring in the lives of learners.

Niemi et al. (2016) mentioned that the Finnish education system established its own strengths for schools when speaking of social statuses. One of such strength has been learners' advanced reading literacy skills (Niemi et al., 2016). Also, the Finnish school system renders exceptional and uniform schooling opportunities notwithstanding learners' living status and social class (Niemi et al., 2016). In addition, Niemi et al. (2016) further argued that, in Finland, learners' engagement, self-efficacy, reading habits and reasoning outcomes are higher than in any other country. Furthermore, Määttä and Uusiautti (2012) disclosed that, from the 20th century, the Finnish education policy has been to equip all learners with equal educational opportunities and doing away with obstacles to learning, especially among the least successful learners and this has been the principle guiding their school system.

Trautwein et al. (2002) maintain that learners with low academic marks achieve more when they receive support from their households because there is no time restriction at home which may enable slower learners to catch up when adequate help is given to them. Nonetheless, the support learners will receive depends on the location of their home and family structure (Ndebele, 2015).

In addition, Ndebele (2015) claims that homework remains a challenge for teachers and learners working and living in underprivileged communities. However, in South Africa, since the end of apartheid, little has changed in rural schools and communities (Janks, 2014). Moreover, considering the sociocultural context in relation to language and reading ability education, learners with low social statuses face challenges when homework is assigned to them (Janks, 2014). Learners often lack resources like learning spaces and stationery to work with at home as their homes are small and overcrowded, not to forget to mention that some live in destructive neighbourhoods. Janks (2014) explains that learners who speak languages that do not frequently appear in print and, in general, learners who have no access to magazines or books at home are likely to have incomplete homework.

Another factor is that the socioeconomic background affects how learners are assisted with learning in schools. Homework is proven to positively impact the performance of primary school learners only if they are from a high socio-economic background (Rønning, 2011). Hence, Rønning believes that learners from high-income earning families will do better than learners from low-income homes.

However, learners from higher socioeconomic backgrounds have an advantage in handling assigned homework over disadvantaged learners. For instance, Singapore is an example of this disparity between the rich and the poor regarding homework. The learners from a high socioeconomic background spend three hours more on homework than learners from a lower socioeconomic spectrum (Borgonovi, 2014). The increased time spent leads to these learners spending about eleven hours per week more on homework. These extra hours lead to the advantaged learners scoring 18 points more in their mathematics examination (Borgonovi, 2014; Hechinger Report, 2015).

Furthermore, Borgonovi (2014) explained that poor learners are more disadvantaged regarding homework. The poor learners cannot complete homework because of the unstable environment they may live in, thereby often skipping homework. In independent schools in Singapore and China, schools assign more tasks to wealthy learners than poor learners (Borgonovi, 2014). In other words, advantaged learners tend to have more time to spend on homework than disadvantaged learners. The privileged learners are at an advantage over the less privileged learners in such countries, and they perform better. These learners are at an advantage because they can put in more effort or hours to get homework done (Borgonovi, 2014; Hechinger Report, 2015).

Chu (2014) in his study, states that a higher socioeconomic status can be associated with learners improved academic performance. He explained that learners with a high social status tend to have higher grades than learners with a low social status (Chu, 2014). In addition, the learners' parents' level of education could determine the amount of support they render to their children with their homework and how effective they communicate with their children's teachers regarding their work. It suggests that parents with higher education levels often

assist their children with homework. In Taiwan, Chu (2014) found that some parents with low education levels often struggle to assist their children with homework, and it reflects negatively on learners' academic achievement.

In summary, the discussions above reveal that homework is impacted positively or negatively depending on the socioeconomic background of learners and parents. The various arguments convey that those who benefitted from homework are from the high social ladders, and those who benefitted less were from the lower social ladder (Rønning, 2011). Therefore, the social and economic issues need to be considered and should not be ignored when schools in South Africa decide to include a no-homework policy or stick with a homework policy.

2.3 NO-HOMEWORK POINT OF VIEW

A no-homework policy implies that schools do not assign homework to learners to improve and concentrate on learners' academic performance (Cordova et al., 2019). The different opinions about a no-homework policy are discussed in the following sections.

2.3.1 No-homework Policy Overview

A few countries introduced a no-homework policy to support learners' academic performance. Finland, some parts of the United States, and the Philippines were some countries mentioned as having adopted a no-homework policy for their schools (Walker, 2017).

Finland is one of the countries that adopted a no-homework policy which has had a high impact on academic achievement in their schools (Coughlan, 2016). Wright (2019) describes Finland as the most prosperous country to practice a no-homework policy, which has worked very well for its education system. The author further explained that the no-homework approach had paved the way for great success in the lives of learners with regard to their academic performance in schools with training for educators and many efforts and contributions from the educators. Finnish schools have shorter school days, little homework and educators focus more on learning than teaching (Matias, 2019). Pfeiffer (2018) explained that as Finland is a small country, having a no-homework policy is possible because the schools

are small enough for teachers to know every student. This means they can give every learner the attention they need (Hancock, 2011). If Finnish schools provide homework to learners, it requires less than half an hour to complete (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).

More recent studies discovered that Finland's no-homework policy in schools has helped improve learners' academic performance (Cook, 2018; Schatz, 2015). For example, Hanratty et al. (2019) stated that Finland incorporated a no-homework policy and was rated best in the PISA rankings (Davis et al., 2019). The Finnish education success of learners cannot be ignored with fewer hours of instruction than in other countries and assigning less homework and learning through creative play (Coughlan, 2016). Finland's educational system approves the method of "quality over quantity" (Coughlan, 2016). For example, on average, Finnish learners are assigned three hours of homework in a week and still emerge with higher scores in the ranking test (Hechinger Report, 2015).

Wilby (2013) further qualified that the success of Finland's no-homework system is because the national curriculum has broad outlines. The curriculum outlines educators must obtain a five-year degree, teach in primary schools, and immerse themselves in the educational theories. These educators only teach four lessons every day, and the system puts them first in their profession. The drop-out rate from the teaching career is only 10-15% because educators are well trained and prioritise their jobs (Wilby, 2013). This development of educators has produced excellent world-class educational performance since the 2000s. Wilby (2013) further stated that "a country where there are no school fees, no inspectors, no exams till 18 years of age, no private tuition industry, no school uniforms, and no more than 30 minutes assignment per night" has everything working, including the economy. Therefore, the idea to cater to the needs of the educators, which he compares to equity, has closed the considerable gap between the lower and higher achieving learners and supported the objective of no-academic disparity between them (Wilby, 2013). In addition to the above study, Aguirre (2020) supports the suggestion to enable educators to have ample time to monitor learners' development, be mindful of their learning styles, and build "a family-type" atmosphere in the classroom.

In the United States of America, the North Rockland school district educators took a new approach to homework. The district decided to implement a home learning policy in New York schools. Educators found that learners' interest and enthusiasm for learning were diminishing, and learners were only interested in getting their grades or checkmark (Cotton, 2019). Educators explained that learners' responsibilities lead to a schedule that must accommodate taking care of their homes or siblings, getting home late, engaging in school sports, completing two to three hours of study, and studying every day. As a result, the new approach eliminates homework on weekends and school holidays for all grades and monitors time spent on doing homework. In other words, “grades K-3 homework is limited to 15 minutes, grades 4-6 time spent on homework is limited to 30 minutes, no grades for learners’ homework, and grades 7-12 have no time limit but must be given a reasonable amount.” (Cotton, 2019). Educators believe that this new approach to homework, known as home learning, is to reduce tasks and be more meaningful to get children excited for learning and allow educators to give better feedback to the learners. Although these educators stated that some parents were concerned, others agreed with this new disposition (Cotton, 2019).

Cordova et al. (2019) conducted research in the Philippines that adopted a no-homework policy for primary and high school learners. The policy states that no homework is given during weekends to allow families the opportunity to bond with their children. The study shows that educators in the Philippines do not assign homework to learners during weekends; the government sees that homework problems may be reduced through this method (Cordova et al., 2019).

Finally, although some South African schools have introduced a no-homework policy, Pfeiffer explained some challenges during his investigation (Pfeiffer, 2018). The scholar discovered that the no-homework policy never posed any real challenges, but educators had to manage their time in covering the syllabus. Educators had to work at their time management and alter their teaching styles to deliver quality content in the classroom (Pfeiffer, 2018).

2.3.2 No-homework on Weekends

Normally, homework is given on weekdays; but it also extends into weekends and holidays (Bennett & Kalish, 2006). Therefore, in the Philippines, the no-homework policy is adopted for weekends only. Educators were thus prohibited from giving homework to learners during the weekends; that is, a no-homework policy applies on Saturdays and Sundays only. The reason is that homework appears to harm children and has taken away family bonds (Pascual, 2019). Also, some learners maintain taking their books home becomes too heavy to carry. Therefore, homework was banned based on learners' health and safety. Pascual (2019) added that:

> "The Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) believe that educators cannot do without homework for learners from K-12 program. The time spent by learners in school is not enough for educators to complete content in the classroom. These committees argued that homework is not a form of torture but better reinforcement of learning for the learners so they can be responsible in future." (Pascual, 2019)

Pascual (2019) reasoned these opinions were justifiable because the first provides for the well-being of the learners, and the second shows that homework helps learners, educators, and parents. Therefore, he concluded that learners' learning capacity should not be measured only by their ability to complete homework within or outside the school (Pascual, 2019).

On the other hand, a study carried out by Cordova et al. (2019) on the possible effect of having and not having homework on weekends was on the transmuted mean scores and performance of high school learners and highlighted that the transmuted mean scores of learners with homework was higher than those without homework. Also, learners who did homework had a better performance than those without homework. The scholars, therefore, concluded that having no homework for learners on weekends harms their performance and retaining homework on weekends has a positive effect on learners' performance (Cordova et al., 2019).

According to the curriculum review (LaChance, 2011), the board members of the Galloway Township school adopted the policy that prohibits educators from assigning homework over the weekend. The decision was based on the district

officials seeing that the correlation between homework and primary school learners' performance was small in the United States. This policy affects all learners from grades K to 6 in New Jersey, US. Although learners will continue to be accountable for studying for tests, exams, reading and other homework, the policy was based on the necessity for children to devote some time to their families and partake in other activities. Therefore, educators cannot assign "more than 10 minutes of homework, multiplied by the learner's grade level a night" (Taketa, 2018).

Also, Kirkwood High School in Missouri in the United States undertook a trial to eliminate homework on two weekends to facilitate and improve learner and educator mental health (Taketa, 2018). The test was for one weekend in February and another in March 2018 from grades 9 to 12. The school principal explained that most learners juggled between schoolwork loads, extra-mural activities, and jobs. On the part of the educators, the work for them does not end, especially on weekends, because they must write lesson plans or mark papers. The principal further explained that "children need to be children at some point because they need time to catch their breath." The trial for a no-homework on the weekend was because of a rise in learners requesting social and emotional help from school counsellors. The school carried out a survey to determine its effectiveness, and the outcome was inconclusive (Taketa, 2018).

Meanwhile, Odesanya (2017) reports that homework and exams for some schools should be suspended because of the Hindu festival of Diwali. The festival is celebrated for five days and for schools to show respect towards the faith of the Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains for international learners. Therefore, the school districts in New York, both public and independent schools, should investigate incorporating this as part of their education system (Odesanya, 2017).

2.3.3 Social-Emotional Learning

Cohen and Sandy (2003) defined "social-emotional learning (SEL) as the process used to promote social and emotional competencies of learners". The skills and knowledge learners acquire aid their ability to understand and express themselves socially and emotionally. As explained by Cohen and Sandy (2003), the SEL features, namely, *"purposively teaching children to become more socially and*

emotionally competent; systematically intervening to create even safer, more caring, participatory, and responsive schools, homes, and communities; creating long-term school-home learning partnerships". In other words, SEL assists every person, such as learners from regular schools, learners with special needs in special education programmes, parents, school management, and its community as they all relate with children.

The conversation about social and emotional learning (SEL) extended during the COVID-19 pandemic (Palton & Russell, 2020). Educators recognised the essence of using SEL in assisting learners in coping with stressful and demanding experiences like lack of support at home and homework fatigue. The SEL teaches learners to manage their emotions, build healthy relationships with others, and practise mindfulness at school and at home. The primary and high school years are among the most difficult on a student's academic journey because it is the period learners learn to steer brand new affairs while dealing with peer pressure, a sense of belonging, academic performance, and puberty. Hence, educators identified an increase in the need for mental health and behavioural support for learners. Therefore, school leaders can impact learners' outcomes when selecting SEL programmes, as there are many from which to choose which are appropriate for their school and learners (Palton & Russell, 2020).

Educators perceive SEL skills as an essential tool to motivate learners' academic performance to get better (Fynn, 2021). The resistance of the learner's attitude towards schoolwork showed before and after COVID as learners had no skills in place. This resistance occurs because learners are told what and how to do things, reflecting how their homework is done. SEL is adopted to boost learners' confidence and attitudes towards homework, relationships, and behaviours. Therefore, social-emotional learning is a toolbox curriculum for young grades to enhance their social skills for academics and life success, such as resilience, self-management, and responsible decision-making skills. The curriculum helps to improve learners' academic performance, reduce emotional stress, and enhance their social conduct, personal attitudes and relation with others (Berkeley Unified School District, 2021; Fynn, 2021).

2.4 THE PERCEPTION OF EDUCATORS ON HOMEWORK

Educators must outline the homework tasks assigned to learners (Cooper, 2015). Educators have struggled for years to fix the proper way of administering homework in the classroom. The different questions such as “should homework be assigned every day? Should homework be graded on accuracy, completion, a mix of the two, or not at all? How do we prevent learners from handing in incomplete homework? How do we motivate them to take it seriously? If they understand the topic, why should they even do homework?” (Ortiz, 2018). These questions are still unanswered as educators and researchers struggle to reach a consensus on homework and no-homework approaches (Ortiz, 2018).

Pasi (2016) found that educators have different motives for allocating homework to their learners. These motives could reinforce learning in the class, test the topic taught, and adhere to stated policy. The mistake an educator can make about homework is allocating trivial tasks that do not favour learners' present knowledge. Pasi (2016) further ascertains that there is insufficient proof to show learners grasp adequate knowledge of homework assigned by their educators. Kobus Maree (as cited in Canham, 2018) recommended that level-appropriate homework be sufficient for educators to give to learners.

Ortiz (2018), in his study, stated that grade allocation is significant to homework. Even though educators realise they cannot control how learners complete their homework tasks, many educators still see value in attaching some grade to homework. Vatterott (2018) explained that many educators are sceptical about abandoning homework grades for three reasons. First, learners may avoid doing it without being awarded credits. Second, the efforts devoted to completing the work should be rewarded. Third, learners who are poor test-takers benefit from homework grades. Vatterott cautioned that learners and parents might confuse not grading homework with not assigning it. Vatterott notes that homework still needs to be set, she suggested three practices for educators to follow: “Evaluate each assignment to determine whether to grade it … tie homework to assessments … [and] focus on demonstration of learning, not task completion” (Vatterott, 2011, pp. 62-63).

Otherwise, homework may be viewed as rewarding expected behaviour rather than providing feedback (Vatterott, 2018).

Van Voorhis (2011) indicated that educators and researchers should observe the emotions, intellectual time, homework design and family benefits of homework for learners, families, and educators and aim to understand the tension homework causes among educators, learners, and their parents. In his findings, he suggested that the benefits of Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) intervention regarding learners' emotions and academic performance exceeded its costs. The intervention was based on homework assigned by elementary mathematics, language, arts and science middle school educators. The result yielded 72% and 91% of TIPS activities, and each family's signature was on between 55% and 83% of the assigned TIPS homework (Van Voorhis, 2011). In addition to this study, Van Voorhis (2003) found that the TIPS helped learners with parental guidance more with their homework than learners who did not interact with their parents. The findings of the study support that TIPS interactive homework does affect family attitudes to science and learner achievement in middle grades (Van Voorhis, 2003).

On the other hand, Van Voorhis (2011) revealed that educators underestimate the influence of families on homework. Van Voorhis (as cited in Eccles & Harold, 1996) conducted a study of middle learners and found that parents help their children with homework at least four times a week. He indicated that learners mentioned that their parents were involved with their homework at least three times a week, but educators were reported to request help from their parents only once or twice a month. It shows miscommunication and misalignment on how and when parents are needed to assist their children with homework, and it contributes to the rise in homework issues (Van Voorhis, 2011).

Haffila et al. (2018) revealed that educators shared positive sentiments toward assigning homework to learners. The educators believed that homework helps train learners to work on their own. They also stressed that homework is valuable and allows parents to share knowledge with their children. Also, homework helps to give a deliberate and substantial connection between home and school (Haffila et al., 2018). Govender (2010, p. 10) reiterated this knowledge when she stated, "I believe

that homework at primary school is necessary". The researchers further explain that homework is valuable to all learners and enforces teaching and learning in the classroom (Haffila et al., 2018).

A study by Davidovitch and Yavich (2017) about the opinions of learners, parents and educators on homework shows that stakeholders do not have definite views about the purpose and usefulness of homework in primary schools. The findings from this study reveal that "the educators' years on the job and attitude towards homework task was found to have a significant negative correlation; such that the more experienced the educator, the more negative his or her attitude to homework" (Davidovitch & Yavich, 2017).

Another perspective is that educators should not adopt a one-size-fits-all method to homework or teaching to accommodate different learners' learning levels and abilities. Learners can understand better when tasks assigned are appropriate for their grades (Jamie, 2020). In achieving this in the classroom, the differentiation method is used. Differentiation means modifying instruction and using different teaching techniques to meet each learner's needs (Stavrou & Koutselini, 2016). The basic idea is for educators to use differentiation techniques when assigning homework to learners. When homework is differentiated, learners receive learning tailored to their own needs (Jamie, 2020). If an assignment is too difficult for learners, they often tend to become fatigued, and if homework seems too simple, they can be bored and not feel appropriately challenged (Jamie, 2020; Tomlinson, 2004).

Haffila et al. (2018) further illustrated that a few educators voiced their dislike for homework, especially the Mathematics and English educators. They need to pay more attention to these two subjects as more attention is required in teaching the learners. Educators dislike homework in primary school because they have too many subjects to teach and assigning homework for each subject seems too much. They rarely give homework, although homework is to be delivered. Haffila et al. (2018) stated that homework was sometimes given to punish or as a chore for learners. Govender (2010) supported this view by stating that "homework is seen in

a negative light and will create a daily ‘battleground’ between learners and the educators”.

Meanwhile, a high school teacher in the US scrapped homework for his 9th-grade learners because he recognised that learners were stressed and delivered poor-quality homework (Walker, 2019). The teacher explained that learners providing higher quality is much better than giving stressful homework. He reiterates that adopting a no-homework approach for his learners has improved learning, making them happy and healthy-looking (Walker, 2019). On the other hand, another teacher in the same school in the US says an educator should not be against homework and believes homework should continuously be a part of learning for learners (Walker, 2019).

Haffila et al. (2018) argued that educators have demanding working conditions, which becomes unpleasant and demotivating for them where homework is concerned. This view suggests that educators are beginning to feel overburdened with homework, and instead of educators marking their homework, learners are asked to mark each other’s work in class. Conversely, educators agreed that homework deprives learners of their favourite interests.

Apart from the issue of work condition, a lack of motivation of educators also affect the issue of homework (Mtshali, 2019). Educators are demotivated because they have too much work to do aside from attending to learners' homework (Mtshali, 2019).

Tam and Chan (2016) found that Chinese primary school teachers in Hong Kong used homework to reinforce work taught in the classroom. Moreover, the findings showed that teachers view homework as a remedial solution (Tam & Chan, 2016). In addition, teachers felt that homework served as a diagnostic plan for their teaching because if most learners showed confusion in a specific area in assigned homework, a teacher would have to re-teach that particular topic to aid learner comprehension.

In addition, Bedford (2014) revealed that educators should note that the quantity of work assigned to learners does not always equal the quality of work delivered by learners. In other words, there is a need for educators to focus less on setting a large amount of homework for learners because it does not determine enough teaching and learning has transpired. Bedford (2014) states that the quantity of homework does not improve a learner's academic performance. Marzano and Pickering (2007) support the idea that educators should not ignore homework completely; instead, educators should develop more on their quality of instruction. Bembenutty (2011) suggests that the value of homework is enriched by teachers who understand the educational benefits of homework by giving homework when it is necessary and by providing homework that appeals to the learners' interests while retaining a focus on curricular goals. Vatterott (2018) notes that it is hard for learners to cope with homework independently when it comes prematurely.

According to Pfeiffer (2018), educators in South Africa need to have proper guidelines such as planning and assigning homework for prescribing and utilising homework as a teaching tool. For homework to be managed effectively, it requires thorough, coordinated planning, guidance and control by all role players. The intention of homework should be to reinforce and extend classroom learning, consolidate basic skills and knowledge, and ultimately develop a routine of independent home study.

2.5 THE PERCEPTION OF EDUCATORS ON NO-HOMEWORK

In Bempechat and Kralovec's (2017) study, an educator explained that there is much agreement on homework as an educator who spends considerable time in school. According to the CAPS curriculum, the stipulated time for homework in primary school is 10 minutes per day for each grade (10 minutes for Grade 1 and 60 minutes for Grade 6). Nevertheless, not all educators observe this instruction in South African schools (Bedford, 2014).

Haddock (2006) confirmed that homework deprives young children of experiencing childhood, builds family problems, and restricts children from cultivating personal curiosity. Brown et al. (2011) support and noticed that the compelling issue with stress in primary to high school was learners' total time spent on homework. The

National Education Association in the United States urged that 10-20 minutes per night of homework should be spent by first-grade learners and an additional ten minutes for other grades. Scholars argue that assigned homework surpasses the recommended amount (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; Kralovec & Buell, 2001). Darling-Hammond and Ifill-Lynch (2006) suggested that practices that result in frustration, disengagement, and decreased self-efficacy should be closely scrutinised and carefully reconsidered.

Another point raised is the improvement in learners' mental stability. In the study conducted by Pfeiffer (2018), the findings revealed that one of the educators stated that the no-homework policy has helped stabilise learners' mental and emotional states. It has also helped improve their family lives and helped shed stress from learners, and parents are happy. Educators further mentioned that replacing homework with reading makes learners sleep better; parents reported less disagreement at home, and educators may have seen an improvement in learners' reading. Learners also have enough time to read about the latest news (Pfeiffer, 2018).

Homework limits intimacy time between parent and child for other extra-curricular activities (Pfeiffer, 2018). For instance, Sybil (2020) investigated a high school educator who referred to learners who have enough tasks at school and do not need more at home. The high school educator stated that most educators have a no-homework policy, but they do not discuss it publicly. The educator attests that requiring no proof of homework will make learners better in the class. Some learners are doing the homework wrong and are cheating, which does not contribute to good practice. Sybil (2020) concludes that giving them homework takes away the time to relax and be children.

Hinton (2018) stated that some educators in primary schools hold firm beliefs against homework. One educator explained that she used to assign a task to her learners, but that has changed. This changed because she noticed that the parents of the learners do the homework for the children, and sometimes parents complain about the frustration their children face with homework. Therefore, the educators replaced homework with reading for her primary school learners, which allowed

them to focus more on the lesson and no complaints were received from the parents or learners (Hinton, 2018).

