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EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE EVIDENCE USED TO SUPPORT DECISIONS ABOUT HOMEWORK: A CASE STUDY OF A FORMER MODEL C SECONDARY SCHOOL IN GAUTENG



by

Mxolisi Kunene

STUDENT NUMBER: 0115112w

A thesis submitted to the Wits School of Education, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Education

JOHANNESBURG, 2016

Supervisor: Prof Felix Maringe

DECLARATION

I**, Mxolisi M. Kunene**, declare that this research report is my own original work. It has never been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University. I am submitting it for the Masters in Education Degree at the University of the Witwatersrand, School of Education, Johannesburg.

Signed_____ Date_____

ABSTRACT

Homework has become an integral part of the school curriculum and policy, yet the evidence base for its inclusion is contestable and inconclusive. In South Africa homework is a statutory requirement for all schools (DoE, 1998) and nearly all schools have included it in the standard process of learning. The main argument of this research is that despite its adoption and application in schools, the justification for its use is barely understood. Its application in schools seemed to be based on anecdotal evidence. Considering there is very little empirical data that demonstrates the extent of the utilisation of evidence around homework-based decisions in South African schools, this study intends to establish what sources of evidence are available to schools to support decision-making around the key policy matters, perceptions, implementation, benefits and challenges associated with the applications of homework in school.

Forty educators and two HoDs were recruited for the questionnaires and interviews respectively. The selected educators represented certain types of characteristics and had comparative teaching styles. This was done because some teachers give assignments that combine learning and ecstasy while others give homework that upset the whole process, therefore the administration of homework is different. Random sampling was used in selecting the educators and purposive sampling was used only in selecting the HoDs and this was done by selecting participants with certain characteristics to provide the best information to address the purpose of the research.

The researcher concludes that most educators claimed they receive very little support from the education department in terms of homework issues. The study suggests there is a correlation between homework and achievement, but is not adequate to conclude beyond reasonable doubt that it is indeed the case. However, the study can argue there are some benefits beyond academic acquisition of knowledge. By contrast, the study also highlights that homework marginalises economically disadvantaged students who find it difficult to complete homework tasks due to environmental issues. In concluding; the study suggests that for homework to be effective, homework implementers need to undertake critical research in order to understand the short comings of homework incompletion.

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ACRONYMS

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
AfL	Assessment for Learning
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
DoE	Department of Education
EBP	evidence-based practice
EBR	evidenced-based research
EIP	evidence-informed practice
GDP	gross domestic product
HoD	Head of Department
RCT	Randomised controlled trial
SASA	South African School Act
SBA	school-based assessment
SCK	subject content knowledge
SMT	School Management Team
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Evidence is data/information that can be used to support or authenticate and validate claims and arrive at decisions

Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) is a process that involves the conscientious, explicit, judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients

Research is an original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with a more capable peer

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Key words: homework assignments, student achievement, research evidence, evidence-based practice, improve achievement, motivation

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CHAPTER 1: GENERAL ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

Homework has become an integral part of the school curriculum and policy, yet the evidence base for its inclusion is contestable and inconclusive. At the time the study was conducted, in South Africa homework was a statutory requirement for all schools (DoE, 1998). Considering that students' performance and achievement were increasingly placed under inspection and educators were under more pressure than ever to produce results, nearly all schools included homework in the standard process of learning. The amount of homework given to students depended on the educator – there was no nation-wide rule about the amount of homework that should be given. The main argument of this research is that despite its universal adoption and application in schools, justification for its use is hardly understood. Its application in schools seems to be based on anecdotal evidence. In the South African context there were numerous problems associated with its practice. The purpose of this research was to determine educators' understanding of the meaning, purpose, policy and nature of homework in terms of the sources of evidence used to support decisions about homework. This study was conducted in a former model C school in Gauteng and involved a qualitative study based on interviews and questionnaires with a range of educators and Heads of Department (HoDs) in the school to determine their perceptions around issues of policy, implementation, benefits, and challenges associated with the application of homework in school. A former model C school was used to establish if the attitude towards homework assignments in students differed according to different racial groups exposed to the same resources and educational opportunities or was it a general behaviour.

The study, which aimed to outline and discuss issues around homework, was developed around six key sections.

The first section provides the background and the statement of the problem including the aims and objectives of the study. The section ends with a proposal for the entire research processes related to the study.

The second section provides a brief conceptual discussion around ideas such as homework, policy implementation, school improvements, evidence and evidence-based practice (EBP). This section also discusses the research that identifies the purposes, the benefits, and challenges associated with homework in schools.

The third section outlines the methodological approach used to make decisions about the data collection approaches, the analysis, issue of trustworthiness, validity and reliability of the research process, and ethical considerations.

The fourth section analyses the data collected from the questionnaires and interview sessions.

The fifth section focuses on the discussions or interpretation of the findings in relation to the reviewed literature and the theoretical framework of this study.

The last section focuses on the implications and conclusions and the examination of the assumptions.

1.1 Background and statement of the problem

1.1.1 Homework in South Africa

Homework performance is defined as the process that occurs when a learner begins, continues to work on, and completes school assignments at home or in another out-of-school setting (Hong, Milgram & Rowell, 2004: 198). Cooper, Robinson, and Patall (2006) define homework as tasks assigned by school educators meant to be done during non-instructional time. According to Ramdass and Zimmerman (2011) historically homework has always been an important aspect of any educational system. The national Department of Education (DoE, 1998) states that homework should be instituted to afford learners the opportunity to reinforce skills, knowledge and attitudes which have been taught at schools. The DoE adds that the homework must be relevant and meaningful to learners and has the benefit of developing a work ethic in the learner. However a balance is important as too little homework or no homework can deny a learner the opportunity for further development, too much homework can be frustrating and stressful. The parent's duty is to monitor if homework is done at home, while the School Management Team (SMT) oversees

thorough organisation and supervision of homework to ensure learners are unreasonably overburdened and deprived unduly of their free time to do other things.

The homework policy of this secondary school situated in Gauteng states that homework should be given regularly and should supplement class work. It continues to state that educators must ensure that the homework given is educationally sound and time allocated must be shared among the learning areas. The amount of homework allocated to students in a week ranges from 3 to 12 hours. It further states that educators must check and assess all homework done. But the question remains; why does the school insist that learners do homework? Is there a depth in evidence that the school uses to base its decisions?

Policies related to the use of homework vary from school to school according to my observation and personal experience. However, there is little understanding about the resources of evidence that support the wide use of homework in schools. For example, we do not know what evidence educators use to support key homework decisions such as that:

- it has to be given regularly
- is has to supplement class work
- is has to be assessed and learners have to be given feedback
- learners can or should not get help with their homework.

1.1.2 Evidence for and against the use of homework in schools

A study done in Malaysia concludes that homework helps to reinforce classroom learning and teach learners' responsibility and self management. Xu (2009) found that homework help set appropriate work environment, help control negative emotions, monitor motivation and help in the management of time. Cooper et al. (2006) in their meta-analysis note that the mean difference on tests between students that complete and those that do not complete homework range from 0.39 to 0.97. Trussell and Dietz (2003) state that student's performance in tests increases as a result of homework done. Xu and Wu (2013) concur that not only does homework help students achieve but it also helps them narrow the gaps in their studies and expand their competence. He also outlines that homework augment self regulation and belief, goal setting and time management. Carr (2013) agrees that homework when designed and implemented properly is indeed a valuable tool for

enforcing learning unfortunately homework is never used effectively. Patton (1994) affirms that about 20% of students have learning disabilities thus any homework assignment tries to compensate for that. In the view of this, it is important that the homework is completed to have any form of positive impact. According to a US website (www.scholastic.com) students from elementary school in Maryland believe they should have homework. As it helps better understand what is learnt in class, especially if they are struggling with a learning area. They are of the view that homework shows educators which students need help and with what concepts and it shows to parents that learning is indeed happening at school. According to comments posted on social media in 2015 (Facebook: A mother fights for her son to not do homework) some parents argued that the role of homework was more important than it is assumed. They were of the view that homework helps students to analyse and memorise contents developed in previous classes. They claimed this activity (memorised knowledge) helped put to practice content of the previous class in the next class.

According to Cooper and Valentine (2001) not only does homework play an important role in improving academic achievement, it also improves students' study skills, their attitudes toward school, and teaches them that learning can take place anywhere, not just in school buildings during school hours. In addition, parents feel homework fosters autonomy and responsibility and that it can involve parents in the school process, enhancing their positive reception of education and allowing them to show appreciation toward their children's achievements. Consequently, we can now see that homework assignments that are adequately challenging and interesting help and students who are at risk of failing can develop motivation skills and self-regulation. In addition, homework, according to Ramdass and Zimmerman (2011) shows students' strengths and helps overcome their weaknesses.

On the other hand, researchers note a negative relationship between homework and achievement. Kohn (2006) maintains that for students who are academically struggling, homework does little to help them, resulting in homework being assigned as a punitive measure rather than being a reinforcing tool. Kohn (2006) adds that homework does little to enhance achievement when its duration is excessive, neither does it improve study skills, or promote self-discipline and responsibility.

A study done by Cooper and Valentine (2001) reveals that some educators and parents feel homework can be rewarding as long as it does not take too long to do. If all educators give or assign homework there is the possibility of students getting bored and not doing the homework. The authors also note that homework does not allow students to spend time with their families and on community activities that can teach important lessons such as developing social skills. They also argue that parental involvement must be redefined because otherwise parents think by interfering they are still getting involved. The problem with this is that the instructions given by educators can differ from those given by parents, thus confusing the children. Cooper and Valentine (2001), most importantly, note that if learners are punished for not having done homework can lead to cheating or mere copying from those who can.

Many children dream of school without homework, but this is hardly a reality for students in most of South African schools. Generally, students have to read a book/or do homework for 30 minutes each night. Theorists who are against homework argue that children need free time after school so they can relax and spend time with their families and friends. While theorists who are in support of homework policies argue that it is important for students to practise what they learn in class. They also say homework helps educators check if students understand what is being taught. Some students of a US primary school argue they should not have homework as they feel that educators sometimes give too much homework. They also contend that they want to do other things when they get home like spending time with their families (Cooper & Valentine, 2001). They claim that reading is better because it helps with grammar skills as compared to homework.

