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An Exploration of School Leadership Conceptualisations of Homework:

Practices, Affordances and Constraints

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ABSTRACT

Homework as an activity of formative assessment is a key instructional strategy in South African schools. However, it is a controversial topic, as there seems to be no consensus among researchers about its contribution to learning and learner outcomes (Cooper, 2007). To find out more about homework, this study explores school leaders' views and opinions about homework: its practices, perceived value and challenges. The purpose of the study is to use what is learnt from school leaders about homework to improve its practice and enhance the contribution homework can make to learning and learner outcomes.

This research reviews literature that forms the conceptual framework in line with assessment theory. It also examines literature that focuses on distributed leadership, i.e. shared leadership of two or more people sharing power and joining forces towards the accomplishment of a shared goal (MacNeil & McClanahan, 2005). This involves school leaders at different levels.

This study is based on qualitative research, using a case study of one primary school in Soweto, Johannesburg west. The primary school is purposefully sampled because it does homework and is situated in a multiple deprived community (Maringe & Vilakazi, 2015). Interviews were conducted, using audio-tape recordings, with people in different levels of school leadership. The school homework policy was also analysed. Data collected were presented and analysed based on the research questions. The evidence from the research findings reveal that the school leaders view homework as a task given to learners to practise, search for knowledge, and prepare for future lessons. Although the participants acknowledged that homework is valuable they identified some factors as militating against its practice, thus affecting the contribution that it can make to learning and learner outcomes Four such factors include: incomprehensive school homework policy; teachers' incompetency in the practice of homework; poor socio-economic status of parents; and lack of parental support.

Based on the findings, the researcher concludes that if the factors inhibiting the effective practice of homework are interrogated, the practice of homework will improve and thus enhance its contribution to learning and learner outcomes. This is supported by international and national literature (see for example, Cooper, 2006; Bennett & Kalish, 2006; Eita, 2007; Felix, Dornbrack & Scheckle, 2008). This study also discovered the use of the Extra School Support Programme (ESSP) to aid struggling learners and orphans in the completion of their

homework, which was found to be helpful. The study concludes by identifying policy, practice and research implications emerging from the findings.

Keywords: Homework; formative assessment; Assessment; Homework policy; School leadership; Principal; Head of Department; Teachers; Learners; Parents

DECLARATION

I, Juliana Ugbo Audu, declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It has been submitted exclusively to the University of the Witwatersrand in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Master of Education degree. It has not been submitted for any degree or examination of any university before. I have used books, journals, thesis and internet as sources of information which have been referenced through the required referencing conventions.

……..…… ……

Signed Date

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACE	Advanced Certificate in Educational Leadership
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
ESSP	Extra School Support Programme
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
GPS	Great Schools Partnership
HoD	Head of Department
NEA	National Education Association
NIU	Northern Illinois University
PTA	Parents Teachers Association
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SGB	School Governing Body

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.0 Introduction

Homework, which is a key teaching and learning activity in many schools, is assumed to contribute to the formative assessment and development of learners. Its practice in schools is as old as formal education. However, its contribution to learning and learner outcomes has become a topic of debate, as opinion is divided regarding its value and relevance to learning and learner outcomes (Cooper, 2006). A key departure point for this study is that the way people perceive of a concept, in this case the idea of homework, has some influence on the way they operationalise the idea in day-to-day practice. Using a case study design, this research is designed to explore school leadership conceptualisations of homework practices, and to identify what school leaders consider to be constraints associated with homework practices in order to improve the contribution homework can make to learning and learner outcomes. Because of its widespread practice in schools, it is assumed that the phenomenon of homework and its value is understood variously by people at different levels. In this study, a variety of leadership levels have been targeted and their views on homework solicited. Such leadership levels include: principal, head of department (HoD), teachers, learners, and parents.

The research report begins with a background to the study followed by a problem statement in which the core issues of the study are unravelled. It identifies the research questions, the purpose and the rationale, significance and justification of the study. The research then proceeds to the literature review, where literature is reviewed based on theoretical and conceptual frameworks. The study also provides the methodology used in the research and outlines how data was collected and analysed. Ethical issues considered in the study are discussed. The final section gives an overview of the chapters.

1.1 Background to the Study

Homework is an integral part of teaching and learning in schools across the world, including South African schools. Felix, Dornbrack and Scheckle (2008) assert that extending work done in the school environment to the home setting is intrinsic to the South African education system. This is confirmed by a Namibian researcher who has noted that most learners go home with one or more homework item to be completed at home and returned to school the following day (Eita, 2007). Teachers give homework with the hope that parents will monitor

their children to complete the assignments at home and return them to school at the appropriate time. Homework can be seen as an opportunity for cooperation in learning and as a bridge between home and school, as parents and teachers can collaborate in educating children. A study conducted in South Africa by Singh, Mokobodi and Msila (2004) reports that homework is part of parental expectation of 'quality education' for their children. Thus, a good link can be established between school and home through homework.

Despite the importance of homework in the school system, it has been a topic of debate among scholars and there is no consensus among researchers that homework is working (Cooper, 2006). The big question is; if homework is not working why it is done in schools? Why do we have to bother children and parents on the issue of homework? Cooper (2006) notes that although researchers have been far from unanimous in assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of homework as an instructional technique, studies find that homework is an important contributor to academic achievement. A synthesis of research shows that homework raises student achievement, in spite of its limitations.

Research on the relationship between homework and achievement shows that learners doing homework have higher unit test scores those who do not do homework (Cooper, 2007). In this regard, Cooper and Valentine (2001) conducted a meta-analysis of 120 studies that examined relationships between homework and achievement. Their findings suggest that learners who did their homework outperformed those who did not, as it increases their study time, thereby helping them to acquire more skills.

However, Kralovec and Buell (2000) argue that the relationship between achievement and the time spent on homework is negative for younger students, and suggest that homework assignments are more effective for older students than for younger ones. The importance of homework and its relevance to learners' achievement is more prominent with the learners in the higher classes than the junior classes (Kralovec & Buell, 2000). This is supported by Cooper (1989) and other scholars who found that homework was positively linked with achievement in the upper grades and negatively linked with achievement in the lower grades.

Other researchers, however, note that if managed appropriately the practice of homework is helpful to all learners, be it in upper or lower grades in school. Bempechat (2004) argues that homework is a vital means by which children can receive the training they need to become mature learners. The effectiveness of homework should not be judged based only on academic achievement in the name of grades and scores, but also how it prepares learners in

the lower grades for future studies. “If our goal is to prepare children for the demands of secondary schooling and beyond, we need to pay as much attention to the development of skills that help children take initiative in their learning and maintain or regain their motivation when it wanes” (Bempechat, 2004, p.190). Thus, homework is needed for both academic achievement and the acquisition of skills likely to help learners to cope with future studies.

In the United States of America, people’s attitudes towards homework as an instructional strategy have shifted from positive to negative and back to positive over the years. Cooper, Lindsay and Nye (1998) assert that the general perspective of the value of homework has undergone its third renaissance in the past 50 years. For decades homework has been a topic of heated discussion and concern for learners, parents, teachers, and administrators. The diverse understandings and attitudes about homework by these stakeholders often lead to disagreement between teacher and learner, child and parent, and teacher and parent.

A lack of consistency in the understanding and purpose of homework among teachers, learners and parents results in variations of its practices. According to Coutts (2004, p.183) the “type and amount of work assigned; where and when it is completed (with or without parental involvement), and whether or not it is graded by teachers” are all linked to young learners’ attitudes to homework. The conceptualisations and practices of homework by schools encourage or discourage parents from active participation in their children’s homework. According to Kruger (2003), principals and teachers are responsible for involving parents in homework. Teachers’ and parents’ beliefs and attitudes about learning and education influence that of the children’s. If teachers and parents believe and show that homework has positive effects on learners’ achievement, then learners will take homework seriously, which will in turn improve their learning outcomes.

A school policy is essential for the effective practice of homework. The policy is formulated to guide administrators, teachers and parents on the practice of homework in schools (Sharp, Keys & Benefield, 2001). Homework policies should stipulate the purpose of homework and the responsibilities of stakeholders, and inform teachers and parents of their specific roles in the practice of school homework. The Centre for Innovation and Improvement (2009, cited in Protheroe, 2009, p. 44) sees homework as “a primary point of interface between the school and the home (with parents better able) to support the school’s purposes for homework when they understand what is expected of their learners and their role in monitoring their children’s

homework". Thus, parents should have access to the homework policies of their children's school so they can contribute to the improvement of homework practices.

In the South African context, homework is considered an important assessment tool. However, there is a problem regarding parental involvement. Felix, Dornbrack and Scheckle (2008) assert that learners' positive experience of homework is dependent on the parent and school cooperation. Singh et al. (2004) state that the South African Schools Act of 1996 decentralised school management, which implies that parents are supposed to be involved in their children's education. However, due to language barriers and the aftermath of apartheid, this is not the case with some parents. Dornbrack (2008) asserts that even though apartheid has officially been abolished in South Africa, discourses of racism, white superiority and class prejudice continue to surface, especially in desegregated schools. Thus, homework seems to be working in some South African schools but not in others, which contributes to educational inequities in schools across the country. Unfortunately, however, there is little research in the South African context on homework, although international research abounds. This research study seeks to explore school leadership conceptualisations of homework practices, affordances and constraints in South African primary schools in an attempt to improve its contribution to learning and learner outcomes.

It is necessary to point out that in the South African context, 'students' refers to those studying in higher education institutions while 'learners' refers to scholars of primary school. Hence, 'learners' rather than 'students' will be used throughout this report since this research is conducted in a primary school.

1.2 Problem Statement

I decided to investigate the controversy among educators, learners and parents about their understanding of the purposes of homework – and to try and understand why for some homework works, but not for others. The opponents of homework view it as work done in the absence of a qualified teacher, thus, no control over who actually completes the homework; which may encourage cheating (Cooper, 1989; Blazer, 2009). For the proponents, provided the work is completed it does not matter whether homework is done in the presence or absence of a qualified teacher (Gill & Schlossman, 2000). These perceptions about the understandings and value of homework among stakeholders will influence how it is practised in schools. Thus, the application is not expected to be uniform, even in the same school, and this affects its contribution to the overall improvement of learning and learner outcomes. I

decided to conduct this study to establish the views of school leadership at the levels of principals, heads of departments, teachers, learners, and parents about the practices, values and challenges associated with homework, and to find out why it is still practised in schools. I also wished to investigate how to improve homework practices in order to enhance its contribution to learning and learner outcomes.

1.3 Research Questions

The research was operationalised through one main question and four sub-questions.

Main question:

> What can we learn from how various school leaders conceptualise and understand the notion of homework, its purposes, and the challenges associated with its administration in order to improve the contribution homework can make to learning and learner outcomes?

In order to answer the main research question, I developed the following sub-questions.

Sub-questions:

1. How do school leaders at the levels of principal, HoD, teachers, learners and parents understand the idea of homework?

   This will involve a range of people at different levels of leadership. The purpose is to try and understand the different organisational leaders' ideas about homework in order to help improve its contribution to learning and learner outcomes.

2. What practices are associated with the application of homework in schools?

   This will involve examining the policy and how homework is practised in the school. The purpose is to know the aim and general principles of administering homework to learners in order to improve its practice, so as to enhance its contribution to learning and learner outcomes.

3. What benefits are associated with the practice of homework in schools?

   This will involve finding out the values of homework. The purpose is to know the benefits derived from doing homework and whether they can improve its contribution to learning and learner outcomes.

4. What are the challenges associated with the practice of homework in schools?

This will involve investigating the problems that are encountered in the process of practising homework. The purpose is to identify the problems, and see how they can be ameliorated to improve the contribution that homework can make to learning and learner outcomes.

1.4 Aim and Objectives

The aim and objectives of this study are based on the research questions.

Aim:

To explore school leaders' views and opinions about the way homework is practised in schools, its perceived values and challenges in order to improve the contribution homework can make to learning and learner outcomes.

Objectives:

1. To find out school leaders' understandings of homework at the levels of principals, HoDs, teachers, learners, and parents.
2. To examine how homework is practised and applied in schools.
3. To discover the benefits that can be derived from the practices of homework in schools.
4. To investigate the challenges associated with the practices of homework in schools.

1.5 Rationale of the Study

According to the literature, homework is supposed to be a link between home and school. Cooper (2007) maintains that the family should be seen as the best and principal site of learning and schools as extensions of family, thereby making homework an opportunity for cooperation in learning. In spite of the importance of homework and the problems around it, there is little research on educators', learners', and parents' perceptions of the practices and benefits of homework in South African primary schools. This research hopes to provide information about how the notion of homework is understood and practised; and to explore its perceived benefits and challenges. It will hopefully help educators make constructive decisions about how to improve the contribution homework can make to learning and learner

outcomes in schools. It is also hoped that this research will minimise the gap of literature on homework in the South African context.

1.6 Significance of this Study

There has been much controversy among researchers over the contribution of homework to learner achievement (Cooper, 2006). Thus, this study explores school leaders' views and opinions about homework, its practices, perceived values and challenges with the aim of improving the contribution that homework can make to learning and learner outcomes. It will be valuable for principals, HoDs, teachers, learners, parents, and researchers. From the findings of the study, the different levels of school leadership will know where they can contribute to improving the poor practice of homework. It is hoped the study will help further researchers and that they will refer to it when researching a similar topic. If the factors found to militate against the effective practice of homework are addressed, the practice of homework will improve and thus enhance its contribution to learning and learner outcomes.

1.7 Justification of the Study

By conducting this research, I hope both to make a contribution to an attempt to discover the challenges associated with the practice of homework in a primary school. Suggestions as to how to ameliorate the problems connected with the practice of homework and enhance its contribution to learning and learner outcomes will be made. Hence, the contribution of this study to existing literature regarding the ongoing debate on homework practices, its purposes, values and challenges.

1.8 Overview of the Research Methodology

This research used the qualitative research design. In qualitative research, researchers collect data in face-to-face situations by interacting with selected persons in their setting (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). A qualitative research design is considered suitable because it seeks deep understanding of people's experiences, behaviour, emotions and feelings; unlike quantitative research design, which emphasises objectivity (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). This study explored the real-life experiences of the different levels of school leaders' understandings of homework, its practices, purposes and challenges. The case of a primary school in Soweto was explored and the participants were the school principal, a HoD, three teachers, six learners, and a parent. Purposeful sampling was used in the selection of the participants.

The data collection instruments used were in-depth interviews, a focus group interview, and document analysis. The principal, HoD, three teachers and the parent were interviewed individually, while the learners form the focus group. Multiple data collection instruments were used to ensure the credibility and dependability of the research. The data collected were analysed through content analysis, which according to Miles and Huberman (1994) entails identifying, coding and categorising the primary patterns in the data (cited in Punch, 2009). Ethical issues such as informed consent, right to withdraw, confidentiality and anonymity were considered. A detailed description of the methodology used in conducting this research is provided in chapter 3.

1.9 Overview of Chapters

Chapter 1 provides the introduction, background to the research, problem statement, research questions, aim and objectives, the rationale, significance and justification of the research. The research design and methodology are highlighted and the chapters outlined. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature that informed the research. It provides the theoretical and conceptual framework of this research which is developed in line with assessment theory. Chapter 3 identifies and maps out the processes involved in carrying out the exploration. It describes the research methodology and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 presents and analyses the data that was collected. Chapter 5 provides a personal reflection summary of the research, limitations of the study, discussion of the findings, conclusions, and implications of the study and suggests areas for further research. Finally, the researcher provides the contribution of this study.

The following chapter reviews literature in line with the structure of the research questions.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

Literature review is the act of designing a conceptual framework which can be used as a tool in developing and understanding a subject area (Rowley & Slack, 2004). The purpose of literature review according to McMillan and Schumacker (2014) is to relate previous research and theory to the problem under investigation. Hence, literature review enables me to have a good understanding of theoretical components, which assists me to think about the topic in a theoretically broad perspective. My study draws on existing literature concerning homework and explores school leaders' views and opinions about homework, its practices, perceived values and challenges.

I review literature on the different levels of school leadership and how they conceptualise the notion of homework. I further review relevant literature that outlines the conceptual and theoretical frameworks informing the study. I also review literature on the controversy over homework, and provide summaries of both national and international research that have been conducted on homework.

2.1 Conceptual Framework

Conceptual framework is a group of concepts or ideas that shed light on the nature of the phenomenon under investigation (Jabareen, 2009). Existing knowledge on homework and how school leaders define it informs this literature search. Figure 1 identifies and summarises the key concepts that structure school leadership conceptualisations of homework: practices, affordances and constraints.