Pfeiffer's (2018) study of the homework policy in a public school in Western Cape Province showed that the principal, an educator, adopted a no-homework policy. The study found that adopting the no-homework policy has positively impacted these young primary school learners. However, Pfeiffer (2018) argued that no-homework would be a disadvantage in future. In other words, they support the idea that educators should keep assigning homework to learners to avoid issues in the future regardless of no-homework positivity from learners.

Another research by Scott and Glaze (2017) indicated that traditional homework could be replaced with a no-homework policy that yielded positive results. The only disadvantage of a no-homework approach was that parents and children had no effective learning structure guiding them. Therefore, educators' support for learners and parents was needed to engage in constructive homework (Scott & Glaze, 2017).

2.6 BENEFITS AND EFFECTS OF HOMEWORK ON LEARNER ACHIEVEMENT

Learners' academic performance is connected to; "completing homework, assessments, and studying for examinations" (Graves & Wright, 2011). The review of literature on homework in some studies for instance; homework for learners, parental support for learners' homework and learners' performance, and the outcomes, connotes that homework has positively impacted student achievement (Bembenutty & White, 2013; Rosário et al., 2009). For learners to achieve academic excellence, the teachers, principals, school management teams (SMT), and parents, as stakeholders, should work together to ensure learners perform well in their education (Naicker, 2020).

Some studies recommended that better academic performance can be achieved if a minimal amount of homework is assigned to learners. For instance, Núñez et al. (2015) showed a positive relationship between time spent on homework and performance. Research further demonstrates that too voluminous homework is detrimental to learners (Trautwein et al., 2002). This infers that assigning lots of

homework to bright learners could negatively affect learners in primary schools. Hence, Rudman (2014) put forward that homework should be given in accordance with learners' different abilities.

Effects on learner achievement can be connected to learner age and education level. An example from the literature suggests that the impact on academic performance was uncovered in high schools rather than in primary schools (Trautwein et al., 2002). Núñez et al. (2015) contend that homework helps learners develop good study habits and improves their performances, but this is not visible in primary school, as learners are still too young to handle homework in a meaningful way without support. Núñez et al. (2015) support this point as the study showed that learner achievement in the foundation phase was immaterial. Also, the younger learners' study habits were minimal as their parents were less involved in supporting their children with work assigned to them (Rønning, 2011). Thus, this implies that since older children may gain from assigned homework in terms of having good study habits that enhance their academic performance, the younger learners may not benefit from homework. This is because they are still young and need time to enjoy and participate in other activities such as playing, bonding, and having fun with their parents and peers.

However, Rudman (2014) highlights homework as a negative approach for younger learners. He affirms that homework does not increase a young child's learning and may even hinder the learning experiences instead by disrupting family life and confusing parents and their children. The general view from the findings of studies on homework revealed a negative relationship with learners' performance (Rudman, 2014).

Additionally, Rudman (2014) also challenges the impression that homework is better for older learners. He specifies that as learners grow older and encounter homework, it becomes boring, and their attitude to homework evolves with time. Some of the thirteen (13) long-term benefits found when homework is assigned are: better study habits and skills, greater self-direction, greater self-discipline, better time management and more independent problem-solving. This only pertains to

older learners; although some studies have contested this logic, as described in the above section.

In a recent study, Núñez et al. (2015) found that students' perceptions of strong control by parents in the homework process were directly and negatively related to academic achievement. The higher the perceived parental homework control, the lower the students' academic achievement. In the same study, perceived parental homework support was positively related to the achievement of junior high and high school students but not to that of elementary school students (Núñez et al., 2015).

Van Wyk (2010) recognised that parents' and learners' relationships had yielded positive rewards for learners' performance; therefore, when parents engage in their children's education, it improves their academic successes. Teachers' role toward learners' academic success starts with choosing the right content of homework that will ensure meeting learners learning goals. Teachers could consider the appropriate format, aim, and time that homework is assigned to accommodate learners' involvement and success without stress to achieve academic success (Chaya, 2021).

Contrary to the opinion that homework enhances learners' performance, Cooper et al. (2006) argued that it is still not proven that homework enhances learners' achievement in primary school. It was found that work supervised in the classroom is more effective in increasing the academic performance of primary school learners than completing homework (Cooper et al., 2006). Similarly, Wilder (2014) claims there is no positive relationship between homework and academic performance.

Homework is relevant to the learner's academic achievement in South Africa and learners are expected to complete homework assigned to them by their educators (Republic of South Africa, 1996b). Kauchaki and Egan (2011) found that learners do not complete their homework. Incomplete homework served as a factor that limited educators' feedback because learners showed no interest nor responded to the feedback given by their teachers.

2.7 HOMEWORK AND ITS ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

For years, educators and parents have debated the benefits of homework as the word evokes very negative and positive connotations for every stakeholder involved, such as learners, parents, and educators. Although research may have found homework to do more harm than good, causing copious amounts of unnecessary stress for stakeholders, others believe it has had significant advantages for learners by encouraging them to think more independently outside the classroom (Dry, 2019; Ndebele, 2018). Therefore, the following paragraphs discuss the advantages and disadvantages of homework.

2.7.1 Advantages of Homework

The following section discusses the advantages of homework found in the literature.

According to the literature, homework has increased standardised test scores (Noll, 2010). She explained that homework has proved essential to learners in primary and high schools. However, there is still no benefit to assigning homework to learners in elementary schools (Noll, 2010). Therefore, Noll recommends that educators evaluate the amount of appropriate and helpful homework for learners' grades (Noll, 2010). Homework proves to have yielded results depending on the duration and amount of work for learners' grades.

Another advantage of homework is that it has brought families closer as learners may ask their parents or siblings for help on their homework. This will help the learners better understand their work, and they not feel stuck with parents getting more involved in their children's academic life.

Furthermore, doing homework prepares learners for future assessments. If a child does poorly in an assignment, they will learn what is necessary to do well on the next test without being punished. It also allows learners to practise what it takes to succeed in school. As they say, practice makes perfect.

Lastly, homework allows parents to see how their children are being educated and develop a better idea of how they can help their children. However, some parents, learners and even some educators feel that after 7 to 8 hours of school lessons, it is unfair to expect learners to come home and work for another three hours.

2.7.2 Disadvantages of Homework

In as much as educators recognise the benefits of homework, it is revealed that homework has had adverse effects on learners, educators, and parents. Although assigning homework has several benefits, an assignment also has adverse effects, which have taken a toll mostly on educators, learners, and parents. The discussion below includes the disadvantages of homework found in the literature.

Firstly, one of the disadvantages of homework is that children need time to relax and take their minds off work. There is a lot of pressure to complete homework every night for most children, and these children need time to refresh their minds and bodies. These learners need time to be children (Glawe, 2011).

Secondly, homework reduces the amount of time learners devote to their families (Pfeiffer, 2018). Family time is very significant for learners still growing, and without its social problems, a family entity can be compromised due to less time spent together. Learners may not be able to finish their homework alone, especially at a young age, if there is nobody to monitor them at night. Kohn (2006) mentioned that an educator encouraged parents to support their children's assignments when he could not cope with the amount of homework his children brought home. If an educator considers that homework upsets his family life, it is easy to see how parents with no educational background can be frustrated with everyday homework.

Thirdly, homework causes disputes between learners and their parents. When parents want to assist their children in doing homework, they may resist as they may not be interested in the work assigned to them because they find the homework too overwhelming (Glawe, 2011).

In a survey conducted by Galloway and Pope (2007), the findings revealed that homework and schoolwork caused constant stress and exhaustion in learners. Also, more than half of the learners reported experiences with stress-related physical problems like headaches, sleeping difficulties, exhaustion, and weight loss or gain. The more time these learners spent on homework, the greater the physical issues caused. Some learners even dropped the extramural activities they loved because

of the amount of stress they were facing. Physical and mental cases like anxiety and depression, which affected the learners, were also reported (Galloway & Pope, 2007).

Kralovec and Buell (2010) discovered that homework contributed to learners dropping out of school. They found that homework often disrupts family life, affects what parents want to teach their children and punishes learners living in poverty for being poor. They further explained that discriminating against learners based on social status is not fair; instead, they should be supported to remain in school. Kravolec and Buell (2010) then suggested that educators should break the cycle and push learners to find a prosperous lifestyle for themselves.

Another negative aspect was that too much homework encouraged cheating because learners copied off one another to complete their given tasks. Learners are then rewarded for cheating which doesn't help them at all. In addition, Kohn (2006) stated that educators are not using homework in a way that is beneficial to the learners.

Furthermore, some educators do not often have the time to grade papers accurately because they are too busy planning lesson plans and consulting teaching resources to handle lessons. Hence, this causes low feedback. By the time learners get their reports, the educator may have moved on to a new topic (Ndebele, 2018).

Likewise, Atilgan (2006) argued that the same pattern of homework used for learners makes them unfocused. Thereby, learners get tired quickly (Buyukalan & Altinay, 2018). Therefore, educators should devise other means for assigning homework to learners in the classroom. The administrators and educators then dismissed homework and agreed that learners spend more time doing other activities such as reading and spending time with families because they believed learners were young and compulsory homework was unnecessary (Caplan & Igel, 2015). In summary, Caplan and Igel (2015) concluded that traditional homework did not improve learning and did not yield good results for learners in primary school. Therefore, homework was dropped by these educators.

Haffila et al. (2018) also expressed some disadvantages of homework in their study. They explained that educators complained that few learners, mainly the high achieving scholars, do homework regularly. They explained that homework is given daily to reinforce teaching and learning, but learners get stressed and cannot cope with extra school responsibilities.

Another disadvantage could be that some parents do the homework tasks assigned to their kids. Hence, learning for learners does not occur, which increases the workload for educators who must remedy the academic situation. Also, some parents find the homework difficult, and some are unavailable to help their children with assigned homework (Buyukalan & Altinay, 2018). These reasons may be a barrier for educators giving accurate feedback to learners.

2.8 BARRIERS TO HOMEWORK IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS

Schoeman (2018) suggested that the change in family dynamics has affected homework directly and indirectly. For instance: poverty, unemployment, inequality, limited educational resources, no family structure in homes, single parenting and many more similar factors increased homework problems in South Africa (Abraham, 2013). Therefore, the idea about some South African schools shifting the narrative from traditional homework to a no-homework approach may be due to the barriers discussed in the following sections.

2.8.1 Socioeconomic Background

Spall (2013) noted the impact of apartheid which brought about inequality in education due to the vast difference in socioeconomic backgrounds, which is why many South African learners perform poorly in their academics. Even though racial segregation was abolished years ago, schools with primarily white learners were functioning well, while the many schools with predominantly black learners were dysfunctional. Furthermore, in South Africa, learner academic performance by the former education departments can be distinguished into two education systems based on language or socio-economic background (Spaull, 2013). Meanwhile, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2006) emphasised accessibility as part of the school curriculum. The school curriculum features are interrelated, and these features are: “aims and objectives, rationale,

content, time learning activities, learning environment and materials, accessibility, teachers and teacher professionalism and assessments." All these features explain that learners should have good access to education regardless of their social status, gender, or ethnicity (UNESCO, 2006).

Ndebele (2018) observed that learners from low-income families are at a disadvantage compared to learners from higher-income families. The learners themselves often act as parents to younger siblings in child-headed households (Ndebele, 2018). As a result, the learners without older adults or parents get neglected in homework supervision. Dry (2019) states that many parents in South Africa have a poor academic background and are uneducated. Therefore, their education level may affect their competence level in assisting their children with assigned homework.

Similarly, Spaull (2013) presents the same argument when he reports that learners who attend underprivileged schools do not receive homework often. When homework is assigned to them, they hardly ever complete the homework because of no access to educational resources. In addition, Mudzielwana (2014) disclosed that parents from poor backgrounds are less supportive where homework is concerned.

2.8.2 **Educators' Participation**

Educators' participation is crucial in achieving academic success for learners. For educators, homework must be given regularly, and it must be age-appropriate, incorporate learning objectives, be checked, assessed, and provide feedback to learners (Ndebele, 2018). According to the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) (2005), the duty of educators concerning homework instructs that a regular assignment must be given to learners, and it must be ensured that parents monitor their children (WCED, 2005). The Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document for teachers requires young pupils from grades one and two to spend hours on homework every year. Educators should adhere to these and many more guidelines, but the narrative has gradually been changing lately.

Some of the challenges educators experience when assigned homework are incomplete homework, lack of response to feedback, parents' complaints about too much work and many others. Research has indicated that the more homework you assign to learners at the primary school level, the less seemingly they enjoy learning (Cooper et al., 2000). Therefore, educators explained that with these challenges, providing feedback to learners makes positive assessments invalid and a waste of their time (Papadakis et al., 2017).

On the other hand, Swanepoel (2015) reported that educators complained about work overload. This means that educators could barely keep up with completing the terms' curriculum, assist children struggling with work assigned to them and teach the learners adequately in the classroom. However, these educators are expected to deliver at the end of the term, suggesting that educators have lots of work to do on their part and too little time to execute it.

2.8.3 **Parental Involvement**

Parents are expected to play a significant role when it comes to homework. Parental interest and adequate support are essential factors that aid their children's success in school (Naidu et al., 2011). Therefore, parental involvement is known as "the representation of various parent behaviours, the practices of parents, parental communication with their children, and their participation in school activities" (Nokale et al., 2010). The South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA) states clearly that parents should monitor homework assigned to learners, but in recent times, parents have voiced different opinions about homework, such as assigning too much homework or scrapping homework in general.

Juan and Visser's (2017) study argue that there is no parental involvement in learners' homework. These scholars explained that the level of parental education determines parents' contribution to the work assigned to their children, which implies that some parents are well educated, while others may not be educated at all, limiting their response to helping their children. This may be the reason why educators struggle to find a balance for homework. Tobias (2020) also buttresses this view stating that there was no-parental support with homework in some school districts.

However, Swanepoel (2015) also contended that South African parents criticised educators for giving too much homework to their children. It was recorded that the percentage for homework from the foundation phase to Grade 12 increased from 3.9% to 14.5%, 30.5% and 31.7%, respectively. The report indicated that most learners are tired after school, making them focus less on their assigned tasks. Some parents have a long day and can barely concentrate on the homework task for their children because they must attend to domestic chores in the house. Therefore, parents appealed to educators to consider giving their children less homework or replacing it with alternative work. Marzano and Pickering (2007) supported the above view stating that educators must assign reasonable amounts of homework to learners.

As mentioned earlier in this study, parents' socioeconomic background affects homework completion as the result of some parents spending more time at work and less time at home. Some parents have more than one job to provide sufficiently for their families. Nowadays, society demands more from working parents, requiring higher educational levels and increasing time at work (Knopf & Swick, 2007). Stresses, such as longer working hours and work responsibilities, result in families not spending enough time with one another (Knopf & Swick, 2007). This may impact the academic performance of young children in school.

Parental negligence is a contributing factor that may have worked against better use of homework in schools (Haffila et al., 2018). It is implied that educators should be more compassionate and not be upset about learners struggling academically but encourage self-learning because many of these learners need additional help after school (Canham, 2018). Likewise, Ndebele (2015) found that families from low social statuses are disadvantaged, thereby affecting how they participate and help their children with homework. Ndebele (2015) further argued that low-income families provide less support for school activities and homework than high-income families. Furthermore, the findings from the study (Ndebele, 2015) depicted several parents with lower statuses that were found never to inspect, sign, and oversee their children's homework. Motala and Lexumo mentioned that poorer families are less likely to be involved in their children's homework while the wealthier families are

more capable of providing educational support for their children (Motala & Lexumo, 2014).

2.8.4 Family Structures

The family structure has been mentioned to play an essential role in aiding learner support and homework completion. Demircan and Erden (2015), on the other hand, considered family structure to affect homework negatively. The care of children is a huge responsibility for all parents, which also encapsulates diverse problems in becoming active parents who have time to participate in parental activities within and outside the school setting (Demircan & Erden, 2015). For this subsection, the study looked at the family dynamics of single parenting and traditional two-parent families. Sewpaul and Pillay (2014) discovered that two-parent families have often been substituted by single parents, child-headed households, grandparent-headed households, or other family structures, affecting learners' abilities to complete assigned homework. Epstein (1990) recognised that single parents spend more time assisting their children with tasks such as homework than those in two-parent families. The two-parent families do not create time to attend to their children's homework, and educators expect that parents should do so. The lack of support could be that parents' busy schedules and duties are tight, which continuously build a daily strain on parents assisting with their children's homework. Another reason could be because single and two-parent families do not have trustworthy adults who can assist in supervising their children's homework at home (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2012).

However, the experiences single parents have faced with homework have added more stress and burden of educating a child alone than the traditional two-parent families (Knepper, 2020). The experiences faced by single parents could also be because they do not have a spouse to share parenting responsibilities, and they may find it challenging to participate in their children's homework and other activities outside the home (Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2000). Therefore, to ensure that their children have an organised environment after school, scholars proposed that these parents could be assisted by arranging after-school care for the learners till their parents show up for them (Barge & Loges, 2003; Demircan & Erden, 2015; Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2000).

2.8.5 Language Barrier

Language barriers in different learners' homes affect the quality of support learners receive when homework is assigned to them. This creates a lack of communication between parents and their children due to the language barrier. The lack of communication with parents is because of their inability to read or write, limiting how they can support their children with homework (Naicker, 2020). Giving homework to learners under these circumstances has proven unrealistic. The availability and unavailability of parents can either have an advantage or disadvantage for learners in their academic performance (Clasqin-Johnson et al., 2010).

2.8.6 Lack of Internet Access

Farai et al. (2018) expressed that technology has played an essential role in the feedback on learners' academic work. These researchers stated that a lack of input from educators to learners had caused a lack of interest in school activities, such as learners not completing assigned homework and not doing assigned tasks. Learners may be unable to complete their homework due to a lack of internet connection, as some of these learners come from low-income families, and some parents of these learners cannot afford to cater to this type of need for their children. The family structure of some children in South Africa reflects that they live in urban and rural areas. The families living in the urban areas can often afford to have good internet connectivity, while those who live in the rural areas may not have access to good internet. Some learners in rural areas may have limited access to the internet because they cannot afford it, impacting or restricting their level of homework productivity.

2.9 OFFICIAL HOMEWORK POLICY IN SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa, different legislation documents exist and emphasise the rules of homework to be actively used in schools by educators. These legal documents include the South African Schools Act (84 of 1996), documents from the Department of Education (DoE, 1998), and the National Education Policy Act (Act 27 of 1996). These documents clearly describe the term "homework" and the legislation's specific expectations for the stakeholders: the schools, teachers, parents, and learners.

Although South Africa has legislation binding on the homework policy, one of the schools investigated with a no-homework approach is working on an actual policy which was slated to be included on their website by the end of the year (Pfeiffer, 2018). This suggests that educators are working towards embracing the no-homework policy and not use the homework policy. In addition, the words of Musi Mahlambe from the Department of Basic Education were articulated in an interview which states that "South Africa does not have a formal policy on how much or what homework should be given, so schools are left to devise their approach" (Pillay, 2016). Therefore, it seems that schools are obligated to adopt a written policy of their choice on homework and no-homework. However, the policy documents listed and highlighted below were studied to understand the stance of the South African education system on homework and no-homework approaches.

South African Schools Act: In the South African Schools Act (SASA), the Code of Conduct for Learners specifies that learners should dedicate time for schoolwork and completion of homework given to them. Also, the Act states that parents should pay attention to monitoring their children's schoolwork and assignment. It further explains that schools should have stated guidelines for homework to enhance learners' academic performance. Section 8 of the South African Schools Act of 1996 (Act 84 of 1996, p.101) states that learners must complete their homework. Also, parents should be involved in helping their children complete their homework (Republic of South Africa, 1996b).

Department of Education (DoE, 1998): The Department of Education states that homework should create skill reinforcement, knowledge, and attitudes based on what learners learn. Learners should create meaning and understand the relevance of assignments to prepare them for future work ethics.

National Education Policy Act (NEPA) (Act No 27 of 1996): The NEPA and SASA state that schools formulate homework policies. Teachers, parents, and learners who are role-players should observe this procedure and review it annually.

Western Cape Education Department (WCED, 2005): The study by Pfeiffer (2018), outlined the Western Cape Education Department guidelines on homework. According to the study, the WCED guidelines serve as the provincial document framework used to guide schools in Western Cape on homework. It records that the schools should follow the stated homework guidelines and should not serve as a burden to learners, educators, or parents. Pfeiffer (2018) further outlined what the

WCED guidelines should entail; “the purpose of the policy, its goals and objectives, recommended time for each grade, types of tasks for each grade; monitoring and evaluation procedures, the role of parents, learners, principals, school governing body (SGB) and educators, and procedures and instructions to parents if learners do not cope with homework”. Therefore, it appears the WCED took cognisance of how they want homework policy to be handled by most of the schools in the province. However, in the Gauteng province, where this study was conducted, there are no-stated guidelines on homework policy by the Gauteng Education Department.

In my opinion, as a researcher who sought to explore the potential adoption of a no-homework policy in South African schools, these policy documents only speak to homework policy and not to the no-homework policy. Thus, it reveals that the homework policy is more about schools having stated guidelines than a proposed policy parse and is centred more around learners and their parents than educators. Maybe not having concrete legislation guiding homework policy could be why some schools are shifting the narrative from traditional homework to a no-homework approach to aid better teaching and learning in their schools.

2.10 Brief Overview of the No-homework Policy in South African Schools

In this section, the limited literature discussed was based on the findings of the few scholars who have researched a no-homework policy in South Africa. Although the researcher mentioned at the beginning of this study that in South Africa, there is a legally binding policy on homework for all schools but no established no-homework policy from the DoE. However, a few schools are embracing this policy to govern the pedagogy of their school system. The following are a few discussions on a no-homework policy in South Africa.

In Wright’s (2019) interview with a 16-year-old learner, the learner raised concerns about attending school for long hours and having lots of homework after school hours. It shows how much homework has become burdensome for learners. Also, because of the rise in incomplete homework, educators now need to devise better means to get learners to do homework (Wright, 2019).

A school headmaster at Riverview Preparatory School in Mpumalanga reports that homework is becoming pointless at the primary school levels (Dry, 2019). The headmaster has put “extension work” in the place of traditional homework, which has aided the change amongst the teachers, learners, and parents because they are more relaxed, and there is an improvement in learners' academic performance (Dry, 2019).

Another example is a well-known school in Western Cape. The principal implemented the no-homework policy by changing the traditional homework to a no-homework policy from primary school level to Grade 9, which has yielded positive outcomes (Ndebele, 2018).

Furthermore, Pfeiffer (2018), in his interview with Sun Valley Primary, located in the Western Cape, reported that the school introduced the no-homework policy based on the conferences the principal had attended in Finland and America. His report showed positive relationships amongst the parents, learners, and teachers because the teachers initiated various innovative teaching methods. These teaching methods included reading, assigned homework in the classroom and fewer take-home assignments, fun and play given as a task, formal assessment and sports, which have significantly improved learners’ academic performance. In essence, the educators explained that allowing learners to participate in reading and other activities like sports has resulted in more family time, less stress on learners and parents, more rest and sleep and emotional stability for learners (Pfeiffer, 2018).