Looking at this differently, Campbell and Fairbairn (2005) describes homework as a way for schools to prove to parents that they are doing work. Literature suggests that most of the time students and even educators just go through homework very fast as their attention is not on homework but on emotions (Sidhu, Fook & Singh, 2010). The effects of homework are dependent on many variables in South Africa: some parents work till late and must still cook and do homework as well. Some of the parents went to school during the Bantu education era and cannot even answer the questions their children come home with, and without Internet learners are at a severe disadvantage. With this in mind it is clear that

homework propagates the disparity between literate and illiterate families, and sets students with parents with limited education up for failure. The comments above might explain why if any learners do not do homework, they probably do badly or even have to stay back a year. Kohn (2006); Bennett (2006); Kalish et al. (1966), and Kralovec and Buell (2000), among others, make a strong argument against homework, citing that homework marginalises economically disadvantaged students who find it difficult to complete homework tasks due to various environmental reasons. Homework, in my understanding, is any educational activity that educators give to students to do on their own outside of class. It is an extension of the day's lesson and serves to reinforce what was taught in the classroom.

1.1.3 Assumptions/Hypothesis

Homework is defined as written/oral individual or group tasks assigned to students by the educator to be done out of school time with the purpose of getting prepared for a new learning material or reinforcing, expanding, practising or completing newly learned material (Corno, 1996: 27). To develop my argument I examined the following key assumptions in relation to homework.

1.1.3.1 It is assumed that homework provides academic benefit when utilised to strengthen the day's learning and when parents stress the value of homework and review their child's assignment. Therefore students should be given homework every day.

1.1.3.2 The second assumption states that the more accountable each student is in mastering the homework, the more likely they are to do homework with persistence, instead of stopping as soon as they hit any sort of roadblock.

1.1.3.3 The third assumption states that the more homework is designed to appeal to each student's' motivation, ie to use their abilities and to compensate for their weaknesses, the more likely students are to invest energy.

1.1.3.4 The fourth assumption is that all schools use the same teaching techniques therefore the administration of homework and the impact thereof is the same for all schools.

1.1.3.5 The fifth assumption is that conditions at homes are always favourable for doing homework and that achievement of disadvantage students is greater under conditions of material reward than verbal reward.

1.1.3.6 The last hypothesis states that all students, regardless of ability, receive the same homework assignments from educators and those educators are trained to administer and assess homework.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

South Africa is facing a huge challenge in providing quality education. This increases the demand for every stakeholder to be accountable and responsible in making sure that schools offer the best education possible for students. With this in mind, some academics believe that deserving students should not be excluded from homework assignments, as homework is an integral part of a child's education. As it is, South Africa is struggling to generate an economic growth rate to sustain all of its needs; this is largely due to the lack of relevant skills. According to the IMF (2015), currently South Africa's economy is growing at a very low rate; 0.7% in the first quarter of 2016 down from 1.3% in the second quarter of 2015. This is down from 1.5% in 2014 and 2.2% in 2013, according to the estimates of real gross domestic product (GDP) released by Stats SA. 'The pressure is with the education and training system, it must be designed to meet the workforces that are trained to be autonomous, inventive and reflective' (Mahomed, & Tyers, 1996 cited in Jansen, 1998). It is believed that the economy must grow at approximately 6% in order to create sufficient jobs and produce skilled labour to drastically reduce unemployment levels in the country, ie to absorb school leavers and the present unemployed (Jansen, 1998). In order to change this, the transformation of the education system is seen in the long term as being a step in the creation of growth. This would require a clear change in the culture and nature of the South African education system.

With the unemployment rate and skills shortages being the central point of discussion in South African education, and as the demand for accountability in schools increases, schools are increasingly required to implement and account for local changes and innovation, so schools take more and more responsibility for learner performance and progression. Thus

the imperative of using evidence as a basis for decision-making has increased. However, there is not much research that tells us about the utilisation of evidence. In the context of this study, homework is widely believed to improve learner performance but the evidence which established this relationship is inconsistent. Despite this inconsistency educators continue to use homework in schools.

1.3 Purpose Statement

Many countries acknowledge the significant contribution of education to their economic development. The success of students in schools is largely attributed to the policies of the department of education, yet educators as instructional conveyors are best placed to create a positive teaching and learning culture that promotes effective teaching and learning. The purpose of the study was to gather evidence which would enable us to make informed views about whether schools do use evidence to support the key decisions they make in relation to homework. Such information would help close the gap of our understanding in relation to how policies are implemented in schools. This report took a critical look at the idea of EBP and the ways in which it had been upheld and executed in the field of education. The study also intended to examine the role of homework and points out the strategies and mechanisms that can be used to help educators to master the overall administration of homework. Finally, the report tried to expand on and question the views about policy and practice as far as homework assignments are concerned.

1.4 Rationale

This study intended to find out what kinds of evidence educators/HoDs use to inform various types of decisions related to homework and where educators/HoDs find the information they use to make decisions on issues pertaining to the administering of homework. The report looked at how we should comprehend the role of (research) knowledge in education, providing special attention to the question of what kind of epistemology was most appropriate for educational practices informed by the outcomes of research. Considering the inconsistencies between homework and achievement, this study intended to establish where educators/HoDs obtained the evidence that supports their decisions to insist on giving learners homework. Considering there was very little empirical

data that demonstrated the extent of the utilisation of evidence around homework-based decisions in South African schools, the study responded to and addressed the need, noted by both proponents and detractors of homework, for greater empirical evidence of non-academic effects of homework. The expectation about the practical role of homework that is implanted in the idea of evidence-based research was also examined. This research study utilised the theory of EBP initially developed in the health sector which deals with issues of patient treatment and care. To investigate these issues, the study had these aims.

1.5 Aims of the Study

The main question of the study was to determine what role evidence played in the key policy and decisions schools made in the context of the homework policy and practice in schools. Considering there was very little empirical data that demonstrated the extent of the utilisation of evidence around homework-based decisions in South African schools, this study intended to establish what sources of evidence were available to schools to support decision-making around the key policy matters, perceptions, implementation, benefits and challenges associated with the applications of homework in school. This was achieved by discussing the key issues in as far as gathering evidence within which educators use to practise their day-to-day homework administration duties. The study also intended to demonstrate how the current status of homework assignments in education in South Africa is handled. In addition, the study aimed to determine if homework improves student learning and whether these can be relied on the entire year.

1.6 Key Research Questions

Main question

What role does evidence play in the key policy and practice decisions school make in the context of the homework policy and practice in schools?

Sub-questions

1. How do educators understand the meaning and purposes of homework?
2. Are the educators aware of the evidence that drives the decisions schools make about homework?

3. Where and how do educators obtain this evidence?
4. What challenges do educators face in administering homework in schools?
5. What conditions support or detract from the effective application of homework in schools?
6. How might schools be helped to have more productive homework policies and practices?

1.7 Outline of Chapters

This study is organised into six chapters.

Chapter 1 introduces the research report by outlining the background of the study (looking at the evidence for and against the use of homework in schools), the research statement, the aims, the purpose statement, the research questions, the rationale of the study and the limitations.

Chapter 2 is a review of related literature and locates the research within current debates concerning the role evidence plays in the key policy and practice decisions schools make in the context of the homework policy and practice in schools. Chapter 2 ends by outlining the analysis of the concepts and assumptions which underpin the data interpretation of this study.

Chapter 3 focuses on the research methodology used in this study in which an outline of the research procedures used in selecting the population sample and collecting the data. The chapter ends with an analysis of the data.

Chapter 4 provides insight into the research findings by presenting the research data.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings in relation to the research questions.

Chapter 6 concludes by providing a summary of the findings and implications/ recommendations in areas that may require further study.

1.8 Conclusion

There seem to be an identical understanding of homework in the light of most proponents of homework. The general understanding was that homework is any educational activity that educators give to students to do on their own outside of class, regularly and should supplement class work, however a balance is important as too little homework or no homework can deny a learner the opportunity for further development, too much homework can be frustrating and stressful. They also agreed that homework when designed and implemented properly is indeed a valuable tool for enforcing learning unfortunately homework is never used effectively. Detractors of homework on the other hand made strong arguments against homework; firstly, they claimed that homework propagated the disparity between literate and illiterate families. Secondly, they believed that for students who are academically struggling, homework does little to help them, resulting in homework being assigned as a punitive measure rather than being a reinforcing tool. Thirdly, homework marginalised economically disadvantaged students who find it difficult to complete homework tasks due to various environmental reasons.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the educator's understanding of the meaning, purpose, policy and nature of homework, and looks at the sources of evidence used to support decisions about homework. The purpose of this chapter is to review previous research on the topic and establish where the current research is located. This literature review will help unpack the key concepts and theory. The main argument of this research is that despite its adoption and application in schools, the evidence for the use of homework is hardly understood. "The review of literature establishes important links between existing knowledge and the research problem being investigated thus enhancing significance" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010: 73). The key issue here consists of conceptual discussion which makes up the key landmarks studies that relate to the utilisation of research evidence in schools. This conceptual discussion will seek to lay the foundation of the study and will attempt to inspire new ideas (Polit et al., 2004).

The literature review will be structured in the following way: it begins by exploring the notion of Evidence based practice; the notion and nature of homework and its importance for and against; research evidence; school improvement; the notion of EBP, its hierarchies and sources of evidence; change and change management; and the value of decision-making. It then summarises what we know about teacher utilisation of research to improve the administering of homework decisions and the use of evidence to maximise students' performance. It further looks at the barriers to the utilisation of evidence in schools.

2.1 Conceptual Framework

Conceptual framework is an analytic tool with context and variations used to organize ideas. This study intended to find out what kinds of evidence schools use to inform various types of decisions related to homework assignments. The study utilised the concept of EBP initially developed in the health sector, which deals with issues of patient treatment and care. Hargreaves (1995) argues that in medicine, professional decisions are always based on the

best possible available research to ensure that patients receive the most suitable treatment. There has been considerable success in medicine and even in agriculture in as far as the effectiveness of research and practice. It was achieved in medicine by acknowledging that treatment and care of patients has a high stake in understanding the reality that human lives can be lost if doctors and nurses fail to take evidence seriously. The question is, to what extent the way of doing things in medicine can be compared to the practice of education. Hargreaves (1995) argues that in the medical sector decisions, such as how much treatment must be prescribed for a particular illness is based on research evidence. Education as a profession is very important and cannot be endorsed by unfounded judgement, and this necessitates EBP. Does it make sense to compare the medical sector and education? It could be as it provides a larger pool of ideas, as not much research has been done in the education field.

EBP is a process that involves "the conscientious, explicit, judicious use of current, best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients" (Sackett, Rosenberg, Gray, Haynes & Richardson, 1996 cited in Florin et al., 2011). EBP is the use of findings from scientific research and other types of knowledge with research based to substantiate; it is to guide practice (Estabrooks, 1999). Sackett et al. (2000 cited in Florin et al., 2011) define it as the process whereby in cases of perceived uncertainty on appropriate care, the clinician defines a researchable question, seeks out relevant knowledge, critically appraises and compiles the identified knowledge, implements it in clinical practice, and evaluates the outcome. Its assumption is that activities of social practice should be guided by best empirical findings in the field.