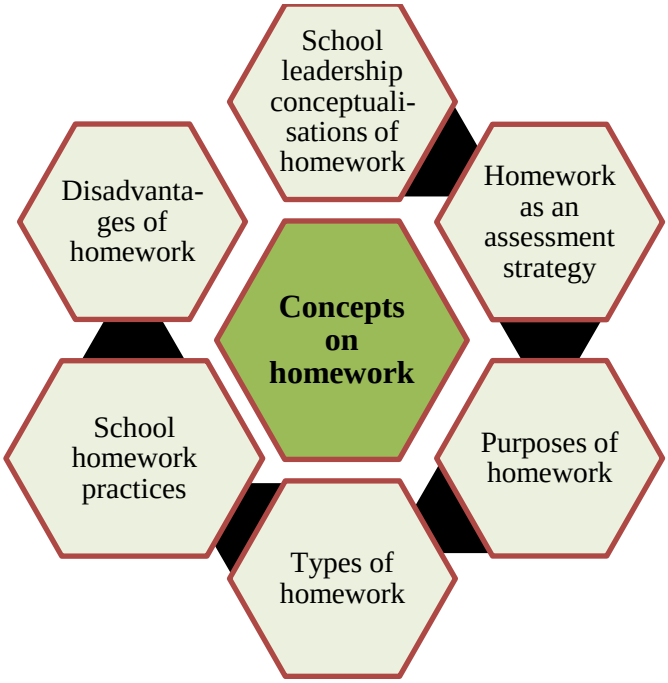

Figure 1: Concepts on homework (adapted from Cooper 1989, 2007; Epstein 2001; Coutts 2004)

2.2 Homework

Homework is defined by different authors in various ways, but all the definitions point in the same direction. Cooper (1989) defines homework as tasks assigned to learners by school teachers that are meant to be performed during non-school hours. Thus, homework may be completed at home or elsewhere. However, as the name implies, homework should be completed primarily at home, so that parents or peers and other more knowledgeable members of the family may be involved. MacBeath (2003) argues that homework is related to the curriculum and is set by teachers; therefore the work embarked on voluntarily by learners or initiated by parents for the improvement of the learners' performance cannot be referred to as homework. Thus, homework must be assigned by teachers to learners based on the school curriculum. Homework can be beneficial to learners when it is related to the school curriculum as it is only then that it can enhance learning and learner outcomes.

2.2.1 Controversy over homework

The argument is that if homework as a teaching strategy in schools is effectively managed, then learners can benefit from it. The current debates concern the efficacy of homework and why it is still done in schools. Conventional wisdom suggests that homework is a valuable process of assessment in schools. However, while this is suggested by much of the literature

on the subject (see for example, Cooper, 1989, 2007; Coutts, 2004; Eita, 2007; Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011), there is an equally large body of literature which suggests that schools should abandon homework because it has no value (see for example, Khon, 2007; Kralovec & Buell, 2000). Despite the lack of consensus, the majority of South African schools continue to use homework. This research is therefore based on the need to know how schools put homework into practice and understand the value and the problems they encounter; and how to improve the contribution of homework to learning and learner outcomes. To do this, it is important to find out school leaders' understandings and ideas about homework.

2.3 School Leadership

School leadership is central to this study because they are the participants of this investigation. Thus, it is important to look at the notion of leadership. Cuban (1988) in Bush and Glover (2003, p.9) postulates that, "… leadership… mean[s] influencing others' actions in achieving desirable ends. Leaders are people who shape the goals, motivations, and actions of others. Similarly, Northouse (2007) asserts that leadership can be seen as a process whereby an individual influences a group of people to achieve a common goal. This influence process is to achieve a purpose, which can be of personal or professional value that is geared towards the attainment of an organisational goal.

Bush (2010) suggests that the three things that are common in the various conceptualisations of leadership are influence, value, and vision. For him, leaders are those who create visions and influence others' actions to achieve organisational goals. From the above definitions, one deduces that leadership has to do with initiating change to reach existing and new goals. Thus, leadership can be seen as an interactive event, which involves the exercise of influence over others to achieve concrete objectives. Although 'influence' is the key factor; value, vision and decision making are also deemed essential components of effective leadership (Bush, 2010). To be able to improve the practices of homework for better contribution to learning and learner outcomes, it is necessary to explore the view of school leaders about homework: practices, purposes and challenges.

School leadership involves working with and guiding teachers toward improving educational process in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. School leadership is conceptualised and enacted in a variety of ways within many school systems and institutions in the world. Some models of leadership are:

- Instructional leadership: This model focuses on teaching and learning and on the behaviour of teachers in working with students (Bush & Glover, 2003).
- Transformational leadership: According to Gunter (2001) it is about building a unified common interest between leaders and followers.
- Distributed leadership: This refers to shared leadership of two or more people sharing power and joining forces towards the accomplishment of a shared goal (MacNeil & McClanahan, 2005).

Among these leadership models, school leadership fit into the distributed leadership model because leadership in school is at different levels. According to Harris (2003) distributed leadership is a shared and collective endeavour that engages all members of an organisation. The favoured strategy in school management discourse is the notion of distributed leadership, i.e. leadership in effective schools is distributed (Hatcher, 2005). In the same vein, Harris and Spillane (2008) view distributed leadership as a collective form of leadership in which teachers develop expertise by working together. However, it may not be only teachers or educators as learners and parents are also involved in school leadership at their own levels. The different levels perform their different responsibilities to achieve a common goal. Therefore, when school leaders at different levels work together the practice of homework can improve to increase its contribution to learning and learner outcomes.

Three elements of distributed leadership that appear to fit well with the characteristics of schools are: provision of space for networking among disparate groups and individuals; allows for multiple layers of leadership enactment at senior management, departmental, subject and other curriculum organisational levels; and allows for an organisational focus on a vision which rallies the school behind a common purpose (Maringe & Vilakazi, 2015). Dispersed and distributed leadership contributes substantially to making a good school climate, as people in the school see its effectiveness as a collective responsibility.

School effectiveness cannot be achieved by individual leaders alone; it is a collective effort. The South African Schools' Act of 1996 promotes a shift from centralised control and decision-making to a school-based system of education management (Grant, 2006), thus, school principals need the collaboration of teachers, parents, and learners. In schools, leadership is at the levels of principals, HoDs, classroom teachers, the chairman of the School Governing Body (SGB) and school prefects. Fullan (2001, p. 134) states "strong institution has many leaders at all levels". These levels of leadership work together to ensure that school

goals are achieved. Being that homework is one of the strategies of assessment, it is pertinent to get school leaders' views about homework, its practices, purposes and challenges.

There are multiple leadership levels in schools. The principals are the individuals who lead and see to the smooth running of the schools. According to Bush and Glover (2009) principals have direct responsibilities for setting high expectations and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of learning outcomes. This implies that the role of a principal is to ensure quality of teaching and learning in his school for learners to achieve.

Leadership at the level of HoDs lead other teachers in their departments and are responsible for the effective functioning of the department. They are saddled with the responsibility of ensuring effective teaching and learning across their department (RSA, 1999). Part of their duty is to coordinate assessment and homework of all subjects in their department. Thus, they check teachers and learners to be sure that effective teaching and learning goes on well.

Teachers are leaders in their classrooms. They are tasked with the responsibilities of teaching, setting and marking homework, giving feedback to learners, and following-up based on the feedback (Sharp et al., 2001). School prefects are learners who lead other learners; while the SGB chairman is a parent who leads other parents. These school leaders work collectively to achieve a common goal. In this case, the common goal is to improve the practice of homework to enhance its contribution to learning and learner outcomes. The next section looks at the conceptualisations of homework by the different levels of school leadership.

2.4 School leadership conceptualisations of homework

The concept of school leadership in the literature review are important for this study, as they enable me to understand the views of school teachers, parents and learners about homework. However, literature does not reveal much about the different levels of school leaderships' concepts of homework practices. This is why this study explores school leaders' perceptions of the affordances and constraints associated with the practices of homework. School leadership at different levels have their ideas and opinions about the practices and values of homework. Their views and opinions will help me learn more about how school homework can be practised to improve its contribution to learning and learner outcomes.

2.4.1 Learners' conceptualisation of homework

There are different views about the viability of homework and its practices. Learners vary on their understandings of homework, their perceptions of the value of homework and on the time they spend on homework. Sharp et al. (2001) state that learners generally have a positive attitude to homework, and they feel it is important in helping them to do well at school. Learners prefer interesting, challenging and varied tasks that are clearly defined and have adequate deadlines to tedious, boring and 'busy-work' homework (Sharp et al., 2001). Vaughn and her research colleagues (in Protheroe, 2009) report that learners find it helpful when teachers assign homework towards the beginning of the class; explain how to do the homework, including providing examples and writing directions on the chalkboard; give learners time to start the homework in class, checking for understanding and providing assistance before the end of the class period; explicitly relate the homework to class work; and permit learners to work together on homework in class.

Learners' attitudes to homework are related to their characteristics, which affects the way they react to homework and the value they attach to it. Blazer (2009) argues that homework is affected by more factors than other instructional strategies; the home environment, learner aptitude, motivation, and age all influence homework, favourably or otherwise. Leaners' attitudes to homework are not universal due to the difference in individual characteristics. However, Coutts (2004) maintains that many children and adolescents feel negatively about the homework activity itself, as well as the interactions surrounding it. Learners complain of the time taken from their leisure activities as a result of completing homework.

2.4.2 Teachers' conceptualisation of homework

Teachers, like learners, have varied understandings and attitudes about homework and attach values to homework in distinctive ways. Due to the differences in their perceptions of homework, teachers have different ways to manage homework: homework planners; the use of new technology; and different approaches to marking and feedback (Sharp et al., 2001). Teachers plan, set, and mark homework, give feedback and follow up. Teachers complain of lack of time to prepare effective assignments, training and support from parents and school administrators (Sharp et al., 2001). Even though teachers acknowledged the value of homework, they viewed it as tasking to them.

2.4.3 Parents' conceptualisation of homework

Parents also have different views about homework and get involved in their children's homework in diverse ways. They feel more positive about their abilities to help their children in primary grades and rate teachers as better teachers, while learners improve their attitudes and achievements (Epstein, 2001). Parents want teachers to set homework, because their regular involvement in the completion of homework increases their interactions with children at home. Coutts (2004) maintains that in general, parents see homework's potential benefit largely as achievement-related; it leads to increased success on class work and fosters attitudes and habits that lead to successful future learning. However, parents are divided in their understanding and attitudes about homework and have diverse complaints against homework.

Not all parents are entirely positive about the purposes of homework, regardless of whether there are disputes within the family about its completion. Parents sometimes express frustration because they do not understand the homework that learners bring home from school. They sometimes complain about the length, standard and clarity of the homework (Cooper, 2007). As a result, homework becomes the source of complaint and friction between home and school, as educators, parents, and learners view home and school as adversaries when it comes to the issue of homework (Cooper, 2007).

Given these problems surrounding the practice of homework, little attention is paid to the context of schools in multiple deprived communities. Research needs to be undertaken at schools in marginalised communities in order to understand how homework is practised, but little is being done and there is a glaring gap in the literature. This study aims to explore this gap.

2.5 Homework as an assessment strategy

The conceptual framework of this research is developed in line with assessment theory, since homework is an assessment strategy that is used in schools. For quality teaching and learning, schools need to assess what has been taught and evaluate the performance of learners. In educational assessment, educators use a variety of methods to evaluate; measure and document the academic readiness, learning process, and skill acquisition of learners from preschool through college and adulthood (GSP, 2015). When learners are taught, they are assessed to see how much has been learnt. After the feedback, both the teachers and learners

will know what to do in order to improve teaching and learning. Thus, any process that provides us with the knowledge about how learners think, achieve and progress in school is referred to as assessment. Because homework is related to assessment, there is the need to have a good idea about the notion of assessment.

Assessment is a word that has always been used in education to refer to all activities used to help learners learn, measure their academic readiness and progress. The link between classroom practice and the learners' learning outcomes can only be known through assessment. Black and William (1998) assert that assessment refers to all the activities undertaken by teachers, and by learners in assessing themselves, which provides information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. Thus, assessment can be seen as a way in which teachers gather data about their teaching and their learners' learning in order to improve teaching and learning. Assessment involves tasks, exercises, tests, and examinations set and marked for learners by educators.

Educational assessment is part of the process of learning, and to motivate learners, teachers should always provide feedback after assessment (Sieborger & Macintosh, 1998). Depending on the teacher's comments, the effects of assessment can be positive rather than negative, as teachers help learners to learn through the use of assessment. This implies that teaching, assessment and feedback go together. Weak assessment is detrimental to learners' achievement in the sense that, without feedback and monitoring of learners' work, it is very difficult to check progress.

Assessment is said to be successful when learners regard it as fair. Sieborger and Macintosh (1998) refer to the fairness of assessment as its validity and reliability. For them, validity is the extent to which the assessment measures what it is purported to measure, while reliability refers to the consistency of assessment to always give the same result under any circumstances. Learners can only account for what they have learnt and in the way in which they have learnt it, therefore, assessment should then test what is learnt.

The appropriate use of assessment procedures helps children to learn well, and taking all assessment decisions as a whole directs and alters children's learning. Sieborger and Macintosh (1998) identify five factors that should be considered when trying to establish fairness in assessment:

1. Does the importance, length, size or weight of the assessment match the amount of work that has been done?
2. Does the choice of the assessment techniques match the way in which the learners have been taught? Do learners have access to the resources that they need?
3. Do all the learners understand what they are expected to do or answer?
4. Are the conditions for administering the assessment appropriate and is there enough time to perform adequate assessments?
5. Is the method of marking as objective as possible? Should the learners know how the assessment will be marked?

The discussion of how to improve teaching and learning is incomplete if assessment as a teaching strategy is not discussed. Achievement at whatever level is based on learners' ability to respond to tasks they are given, and their response depends on how well they can take control over their own learning (Hopkins & Macgilchrist, 1998). For them, the link between classroom practice and the learners' learning outcomes should be taken seriously, particularly in terms of what the learner learns, how the learner learns, the pace of learning, and the high expectations existing in the classroom.

Assessment may be formative or summative depending on the way the result of assessment is used. "Formative assessment gives information in order to help learners to grow and to make progress; while summative assessment enables you to tell how much a learner has achieved by a certain stage" (Sieborger & Macintosh, 1998, p.24). This implies that summative assessment is intended to summarise what a learner has attained at a particular time; while formative assessment is intended to promote further improvement of learner attainment. For the purpose of this study, the focus is on formative assessment, because homework is one of its activities.

2.5.1 Formative assessment

Formative assessment is referred to as assessment for learning and is defined in various ways. It can be defined as a range of formal and informal assessment procedures undertaken by teachers in the classroom as an integral part of the normal teaching and learning process in order to modify and enhance learners' learning and understanding (New Zealand, Ministry of Education, 1994). Black and William (1998) interpret formative assessment as encompassing all those activities undertaken by teachers and learners, which provides information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged.

From the various definitions, it is evident that formative assessment enhances learning if properly managed.

Assessment can be said to be formative when the feedback is actually used to adapt the teaching to meet the needs. Black and William (1998) argue that feedback to learners should be given regularly and be specific to the task. Feedback is central to formative assessment; knowledge of results when provided consistently with detailed feedback helps the learner work through misconceptions or other weaknesses in performance (Black & William, 1998). Harlen and James (1997) assert that formative assessment is essentially positive in intent, in that it is directed towards promoting learning, thus part of teaching, and takes into account the progress of each individual and the effort put in. For them, learners should play a central part in formative assessment. This implies that learners can make progress when they are active in their own learning. Evaluating their own work helps learners know where they are proficient and where they need improvement.

The purpose of formative assessment is for teachers to check learners' understanding along the way, decide how to go about future instruction, and provide feedback to improve their performance. Black and William (1998) note that for effective formative assessment, learners should be given opportunities to express their understanding of any aspect of teaching, which will initiate the interaction whereby the assessment will aid learning. Examples of formative assessment include observation during in-class activities or learners' non-verbal feedback during lectures; homework exercises and class discussions; question and answer sessions, both planned and spontaneous; and in-class activities where learners informally present their results (NIU, n.d.). For the purpose of this study, homework as an assessment tool in a primary school in the South African context is examined.

2.6 Purposes and advantages of homework

School homework has been a tool for assessment from the beginning of formal schooling, despite the controversy around it. Murphy and Decker (1990) argue that homework serves as a window through which one can observe a child's progress, and express positive attitudes towards the child and his/her education. From the school's perspective, homework is a way to provide additional instruction in practice. Homework can improve learners' mastery of basic academic skills such as writing, reading and maths (Wallis, 2006). Homework that is based on the school curriculum helps learners learn ahead of classroom instruction and grasp what is being taught faster, because learners have had previous knowledge of the topic.

Homework could be a ‘practice exercise’ given to learners by teachers to complete after a topic has been taught in class; a ‘preparatory assignment’ for future lessons; and ‘extension tasks’ to apply, individually and imaginatively, the concepts or skills learnt in class to new activities (Molepo & Mji, 2014). They are all designed to reinforce what has been taught during normal school hours and are meant to be completed outside those hours.

Regular homework is a necessary part of learning because it accelerates the pace of knowledge acquisition. Kralovec and Buell (2000) maintain that homework provides a control mechanism for the educator to determine which learner needs help and attention. Although homework is said to have smaller effect at lower grade levels, Cooper (1989) recommends it for elementary learners. In the battle over homework, Cooper (2007) notes that homework should have different purposes at different grade levels. For learners in the earliest grades, it should foster positive attitudes, habits, and character traits; permit appropriate parent involvement; and reinforce learning of simple skills introduced in class. For students in upper elementary grades, it should play a more direct role in fostering improved school achievement; while in the sixth grade and above, it should play an important role in improving standardised test scores and grades.