Konco (2021) reports that Grassroots Preparatory in Cape Town is one of the few independent schools to have incorporated the no-homework policy in their school. The school’s curriculum was based on the Finnish curriculum because the school management carried out extensive research and travelled to Finland to understand the Finnish school system, which convinced them to adopt the policy. Furthermore, one of the educators explained that the South African schooling system overburdened children with homework, affecting their health. However, with the school incorporating a no-homework policy, learners' needs were considered because the school management wanted learners to have a well-rounded life by

having academic work in the morning and having enough time for other activities in the afternoon. Therefore, Konco (2021) found that educators, parents, and children expressed that the outcome has been positive because learners have enough time for schoolwork and their families; and the school is thriving academically with the adoption of a no-homework policy (Konco, 2021).

In conclusion, from the various arguments about homework and no-homework approaches, the researcher discovered that only limited literature was evident on a no-homework policy internationally and locally. There were various discussions, mostly on homework and policy. Still, nothing much was found about a no-homework policy because homework is practiced in most countries, and very few countries practice no-homework policies. Therefore, this revealed that there are still research gaps as far as a no-homework policy is concerned in South Africa.

2.11 The Theoretical Framework: Student Engagement Theory

A study's theoretical framework stems from an established theory that has been tried and approved by different scholars (Sefotho, 2018). The theoretical framework for this study was established from the outset. This theory was an important guide for investigating educators' perceptions about adopting a no-homework policy in schools.

Alexander Astin's (1984) theory on Student Involvement Theory (SIT), also known as the Student Engagement Theory (SET), was used as a lens to view this study which has assisted the researcher in having a sense of direction of the study (Vinz, 2019). The theory is defined as the bulk of physical and psychological energy that learners dedicate to the academic experience, which could create significant engagement in a learning environment (Astin, 1984; Delfino, 2019). For learners to achieve this form of engagement, educators need to play their roles as mediators to help them create new knowledge. Martin and Torres (2017) term this a relationship between learners, teachers, peers, instruction, and curriculum. Also, understanding student engagement is an essential aspect for schools that wish to promote better academic performance and students' positive behaviour (Gallup, 2013; Li & Lerner, 2011). Therefore, this theory is helpful in this study because it deals with support for schools willing to devise better learning achievements for their learners. Thus, in

this case, the main aim of this study was to understand how educators perceived no-homework and how it may have helped learners' academic performance.

According to this theory (1984), SET is often considered a good predictor of student learning, achievement, and development (Carini et al., 2006). It is seen as an essential aspect of enhancing better teaching and learning. Educators should refine their teaching by investigating engagement as a primary contributor to knowledge outcomes (Groccia, 2018; Pike et al., 2012). SET is a subset of purposive educational activities and positive outcomes of student success and development, including satisfaction, persistence, academic achievement, and social engagement (Trowler, 2010). The theory states "how involved or interested learners appear to be in their learning and how connected they are into their classes, their schools and one another" (Axelson & Flick, 2010). Also, Fletcher (2015) asserts that SET is "any sustained connection a learner has towards any aspect of learning, schools or education." In other words, student engagement was viewed as a tool for success for learners in the classroom. Similarly, Kuh (2009) attributed engagement as "the time and energy learners devote to educationally sound activities inside and outside of the classroom and the policies and practices that schools use to induce learners to take part in these activities", which means that it aids a better teaching and learning environment from primary school levels through tertiary levels (Burch et al., 2015). Therefore, educators could develop better learning engagement with learners because homework happens outside the classroom. In addition, this theory can serve as motivation for better academic achievements (Groccia, 2018; Olson & Peterson, 2015). Hence, "the level of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that learners show when they are learning or being taught, … extends to the degree of motivation they have to learn and progress in their academics" (Glossary of Educational Reform, 2016).

However, the study is about the no-homework policy; the theory links to this study as it focuses on developing a good learning environment for learners and their performance. This study aimed to understand how educators perceived the adoption of a no-homework policy and its influence on learners' academic performance. Therefore, the theory may help reveal if educators have improved learning by assigning no homework. The result was significant as this theory focused on learner

performance outcomes with a no-homework policy in the selected schools. Student engagement theory was linked with the critical contexts such as teachers, principals, learners, homework, and no-homework policy to yield interest.

The student engagement theory was appropriate for this study because it is learner-centred and focuses on learner outcomes such as improved academic performance. SET was built on the knowledge that learning improves *"when learners are inquisitive, interested, or inspired, and that learning tends to suffer when learners are bored, dispassionate, disaffected, or otherwise 'disengaged'"* (Glossary of Education Reform, 2016). Educators' perceptions concerning no-homework approaches in the selected schools were probed using this theory. In this study, the choice of SET was premised on three major categories that were discussed separately and then integrated to link this study's purpose, namely: behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement theories (Fredricks et al., 2004, as cited in Delfino, 2019; Groccia, 2018).

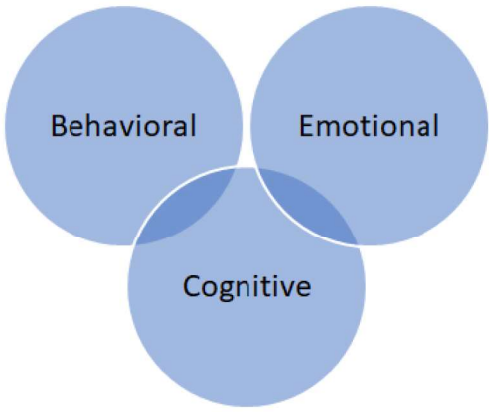
Behavioural engagement: The first category of SET is behavioural engagement. This type of engagement requires learners to observe community norms and participate in activities (Delfino, 2019). Trowler (2010) explains that it entails learners' compliance with rules such as attendance and involvement and would demonstrate the absence of disruptive or harmful behaviour. This implies that learners' engagement in different activities helps them build good habits.

Emotional engagement: The second category of SET is emotional engagement. Fredricks et al. (2004, as cited in Delfino, 2019) stated that it deals with learners' emotions such as "a sense of belonging, interest, enjoyment, happiness, sadness, anxiety or willingness to learn". This suggests that learners have a sense of relevance in what they learn or have learnt; their challenges could be to build better relationships and trust with educators or parents in or outside the classroom.

Cognitive engagement: The third category of SET is cognitive engagement. This aspect deals with learners' learning process: their willingness to invest in their learning. It is learners' mode of motivation, desire and ability shown towards engaging in their own self-learning (Olson & Peterson, 2015). Although the theory is not very recent, it is still applicable to today's modern practice of teaching and learning. Therefore, for this study, all three components of SET were considered as mentioned above and could yield both positive and negative results.

Figure 2.1

Student Engagement Theory for a no-homework policy



Adapted from Atsin (1984).

The theoretical framework chosen for this study formed the support structure for adopting a no-homework policy which informed the study in different ways. It enabled a deeper understanding of the criticism behind homework, such as assigning too much work, incomplete assignments, homework stress, health issues and fewer family relationships. Also, the study aimed to find out the influence of a no-homework policy on learners' academic performance. This SET theory also guided the research questions for this study, as one of the sub-questions was to know how educators have engaged with learners by adopting a no-homework policy in their schools. The SET theory helped to answer these questions as the study unfolded. Another aspect addressed was discovering the motivation behind adopting a no-homework policy, especially since it was not practised in the South African education system. The reason for this may be related to issues faced with homework. For clarity, this study argues that it was necessary to unpack the perspective of why a no-homework approach and not a homework approach theory was chosen to achieve the outcome. The theoretical framework was used when data were analysed, which helped gain insight into the no-homework policy in schools and classrooms.

The rationale behind using this theory was the need to investigate the potential adoption of a no-homework policy in other South African schools despite the socio-economic status and the clauses binding the education system. The theory

ascertains that learning outside the classroom contributes to the academic excellence of learners. In other words, educators assigning homework may be valid, and there is still no certainty about the effect of taking assignments out of school teaching on earner achievement (Akbari et al., 2016). Educators are the drivers of learning and teaching; therefore, choosing a no-homework over the homework approach to aid better learning successes may be based on their experiences dealing with issues homework causes among the stakeholders.

2.12 Summary of the Chapter

The arguments from the literature for this chapter covered the reviews on recent homework and no-homework overviews, the perception of educators on homework and no-homework approaches, the effects of homework on learner achievement, homework and its advantages and disadvantages, barriers to homework in South African schools, homework policies in South Africa and a no-homework policy in South African schools. The literature revealed that homework is a good part of academic learning in primary schools and should not be replaced. Still, better measures should be implemented when assigning homework to learners. However, the literature posed that a no-homework policy has also helped improve learners' academic performance despite some disagreements on the potential adoption of the policy. Thus, using the no-homework policy as an academic tool does not reflect a strong positivity in enhancing learners' academic performance in South African primary schools. Since some schools are shifting the narrative from traditional homework to no-homework, research was necessary to determine educators' perceptions about the potential adoption of a no-homework policy in South African independent primary schools. The theoretical framework discussed the theory, which was essential because it revealed how the theory and its components were integrated into examining the research questions in this study.

In Chapter 3, the researcher will explain the research approach, design, and methodology that was chosen for this study. The researcher will describe the data collection methods, document analysis, data analysis and interpretation, and procedures followed for this study. Lastly, the ethical application and rules employed during this study are also discussed.

3. CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH APPROACH, DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 2, the researcher discussed the literature review and the theoretical framework used for this research. This chapter begins with a vivid description of the research approach, methods and procedures chosen for this research. The research methodology is explained with the sampling, data collection and data analysis procedures. Also, the researcher explains in detail the way data was gathered and analysed and the trustworthiness and ethical considerations that were followed. This study aimed to investigate educators' perceptions of a no-homework policy in independent primary schools. Therefore, this chapter expatiates the methods used in this study.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

The qualitative approach was used for this study to better understand educators' perceptions about adopting a no-homework policy in independent primary schools from the perspective of teachers and principals within each school context. Cresswell (2013, p. 18) defines qualitative research as a form of research where the inquirer often makes knowledge claims primarily based on constructivist perceptions. The constructivists believe in constructing natural reality in our social world. The truth is obtained through this social connection, thereby forming the ideology, methodology, framework, and approaches used for the study (Salkind, 2010, p. 2). The qualitative approach was appropriate for this study as the researcher wanted to investigate educators' perceptions about adopting a no-homework policy in their school settings. The advantages and limitations of a qualitative approach are discussed in the next paragraph.

An advantage of qualitative research is that it enables the researcher to make sense of the experiences and perceptions of people and entities (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; p. 6). Merriam and Tisdell acknowledge that the qualitative approach helps the researcher project a rich description of processes from participants' perspectives. Therefore, it is suitable for investigating participants' lived experiences and

perceptions for this study. Another advantage of a qualitative approach is that it allows the researcher to observe, listen and interact from the participants' perspective (Ganong & Coleman, 2014).

The qualitative method revealed some limitations of the study. The sample size was limited as it was carried out in the Gauteng Province in two independent primary schools. The data findings were not generalisable compared to a larger population. Despite the small sample size, the researcher found that the rich data obtained was substantial but challenging to analyse. The researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim, which was time-consuming but ensured accurate analysis. The analysis enabled the researcher to have a clear picture of the interview processes and envision participants' perspectives and their emotions about the study.

3.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM

In research, a paradigm is a form of perspective that informs the rationale and philosophy of the research methodology (McGregor & Murnane, 2010). Denzin & Lincoln (2018) recommend that the chosen paradigm guides the researcher's expectations of the study process regarding the participants, approach, instruments, and research results. Therefore, paradigms play a significant part in steering the research methods and rules to influence how one sees and understands a particular study (Sefotho, 2018). The different paradigms have specific ontological and epistemological bases. Scotland (2012) refers ontology to what reality is and how it works. It is also seen as a reality constructed through the interaction of various individuals (Scotland, 2012).

For this study, the researcher believes that the perceptions of participants may be deduced from their interaction with the contexts in which they live. The researcher further believes educators' perceptions of the potential adoption of a no-homework policy and its influence on learners' academic performance within schools may be constructed from the interaction between the researcher and the participants, namely, the teachers and principals involved in this study. The researcher was aware that the participants in this study had constructed their individual realities through interactions with the no-homework policy, homework, and learners'

academic performance. In this study, the researcher intended to present multiple co-constructed realities of the inquiry studied.

Duberley et al. (2012) recognise that the epistemological bases involve understanding and knowledge processes. In this study, the researcher believed that the knowledge of how educators perceived the potential adoption of a no-homework policy and its influence on learners' academic performance might be generated from the experiences of participants' reality and the meaning participants and the researcher have attached to these experiences. Therefore, with this study, the researcher employed an interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative approach to recognise and clarify educators' perception of the potential adoption of a no-homework policy in independent primary schools. The interpretivist paradigm is known as the "humanistic, constructivist or naturalistic paradigm" (Mustafa, 2011; p. 25). Interpretivism poses the view that individuals have about their world, which cannot be quantified, making meanings from their experiences subjective (Cresswell, 2014; Sefotho, 2018). Since multiple meanings are derived from the relationship with other individuals, the interpretivist paradigm enabled the researcher to see and experience the world through various perspectives, avoid bias in the study and interference with people's opinions (Hammersley, 2013; Pham, 2018). Hence, it serves as a paradigm that allows the researcher to establish the absolute truth about educators' perception of the potential adoption of a no-homework policy in primary schools.

In this research, the interpretivist paradigm assisted the researcher in gaining additional depth through seeking experiences and perceptions of a particular collective perspective of educators (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; p. 39). The interpretivist paradigm (Levers, 2013; Thanh & Thanh, 2015) views that a close relationship between the study and the researcher allows the researcher to create multiple meanings from the participants' opinions. This paradigm acknowledges various norms, thoughts, and growth of diverse social realities. Using a qualitative approach with an interpretivist paradigm helped the researcher understand the richness of the data gathered rather than providing general viewpoints of participants in the research (Saunders & Lewis &Thornhill, 2012).

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design is the framework of the research approach and techniques selected by the researcher (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In this research, the case study design was adopted. The case study design enables a researcher to explore data intimately in a setting (Creswell, 2014). It is a unit of study of its own of the phenomenon being studied (Salkind, 2010; p. 2). The researcher can then investigate the real-life phenomenon through an in-depth background study of several entities or social units. Yin (2012, p. 18) defines case-study research as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real-world settings; that is, the limitations between reality and context are not evident." McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined a case study as an in-depth analysis of a single entity. The concept of "case" helped examine the phenomenon within its real-world settings, and numerous case study approaches were used to show its intensity to the case study (Yin, 2014). Therefore, the case study design helped the researcher to understand the participants' perception of a no-homework policy in their respective schools (Salkind, 2010; p. 3). A case study in qualitative research design enables the researcher to concentrate on "the case" and maintain the real-world standpoints during the research, which, in this study, is educators' perception of a no-homework policy in independent primary schools (Yin, 2014). Researchers have a common interest in participants' meaning and real-world experiences in qualitative research. It enables the researchers to immerse themselves in the findings from the phenomenon (Fouche & Schurink, 2011).

Yin (2014) states that data from multiple cases are often considered more convincing, and the overall study is regarded as being more compelling than a single case study. Hence, a multiple case study design was chosen because the study was conducted at two different schools, and the findings were combined into one study. For a case study to be conducted, the researcher must select the case that will be used in the study (Gustafsson, 2017). The case identified for the study was the no-homework policy.

3.4.1 Advantages of a Case Study Design

The case study design showed how the researcher tested and contributed to the theory of the inquiry. Secondly, this research design helps to find explanations with the required richness and depth and enlightens the researcher on the specific case. Using a case study enabled the researcher to use more than one data source to explore the situation.

Also, it is apt to investigate a particular problem and proffer a solution to the context of the specific crisis from the participants' point of view. Thus, using a case study allowed me to gather data through voice recording and document analysis. Furthermore, it is useful when studying a small number of cases in a specific context. The use of the case study approach helped the investigation of the study objectives while using a small number of participants (Swanborn, 2010). Therefore, the participants were a small sample of ten participants who were interviewed for this study. Another advantage was mentioned by Merriam (2009), who noted that a better understanding gained from the study helps develop more knowledge in the field studied. Hence, the researcher conducted interviews according to a schedule based on educators' shared views and perceptions.

3.4.2 Disadvantages of a Case Study Design

One of the disadvantages of the case study design is that some researchers pose it as a pilot study that cannot be used for analysis, which dismisses the study's quality (Yin, 2014). Also, the generalisation of findings cannot be used for a large population. The investigator’s emotions may influence the case (researcher bias), be hard to duplicate, and be time-consuming (McLeod, 2014). In this study, the findings were not generalisable. The teachers and principals could share their experiences, which helped the researcher connect with this study's results.

Therefore, the aim during this study was not to generalise the results but to clarify and understand the context, that is, the participants' perceptions of the no-homework policy in their schools. (McLeod, 2014).

3.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A research methodology is a procedure used to guide the study to answer the research questions and attain the research outcomes (Yunos & Ahmad, 2014). The methods used for this study was determined by the research questions and these questions determined the data collection methods used by the researcher to interact with the participants.

3.5.1 Target Population

The target population was chosen for this study focused on schools and study participants. The participants were selected based on three purposive criteria. These criteria included: Literacy subject teachers, two school principals, and lastly, independent schools in an urban area practising a “no-homework" approach as its school policy. The schools were selected from Tshwane South District, Pretoria, Gauteng Province.

3.5.2 Research Site

The research was conducted in two independent primary schools in the Tshwane South District, Gauteng Province. These two schools were selected based on their no-homework practice within each school setting. When choosing the schools, I got information from schoolteachers about the schools’ no-homework practices to ensure that the school setting was related to this study. The researcher chose these schools as research sites because they were situated in Pretoria, close to where I lived, and this helped save time and travel costs, which was convenient and easy. The selection of the two schools that participated in this study depended on the permission received from the school principals, as both were independent schools.

The participants chosen for this study were teachers and school principals of the two independent schools. The reason for choosing teachers to serve as the main participants for this study was because they engaged more with the learners in the classroom. The principals were selected because they were responsible for the professional management of the school and were in the best position to state why they had decided to adopt a no-homework policy in their schools. The research participants were intentionally selected regarding the predetermined set of criteria

because of their knowledge of interest and experience in the relevant topic and suitability to advance the purpose of the research (Maree, 2016; Rule & John, 2011). The criteria for choosing the participants where they had to be literacy teachers, literacy as a subject, they had to be from independent primary schools and female or male participants.

3.5.2.1 A research site for the first case study: School F

It was imperative to explore the structure and involvement of the school management to understand educators' perceptions of a no-homework policy. The school principal explained that the no-homework policy used was called "the home connection", a social-emotional curriculum that connects the parent with the child. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) was used to promote better relationships between the learners and their parents. Also, the context in which no homework was given is "no-content based" and not academic based homework. The reason for choosing no-content-based homework was to build the children's values and morals in kindness, self-control, persistence, responsibility, etc. This will help them navigate life as they grow and fit into society. The participants' selection was based on purposive sampling. The sample comprised four literacy teachers and one principal from the primary school, which equals five participants chosen from this school because they were accessible and readily available (Maree, 2016).

3.5.2.2 Research site for second case study: School G

The researcher emailed the school principal to discuss the aim of the research due to the school's COVID restrictions. The principal gave her contact details to the researcher, who proceeded to expound on the objective of this study. The principal confirmed that the school has a no-homework policy. The principal and the teachers' responses were based on their experience with a no-homework approach. The school has a principal and an assistant principal, who are assigned to be the line managers for the literacy teachers. Grade R to Grade 3 is called the Foundation phase, while Grade 4 to 6, generally referred to as the Intermediate phase, is called the Flex phase. The selection of the participant was based on purposive sampling. The participants chosen were four literacy teachers and one principal from the primary school, making a total of five participants interviewed from this school.

In summary, the participants from the two schools were interviewed based on their experiences with a no-homework policy. The ten participants for this study functioned as a significant source of rich and trustworthy data due to their teaching positions and experiences with a no-homework approach.

3.5.3 **Sampling**

Using qualitative research, the researcher wants to provide an explicit understanding of the context in this inquiry in terms of educators' perception of a no-homework policy in their schools. Reviewing the researcher's selection of participants and sites will provide a better insight into the study (Creswell, 2014). "The purposeful selection of an aspect of the entire populace to gather knowledge and information is known as sampling" (Holloway & Galvin, 2016). It comprises the researcher's target population, sample size and study population.

Purposeful, non-probability sampling was employed to determine the two independent primary schools as research sites and the participants associated with these schools. The researcher decided on the number of samplings that show the entire sample selection process (Holloway & Galvin, 2016). The reason for using purposive sampling was to ensure that the participants could give relevant and adequate information about the answer to the research questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). However, due to COVID restrictions at the time of data collection, the researcher could not visit the schools and resorted to email and contact numbers on the school's website as a form of communication. It was hectic as responses were slow, and some schools did not respond. Eventually, the researcher received a positive response from two independent primary schools, and the participants were selected according to the criteria that were important to the purpose of this research (Maree, 2016).

Due to the limited scope of this research, the research chose a small sample of ten participants in total. The ten participants consisted of eight teachers (seven female and one male) and two female school principals. The teachers were selected based on a minimum of two and above years of experience in teaching. In both schools, the criteria used in selecting the teachers as participants were determined to reflect their first-hand knowledge of a no-homework policy in their schools. The participants available were within the chosen option of experience with the principal assisting in

choosing those who would be able to add value to the study. Also, the teachers selected were teaching literacy as a subject from grades one to six in both intermediate and foundation phases because it was their practice as a school. The researcher selected literacy as a subject because of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2016 South African report; the literacy subject shows that 80% of learners cannot read accurately to excel in subjects across the curriculum in lower and higher grades (Gustafsson, 2020). The two independent primary schools were chosen because they do not give homework, and both were situated in urban areas. The criteria used for selecting these two primary schools were no-homework practicing schools, independent primary schools, and schools in Pretoria, Gauteng Province. The researcher used pseudonyms to identify the two schools as School F & G, respectively.

Table 3.1

Sample size for the selection of participants

Subject	Grade	School F	School G
Literacy teacher	Grade R &1	Grade R: 1	Grade 1: 1
Literacy teacher	Grade 2 & 3	Grade 2: 1	Grade 3: 1
Literacy teacher	Grade 3 & 4	Grade 3: 1	Grade 4: 1
Literacy teacher	Grade 5 & 6	Grade 5: 1	Grade 6: 1
Principal	Schools F & G	Principal SCHF: 1	Principal SCHG: 1
		5	5
TOTAL Interviews		10	

3.5.4 Research Methods

In qualitative research, data collection entails direct quotes from individuals on their perceptions, experiences, beliefs, thoughts, and emotions gathered from conducted interviews. The two data collection methods adopted for this study were interviews and document analysis. The first method used was interviews conducted with all the participants. The interview method enabled the researcher to access participants'

perceptions and opinions to obtain rich data explaining their perspectives on the phenomenon studied. The interview method aimed to understand the concept of the no-homework policy and its influence on learners' academic performance from the participants' perspective. Also, qualitative research explains individual activities, patterns, and actions by observing and quoting passages or extracts from different documents or artefacts (Patton, 2015, p. 14). Therefore, the researcher used document analysis as a second method to gain more insight into the phenomenon being studied. The documents analysed were the "South African Schools Act of 1996", "Toolbox: Social Emotional Learning Curriculum for K-6 Learners" and "2020_Scholar_and Family Handbook.pdf".