EBP provides a scaffold to appreciate the role of research in educational practice that not only curbs the scope of decision-making to questions about efficiency and effectiveness, but also restricts the opportunities for involvement in educational decision-making. EBP seems to favour professions like medicine and agricultural science in which it is assumed that the only relevant research links with practice. Educators tend to use research evidence less when compared to other professionals, according to Latham and Ricklefs (1993) and Hannan et al. (2000).

EBP helps provide a framework for understanding the role of research in educational practice and how decision-making comes about. Page and Meerabeau (2004) enumerate that EBP is more transparent and answerable even on legal matters and is now used to promote universal learning across most professional careers. I therefore conclude that evidence helps with reflection; looking at what works and what did not work, what the data tells us about the areas of improvement and what should be done next. On the practice side, EBP in education seems to bind the opportunities for educational specialists to make such judgements in a way that is responsive to and relevant for their own contextualised settings.

Kemmis (2009) argues evidence seeks to assist experts to understand reality of things instead of only using their experiences. Richey and Cahill (2015) examine similarities in Kemmis' argument that they see EBP as one aspect that empowers and evaluates practices through standard guidelines. While they carefully analyse the importance of EBP, they also understand it as a planning tool to help plan and communicate the envisaged goal for any practice. Planning in this regard pertains to merging research and standards and with available data to inform practices. In the view of this, evidence also focuses on assessment and the appropriateness thereof and the goals to be reached.

2.1.1 Homework

Homework is defined as written/oral individual or group tasks assigned to students by the educator to be done out of school hours with the purpose of preparing for new learning material or reinforcing, expanding, practising, or completing newly learned material (Cooper & Roberston, 1989: 7; Corno, 1996: 27). According to Yücel (2004: 148 cited in Altun, 2008) "assignments are mental or physical tasks related to a particular topic or unit for students to cover". Yücel continues to elaborate that in a universal understanding, assignments provide instruction to continue outside of the classroom and are means of gaining new capability, knowledge, skills and benefit from the previous learning activities. According to La Conte (1981 cited in Sidhu et al., 2010), homework is defined as a set of tasks done out of class that are assigned to students as an extension of work done in class, while Cooper et al. (2006) define homework as tasks assigned by school educators meant to be carried out during non-contact time. In addition, according to Altun (2008) and Kohn (2006), homework

assignments assist students to understand what has been taught at school to improve achievement.

Historically, homework has been an important part of the South African educational system. The DoE (1998), notes that homework should be done to afford learners the opportunity to reinforce skills, knowledge and attitudes which have been taught at school. The DoE homework policy further states that the homework must be relevant and meaningful to learners. According to the DoE, homework has a benefit of developing a work ethic in the learner, ie too little homework or no homework can deny a learner these opportunities and too much homework can frustrate. The parent's duty is to monitor if homework is done at home, while the SMT ensures through organisation and supervision that learner's work is not unreasonably beyond their capacity and that learners are not deprived unduly of their free time to do other things. The national and provincial DoEs state exactly the same aims and objectives of homework.

The homework policy of a high school in Gauteng states that homework should be given regularly and should supplement class work (Cooper & Robertson, 1989: 7; Corno, 1996: 27). It continues to state that educators must ensure that the homework given is educationally sound and that the time allocation must be shared among the learning areas. The amount of homework allocated to students a week ranges from 3 to 12 hours. It further states that educators must check and assess all homework done. According to this school's homework policy, the purposes of homework are to consolidate and reinforce skills and understanding, extend school learning through additional reading, encourage students to develop confidence and self discipline and thus prepare for adult life, and support school/home relationship (Cooper & Robertson, 1989: 7; Corno, 1996: 27; Cooper & Valentine, 2001). On the other hand, educators in primary schools believe homework teaches learners how to manage their time. It might be true that less homework is given to primary school students, but the effect of homework assignment goes a long way in shaping the students' management skills (Muhlenbruck, Cooper, Nye, & Lindsey, 2000 cited in Altun, 2008; Cooper et al., 2006). Protheroe (2009) posit that homework has a long term benefit to students, increases better study habits, and most of all teaches students time-management and self-discipline.

In the light of this, Redding (2006 cited in Carr, 2013) also makes it clear that homework should aim at teaching students how to self regulate their lives; how to set goals; how to select appropriate learning strategies; monitor self-progress; and how to reflect on oneself. Ramdass and Zimmerman (2011) outline homework benefits as managing distractions and managing time. Most importantly, they state that for homework to be of value, the focus should not only be on setting a place for homework to be done, but on the amount of time spent and the completion thereof. Research by Cooper, Robinson and Patell (2006 cited in Langberg et al., 2010); Keith & Cool (1992); Keith et al. (1993); Paschal, Weinstein and Walberg (1984); and Carr et al. (2013) conclude that homework is an important factor that increases student achievement. The question thus remains, why does the school insist that students do homework? Is it conventional wisdom or is there a depth of evidence that schools use to take the decisions they do? On which evidence does this high school under study base its belief about homework?

A further research study done in Malaysia highlights that homework helps reinforce class work learning and also helps in teaching learners responsibility and self management (Muhlenbruck et al., 2000 cited in Altun, 2008). On the other hand, homework according to Fairbairn (1993) and Portier et al. (2013) is a way for schools to prove to parents that they are doing work and also helps in building relationship between school, educators and parents. Trussell and Dietz (2003) state that students' performance in tests increases as a result of homework done and assessments graded. Cooper et al. (2006) makes it clear that a student doing homework scores about 26% higher than one that does not do homework at all. In their survey, Cooper, Robinson and Patall (2006 cited in Langberg et al., 2010) found that the influence of homework is much more significant from grades 7 to 12. Xu and Wu (2013) concur that not only does homework help students achieve but it also helps expand their competence. Moreover, homework consolidates learning according to Coutts (2004). According to Langberg et al. (2010), both the amount of time spent on homework and the amount of homework completed are positively correlated with class grades and achievement test scores (Cooper & Robertson, 1989; Cooper et al. 1998).

Grodner and Rupp (2013) in their field experience study confirm that homework assignments provide students with more frequent indications of their performance during

the course of the year before embarking or facing end of the year exams. It gives an idea of what content they understand and what content they must still reinforce before exams or tests. The authors also content that homework provides students with an opportunity to learn from their homework mistakes before taking the tests/exams. Rogers et al. (2009) confirm in their study that homework helps in promoting family involvement in the education of children and plays a vital role in bringing together parents, the school and the children.

A study done by Fink and Nalvern (2001) declares that children from low-income homes increase their academic output when motivated and given symbolic rewards as opposed to verbal. Their survey showed that students who were given candies as motivation for doing homework improved, as compared to those who were given verbal praise. Guskey (2007) states for the sake of equity and fairness, learners must be given homework in different set-ups or venues to allow them to perform their duties independently. Homework and assessment are used to evaluate schools and students for the purposes of accountability. Homework is also a measure or an evaluation tool to judge the quality of a student's progress (Guskey, 2007). The author also maintains that if feedback is delayed then the formative value and the objective of improving results become difficult to obtain. McNary et al. (2005 cited in Allan, 2008) go as far as to suggest that homework becomes effective when it is assigned at the beginning of class/lesson with clear guidelines displayed on the board. In so doing, learners get to understand what is expected of them while still in class. In addition, they should even be given time to start doing the homework in class so the educator can monitor and see the intensity of understanding so assistance, if necessary, can be offered while they are in class. McNary et al. (2005 cited in Allan, 2008) feel homework must be discussed and assessed in class.

Each learner has a dissimilar, personal homework performance pattern consisting of a unique profile that is the driving force that influences conformity with and completion of homework tasks. Furthermore, some students have learning disabilities, for example distractibility, procrastination, need to be reminded, day-dreaming, problems in working alone etc, and this should be taken into account when homework is assigned. Homework, by definition, takes place without the supervision of an educator. While learners are part of a

class in school and learn in a certain way, usually determined by the educator, they have some choices when it comes to homework. They can decide whether or not to do the homework at all and how much time and effort to invest in doing the assigned tasks. This becomes a challenge to some. Similarly, research tells us that there is some value associated with homework, these include self-motivation, the use of strategies on how to complete homework, managing time, and goal-setting and self-control (shying away from distraction).

Conclusions can be drawn from what theorists say about homework: first, homework plays a significant part in students' daily routine and improves achievement; second, it is also obvious that not all educators give homework and not all students do homework that is given, which suggests there is always going to be a variation in the distribution of the end product of homework; third, most educators believe homework can be an important complement in school and in academic activities.

Turning our focus to the disadvantages of homework, according to Kohn (2006: 2), "there is no good evidence that homework produces better academic achievement". Sidhu et al. (2010) state that some schools in the UK and US are cutting down on homework given to learners and some schools are even looking into challenging the policy on homework to try and abolish it in the lower grades. This is as a result of some studies having proven that there is no corresponding improvement in learner achievement and doing homework. Kohn (2006); Bennet and Kalish (2006); and Kralouec and Buel (2000) argue that homework marginalises economically disadvantaged students who find it difficult to complete due to inequities of their home situations. They are also of the view that educators are not sufficiently adequate to create effective homework assignments; they claim that educators must be provided with the necessary tools and knowledge if homework is to be made effective. A study done by Cooper (1995 cited in Kohn, 2006) discovered that time spent on homework does not influence a student's achievement in tests. Besides the mostly spoken about positive, there are negative effects of homework that are only noticeable after some time. Cooper (1995 cited in Kohn, 2006) lists the following negative effects of homework assignments: loss of interest in academic stuff, physical and emotional fatigue, not having free time to spend either with family and friends or just time to yourself and community activities, parental interference, pressure to complete and perform well, confusion of

instructional techniques, cheating (copying from other students) and helping beyond tutoring. Not only does homework negatively affect the livelihood of students but also, according to Galloway, Conner and Pope (2013), the workload that comes with homework leads to sleep deprivation and other health problems. Students also described homework as the “main reason” preventing them from getting the recommended 9.25 hours of sleep each night.

There has been research done that shows that students' emotions are depressed when they are engaged in homework assignments (Leone & Richards, 1989). Some theorists even conclude that homework is more productive to students that are in secondary school than those in primary school. There is a negative relationship between homework and achievement (Kohn, 2006). The author notes that homework does little to help struggling students, adding that homework does little to enhance achievement when the duration is excessive. Children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) can be severely impacted by homework, as they often forget to do it or forget to hand it in once it is done, may fail to complete assignments, or complete assignments but forget to turn them in (Du Paul, 2007; Langberg, Epstein, Urbanowicz, Simon & Graham, 2008; Raggi & Chronis, 2006). Langberg et al. (2010) note that children with ADHD struggle when it comes to managing their lives, which in this the case of homework could be homework management, studying for tests etc. However, there is treatment for ADHD and the medication, according to Langberg et al. (2010), can improve the problem of inattention, and distractibility which are the causes of homework not being done or completed.