Generally, teachers have diverse reasons for giving homework to learners. Epstein (2001) identifies nine reasons for giving homework: practice, participation, personal development, parent-child relations, parent-teacher communication, peer interactions, policy, public relations, and punishment. These can be classified into four groups:

1. Academic functions: Homework is used to complete unfinished work, revise, drill, consolidate and expand on concepts introduced in the classroom.
2. More general socialisation purposes: Homework is designed to encourage responsibility, study skills, and time management.
3. Home/school/community communication: Homework is designed to inform families of topics taught in class and how children are progressing.
4. School and system requirement: Homework is done to ease time constraints in a crowded curriculum (cited in Coutts, 2004).

However, from synthesis of research on literature, it is noted that homework serves different purposes for learners at different grade levels. For instance, at the elementary level, homework tends to focus on issues such as helping learners learn how to manage their time and develop good study habits, while the primary focus on homework at the high school level

is on academic content (Epstein, 2001). Assignments that are designed to meet these purposes should help to increase learner learning and development, develop home-school-community partnership, and improve teaching and administrative practices (Epstein, 2001). Hence, homework has both academic and non-academic values to learners' learning and increases parental involvement in schooling.

Homework helps learners to acquire skills that will be helpful later in life. Molepo and Mji (2014) maintain that homework gets the learner ready with crucial skills they may need in future, for instance, exposure to reading-up and research. For them, it also encourages learners to act proactively regarding their class work. According to Ramdass and Zimmerman (2011) a number of researchers speculate that homework assignments will enhance the development of non-academic skills such as self-discipline, self-regulation processes and self-belief, which include goal-setting, time management, managing the environment, self-efficacy and motivational skills (Pintrich, 2000; Bempechat, 2004). All these are important skills that individuals need to succeed in life as learners are supposed to take control of their learning and academic studying rather than relying on their teachers for every direction as they progress in school.

2.7 Homework practices and types

Homework practices differ according to the grades of learners in South Africa. Thus, learners' age is taken into consideration when determining the amount of homework to assign. According to statements by the national Parents Teachers Association (PTA) and the National Education Association (NEA), the following amounts of homework are recommended: from grade R to third grade, not more than 10 minutes per day; and from fourth to sixth grades, 20 to 40 minutes per day (Doyle & Barber, cited in Molepo & Mji, 2014). This corroborates the international recommendations from the National Foundation for Educational Research (DfEE, 1998), who published guidelines on homework for both primary and secondary schools, and advised schools to develop written policies for effective practice of homework (cited in Sharp et al., 2001). Table 1 outlines the DfEE's recommendations for homework in the various primary school grades in terms of time allocations and subjects.

Table 1: DfEE recommendations for homework in primary school

Year group	Time allocation	Subjects
Years 1 and 2	1 hour per week	Reading, spelling, other literacy and number work
Years 3 and 4	1.5 hours per week	Literacy and numeracy as for Years 1 and 2 with occasional assignments in other subjects
Years 5 and 6	30 minutes per day	Regular weekly schedule with continued emphasis on literacy and numeracy but also ranging widely over the curriculum

These DfEE guidelines, cited in Sharp et al. (2001) suggest that homework has different purposes for children at different ages. The main aim of homework for younger children should be to involve parents in their children's education (Sharp et al., 2001). It shows that as children grow older, homework helps them develop study habits and provides them with opportunities for independent learning. Homework for learners in the first stage should consist of reading, learning spellings, practising pronunciations and numeracy (language and mathematic work with parents). In stage two, homework may occasionally extend to other subjects; while in the third stage, homework on all subjects should relate to the curriculum.

The manner in which homework is set and administered enhances learners' interest in the completion of homework. For effective homework practices, Marzano and Pickering (2007) assert that homework should not be assigned simply as a matter of routine but only when there is a clear purpose in regard to learner learning. Teachers should ensure that they assign both manageable and educationally beneficial homework to learners.

Other guidelines for good homework practice are that schools should "view homework as contributing to schools' plan for learning; establish a strategy; ensure clear communication with parents and learners; and plan homework to complement and not simply complete work in class" (Sharp et al., 2001: 12). This implies that teachers should know the learning needs of their learners, and device strategies of setting homework that will address their needs. Teachers should give learners feedback that shows learners what and how to improve; and parents should also be involved in the practice of homework (Sharp et al., 2001).

Another point for effective practice of homework is consistency in assigning homework to learners, which helps them get used to doing it. Paulu (1998) proposes that the use of a consistent homework schedule helps learners remember to do assignments as well as busy parents to remember when their children's assignments are due. Thus, the assignment of

homework to learners should be consistent as stipulated by the school homework policy. The school homework policy states how homework is practised in schools. A homework policy should consist of a schedule of tasks; and to ensure compliance by staff and learners there should be a system of monitoring and supervision by the school management at the HoD level.

2.7.1 Homework policy

A homework policy provides some guidelines to be followed in assigning homework in schools. Protheroe (2009) argues that for homework to be effective, it should support educational goals, take into account learners' abilities and needs, and strengthen the school-home link. Therefore, homework policy provides guidelines for educators and parents on the practice of homework. "The homework policy means a plan of action for dealing with parent involvement in homework throughout the year. It also includes clear objectives for learning, instruction for completion and explicit instructions to the learner for involving family members in certain portions of the assignment" (Van Voorhuis, cited by Eita, 2007: 13). Homework policies when given to parents enable them to know how they are involved in their children's homework.

The elements of a Massachusetts elementary school homework policy are summarised by Cooper (1994) as: defining the role of homework in learning at each grade level; communicating clear expectations for each assignment; assigning developmentally appropriate homework; limiting the amount of homework given to all for independent reading time; outlining responsibilities of teachers, parents, and learners (cited by Protheroe, 2009). Cooper (2007) states that school administrators can develop homework policies and assist in explaining to teachers and parents the rationale behind the guidelines they set. This will help to improve the practice of homework when teachers and parents know what to do.

In the South African context, each school should have a homework policy to guide the practice of homework (Felix et al. 2008). See for example, the homework policy for South African College Junior School grades 4 to 7, which states that the aims of homework are to aid each child's progress towards achieving his full potential with the assistance, support and co-operation of parents; and to adequately prepare children for the demands and responsibilities of high school. The objectives; general principles; types and amount of homework given in the intermediate phase; the roles of parents and caregivers; and the

responsibilities of teachers and learners in the practice of homework are also stipulated in the policy (Brand, 2011).

2.8 Disadvantages of homework

Although reports from previous research show that doing homework brings about improved academic achievement, and other skills that may be helpful to learners in future, the negative consequences of doing homework have to be addressed. According to Warton (2001), researchers (see for example, Cooper, 1989; Cooper & Nye, 1994; Hallam & Cowan, n.d.) have enumerated a range of potential disadvantages of homework. These are issues of social justice, for example social inequality of home resources; increasing differences between high and low achievers; promoting cheating; decreasing motivation; increasing anxiety and boredom; and limiting time for other activities. Consequently, some challenges that can affect the effective practice of homework are time, environment, characteristics of the learner, a lack of training for teachers, and a lack of support from parents and administrators.

The issue of time is crucial in the practice of homework. Learners complain that homework takes away much of their leisure time; parents need time to do their work; and teachers have to set, mark and give feedback, which requires time (Cooper, 2007). Doing homework is disadvantageous to less privileged children and parents as they need time to help their parents in their businesses or with household chores, resulting in their inability to complete their homework. Kralovec and Buell (2000) assert that homework is harmful to economically disadvantaged learners who are unintentionally penalised because their environments make it almost impossible to complete assignments at home. These learners are often penalised for failure to complete their homework.

Similarly, parents have to make time from their busy schedule to guide and monitor their children, to ensure that homework is completed and signed to be returned to school at the specified time. Parents are also expected to create an enabling environment for their children to complete their homework, which may not be convenient for some parents. Homework is viewed as an activity that disrupts families, overburdens children, and limits learning (Kralovec & Buell, 2000). As a result, homework often causes conflict between children and their parents.

Another disadvantage could be seen from the angle of the quality and quantity of homework given to learners, when teachers do not use homework properly. Bennett and Kalish (2006)

are of the view that when teachers are not well trained in how to assign homework, and they give too much, it harms students' health and family time. They suggest, therefore, that teachers reduce the amount of homework, design more valuable assignments, and avoid homework altogether during breaks and holidays.

Unlike Kralovec and Buell (2000), who advocate for the abolition of homework, Bennett and Kalish (2006) call for the training of teachers on how to assign homework. Kohn (2007, p.166) recommends "it makes sense to only assign homework that is beneficial to learner learning instead of assigning homework as a matter of policy". Homework that is irrelevant and inappropriate to learners may not be beneficial or helpful; it may rather waste the learners' time and energy, thereby decreasing their academic achievement. In as much as homework is beneficial to learners, if it is not properly assigned by teachers then it affects learners negatively.

2.9 Conclusion

Both national and international literature confirm there is little consensus among researchers about educators', parents', and learners' understanding and views about homework, its practices, and values. In spite of these controversies around homework, it is perceived in the literature to be a valuable instructional strategy. The discussion of leadership was relevant because the study participants were selected from the different levels of school leadership in a primary school in Soweto. I looked at school leaders' definitions and understanding of homework at the levels of teachers, learners, and parents. Literature reveals that homework is a task that must be related to the curriculum, and assigned by teachers. The purpose of homework determines the type of homework that is given, as homework serves different purposes at different stages in primary school. According to Sharp et al. (2001), in order to be effective, the practices of homework have to be based on a school homework policy, which states the guidelines that should be followed by stakeholders in the practice of homework. Although homework has educational benefit, there are some challenges associated with its practice and administration. Finally, I discussed the disadvantages of homework.

The next chapter discusses the methodology used in the research.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

Having engaged with the relevant literature on homework and its practices, I aimed to get the views and opinions of school leadership about the benefits and challenges associated with homework. Thus, this chapter discusses the methodology of the research titled 'an exploration of school leadership conceptualisations of homework: practices, affordances and constraints'. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) methods refer to the various approaches used in educational research to gather data, which are used as a basis for inference and interpretation, for explanation, and prediction. The choice of research method is essential because it influences the way in which I collect data.

This chapter explains the three competing research paradigms, out of which the most appropriate one for this study was selected and backed up with reasons. Methodological issues such as research design and procedures; sampling techniques; data collection; validity and reliability; and data analysis are discussed. Ethical issues considered in the conduct of the research are highlighted.

3.1 Research Paradigms

Educational practice is a complex phenomenon with different sorts of questions, which requires different sorts of research (Pring, 2000). Thus, different approaches are used to answer different questions. Three main methods in educational research are positivism, interpretive, and critical theory (quantitative, qualitative, and action research designs respectively).

3.1.1 Positivism paradigm

Positivists believe that reality is fixed, measurable, verifiable and objectively given on the basis of scientifically derived evidence. The only authentic knowledge is that which is scientifically generated using mathematical and statistical models (Hamersley, 2012). Thus, anything that cannot be scientifically proven by general laws of science and mathematics is seen as mere speculation, not knowledge. Such beliefs have become the basis of scientific experimentation, hypothesis testing, and statistical modelling. The models provide for empirical methods which arrive at only one answer does not require interpretation of the data. This research does not fall into a positivism framework because it explores school leaders'

understanding and views about homework; its practices, purposes and challenges with the aim of improving the contribution that homework can make to learning and learner outcomes; thus, data needs to be interpreted.

3.1.2 Interpretive paradigm

Interpretivists believe that knowledge and truth do not exist separately from the 'knowers', as people bring their own understanding to the phenomena of the world (Popper, 1963). For interpretivists, understanding the world and its various occurrences cannot be attributed to science and mathematical modelling alone. People give meaning and value to their environment and themselves based on their perceptions, cultural and social upbringing and experiences (Popper, 1963). These are important elements in the social construction of knowledge about the world as two people viewing the same thing at the same time can interpret it differently. Interpretive researchers use systematic procedures, but maintain there are multiple socially constructed realities (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Thus, under an interpretive paradigm, truth can be subjective, unlike under positivism where it can only be objective.

3.1.3 Critical theory

This paradigm criticises both positivism and interpretive theories. Critical theory like interpretive paradigm believes that reality is constructed by people. The purpose of critical theory is not merely to understand situations but to change them (Cohen, et al. 2000, p.28). Thus, critical theory does not only give account of society and behaviour but critique and brings about transformation.

3.1.4 Adopted research paradigm

Of the three research paradigms that have been discussed, the most appropriate for this study is the interpretive paradigm. Cohen et al. (2000, p.22) maintain "… the central endeavour in the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subject of human experience". Henning (2004) asserts that interpretive research is fundamentally concerned with meaning, and seeks to understand social members' definitions and understandings of situations. Operating within this paradigm availed me the opportunity to find out school leaders' views and opinions about homework practices based on their lived experiences rather than from literature. Thus, this study adopted a qualitative research design.

3.2 Positionality

As a teacher I have been practising homework and assumed there are some benefits and challenges that are associated with homework. While conducting this I became aware of my biases in favour of homework as I held firmly to the assumption that homework contributes to learner achievement when it is properly practiced. Thus, for me, homework is a valuable assessment strategy which the practice needed to be improved in order to enhance its contribution to learning and learner outcomes. This stance may have prevented me from listening carefully to my participants to decipher where they detest homework out rightly. It could also have tailored my promptings to the measures that could be taken to improve the practice of homework in schools rather than abolishing it. Being biased could affect the quality of my data, if the participants were aware that I was a proponent of homework, they might choose to tell me what I would like to hear, thus concealing their true experiences and feelings about homework. To reduce this limitation I tried as much as possible not to reveal my belief to my participants by keeping to the planned interview questions.

3.3 Qualitative research design

A qualitative research approach was employed in conducting this study that explored school leadership understandings of homework practices, purposes and challenges. Henning (2004) states that qualitative approach investigates and collects data in a natural setting in a way that is sensitive to the people and places that are being investigated. On the same note, Leedy and Ormrod (2005) assert that qualitative research is typically used to answer questions about the complex nature of phenomena, often with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomena from the participants' point of view. A detailed understanding of a problem can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to narrate their experiences and feelings.

Unlike quantitative research design which relies on the collection of numerical data and emphasises objectivity and generalisation, qualitative research design is based on non-numerical data such as words used to report detailed views of informants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Therefore, I used qualitative research design in this research to explore the real-life experiences of the different levels of school leadership. A qualitative research design is considered suitable for this study because it seeks the understanding of school leaders' perceptions and experiences of homework, its practices, benefits and challenges.

3.3.1 Case study

The study used the case study approach. Henning (2004) asserts that a case study focuses on a particular situation, event, programme, or phenomenon. In this case, the study aims to explore the views and opinions of school leaders about the practices of homework, its values and challenges, in order to improve the contribution that homework can make to learning and learner outcomes. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010) a case study may be suitable for learning more about a little known or poorly understood situation. Thus, to know more about school leaders' perceptions of homework in their own setting, I adopted the case study approach. The case of conceptualisations of homework at a primary school was investigated.

I made the choice of convenience by selecting a government school. It is situated in an area with socioeconomic barriers, where the learners seemed to go through many problems such as, lack of feeding, shelter and electricity. Learners constrained by such situations might find it difficult to complete their homework (Maringe & Vilakazi, 2015). This study was conducted in a primary school in Soweto. It involves twelve participants, selected from different levels of school leadership. They are; a principal, a HoD, three teacher, six learners and a parent. I chose this school because it has a strong homework culture and a school homework policy. Due to my interest in knowing how the less privileged cope with homework in schools; I decided to select a school that is located in a multiple deprived area, where children of deprived parents attend. This gave me the opportunity to know the school leaders' opinions about homework, its practices, benefits and challenges. The information that is got from the participants can be used to improve the contribution of homework to learning and learner outcomes.

3.4 Sampling technique

Participants for this study were selected through the purposive sampling technique. According to Cohen et al. (2000) purposive sampling is a feature of qualitative research where the researcher handpicks the cases to be included in the sample, based on what the study is about and what the researcher seeks to establish. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) concur by stating that in purposive sampling, the researcher selects particular elements from the population that will be representative or informative about the topic of interest. In this case, a primary school in Johannesburg was chosen for exploration, in order to understand school leaders' views and opinions about homework; its practices; perceived values and challenges.

Purposive sampling was the most appropriate method for this research, because it enabled me to select key and specific individuals, who provided the best information required to answer the research questions. It also gave me the opportunity to identify and select a school that has a strong homework policy. The participants were the principal of the school, who represented the whole school; a HoD, who represented his department; three teachers, each representing his/her class; the chairman of the SGB, who represented the parents; and six school prefects, who represented the learners. They gave their views of homework; its practices, affordances and constraints, which provided me with information that, answered the research questions.