I made sure to guard against any form of bias by not influencing the views and responses of the participants during the research interviews. The challenges that I faced were time management and the new reality of the current global COVID-19 pandemic. I could not control the decision on time allocation to conduct the research interview with the participants. The participants could accommodate me in their new schedules, and the COVID-19 restrictions were applied, which affected the face-to-face interview sessions. I had to resort to an online interview, using email, google meets, WhatsApp calls, and messages to interact with the participants. Only one of the participants obliged with a face-to-face interview, and I made sure the COVID-19 precautions were applied by wearing a face mask and sanitizing our hands for both the researcher and the participant. In the sections below, the researcher describes the various data collection methods used for this study.

3.5.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

Yin (2013) states that an interview is one of the most important sources of evidence in a case study. "An interview is a guided conversation between a researcher and a participant, where the researcher gathers information, such as the participant's ideas, beliefs, opinions, and behaviour" (Maree, 2016). The interviewer compiled an interview schedule with field questions that would initiate the discussion, followed by further questions that emerged as the interview continued beforehand (Rule & John, 2011). A qualitative interview aims to obtain rich data to help the researcher understand the participants' experiences (Maree, 2016). There are numerous benefits to conducting interviews in the data collection process. Interviews allow the

researcher to ask the right questions, which is beneficial when the participants cannot be directly observed (Cresswell, 2013) and allow for pliability in the data collection process (Rule & John, 2011). Some of the limitations of an interview are that the researcher's presence may influence the participants' responses and that the interview provides information in a specific place rather than a field environment (Creswell, 2013).

In this study, the interview schedule included questions formulated by the researcher that investigated how educators perceived homework and no-homework approaches. The questions focused on teachers' and principals' opinions about adopting a no-homework policy in their schools. The estimated time for the interviews was between 30 and 60 minutes long via different online platforms such as WhatsApp (audio/video) and Google Meet for each participant. These interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants to ensure the reliability of data and transparency. Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted for this study as there were two participating schools. The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to enable involvement and control of the questions asked to allow unexpected emerging themes to be pursued. The discussions were conducted individually. The semi-structured interview helped provide reliable and comparative data. The researcher chose to use a semi-structured interview because of its importance to the aim of the inquiry. A semi-structured interview helps address issues through probing and clarification; ensures that questions asked are adequately covered by participants and allows the interviewer to raise additional questions in the process, and the interviewer can redirect the participants from digressing from the main topic (Wilson, 2013). Overall, this type of interview allows the researcher to understand better and clarify participant engagement. Semi-structured interviews ensure that the interpretation of responses from the participant is accurate and gives a chance for more depth to answers from the participant (Galletta & Cross, 2013).

On the other hand, the disadvantages of using interviews as data collection methods are as follows: Research interviews require data to be streamed through the participants' eyes, which could be misleading because participants may give inaccurate information (Yin, 2014). In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer effect can influence the amount of information participants are willing to divulge

during an interview (Denscombe, 2010; Wilson, 2013). Therefore, the researcher listened attentively to the participants allowing them to express their opinions as they intended. She showed empathy when needed, which made the participants express themselves wholeheartedly and created more honest responses that helped buttress the data being gathered.

The use of audio recording during the interview helps to avoid any form of misguided information and imperfect remembrance (Yin, 2014). This method is used to acquire multiple opinions about the inquiry. The participants were informed about the use of an audio recorder for all information that was gathered. The duration of the interviews conducted by the researcher was 45 minutes to an hour. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions of school when these interviews took place, the participants were interviewed telephonically. The interviews were scheduled for after school hours according to each participant's set time and availability, which did not disrupt their work or personal time. All the participants were interviewed separately on different days and were interviewed within six weeks, based on participants' availability.

During the interviews with each participant, the researcher elaborated on the topic and purpose of the study. The ethical aspects of the study were also stated to put the participants at ease. The researcher informed the participants about their protection, that participation was voluntary, and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any prejudice. The participants decided the conditions, and the researcher did not impose on their requirements. The researcher ensured that the data collection was not perceived as stressful, and sensitive questions were avoided for better responses from participants. The small number of participants made the data collection more manageable. The researcher made sure to guard against any form of bias in the data collection and strived to be objective during the data collection process. Also, the researcher presented the consent forms and biographical information to each participant to complete with an overview of their experiences, qualifications, and gender. The researcher followed the interview protocol using the set of questions attached in Addendum B. The researcher recorded the interviews with a recording device, and few notes were made during the interviews. After the interviews have been completed, the

transcriptions were finished and sent to the participants for member checking to ensure data analysis accuracy. The researcher also employed document analysis for triangulation purposes.

3.5.4.2 Document analysis

"Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents both printed and electronic (computer-based and internet-transmitted) material" (Bowen, 2009). This analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted to induce meaning, understand, and acquire first-hand knowledge (Bowen, 2009; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As part of this study, the document used for systematic evaluation is a personal and official document, such as the no-homework policy. Using this qualitative research method with the semi-structured interview ensured the triangulation of this study. The use of existing written documents enabled the researcher to save time and the expense of transcribing. It also showed the data the participants had to reckon with during data collection (Creswell, 2014). The researcher was aware that there could be limitations, such as, “materials could be incomplete, [it] may not be able to determine the authenticity or accuracy of the documents and [documents] may not be easily accessible” (Creswell, 2014). The researcher asked the principals about the document's authenticity and whether the schools used it to accommodate this limitation. Therefore, this data collection method is appropriate for this study, as the document analysis was combined with semi-structured interviews and biographical data. These documents helped reveal the vital information that participants could not provide during the interviews. Another reason for adopting this method was to determine if educators knew of these documents and used the no-homework policy. The documents used were documents provided by the two primary school principals, and they were electronic documents. During this study, the principal of school F shared a URL link that the researcher retrieved online using the shared link, and the principal of school G shared a school pdf document showing the stated no-homework policy. The SASA 1996 document was also reviewed to compare with the two schools' practising no-homework policy. The contents of these documents were carefully analysed based on the insights from the participants.

Table 3.2

Documents reviewed

Title of Document	Description
South African Schools Act (SASA 1996)	A legal binding document that illustrates the Guidelines for the consideration of Governing Bodies in adopting a Code of Conduct for learners. Here, the homework responsibilities were stated.
Toolbox: Social Emotional Learning Curriculum for K-6 Learners	School F- A toolbox based on the social-emotional learning curriculum followed by the school.
2020_Scholar _and _Family_Handbook.pdf	School G- A Scholar and Family handbook that guides the school's policies and procedures.

Whilst conducting document analysis, two principles from Briggs et al. (2012) were selected: meaning and credibility. The principle of meaning refers to whether the evidence is clear and understandable, and both literal and interpretive meanings were considered. Literal meaning refers to the face-value meaning of the document, which calls for the purpose to be restructured. In contrast, interpretative meaning requires the researcher to relate the face value meaning to the context in which the documents were produced. I related the documents to the context in which they were written and further ascertained how the content represented the current practice in the environment. These contexts included teachers' and principals' responsibility to share their experiences regarding the no-homework policy and learners' academic performance to constitute face-value meaning. In this light, I needed to ascertain the absolute value to understand how individual teachers perceived this phenomenon and how they were engaging with the no-homework policy. As a result, participants were engaged in gathering data that helped substantiate information obtained from the document analysis.

On the other hand, credibility means analysing the document for accuracy and ensuring that there are no mistakes and alterations in the document (Briggs *et al.,* 2012). These were statutory and policy documents, indicating that they resulted from a group effort, which established that they were credible. The document analysis led to asking questions in the interviews as to whether the intended purposes of the documents were applicable.

3.5.5 Data Analysis

Stake (2010; p. 133) referred to qualitative data analysis as “the taking things apart and then putting things together.” The data collected showed the interpretations and experiences of the participants to the study by their responses to aid the researcher in doing a thorough analysis of the data gathered. Therefore, the researcher transcribed the participants’ responses verbatim from the audio recordings. The transcription process was tedious, and it took a while for the researcher to finish. In this study, the schools and participants were coded using pseudonyms: The two schools were categorised as F & G. Each participant of the schools was coded using their positions and the alphabetical letters in conjunction with their schools, for instance, SCHF1 or SCHG2. The researcher categorised all participants using pseudonyms to ensure that they remained anonymous by not mentioning their names or affiliated schools. Only the researcher could recognise the participants, who then returned the transcribed material to the right participants to check data accuracy. Member-checking allowed participants to add or remove information that would enrich the data gathered.

The primary purpose of the qualitative data analysis is to summarise the information accrued by the researcher during the investigation, which will aid the interpretation and understanding of the data collected (De Chesnay, 2015). Therefore, data analysis permits the researcher to identify patterns, themes, relationships, and learning and interpreting, allowing the study's correct form of data analysis (Hatch, 2002). There are different approaches used for qualitative analysis studies. They explain how the researcher analyses data to derive results using strategies to organise and interpret data collected to understand the participants' experiences (Crowe et al., 2015). Therefore, thematic analysis was chosen for this study for the accurate estimation of data gathered. Thematic analysis can be defined as a process for identifying and classifying patterns in content and meaning in qualitative data (Willig, 2013: p. 57). The analysis process includes steps common to many approaches, such as transcribing interviews by organising, ordering, and storing the data, and listening to and reading or viewing the material collected repeatedly using themes. These themes are verified and confirmed from the interview transcripts and transcribed verbatim (Burnard et al., 2008; Holloway & Wheeler, 2013).

This study used codes to develop themes or categorise the emerging data from the transcripts (Rule & John, 2011). The data patterns that emerged from the transcripts were written in words and sentences and then grouped accordingly using themes and sub-themes. The researcher consistently shifted between the gathered data and analysis to ensure these themes aligned with the inquiry studied. Hence, the researcher transcribed and grouped all responses according to the interview questions by identifying the themes manually for each question. The participants' responses generated relevant quotes related to the questions highlighting the participant codes to identify the sources. The research developed three main themes that generated different sub-themes to align with the sub-questions of the study to answer the primary research question on how educators perceived the influence of adopting a no-homework policy in improving learners' academic performance.

Table 3.3

Steps in thematic analysis

Description of the proposed thematic process		
1.	Preparation of the data	These include transcribing the data collected, reading and rereading the transcripts to understand the data, and putting down initial ideas and the necessary responses.
2.	Data coding	Identify attractive data codes, highlight the segments, and link them with the codes by hand or computer.
3.	Identifying possible themes	Link the codes with the proposed themes and collect appropriate data for the potential themes.
4.	Categorise themes	By using different colours, identify the themes.
5.	Define and name the codes	Examine the data to refine all themes to determine all aspects of the pieces.
6.	Presentation	Assess the selected extracts that connect with research questions and the literature and use the relevant examples.

The data from this study were transcribed and coded, and the researcher examined the themes embedded in the coded data.

3.6 Ethical Issues

Edwards and Mauthner (2012) describe ethics as when the researcher conducts him or herself morally and remain accountable throughout the research process.

The researcher explains the ethical conduct considered during the data collection process for this study in the sections below.

3.6.1 Protecting the Privacy and Confidentiality of the Participants.

The researcher considered protecting participants' right to privacy and confidentiality before the interview commenced (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The researcher maintained complete confidentiality regarding any information presented by the participants during the research process (Willig, 2013). The participants' privacy had to be respected (Holloway & Gavin, 2013). For this study, the two selected schools were protected with code names, for instance, “School F” and “School G”. For the participants, pseudonyms such as “Participant F1” and “Participant G2, and others were used. The researcher stated this protocol in the consent letters for all the participants.

3.6.2 Right to Withdraw and Debriefing of Participants

The researcher guaranteed that participants were free to withdraw from the study without fear of any intimidation at any stage. The researcher also ensured participants were informed of the explicit goals of the survey after gathering data. Also, they would have access to any publications occurring from the research in which they have participated (Willig, 2013).

In addition, as part of this research, the researcher’s and participants’ relationship had to be accommodated. This relationship helped determine how much of the study’s aim was revealed by the researcher and protected all the participants and the study's results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Ensuring trustworthiness also improved the study.

3.7 Enhancing the Quality of the Research

The trustworthiness of data analysis is important in qualitative research. Thereby, the researcher demonstrates confidence in the data, interprets the data, and approaches used to determine the study's credibility (Pilot & Beck, 2014). Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Connelly, 2016) mention five categories used in qualitative research to show how trustworthy a study is: “credibility, transferability,

dependability, confirmability and authenticity." These five categories will be explained briefly utilising the factors indicated below.

3.7.1 Credibility

The study's credibility is how the researcher portrays participants' opinions, and interprets, and represents the quality of the data (Polit & Beck, 2012). This aspect of the study is critical because the researcher's findings should address the truth of the research. In other words, the researcher describes her experience and verifies the results with the participants (Diane, 2014). The methods used to establish credibility consist of participants' engagement, audit trails, member checking, and constant observation if applicable to the research (Connelly, 2016; Diane, 2014). In addition, data analysis must be interpreted and reported by the researcher as truthfully and adequately as possible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

3.7.2 Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research shows that the researcher's findings apply to other groups or other settings (Houghton et al., 2013). Therefore, the research shows the level of generalisation of the research findings (Merriam, 2009). The researcher supports the rich transferability of this study with a detailed description of the participants, research design, and purposeful sampling to ensure transparency and trustworthiness of data analysis. By applying these techniques, the study can inform and resonate with the reader about the research findings and other aspects of the research (Amankwaa, 2016).

3.7.3 Confirmability

Confirmability is the ability of the researcher to establish that the data collated represents responses from the participants and shows no form of bias from the researcher (Polit & Beck, 2012; Diane, 2014). The data collected must directly explain conclusions, interpretations, and the research findings. Using data triangulation with multiple data collection instruments and minimising bias from the researcher shows confirmability (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). The researcher provides rich quotes from the participants showing the rising themes in the data. The researcher uses member checking to confirm the data accuracy (as stated in Section 3.6.1) (Diane, 2014).

3.7.4 Dependability

Dependability is also known as reliability. This proves how reliable the researcher's data conditions could be throughout the study (Polit & Beck, 2014). The researcher ensured the dependability of the survey by using member checking. Also, after transcribing the interviews and documents, the researcher showed the reader the raw data of the research; using detailed descriptions to explain the "case" and the development of the study, the use of data triangulation, ethical considerations and a collection of data, and described the limits of the research (Connelly, 2016).

3.7.5 Authenticity

In this aspect, the researcher shows the vulnerability of participants' views to ensure the reliability of the study (Polit & Beck 2012). Authenticity is ensured by choosing the right participants for the study, using purposive sampling, and providing thick descriptions of the survey, giving the reader a better understanding. The researcher ensured that participants confirmed the accuracy of their responses through member-checking.

3.7.6 Member checking

Member checking in research is returning gathered data and its interpretation to the participants used for the study to allow participants to validate the accuracy of the data (Lori, 2013). The importance of using member checking requires participants to have their own voices in interpreting and analysing the data. After the researcher had transcribed the report from each school, the participants were requested to peruse the report to ensure accurate data had been collected. Unfortunately, not all the participants provided feedback as they were too busy with their work, but they did acknowledge that the researcher could go ahead with the analysis. Whenever the participants needed a change of thoughts, the information was amended accordingly. Also, three participants offered additional information which they felt was missed during the interview session.

3.7.7 Peer Debriefing

In qualitative research, the researcher can ask for academic assistance from experts ready to provide guidance and insights into the study. For this study, from the research proposal phase, the researcher continuously engaged with the supervisor

and one of my colleagues in South Africa who did her PhD in the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria to read and review my work. She was very helpful in enhancing the quality of this study.

3.7.8 Keeping an Audit Trail

An audit trail in research shows the full research procedure to validate the findings (Anney, 2014). A record of all the research processes was kept including the documents that were reviewed, the interview schedule and questions, transcripts and raw data in the form of the audio recordings. This enabled the basis for re-reading and listening to the raw data for verification purposes.

3.7.9 Data Triangulation

Flick (2014) refers to triangulation as using multiple methods in investigating a phenomenon. In the same way, Meyer (2013) presents triangulation as a concept that uses various research methods in a single study. Maree (2016) adds that triangulation can improve research credibility. Bearing these views in mind, the data in this study were obtained from various sources with dissimilar features, specifically document analysis, interviews with male and female teachers and principals, and a review of the literature. The researcher continually communicated with the participants through telephonic communication to clarify some statements. The researcher carried out all these actions throughout the data analysis phase with the aim to verify and fill the gaps detected in the information after the fieldwork exercise.

3.7.10 Thick Description

Thick description is an effort to gather rich descriptive data that enables comparison of the research context with another. Maree (2016) asserts that thick description helps to judge how well the research setting fits other contexts. As such, the researcher presented the procedures followed in the study in detail. Thus, threads of the research problem, rationale, research questions, design, sampling, methodology, and others were used to gather and analyse data. This will help to replicate the study in dissimilar contexts.

3.7.11 Role of the Researcher

The researcher's main aim as the instrument was to critically evaluate her values and position in the research process (Salkind, 2010; p. 4). The interpretivist paradigm enabled the researcher to interact closely with the participants, gain knowledge, and form a clear picture of educators' perception of a no-homework policy regarding learners' academic performance. My role as the researcher was to investigate and establish educators' perceptions about a no-homework policy and know how or if having no homework assigned may or may not have influenced a learner's academic performance. In addition, in such a study on a topic that is not often researched, it was important to make educationists aware of how schools may choose to incorporate such a no-homework approach in primary schools in South Africa.

3.7.12 Permission to conduct the research

The ethical process is an essential aspect of research and should be adhered to thoroughly throughout the study (Rule & John, 2011). By so doing, protecting the research participants, promoting research integrity, and guarding against misconduct during the research process should be observed (Cresswell, 2014). For this study, it was imperative to obtain informed consent from the participants, avoid deceit and harm, select the participants voluntarily, and assure their privacy and confidentiality (Yin, 2013). As the researcher, I had obtained permission to conduct this study from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria, which was granted before the commencement of recruiting participants. Separate interview schedules for teachers and principals (cf. Addendum B) were designed for the selected schools, and they were approved. The necessary permission to conduct this study was obtained from the principals and teachers using the permission letters and consent forms (cf. Addendum A). All of these were approved by the ethics committee and the principals of the independent schools.

3.8 Summary of the Chapter

For this chapter, the researcher described the qualitative approach and the case-study design used to recognise educators' perceptions of a no-homework policy in schools. The researcher further clarified the research methodology, which comprises the description of the research site, sampling method and data collection

methods. The researcher addressed the data analysis and ethical issues encountered in this study. In Chapter 4, the researcher will discuss the research findings in detail.

4. CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Earlier in the third chapter, the researcher described the research paradigm, research approach, research design, research site and sampling methods, data collection and analysis, appropriate ethical considerations, and enhancement of the quality of this study. For this chapter, the findings are provided and discussed in relation to the relevant literature of this study. This study aimed to answer the main research question and sub-questions. The main research question was:

How do educators perceive the influence of adopting a no-homework policy in improving learners' academic performance?

The main research question and the research sub-questions (How do educators perceive the absence of homework on their learners' academic performance? How do educators engage learners by adopting a no-homework policy in independent primary schools? What is the motivation of the school management behind adopting a no-homework?) were used to analyse the data gathered.

The researcher further includes a detailed table that indicates the qualification, gender, and level of experience, revealing the individual participants' experiences and perceptions. Pseudonyms were used to identify participants in the thematic analysis. The researcher also specified the alignment of interview questions with research questions using a detailed, explanatory table. The findings from this study were divided into three themes that emerged from the sub-questions constructed to answer and support the main research question. The themes and sub-themes recognised by the researcher relate to the interview and research questions through thematic analysis. The researcher likewise discussed the research findings discovered from the interviews and document analysis with the relevant quotations extracted from the data. The research results were compared with discussions from the literature to determine similarities and differences.

4.2 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

To fully support this study, the biographical data profile of all participants were recorded. This profile comprises the detailed personal data of all participants and data of the schools (the physical setting). Each participant completed the forms individually, including their name and surname (pseudonyms were used), gender, qualification, and years of experience. After communicating via email with the school principals, the researcher used the same profile questions for each school. The participant biographical data, information about the physical environment (the school), and all participants' positions in the school were important to know. The information helped the researcher make delicate assumptions about the participants' environment and perceptions. The researcher poses that the personal biodata of all participants is strictly confidential and cannot be disclosed.

Table 4.1

Description of participants

School	Participant	Gender	Qualification	Experience
School F				
School F	Teacher F1	Male	B. Sc Psychology/Hon. Industrial Psychology/PGCE	Five years
	Teacher F2	Female	PGCE	Four years
	Teacher F3	Female	B. Ed FET General	Seven years
	Teacher F4	Female	B. Ed	Four-Five years
	Principal F1	Female	B. Ed	Five years
School G				
School G	Teacher G1	Female	PGCE	Three years
	Teacher G2	Female	BA Psychology/PGCE (Intermediate phase)	Three years
	Teacher G3	Female	PGCE	Four years
	Teacher G4	Female	B.Ed. (Intermediate/Senior phase)	Seven years
	Principal G1	Female	BA (Hons) in Psychology & Research/PGCE (Foundation Phase and Early Childhood Development)	Seven years

4.3 Research Questions and Interview Questions

The main research question was: ***How do educators perceive the influence of adopting a no-homework policy in improving learners' academic performance?***

In Table 4.2 below, the research questions are reflected on in line with the interview questions.

Table 4.2

Research Questions in conjunction with Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions	
	Questions for Teachers	**Questions for Principals**
Sub-question 1 *How do educators perceive the absence of homework on their learners' academic performance?*	• What do you understand by the term "homework" as a teacher? • What is your own understanding of the term "no-homework" as a teacher? • Could you describe your own understanding of the homework policy? • According to you, describe your own understanding of a no-homework policy?	• What do you understand by the term "homework" as a principal? • What is your own understanding of the term "no-homework" as a principal? • Could you describe your own understanding of homework policy? • According to you, describe your own understanding of a no-homework policy?
Sub-question 2 *How do educators engage learners by adopting a no-homework policy in independent primary schools?*	• Why is no-homework policy important in improving learners' academic performance? • What are the pros of no-homework policy on learners' academic performance? • What are the cons of no-homework policy on learners' academic performance? • How do you as a literacy teacher participate in planning and delivering your lessons to learners with the absence of no-homework?	• Why is no-homework policy important in improving learners' academic performance? • What were the advantages and disadvantages of adopting no-homework policy? • How have you as a school head managed this new adoption of no-homework policy?

Research Questions	Interview Questions	
	Questions for Teachers	**Questions for Principals**
Sub-question 3 *What is the motivation of the school management behind adopting a no-homework policy?*	• What were the factors that contributed to adopting a no-homework policy on learners' academic performance? • Are there any challenges you have encountered as a teacher with regards to no-homework in your school? • Should homework be scrapped in South African primary schools?	• What were the factors that contributed to adopting a no-homework policy on learners' academic performance? • In your own opinion, has no-homework policy improved teaching and learning performance of the school? • Are there any challenges you have encountered as a teacher with regards to no-homework in your school? • Should homework be scrapped in South African primary schools?