Further, Cooper and Valentine (2001) note that homework can heighten existing social inequities. Children from poorer homes will likely to have more difficulty completing assignments than their middle-class counterparts. Poorer children are more likely to work after school or may not have a quiet, well-lit place to do their assignments.

In concluding; this study corroborates what Cooper et al. (2006: xx) warned “too much homework may reduce its effectiveness, or even counter what is aimed at in as far as being productive”. Literature seem to suggest that more time spent on homework is connected with greater stress; bad for one’s health and less time for family, friends, and other extracurricular quests. Finally, some parents acknowledge that the purpose of homework is

to consolidate work done in class and see homework as a way to try and finish the curriculum that cannot be finished within the school time.

Table 1: Homework policies in South Africa

Name of policy	**Optional or compulsory**	**Number of times a week**	**Feed back**	**Parental involvement**	**Sources of homework**
National DoE policy	compulsory	Not stated	Not stated	yes	Research
Provincial policy	compulsory	Not stated	Not stated	yes	Implementers of national policy
District policy	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Implementers of province policy
Schools policy	compulsory	Grade 8: 3hrs/week Grade 9: 3hrs/week Grade 10: 6-8 hrs/week Grade 11: 8-12 hrs/week Grade 12: 8-12 hrs/week **NB: time is shared by all leaning areas**	Yes; for learners' growth and parents information	yes	Implementers of homework policies from national down to district but also incorporate with own research

Source: GDE Circular 79. Government Gazette 19640 (1998)

2.1.2 Evidence

The complexity of the word 'homework' and of education has compelled the use of research. These complexities introduce factors that determine that the required results are going to be achieved by the policies in place. The findings, reviews and the surveys around the evidence try to answer many questions that relate to homework (Cooper & Valentine, 2001). These questions may include how much time students should spend on homework or what type of assignment is beneficial, and suggestions can be made on how educators can be trained in the best way to assign homework. Many reviews suggest that homework has a positive effect on achievement (Cooper & Robertson, 1989: 7; Corno, 1996: 27; Cooper et al., 1998; Cooper et al., 2006 in Langberg et al., 2010). However, not all these reviews are easy to understand, as some empirical studies are not of sufficient quality to be reliable. For the purposes of this study, research evidence will seek to help educators improve their homework administration, highlight students' differences as being one reason homework is

not done, bring to light the homework influences, and lastly, examine how to involve all stakeholders in the administration of homework.

Evidence is data/information that can be used to support or authenticate and validate claims and arrive at decisions (Foskett et al., 2008). To develop an understanding of evidence, in the view of Spillane and Miele (2007), the following key assumptions were scanned in relation to evidence: first, policy-makers habitually work on the assumption that EBP should be a simple and straight forward process for school practitioners; second, judgement about the most appropriate course of action in a given educational milieu can be understood from relevant research findings (conversely, however, research findings merely inform practitioners about what the general activities are of the different type of decisions); third, the various research findings relevant to a particular educational decision will generally not reach a single and clear conclusion.

Phillips (2007) points out that evidence is not just information, facts or data; instead it is information chosen from the available stock and launched at a specific point in a dispute in order to convince the listeners. Different purposes call for different sources and types of evidence, which may be empirical, theoretical or experiential (Andrews et al., 2011). There is no one definition, but can be any kind of information that has been practically proven to contain facts in it while EBP can be an approach that helps leaders make decisions based on findings (Bryan et al., 2011). This is scientific research that makes sure studies help determine if practical work is probable.

Having said that, evidence can also be understood as something obvious (from experience) to data that has been thoroughly collected (Caitling, 2010). Caitling (2010) further states that, in general, evidence can be used to support a conclusion or used to prove that something is indeed true. Jack et al. (2010) concur that evidence is similar to results that have been collected and evaluated, and also involves report-backs as data. Not only is evidence important, but it seeks to assist experts to understand reality instead of using their experiences only, in other words it helps give explanation for practices (Kemmis, 2009). The author also notes that research-based evidence give rational and moral rule over their practice resulting in effective homework practices.

There has been an increase of Internet-based information sources which should lead to the use of research evidence in a generic sense. These have led to different information sites, which contain different studies such as how leadership and management and how homework assignments are managed, being developed. In order for assignments to be effective, research must inform decisions taken in regard to the administration of homework. The Internet is a powerful means to access sources – only a mouse click is needed to access information which in the past used to be very hard to find. However, educators need to differentiate between reliable and unreliable information sources (Sgouros & Martin, 2005 cited in Altun, 2008).

Evidence used in schools entails examining day-to-day practice; monitoring instructions and setting instructional priorities; and attending meetings. It is this kind of practice that new research evidence is used; it is interpreted and implemented, discredited or dismissed as irrelevant. Bourdieu (1988) describes practice as pattern of behaviour resulting from people's activities with each other and with social interaction. Putting research evidence into practice is a complicated exercise, as people will act in response to eventualities; once practice actually spreads the well-planned strategies in most cases turn out differently from what was originally planned. For example, there is enough evidence to show a link between homework and achievement (Cooper & Valentine, 2001), but there is still the challenge of students not doing homework and parents not being supportive. Research evidence done by Grodner and Rupp (2013) helps understand that homework provides students with many benefits, including better test performance, higher grades, and better time-management in their future careers. It also grants students who initially perform poorly the means of improving their learning, and hence pass the course. But on the contrary, I have not come across any evidence that proves students think and believe that time management is indeed one of the benefits of homework. With the way students perceive homework it will be difficult for students to even think positively about time management or even study skills being benefits of homework. Experts understood this better as a result of their research.

It is however of great concern when there is tension with scientific research, educational research, and educational tradition. But the questions that are never answered are, what practice ever works, and who should have a say in what exactly must be done? The

confusion is as a result of the educational expects interpreting new research in the light of their knowledge, beliefs and values.

Research evidence shows that regardless of a student's ability or prior coursework, academic achievement is positively related to homework completion (Keith & Cool, 1992; Cooper, Lindsey, Nye & Greathouse, 1998). And while most educators do not have a problem with homework administration, they are concerned about which research evidence is trustworthy and which is not to be trusted.

2.1.3 The nature of evidence

The nature and the use of research pull from many other evidence-related disciplines. According to McCurtin and Roddam (2012) EBP has improved and expanded the sources of knowledge. It has even addressed the probable questions of reliability of the evidence. In contrast, some professionals do not like EBP as they deem it a threat to their own practice. This, according to McCurtin and Roddam (2012), is because they do not use computerised databases. At the centre the quality of the evidence produced is the Randomised Control Trial (RCT). It is regarded the best because it an experimental research that is almost error free. Educational decisions should be based or informed by evidence (Patricio & Carneiro, 2012). Educators' or HoDs' decisions should not only be from their own experience but must also be based on scientific evidence in order to improve homework practices at schools.

There are many studies done on education in South Africa. It is important that the evidence collected is credible and relevant (Hemsley-Brown, 2004). As professionals, teacher should be able to make judgements based on the context of the school and the learners and on the value of the evidence. The world today is diverse and the education system is getting complicated, thus it is important that schools/educators use the current evidence. Patricio and Carneiro (2012) talk about the nature of evidence being reliable, valid and practically doable and appropriate. However, not only is the evidence expected to be valid, reliable and practically possible to implement, schools must have the resources to be able to support implementation. While there are still challenges in the depth of research productivity, there will be a continuous professional growth and improved quality.

2.1.4 School improvement

Hargreaves (1995: 41) states "School culture may be a cause or effect of school improvement". Hargreaves' statement does not imply that changing culture alone can

improve school performance, but most certainly a culture of utilising evidence can improve the quality of teaching and learning and subsequently improve students' achievement. A relationship between school culture and school improvement needs special attention if schools are to succeed in their goal of increasing students' achievement (Hargreaves, 1995). The utilisation of evidence in schools relies on the commitment of the educators and the HoDs to share the same vision, which according to (Gupta, 2011), is to provide direction and purpose. Hargreaves (1995) concurs that policies must be organised in a way that it makes provision for a shared understanding among educators, SMT and students.

Improving schools (students' achievement) also requires an approach to leadership that has to do with instructional leadership that focuses on direct influence of teachers on learners. Bush and Glover (2009) talk about instructional leadership being concerned with teaching and learning, which focuses on the practices that enhances students' achievement. These practices may include the administering of class work and homework that puts instructional leaders (educators, SMTs) at the centre of utilisation of evidence. To improve schools' and learners' achievement, other than subject content knowledge (SCK), educators must also have the knowledge of assessments in order for homework feedback to be productive. Leadership must be in a position to address questions like the purpose of homework and how educators must work to achieve this purpose. Christie (2008) talks about parental involvement and good teaching pedagogies, which are practices that help link a student's background knowledge and activities happening beyond the classroom. Xu (2009 cited in Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011) on the other hand, theorise that school improvement is not linked only to management but also to the completion of homework.

It is critical for any organisational structure to have its own custom, which is important in understanding evidence used in schools in as far as homework is concerned. These ways of going about doing business can be departmental meetings or parent-educator meetings which inform how well the institution is doing and the strategies working in classrooms that make a difference in the administration of homework. This is to check if there are no deviations from what evidence suggests. The leadership of the school will weigh in if research evidence supports curriculum reform or homework administration. Educators will evaluate whether the evidence before them can indeed be used for the homework purposes

in their context, or not if the research was conducted in a school with a different context from theirs. Spillane and Miele (2007) maintain that when evidence is constructed, context plays an important role as it helps people perceive and interpret the information.

In concluding; a principal is a leader and a manager of a school, s/he is expected to keep up with the ongoing issues and development of the school. It is therefore important that a principal together with the SMT are up to date with the current research in order to be in a better position to take reasonable decisions. In other words, in order for teaching and learning to improve, the SMT of a particular school must be in a position to teach and support educators and even the community in order to support the school to achieve its goals. This kind of management of the school will not only improve professional development but will help improve academic achievement.