3.5 Sources of data

This research was conducted by means of reviewing relevant literature and undertaking an empirical investigation at a primary school in Johannesburg. The study used both primary and secondary sources to provide a background to the empirical investigation. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) define a primary source as one in which original data and first-hand information are used. This can be referred to as the document that contains the observations and experiences of the writer. The primary sources used in this study are research reports and journal articles. Conversely, secondary sources are derived from primary source and there is no first-hand gathering of data. Secondary sources may be a review of a research or a conceptual paper about a topic, a digest, a book or an article in a journal that rarely publishes primary studies (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014, p.88). Reviewed papers and textbooks are used as secondary sources in this research.

3.5.1 Data collection strategies

Data were collected based on the research questions. This study adopted semi-structured interviews; a focus group interview; audio-tape recording and document analysis. A multi-method approach for data collection was used, so as to have different strategies that might yield different insights into the topic and increase the credibility of the findings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This approach helps in data triangulation. According to Scott and Morrison (2006), triangulation refers to the cross-checking of evidence by collecting various kinds of information about the same phenomenon for the purpose of validation.

3.5.2 In-depth interviews

One of the powerful ways of gaining insight into educational issues is through interviewing; where I gain an understanding of the experiences of individuals involved in education. In-depth interviews are long, extensive and probing interviews. They use open responses to questions to obtain data on individuals' opinions of their world and how they make sense of the important events in their lives (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Thus, interviews are natural ways of collecting data as they avail participants the opportunity to express their views clearly (Cohen et al., 2000). There are different types of interviews; this study used the semi-structured interview. A semi-structured interview is an interview-guided approach where topics and issues to be covered are specified in advance; the interviewer decides the sequence and asking of questions in the course of the interview (Cohen et al., 2000). The interview guide approach is conversational and situational.

The semi-structured interview was appropriate for this study because it gave me the opportunity to probe participants' initial responses on their understandings of homework; its practices, perceived values and challenges (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Thus, semi-structured face-to-face interviews were used to collect data from a school principal, a HoD, three teachers, and a parent (chairman of the SGB) of one primary school (see Appendix E). A total of six participants were interviewed one-on-one to discover their views about the topic under investigation; while learners had a focus group interview. The major challenge of this interview was that my flexibility in sequencing and wording of questions resulted in different responses from different perspectives, which made participants' responses to be less compatible.

3.5.3 Focus group interview

School leadership at the level of learners formed a group to discuss their views about homework practices in school. The focus group, according to Scott and Morrison (2006), is a group interview that has the potential to reach the research parts that individualised responses from one-on-one responses cannot reach. For McMillan and Schmacher (2014) a focus group strategy creates a social atmosphere in which group members are stimulated by one another's opinions and ideas, thereby increasing the quality and richness of data more than one-on-one interviewing. It is pertinent that participants have similar characteristics that are related to the purpose of the research in a focus group. In that regard, six prefects in grade 7 (intermediate phase) formed the focus group to discuss their perceptions of homework. Eight interview

questions were used to obtain in-depth responses from the school prefects about their understandings and experiences of homework practices, values and challenges (see Appendix F). The interview lasted 30 minutes during one lunch break.

For the participants to provide useful information, I created an understanding relationship of trust. De Vos et al. (2005, as cited by Eita, 2007) assert that the researcher should consider respect and courtesy, acceptance and understanding, confidentiality, integrity and individualisation as basic principles during the interview process. I observed these principles while carrying out this study. A focus group interview that is conducted properly is more economical in terms of time than conducting numerous individual interviews; the group dynamic is a collaborative factor in bringing out information (De Vos et al., 2005, as cited by Eita, 2007). Participants express their honest feelings more confidentially within a support group of peers than during individual interviews. The major challenge of this interview was that some learners might divulge their mates' responses to their teachers, who might punish them.

3.5.4 Audio-tape recording

The interviews were tape-recorded, with the permission of the participants, and notes were taken directly during the interview in case the audio-tape recorder malfunctioned. The interviews were recorded to get the verbatim responses of the participants (McMillan & Schmacher, 2014). The purpose of recording the interviews was to record the participants' responses word-for-word and store them to be transcribed later. Notes were also taken directly to capture the non-verbal responses. Thus, using the semi-structured interview provided the most direct evidence of school leaders' understandings of homework; its practices, values and challenges.

3.5.5 Document analysis

The documentary material that was analysed in this research was the school homework policy. Merriam (2009) observes that document analysis enables the researcher to learn more about the situation or the event being investigated. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014) official documents suggest official perspective on a topic, issue or process. This type of research instrument describes people's experiences, knowledge, actions and values in relation to the institution. The document, which is the school homework policy reflect and provide information on the practice of homework that has been put in place by the school.

From the analysis of the school homework policy, I obtained information about the aims and purposes of homework, the general principles of homework practice, and the responsibilities of teachers, learners and parents in the practice of homework.

3.6 Credibility (Validity) and Dependability (Reliability)

It is important to ensure that research findings are valid and reliable. Although, validity and reliability are associated with quantitative research, they are as important in qualitative study for checking and reaffirming the data collected. Goafshani (2003, cited in Matshidiso, 2012) explains that validity is the need for some kind of qualifying check or measure in the research; whereas reliability is used for testing and evaluating quantitative research, nevertheless, both concepts are used in all research. Other concepts that could be used synonymously with validity and reliability in qualitative research are credibility and dependability. Credibility depends more on the richness of the information gathered and on the analytical abilities of the researcher than on sample size (Patton, 1990). Dependability on the other hand is the use of an 'inquiry audit' in which viewers examine both the process and the product of the research for consistency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These concepts were considered at the designing stage of the research, when analysing the results and in judging the quality of the study.

To ensure credibility and dependability of this study, I employed more than one data collection method. I used in-depth interviews; document analysis; focus group discussions; and an audio-tape recorder to record the responses of the participants verbatim. Notes taken directly during the interview validated the tape-recorded interviews. McMillan and Schumacher (2014, p.390) maintain "the addition of supplementary techniques to study can increase not only the validity of the initial findings but also the credibility of the entire study". All these methods were used to obtain information from school leaders about their perceptions of the practice of homework; its purposes, perceived values and challenges.

3.7 Data analysis

Data analysis is breaking the data collected into smaller parts in order to understand and make meaning from the information. According to Patton (2002) qualitative data analysis involves a process of transforming data into findings. Delamont (2002) confirms Patton's assertion by stating that data analysis in qualitative research is the process during which the researcher formally identifies themes as suggested by the data and demonstrates support for

the themes. In addition, McMillan and Schumacher (2014, p.395) argue "qualitative data analysis is primarily an inductive process of organising data into categories and identifying patterns and relationships among the categories". This implies that data analysis is the process of making meaning from the data that were collected.

The data collected were transcribed and checked to identify the respondents who answered the research questions. Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to this process as content analysis, which entails identifying, and categorising the primary patterns in the data to form themes from participants' responses. This pattern pulled together material into smaller and more meaningful units which eased the interpretation of the data collected (Miles & Huberman, in Punch, 2009). The data were organised under the research questions that they answered, and analysed in the following sequence: school leadership conceptualisations of homework; the practice of homework in schools; the perceived values of homework; and the challenges associated with the practice of homework.

3.8 Ethical considerations

This research took into account ethical considerations. Research ethics are focused on what is morally proper or improper when engaged with participants or when accessing archival data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). To conduct this study, I obtained ethics clearance from the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. I was given a protocol number (2015ECE030M) and also obtained permission from the Gauteng Department of Education in order to gain access into the chosen school to conduct the interviews and analyse the necessary document. The four pillars of ethics were considered:

- Informed consent: This means that research subjects have the right to know that they are being researched, and the right to be informed about the nature and purpose of the research (Ryen, 2002). I invited the participants and informed them that the purpose of my research was to explore their opinions about homework, its practices, purposes and challenges with a view to improve its contribution to learning and learner outcomes. They agreed to participate and I gave them the consent forms to sign.
- Right to withdraw: I informed the participants that their participation was voluntary, and they had the right to terminate it at any stage of the study without any penalty. They were also informed that the outcome of the research would not be harmful to them in any way.

- Confidentiality: I protected the participants' identity, places and the location of the research. The information from the participants was solely used for the purpose of this research, as it was only my supervisor and me who had access to the research data.
- Anonymity: Neither the name of the school nor those of the participants were mentioned in the course of writing this report. I used pseudonyms instead of real names.

I adhered to the above ethics, and thus got maximum co-operation, openness and acceptance from the participants. In addition, I negotiated the use of an audio-tape recorder during the interview and the participants consented to it. Finally, I did not impact on contact time in the school in any way, as the participants selected the time and place convenient to them for the interviews.

3.9 Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted before the actual research in order to acquire in-depth background knowledge of the topic of exploration. Baker (1994) explains that a pilot study is a pretesting of a particular research instrument. It is also referred to as a small-scale feasibility study, which is done in preparation for the major study (Polit, Becker & Hungler, 2001). The importance of a pilot study is that it gives advance warning about the possible deficiency in the data collection process and analysis of the planned project. The pilot study enables me to make necessary modifications to the data gathering instruments before the exploration (De Vos et al., 2005, as cited by Eita, 2007). Thus, it helps me identify problems that need to be clarified before implementing the study.

To conduct the pilot study, I identified a school that has similar characteristics to the school of my research target group, and the planned interview questions for the project were pretested with the different levels of school leadership. In-depth interviews were held with the school principal, a HoD and a teacher; while six school prefects in grade 7 were interviewed in a focus group. I learnt that during school hours, principals cannot concentrate due to distractions, such as phone calls from the Department of Education, teachers, learners, and parents coming in to solve one problem or the other. I had to find a means of managing such distractions during the interview for the actual research, thus, I negotiated with the principal of the school of my research to have the interview after school hours.

From the pilot study, I also learnt the time spent on each interview is important, as participants found it difficult to spend more than 20 minutes as they complained of having many other things to do. Participants' responses revealed that some questions elicit the same answers. In order to reduce the interview time so as not to inconvenience the participants, any two questions found to produce the same answers were combined, thereby, adjusting the initial time of 40 minutes per interview to 30 minutes. I learnt from the pilot study that my interview questions would provide the required data for this study. Thus, the pilot study gave me the confidence to conduct the actual research using the planned interview questions; and the opportunity to be prepared to deal with any issues that might arise in the process of implementing the exploration.

This chapter has discussed the research paradigms, research methods, positionality, and the sampling technique used to identify the participants for the research interviews. It explained the data collection methods, the credibility and dependability of the data, and how the data were analysed. Ethical issues were identified and discussed. Finally, the pilot study that I conducted before the actual research was explained.

The data collected are presented with analysis in the subsequent chapter.

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CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

While the previous chapter discussed the methodology used in this study, this chapter presented and analysed data collected. I conducted this research in a public primary school in Soweto, Johannesburg west district. It is a large school with many learners, who are mostly children of the working class parents. The school is situated in the heart of the town surrounded by shops and residential houses. If not for the solid fence round the school premises, the geographical location of the school would not have been conducive for teaching and learning, due to the busy and noisy nature of the area.

This chapter deals with the presentation and analysis of data collected from document analysis, both in-depth interviews and a focus group on school leadership understandings of homework practices, purposes, perceived benefits and challenges. Majority of the participants acknowledged that homework has the potential to contribute positively to learning and learner outcomes if appropriately practised. However, they pointed out some of the factors, which militate against effective homework practice. The data collected were presented and analysis in line with the research questions.

Table 2: Keys used to represent participants

Item	**Key**
Principal	Principal
Head of department	HoD
Teacher One	T1
Teacher Two	T2
Teacher Three	T3
Parent	Parent

Learner One	L1
Learner Two	L2
Learner Three	L3
Learner Four	L4
Learner Five	L5

Learner Six	L6

In the presentation and analysis of the data collected, 'Principal' refers to school leadership at the level of the principal; HoD represents leadership at the level of the head of department; T1, T2, T3 represent leadership at the level of teachers, according to how they were interviewed; and L1, L2, L3, L4, L5, L6 represent school prefects, based on their sitting positions during the focus group. 'Parent' refers to school leadership at the level of parents. These names are used throughout the presentation and analysis of data, and in chapter 5.

4.1 Demographic Data

Table 3: Profiles of participating school leaders

Item	Age	Gender	Teaching experience	Highest qualification
Principal	51-60 years	Female	15-20 years	Bachelor of Education
HoD	31-40 years	Female	10-15 years	Bachelor of Education (Hons)
T1	51-60 years	Female	15-20 years	Bachelor of Education
T2	41-50 years	Male	5-10 years	Diploma + ACE
T3	21-30 years	Female	0-5 years	Certificate in Education
Parent	41-50 years	Male	5-10 years	Certificate in Education

The demographic data indicate that the principal of the school, the HoD and two teachers have spent over ten years in teaching, while only one teacher has spent less than five years. This implies that the majority of the educators are experienced teachers, who seem to have rich information about homework, its practices, perceived values and challenges.

Table 3 shows that the principal and one of the teachers have Bachelor of Education degrees, whereas the HoD holds a Bachelor of Education Honours degree. Another teacher has a Diploma in Education plus an Advanced Certificate in Education, while the parent and one teacher are holders of Certificates in Education. This suggests that all the educators and the parent that participated in the research went through teacher training schools; which might have equipped them with the knowledge of homework and its practices.

Table 4: Profiles of learners

Item	Age	Gender	Grade	Responsibility
LA	15 years	Male	7	Prefect
LB	13 years	Male	7	Prefect
LC	12 years	Female	7	Prefect
LD	16 years	Male	7	Prefect
LE	13 years	Female	7	Prefect
LF	12 years	Female	7	Prefect

Six learners at the level of school leadership participated in the focus group. There were three boys and three girls, who were between the ages of 12 and 16 years. L3 and L6 were 12 years old; L2 and L5 were 13 years old; L1 was 15 years old; while L4, who was the oldest, was 16 years old. They were all school prefects in grade 7.

4.2 How Homework could be improved

The educators and parent who participated in the study were asked to write two things they thought should change to make homework work better in the school. Their responses are recorded in table 5.

Table 5: How to improve the contribution of homework to learning

S/NO	Participants	Two things that can make homework work better
1.	Principal	1. Learners should do their homework in the classroom after school hours. 2. Full and clear instructions to learners on what to do.
2.	HoD	1. Approach and methods. Homework must be based on ability, grouping according to the needs of the learner. 2. Consistent homework. Learners should not do homework every day, maybe two or three times a week.
3.	T1	1. More homework tutors should be employed to help individual learners. 2. Instructions should be clear and specific, so that learners know what to answer.
4.	T2	1. There should be homework assistants at school. 2. There should be supervisors to supervise homework assistants and to mark homework.
5.	T3	1. More parental involvement in learner reading and writing skills, if parents could reinforce homework at home. 2. Subjects could be coordinated so that learners have certain homework days for certain subjects and not everyday homework for every subject.
6.	Parent	1. I would say communication between teachers and students, and parents should work hand in hand with them.

		2. We need reading and writing and more books and other materials e.g. DVD for learners and parents.

From table 5, it is evident that leaders at different levels have their areas of concern as expressed in their responses. The different school leaders made their suggestions on how to improve homework, its practices, values and problems associated with it, as it affects them. Thus, the theme of school leadership at different levels incidentally emerged.

4.3 School Leadership at Different Levels

The revelations from the participants show the importance of distributed leadership in schools, as they gave their suggestions in line with their areas of responsibility. The exploration of the views and opinions of school leaders at different levels depicted how each level thinks about homework; and what could be done to improve its contribution to learning from different angles. This confirms the assertion that shared leadership enhances effective leadership and management of teaching and learning (Harris, 2003; Spillane, 2006; Maringe & Vilakazi, 2015). School leadership at the various levels gave different suggestions, which when implemented can improve homework practice to enhance its contribution to learning and learner outcomes.

As the leader of the entire school, the principal's responses tend to focus on how to make homework practice effective in classroom practice (Maringe & Vilakazi, 2015). Seeing that some learners do not do their homework at home due to circumstances beyond their control, she suggests that instead of learners completing their homework at home, it would be better to extend the school day. This implies that all learners would stay behind after school hours to complete their homework with the assistance of those running the Extra School Support Programme.

At the level of the HoD, because she is responsible for the effective functioning of the department, her responses seemed to focus on the need to make the practice of homework in all subjects in her department effective (RSA, 1999). She proposed that the approach and method of homework practice be modified. She brought in the decision that homework must be based on ability, grouping according to the needs of the learner and there should be consistent homework. This can help learners to work at their own pace and according to their abilities; which will make it easier for them to complete their homework.

School leadership at the level of teachers, who are responsible for teaching and administration of homework (Sharp et al., 2001), their responses tend to focus on their experiences with learners on the practice of homework. T1 and T2 advocated for more homework tutors and supervisors who could assist with ensuring that learners complete their homework and help mark the homework. This gives the impression that the workload is too much and they need assistance; and they indirectly agreed with the principal that homework should be completed at school. However, T3 believes that homework should be completed at home so that parents can be more involved in their children's homework. When learners complete their homework at home, they feel free to ask their parents or a more knowledgeable person, who may clarify the topic for them, therefore improving learning and learner outcomes.