4.4 Research Questions, Themes and Sub-Themes

In the following table, Table 4.3, the research sub-questions are stated in line with the themes and sub-themes.

Table 4.3

Themes and Sub-themes in line with the Research Sub-questions

Research Questions	Themes and Sub-themes

Sub-question 1 *How do educators perceive the absence of homework on their learners' academic performance?*	**Theme 1** The perceptions of educators on homework and the absence of homework. **Sub-themes:** • Background knowledge of homework • Background knowledge of no-homework • Background knowledge of homework policy • Background knowledge of no-homework policy • Perceptions of educators on homework and no-homework
Sub-question 2 *How do educators engage learners by adopting a no-homework policy in independent primary schools?*	**Theme 2** Educator's engagement of learners with adopting a no-homework policy **Sub-themes:** • Social-Emotional Learning • Aim to build better relationships • The improvement in learners' academic performance
Sub-question 3 *What is the motivation of the school management behind adopting a no-homework policy?*	**Theme 3** The reason behind adopting a no-homework policy **Sub-themes:** • Time structure of the schools • Lack of parental involvement • Challenges faced with homework • Socioeconomic background • Family structure • Extra workload • Health issues • Language barrier • Time management

Table 4.3 illustrates the themes and sub-themes established from the responses generated from the interview questions lined up in Table 4.2. In Table 4.2, the themes and sub-themes and their connection to the research question in which they have been answered are set out.

4.5 RESEARCH FINDINGS

The researcher sought to obtain a detailed knowledge of how educators perceive the influence of adopting a no-homework policy in improving learners' academic performance by conducting interviews and document analysis. The aim was to understand educators' perceptions of a no-homework policy and its influence on learners' academic performance. For this reason, themes and sub-themes were implemented during the data collection and analysis to give a broader insight into the no-homework policy of the selected schools. In the following sub-sections, the researcher discusses the themes in detail. As mentioned in Chapter 1, about educators as teachers and principals, I will be distinguishing between educators as the teachers or principals in my analysis to create a better meaning and understanding of each participant's views through the interview conducted.

4.5.1 Document Analysis

4.5.1.1 The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996

Before conducting the interviews with the educators, the researcher reviewed the SASA document and the guidelines for the consideration of Governing Bodies in adopting a Code of Conduct for Learners. The Code of Conduct for Learners evaluates learning and schoolwork and the responsibilities of parents. The document explains what is expected of the learners and their parents regarding homework but provides no clarification statement on what educators should do about homework. For learners, SASA specified that learners should dedicate time to schoolwork and completion of homework given to them to enhance their academic performance (Republic of South Africa, 1996b). For parents, the Code of Conduct stated that parents should pay attention to monitoring their children's schoolwork and assignment and help their children complete homework assigned to them (the Republic of South Africa, 1996). Although the SASA instructions are clear on homework, it does not consider any relative factors about any instructions for educators. It also confirms that homework is embraced in the South African education system and not in a no-homework policy. According to SASA, it also doesn't seem as if it is compulsory for schools to state homework guidelines which could be why the selected schools could decide to adopt a no-homework policy.

From the interviews conducted in Schools F & G, some participants were aware of SASA's homework policy instructions, and others were simply not aware of it.

4.5.1.2 School F

The following section addresses the findings that relate to School F's document analysis.

Although the teachers were aware of the no-homework policy and engaged in no-homework in their classrooms and various subjects, they were unaware that the school management had a blueprint for it. On the other hand, the principal was aware of the no-homework policy in the school. The principal explained that though the school management terms it a no-homework policy, she disagrees with the term "a no-homework policy" because it was not an academically correct description. Hence, she preferred to use the term no content-based homework providing a "home connection" to the students. She further explained that the time spent by learners in school is longer than in other schools. The principal and the teachers explained that the Grade R learners leave school at half-past two, and Grades 2 and 3 leave school at 3 o'clock as they are an independent primary school. Grades 4 to 7 leave school at half-past three, and they used to exit the school at 4 o'clock, unlike other schools from grades R 1 to 3, exiting school around two o'clock or half-past one. The additional time allows teachers to spend more time with the learners in the classroom. With a no-homework policy, the teachers engage with the learners through centre time, a form of rotational learning for the learners to achieve the academic content of the day.

However, the document analysed for this school is "Toolbox: Social Emotional Learning Curriculum for K-6 learners". The researcher found that they have adopted this toolbox from a public school in the United States of America. In the toolbox document, as explained, "Toolbox is a research-based social-emotional learning curriculum. It teaches critical social competencies necessary for academic and life success such as resiliency, self-management, and responsible decision-making skills." The document disclosed that the social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum was used to regulate learners' emotional and behavioural patterns. The SEL was to aid in teaching learners about the necessary social competencies related to their academic and life successes, such as being resilient, kind, and responsible for

decision-making in the future. *Therefore, the principal and teachers acknowledged that the no-homework policy was based on this curriculum in their school*. The teachers administered different general questions in learners' take-home workbooks to engage with their parents at their respective homes. The questions were in the form of general knowledge, social problems, personal problems or school issues that might have occurred in school or classroom, which the parents and educators identified according to learners' responses. The educators believe that the no-homework policy improved communication between learners and their parents, strengthened both relationships, and positively influenced learners' academic performance. The principal could express her understanding of the no-homework policy in her school. She specified that:

> *"In my school, the no-homework policy it was not a no homework policy like I keep saying and I think we spoke about it the no-homework policy worked because we had enough hours in a day to cover required concepts. And it was because most of the parents that we had were working full time, office setting, and most did not have the time to sit down with their kids to do the work. But some of the concepts too were too difficult for kids to take home. And it got frustrating for the parents because the parents had learnt a different curriculum than what the kids are learning now. So, taking homework home was ineffective for the younger kids because there was no one who was gonna help them at home considering that the adults don't have the same knowledge that they are meant to have to help them." (PF1)*

To buttress the point on the influence of the no-homework policy on learners' academic performance, the principal expressed that:

> *"Yes, so no academic homework brought positive result because instead of having academic, we had social emotion, like I said. U-hmm … it was more engaging because the families, the kids were needed the whole entire family to answer that homework. It was not based on Math, algebra, or anything that somebody might not know. It was based on everyday knowledge … how are you feeling? How do you feel about bullying as an issue? How do you feel? Who is your friend at school? What … so it was*

a check-in moment for parents to check in with their kids. It was more structured because it ensured that every parent asked their kids how they are doing and how school was. So, it did because the kids were able to talk to their parents every single day at the end of the day. And that is what the kids want … somebody to sit and check-in". (PF1)

4.5.1.3 School G

The following section addresses the findings related to School G's document analysis.

In School G, the no-homework policy was used and taken seriously. Also, the teachers were conversant with the adopted no-homework policy and made use of a no-homework approach in their literacy subjects and classrooms. Still, some of the teachers were unaware that the school management had a no-homework policy blueprint. On the other hand, the principal was aware of the no-homework policy in their school. The principal clarified that the no-homework policy referred to no content-based homework. The main reason behind adopting a no-homework policy was that learners spent a more extended period in school, and parents were not adequately present in their children's lives. The principal described that their school ends at 3:30 pm for the intermediate phase, and the foundation phase closes at 2:30 pm compared to other schools' closing periods. The teachers spend longer quality time teaching the learners in the classroom. The principal explained that teachers used these four steps to deliver good lessons to the learners such as: "I do time where the teacher teaches the concept, the guided time where the teacher repeats the same ideas, and the centre time where the learners get to do the work themselves." It is simply a repetitive step to help learners master the content taught for the day.

The document analysed for this school is called a Scholar and Family Handbook that comprised their diverse school policies and procedures. One of the policies that the document contained was the no-homework policy. Although it was called "the homework policy" on the document, School G did not give homework, and the social-emotional learning curriculum was practised. The document examined by the researcher mentioned that:

> *"Because our scholars participate in an extended instructional day, we believe they have ample opportunity to practice academic skills during the school day. Homework at our school consists of a conversational prompt that allows parents and scholars to discuss what the child is learning at school and how they are making use of core values and social-emotional tools. We believe that this redesigned homework will lead to deeper parent engagement with the school and deeper relationships between scholars and parents."*

The document stated that parents should request extra worksheets or more practice with their teacher if their children need to practice academic work at home. Also, the document further explained that parents would be sent the progress of the children's academic improvement by hand or electronically. The parents need to comment according to the teachers' discretion as there is no academic content homework given to the learners.

During the interview conducted by the researcher, the principal and the teachers acknowledged that parents had a handbook and learners had a workbook, and in those booklets, questions, answers, and feedback were given and monitored by the teachers. This was how teachers knew and understood the progress of each learner at home and the progress in their social skills. The principal described their knowledge of no-homework during the interview as:

> *"I think from my understanding is that by no-homework because we're used to homework being academic, the no-homework is more of a way from the academic side of homework but focusing on like the scholar only and, engaging parents in a different way. So, instead of, homework, the recent one, multiplication and all these things focusing on skills, then no homework would focus on the overall picture of what is happening at the school. So, it would be based on the scholars' social life at school, what their understanding and just, their perspective or rather their experience about the school or how they are experiencing their friends, their teachers, their daily school life in general. So, there's still homework, but it's not academic, that's my understanding". (PG1)*

She further explained that there is no certainty that the no-homework policy helped learners' academic performance.

"If I'm being honest, well referring to, now I'm trying to remember the year I was in the classroom, and we had this no homework thing. I never really checked the correlation between the two, … I never really thought about it, if I'm being honest, I never thought about it until now. But I think that if they were struggling or if they really needed the homework then I would've been able to notice that gap". (PG1)

The findings and analysis above revealed that though the South African education system recommended homework according to SASA, the two independent schools were not using the guided instruction stated for South African schools. These two independent schools believed that the no-homework policy was suitable for achieving better academic performance if proper structures were implemented by the DoE. However, the structure for homework in South African schools displayed no solid or constructive policy guiding homework, making it easy for some schools to adopt a no-homework policy as their own academic framework.

4.5.2 MAIN DATA PRESENTATION

4.5.2.1 Theme 1: The perceptions of educators of homework and no-homework policies.

It was imperative to learn how the participants understood the two concepts, "homework" and "no-homework", to understand how educators perceived the adoption of a no-homework policy. In doing so, the researcher explored the meaning of both concepts from the perspective of the teachers and principals. From the participants' responses, it was clear that their views on homework and no-homework policies were based on their background knowledge of homework, no-homework, homework policy and no-homework policy and their perceptions of the two concepts. These sub-themes are defined in the following sections.

4.5.2.2 Sub-theme 1: Background knowledge of homework

In this study, the researcher explored how the participants perceived the concept of homework. The educators' responses showed that they had similar understandings of homework. The participants described homework as work given to learners after school hours, and it is recommended as a take-home assignment. The responses from the participants regarding the question on what homework means to them are as follows:

"So, to me, homework as a teacher…work that is given to scholars to allow them to practice at home what was been done at school" (SCHF:TF1).

"I understand it as an extension of what is being done in the classroom. That it could have been not finished or it could be an extension of the concepts that learners need to practice more at home" (SCHG:TG1).

"Ahh…it is basically work, schoolwork that kids have to do at home. It is mostly extended work that kids did not finish at school but could do when they get home" (SCHF1:PF1).

"Just as the name depicts, homework it is a work you do at home, and it's a work that helps you reinforce learning the things that you have already learnt in school just so that you can practice the concept again and master it" (SCHG:TG3).

'But according to my understanding, it's just it's being able to go home and practice whatever was done at school and not necessarily start new concepts" (SCHG:PG1).

These responses from the participants affirm that there is an understanding of the concept of "homework". There is evidence of comprehension of homework as a concept. Participants are aware that homework is work done outside school, and learners use homework as a form of recap or reteaching what they have done in the classroom. The background knowledge of homework helped educators know whether learners are academically stable in their subjects. Therefore, homework reinforces learners' learning with constant practice of the different concepts and better mastery of knowledge taught in the classroom by educators. According to Bembenutty (2011), his understanding of homework as a concept ensures that educators assign work to be completed during leisure hours. Cooper et al. (2012) believe that homework is a task that learners should endeavour to finish during non-school hours. However, Corno & Xu (2004) adds that homework is "the job of childhood" as it reinforces learners' accountability and good attitudes toward developing their future skills.

Regarding the findings of this current study, the researcher agrees with the scholars (Bembenutty, 2011; Cooper et al., 2012; Corno & Xu, 2004) that homework should

be a task given to learners to reinforce the knowledge of what has been studied in school. This will help build learners' consciousness of their world in the classroom and amongst their peers and future decision-making in deciding their profession or careers.

4.5.2.3 Sub-theme 2: Background knowledge of no-homework

To explore participants' background knowledge of no-homework, it was evident that these participants had little understanding of the concept of "no-homework". The participants struggled to give a constructive definition of no-homework as they did with homework. The following quotes sum up their knowledge of no-homework:

> *"My definition of no-homework will be … means that learners are not getting enough practice at home" (SCHG:TG1).*
>
> *"No homework is when kids are not given homework. So, they do all the schoolwork at school, and they are not given homework" (SCHF:TF1).*
>
> *"No-homework, … I think I would say that it's assuming that we have done enough at school, so there is no need to overlook those scholars with extra work to do at home" (SCHF:TF4).*
>
> *"My understanding is that by no homework because we're used to homework being academic, the no homework is more of a way from the academic side of homework but focusing on like the scholar only and, engaging parents in a different way" (SCHG:PG1).*
>
> *"It's so tricky so, when they say no homework, they mean there isn't any extra learning that is taking place at home yeah, which is different at home" (SCHF:PF1).*

In this section, it seems that there is some confusion as to how the participants could define their knowledge of no-homework. The study tells us that some but not all the participants understood the concept of "no-homework" despite it being policy in their schools. The participants who could not explain the idea only gave the meanings to no-homework as they understood it individually. The participants perceived the background knowledge of no-homework somewhat tricky because they were still growing into the new system of no-homework as they had been used to giving homework from their previous teaching experiences. The participants were aware

of no-homework in their school, focusing more on learners' and parents' relationships than academic content. The findings of this study are opposite to that of Cordova et al. (2019), who defined no-homework as learners doing completely without homework and believed that it was more effective to focus on learners' academic achievements. This is because the educators still engage learners with work termed no academic content work. Therefore, the researcher does not fully agree with the responses from participants that educators should adhere to doing completely without homework or only assign no academic content homework.

4.5.2.4 Sub-theme 3: Background knowledge of homework policy

In the data analysis process, the researcher identified participants' background knowledge of homework policy. As the South African education system has embedded homework policy guidelines, it was clear that not all these educators have vivid knowledge about homework policy. Therefore, this aspect was based on participants' understanding and their awareness of homework policy in the South African context. The participants described the homework policy as follows:

> *"So, homework policy, of course, will mean the opposite that it will mean that scholars get written homework get extra work to take home that's what I believe. So, it's extra homework that the scholars will take at home, and it is done at home" (SCHG:TG1).*

> *"Homework policy is [laughs], I wouldn't say the incriminating policy [both laughs]. But it's, it's a policy that enforces the teacher to give scholars homework on a daily basis. So, we are saying that it's a must for whatever content you have been taught that you give the children a homework based on what you taught them not new work where they would have to go through it by themselves" (SCHF:TF2).*

> *"From what I think homework policy is that it's a policy that, guides or states the rules of having homework. It's a policy that kinds of guides how kids should be in the given homework and what should be in the homework" (SCHG:TG3).*

> *"So, the homework policy is basically when your scholars take certain concepts home with them and do application at home independently" (SCHF:PF1).*

The above responses convey that although the participants recognised a homework policy but failed to give a proper explanation of their thoughts on such policy. The participants explained that through their previous dealings with homework, they had used it to reinforce the knowledge of learners, and they indicated it has helped despite the challenges they might have faced with the use of homework. The participants observed that the decision to administer homework to learners was based on the content and topics taught in the classroom.

Likewise, the findings reveal that some educators raised the issue that they have never engaged with the document nor were they aware that the Department of Education (DoE), as stated in the South African schools Act, had a blueprint guiding schools on homework as can be seen from the following statements:

> *"I've never actually engaged with an actual document on homework policy, …, in my understanding like it's just something that maybe a school will choose to employ or use or something" (SCHF:TF1).*

> *"I've never heard of the homework policy. We in our school. one day there is homework and one day there isn't… Let me just say, from my side, I haven't heard of a specific policy that should maybe be followed … you know given by the Department of Education or given by our school" (SCHG:TG2).*

> *"Yea, I don't know the homework policy, I just know like the things we used to do regarding homework" (SCHF:TF3).*

> *"Basic guidelines laid out so if the guideline we have is just basically from what I understand from us, if we have a policy, I will go check it up" (SCHG:TG4).*

The responses of these educators revealed that their utmost awareness and understanding of homework policy were limited. There was an acknowledgement that different schools can employ their individual homework policies, but they do not know if their schools or DoE formulates an actual document. This also shows that there are loopholes in information and communication with educators concerning what they should know and what they should not know about the field they are working. It also appears that the DoE and school management do not carry out

proper professional development training and orientation for educators to be aware of important information in their field.

Horsley and Walker (2013) acknowledge that homework policies are developed based on learner achievement, time structure, school content and school subjects. In the case of this study, the participants classified homework policy as extra work, a guideline, an incriminating policy, and specific work assigned to learners to complete at home. However, the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996b) highlights homework policy as guidelines that schools should abide by for smooth educational achievement by learners in schools. The researcher can see from the interview that most of them are not familiar with homework policy, but they know they have to assign homework to their learners. This shows that educators have not developed their knowledge of homework policy in relation to their professional development. Therefore, this type of policy information could be included in their professional development curriculum to keep them updated on their profession.

The Hechinger Report (2015) classified homework as an essential tool for learning in some countries' education systems. In this study, it was clear that educators acknowledged homework as a significant factor in reinforcing learners' knowledge. Although these schools have adopted a no-homework policy approach, they believe that it works both ways depending on the school structure or goals set to be achieved by any school.

In addition, Borgonovi (2014) thoughts were similar because he reiterated that homework was an excellent tool for learning. Therefore, one of the participants, when asked by the researcher if homework should be scrapped in primary schools, responded:

> *"I don't think it should be scrapped … we are behind a lot of, research will show that 75% of our kids cannot read for meaning. I think we need to get creative with what kind of homework we want and what kind of problems we are addressing … our kids don't know how to read and write".*

This study argues, therefore, that schools may need to adapt to accommodate the challenges educators face with homework and decide if homework works or less homework works for them.

4.5.2.5 Sub-theme 4: Background knowledge of the no-homework policy

In this study, educators demonstrated diverse background knowledge based on their school practices with a no-homework policy. This study revealed that the no-homework policy focused on learners' and parents' issues with homework and the schools' values and objectives, with learners spending long hours in school. Some of the responses are as follows:

> *"You know what I know that a lot of schools are adopting this no-homework policy because I know that a lot of parents are complaining that from, you know, coming from a long hour's day at work and then they also have to come home and then also do homework, so I feel like the no-homework policy is stemming from the fact that the parents are complaining … So, no homework policy means that, scholars do not get any homework to take at home, scholars do not get any extra work to take at home" (SCHG:TG1).*

> *"My understanding of it is also just like from my perspective and not from a particular document is that kids are not given homework because, it's like the idea is that as they go home, they need to do like[do] other things instead of schoolwork so like yea" (SCHF:TF1).*

> *"No-homework policy [pause] this means that, you are not allowed to actually give children content-based homework" (SCHF:TF2).*

> *"I believe that a no-homework policy is a policy that, support the fact that there should be no-homework and, the school should make provision where the kids would have loved to learn sufficiently were they don't have to go home again and learn again" (SCHG:TG3).*

> *"So, my understanding was that the no-homework policy was implemented because then the homework became too much and , the parents were struggling to help their learners their children and then , also like parents were complaining that it's a waste of paper like some other things that were in the homework pack they could have just been doing at school like it's just it was about the whole pointing of fingers about why the homework is not been done". (SCHF:TF3)*

"So well, this particular policy is based on the goals, the values of the school and goals". (SCHG:PG1).

"The no-homework policy worked because we had the enough hours in a day to cover required concepts., and it was because most of the parents that we had were working full time, office setting, and most people did not have the time to sit down with their kids and do the work. But some of the concepts were too difficult for kids to take home with them. And it got frustrating for a parent because the parents had learnt a different curriculum than what the kids are learning now. So, taking homework home was ineffective for the younger kids because there was no one who was gonna help them with the homework considering that the adults don't have the same knowledge that they are meant to have in other to assist". (SCHF:PF1)

The above perspectives of the participants reflect that these schools shifted to a no-homework policy to solve the problems behind homework. The participants stated their understanding of the underlining issues they faced regarding homework, and they acknowledged that no-homework had been able to bridge the homework gaps between the learners, parents, and educators positively. The findings of this study further revealed that the social-economic background of South Africa is a huge challenging factor in having solid homework practices, which then prompted these schools to find other learning alternatives for their learners.

Cordova et al. (2019) indicate that a no-homework policy entails a given or stated blueprint guiding respective stakeholders regarding no-homework to foster better academic achievement of learners. Schools G's and F's participants knew that their school practiced a no-homework policy. Some participants agreed that it had fostered better academic learning of their learners, while others disagreed. From the interviews with the participants, it was clear that only the principals and a few teachers were aware of the no-homework policy blueprint of their schools. The researcher believes that schools should constantly update educators about changes or improvements of policies if changed or adjusted. It could also be included in their professional development training.

4.5.2.6 Sub-theme 5: Perceptions of educators on homework and no-homework

The analysis reviewed in this aspect identified the positive and negative perceptions participants expressed about homework and no-homework. Therefore, this aspect addressed the perceptions of educators for or against no-homework. The following were some of the sentiments echoed by the principals and teachers on how they perceived homework and no-homework:

> *"I am against no-homework because I believe that whatever was been done in the classroom should also be reinforced at home. So, I am against learners not having homework. I feel like learners need to have homework so that they practise the concept more so that they can also stretch themselves. So, I believe that scholars should get homework" (SCHG:TG1).*

> *"So, I do believe that there is a very important role that homework plays because in as much as that I could see that kids have a lot of their time at school, what they learn is not actually [pause] it's not enough time in teaching with the curriculum" (SCHF:TF1).*

> *"No, so I, I am not for it. I don't think it's a good idea to not have homework. I will prefer that all schools give it like I said it is a good way to you know close gaps [pause]. So, I am all for homework, it must be given, I I I prefer it as a tool to close gaps" (SCHG:TG2).*

The comment from these participants confirmed that participants recognized that the no-homework policy was adopted in their schools. Still, they do not support the no-homework practices because these teachers feel learners' academic learning should not only be limited to the classroom. The participants understood the school's logic behind no-homework but believed that it was more detrimental to the academics of their learners, especially on the weaker learners than stronger learners.