2.1.5 Hierarchies of evidence

The hierarchy of evidence varies in ease of use from profession to profession. In the education sector most information is shared in workshops organised by the district branch of the DoE or by the provincial/national offices; this can also be called “cohort studies” as referred to by Roberts and Petticrew (2002). In making decisions nowadays it is much safer to base your decisions on research findings to avoid risks. The problem is then to locate that evidence in terms of validity and relevance (Roberts & Petticrew, 2002). The assumptions are that different professions use different hierarchies. There might be a lot of research on the effectiveness of homework in education, but research evidence cannot have the same value. Do educators and SMTs use RCT to decide if students should be given homework, or do they rely on conventional wisdom, or even from friends in cluster meetings? The following are the typologies of evidence as mentioned by Petticrew and Roberts (2002): (1) RCT with results and its effectiveness is empirically proven beyond reasonable doubt; (2) RCTs with non-definite results, ie theoretical; (3) cohort studies; (4) case-controlled studies that may be based on a case study of one entity/school; (5) cross-sectional surveys; and (6) case reports, that could be by work colleagues or from other schools or even HoDs from your school. It is possible as well that those teachers might be using their experiences to decide on homework assignments or even case study reports. It is difficult to apply hierarchy of evidence in education because, according to Hargreaves (1995), educators

hardly use evidenced-based research (EBR) for their practice. In a democratic country or society, the seriousness of education is always a topic for dialogue and discourse, but the purpose of education and what is educationally desirable is hardly ever given attention.

Evidence based education, according to Biesta (2007), is not sufficiently aware of the roles of norms and values in decision-making but also limits the judgement of experts on what is educationally enviable. This study tries to challenge the way in which EBR can be used to achieve effective educational practice. The other way of testing if evidence works in a particular situation is by trying it out, so it is often argued, that it is through experimental research, most notably in the form of RCT. Biesta, 2007: 2, tells us that one opponent of evidence-based education writes:

> The most important question for educational professionals is therefore not about the effectiveness of their actions but about the potential educational value of what they do, that is, about the educational desirability of the opportunities for learning that follow from their actions (and what should be prevented at all costs is the situation in which there is a performative contradiction between what they preach and what they practice).

Theory tells us that if practice is based on evidence, that evidence must come from experiments in real contexts. 'Evidence' from surveys or correlation research is not a basis for action.

2.1.6 Sources of evidence

General sources of evidence that are at a lower end of the hierarchy can be in a form of the Internet, books, news, images, videos and articles (Caitling, 2010). Some sources, according to Catling (2010), can be personal experience, which is at the low end of the hierarchy of evidence; and investigations (testing observations etc) that are part of RCT, which is at the top of the hierarchy of evidence list. If more than one source is used, then the possibility of drawing a better conclusion with regard to the information you looking for is good.

Sources should be relevant and credible to make sense. Spillane and Miele (2007) list the following sources (in no particular order) of evidence in education: evidence in the form of the curriculum related to the learning area; scientific research (published research reports); conference information; course evaluation feedback; class feedback (boredom);

professional reports or standardised test scores; educational material (textbooks); examination standards; HoDs, colleagues (word of mouth) from other schools; personal experience; social science research; demographic data; workshops organised by the district; and even DoE policies. These sources are central to the practices of teaching and learning. All of these sources may have an impact in educators' decisions around homework to an extent that that they are used by educators to justify or even to criticise traditional classroom practices. Books related to learning, as well as previously done projects and even reports on the same subject can also have an influence. Theorists suggest that the systematic review of RCT is the one on which most educators base their homework practices.

To sum up; educational agencies have tried to improve the use of EBP. Policy-makers have also tried to use policy in a bid to ensure that student achievement statistics serve as a fundamental source of evidence for decision-making bodies at school level. It must be noted, however, that social science research, which is one that policy-makers use in an educational context, offers very weak evidence with respect to what exactly happens in schools. Correspondingly, examining and evaluating these interpretations and sources is in most cases left to educators themselves to come up with suitable and convincing approaches to help with students' achievement.

2.1.7 Change management and decision-making

At the heart of EBP lies a concern for the effectiveness of school management as part of the education fraternity. Change management is defined as "the process of continually renewing organisations' direction, structure and capabilities to serve the ever changing of external and internal customers" (Moran & Brightman, 2001: 111 cited in Todnem By, 2005), while management is the implementation of school policies and the effective and efficient monitoring of the school's current activities (Bush & Glover, 2009: 10). The authors maintain that an organisation needs to have plans on where it is heading in the future, which means managerial skills are crucial requirements for SMT at schools and why the question of their involvement in decision-making around the administering and continuation of homework is being interrogated. Authors repeatedly stress the importance of schools to improve school performances (Christie, 2001; Gupta, 2011; Kotter, 2008). For

an organisation to change, developing strategies for change and innovation will have to be a priority for everyone in leadership. School leaders therefore need to develop themselves in as far as the use of evidence to improve homework practices. The need to empower staff with the skills relevant for their practice is of paramount importance; this could be achieved through assessment, policy on homework, and research and collaboration with others to enhance better understanding of social practice issues. Day, Harris and Hadfield (1999) acknowledge that in order to make decisions, leaders concerned should be aware of the range of sources that can help solve problems they face.

Change in an organisation is a precondition to help advance knowledge of custom of the institution; but in contrast to that, Flores-Kastanis (2009) states that in most cases organisations will always have a strong effect against the improvement of practices. To put it more simply, institutions provide the foundation of resistance to change. Sarason (1990 cited in Leithwood, 1992); Bolman and Deal (2002); and Fullan (2007) illustrate that organisational characteristics must include the traditions of the institution; the school's cultural characteristics must also add to the change improvement. Research shows that SMTs believe political and personal reasons prohibit them from seeking and using research evidence to support their decision-making. Political reasons were broadly those that relate to government pressure, and top-down decision-making (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2005).

Management should aim at putting processes in place that will engage students in the process of discovery, but also guide them to define the methods and evidence they use. According to Getz (2009), change is possible in leadership or in management through EBP that helps influence decisions around how better learning can be achieved. In addition, management also helps in creating an environment that paves the way for students to be responsible for their own learning. If the SMT can encourage educators to make use of research-based good practice it can augment the effectiveness of homework or schooling in general and can help put educators in the driving seat as far as making students make scholastic gains.

Most empirical studies suggest that users of research (leadership of organisations and experts within the same fraternity) do not see eye to eye with researchers because of their differences in professional objectives (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2005). According to a

review by Pham (1989 taken from Russo & Schoemaker, 1989) every good decision-maker must at some point face a situation where he will have to take decisions. Pham maintains that it is important to know the people around you who will be affected by the decisions you make. It is important though, Pham (1989) continues, to say that previous mistakes can be a lesson. For the value of decision-making, the evidence-informed practice (EIP) needs to be an approach to be used by leaders. Nutley (2010) maintains that the EIP approach is the one that helps people and organisations to make good decisions. This will then enable proper and constructive debates. Decision-making becomes valuable when it is for the good course of the company. There is, however, a question that is always asked: who is and who should be allowed to partake in decisions about what is educationally enviable? Decisions concerning homework communication practices should be vibrant and mutual practice involving the SMT, educators and families. Given that all these parties determine practices, it is important for all of them to make decisions collaboratively (Featherstone, 1985 cited in Nelson, 2002).

The value of decision-making is crucial in facilitating the effectiveness and the efficiency of homework. There seems to be a lot research that propels the decision-makers to take high stakes decisions about homework (Guskey, 2007). These multiple resources must be used in taking decisions to provide a comprehensive view of how the educators interpret substance. In addition, the use of many sources of evidence ensures users are responsible and accountable for the decisions they take. The use of multiple sources for decisions is to counter the potential short falls of evidence that may not be appropriate for taking particular decisions. Educators' perception of homework is a quick and highly proficient way of gathering information on student performance (Guskey, 2007).

Decision-making has never been an easy exercise, as it is always influenced by the context of the organisation, such as political, economical, socio-economical, technological, legal and environmental issues. It is about who the organisation serves and as leadership is the backbone of the structure of the organisation, it cannot be left out. Moreover, EBD in areas of homework is not collusive; Cooper and Valentine (2001) note that the policy-makers and the educational experts have observed researchers of homework question each other's findings, thus casting doubt on the entire homework research. This makes it impossible to

take decisions as those decisions or polices will be based on what experts themselves are sure of.

In concluding; it is widely known that since education is increasingly placed under inspection and educators are under more pressure than ever to produce results, decisions now require the integration of research evidence and good leadership. This is because decision-making should ultimately direct the efficient allocation of educational resources and the implementation thereof. Implementation in this case includes proper training for educators to be able to make decisions based on research and to access the resources needed to do so. It is also important that the education fraternity finds as many sources as possible to take decisions to reach the variety of goals that education aims to achieve. Not only that, but multiple resources give a rich collection of evidence for better decisions to be taken.

2.1.8 Barriers to the use of evidence

Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2005: 8) outline some barriers to the utilisation of research:

- the limited use of and inaccessibility of journals
- lack of encouragement given to journal distribution to users
- the absence of time and support to help potential users access research
- the lack of time to and problems accessing research, due to constant pressure to change within the teaching profession ("the relevant literature is not compiled in one place"; "implications for practice are not made clear", "statistical analyses are not understandable", and "research articles are not readily available")
- lack of exposure to research; relevance and fitness for purpose; and lack of encouragement or support.

Wilson et al. (2003); Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka (2005) and Hemsley-Brown and Sharp (2004) add the following to the list:

- research evidence is not readily available and accessible to everyone, it is unhelpful and to a large extent theoretical
- no practical applications of research and there is always the use of consultants either outside the education profession or use of people who have no idea of local context

- there is lack of collaboration between educators and researchers and there is just not enough material or resources to support the implementation of the idea of research utilisation

Findings from theorists conclude that the amount and the practicality of using research sources is always a hurdle to education practitioners (Cousins & Leithwood, 1993; Shkedi, 1998). Research conducted in Israel suggests that fewer educators turn to research to expand knowledge. The language used in the research evidence seems to be too complex and sometimes confusing to be practical. Finally, the research findings confirm that most teachers do research for academic study to support their individual learning.

A study done by Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2005) in England and in Israel concludes that at school level educators hardly do research to expand knowledge because they believe that educational research evidence is so vast that you do not know where to start. The authors also contend, based on their research, that educators say research evidence is neither relevant for the practice it is intended for, nor found in the one place. The most important barriers to the use of research is that there is a lack of interest or educators are just willing to change or use new ideas.

2.2 Analysis

Evidence seems to suggest that the available research seems to be irrelevant to users and the gap of understanding between users and the researchers has widened so there is a lack of access to research or EBR more especially in the South African context. What seem to be puzzling is that the goals between the users and researchers are different, making it difficult for them to connect. Biesta (2007) relates that the relevance of any EBR must not only be for the policy-makers, but also the research community, while Hemsley-Brown (2004) seems to think that the gap between the researchers and the users can be reduced. Time continues to be a problem, as it still remains insufficient for educators to read articles. Most theorists seem to agree that research needs to be adapted for a particular local practice context and if possible the research can be driven by people who are familiar with the context as part of developing sufficient integration (Nutley, 2010).