School leadership at the level of parent is of the opinion that homework be more in English to improve the communication skills of learners. He suggests that learning materials for reading and writing, such as textbooks and DVDs for learners and parents, be provided. Also, teachers should be patient with learners, as they have to take time to explain to learners what they are expected to do. This is to avoid confusion and frustration on the part of the learners and also to ease parents' responsibilities of supporting their children in the completion of homework.

Learners' level of leadership responded based on their views of how teachers administer homework and the challenges they have. They complained of too much homework, lack of clear instructions, and teachers' reactions when they failed to complete their homework. They requested homework with clear instructions (Sharp et al., 2001) and suggested the duration of homework per day. They want regular homework, but one daily, so they could have time for leisure and to do other things. When homework becomes too much it harms learners, so moderate but consistent beneficial homework can contribute to learning and learner outcomes. It is evident from the above discussion that school leadership at all levels value homework. After expressing their experiences and feelings about homework, they suggested ways of improving the practice of homework so as to increase its contribution to learning and learner outcomes.

4.4 School Leadership Understandings and Ideas of the Notion of Homework

In response to the question regarding school leadership understandings and ideas of the notion of homework, leadership at the level of principal said:

> *Homework is work given to learners to complete at home with the help of others, if possible it could be done at school with the help of a teacher or peer or ESSP (Extra Support School Programme).*

According to the principal, homework is supposed to be completed at home where learners can be assisted by their parents or a more knowledgeable person. Although leadership at the level of principal acknowledges that homework is supposed to be done at home, she goes further to suggest that it could be done at school after school hours. This is to ensure that all learners do homework, as some learners are orphans or live with grandparents and have no one to assist them with their homework at home.

The HoD was in agreement with the principal and responded:

> *Currently, we give them homework regularly in terms of closing the gap because we are following the curriculum, meaning if we did not manage to finish up on time, we give learners extra work to do at home.*

For school leadership at the level of HoD, homework is a school activity that enables both teachers and learners to complete what is set for them in the curriculum within the specified time.

T1 said:

> *Homework is done about learning in all the contexts of the child either at home or school, where there will be assistance.*

T1 views homework as work that involves learning in all contexts, which implies that homework is not only done at home but could also be done at school or any learning centre.

T2 commented:

> *Homework helps to make our work easier, it also assists us because sometimes our work is too much and the periods are short and the learners are slow in writing, so when we give them homework it helps in a way that our work goes on.*

T2 views homework as a continuation of the class work, which is done at home to enable those that are lagging behind to catch up.

However, contrary to other participants' views, T3 argued:

Homework is a time for the learners to reflect on the tasks they do in school, when they go home. It is for them to translate the information they have in school, do it on their own without a teacher. It is an extended activity, if they can apply what they learnt in class to solve problems in another context.

According to T3, homework is an activity that is meant to help learners to work on their own rather than being assisted by more knowledgeable others.

School leadership at the level of teachers view homework as tasks assigned to help both teachers and learners to improve teaching and learning. It could be done at home or school by learners on their own to try to understand, do what they learnt in the classroom and apply it in other contexts, so as to gain more understanding of the topic.

In response to the question regarding what homework meant to learners, L1 asserted:

Homework is practising school work at home and not just any work.

For L2:

Homework is revision of what you did at school at home.

L5 elaborated:

Homework is practising and rehearsing at home, what you have done at school.

In the case of school leadership at the level of learners, homework is not just work, but work given by teachers to learners to practise at home, and it has to be related to what is done in the classroom.

In his response to the question on his idea about the notion of homework, the parent stated:

Homework teaches learners how to study, understand and communicate with books at home after school hour, as learning needs time.

For leadership at the level of parent, assigning homework encourages learners to spend more time reading at home, what they could not read at school due to lack of adequate time. He concluded that homework is an important school activity that aids learning.

From the participants' responses, it seems their understandings and ideas about the notion of homework is consistent with the definitions, which state that homework refers to curriculum

related tasks set by teachers for students to be done during non-school hours (Cooper, 1989; MacBeath, 2003). Although all participants viewed homework as related to the curriculum, not all agreed that it must be completed at home. Ten of the participants indicated that homework should be completed at home with the assistance of parents, while one participant responded that it could be at any learning context, and the other suggested it should be done at school, if possible, so that orphans and learners staying with grandparents could be assisted by their teachers or peers or the Extra Support School Programme (ESSP).

4.5 Purposes of Homework

With regard to the question on the principal's views about homework for learners in schools, the principal responded:

> *I view homework as a follow-up of what is being taught in class and work to help them either to understand what is taught in school, to find information on their own, or to ask questions and get feedback from educators; and extra work to test for understanding that can help teacher's reflection.*

School leadership at the level of principal viewed homework as a task that is related to the school curriculum. It is meant to help learners practise what they have learnt in the classroom and helps teachers to reflect on their teaching.

To answer the question why learners are asked to do homework, the HoD said:

> *To cover the entire curriculum that has been set for them, let's say we are teaching language, for example the* consonants*, some learners are slow, as you teach, for you to make sure that learners understand, give them class work and homework.*

For school leadership at the level of HoD, homework is given to learners so as to cover the curriculum, and also to help struggling learners to catch up. Thus, homework is a school activity that enables both teachers and learners to complete what is set for them in the curriculum within the specified time.

When teachers were asked why they give learners homework, T1 indicated:

> *To emphasise on the work they have done, so that they have more understanding of the content.*

T2 responded:

Homework assists parents know what their children are doing in school, because we encourage parents to check learners' work every day. It makes parents to be involved in their children's education.

T3 stated:

To get their understanding, make them responsible, to help them to make decisions on their own, and also to challenge them so that their minds can grow.

School leadership at the level of teachers, commented that assigning homework is for both academic and non-academic purposes. For them the purpose of homework is for learners to learn more outside the classroom, for teachers to assess them, and for parents to be involved in their children's education.

Learners' responses to the question why they like or hate homework were varied.

L1 said:

You are free to work at home and you gain more knowledge and boldness.

L3 indicated:

It keeps you off the street, but I hate homework if there are no instructions.

L4 added:

It keeps us busy, but I hate it when teachers give homework without explaining how it should be done.

L5 stated:

It makes us busier and we do more work at home, but I hate it sometimes when they give a lot and you don't know which to start with.

L6 said:

It helps me to improve myself. I hate when many students do not do homework but just copy from us.

School leadership at the level of learners in the focus group maintain that homework keeps them busy at home, helps them to work independently, improves their knowledge, and makes

them bold. They assert that they hate when teachers give them homework without clear instructions, and when other learners do not do their homework but just copy from others.

The parent's response to why children do homework is to improve their learning. He asserted:

> *Doing homework is important, if you don't do homework, you won't know anything.*

From the participants' responses, homework serves various purposes – both academic and non-academic. For teachers, it is to help them with the information about what the child has learnt from what they taught, so that they would know the next step to take. Learners gain more knowledge in the process of searching for information to solve the problems given to them as homework. They also acquire skills such as decision-making and a sense of responsibility; and their parents become involved in their studies (Cooper, 2007; Murphy & Decker, 1990). Although learners assert that they like homework, they hate it when teachers do not give them clear and specific instructions.

4.6 Practices associated with the application of homework in schools

When interviewed on what the key guidelines regarding homework are in schools, the principal stated:

> *Homework should be given every day, the feedback and the work given should be aligned to the lesson given in classroom. We don't give homework on Fridays because learners need to rest and do lighter things like read on their own. Daily homework is not on every subject, we have a plan, short reading on English and problems to solve in mathematics every day.*

Leadership at the level of principal indicates that homework is given to learners daily with the exception of Fridays, when learners need to rest and do their own work. Mathematics and English are assigned daily.

The HoD in responding to the same question said:

> *We do have a homework policy that says that learners should be given homework daily and it should be assessed to know where the levels of learners are. We draw up the policy and make sure that the planned policy is followed all the time.*

Leadership at the level of HoD mentions that they draw up homework policy and make sure the planned policy is followed at all times.

When leadership at the level of teachers were asked how frequently they assign homework to learners and the duration of each, their responses were varied.

T1 said:

> *Every day and it should be done with the help of a more knowledgeable person besides the teacher. It should not be too long, so that it will not confuse the child. You have to understand that the child has done this work before in the class.*

T2 responded:

> *… I prefer to give them homework from Monday to Thursday. I give learners homework that takes them a maximum of 30 minutes, because they are still young.*

T3 stated:

> *I teach mathematics and I give them homework every day, but sometimes we repeat homework because they did not do tasks, so I give them homework frequently. The duration of homework is 30 minutes or less a day. To catch up on what is lost; homework is done daily.*

There seems to be no uniformity among the teachers in the frequency and duration of homework assigned to learners. Two teachers assign homework every day with the exception of Fridays, while one teacher assigns homework only twice a week, including mathematics and English language.

In response to how learners rate the way their teachers assign homework, the learners responded as follows.

L1 said:

> *Some teachers don't give us homework the way we want it. They give us too many, and there is no time, at times they send us out of the class, if we don't do it.*

L2 commented:

> *Teachers give us a lot of work, they don't teach when they are supposed to work.*

L3 complained:

> *The homework is too much for us, there is no rest, homework every day. We mark our homework, even when we don't know whether it is right or wrong.*

L4 responded:

> *Teachers tell us to ask when we don't understand, but won't explain clearly when we ask. And if our parents help us, he would say we don't heed to instructions.*

L5 asserted:

> *Teachers give us a lot of homework; some of what they want us to do is difficult for our parents.*

L6 stated:

> *Some teachers do not know the answers to what they set; they just copy questions from textbooks. It is like our teacher does not understand the questions he set for us, because he cannot explain them.*

School leaders at the level of learners seem not to be satisfied with the way teachers set and administer homework. They complain of lack of clear instructions and teachers' proficiency in handling homework, which influences the way they react to homework. This dissatisfaction points to Coutts' (2004) assertion that the administration of homework by teachers is linked to young learners' attitudes to it. When the concepts are not understood and the instructions are ambiguous or not explicitly explained, parents' explanation may not tally with teachers' expectations.

In response to how parents rate the way teachers set homework, the leadership at the level of parent stated:

> *Teachers here handle homework very well with simple works then proceed to higher works. They are very keen in communicating with students.*

School leadership at the level of parent acknowledges that teachers practise homework well, as they proceed from simpler tasks to higher ones.

The responses of school leadership at the level of HoD confirms that of the school leader at the level of principal, which states that the school involves parents in planning their

homework policy (Cooper, 2006). There seems to be no consensus among the participants on the issue of frequency and duration of homework in the school. It appears that teachers assign homework when and how they want, but do not adhere to the guidelines as stipulated in the school homework policy. This agrees with Sharp et al. (2001) who argue that the management of homework differs from teacher to teacher. This gives the impression that the aim of the school homework policy in the practice of homework is defeated. Leaders at the levels of principal, HoD, teachers and parent seem to be satisfied with the homework practices in their school. However, learners' complaints about the workload and how it affects their leisure time suggest there should be some adjustments in homework practice.

In responding to the question on the roles that parents play in enforcing the homework policy of the school, leadership at the level of principal asserted:

> *Parents are expected to supervise and make sure their children do their homework. Help research for information. Call the school for clarification, where they are confused. Sign learner's homework books.*

The principal indicated that the school has a homework policy drawn up by the school in collaboration with the parents, which stipulates the responsibilities of parents and other stakeholders.

School leadership at the level of HoD when asked about the purposes behind the policy and the roles parents play in enforcing the homework policy of the school, stated:

> *... when we draw up the policy by involving the SGB, who are the parents. For them to know what we are doing with the learners, we give them a plan that specifies what homework will be given for the week. So that they know what the learners are supposed to do and how to assist them. Thus, in drawing up homework programme we sit with SGB to see how we can assist the learners with homework problems, and this is done monthly.*

Leadership at the level of HoD asserts that the policy is drawn up to involve all stakeholders for better homework practice. The roles of parents are to assist in the formulation of homework, support their children, and assist with homework problems.

With regard to the support teachers get from administrators and parents, T1 asserted:

Parents are called to support their learners; sometimes they come to ask how they can help … Department of Basic Education books are very helpful. We have Extra School Support Programme that helps some learners with their homework after classes in the school.

T2 said:

Mostly learners' parents don't support us because most of the learners are staying with their grandparents, who don't check their books to know whether they have homework to do or not. School administrators' support is in the area of typing and photocopying our homework; and if we have problem in understanding what we teach, the administrator come to help so that we will develop.

T3 responded:

Parents rarely support, very few parents support by coming to ask how their children are doing in school. On the part of the administrators, they have organised homework tutors, who help some backward learners with their homework after school. It is called Extra School Support Programme.

For leadership at the level of teachers, T1 admits that she got support from both parents and administrators. On the contrary, T2 and T3 assert that parents rarely support them, but administrators do.

When school leaders at the level of learners in a focus group interview were asked to share how they would like their teachers to set homework, they gave different suggestions.

L1:

They should start by explaining it to us.

L2:

All teachers should not give homework every day, but one per day. And the duration should be as follows:

Mathematics – 30 minutes
English language – 1 hour
Science – 1:30 minutes

L3:

Teachers have to set challenging questions, but the ones we can do.

L4:

Teachers should set questions that they can solve, not just copying the answers on the board from the textbook.

L5:

They should give us challenging questions, but explain the instructions clearly.

L6:

Teachers should not set too many questions.

The evidence from leadership at the level of learners suggests that teachers should improve the way they administer homework.

On how the homework task that is assigned to learners relates to what they are taught in class, school leaders at the level of parent said:

It relates to the work done in class, my daughter sometimes do homework on her own. She relates to what she was taught in school.

School leadership at the level of parent feels the homework assigned to learners by teachers relates to what is taught at school.

From the responses of the principal and the HoD, it is evident that the school involves the parents in the planning of the school's homework policy as advocated by Van Voorhuis, (cited by Eita, 2007). The parents were involved in both the planning of homework policy and solving problems that may arise in the course of the practice. The homework policy also supported their educational goal of building an effective and efficient nation; by involving and stating the roles of parents and other stakeholders in the policy (Protheroe, 2009). This seems to help parents understand what they are requested to do and when and how to do it in order to assist their children in the practice of homework. However, it appears that the majority of parents are not playing their role as specified in the school's homework policy. The reasons given for the non-performance of their duties are that most of the parents in the community are not educated and are grandparents, and thus know nothing about homework.

4.7 Perceived values of homework in schools

In responding to the question about the purpose that homework generally serves in her school, the principal commented:

> *Homework serves to help learners complete their work. Assess them and reflect back on what they have learnt; to ask questions, and discuss with their peers or more knowledgeable person.*

School leadership at the level of principal believes that homework helps learners assess themselves, reflect on what they have learnt and be able to socialise with others by asking and discussing questions.

The HoD concurred:

> *Generally, homework is assisting us; currently we are using Extra School Support Programme to assist learners on homework. It is meant to assist those that are not doing well and those that have no one to assist them with homework at home.*

For the school leader at the level of HoD, homework is beneficial to both learners and educators, especially with the introduction of the ESSP.

T1 responded:

> *It improves the performance of the learners.*

T2 said:

> *To practise what they have learnt in class and it also helps them to study on their own.*

T3 asserted:

> *The purpose of homework is for learners to practise on their own in order to find solutions to the problems that they are given as homework. Therefore it instils self-discipline and makes them to be responsible. It also keeps learners off the street.*

School leadership at the level of teachers believe that doing homework improves learner performance as homework is assigned for learners to practise on their own in order to solve

the problems given as tasks by their teachers. Apart from the academic value, T3 went further to point out the non-academic benefits of homework.

In responding to the question on why schools give homework to learners, leaders at the level of learners in their focus group were very positive.

L1:

So that learners can develop their minds.

L2:

To show learners' ability, you can do well with your parents.

L3:

Because teachers think our parents can help us with the work at home.

L4:

For our parents to help us and also to assess our abilities.

L5:

To meet up with the school work.

Learners in their focus group overwhelmingly confirmed T3's views, as they gave a litany of the values of homework.

When the parent was asked about the value he attached to homework, he responded:

Homework is very important in learning, without homework you cannot have education, learning in education is very important. It helps learners to learn on their own.

School leadership at the level of parent acknowledges the importance of homework and its value in learning, as it helps learners to be independent.

In answering the question regarding the value of homework, the principal said:

Homework gives learners the chance to assess themselves. It serves as revision of what was learnt, completion of class work, and to find some answers on their own

with the help of parents at home. It does depend on whether they do their homework and get feedback. It is for teachers' reflection.

School leadership at the level of principal affirmed that homework is valuable to both teachers and learners in teaching and learning, but only if learners complete their homework and are assessed by their teachers.

The HoD added:

Both learners and teachers benefit from homework ... It increase their achievement especially learners with barriers and those that have nobody to assist them at home, they gain from ESSP. Homework also helps teachers to know where their learners are to know what to do and assist those lagging behind. As a teacher homework helps me to achieve my goals and target.