Some of the participants expressed a contrary opinion concerning their perception for or against no-homework. Here are some of their verbatim responses:

> *"For me, I think, no-homework is good because then we're also giving the children time to relax as opposed to always over-loading them with schoolwork" (SCHG:TG3).*

"So, for no-homework again, I want [a] school to have children to be children, in an ideal world, I would love them to go home and go make lunch and hang out with their siblings and their parents and just be kids. So, for me that is cool not having homework [pause], but as an educator for wanting homework, you want scholars to go back to retrack what they studied, to reinforce the knowledge and go back, but then question comes… is that too much?" (SCHG: TG4).

The principals further stressed their opinions about no-homework in the context of the current pandemic that we are experiencing and its impact on learners' academics. These participants' responses were articulated as:

"Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, I am for homework , I think we have lost a lot of hours in the day. , the teachers have to cover a lot of work, and the curriculum , and then , the pandemic has made that mandatory for kids to cover certain concepts at home because , we have lost the amount of time in the year that we need to cover certain concepts" (SCHF:PF1).

"So, I think, I really like the no-homework, situation because that built a lot of relationships between the parent and the scholar. So, I think I can't really choose, I think am leaning more towards the no-homework one even though I feel that parents need to know what's happening in the school" (SCHG:PG1).

The above comments emphasised that some educators are positive and support adopting a no-homework policy. They are worried about learners being overloaded with work and not having enough time to themselves as children or spending enough time with their families. The educators also reiterate that a small amount of homework should be assigned because it helps reinforce learners' academic knowledge.

The result correlates with the concept of Astin's (1984) cognitive engagement theory, which frames this study that learners can direct their learning and willingly put great effort into their education. Some of these participants were sceptical about the no-homework approach, although they had been practising it before the current state of the pandemic. The participants in support of no-homework are willing to

embrace the change because they believe it has helped shape better relationships between parents and their children and influenced learners' academic performances. The participants against the no-homework approach are more sceptical because of the social-economic background of South Africa. The assumption is that there is no-definite balance in the socio-economic statuses of learners in South African schools. It is very difficult to bend the rules and shift from homework to no-homework without considering this underlining factor.

The above responses portray what the literature revealed concerning different perceptions of educators about homework and no-homework. Haffila et al. (2018) explain that homework is essential and serves as a tool that drives teaching and learning in the classroom. This was evident in the findings, as some educators expressed their uttermost support towards homework as an essential aspect of teaching and learning for their learners. It enables them to know how to help their learners, especially those struggling with academics. Despite some participants' stated preference for homework, other participants stated a preference for no-homework. Walker (2019) reported that an educator scrapped homework when he noticed the level of stress homework caused his learners, making them deliver low-quality homework. Haffila et al. (2018) stated that a few educators voiced their dislike for homework, as an example, participant TG3 mentioned that she preferred no-homework because she could see the adverse changes it has made on her learners' academic performance.

The researcher sees the consistency in the literature as educators explained that the no-homework policy had improved learners' mental and emotional states (Pfeiffer, 2018). This is in relation to Bedford (2014) and Bempechat and Kravolec (2017), who found that assigning homework to learners was unnecessary and a huge waste of time. Also, Haddock (2006) reiterates that homework deprives children of a fun and happy childhood, creates family problems and does not lead to a proper understanding of their personal self as they grow older. From the results shown, it is found that participants know that they gave too much homework, and it made inroads into learners' family time. Several of the participants agreed that a no-homework approach brought many advantages and improvements in the lives of all the stakeholders. This is accomplished by reducing stress and conflicts and supporting better family engagement. All the participants accentuated that children

still need to be children instead of overloading them with homework. One of the educators confirmed that: *"Play is still essential for learners as 'all work and no play make Jack a dull boy'" (SCHG: TG3).*

Therefore, play and fun time are needed for kids to grow and spend time enjoying their childhood. It emerged that most participants want the best for their learners when it comes to their academic performance, but there is a conflict between their decision in choosing homework or a no-homework approach.

4.5.2.7 Summary of Theme 1

Theme 1 demonstrates that understanding the concepts of homework and no-homework approaches from the participants' perspectives varied. There seems to be a conflicting distinction between educators regarding homework and no-homework approaches as some require homework to build their learners academically, and others prefer no-homework approaches to aid better family engagement and improve learners' academic performance.

4.5.3 Theme 2: Educators' engagement of learners with adopting a no-homework policy.

In this theme, the researcher wants to know how educators engaged learners by adopting a no-homework policy and how it influenced their academic performance. Theme 2 allowed the researcher to underpin how participants engaged learners in their classrooms. It was evident that the social-emotional learning curriculum aimed to build relationships and improve learners' academic performance from sub-themes derived from the discussion with the participants, as discussed below.

4.5.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Social-Emotional Learning

The participants revealed that using social-emotional learning was an avenue for parents to connect with their children, mainly by teaching them social skills, building better relationships at home, building values, connecting emotionally with their children, and getting to know how they relate to their peers in school. These participants explained that parents could understand what needs to be in place and what is going right or wrong with their children, and they can also address the issue by reporting to the educators or school management. The participants responded as follows:

"And then the home connection is social-emotional curriculum which connects the parent and the child … yeah, just the kid's well-being, connection with the families, investment with the families, parents were involved in writing the homework with the kids., it was a family affair basically, and that was great because the social-emotional learning contributes 70% to what we were striving to do" (SCHF:PF1).

"So, we need to look at their social-emotional well-being. We need to look at their values as human beings, and also, we need to look at the relationships that they have with the world. So, the no-homework policy is just basically to develop those other aspects that may not be like taught in a transition, no sorry, in a transmission way in the classroom … when children can't manage their emotions and when you see that field in, it also just gives you as a teacher a lot of insight on how the family is". (SCHG:PG1)

"So instead of giving them academic content, we give them emotional content. So, we believe that if a child is emotionally okay and we also notice the gap between the parents and children. Parents are too busy; they don't have time so what we have done is we bridge the gap by making them connect with their children". (SCHG:TG3)

"So, this booklets or social-emotional learning was one of the biggest things with and in our curriculum where our learners our learners emotional state comes first, we, you know we have values that aligns to our school's kindness showing kindness being persistent and stuffs, so the booklet was based on that". (SCHF:TF2)

The above-mentioned statements correlate with the second concept of student engagement theory. The second concept of emotional engagement theory is pinned on "learner's emotions", which means educators want to know how learners develop their own sense of belonging, carve their social or academic interests, and thirst for knowledge. Fulfilling the need to understand the emotional commitment, struggles and experiences of learners can result in more effective learning achievement, increased motivation to learn and a more positive quest for knowledge by educators, learners, and parents.

Social-emotional learning (SEL) entails a skill set and knowledge used to improve learners' social and emotional competencies with the help of their parents and educators (Cohen & Sandy, 2003). Through interactions with the participants, the researcher found that the two selected schools used SEL to build learners socially and emotionally by adopting a no-homework policy. They believed that children need to be trained at a young age to be kind, resilient, persevere and become responsible humans in society as young adults.

Educators appreciated the essence of using the SEL by learners in managing and engaging their harmful and exigent experiences with homework (Palton & Russell, 2020). These challenges could be related to their academic, social, or family issues. This implies that social-emotional learning has helped educators to understand learners more through their family background and parental involvement in their children's academics. They can now accommodate learners with complex family backgrounds and proffer solutions to handle these children's emotions, which sometimes may be tricky.

Van Voorhis (2011) specified that by observing the effect of homework's emotional and intellectual time on learners, families, and educators, one could determine the actual causes of homework tension amongst the stakeholders. This study showed that educators from both schools were very concerned and particular about learners' emotional health. Therefore, SEL helped them know and identify learners who might have emotional problems based on the reports they discovered in their booklets.

4.5.3.2 Sub-theme 2: Building better relationships

The researcher further probed participants on how they have managed to engage learners by adopting a no-homework policy. From their reactions, the researcher perceived that the no-homework policy had built better relationships amongst the stakeholders. The following responses depict this:

> *"It helps, it really helps them because now they know that I don't have to bottle stuff in, I can write it, and my parents will read it, my teachers will read it, I can discuss this with my parents". (SCHG:TG3)*

> *"So, the relationships I think, were both better because the parents were able to see how their kids are performing. The parents were able to help*

their kids. The teachers were talking to the parents [pause]. You know it brought a little bit of relationships. I believe in all instances between the scholar and the parents, with the teacher and the parents as well." (SCHG:TG2)

This study's findings exposed that the relationship between the parents, learners and educators became better with adopting the no-homework policy and using the social-emotional learning curriculum to achieve this positive change. The assumption was that educators encountered more challenges with parents and their children when homework was administered. Hence, adopting a no-homework policy lessened homework frustration and conflicts between parents and children. It was evident in literature, as Pascual (2019) affirmed, that the policy was rooted in supporting the fundamental way for children to dedicate some time to their family's needs. The report conveys that the schools adopted a no-homework policy to enable better family relationships. If there is a form of stability at home, it will reflect in the classroom and on learners' academic achievements.

Similarly, Pfeiffer (2018) and Fynn (2021) affirm that the no-homework policy has changed family lives, relieving stress issues, boosting confidence and changing learners' attitudes and behaviours towards work. Some of the participants mentioned in the above feedback that the relationships aided better communication in some families but not in all. This seemly implies that having a good relationship is not a one-way channel. The schools should play an active role in creating better relationships amongst the stakeholders. Learners' academic achievements could be communicated better with their parents and vice versa.

4.5.3.3 Sub-theme 3: The improvement in learners' academic performance

The participants' progress in improving learners' academic performance revealed how they perceived their learners' engagement by adopting a no-homework policy. The educators described these as follows:

"So, for me, that was disadvantaging the scholars because I feel that it's disadvantaging the scholars because their only academic time that they would receive work is at school. They would remain on one level, you know. It was their academic performance was stagnant" (SCHG:TG1).

"You know what, when the homework wasn't given, I don't think it improved the scholars academic" (SCHG:TG2).

Regarding this feedback, these participants perceived learners' engagement with adopting the no-homework policy as a significant disadvantage for learners' academic performance because learning only occurred in the classroom, and nothing was reinforced at home. There is a type of assumption that the no-homework policy was not working and did not influence learners' academic performance. Therefore, this informs the researcher that adopting a no-homework policy has a negative influence on learning because learning is limited to the classroom only. Although the researcher found that learning occurred in the classroom, the literature reveals that there is no positive relationship between homework and learner achievement (Wilder, 2014).

Other participants had a different opinion, and their responses were expressed as:

"It did produce more focused learners in class–the marks did not like go down or anything" (SCHF:TF3).

"Yea, it did work. Giving different kids every year [is] imperative with different requests, and some things [are] pushed to change certain decisions. Yea it did work" (SCHF:TF4).

"It worked as a reflective tool, and then you could check skill mastering [pause]. I think the way for me, it achieves, it gets kids talking about their academics. I would say it had an impact here and there" (SCHG:PG1).

"Yes, so no academic homework brought positive results" (SCHF:PF1).

From the report of these findings, the participants perceived adopting a no-homework policy as a positive tool to improve learners' academic performance. It shows that the positive impact was because of the strengthened relationship between the parent and child, which represents parental support in their children's lives. It also reveals trust, support, and teamwork amongst the stakeholders. Therefore, it positively influences learners' academic performance because work was completed in the classroom, and no content-based work was assigned to learners.

Literature supports this notion as Cooper et al. (2006) and Fynn (2021) voiced that work assigned to learners in the classroom is more effective as it enables an increase in academic achievement of primary school learners than when homework was assigned.

4.5.3.4 Summary of Theme 2

The feedback from participants in this section addressed how educators engaged learners with the adoption of a no-homework policy in their schools. According to the participants' responses, the main goal of the selected schools was to stabilise the emotional well-being rather than improve the academic performance of learners. It seems that stabilising the emotional well-being of learners could automatically yield better academic performance of learners.

4.5.4 Theme 3: The reasons behind the adoption of a no-homework policy

During the data collection process, it was important for the researcher to have vivid knowledge of the motive behind adopting a no-homework policy and its influence on learners' academic performance. In relating the participants' responses concerning determining the motive, this theme was guided by the following sub-themes: Time structure of the schools, Lack of parental involvement, Homework frustration and problems, Social-economic background, Family structure, Extra workload, Health issues, Language barrier and Time management.

4.5.4.1 Sub-theme 1: Time structure of the schools

This sub-theme highlights one of the main factors the teachers and principals identified for adopting the no-homework policy to better learning performance. The time structure of the schools emerged as one of the factors in the researchers' findings supporting a no-homework policy. The following extracts provide supporting evidence from the statements given by the participants:

> *"I think the main thing, well for our school, it was at the time. It was just like the time" (SCHG:PG1).*

> *"Our kids had extended hours. They are not like other schools. So that is why we opted for something quick and easy because our days are extended. We have an extra two-plus hours of learning [more] than government schools". (SCHF:PF1)*

"For instance, our school ends at 15:30 for the intermediate phase, and then for the foundation phase it's 14:30. Our scholars spend a lot of time in the classroom with the teachers; they spend a lot of time well being taught, practising and in the lab as well". (SCHG:PG1)

"Because of the long hours of which children come to, for yea" (SCHF:TF2).

From these responses, it appears that the selected schools had a huge problem regarding learners spending longer days in school and having to deal with homework at their respective homes. The reality was a daily confrontation with learners not getting homework done because they may get home late, be tired, and parents' unavailability. This means that there is little chance of learners getting homework done.

According to the literature, Borgonovi (2014) mentioned that schools should take cognisance of the quality of instruction and output by educators because it is more important to the academic achievements of learners than assigning homework. The amount or time spent on homework does not determine the effectiveness of homework. A study by Cooper (2007) revealed that the amount of time learners should spend on homework is two hours every evening and children in primary schools are given homework to finish in two hours per night.

4.5.4.2 Sub-theme 2: Lack of Parental involvement

The participants believe that one of the main reasons for adopting a no-homework policy is a lack of parental involvement. These participants perceived that parents have different challenges with their children regarding homework. They were having issues and conflicts with their children with homework based on their availability, level of education, work, and income range. The participant's responses in relation to lack of parental involvement are given in the following statements:

"Parents were complaining you know. [pause]. Also, the reason why they didn't do the homework is because parents did not want to print the homework" (SCHG:TG1).

"Most of the time [it] is because they are not getting support at home and there is no one who would say let me help you" (SCHG:TG1).

"Sometimes you find that even parents are also just doing the homework for their kids" (SCHF:TF1).

"You know I know that some factors were parents who do not have the time. Parents who are complaining" (SCHG:TG2).

"There are parents who really do struggle with evening work. You know we've got parents I've had even here we've had parents who've said listen I travel I long distance to work" (SCHG:TG2).

"Some parents are not educated, so they struggle to even help you as a child" (SCHG:TG3).

From the participants' statements, the study's findings appear to indicate that the participants perceived both positive and negative forms of responses on the no-homework policy. It is perceived that despite educators assigning homework to the learners, the problems still emanated from a lack of parental involvement with their children's homework. The comments from the participants reveal that there is a struggle with the family structure, unavailability of the parents to help their children with homework, their poor educational background, parents complaining about too much work being assigned to their children and parents doing homework for their children. The responses further indicate that the schools had to figure out a way to address the problems with parents not being involved with learners' work. Thus, adopting a no-homework policy helped address some of these issues.

In Juan and Visser's (2017) research regarding parental involvement with homework suggested that the level of education of some parents hindered their capacity to support their children with assigned homework. This type of situation contributes to parents' lack of involvement with homework given to their children. Similarly, Haffila et al. (2018) indicated that parents neglecting their children's work also contributes to homework issues. This study shows that this is a persistent problem that must be addressed to help reduce educators' workload. The lack of parental involvement with homework also stems from parents condemning educators for assigning too much homework to their children (Swanepoel, 2015). They found that based on the unavailability of some parents, they struggle to participate in helping with their children's homework, thereby making learners submit undone homework. Therefore, this study tells us that all participants understood that parents complained

when their children were given a large amount of homework because some parents were not always available to assist them due to work reasons or other inevitable issues. A considerable concern which emerged from this study, having earlier also been tackled by Abraham (2013), was that parental involvement was limited due to a lack of family structure, inequalities, unemployment, poverty, single parenting, and other growing issues.

4.5.4.3 Sub-theme 3: Challenges faced regarding Homework

To unpack the reason behind adopting a no-homework policy, the researcher assumed that educators may have encountered some homework problems or frustrations. This sub-theme was developed from participants' responses which may have reflected the challenges faced with homework. These statements suggest that educators could identify their homework frustration, especially from their different experiences in teaching learners and relating with the parents, as another reason for adopting a no-homework policy. Some of the responses are highlighted below:

> *"I have to do the work, and then this puts a lot of strain in the house" (SCHG:TG3).*

> *"They are struggling so usually they still wouldn't get to do the homework, so you find out that a lot of the kids don't even do homework they come back to school to school without the homework the next day" (SCHG:TG3).*

> *"But I feel like that academic work places a lot of frustration between the parent and the child, because some parents just don't know how to balance it out" (SCHG:PG1).*

> *"So, we thought that okay maybe we are giving these kids too much homework, like let's cut it out so let's cut out, like see what happens" (SCHF:TF3).*

> *"Therefore, what was the point of giving me a homework when I don't understand at school, nobody at home can really help me? All that does is just bring frustration" (SCHF:PF1).*

> *"I also feel like so the loopholes of giving children homework and it's actually not working" (SCHF:TF2).*

"We've realised that a huge percentage of scholars are not completing their homework" (SCHG:PG1).

"It was just getting the teachers to understand the why and how they can utilise it to form relationships in the classes" (SCHF:PF1).

"They need to complete homework when they actually don't have the time because they come back, let's say around six, and they have to cook and they have to do all these other things, and if a child's homework is not completed, there's that stress so it actually puts a lot of pressure" (SCHG:PG1).

The above responses of these participants emerged to be perceived as negative factors that have affected educators on different levels. There are many more negative thoughts towards homework than the no-homework approach because they seem to complain more about the homework they assign to learners.

One of the key challenges that emerged from this study was the issue of incomplete homework from learners. Bennett and Kalish (2006) reported that educators have high expectations when homework is assigned to their learners. This expectation causes great disappointment when homework is returned as incomplete, or some learners do not attempt to do the homework at all. The participants (7 out of 10 participants) indicated that learners do not complete their homework or submit anything. Another challenge that was mentioned was homework stress. The study found that some of the participants reported physical problems such as headaches, sleeping difficulties, exhaustion, anxiety, and stress. This is what learners face both in school and at home, which causes less concentration in the classroom.

Swanepoel (2015) revealed that because learners are assigned a large amount of homework, they tend to be fatigued and lose concentration in the classroom or on homework tasks. In this study, it was found that assigning a lot of homework to learners negatively affected their health, especially mentally. Konco (2021) stated that the South African schooling system overloads children with homework, affecting their well-being. Homework was found to take away the social and emotional aspects of children's and parents' time together. Pascual (2019) revealed that assigning homework has affected young children's lives, taking away family

engagement. Likewise, Bedford (2014) inferred that homework does rob children of having fun, enjoyment and time for themselves and their parents. Therefore, through the participants' lenses, this study highlights that homework affects family time, which takes away from their social existence.

4.5.4.4 Sub-theme 4: Social-economic background

Some of the participants expressed similar opinions about the reason behind adopting a no-homework policy in the sampled schools. The social-economic background poses to be another factor pushing the narrative of schools considering a no-homework instead of homework policy in South Africa. The participants responded as follows:

> *"However, from a social-economic perspective, most of our parents are not educated" (SCHF:PF1).*

> *"Yea, most schools, most definitely you find out that children that are from high income earning homes, they sometimes do better because they have had access to good books, they have had access to quality education as opposed to parents usually maybe even if they can't physically be there, they can get the resources to help them" (SCHG:TG3).*

> *"Our social standing, and, you know, picking into consideration that you know we've got schools beyond Silver Lakes where scholars are sometimes, you know they, don't have the parents there or the parents come back late etc., etc." (SCHG: TG2).*

> *"With the socio-economic background of South Africa, some parents, some homes are child-headed, so there's no one to assist with homework. With the legacy of apartheid, a lot of people who are older are not educated so they are unable to help their kids with their homework" (SCHF:TF1).*

> *"Yea, there were some kids who were travelling from very far distance, and it was difficult. As a result, we have learners that sleep in class because they are tired and [have] not slept" (SCHF:TF3).*

One educator believes that the social-economic background can be salvaged if homework is assigned. She narrated: "*I feel like homework helps not only the scholars but also the parents as well even the socio-economic factors you know" (SCHG:TG1*).

From the above excerpts, participants think that the country's socio-economic status is a contributing factor to how parents respond to learners' work, highlighting their learners' family dynamics. It also poses a challenge for them in their experiences with learners' academic performance, in which they need to determine if the learner is coping or not. This leaves the educators wondering and devising other means to help these learners excel in school. The other response shows that the participant also perceived homework as crucial for the teaching and learning of learners regardless of their socio-economic background. It also depicts that homework will help both children and parents educationally. Parents who are not educationally privileged can learn by helping their children with homework. However, this study found that some participants were worried about learners who do not have the privilege and believed that the no-homework approach is a good help for these children. Mudzielwana (2014) explained that parents with a poor background could not support their children with homework. This study's participants mentioned that the family's social-economic background contributed to the problems learners faced with homework. Ndebele (2018) observed that children from low-income households are at a greater disadvantage than learners from high-income households.

4.5.4.5 Sub-theme 5: Family structure

The participants also believed that the participants' family structure could be attributed to the family dynamics of every learner as a contributing factor to the adoption of the no-homework policy. They responded as follows:

> *"When we have scholars that are coming from a positive household, meaning safe and secured, they do perform way better, you know, at school than scholars coming from a background with either one parent or no parents or they live with aunty or grandmother and with where there is abuse or something taking place" (SCHG:TG4).*

> *"But you know with different culture when a kid goes home; he has to cook or clean or take care of babies and brothers and sisters and probably help them with their homework" (SCHF:TF4).*

"If you look at the social-economic background of South Africa, how the family structure is, most of our kids stay with their grandparents" (SCHG:PG1).

"Some homes are child-headed, so there's no one to assist with homework" (SCHF:TF1).

"We are not literate and maybe that this no homework policy might actually have been a way to help some families to first just; you know, engage and also actually now when you think about the family structure, kids and parents don't have conversations" (SCHG:PG1).

The participants' responses reflect that both schools accommodate a mixed percentage of families because the learners come from diverse family structures. The family structures could be a mix of a percentage of 50% high-income earners and 50% of low-income earners. The participants recognised that the family structure is an essential aspect of learners doing well academically, and vice versa. Ndebele (2018) explained that some of these learners act as parents to their younger siblings. All participants also understand that some of these children are from child-headed, single parenting and busy parenting households, which continues to impact some learners' academics. Some parents tend to be very preoccupied with work and other duties, which contributes to learners getting no response or help (Knepper, 2020). The participants considered that learners from well-educated and high-income households tend to do better academically than learners from families who are not well-educated and earned low-income. This situation continues to negatively impact learners' homework completion or not being done because they do not have enough help. The participants believe that the no-homework policy has done a better job in helping and bringing the family closer and being better partakers in their children's lives.

4.5.4.6 Sub-theme 6: Extra workload

These participants explained that homework served as extra work because they had to attend to learners with or without completing homework and teach the concepts for the day. Hence, a no-homework approach reduced that extra stress and workload off their shoulders.