EBP suggests that a generally understood and supported theory should be encouraged. On the other hand, a barrier to research utilisation is not individual but institutional from a culture that does not allow research utilisation to be enforced (Hemsely-Brown & Sharp, 2004). A call from a strong leadership of an organisation is needed to encourage and to create an environment that will change the culture and instil one that relies heavily on EBR. The utilisation of evidence in schools relies on the commitment of the teachers and the SMT to share the same vision that, according to (Gupta, 2011), will provide direction and purpose. Some theorists see the presentation of language used in research findings difficult for educators to understand. Christie (2001) has emphasised the importance of a sense of agency and responsibility that must be shown by teachers and SMTs to help enhance school performance.

Homework, even though not administered productively, does remain an important part of learning and around the world the world it is taken as a learning tool for students (Sidhu et al., 2010). Arora, Rho and Masson (2013); Cooper and Robertson (1989); Cooper et al. (1998) concur that there is a positive correlation between homework and achievement. They further highlight that homework aligned to the requirements of the subject's goals renders improvement. With respect to the sources of evidence, Hemsley-Brown (2004) maintains that for sources to be credible, evidence must be obtained from more than one source. In as far as management is concerned, and in order for leaders to make decisions, the SMT must be sufficiently empowered in the areas in which the decisions will be taken (Day et al., 1999). The need to empower staff with the skills relevant for their practice, through assessment, policy on homework, research and collaboration with others to enhance better understanding of social practice issues, is of paramount importance. The world today is diverse and the education system is complicated, thus it is important that schools/teachers use the current evidence.

My review of previous researches and their influence on students both in primary and secondary school is only the tip of the iceberg of issues in as far as homework policies and practices are concerned. I have also tried to highlight what the literature says and suggests about homework and to put forward the advantages of homework, including that learning is not only supposed to happen at school but can happen anywhere. According to the

literature, homework teaches students self-management, responsibility, discipline and also helps define a student's temperament. Homework helps in informing parents what is happening in their children's education. Regarding the amount of homework given, literature tells us that primary school learners must be given less than secondary students.

Contrary to the benefits, homework can be detrimental, such as boredom and denying students free time to explore and participate in other social activities and acquire social life skills. Over and above that, homework can confuse students when parents give different instructions to those of educators. It is also true that students' achievements cannot only be attributed to homework completion or management, as there is still the possibility that students have other problems like reading skills which may be the reason why students do not do homework. Universally, the aim of homework assignments is to teach students independent learning, efficient planning, and individual thinking (Sgouros & Martin, 2005 cited in Altun, 2008).

2.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reviewed previous research on the topic and established where the current research is located. This literature review has helped unpack the key concepts and theory. The main argument of this research is that despite its wide adoption and application in schools, the evidence for the use of homework is hardly understood. "This interpretive review of literature", according to McMillan and Schumacher (2010: 73) "establishes important links between existing knowledge and the research problem being investigated, thus enhancing significance". In this literature review I have tried to shed light on the related literature that the person who reads this report will understand the significance of the problem.

There is a view that homework is indeed effective only if the following are taken into consideration: first, homework cannot be given on topics not having been taught; second, homework must be set at the appropriate level of difficulty; third, homework has the potential to be an extremely precious part of students' learning experience; and last, that it must connect with students' interest. Supporters of homework have indicated that homework improves achievement and also helps with time management, while detractors

of homework indicate “the stressful effects of homework have been grossly neglected in research on children and adolescents” (Galloway et al., 2013: 146). Literature suggests there is always a dispute that research evidence tries to close the gap between research and practice, yet there is, and I will argue in my conclusion, a need to establish the relationship between research, policy, and practice in order to facilitate the contestation and deliberations of the three.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter was to highlight the processes of doing research investigation and data collection. It also aimed at providing insight into the research methodology and research approach. A qualitative research approach was more appropriate in the study to suit the question: What role does evidence play in the key policy and practice decisions school make in the context of the homework policy and practice in schools? This qualitative study when used tends to seek deeper understanding of teacher practices in class, their experiences, their behaviour, and even their feelings (Cresswell, 2012) around the administering of homework assignments. This section explains research approaches, sampling and data analysis as well as the issues of ethical consideration, reliability and validity of data received. Extensive literature review was employed in this study. Section two of the chapter discusses the context in which this research is mapped by reviewing literature that looked at the extent of research utilisation. Particular focus is placed on how teachers obtain research evidence and how they ultimately use it to improve schools through learner achievements. I now focus on the research methodology and the approaches used to carry out this study.

3.1 Research Approach

Considering the nature of the research questions being addressed, a qualitative research methodology was deemed the most appropriate for this study because it was the best in answering research questions of this quality and it helped gain insight into the educator/HoD practices around school homework. It suggests that events, cases, processes, individuals and their behaviour are unique, context-dependent and cannot be generalised. It fully describes the cases at hand. It requires the researcher to become a research instrument suggesting that the researcher must be able to observe behaviour and interview people face to face, allowing the researcher to establish close contact with the participants (Cresswell, 2012). It emphasises understanding the social setting other than making predictions about the settings, thus seeking pluralism and complexity in those settings. It is

suitable to answer questions about the role evidence plays in the key policy and practice decisions schools make in the context of the homework policy and practice in schools.

It was helpful in identifying issues and factors around the topic and also allows investigation of different types of research questions. It helped study the behaviour (in-depth understanding) of educators as they administer homework and how that behaviour plays itself out. The data collected was direct from the source and a prospect of multiple perspectives was anticipated. Qualitative researchers get information directly from the source and, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2010: 322) "they do this by spending a considerable amount of time in direct interaction with the settings, participants and documents they are studying". It helps the researcher not to formulate hypotheses around the practices of educators in as far administering of homework, but instead, to inductively synthesise only after the gathering of data. It will help study participants' perspectives, feelings, thoughts, beliefs, ideals, and actions.

The evidence gathered from the educators and HoDs has probably helped me understand what educators think about research utilisation based on homework. Qualitative research is "any type of research that produces findings that are not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Corbin & Strauss, 2007: 10). Qualitative research, therefore, has the strength of allowing an in-depth understanding of social practice and this was achieved by analysing the participants' meaning of their situation and events and also helps refine concepts (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This method can also be used to obtain the most details about thought processes, feelings etc (Cresswell, 2012).

3.2 Research Design

A research design is a procedure that is used to conduct a particular study (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010). In order to establish educators' perceptions in as far as supporting decisions about homework is concerned, the following methods of collecting data were used.

3.2.1 Case study

“A case study is an in-depth analysis of a single entity/bounded system” (Cresswell, 2008 cited in McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). A case study method enabled the researcher to closely observe the data within a specific context (Zainal, 2007). S/he further states that case study explores and investigates real life phenomenon and context. According to Zainal (2007) advantages of case study are; first, the examination of data is most often conducted within the situation in which the activity takes place. Second, instrumental and collective procedures/approaches to case study allows for both qualitative and quantitative analyses of data. Third, the detailed accounts produced do not only describe the data in real life but also help explain the complexities of real life which may not be captured in the survey. Zainal, also highlights disadvantages of case study. First, case studies provide very little basis for scientific generalising since they use one case. Second, case studies in most cases lack rigidity and the tendency of researcher to have a biased interpretation of data. Third, case studies labelled as being too long and difficult to conduct and produce.

The case for this study was selected on the basis that it will provide insight into a specific theme of the research, as it investigated what evidence schools used to come to a conclusion that homework is productive. The investigation was done at the school at which the researcher is based and so gave a clear contextual understanding of conditions and the flexibility to return to the teachers for more information. The convenience also allowed the researcher to informally interview some of the teaching staff to make the investigation more comprehensive, or even become a pilot study.

3.3 Sampling

This research was conducted at a secondary school in Gauteng; 40 educators were recruited for the questionnaire. The selected educators represented certain types of characteristics and had different teaching/leading (comparative) styles. They (educators) were required to answer questionnaires to help establish views on their understanding of the meaning and purposes of homework. Purposeful sampling was used only in selecting the HoDs. This type of sampling involves the selection of participants with certain characteristics to provide the best information to address the purpose of the research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Robson (1993: 142 cited in Elo & Kyngas, 2008) also hold that "in purposive sampling, a sample is built up which enables the researcher to satisfy her specific needs in a project". Convenience sampling was also used, but it depended on the willingness and availability of the participants (Cresswell, 2012).

In addition to the questionnaire, interviews of two HoDs of difference learning areas (departments) were conducted to provide in-depth understanding and were also used to provide an overview from a leadership perspective. The researcher had hoped this would represent a "frequently used form of data collection with the researcher being able to assume different roles in the process" (Sprandley, 1980 cited in Creswell, 2012: 212). These carefully selected participants were instrumental in providing helpful information. A principal and one deputy principal were informally interviewed to provide an in-depth understanding from a leadership perspective. This informal set up allows the principal and the deputy principal to answer the questions freely and give more information than they would in an office/formal set up.

The semi-structured interview questions were phrased in such a way that they allowed individual responses. Semi-structured interviews are flexible and adaptable in that they "offer the possibility of modifying one's line of enquiry, following up interesting responses and investigating underlying motives" (Robson, 1993: 229). This implies that open-ended questions, fairly specific in intent, were used. Document analysis, where minutes of subject meetings chaired by the HoDs when discussing assessment (homework), were analysed.

3.4 Data Collection Strategies

Bell (2005) defines data gathering as a process of collecting information from a number of sources and the information is compared and contrasted so that a full and balanced study is produced. This study employed the following data gathering methods: questionnaires and Interviews (semi-structured). In the interview sessions the researcher took notes, which was fundamental since the topic is fairly complex. In order to get the best results from the interview sessions, the researcher elaborated on key concepts that required in-depth clarification. From time to time the researcher also gathered information by conducting non-participant kinds of observation. The researcher continually asked similar questions to

non-participants informally. This helped the researcher as it provided some knowledge to see things that participants were not aware of or things that the participants did not want to discuss. This process provided the researcher with some independence in the asking of the questions and also validated the data collected.

3.4.1 Interviews/Questionnaires

3.4.1.1 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with simple/standard questions were used. This kind of interview allowed the researcher as interviewer to have the freedom to ask follow-up questions based on the interviewee's response, it also allows for cover both factual and significance level. From time to time, in-depth interviews (open-ended) were employed to obtain information on how activities. A research instrument refers to what the researcher is going to use to collect data. Interviews were conducted to get greater depth on the behaviours of teachers as they employ the research utilisation (Cresswell, 2012). They were used to answer questions on what exactly informs teachers/HoDs to use the research for any decision-making in particular situations.