School leadership at the level of HoD concurs with the principal in asserting that homework is valuable to both teachers and learners. She explains further how helpful ESSP is to learners and teachers can identify the students who are lagging behind through homework.

T1 concurred:

It improves the performance of the learners.

T2 said:

It helps learners to perform well in their schoolwork.

T3 asserted:

It has positive effects in their achievement for those who do homework regularly, do better, since it is practice when you get home. They practise better at home.

Homework challenges the learners; they can try on their own without the assistance of a more knowledgeable person.

School leadership at the level of teachers also believe that homework is a valuable school activity as it helps learners work well and independently.

L1 responded:

> *We gain a lot of knowledge, and it improves our knowledge.*
> *Homework keeps us busy and helps us to learn ahead.*

L2 said:

> *It develops our reading skills.*

L3 asserted:

> *It helps us to find out things by ourselves without teachers' assistance.*

L5 commented:

> *Homework keeps us off the street, from doing drugs and makes us responsible children.*

L6 stated:

> *Some learners are slower than others, so homework helps the slow ones.*

School leaders at the level of learners acknowledge that homework is valuable both academically and non-academically. However, they do not agree with T3's idea that learners do their homework independently of their parents as they believe that teachers give them homework because they think their parents can help them with the work at home and also to assess their abilities.

In responding to the question about the ways he thinks homework is valuable to learners, the parent noted:

> *English is spoken everywhere, it helps them to speak English well, to communicate with people. It helps them to achieve, my children have really achieved by doing homework. It makes them responsible and self-reliant.*

School leadership at the level of parent emphasises the importance of homework in the acquisition of communication skills, which will be helpful to all learners.

All the participants believe that homework is a valuable activity as it contributes positively to learners' achievement, if it is practised properly. It is interesting to note that homework is found to be valuable to learners both academically and non-academically. The participants

indicate that homework has long-term academic benefits such as better study habits and skills; and non-academic benefits, such as greater self-direction and self-discipline and motivational skills (Cooper & Valentine, 2001; Bempechat, 2004). The parent emphasises the role of doing homework in resulting in good communication skills, and making learners responsible and to believe in themselves. For teachers, homework helps them with information about what the child has learnt from what he was taught, so that he knows the next step to take.

4.8 Challenges associated with the practice of homework in schools

When the principal was asked about the problems schools experience in the practice of homework, she retorted:

> *Learners staying with grannies, who do not know anything about the current curriculum, half of the learners here are orphans, so nobody to assist them. These posed a lot of problems as such learners do not do their homework. But with ESSP that has minimised.*
>
> *The location of schools is also a challenge because most of the parents are poor as they are unemployed. This socio-economic problem is really affecting the learners in the areas of buying books and feeding. Learners are fed in school three times due to poverty. They can't think and learn properly if they have no food.*
>
> *Another problem is that of language. Our language is Sesotho, but those speaking other languages such as Zulu, Venda, etc.; and those who come in the higher grade stay behind after school to learn the basics of the language. Extra School Support Programme has been very helpful.*

The response of the school leader at the level of principal summarises the constraints of the practice of homework. She identified three problems the school experiences in the practice of homework: learners staying with grandparents and orphans; the location of the school; and language barriers.

In responding to the question about the problems that teachers face in administering homework, the HoD noted:

> *Sometimes, it is discouraging to give homework because learners do not do their work. No libraries for learners to easily gain access to information. Some learners*

can Google the information, while others cannot. Some parents are illiterate. Some parents complain that they do not understand the instructions. Language being a barrier and learners are lazy to read the instructions … Those that don't do homework, steal other people's work.

School leadership at the level of HoD concurs that most learners do not do their homework at home, but that has minimised with the introduction of the ESSP. She believes that homework increases inequality among learners as privileged learners have access to the website, whereas the disadvantaged learners do not. Homework also makes some learners cultivate the habit of cheating by stealing from other learners.

School leaders at the level of teachers responded to the question about the obstacles they encounter in the practice of homework as follows.

T1 lamented:

Clear instructions; make sure the child understand the concepts. If they do not understand the instruction, they won't do it, so I don't blame it entirely on them. Instructions have to be clear and specific.

T2 commented:

Learners staying with grannies don't do homework. Some don't finish, except for the assistant from ESSP, which the department has made available for the school.

T3 argued:

Main challenge is the learners not doing their homework. They don't want to read nor write. At times I incorporate homework in class work. Even if you break down the concepts, learners still don't seem to understand instructions and it becomes frustrating.

T1 blames learners' inability to complete homework on both learners and teachers. For her, teachers need to give clear and specific instructions to learners for effective practice of homework. T3 argues that even though teachers give clear instructions and explain the concepts, most learners do not do their homework. The issue of non-completion of homework has been minimised by the ESSP.

In responding to the problems learners encounter when they go home with homework, school leaders at the level of learners had many complaints.

L1:

> *At times, I do not understand some of the books that are supposed to be read before I answer the questions.*

L2:

> *Homework without instruction is problematic*.

L3:

> *Homework without clear explanation and when the answers are not in the book is a problem.*

L5:

> *Affect our time of doing house chores, you get disturbed, it takes our leisure time.*

L6:

> *Homework is a problem, sometimes no electricity and no money to buy candle. And if you don't do it, then problem at school.*

School leadership at the level of learners seem to be concerned about the way teachers set and administer homework. They claim that it affects their leisure time and the time to help their parents.

On the question of the problems parents encounter when their children come back with homework, leadership at the level of parent responded:

> *Sometimes, they don't understand some words, spellings, concepts and unclear instructions, reading should be taught, patience (sic) on the part of teachers and parents.*

School leaders at the level of parent values his children's education, thus, does not give them any house chores on school days to enable them do their homework. He complains of how teachers set homework.

Although homework is portrayed as an important activity in learning by the participants, there appear to be many challenges associated with its administration and practice in schools. Leaders at the level of principal and HoD believe that giving homework is discouraging as the majority of learners do not do their homework. The educators are concerned with the challenges they experience from learners' attitude to homework (Sharp et al., 2001). It seemed that even though they did their best to encourage learners to do their homework, they were lazy and would not do their homework. Poverty is another problem as the learners are deprived of many things such as food and materials to work with, due to the nature of the environment where the school is situated. Apart from poverty, language is a barrier, as the majority of parents are illiterate in the language of instruction. These multiple deprivations might be the reason why the Department of Education introduced the ESSP in this school.

From the evidence above, it is evident that the leaders demonstrated their influence, power and vision by making suggestions at their various levels on how to improve the practice of homework in schools (Bush, 2010). The major themes that emerged from the analysis of the data based on the research questions were:

- School leadership's understanding and ideas of the notion of homework.
- The practices associated with the administration of homework.
- The perceived values of homework.
- The challenges associated with homework.

Two themes incidentally emerged in the course of analysing the data: purposes of homework; and different levels of school leadership.

4.9 Summary

This chapter presented the data obtained from the participants and analysed them. The different levels of school leaders responded to the sub-research questions from their positions of leadership. The answers to the sub-research question 1 indicate that homework is a task that is assigned to learners to enable them to practise what they have learnt in school, which helps them to gain more knowledge. The answers to the second sub-question show that homework practice in that school is not consistent with the planned school homework policy. For sub-question 3, the answers seem to suggest that if effectively practised homework has both academic and non-academic value. However, the answers to sub-question 4 identify some challenges that are faced in the practice of homework in the school.

The major findings from the presentation and analysis of the data are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a personal reflection and summary of the research; a discussion of the findings; conclusions for each of the research questions with regard to the topic based on the analysis and interpretations of the data collected empirically and from the literature search. The implications for homework practices; implications for further research; the contribution and limitations of the study are also discussed.

5.1 Personal reflection and summary

This study sets out to explore school leaders' views and opinions about homework practices, perceived values and challenges. It was conducted in a primary school in Soweto. The background to the study shows the importance of homework as an instructional strategy in South African schools, despite the controversy among researchers over its contribution to learners' success. Thus, in order to improve the contribution that homework can make to learning and learner outcomes, it becomes imperative to find out the problems associated with its practice with a view to ameliorate them.

Having looked at the problem that surrounds the practice and administration of homework in schools, I came up with a research question. The research question seeks to know what can be learnt from various school leaders' understandings and ideas about homework, its purposes, and the challenges associated with its administration that may improve its contribution to learning and learner outcomes. To answer the main research question, I developed the following sub-research questions:

1. How do school leaders at the levels of principal, teachers, learners, and parents understand the idea of homework?
2. What practices are associated with the application of homework in schools?
3. What benefits are associated with the practice of homework in schools?
4. What are the challenges associated with the practice of homework in schools?

This research aimed to discover the views and opinions of school leadership at different levels about homework; its practices; perceived values; and challenges in order to improve its contribution to learning and learner outcomes. The findings of the study will help

stakeholders make constructive decisions about how to improve the practice of homework in their schools. It will hopefully minimise the gap of literature in South Africa, as researchers on a similar topic will refer to this study.

This research explored a range of literature, which allowed me to identify the gap. Literature was reviewed based on the conceptual framework that was developed in line with the assessment theory, which covered some groups of concepts. Having explored the existing knowledge about homework practices, values and challenges, I decided to carry out an empirical investigation to have first-hand information about how South African school leaders at different levels understand the notion of homework.

This study used the interpretive research paradigm, and adopted the qualitative research design, which sought deep understanding of people's experiences about the phenomenon of interest in their natural setting (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Thus, through a small sample of school leaders (the principal, a HoD, three teachers, six school prefects, and a parent), the research data was collected. Multiple data collection methods were used to ensure credibility and dependability of the research. A pilot study was also conducted to strengthen the credibility and dependability of this study. Ethical issues were considered in conducting this research in the Johannesburg West District. The data collected were presented and analysed based on the themes that emerged. The findings were discussed; conclusions, implications, and contributions of the research were provided. However, there are some limitations of the study which are discussed below.

5.2 Limitations of the study

The essence of conducting research is the quest to contribute to other research. This qualitative exploration used a small sample approach and was conducted in one school, the study was limited to one context and the data were based on that context. The usability of the research in other contexts may not be possible as not all teachers of this school participated in the research. People in leadership positions may have a more positive attitude towards issues in their school, so the research may be skewed. However, it will be valuable for the school in the sense that the challenges that were faced in the practice and administration of homework were identified. If addressed, then the practice of homework may improve and its contribution to learning and learner outcomes will be enhanced.

5.3 Discussion of findings

This section specifically looks at issues that tend to compromise the impact of homework in the school where this research was conducted. Although it was established by a majority of the participants that homework is a valuable school activity, the following were identified as factors that might affect its practice; thereby impede its contribution to learning and learner outcomes. The controversy over homework seems to stem from the problems associated with its practices.

5.3.1 Lack of comprehensive school homework policy

As leaders of schools, principals are responsible for the formulation of school homework policies in collaboration with teachers and parents (Cooper, 2007). The analysis of document in the school of the research shows that the school has an incomprehensive homework policy. The policy consists of a few elements of normal school homework policy as compared to the sample of another South African school. A copy of the homework policy of the school of the research is attached as an appendix (Appendix H). This implies that school leadership at the level of the principal did not do his duty satisfactorily; he is responsibility for creating visions and influencing others to improve learners' performance through the practice of homework (Bush, 2010).

There are no comprehensive teachers' and parents' responsibilities, types of homework, and amounts of homework listed in this school homework policy. Thus, the practice is not guided by a comprehensive homework policy, which can make it difficult for homework to contribute maximally to learning and learner outcomes, as teachers practise and administer homework individually (Coutts, 2004). If a school homework policy does not stipulate clear guidelines on homework practice, then the stakeholders may not know their responsibilities. School administrators should ensure that they formulate a comprehensive homework policy that would lead to the achievement of their vision for the school concerning the practice of homework (Bush, 2010). When the policy is comprehensive and stakeholders know their roles and perform them, the practice of homework can enhance its contribution to learning and learner outcomes.

5.3.2 Teachers' incompetency in homework practice

School leaders at the level of teachers who were supposed to administer homework in ways that learners would benefit from it were found to be incompetent. When teachers are not

competent, it will be difficult for them to influence learners in order to achieve their common goal of improving the practice of homework (Northouse, 2007). School leaders at the level of learners and parents believe that teachers need to improve their approach in the administration of homework. From the analysis of the prefects' responses in the focus group interview, it is evident that teachers need more training on how to set, administer, mark, provide feedback and follow-up on homework assigned to learners in order to improve teaching and learning. They complained that some of their teachers are not knowledgeable in their fields. This is consistent with the literature that advocates for more training of teachers on how to administer homework (Sharp et al., 2001; Bennett & Kalish, 2006). The training will help to improve homework practice in order to enhance its contribution to learning and learner outcomes.

School leadership at both levels of parents and learners complained about unclear and non-specific instructions given on how to complete homework. If instructions are not clear and specific, then learners may not know what to do, and parents may be confused about how to assist their children in the completion of their homework. This corroborates Cooper's (2007) assertion that sometimes parents complain about the length, standard, and clarity of homework. Therefore, teachers need training in order to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for better homework practice that can improve its contribution to learning and learner outcomes.

5.3.3 Poor socio-economic status of parents

The school leadership at the levels of the principal, HoD, and teachers believe that parents' poverty contributes to learners' failure to complete homework. According to the participants, the school is situated in a poverty-stricken area, where most of the parents are disadvantaged. The majority have low levels of education, are illiterate or poorly literate and unemployed, and therefore lack basic needs such as good meals; inadequate space; and electricity (Maringe & Vilakazi, 2015). These socio-economic problems make it difficult for leadership at the level of parents to meet the needs of their children. Thus, they can neither exercise their power nor influence their children in the completion of their homework (Bush, 2010). Learners who have socio-economically disadvantaged parents are deprived of many things that may hinder them from completing their assignments at home.

Closely linked to poverty is the issue of language. Some parents are illiterate both in their native language and in English and so cannot read instructions. Thus, when learners come

back with homework, such parents find it difficult to assist their children. In this environment and with the language barriers, homework might not make any meaningful contribution to such learner's success as they would likely become frustrated and demoralised. This confirms Warton's (2001) report that researchers list a range of potential factors that could militate against the effective practice of homework; which includes the issues of social justice.

5.3.4 Lack of parental support

Another major finding is a lack of parental support. School leadership at the levels of principal, HoDs, and teachers complained that parents do not support their children in the practice of homework. They emphasised the fact that most learners are being taken care of by their grandparents, some parents are illiterate, and some learners are orphans. Learners with these problems have no one to support them to complete their homework; hence non-completion of homework. For learners to benefit, they have to complete their homework so that teachers can use the feedback to reflect on their teaching and make modifications where necessary to enhance learning (Black &William, 1998). If learners fail to do homework, then teachers will have no information to assess learners' progress for the purpose of promoting learning. If leaders at the level of parents are unable to support their children, then the practice of homework may not be effective, thus, it may not contribute to learning and learner outcomes.

5.3.5 The use of the Extra School Support Programme

I discovered that the Department of Education has introduced an ESSP to assist orphans and struggling learners with homework after school hours. One of the leaders at the level of teachers, T2, suggested one way to improve the effectiveness of homework practice is to hire homework assistants and supervisors, who could mark learners' homework. However, this suggestion is contrary to the aims of assigning homework, which is meant to provide information that can be used to adapt learning to needs (Black & William, 1998). It is when teachers mark learners' homework that they find out the needs of learners and adjust their teaching accordingly. In addition, if homework is done in school, then it is no longer a bridge between home and school (Cooper, 2007) and parents will not be involved in their children's education through homework.

5.4 Conclusions for each research question

5.4.1 Sub-research question one

The first question required me to find out how school leaders at the levels of principal, HoD, teachers, learners, and parents understand the idea of homework. I did the exploration and found their collective understanding of homework is consistent with that of Cooper (1989) and MacBeath (2003). Their overall understanding of homework is that it is a task assigned to learners by teachers to be completed at home after school. One teacher believed it can be completed at any learning context, but the majority of the participants stated that it should be completed at home so that parents can be involved.

5.4.2 Sub-research question two

With regard to the second question, which asked about the practices associated with the application of homework in schools, I found there is no uniformity in the practice of homework in the school. Although there is a school homework policy, it is not comprehensive. Thus, homework is not well coordinated, as it is more of an individual teacher's responsibility and as such there are variations in its practices (Sharp et al., 2001; Coutts, 2004). I discovered that the controversy over homework is as a result of how it is practised and administered in schools.

5.4.3 Sub-research question three

The third question sought to discover the benefits associated with the practice of homework. I found that homework has both academic and non-academic benefits. Academic benefits include better study habits and skills; and non-academic benefits include greater self-discipline, independent problem-solving and motivational skills. These benefits are consistent with Cooper and Valentine's (2001) and Bempechat's (2004) findings.

5.4.4 Sub-research question four

This question required me to investigate the challenges associated with the practice of homework in schools. I found there are factors which militate against the effective practice of homework. These are an in-comprehensive school homework policy, teachers' incompetency, parents' poor socio-economic status, and a lack of parental involvement in the practice of homework.