"So, I could partially say that the advantage is without this extra work, and you know, not having some scholars feel why is my homework not done" (SCHG:TG2*).*

"It was just less admin because obviously, it's less admin to put together the packs for homework" (SCHF:TF4).

"It also helps us teachers, so it's less admin–marking homework again is extra admin or work on top of all the stressful work we do, so imagine if there was homework to mark again" (SCHG:TG3).

"The teachers have to cover a lot of work and the curriculum" (SCHF:PF1).

"It's extra work, but I actually enjoy it" (SCHG:TG1).

These participants' responses show that the educators perceived homework as extra work that has been added to their daily routine and causes a bit of strain which makes them work harder to deliver on the curriculum. However, since adopting the no-homework policy in their schools, the stress on their work has subsided. Swanepoel (2015) indicated that educators did express their feelings based on work overload. In this study, the educators explained that work overload stems from incomplete homework returned by learners and a lack of support from parents. They will need to teach and complete the content for the day, which is sometimes difficult for them to achieve.

4.5.4.7 Sub-theme 7: Health issues

The participants understand this aspect of the homework disadvantage, which continuously causes a lot of strain on learners' health, creates anxiety and affects learners' mental health. In their responses, they acknowledge these issues:

"So, with no-homework policy the kids do not have to go through stress of doing their homework even if they don't understand the concept" (SCHF:TF2).

"I would say it was there for the learners was, they had no pressure in terms of work that has to be done" (SCHG:TG2).

"That helped them more or that helped them be less anxious because now it's not about anxious about not having their homework done" (SCHF:TF1).

"They are not anxious because homework really gives you anxiety because you are like, I haven't done my work" (SCHG:TG3).

"For me is that removal, is removing that anxiety and frustration of like having more homework and not taking a break after school" (SCHG:PG1).

"Children are able to relax even if parents are not stressed" (SCHG:TG3).

From the quotes mentioned earlier, some of the study's participants believed that adopting a no-homework policy enabled learners to feel relaxed and happy at home and concentrate better in the classroom as their anxiety levels have decreased drastically. This has also helped their parents positively because they are not stressed about their children's health, and they can see the changes the policy has brought to their families. Pascual (2019) also maintains that the health and safety of learners needed to be put first, thereby causing the ban of homework in their respective schools. In the study, all the participants agreed that homework affects learners' health because they suffer from stress, anxiety, and no time to rest, but a no-homework approach has helped learners feel more relaxed in the classroom.

Pfeiffer (2018) supports the findings that teachers and principals feel that learners' health should be the top priority as they can only function well if they are doing well mentally and physically. Research also shows that educators acknowledge that replacing homework with reading makes learners more relaxed, sleep better, and reduces the strain between parents and their children (Pfeiffer, 2018). Likewise, Jamie (2020) also believes that learners tend to suffer from burnout or become stressed due to excessive homework.

4.5.4.8 Sub-theme 8: Language barrier

The participants in this study perceived the language barrier as a challenge because some learners cannot be helped with the task given to them. Here are some of their responses:

"Because where I work, it's mostly like Tswana speaking scholars, and that's their home language. And then we have English as our first language, as our home language at school, so now they have that and then we have isiZulu as our first additional language" (SCHG: PG1).

"So, basically it was written in English so it's gonna be asking you half of your day in English and you gonna find that some of the kids stay with their grandparents at home who speak different vernaculars, and that [they] could not be able to answer certain words or certain questions because the questions were in English" (SCHF:PF1).

From the interviews with the participants, the language barrier is a disadvantage, and learners struggle, most especially those from low-income households. Ndebele (2018) noted that some foreign learners are unable to communicate properly due to [the] barrier in language. This was confirmed in this study because communication for some learners was limited, since they were used to speaking a specific language, thereby, [they are] forced to adapt due to their new environment. In addition, Clasqin-Johnson et al. (2010) recognize that the issue of language barrier does affect the positive feedback expected from learners' homework in different homes.

4.5.4.9 Sub-theme 9: Time management

Time constraints seem to be a significant challenge for educators with the adoption of a no-homework policy. The educators perceived that since there is a no-homework policy for learners, they spend more time teaching learners' different concepts, but the time is still not enough to cover the content for the day. Some of the participants commented:

"Cos you know you cannot cover everything in class, so you would have little extended time" (SCHG:TG4).

"So, time management is the most [important] thing. It's not enough time" (SCHF:TF2).

"There's definitely a lack of time" (SCHF:TF1).

The statements above show that time management was a huge problem because it was insufficient, and the syllabus needed to be completed. Pfeiffer (2018) found that educators did have to manage time to cover the curriculum.

4.5.4.10 Summary of Theme 3

With these findings, the researcher understood that the participants see adopting a no-homework policy in their schools as a positive and negative initiative to foster learners' academic performance. Positively, some educators perceived the adoption of a no-homework policy as appropriate for learners irrespective of the social-economic background of South Africa. This is because not giving homework to learners has reduced and improved the different homework problems parents and their children face. Also, the relationship among the various stakeholders has improved adequately as parents are now more involved in their children's lives. For learners, the no-homework policy may have partially improved their academic performances, and, most importantly, improved their discipline and values, and boosted their emotions and self-confidence.

On the other hand, the negative aspect is that some educators still want homework because they presently assign no content-based work. They believe that these learners need homework to reinforce knowledge after school. Also, they think that the social-economic stance of South Africa may continue to be a significant problem. Unless that is solved, schools might continue to have a divided perception or opinion on choosing a homework or no-homework approach to suit their teaching and learning, whether in public or independent primary schools.

4.6 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

In this chapter, the reports from each school, obtained from the interviews, the findings from the literature and the interpretations of the results were discussed. The researcher expounded on the three main themes identified in the data collected. The sub-themes under each main theme were explored and discussed. The next chapter, which serves as the final chapter of this study, summarises the main findings according to each theme. The reflection of my journey, the significance, contributions, delimitations, and limitations of the study were discussed in detail and the recommendations which emanated from the significant results were also discussed.

5. CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER

The focus of this research was to investigate educators' perceptions about the adoption of a no-homework policy in South African independent primary schools. The study also aimed to discover if adopting a no-homework policy influenced learners' academic performances positively or negatively. Chapter 5, the last chapter of the dissertation, presents, analyses, and discusses the study's findings. The researcher summarises the findings to draw conclusions and make recommendations from the results.

5.2 REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

My research journey has been very interesting but challenging. It was challenging because I enrolled for a master's degree in education management, law, and policy studies in 2019, and it has taken me almost four years to complete my qualification. I encountered financial, visa-related, academic, and emotional challenges.

The first problem that I encountered was with finances. In December 2018, after I had completed my B.Ed. Honours degree, I got the bad news of my financial supporter withdrawing from supporting my education to a master's degree further as promised because of financial constraints. The news made me sad and depressed, but I promised myself I would not give up on this dream. In this period, my family became my biggest support, and we decided that I would complete my master's degree, keeping the faith even though we had no idea how to finance my studies. I went ahead to apply for my visa, hoping that things would fall into place with time.

The second problem that I faced concerned my visa application. In January 2019, I applied for my study visa in my home country, Nigeria. It took four months to get feedback regarding my visa status at the South African embassy in Nigeria. Due to the long waiting period for visa approval, I could not register for my master's degree

on time because only registered students were allowed to commence their studies and attend classes. Finally, I got a breakthrough about my visa in April 2019, and my family gathered money together to ensure my travel to South Africa to register for my studies. I made it to South Africa; registered, but unfortunately, it was already too late as I had missed the classes for the compulsory NMQ 800 (research) module. The good part for me was the University of Pretoria bursary that I received helped pay my fees in 2019.

Meanwhile, I had no idea I was battling emotional stress and depression because I could not focus on my studies. My supervisor, Dr Sing, engaged with me, and I explained to her what I was going through and then Dr Sing immediately booked me to see the university counsellor, where I received help for three months. These therapy sessions helped greatly as I was able to confront my issues and fears. By late 2019, I started working on my proposal and waited for 2020 to reregister for the compulsory research module. In 2020, I registered and completed the research module and successfully completed and defended my proposal in August. I applied for my ethics clearance which took another six months to get approval. The other challenge was getting access to the sampled research sites. This was difficult due to the COVID-19 restrictions in the country. It took another two months for permission from the two selected school principals as my study was only based on a no-homework policy practising school. The process of getting access was very tedious and frustrating. After I received permission, gaining access to the participants was another hurdle.

All these experiences and delays meant that I had to ask for an extension to complete my studies. The first extension was used to apply for a visa renewal as my visa expired in December 2020. The second extension was for me to complete and submit for examination in 2022.

The interesting part of my journey was that despite all the hurdles, I have been able to pull through with God on my side, and I have come to realise that this master's dissertation was the first step of my journey to gaining experience as a researcher. My family encouraged me greatly, and my supervisor, who believes in me, was a solid pillar who saw potential in me to do better for myself. Being passionate about

teaching and the challenges that teachers and learners face, I realigned my passion for a research topic focus that is not so commonly researched about within a Gauteng Province context.

5.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This summary of the study findings is based on participants' perceptions of adopting a no-homework policy and whether it has improved learners' academic performance. This section focuses on the findings from the three main themes used to inform the research questions.

5.3.1 How Educators perceived the absence of homework on their learners' academic performance

In this theme, participants expressed their understanding of the concepts of assigning homework and no-homework as well as their perceptions about the absence of homework and its influence on learners' academic performance. The teachers and principals identified the concept of homework and no-homework in their own understanding. While some of the participants perceived no-homework positively, others viewed it as a negative factor in learners' academic performance.

From the different explanations, participants portrayed a vivid understanding of homework, but they appeared to have limited knowledge about no-homework. The concept of homework was identified as a useful function for ensuring adequate learning by most teachers, while no-homework was perceived as a limiting factor to achieving academic excellence because it was no-content based work. Even though the school practised no-homework, some participants still preferred homework to no-homework.

This study further examined the understanding of participants on a homework policy and no-homework policy. Although a no-homework policy is not practised in South Africa, a homework policy is used as a policy guideline for schools in administering homework, according to SASA. Some participants admitted that they knew about the homework policy, but they were unaware of the blueprint. This means that in many cases, teachers only administer homework to learners because they are told to do so without being formally trained and informed professionals. Also, in the case

of the no-homework policy, participants understood that they practised the policy but had limited information about the blueprint. They are only aware of homework policies from their personal knowledge and what is being practised in their schools, not necessarily because they have first-hand information about the concept. As a result, many participants do not have a vivid understanding of both policies because they were unaware of the stated blueprint. The significant intellectual knowledge that participants mentioned about the no-homework policy were its focus on finding solutions to homework issues which may work in building better relationships amongst stakeholders. Therefore, it should be noted that there is a vast difference between defining and understanding both policies, and this shows that educators are not well informed about such policies.

The findings of this study also show participants' perceptions concerning a homework and no-homework policy adoption and implementation. These perceptions came across as positive and negative for both concepts. One of the most challenging factors is the socio-economic background of South Africa. On the one hand, some participants want homework, and others prefer no-homework, which exposes some confusion about where educators should take a stand regarding both concepts. However, they agreed that homework had helped learners academically and no-homework had improved family relationships and learners' academic performance.

5.3.2 How Educators engaged learners by adopting a no-homework policy in Independent primary schools

The educators used three ways to engage learners with no-homework: social-emotional learning, building better relationships and improving learners' academic performance. These three methods were deemed effective, positive, and negative, respectively, for engagement with adopting a no-homework policy in these schools. The social-emotional learning aspect appears to be very effective and brought positive changes in the lives of the stakeholders, most especially the parents and their children. The participants saw SEL as a form of the curriculum adopted to improve the emotions, relationships, social values, and skills of their learners. In building better relationships, participants acknowledged it has helped build better communication amongst the stakeholders. The findings portrayed that building

better relationships was advantageous for parents, learners, and teachers. This indicates that most of the participants view adopting a no-homework policy positively. Their viewpoints revealed the advantages and disadvantages of adopting a no-homework policy approach to improve learners' academic performance. The findings of this study imply that the benefits of learners' academic performance stem from the fact that learning started and ended in the classroom, which gave learners enough room to be themselves, whether in school or outside school. Also, the disadvantages of improving learners' academic performance included that learning was limited in the classroom, unlike when homework is assigned to learners. The findings explained that some participants perceived no-homework as affecting learners' academic performance negatively as work was not reinforced outside the classroom. Therefore, they could not see any improvement in their learners' academic achievement.

5.3.3 The Motivation of the school management behind adopting a no-homework policy

This study uncovered different reasons and challenges that prompted the adoption of a no-homework policy in their schools. These reasons included: the time structure of the schools, lack of parental involvement, challenges faced regarding homework, social-economic background, family structure, extra workload, health issues, language barrier and time management. These reasons are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Time structure of the schools: The time structure challenges of each school's management team was the primary factor in adopting a no-homework policy. Each school's management team perceived that learners spending long hours in schools was detrimental to them as they were very young children. In addition, due to learners spending long hours in school, they are assigned homework that they believe would take away family time and fun and would not allow them to be children. Therefore, the school management adopted a no-homework policy, found in this study as no content-based work assigned to the learners. The study revealed this motivation as a positive step to achieving better learning academic performance and creating a good learning environment for learners both at home and in school.

Lack of parental involvement: Parental involvement in their children's academics, especially with homework, has been a significant issue in the literature (Juan &

Visser, 2017). The lack of parental involvement stems from their unavailability due to work or other issues, their level of education and income. Many parents who work long hours have to limit the time spent with their children, which includes the supervision of homework. Others could be constrained because of their limited education and financial constraints. Some parents may be working, and some may not be working or may be working more than one job to make ends meet. The study revealed the abovementioned issues that may have affected parents' lack of support towards assisting their learners with homework. In addition, the study found that the no-homework policy has brought about positive change in this aspect as parents may have become more involved in their children's lives and school activities.

Challenges faced regarding homework: Homework frustration and problems have caused more harm than good in the lives of the stakeholders such as the teachers, parents, and learners. There have been several debates as to how homework has caused stress, health issues–both emotionally and mentally, incomplete homework, and generally, learners, parents and teachers not having been able to cope with the pressure that homework brings (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; Swanepoel, 2015; Papadakis et al., 2017; Pascual, 2019). The findings of this study have also established the challenges that homework brings, such as teachers having issues with incomplete homework or learners not submitting any work, and homework affecting learners' health and causing strain and stress in the lives of learners and their families. The study found that these issues have been persistent enough, and to find a balance for all stakeholders, adopting a no-homework approach may help in this regard. Furthermore, the findings revealed that the teachers and principals saw these challenges as negative factors which have caused the ineffectiveness of homework and found a no-homework approach relieved them from such problems.

Socioeconomic background: Some teachers and principals indicated that the socio-economic background of South Africa poses to be a factor in homework problems. They explained that learners are subject to different family backgrounds, which may affect them positively or negatively, especially with homework supervision. Therefore, it was found in this study that socio-economic background negatively affected homework; thereby, different households cannot supervise their children's work because of their family dynamics which could be education, income earnings, and others.

Family structure: The family dynamics of learners play an important role in adopting a no-homework policy. Educators saw these dynamics as a challenge because some of these learners were from unstable homes, had absent parents, were products of single parenting, or were from child-headed homes. The study's findings established that learners do not receive enough support with homework because some of their parents are absent. Some of these children take care of themselves and their siblings alone as their parents may be busy or unavailable. Single parents are often unavailable because they may be working on one or two jobs to earn enough money, reducing their availability for their children's work. On the other hand, some parents who are doing well and earning a good income are also unavailable as they spend a lot of time at work, reducing the available time they can possibly spend with their children. All these factors were examined in these findings from the responses given by the participants. The findings further revealed that a no-homework approach improved family relationships.

Extra workload: Some teachers indicated that homework caused a lot of stress and an additional workload because they had to deal with homework issues and then complete the syllabus. In the findings, it appears that the teachers were relieved of stress and too much work when a no-homework policy was adopted in their schools. They have portrayed it as an effective way of teaching and learning seamlessly.

Health issues: There were issues concerning homework regarding the stress it causes parents and their learners. Also, the homework created some sort of anxiety and mental issues for learners. However, the study showed that the adoption of a no-homework policy by the school management of each school contributed to an improvement in the learners' health. Learners seemed to be happy and more relaxed in the classroom. They tended to participate more in the classroom activities; their parents were also more relaxed and found their relationship with their children boosted.

Language barrier: There is often poor communication between teachers, learners, and parents due to language barriers. The only communication medium in the interviewed schools was English because they were English medium schools. However, many parents' and learners' preferred communication medium is not English, which may affect the communication level achieved. The participating teachers in this study mentioned that some learners came from homes where the only language used was their mother tongue, which affected their level of

communication in school and at home. Therefore, this affects how the parents would assist with homework because they cannot communicate in their children's language of teaching and learning.

Time management: This study found time management as one of the challenges perceived by the teachers. They mentioned that they struggled with completing the syllabus as they felt the time was insufficient to teach all the academic content.

5.4 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The use of document analysis as part of my research methodology was a limitation in this study. This is because the documents presented by the two selected school principals to the researcher were brief online documents which did not give adequate meaning to the main aim of this study. The researcher struggled to analyse the documents as the schools did not have stated policies that speak directly to the study's area of investigation. The document data analysed in this study added little or no value because the documents could not help the researcher acquire enough information to answer the research questions. This shortcoming explains why the researcher primarily used semi-structured interviews as the primary data source for this study.

5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

As a case study, some strengths and weaknesses of the study became evident. Therefore, throughout this study, it was essential to look at reality from the perspectives of the educators' perceptions of a no-homework policy in independent primary schools. The findings of this study cannot be generalised, and it is valid for this case only (Rule & John, 2011). The primary focus of this study was not to generalise the findings but rather to interpret and gain an in-depth understanding of educators' perceptions of a no-homework policy. Only two primary schools were involved in this study, and the results are only accurate for these schools.

The data collection process of this study took longer than expected due to the pressure of work on educators, but they were able to accommodate me in their schedules. Schools that practice a no-homework policy are scarce in Gauteng and South Africa in general, and I could locate only those two schools for this study. The contact was only done virtually. This contact was done via emails, telephone calls,

WhatsApp calls or video calls, and google meet, depending on the participants' preferences. This made it difficult for participants to recognise the researcher. In addition, the pandemic created no physical access to the schools. Therefore, they could not see me physically, which limited the interaction between the researcher and participants because they could only speak to me on the phone instead of meeting me face-to-face. The participants mostly preferred audio calls, and only a few wanted to utilise video calls to see with whom they were communicating with at first.

Initially, the researcher set out to interview fourteen participants for this study but could only interview ten because some participants withdrew or became unavailable at the last minute while planning the meeting schedule due to work constraints and health-related issues due to the pandemic. The researcher could not find replacements as some potential participants were new staff in the school and would not have the relevant experience with the focus. The school principals could not help with contacting the previous educators who had left and would have better knowledge of the no-homework policy. Hence the researcher conducted the research interview using only ten participants.

5.6 CONCLUSION

This study focused on answering the main research question of how educators perceive the influence of adopting a no-homework policy in improving learners' academic performance. The response was that educators perceived adopting a no-homework policy approach as providing an inadequate tool for reinforcing teaching and learning in the classroom. In some cases, it has positively affected learners' academic performance, but on the other hand, it has not necessarily improved academic performance. The findings revealed that adopting a no-homework policy was a non-academic content-based task. Hence there was a conflict between educators' perceptions of adopting a no-homework policy and the more traditional homework policies. The educators disclosed that the no-homework policy mostly improved the relationship between parents and their children but not necessarily learners' academic performance. However, most educators would want homework to be used to reinforce learning for learners. In the beginning of this study, the researcher mentioned that homework guidelines were required from schools and

that a no-homework policy was not officially embraced in South Africa. The literature reported no significant relationship between homework and learners' academic performance, which may be why some schools embrace a no-homework policy to aid with learning performances. However, homework plays a significant role in the South African education system, and these schools should ensure that their respective executive bodies address the identified areas of concern.

Educators' perceptions regarding a no-homework policy in solving the issues with homework and the no-homework work debate will require finding a balance to improving learners' academic achievements. Educators are professionals in their field and know what is best for their learners. Therefore, without the Department of Education revisiting the policy regarding homework and addressing some of these homework issues experienced by the stakeholders, the debate about homework models may continue to negatively impact all stakeholders, the teachers, principals, learners, and parents.

5.7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The following recommendations for further research on educators' perceptions of a no-homework policy in South African independent schools are proposed. These recommendations are based on the literature review and the data analysis of this study.

5.7.1 Recommendation 1

Further research should focus on parents' perceptions and experiences of adopting a no-homework policy in independent primary schools. This research can be extended to other parts of the Gauteng Province to gain an insight into parents' perspectives on the no-homework policy for their children.

5.7.2 Recommendation 2

Each independent primary school should have a proper layout for their school structure. This school structure should be based on their beliefs on the organisation. For instance, if they believe a homework policy or no-homework policy will work better to foster teaching and learning and strengthen learners' academic

performance, proper structures should be put in place to support their choice. This should help combat the issues or confusion that all stakeholders face regarding a homework or no-homework policy in schools.

5.7.3 Recommendation 3

Also, a future study should focus on how schools can develop different approaches for the potential adoption of a no-homework policy in primary schools. It should be mandatory for every primary school contemplating adopting a no-homework policy to have a guiding blueprint policy document for the no-homework policy in their schools. This policy should specify the functions of all stakeholders and how they can contribute to making the policy work. The schools should do a yearly evaluation to ensure that teaching and learning occur, and that no child is left behind in their academics.

5.7.4 Recommendation 4

It was evident during this study that some educators are not aware of any stated guidelines for homework or no-homework approaches either by their schools or SASA. These educators only know that their school is either offering homework or no-homework, and they go along with it. Therefore, I would like to recommend that policies be added to educators' continuous professional development training so they can be aware and learn what these policies entail and use them wisely in their teaching profession.

5.7.5 Recommendation 5

Future studies should focus on how policymakers and the Department of Education (DoE) may take charge of a proper homework policy or guidelines that will govern homework use in public and private schools. This is recommended because the homework guidelines do not specify what is expected from each stakeholder, especially the educators. Also, the DoE should revisit the policy directing homework regarding some of the issues experienced by all stakeholders. They may focus on letting schools choose between a homework policy or a no-homework policy according to what fits their school's ethos. It appears that SASA does not state whether the guideline instructions binds both public and independent schools therefore, it is possible for some schools to decide to adopt a no-homework policy.

5.7.6 General Recommendations for Conducting Future Research

Some suggestions can be made as to how future research may be conducted to create and improve the findings of this study.

To achieve a more thorough understating of educators' perceptions of a no-homework policy in independent primary schools, the research questions used in this study should be tested with other groups of educators in other schools. This could determine whether their perceptions are for or against the no-homework policy concerning the current findings of this study.

This study examined educators' perceptions of a no-homework policy in independent primary schools as a post-participation investigation. However, there is a need to broaden this research and examine another group of teachers' learning obtained from self-initiated professional development. Examining participants' perspectives of the same activity would enable the identification of how different people interpret contextual factors in personal development activities in general and specifically self-initiated professional development on their learning and interactions. Semi-structured and focus group interviews can be suggested for such a study, which may be significant as it would investigate the extent to which participants' perceptions of the same activity may differ.