3.4.1.2 Questionnaires

The researcher chose the questionnaire because they are familiar to most people and save time. This method of collecting data is more objective and it easily quantified because usually there is no researcher as a middleman. The questionnaires that were used were designed in a way that would interest respondents and the layout of questions was in such a way that the questions and answer choices were precise (Burgess, 2003). These questions were easy to complete and required single responses. The questionnaires were delivered to the respondents personally. The responses helped the researcher draw conclusions.

3.4.2 Extensive literature review

The extensive literature review in this study involved drawing information from journals, books and the Internet. This is a form of secondary data where existing literature relevant to this study is critically evaluated. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) point out that secondary literature enables a critical assessment of the stature of knowledge. The reading of

secondary literature was essential in this research because it provided a background of how other authors think about the role of EBR in high schools. Interviewing participants is a source of primary data in that it elicits original or first-hand information, McMillan and Schumacher (2010: 322) note “in qualitative research, primary sources are the artefacts and individuals with whom the researcher has direct interaction”.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis is defined as the process of drawing or finding responses out of the data (Freeman, 1998). In analysing the data for this study, the first step was to make transcripts from the interviews. The interviews and the were transcribed verbatim in order to obtain all the details and information. The next step was to analyse the contents of the transcripts and the minutes, which involved “capturing and interpreting common-sense substantive meanings in the data” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003: 202). This enabled the researcher to make sense of and understand the data.

The third step involved selecting how much of the data counted as critical evidence. The researcher then engaged in a process of making justifiable choices about what to include and what to exclude. This process of analysis, for Walting and James (2002: 355), “involves weighing up the value of worth of specific things deciding whether or not they are likely to ‘count’ in the research”. This was followed by the forth step which involved coding, categorising, which generated themes that emerged in the interviews, minutes, and the questionnaire. In coming up with the themes the researcher used coding symbols to retrieve and organise similar ideas into categories. The identified categories were further organised and grouped into themes and into items of particular significance in relation to the research questions of the study.

3.6 Trustworthiness and Reliability

Reliability is the extent to which a measurement procedure yields the same result regardless of where and how it is carried out, and is the degree to which a test consistently measures whatever it measures (Berk, 1979: 460). The trustworthiness of qualitative research generally is achieved by applying the four aspects: (1) credibility, (2) transferability, (3) dependability, and (4) confirmability (Guba, 1981). In qualitative research such as this it is

difficult to address trustworthiness and reliability in its totality. The use of two types of sampling, namely purposive and random was applied to make sure the investigator was not biased, to get the best data possible, and because the selected group represents the larger group (Shenton, 2004). Human behaviour is never static, so in asking interview questions and probing (iterative questioning) enhances the reliability of the data and helps establish consistency of the data. Triangulation was also used in the collection of data. This was done to get information from different sources to allow the researcher to assess if the results correspond and also not to compromise the participant's professional judgement. Shenton (2004: 65) states "triangulation in interviews makes sure that participants' limitations are compensated and benefits are exploited". To make sure that the data collected was indeed trustworthy, data collection sessions involved only the participants that were genuinely willing, thus the data offered was free. Having more than 40 participants helped give the researcher a variety of answers.

Reliability means data is stable and consistent, while validity is the development of sound evidence to demonstrate that the data collected matches its proposed use (Cresswell, 2012). The information that the researcher got was valid and reliable as it was elicited first hand. To be able to validate the information, the researcher had to compare the findings with existing processes found in literature to check if it substantiates the theory (Cresswell, 2012). At some points the researcher had to refine his hypothesis to make sure he got the best data.

To ensure its trustworthiness, the report was then compared to other similar projects to check if there were similarities between them (Shenton, 2004). To maximise trustworthiness and reliability, a neutral role was shown right from the beginning to make sure that the participants felt free to honestly contribute their ideas without losing credibility with their principal. Bob (1999) concurs that an investigator needs to be responsive to the situation and must engage in change. The researcher made sure the questions were clear and the time allocated to conduct the research sufficient to ensure the participants were not nervous or fatigued which may have led to the questions being misinterpreted (Cresswell, 2012). In testing that the data is indeed reliable and trustworthy, the researcher used

alternative forms of data collection. This was done in conjunction with a pilot study conducted with the same participants.

3.7 Ethical Consideration

This research is qualitative in nature and involved interactive data collection methods. The researcher conducted interviews and questionnaires, which required him to adhere to research ethical guidelines where measures are put in place for the protection of the participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher was granted permission by Gauteng department of Education access the selected school in order to conduct the research. The ethics committee from the University of the Witwatersrand (Ethics number: 2015ECE008M) also gave the researcher the permission to conduct the research within the strict framework and standards set out by the committee. Participants were given assurance of confidentiality and anonymity and code names were used in place of the participants' real names or school. Sufficient details concerning the use of the collected data was provided to the participants and the transcripts were made available to the participants before analysis could be undertaken. The participants and respondent were assured that all the data collected was only for the research of the Master of Education degree. The researcher generated letters of consent in which participants agreed to their participation as interviewees. These letters explained to all respondents the nature, the objectives, the purpose and significance of the research, and the role they would play. Participants were assured that their participation is voluntary thus there were given the authority to discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefit. The data received is being kept safely in the Wits library and will be destroyed after three to five years from completion of project.

3.8 Limitations of Study

There are many limitations of this study.

First, the findings are applicable to the case study of the school at which the research was conducted. The study was conducted in only one Model C school and only reflects the perspectives of that school. It cannot be representative of the larger population of educators in Gauteng. Second, the results might not represent the finer details of the

research due to limited time; especially in getting all the educators ready for the writing of the questionnaire test. Time constraints put too much pressure on the participants that some might have not thought through their responses. Third, due to the fact that the context and conditions of any environment change, the results might not represent the current context of the school. Fourth, due to the fact that ethical consideration protects the rights of participants, the number of participants who agreed to take part was limited, thus results are based on fewer responses than initially anticipated. Fifth, participants were affected by a range of influences which led to the researcher having to deal not only with the question at hand but had to consider other variables, thus shifting the focus a little. Sixth, the availability of resources or literature on the evidence used to support decisions about homework in South Africa was the greatest limitation. Seventh, the educators might have been predisposed towards more favourable answers considering the position the researcher holds in the school. In addition, some educators might not have had the time to think thorough their answers. However, given the relatively small sample size for this educational context, the study does enough to highlight the situation of the phenomenon under study.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has heighted the research methodology used to conduct the research on the perception of educators in supporting the decisions they take in as far as homework is concerned. The chapter also explained why the qualitative method was used. It is thus assumed that the data collection methods used were sufficient for the research. The chapter also outlined the profiles of the participants involved in the study. The following chapter analyses the data and presents the findings.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

While the previous chapter outlined the research methodology used in data collection, this chapter focuses on analysing the data collected from the questionnaires and interview sessions. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section provides a description of the research participants; the second section is a detailed outline of how the data was prepared and analysed; while the third section is a presentation of the data. The school is situated in Benoni in the Gauteng province of South Africa. It has about 60 teachers and a population of 1 100 learners. Learners in the school come from the townships nearby as per the process of zoning. At the time of the study, most of the educators' teaching experience ranged between three and 35 years. In the last 15 years, the profile of the school has changed dramatically, in response to changes in the country's democratic vision. When the researcher first started teaching at the school, the learners were 80% white because of apartheid laws, and most of them lived in the town and surrounding suburbs in which the school is situated. With the demise of apartheid laws, the school started admitting learners of all races. At the time of the study, the school's population comprised 50% African learners from surrounding townships and suburbs, 45% Indian learners, and 5% coloured and white learners. The learners who came from surrounding towns spend up to two hours a day travelling to and from the school.

4.1 Information about Participants

The participants selected for this research are summarised in Table 2.

4.1.1 Profile of HoDs

Two HoDs, one female and one male, were interviewed. Both the HoDS averaged 23 years' experience. In as far as qualifications are concern, one had an Honours degree in English Language and the other one had a Higher Diploma in Education and an ACE certificate.

Table 2: Profile of HoDs

Participants	Highest qualification	Position at school A	Years of experience	Years in the school
HoD 1	BA	Head of Department (English)	24 years	24 years
HoD 2	HDE	Head of Department (Commercial subjects)	22 years	8 years

4.1.2 Profile of educators

Forty educators were given a questionnaire to complete. Of the 40 educators, only ten were males and the rest were females. The teaching experience ranged from one to 39 years. Most of the educators that participated were qualified with an average qualification being a four-year diploma (undergraduate degree).

Table 3: Profile of the educators

Respondents	Highest qualification	Position at school A	Years of experience
Educator 1	Bed	English educator	3 years
3 Educators	BSC	Maths educators	5, 14 and 25 years
2 Educators	Bed honours in Mathematics	Maths educator and Maths Literacy educator	4 and 31 years
Educator 4	Masters in Biology Studies	Life Science educator	8 years
Educator 5	Bed in English	English educator	1 year
Educator 6	BSC in Biology	Life Science and NS educator	8 years
Educator 7	Bed in Technical Studies	Technology and EGD educator	4 years
4 Educators	Bed honours in English	English educators	4, 8, 18 and 18 years
Educator 8	3-year diploma (Physical education)	Life Orientation	6 years

13 Educators	HDE	Two Accounting educators, two Maths educators, two History educators, Mechanical Technology educator, Afrikaans educator, Life Orientation educator, two Life Science educators, Business Studies educator, and Physical Science	20, 25, 12, 32, 35, 10, 35, 11, 22, 18, 23 and 36 years
Educator 4	Bachelor of Commerce and PGCE	Business Studies educator	9 years
Educator 8	Honours in Psychology	Life Orientation educator	31 years
Four Educators	Bed honours (History)	History, Social Sciences and Life Orientation educators	6, 11, 16 and 38 years
Two Educators	Med (Afrikaans)	Afrikaans educators	14 and 36 years
Educator 9	N6 Certificate in Electrical Engineering	Electrical Technology and Mathematics educator	16 years
Educator 10	HDE - Technika and ACE certificate	Technology and Life Orientation	39 years
Educator 11	Bed in Dietician	Consumer Studies	10 years
Educator 12	BSC	Physical Science educator	19 years

As Tables 2 and 3 show 42 respondents/participants involved in this study. Their working experience at the school ranged between three and 35 years. Most of the educators and HoDs were not at the school at the time the assessment/homework policy was adopted. Currently, all of the educators and HoDs have different yet important roles in as far as the implementation of the homework policy is concerned. HoD 1 was involved in the development of the homework policy of the school; HoD 2 is in the school leadership and her role was to oversee the implementation of this policy; and the rest are educators who teach different subjects, and the issue of homework touches them on a daily basis. In trying to unpack or in order to understand educators' perceptions of the evidence used to support decisions about homework, the two HoDs were interviewed first. The interview questions were concerned with how HoDs perceive the evidence used to support decisions about homework in their respective departments. Later, level 1 educators were given a questionnaire to complete. It was necessary that the individual expressions were obtained from the process of interviewing the HoDs were highlighted. Below are some examples of the struggles they face.