5.4.5 The main research question

From school leaders' conceptualisations and understanding of homework and its purposes and challenges, as described above, it is clear that for homework practice to improve and enhance its contribution to learning and learner outcomes, the problems inhibiting the homework practice have to be ameliorated. Thus, for effective practice and administration of homework, Leadership at the level of principal should ensure that a comprehensive homework policy that teachers are obliged to follow is developed (Van Voorhuis, 2003; Brand, 2011). Leadership at the level of teachers should be trained to be competent in their instructional practice and the application of homework. Leadership at the level of parents should inform others of the different ways of supporting their children in completing their homework, whether they are rich or poor; literate or illiterate. The responsibilities are shared among the levels of school leaders (Harris, 2003) and when each level does its duty, then their common goal will be achieved. These factors identified to affect the practice of homework when addressed appropriately, the practice will improve, thus, improving the contribution that homework can make to learning and learner outcomes.

5.5 Implications for homework practices in schools

5.5.1 Implications for theory

School leaders are those who lead at different levels in the school and capable of influencing others to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2007). In this case, the common goal is to improve the practice of homework and make it effective. Thus, the principal should be able to initiate policies and influence heads of departments, teachers, learners and parents to achieve the intended goal. Heads of departments should influence teachers to do their duties well. Also teachers should be able to influence learners to complete their homework by improving the way they administer homework. Learners, who are prefects, should be able to influence other students by encouraging them to comply with school rules and regulations, for example, completing their homework; and parents should influence their children to complete homework by supporting them (Cuban, 1988).

School leadership should create vision, make good decisions and be able to influence others, in order to improve the practice of homework for a better contribution to learning and learner outcomes (Bush, 2010). Theirs is to articulate the values of homework and make it known to

stakeholders; create vision and make decisions that will lead to the effective practice of homework.

From the findings the school leaders acknowledged the values of homework, stated their visions, and made suggestions on how to improve the practice of homework to enhance its contribution to learning and learner outcomes. Therefore, homework should not be abolished as suggested by some researchers (Kralovec and Buell, 2000), but be improved for better contribution to learning and learner outcomes. Homework has been found to be a crucial learning activity that contributes to learning in the South African context, depending on how it is practised. Thus, theories of homework should not condemn the practice of homework rather encourages it as one of the activities of assessment for learning. Homework theory should give guidance on the effective practice of homework. The academic and non-academic benefits should be made know to stakeholders, and stakeholders should work against the constraints by carrying out their responsibilities as stipulated in the school homework policy.

5.5.2 Implications for practice

The implication of the findings for school leadership at the level of principal is that she, as the leader of the entire school, should cooperate with teachers and parents to make homework effective. She can do this by developing a comprehensive policy, organising seminars or workshops for teachers to improve their skills in the administration of homework, and also enlightening parents on how to be involved in their children's homework. Thus, the principal has to be proactive in her leadership and management of the school (Bush & Glover, 2009), and should also support teachers in the practice of homework. The principal should strongly emphasise the role of homework in the promotion of learning through her influence, and vision creating (Bush, 2010). The principal should also devise a process that publicly discloses evidence of learners who improve academically as a result of doing homework in order to encourage others. For leadership at the level of HoD, it implies that she should monitor and supervise teachers to ensure that homework is appropriately practised as stated or planned in the homework policy.

Leadership at the level of teachers should ensure that learners understand the concepts and skills needed to complete their homework assignments; set challenging questions; and provide clear and specific instructions. This shows consistency with Marzano and Pickering's (2007) assertion that when homework is designed at the appropriate difficulty level, learners

are able to complete assignments independently with a relatively high success rate, but still find the assignments challenging. Teachers should go for in-service education training that equips them with skills to practise homework effectively, such that it would contribute to learning and learner outcomes. Educators should know their learners so they can identify those who are orphans or those who face extreme socio-economic conditions and have no one to assist them with homework at home. Such learners can benefit from the ESSP.

Parents should support their children by allowing them some time to complete their homework. Parents should also be enlightened and informed that poor socio-economic status does not prevent them from carrying out their responsibilities with regard to homework practice, as they have different ways of involving themselves in their children's homework. Learners should work hard to grasp what is taught in the classroom and try to maximise the time they have at home to complete their homework.

5.5.3 Implications for policy

The implication of the findings for policy is that principals should formulate a strong school homework policy in collaboration with teachers, learners, and parents. The school homework policy should be comprehensive by including necessary elements such as the aim and objectives of homework; types and amount of homework to be given to learners depending on the grade level; general principles of the practice of homework; and the responsibilities of teachers, parents, and learners. The HoD should ensure that teachers are monitored and supervised to follow the planned policy.

5.5.4 Implications for further research

This study could be replicated with a larger number of participants from two or more schools in similar situations to see whether it corroborates the findings of this study. The same procedures could be followed to obtain information about school leadership views and opinions about homework practices, purposes and challenges. This study did not examine how homework can contribute to learning and learner outcomes; hence, potential research would be to investigate how homework improves learning and learner outcomes.

5.6 The Contributions of this research

Based on the aim of the research, I believe this study makes a modest contribution in the sense of broadening the evidence related to issues of homework in schools. In particular, it

identifies the following as critically important. First, the study findings seem to refute the assertion by some of the literature that homework does not contribute to learning and learner achievement (see for example, Kralovec & Buell, 2000; Khon, 2007) as it has been found to have both academic and non-academic benefits for learners. Second, the study shows that the root cause of the controversy over homework is in its practice, as not all teachers administer effective homework policies that can contribute to learning and learner outcomes. Thus, this study enjoins principals and HoDs not to take for granted that all teachers have the skills to practise and administer homework effectively. Leaders have to organise training for the less competent teachers. Third, the study identifies some factors that inhibit the effective practice of homework, which need to be addressed for homework to increase its contribution to learning and learner outcomes. Fourth, the conceptual framework as depicted in figure 1 is another contribution this study has made. This research provides a model which other researchers can use in further research. It could also be used as a source of information for those researching similar topics, thus, contributing to literature on homework in the South African context. The key areas of this research are shown in figure 2.

Figure 2: An analytical model for homework research in schools

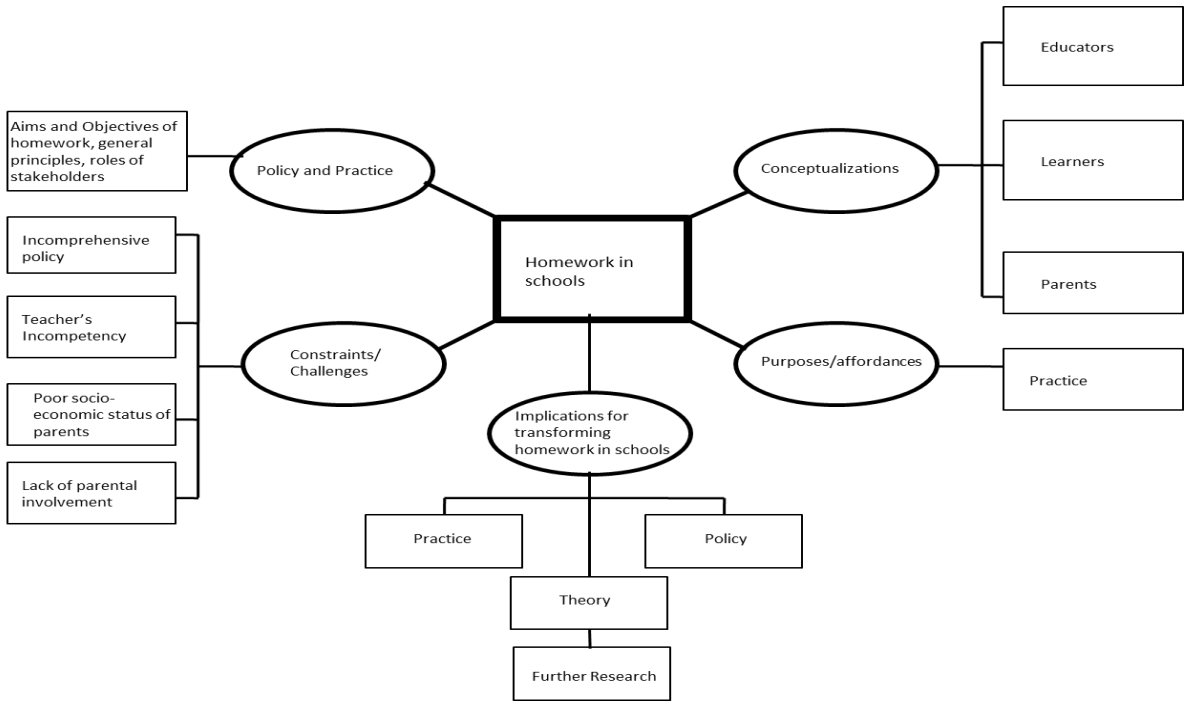

Figure 2 is identified as analytical model as it is a description of a plan that could be used as a guide for researchers of homework in schools. It outlines the different components that could be investigated. In conducting a research on homework in schools, the major areas of focus

could be: Conceptualisations of homework – it is essential to know what homework is, and the opinions and views of stakeholders (educators, learners and parent) about the notion of homework. Policy and practice refers to a guide on how homework should be practiced in schools. The elements of homework policy include; aim and objectives of homework, general principles and roles of stakeholders. Purposes/affordances of homework – the values or benefits derived from doing homework. Constraints/challenges – these are the possible problems that are likely to be encountered in the practice of homework. Implications for transforming homework in schools – these are things that could be done to improve the practice of homework in schools, which could be the formulation of a strong homework policy that is well implemented; practice; and theory of homework. Further research – there may be some areas that the research did not cover but needs to be research to get a better understanding of the issue.

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Appendix A

Wits School of Education

27 St Andrews Road, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193 Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa. Tel: +27 11 717-3064 Fax: +27 11 717-3100 E-mail: enquiries@educ.wits.ac.za Website: www.wits.ac.za

02 July 2015

Student Number: 830423

Protocol Number: 2015ECE030M

Dear Juliana Audu

Application for Ethics Clearance: Master of Education

Thank you very much for your ethics application. The Ethics Committee in Education of the Faculty of Humanities, acting on behalf of the Senate, has considered your application for ethics clearance for your proposal entitled:

School Leadership Conceptualizations of Homewok: Practices, Affordances and Constraints: A case study of a primary school in Gauteng.

The committee recently met and I am pleased to inform you that **clearance was granted**.

Please use the above protocol number in all correspondence to the relevant research parties (schools, parents, learners etc.) and include it in your research report or project on the title page.

The Protocol Number above should be submitted to the Graduate Studies in Education Committee upon submission of your final research report.

All the best with your research project.

Yours sincerely,

MMaseko

Wits School of Education

011 717-3416

cc Supervisor – Prof Felix Maringe

Appendix B

GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

For administrative use:
Reference no: D2016 / 160
enquiries: Diane Buntting 011 843 6503

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	**2 July 2015**
Validity of Research Approval:	**2 July 2015 to 2 October 2015**
Name of Researcher:	**Audu J.U.**
Address of Researcher:	**No 31, Umgeni Crescent, Gallo Manor, Sandton, 2052**
Telephone / Fax Number/s:	**078 279 3549**
Email address:	**audujuliana2015@yahoo.com**
Research Topic:	**School leadership conceptualizations of homework: practices, affordances and constraints: A case study of one Primary School in Gauteng.**
Number and type of schools:	**ONE Primary School**
District/s/HO	**Gauteng West**

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to the Principal, SGB and the relevant District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted. However participation is VOLUNTARY.

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher has agreed to and may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

CONDITIONS FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH IN GDE

1. The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s concerned must be presented with a copy of this letter;

followed 2015/07/02

1

Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Knowledge Management and Research
9th Floor, 111 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, 2001
P.O. Box 7710, Johannesburg, 2000 Tel: (011) 355 0506
Email: David.Makhado@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

2. A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB);
3. A letter / document that outlines the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned;
4. The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of all the GDE officials, principals, SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Participation is voluntary and additional remuneration will not be paid;
5. Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal and/or Director must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage;
6. Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year;
7. Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.
8. It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent and learner;
9. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources;
10. The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations;
11. On completion of the study the researcher must supply the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management with one Hard Cover, an electronic copy and a Research Summary of the completed Research Report;
12. The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned; and
13. Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director and school concerned must also be supplied with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

Kind regards

.....

Dr David Makhado

Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: 2015/07/02

Office of the Director: Knowledge Management and Research
9th Floor, 111 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, 2001
P.O. Box 7710, Johannesburg, 2000 Tel: (011) 355 0506
Email: David.Makhado@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

Appendix C
INFORMATION LETTER TO THE PRINCIPAL

15th June, 2015.

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Juliana Ugbo Audu. I am a Masters student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand.

I am doing research on "School leadership conceptualizations of homework: practices, affordances and constraints."

My research involves interviewing people from the different levels of leadership in your school, that is; the principal, one head of department, three teachers, six prefects (learners) and the School Governing Body Chair. Each of them will be interviewed one on one with the exception of the learners, who will have focus- group interview. The interview will be semi-structured; there will be interview questions for the interviewees to respond to. It will be conducted after school and I will need 20 minutes for interviews with each of the participants, but 40 minutes with the learners for the focus-group interview. The interviews will be audio-taped and will be available for participants to access.
I am also asking for permission to use the school homework policy. This document will enable me to know more about the practices of homework in your school.

The reason why I have chosen your school is because I feel that all the participants from your school are information rich-informants that can supply the data required to answer my research questions.

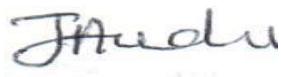
I am inviting your school to participate in this research in order to explore the views and opinions of school leaders about the notion of homework, and the perceived values and challenges associated with its practices; so as to improve the practice of homework.

The research participants will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. They will be reassured that they can withdraw their participation at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. The participants will not be paid for this study.

The names of the research participants and identity of the school will be kept confidential at all times and in all academic writing about the study. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

All research data will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of the project.

Please let me know if you require any further information. I look forward to your response as soon as is convenient.
Yours sincerely,



Juliana UgboAudu
No 31, Umgeni Crescent, Gallo Manor, Sandton, Johannesburg
audujuliana2015@yahoo.com (0782793549)

INFORMATION LETTER TO HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

15th June, 2015.

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Juliana UgboAudu. I am a Masters student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand.

I am doing research on "School leadership conceptualizations of homework: practices, affordances and constraints."

My research involves interviewing people from the different levels of leadership in your school, that is; the principal, you as a head of department, three teachers, six prefects (learners) and a parent, who could be the School Governing Body Chair. Each of them will be interviewed one on one with the exception of the learners, who will have focus- group interview. The interview will be semi- structured; there will be interview questions for the interviewees to respond to. It will be conducted after school and I will need 20 minutes for interviews with each of the participants, but 40 minutes with the learners for the focus-group interview. The interviews will be audio-taped and will be available for participants to access.

The reason why I have chosen your school is because I feel that all the participants from your school are information rich-informants that can supply the data required to answer my research questions.

I am inviting your school to participate in this research in order to explore the views and opinions of school leaders about the notion of homework, and the perceived values and challenges associated with its practices; so as to improve the practice of homework.

The research participants will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. They will be reassured that they can withdraw their participation at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. The participants will not be paid for this study.

The names of the research participants and identity of the school will be kept confidential at all times and in all academic writing about the study. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

All research data will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of the project.

Please let me know if you require any further information. I look forward to your response as soon as is convenient.
Yours sincerely,



Juliana UgboAudu
No 31, Umgeni Crescent, Gallo Manor, Sandton, Johannesburg
audujuliana2015@yahoo.com
0782793549

INFORMATION LETTER TO THE PARENTS

15th June, 2015.

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Juliana UgboAudu. I am a Masters student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand.

I am doing research on "School leadership conceptualizations of homework: practices, affordances and constraints."

My research involves interviewing people from the different levels of leadership in this school, that is; the principal, one head of department, three teachers, six prefects (learners), and you as a parent and the School Governing Body Chair. Each of them will be interviewed one on one with the exception of the learners, who will have focus- group interview. The interview will be semi- structured; there will be interview questions for the interviewees to respond to. It will be conducted after school and I will need 20 minutes for interviews with each of the participants, but 40 minutes with the learners for the focus-group interview. The interviews will be audio-taped and will be available for participants to access.

The reason why I have chosen the school is because I feel that all the participants from the school are information rich-informants that can supply the data required to answer my research questions.

I am inviting the school to participate in this research in order to explore the views and opinions of school leaders about the notion of homework, and the perceived values and challenges associated with its practices; so as to improve the practice of homework.

The research participants will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. They will be reassured that they can withdraw their participation at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. The participants will not be paid for this study.

The names of the research participants and identity of the school will be kept confidential at all times and in all academic writing about the study. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

All research data will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of the project.

Please let me know if you require any further information. I look forward to your response as soon as is convenient.

Yours sincerely,



Juliana UgboAudu
No 31, Umgeni Crescent, Gallo Manor, Sandton, Johannesburg
audujuliana2015@yahoo.com
0782793549

INFORMATION SHEET TEACHERS

15th June, 2015.