Research can equally be conducted to identify the perceptions of professional development facilitators, policymakers and institutions concerning both self-initiated professional development and externally/school-initiated professional development. In addition, the research could be conducted on why teachers do not self-initiate their own professional development activities even though policy clearly mandates them to do so.

It could be a good idea to inform teachers about action research as a means of self-initiated development and encourage them to engage in action research and learn from their experiences. Encouraging teachers to become their own classroom researchers and providing a suitable platform for them to air and share their experiences, can benefit the curriculum because it has the potential for self-development as research can create sustained and genuine school improvement.

5.8 Contributions of this Study

The study focused on South African educators' perceptions of a no-homework policy in the selected primary schools in Gauteng province. The insights gained from the participants' opinions on their perception of the no-homework policy provided insight into the perceptions of educators on homework and no-homework policies, educators' engagement with learners by adopting a no-homework policy, the improvement in learners' academic performance and the benefits experienced faced with a no-homework policy. The educators in my study understood the advantages and disadvantages of homework and no-homework policies. These two concepts may impact learners' academic performance, but educators failed to understand the notion behind adopting a no-homework policy. The awareness and understanding gained from this study may assist with formulating informed policies or guidelines to foster improved teaching and learning regarding homework policies decided on by primary schools in Gauteng province and possibly other parts of South Africa.

5.9 REFLECTIVE THOUGHTS

During this research process, I believe I have grown as an individual both as a master's student and a growing researcher. As a student, I had to do a form of self-reflection to understand who I am and want to become as I progress in this academic journey. The ability to read extensively in the aspect of homework and the no-homework policy widened my knowledge of both subjects internationally and nationally. I have improved my skill as a researcher by gaining more knowledge of conducting qualitative research.

I believe that I have grown to the point that my research journey is getting better by the day. Gaining more insights into the education system of South Africa in the aspects of homework and no-homework policies has been quite exciting and refreshing. My primary commitment is how to best support our learners so that they may meaningfully apply their knowledge gained from class in the real world and their future.

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7. ADDENDUM

7.1 ADDENDUM A: APPROVAL AND CONSENT LETTERS

Ethics Approval Letter

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Education

Ethics Committee

26 February 2021

Ms MT Soyombo

Dear Ms MT Soyombo

REFERENCE: EDU145/20

We received proof that you have met the conditions outlined. Your application is thus **approved**, and you may start with your fieldwork. The decision covers the entire research process, until completion of the study report, and not only the days that data will be collected. The approval is valid for two years for a Masters and three for Doctorate.

The approval by the Ethics Committee is subject to the following conditions being met:

1. The research will be conducted as stipulated on the application form submitted to the Ethics Committee with the supporting documents.
2. Proof of how you adhered to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) policy for research must be submitted where relevant.
3. In the event that the research protocol changed for whatever reason the Ethics Committee must be notified thereof by submitting an amendment to the application (Section E), together with all the supporting documentation that will be used for data collection namely; questionnaires, interview schedules and observation schedules, for further approval before data can be collected. Non-compliance implies that the Committee's approval is null and void. The changes may include the following but are not limited to:
    - Change of investigator,
    - Research methods any other aspect therefore and,
    - Participants.

The Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education does not accept any liability for research misconduct, of whatsoever nature, committed by the researcher(s) in the implementation of the approved protocol.

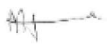
Upon completion of your research you will need to submit the following documentations to the Ethics Committee for your

Clearance Certificate:

- Integrated Declaration Form (Form D08),
- Initial Ethics Approval letter and,
- Approval of Title.

Please quote the reference number EDU145/20 in any communication with the Ethics Committee.

Best wishes



Prof Funke Omidire
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Faculty of Education
Fakulteit Opvoedkunde
Lefapha la Thuto

Examples of consent letters to the following:

1) Permission from Principal

LETTER TO SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Dear Principal

My name is Moyosoreoluwa Soyombo, a master's student at the University of Pretoria. I am conducting a research project on "Educators' perceptions of 'a no-homework policy' in South African independent primary schools". The purpose of this study is to investigate the perception of educators concerning a no-homework policy and its influence on learner's academic performance in independent primary schools. My project is supervised by Dr Nevensha Sing, from the Department of Education Management and Policy Studies at the University of Pretoria.

The purpose of this letter is to request that you grant me permission to invite your humble self as the principal who is part of the School Management Team (SMT) as one of my participants. Also, I am seeking your consent to approach the teachers in your school to participate in this interview. I will also need your permission to use documents such as homework policy/no-homework policy and passwords to other documents on the system that you know I will need to buttress the document analysis method that I will be using for this research. I hereby request your permission to allow your child's workbook to be part of this research.

The data will be collected by means of interviews which will take about 40-60 minutes to complete. Each teacher will be given a formal letter inviting her to participate in this study. Data collected will be kept strictly confidential and neither the school nor the participant will be identifiable in any report. The participants who agree to participate may withdraw at any time during the research process without any penalty.

Should any further information be needed, please contact my supervisor or me.

Yours sincerely,

Moyosoreoluwa Soyombo.
E-mail address: moohsho@yahoo.com
Contact number: 0621724040.
Supervisor: Dr. N. SING
E-mail address: Nevensha.Sing@up.ac.za

PRINCIPAL PERMISSION FOR RESEARCH
I, _____, hereby give my consent to Moyosoreoluwa Soyombo to include my school, staff members and learners as participants in her study on Educators' perceptions of "a no-homework policy" in South African independent primary schools. Signature: _____ Date: _____

Consent form for Principal:

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL AS PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I _____ consent to participating in the interview by Moyosoreoluwa Soyombo for her research on "Educators' perceptions of 'a no-homework policy' in South African independent primary schools."

I understand that:

- if I participate in this interview and complete this interview schedule my contribution will be kept confidential.
- I will not be identifiable in any research report.
- I also understand that there are minimal risks associated with this study, and I will not be harmed in any way.
- That I will remain anonymous, my participation is voluntary, and I am not forced to partake in this research. I understand that by signing the consent letter I am agreeing to participate in this study.
- I also understand that my contribution will be used primarily for a research project for this master's degree.
- I understand I have the right to withdraw voluntarily at any time during the research process and that withdrawing will not affect me in any way.
- The semi-structured interview will be audio recorded for the purpose of transcription. All transcribed data will be done in private, and names of participants will be coded so that names will not be mentioned in my report. The data collected will be safely stored and protected using a password system and can be only accessed by me and my supervisor.
- We also would like to request your permission to use your data, confidentially and anonymously, for further research purposes, as the data sets are the intellectual property of the university of Pretoria. Further research may include secondary data analysis and using the data for teaching purposes. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will be binding on future research studies.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

2. Permission for Teachers

LETTER OF PERMISSION TO TEACHERS

Dear Educator

My name is Moyosoreoluwa Soyombo, a master's student at the University of Pretoria. I am conducting research on "Educators' perceptions of 'a no-homework policy' in South African independent primary schools."

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perception of educators concerning a no-homework policy and its influence on learner's academic performance in independent primary schools. My research project is supervised by Dr. Nevensha Sing, from the Department of Education Management and Policy Studies at the University of Pretoria.

I kindly invite you to participate in this research as one of the participants. For this study, there is only one part which is a semi-structured interview. The interview will be arranged according to your availability and will take place at your convenience. The interview may last between 40-60 minutes.

However, due to COVID-19 considerations, an alternative option of meeting virtually through the platforms most suitable and preferred by the participant such as: WhatsApp video call/zoom/google meet or any valid suggestion will be considered. I am flexible to accommodate what would suit you best.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and confidential. To ensure that your privacy and confidentiality is protected pseudonym will be used. There will be no revealed information about the participants during the transcription period. In my findings, no respondent names or information will be reported. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw from this research at your own convenience.

With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. The interview will take place at your school, at a time which will be convenient to you. You will not be reimbursed for your expenses or given any incentives to participate in this project. The recording will be kept and protected with a password computer device which only I will have access to, likewise my supervisor.

If you have any questions or clarifications about the interview schedule or about participating in this study, you may contact me or my supervisor. You will have the opportunity to access and verify the recorded opinions and the transcriptions of the interviews made as a participant if needed.

Please sign below as an indication of your consent to participate in this study.

Kind regards,

Moyosoreoluwa Soyombo.

E-mail address: moohsho@yahoo.com

Cell phone number: 0621724040

Supervisor: Dr. N. SING.

E-mail address: Nevensha.sing@up.ac.za.

Consent form for Teacher:

CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHER

I _____ consent to participating in the interview by Moyosoreoluwa Soyombo for her research on "Educators' perceptions of 'a no-homework policy' in South African independent primary schools."

I understand that:

- if I participate in this interview and complete this interview schedule my contribution will be kept confidential.
- I will not be identifiable in any research report.
- I also understand that there are minimal risks associated with this study, and I will not be harmed in any way.
- That I will remain anonymous, my participation is voluntary, and I am not forced to partake in this research. I understand that by signing the consent letter I am agreeing to participate in this study.
- I also understand that my contribution will be used primarily for a research project for this master's degree.
- I understand I have the right to withdraw voluntarily at any time during the research process and that withdrawing will not affect me in any way.
- The semi-structured interview will be audio recorded for the purpose of transcription. All transcribed data will be done in private, and names of participants will be coded so that names will not be mentioned in my report. The data collected will be safely stored and protected using a password system and can be only accessed by me and my supervisor.
- We also would like to request your permission to use your data, confidentially and anonymously, for further research purposes, as the data sets are the intellectual property of the university of Pretoria. Further research may include secondary data analysis and using the data for teaching purposes. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will be binding on future research studies.

TEACHER PERMISSION FOR RESEARCH
I, _____, hereby give my consent to Moyosoreoluwa Soyombo to be involved as a participant in her research on Educators' perceptions of "a no-homework policy" in South African independent primary schools. Signature: _____ Date: _____

7.2 ADDENDUM B: EXAMPLES OF DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Example of data collection methods:

1. Individual semi-structured interview
2. Document analysed.

Individual semi-structured interview schedule:

Please answer these following questions to your own understanding.

Questions for the Teachers

1. What do you understand by the term 'homework' as a teacher?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

2. What is your own understanding of the term 'no-homework' as a teacher?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. Could you describe your own understanding of homework policy?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

4. According to you, describe your own understanding of a no-homework policy?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

5. Why is no-homework policy important in improving learner's academic performance?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

6. What are the pros of no-homework policy on learners' academic performance?

7. What are the cons of no-homework policy on learners' academic performance?

8. How do you as a literacy teacher participate in planning and delivering your lessons to learners with the absence of homework?

9. What were the factors that contributed to the adoption of the no-homework policy on learners' academic performance?

10. Are there any challenges you have encountered as a teacher with regards to no-homework in the school?

11. Should homework be scrapped in South African primary schools?

Questions for the Principals

1. What do you understand by the term ‘homework’ as a principal?

2. What is your own understanding of the term ‘no-homework’ as a principal?

3.Could you describe your own understanding of homework policy?

4. According to you, describe your own understanding of a no-homework policy?

5. Why is no-homework policy important in improving learner’s academic performance?

6. What were the factors that contributed to the adoption of the no-homework policy on learners’ academic performance?

7. Why have you as a school leader decided to adopt a no-homework policy in the school?

8. How have you as a school head managed this new adoption of no-homework?

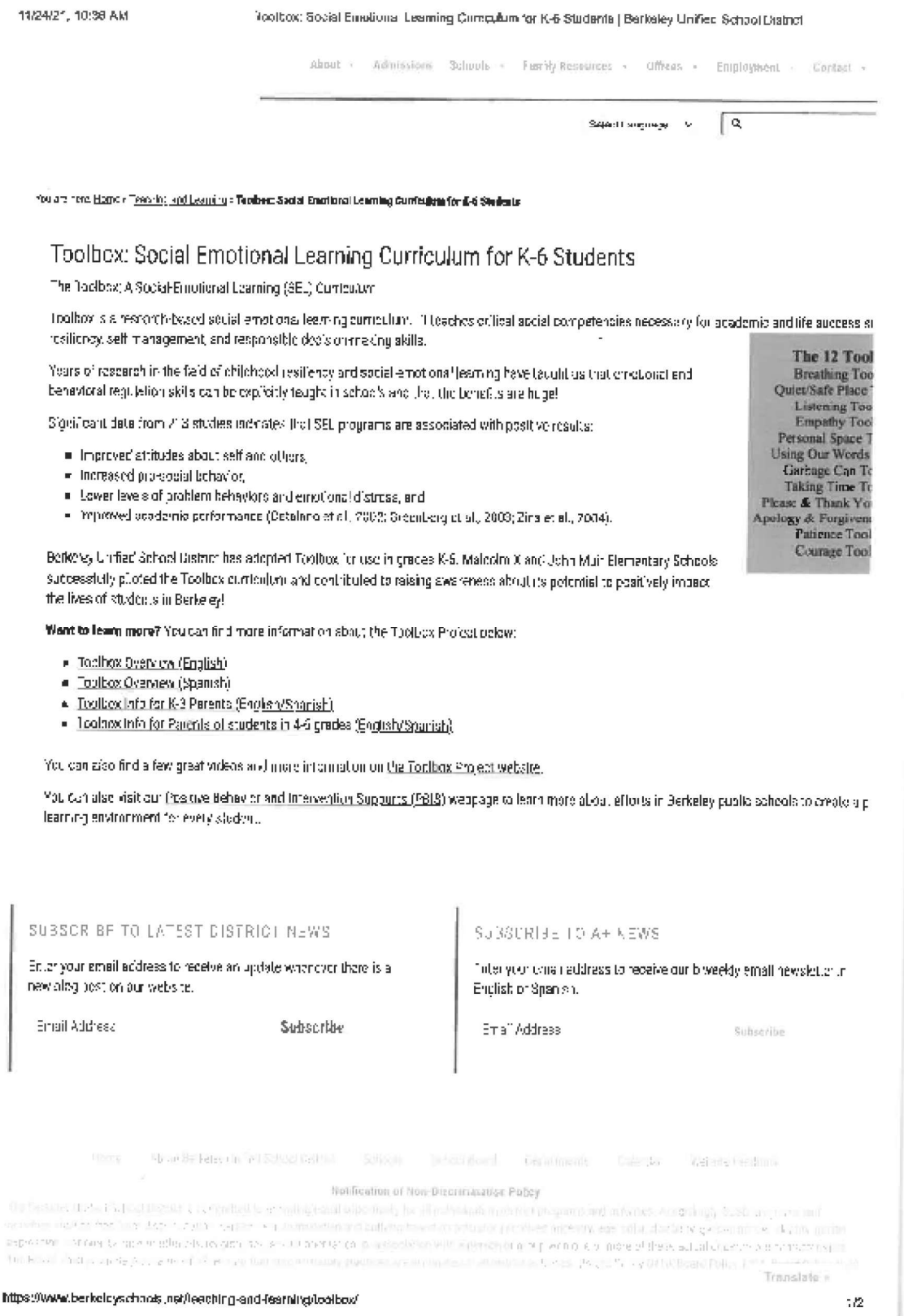
9. In your own opinion, has no-homework policy improved teaching and learning performance of the school?

10. Are there any challenges faced with having no-homework in the school?

11. Should homework be scrapped in South African primary schools?

Individual Documents analysed

a. Screenshot of School F's Toolbox: Social Emotional Learning Curriculum.



11/24/21, 10:38 AM Toolbox: Social Emotional Learning Curriculum for K-6 Students | Berkeley Unified School District

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You are here: Home > Teaching and Learning > Toolbox: Social Emotional Learning Curriculum for K-6 Students

Toolbox: Social Emotional Learning Curriculum for K-6 Students

The Toolbox: A Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Curriculum

Toolbox is a research-based social emotional learning curriculum. It teaches critical social competencies necessary for academic and life success a resiliency, self-management, and responsible decision-making skills.

Years of research in the field of childhood resiliency and social-emotional learning have taught us that emotional and behavioral regulation skills can be explicitly taught in schools and, for the benefits are huge!

Significant data from 213 studies indicates that SEL programs are associated with positive results:

- Improved attitudes about self and others,
- Increased pro-social behavior,
- Lower levels of problem behaviors and emotional distress, and
- Improved academic performance (Catalano et al., 2002; Greenberg et al., 2003; Zins et al., 2004).

The 12 Tool
Breathing Too
Quiet/Safe Place
Listening Too
Empathy Too
Personal Space T
Using Our Words
Garbage Can To
Taking Time To
Please & Thank Yo
Apology & Forgiven
Patience Tool
Courage Tool

Berkeley Unified School District has adopted Toolbox for use in grades K-5. Malcolm X and John Muir Elementary Schools successfully piloted the Toolbox curriculum and contributed to raising awareness about its potential to positively impact the lives of students in Berkeley!

Want to learn more? You can find more information about the Toolbox Project below:

- Toolbox Overview (English)
- Toolbox Overview (Spanish)
- Toolbox Info for K-3 Parents (English/Spanish)
- Toolbox Info for Parents of students in 4-6 grades (English/Spanish)

You can also find a few great videos and more information on the Toolbox Project website.

You can also visit our Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports (PBIS) webpage to learn more about efforts in Berkeley public schools to create a p learning environment for every studen...

SUBSCRIBE TO LATEST DISTRICT NEWS

Enter your email address to receive an update whenever there is a new blog post on our website.

Email Address Subscribe

SUBSCRIBE TO A+ NEWS

Enter your email address to receive our bi-weekly email newsletter in English or Spanish.

Email Address Subscribe

Notification of Non-Discrimination Policy

Translate

https://www.berkeleyschools.net/teaching-and-learning/toolbox/ 1/2

b. Screenshots of examples of non-academic content (no-homework) assigned to learners.

Foundation Phase

Wednesday, 19 May 2021
Home-School Connection

SPARK Schools

My Behaviour:

Literacy	◯	Comments:
Maths	◯	Comments:

Questions do to discuss together at home:

My SPARK scholar and I discussed (parent to complete Gr R/1, scholar to complete Gr 2/3):

What did you learn in Literacy today?

Which Toolbox Tool did you use today? When and how?

I have reviewed today's behaviour report and completed today's Home-School Connection with my SPARK scholar as part of my commitment to family engagement. **Parent Signature:** _____

☐	The scholar's parent has recorded three insights from the Home-School Connection conversation and signed to indicate reviewing the daily behaviour report.
☐	The scholar's parent has not recorded three insights from the Home-School Connection conversation and/or not signed to indicate reviewing the daily behaviour report.

Tuesday, 18 May 2021

Home-School Connection and Reflection

Reflecting on my day:

Circle the core value you demonstrated most today:

Service *Persistence* *Achievement* *Responsibility* *Kindness*

Why did you circle it? Give an example as to how you demonstrated it.

Circle the core value you demonstrated least today:

Service *Persistence* *Achievement* *Responsibility* *Kindness*

How can you improve on this tomorrow?

How did you review your work today for error and then improved what you did?

How did you show SERVICE today?

Educator Comment:

c. Screenshots of School G's 2020 Scholar and Family handbook.

SPARK™ Schools

Language through different modalities. The aim of the model is to create autonomy and purpose in learning, improve mastery of objectives, build intrinsic motivation in students and promote daily reflections to prepare students for university.

Social-Emotional Learning
Using social-emotional curriculum, we teach scholars how to manage their emotions, build healthy relationships with others, and practice mindfulness at school and at home. Our primary social-emotional curriculum is Toolbox by Dovetail Learning.

In accordance with our focus on core values as part of social-emotional development, SPARK Schools is non-denominational. We practise tolerance and respect the rights of families to share their beliefs with their scholars. As a part of the life skills curriculum, children may be exposed to various religions of the world, but SPARK Schools does not endorse or show favouritism to a specific religion or culture. According to our Diversity Policy, SPARK Schools is committed to upholding diversity by providing equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice for all children and families.

Report Cards
Report cards are distributed during the first week of each term with scholar marks and progress from the previous term's formal assignments and assessments. (In Term 4, these reports are sent home during the final week of term.) Our report cards show the scholar's progress according to our globally competitive assessments, as well as a mark indicating the child's progress against a traditional South African grading scale. Parents are asked to attend a short conference with one of the child's educators to receive the report card, understand their child's progress, and receive resources to support their child going forward.

If your child is struggling to make adequate progress or meet grade level standards, your child's teacher will work with you to create a plan to ensure your child's success. Our aim is to prevent the need to retain children in grade level at the conclusion of the school year through our Fail No One (FNO) program. For more information on our retention prevention program, please contact your child's teacher or school leader.

Please note that informal assessments will be given in each subject throughout the term, in order to determine your child's progress prior to formal assessments at the conclusion of each term. The results of these assessments are not reflected on your child's report card, but are an important tool your child's teacher uses to support your child to success.

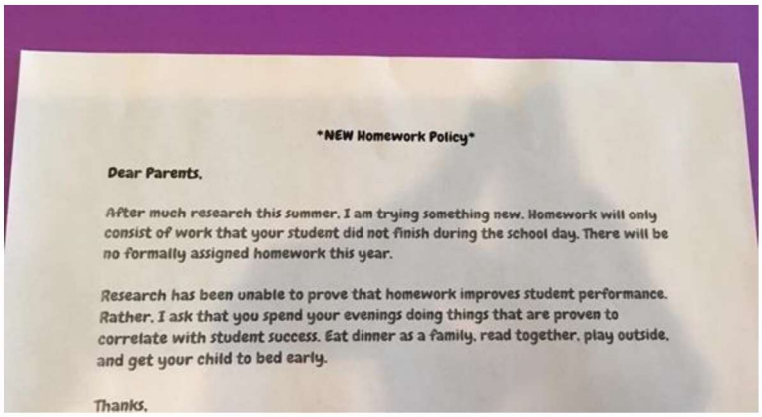
Homework
Because our scholars participate in an extended instructional day, we believe they have ample opportunity to practice academic skills during the school day. Homework at SPARK Schools consist of a conversational prompt that allows parents and scholars to discuss what the child is learning at school and how they are making use of core values and social-emotional tools. We believe that this redesigned homework will lead to deeper parent engagement with the school and deeper relationships between scholars and parents.

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA PROFILE

Please fill in the following information:

Biographical data profile	
Date:	
Name and Surname:	
Date of birth:	
Gender:	
Contact number:	
Email address:	
Years of Experience:	
Qualification:	
Please answer the following questions:	
1. Tell me about yourself	
2. How has your own experience as in an independent school shaped you?	

A Teacher's note



NEW Homework Policy

Dear Parents,

After much research this summer, I am trying something new. Homework will only consist of work that your student did not finish during the school day. There will be no formally assigned homework this year.

Research has been unable to prove that homework improves student performance. Rather, I ask that you spend your evenings doing things that are proven to correlate with student success. Eat dinner as a family, read together, play outside, and get your child to bed early.

Thanks,

The picture was taken from Jane Linley-Thomas (2016).

"The picture above represents a teacher's note to the parents that sparked up a homework debate. Educators have no chances with homework and work to find better ways to accommodate learning and put the learners first" (Linley-Thomas, 2016).