Dear Sir/ madam,

My name is Juliana UgboAudu and I am a Masters student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand.

I am doing research on "School leadership conceptualizations of homework: practices, affordances and constraints."

My research involves interviewing people from the different levels of leadership in your school, that is; the principal, one head of department, three teachers, six prefects (learners) and the School Governing Body Chair. Each of them will be interviewed with the exception of the learners, who will have focus-group interview. The interview will be semi- structured; there will be interview questions for the interviewees to respond to. It will be conducted after school and I will need 20 minutes for interviews with each of the participants, but 40 minutes with the learners for the focus-group interview. The interviews will be audio-taped and will be available for participants to access.

The reason why I have chosen your school is because I feel you are an information rich-informant that can supply the data required to answer my research questions.
I was wondering whether you would mind if I invite you to participate in my research. I need your help to participate in the interview, your responses will be audio- taped, but you will have access to it.

Your name and identity will be kept confidential at all times and in all academic writing about the study. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

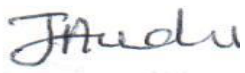
All research data will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of the project.

You will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. Your participation is voluntary, so you can withdraw your permission at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating and you will not be paid for this study.

Please let me know if you require any further information.

Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,



Juliana Ugbo Audu
No 31, Umgeni Crescent, Gallo Manor, Sandton, Johannesburg
audujuliana2015@yahoo.com
0782793549

INFORMATION SHEET LEARNERS

15th June, 2015.

Dear Learner

My name is Juliana Ugbo Audu and I am a Masters student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand.

I am doing research on "School leadership conceptualizations of homework: practices, affordances and constraints."

My investigation involves interviewing people from the different levels of leadership in your school, that is; the principal, one head of department, three teachers, six prefects (learners) of whom you are one, and the School Governing Body Chair. Each of them will be interviewed with the exception of the learners, who will have focus- group interview. The interview will be semi- structured; there will be interview questions for the interviewees to respond to. It will be conducted after school and I will need 20 minutes for interviews with each of the participants, but 40 minutes with the learners for the focus-group interview. The interviews will be audio-taped and will be available for participants to access.

I was wondering whether you would mind if I invite you to participate in my research. I need your help to participate in the focus-group interview, your responses will be audio- taped, but you will have access to it.

Remember, this is not a test, it is not for marks and it is voluntary, which means that you don't have to do it. Also, if you decide halfway through that you prefer to stop, this is completely your choice and will not affect you negatively in any way.

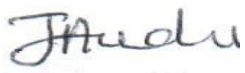
I will not be using your own name but I will make one up so no one can identify you. All information about you will be kept confidential in all my writing about the study. Also, all collected information will be stored safely and destroyed between 3-5 years after I have completed my project.

Your parents have also been given an information sheet and consent form, but at the end of the day it is your decision to join us in the study.

I look forward to working with you!

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Thank you



Juliana Ugbo Audu
No 31, Umgeni Crescent, Gallo Manor, Sandton, Johannesburg
audujuliana2015@yahoo.com
0782793549

INFORMATION SHEET PARENT

15th June, 2015.

Dear Parent

My name is Juliana Ugbo Audu and I am a Masters student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand.

I am doing research on "School leadership conceptualizations of homework: practices, affordances and constraints."

My research involves interviewing people from the different levels of leadership in your child's school, that is; the principal, one head of department, three teachers, six prefects (learners) and the School Governing Body Chair. Each of them will be interviewed with the exception of the learners, who will have focus- group interview. The interview will be semi-structured; there will be interview questions for the interviewees to respond to. It will be conducted after school and I will need 20 minutes for interviews with each of the participants, but 40 minutes with the learners for the focus-group interview. The interviews will be audio-taped and will be available for participants to access.

The reason why I have chosen your child's class is becauseI feel they are information rich-informants that can supply the data required to answer my research questions.
I was wondering whether you would mind if I invite your child to participate in my research. I need his/her help to participate in the focus-group interview, his/her responses will be audio- taped, but he/she will have access to it.

Your child will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. S/he will be reassured that s/he can withdraw her/his permission at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating and your child will not be paid for this study.

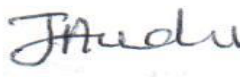
Your child's name and identity will be kept confidential at all times and in all academic writing about the study. His/her individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

All research data will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of the project.

Please let me know if you require any further information.

Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,



Juliana UgboAudu
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audujuliana2015@yahoo.com
0782793549

Appendix D

Principal's Consent Form

Please fill in the reply slip below if you agree to participate in my study called: "School leadership conceptualizations of Homework: practices, affordances and constraints."

My name is: _____

Circle one

Permission to be audiotaped

I agree to be audiotaped during the interview or observation lesson	YES/NO
I know that the audiotapes will be used for this project only	YES/NO

Permission to be interviewed

I would like to be interviewed for this study.	YES/NO
I know that I can stop the interview at any time and don't have to answer all the questions asked.	YES/NO

Permission to use School Homework Policy

I agree that you use the School Homework Policy.	
I know that the analysis of the School Homework Policy will be used for this project only.	YES/NO

Informed Consent

I understand that:

- my name and information will be kept confidential and safe and that my name and the name of my school will not be revealed.
- I do not have to answer every question and can withdraw from the study at any time.
- I can ask not to be audiotaped, photographed and/or videotape
- I can refuse to allow you to use the School Homework Policy
- all the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of my project.

Sign_____ Date_____

Head of Department's Consent Form

Please fill in and return the reply slip below indicating your willingness to be a participant in my voluntary research project called:

I, _____ give my consent for the following:
Circle one

Permission to be audiotaped

I agree to be audiotaped during the interview or observation lesson	YES/NO
I know that the audiotapes will be used for this project only	YES/NO

Permission to be interviewed

I would like to be interviewed for this study.	YES/NO
I know that I can stop the interview at any time and don't have to answer all the questions asked.	YES/NO

Informed Consent

I understand that:

- my name and information will be kept confidential and safe and that my name and the name of my school will not be revealed.
- I do not have to answer every question and can withdraw from the study at any time.
- I can ask not to be audiotaped, photographed and/or videotape
- all the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of my project.

Sign_____ Date_____

Teacher's Consent Form

Please fill in and return the reply slip below indicating your willingness to be a participant in my voluntary research project called:

I, _____ give my consent for the following:

Circle one

Permission to be audiotaped

I agree to be audiotaped during the interview or observation lesson	YES/NO
I know that the audiotapes will be used for this project only	YES/NO

Permission to be interviewed

I would like to be interviewed for this study.	YES/NO
I know that I can stop the interview at any time and don't have to answer all the questions asked.	YES/NO

Informed Consent

I understand that:

- my name and information will be kept confidential and safe and that my name and the name of my school will not be revealed.
- I do not have to answer every question and can withdraw from the study at any time.
- I can ask not to be audiotaped, photographed and/or videotape
- all the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of my project.

Sign_____ Date_____

Learner Consent Form

Please fill in the reply slip below if you agree to participate in my study called: “School leadership conceptualizations of Homework: practices, affordances and constraints.”

My name is: _____

	Circle one
Permission to be audiotaped	
I agree to be audiotaped during the interview or observation lesson	YES/NO
I know that the audiotapes will be used for this project only	YES/NO
Permission to be interviewed	
I would like to be interviewed for this study.	YES/NO
I know that I can stop the interview at any time and don’t have to answer all the questions asked.	YES/NO

Informed Consent

I understand that:

- my name and information will be kept confidential and safe and that my name and the name of my school will not be revealed.
- I do not have to answer every question and can withdraw from the study at any time.
- I can ask not to be audiotaped, photographed and/or videotape
- all the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of my project.

Sign_____ Date_____

Parents' Consent Form

Please fill in and return the reply slip below indicating your willingness to allow your child to participate in the research project called: "School leadership conceptualization of Homework: practices, affordances and constraints."

I, _____ the parent of _____

Circle one

Permission to be audiotaped

I agree that my child may be audiotaped during interview or observations.	YES/NO
I know that the audiotapes will be used for this project only	YES/NO

Permission to be interviewed

I agree that my child may be interviewed for this study.	YES/NO
I know that he/she can stop the interview at any time and doesn't have to answer all the questions asked.	YES/NO

Informed Consent

I understand that:

- my child's name and information will be kept confidential and safe and that my name and the name of my school will not be revealed.
- he/she does not have to answer every question and can withdraw from the study at any time.
- he/she can ask not to be audiotaped, photographed and/or videotape
- all the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of my project.

Sign_____ Date_____

Parent's Consent Form

Please fill in and return the reply slip below indicating your willingness to be a participant in my voluntary research project called:

I, _____ give my consent for the following:

Circle one

Permission to be audiotaped

I agree to be audiotaped during the interview or observation lesson YES/NO

I know that the audiotapes will be used for this project only YES/NO

Permission to be interviewed

I would like to be interviewed for this study. YES/NO

I know that I can stop the interview at any time and don't have to answer all the questions asked. YES/NO

Informed Consent

I understandthat:

- my name and information will be kept confidentialand safe and that my name and the name of my school will not be revealed.
- I do not have to answer every question and can withdraw from the study at any time.
- I can ask not to be audiotaped, photographed and/or videotape
- all the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of my project.

Sign_____ Date_____

Appendix E

University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Wits school of Education

Division of Education Leadership and Policy studies

Interview Protocol for Participants

1. My name is Juliana Ugbo Audu and I am a Masters student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. Thank you for allowing me in.
2. I am here for the interview for my research titled; Leadership conceptualizations of homework: practices, affordances and constraints. The purpose of the research is to explore school leaders' views and opinions about the way homework is practiced in schools, its perceived values and challenges in order to improve the contribution homework can make to learning and learner outcomes.
3. I want to assure you that whatever information I get from you will not be disclosed to anybody and will be highly confidential. It will solely be used for the purpose of the research and only my supervisor and I will have access to the information. You will be interviewed separately in an office or empty classroom and your name will not be used when writing the report or any write-up about the research; pseudonym or coding system will be used in place of your name. You have the right to say that you will not participate in the research again at any time without penalty, or refuse to answer any question that you are not comfortable with.
4. I won't take much of your time, the interview will not take more than 30 minutes of your valuable time.
5. I was wondering whether you would mind if I audio-tape the interview.
6. I also seek your permission to analyse the homework policy of the school.
7. I have your consent letter here, if you agree to help me and participate in the research, please, sign it for me.

A demographic questionnaire for general information

1. Age

   20-30 years
   31-40 years
   41-50 years
   51-60 ears

2. Gender
   Male

   Female

3. Highest Qualification

   Certificate in Education
   Bachelor of Education
   Bachelor of Education (Hons)
   Masters' degree
   Others

4. Experience in this school

   0-5 years
   5-10 years
   10-15 years
   15 years and above

5. Experience in other schools

   0-5 years
   5-10 years
   10-15 years
   15 years and above

The two things I think should change to make homework work better in the school are;

1.
……
……
…….

2.
……
……
…….

Appendix F

Interview Questions for Principals

Research Questions	**Interview Questions**
How do school leaders at the levels of principals, teachers, learners and parents understand the idea of homework?	1. What is your understanding of the idea of homework? 2. Can you share with me your views about homework for learners in schools?
What practices are associated with the application of homework in schools?	**3.** What are key policy guidelines regarding homework in the school? 4. What role do parents play in enforcing the homework policy of the school?
What benefits are associated with the practice of homework in schools?	**5.** What purposes are served by homework generally and in your school in particular? 6. What can you say are the values of homework?
What are the challenges associated with the practice of homework in schools?	7. What problems do teachers face in administering homework in schools? **8.** What might the school need to do or to have in order to improve the potential benefits from homework?

Interview questions for Head of Department

Research questions	**Interview questions:**
How do school leaders at the levels of principals, Head of Departments, teachers, learners and parents understand the idea of homework?	1. Can you share with me your understanding of the notion of homework? 2. Why are learners asked to do homework?
What practices are associated with the application of homework in schools?	**3.** What are the policy guidelines regarding homework in the school? **4.** What are the purposes behind the policy and what role do parents play in enforcing the homework policy of the school?
What benefits are associated with the practice of homework in schools?	5. What purposes are served by homework generally and in your school in particular? 6. What value do you attach to homework?
What are the challenges associated with the practice of homework?	7. What problems do schools experience in the practice of homework? 8. What might the school need to do or have in order to improve the potential benefits from homework?

Interview Questions for Teachers

Research questions	**Interview questions**
How do school leaders at the levels of principals, Head of Departments, teachers, learners and parents understand the idea of homework?	1. Can you share with me about your understanding of the notion of homework? 2. Why do you give learners homework?
What practices are associated with the application of homework in schools?	3. How frequent do you give your learners homework and what is the duration of each? 4. What support do you get from administrators or parents in the practice of homework?
What benefits are associated with the practice of homework in schools?	5. What is the general purpose of giving homework to learners in schools? 6. What value do you attach to homework?
What are the challenges associated with the practice of homework?	7. What obstacles do you encounter in the practice of homework? 8. What can you do to improve homework in your school?

Interview Questions for Parent

Research Questions	**Interview Questions**
How do school leaders at the levels of principals, Head of Departments, teachers, learners and parents understand the idea of homework?	1. What is your idea about the notion of homework? 2. Why do you think children do homework?
What practices are associated with the application of homework in schools?	3. How would you rate the way teachers set homework? 4. How does the homework relate to what they are taught in classroom?
What benefits are associated with the practice of homework in schools?	5. What value do you attach to homework? 6. In what ways do you think homework is valuable to learners?
What are the challenges associated with the practice of homework?	7. What problems do you encounter when your children come back with homework? 8. In what ways can you motivate your child to do his/her homework?

Appendix G

Interview Questions for Learners

Research Questions	**Interview Questions**
How do school leaders at the levels of principals, Head of Departments, teachers, learners and parents understand the idea of homework?	1. What does homework mean to you? 2. What do you like/hate about homework?
What practices are associated with the application of homework in schools?	3. How would you rate the way your teachers assign homework? 4. Can you share with me how you would love your teachers to set homework?
What benefits are associated with the practice of homework in schools?	5. Why do schools give homework to learners? 6. What in your opinion is the value of homework?
What are the challenges associated with the practice of homework?	7. What problems do you encounter when you go home with homework? 8. What do you think can be done to improve the practice of homework in schools?

HOMEWORK POLICY

AIM

The mission and objective of the homework policy is:

- to test a learner's understanding of work that has been done
- to make learners independent and responsible
- to encourage self-activity and also to guide learners towards being able to do a task independently
- to provide a control mechanism for the educator to determine which learners need attention and help
- to teach learners to be conscientious at all times and to promote neatness
- to equip learners with crucial skills that they may need in future, e.g. exposure to reading up and research
- to act proactively regarding class work
- to create space for tasks that are impracticable in class to be done at home

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

- There should be prior consultation with parents regarding what the school's homework policy involves.
- There should be regular contact between parent and educator to determine the degree to which the parent should be involved in terms of helping with homework, e.g. accessing resources for assignments, etc.
- Record should be kept of the parents who support their children with their homework and the issue should be taken up with those who do not pull their weight and they should be motivated to participate.
- Each parent should sign his or her child's workbook regularly in order to stay in touch with the educator and to stay informed regarding the child's work.
- Parents should show a keen interest in their child's homework and also carry the responsibility for the completion of the homework.
- If the parent is illiterate a family member should step in to help the learner.

IMPLEMENTATION OF HOMEWORK POLICY

- Not doing homework is regarded as an offence and doing homework can be rewarded.
- Exceptions in special cases such as sickness, death and other unforeseen circumstances should be taken into consideration.
- Time should be set aside for the marking of homework.
- Record should be kept of whether homework has been done or not.
- Homework assignments should vary with a view to sharpening different skills, e.g. research, summaries, practical tasks, etc.
- Parents who do not perform their responsibilities regarding their child's homework should be contacted and the matter should be taken up with them.
- If homework has not been done, the reason should be determined. Consequences for intentional non-completion should be:
    - 1st time - warning
    - 2nd time - letter to parent
    - 3rd time – parent is called in

IMPLEMENTATION IN GRADES
GRADE 1 – 3

- There should be close cooperation between parent and educator.
- The educator should play a guiding role in class regarding homework.
- The volume and level is important.

GRADE 4 – 7

- The subject policy determines the volume and level of homework in the specific learning areas.
- There should be coordination between learning areas regarding homework.
- Homework should display progress between grades – it should become gradually more advanced and independent, which includes visits to the library, research centres, etc.
- Educators should give clear instructions regarding assignments, in order to enable parents and learners to know precisely what the assignment involves, with clear and specific reference to resources.
- There should be differentiation between the different grades.

LEARNERS' RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING HOMEWORK

- Each learner should have a special homework book in which to record each day's homework.
- It remains the learner's responsibility to ensure that each day's homework is recorded correctly.
- It remains the learner's responsibility to ensure that his or her homework bok is signed.

This policy has been adopted:

_____ _____

Date Place

EDUCATORS: _____

_____

_____

_____

PRINCIPAL: _____

CHAIRPERSON (SGB): _____