4.2 Presentation of Findings

This part of the data analysis focuses primarily on extracting information from the respondents as they responded to the interview questions and questionnaires that had the objective of answering the major research questions of this study. To distinguish between respondents, the following coding was used:

4.2.1 HoDs' responses

In response to the first question: **How do educators understand the meanings and purpose of homework?**, the HoD's answered:

HoD 1: *Homework is a practical aspect of taught concepts in the classroom. Its purpose is to reinforce the concepts taught and learners that complete homework excel and perform better than learners that do not do homework. Parents play a role in ensuring that homework is done and completed.*

HoD 2: *Homework is work completed by the learner preferably as individual work or the completion of activities not completed in class. It is reinforcement and application of concepts taught or learnt. Its advantage is that it improves learner achievement as the learner has time to assimilate the work and creates better understanding. Parents have a role to play as they are expected to encourage children to work independently and regularly.*

Comment: Both HoDs see homework as a reinforcement exercise. They are of the view that homework improves learner achievement and parents have an important role in ensuring that the learners complete the homework assignments. More importantly, they see homework as an extension and remediation work out of class.

When the participants were asked: **Are they aware of the evidence that drives the decisions school make about homework?**, the responses were:

HoD 1: *Learners who complete homework tend to perform better. Routine homework helps learners to establish a work ethic. Learners need to know whether the concept they have studied has been understood properly. When parents insist that the children do homework*

or study at homework, those children tend to achieve better than they would have if they did not complete the homework.

HoD 2: *The evidence is that learners perform generally better if they practised homework. Homework is given every day or at an educator's discretion. Learners were encouraged and took homework seriously if positive or negative feedback is given. There are parents' meetings where parents monitored learners' school work by sitting with them during homework.*

Comment: The two HoDs seem to agree that learners who do homework and those who complete it tend to perform better. Parents' involvement is of outmost importance. They see the feedback as vital to positively enforce the practice. Both HoDs believe that homework does play a significant role in the enhancement of learning and academic achievement and to the development of academic skills and responsibility.

When participants were asked: **Where and how do they obtain this evidence?**, the responses from HoDs were:

HoD 1: *They get evidence from the school's policy documents, from annual teaching plan, Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) and when parents sign learners' homework books and comment. Evidence is anecdotal and even historical.*

HoD 2: *They get the evidence from experience as learners are eager to contribute correct answers. They also gauge the time it takes an average learner to complete a task. Evidence about parental involvement is noticed when learners have better study routines which I can safely say it is from experience.*

Comment: It is evident that the two HoDs answered this question completely differently, with one HoD saying that the evidence used is obtained from experience, while the other HoD mentioned the DoE's policy documents and the school's policy documents as the main sources of the evidence used.

In response to the question: **What challenges do educators face in administering homework in schools?**, the responses were:

HoD 1: *Homework is never done or sometimes it is copied or even incomplete. Some learners have a poor attitude towards homework. Some of the challenges are that there is no support from parents, there is no interest shown by learners, they have no time to complete the homework assignments or sometimes they do not understand the work. Learners can be deterred from copying homework from Internet by being taught plagiarism policies. Learners can do homework beyond the responsibility they have at homes by having homework times at the end of the school day with teacher support.*

HoD 2: *It is time-consuming, feedback can also be time-consuming and sometimes the learners do not complete the work. So, this needs to be recorded and steps need to be put in place to encourage the learners to take part in homework. Parents are often not at home when the learner needs to do homework, so they do not provide the supervision and encouragement that needs to be provided. Another challenge is that work can be copied therefore homework assignments need to be set in a way that requires the learner to put into their experiences. Some homework assignments are difficult to access if it has been copied from others if it is correct but if the answers are wrong it is then easier to pick it up if they have copied from others. The amount of work given should not take the learner the amount of time to complete. If it is a large volume of work then the learner needs to be given sufficient time to complete.*

Comment: The two HoDs agree that an unfavourable home environment in terms of limited resources, time and lack of skills from parents or even lack of parental support are all challenges that teachers face when administering homework. They are also of the view that learners lack the will to do homework. Over and above this, a mere incompetence from the side of learners propels them to acquire the wrong skills thus affecting homework to be reproduced.

In response to the question: **What conditions support or detract from the effective application of homework in the schools**?, HoDs responses were:

HoD 1: *Learners learn little and perform poorly. Learners are becoming lazier; educators feel it is better not to give homework as a result of no support from management. Learners' lack of understanding of the concepts cannot be a condition that detracts them from performing*

homework assignments because homework is practice not about getting it correct but about learning through practice. Homework is a pre-test practice; consistency and assigned homework benefit learners in getting better results in a test. Learners' positive attitude towards homework helps them get merit awards and monitor badges. Clear communication between students, parents and teachers helps to better the outcome of homework outcome performance. Support from parents motivates learners and teachers to assist learners with academics beyond school hours.

HoD 2: *Learners do not do homework if they don't understand what is required of them. Sometimes they do not know how to start so they just don't do it. If there is no support at home they usually don't ask anyone else either. If leadership does not see value of homework then the learners will not do it since there will be no support for the teachers to implement it. Learners' lack of understanding can be a condition that detracts learners from doing homework assignments because learners don't like to struggle with homework so it appears difficult they will not complete. Learners' lack of interest can also result in them not completing homework because they do not get practice so their skills are not developed so their application is poor. Most skills need to be practised repeatedly in order for them to master. If learners see the purpose of the homework to be valid, they are more likely to do it. Positive attitude means the learner will try harder and probably means the learner will be successful at mastering the skills which makes work seem easier which contributes to the learners' positive attitude. If a learner knows that the parents are aware of what is expected of him, then in turn the parents encourage and assist in completing the necessary tasks. Support from parents helps learners develop a study routine and is easier for them to settle and do the work.*

Comment: It is clear that both HoDs see parental support as important in completing the homework assignments and if the leadership sees no value or do not assist teachers in administering the homework practice then the level 1 educators do not see any value thus end up not giving the homework. In answering the sub-question, Can student lack of understanding the concepts or lack of skills be a condition that can detract them from performing the homework tasks?, the HoDs differ as HoD 1 answers that homework is about learning through practice and is not about getting it correct or incorrect; HoD 2's response

was learners don't like to struggle with homework so if homework appears difficult they will not complete it.

In response to the question**: How might schools be helped to have more productive homework policies and practices?**, the responses from HoDs were:

HoD 1: *Educators must be better informed with regard to the effective homework practices as well as monitoring and administering of homework. The RCL must be taught to supervise not educators because educators re-teach homework the next day. Homework must be at home as it is deemed a learner initiative. Compulsory homework timetable can help to have productive homework practice and that can push parents to be more supportive and motivation.*

HoD 2: *Educators must be made aware of the productive homework activities and be able to feel the difference between the homework they also need to insist that their learners do it. Provide a venue for the learners to complete homework in an organised environment. Use senior learners to monitor the younger ones; start with voluntary then compulsory attendance once the learner has signed up. Learners must be encouraged and the ones that want to improve their marks must join. Learners might get into a routine of studying and completing their work. Learners sometimes say they do not do homework because they don't know where to start but if they feel that they have the skills they might attempt more readily.*

Comment: Both HoDs agree that educators must be made aware of all the homework practices; and provide a venue for the learners to complete homework in an organised environment. Lastly, they also propose that a compulsory timetable either at home or at school might be made available to try facilitating homework practice.

4.2.2 Educators' responses

Educators were given a questionnaire to complete. The questionnaire was designed to provide a profile of educators teaching at a high school, this questionnaire consisted of 38 behavioural statements that describe actions of educators in the administration of

homework. Educators were asked to consider each of the questions in term of their practice. Table 4 list the results.

Table 4: Results of survey

Statements	**Responses**					
How do educators understand the meaning and purpose of homework?						
	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Not sure**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**	**Total**
I see homework as a way of fostering responsibility in students	18 = 45%	21 = 53%	1 = 3%	0	0	0
Homework is an important vehicle for developing better study habits and self regulatory strategies	24 = 60%	13 = 33%	2 = 5%	1 = 3%	0	0
Homework helps develop learner understanding thus enhance student learning	19 = 48%	14 = 35%	5 = 13%	2 = 5%	0	0
I see homework as an extension of class work	18 = 45%	18 = 45%	2 = 5%	2 = 5%	0	0
Homework aims to teach children to think for themselves	23 = 58%	14 = 35%	1 = 3%	2 = 5%	0	0
Helps reinforce previously learnt skills	23 = 58%	15 = 38%	2 = 5%	0	0	0
Help reinforce poor lesson done in class	6 = 15%	9 = 23%	6 = 15%	14 = 35%	5 = 13%	0
To produce better academic achievements	22 = 55%	12 = 30%	4 = 10%	2 = 5%	0	0
To learn, revise and consolidate learning	23 = 58%	17 = 43%	0	0	0	0
To instil regular studying	22 = 55%	14 = 35%	3 = 8%	1 = 3%	0	0
The evidence for decisions about homework						
There is a national policy on homework we use to make our decisions on homework in this school	11 = 28%	5 = 13%	18 = 45%	4 = 10%	2 = 5%	0
There is a district policy on homework we use to make decisions about our homework practices	9 = 23%	4 = 10%	23 = 58%	4 = 10%	2 = 5%	0
There is a school policy we use to make our decisions on homework practices in this school	15 = 38%	16 = 40%	6 = 15%	2 = 5%	1 = 3%	0
There is a subject level policy we use to make decisions on homework practice in our school	15 = 38%	16 = 40%	4 = 10%	2 = 5%	3 = 8%	0
I just give homework based on my own personal beliefs	13 = 33%	10 = 25%	4 = 10%	6 = 15%	7 = 18%	0
Where and how do they obtain this evidence						
They get it from national policy in the SBA	3 = 8%	12 = 30%	18 = 45%	7 = 18%	0	0

assessment guidelines						
They obtain it from colleagues through informal consultations and associative behaviours	1 = 3%	17 = 43%	13 = 33%	9 = 23%	0	0
They obtain it from the district workshops during the subject-based training happening throughout the year	2 = 5%	18 = 45%	14 = 35%	6 = 15%	0	0
They get the evidence from books/handbooks/articles or even Internet	3 = 8%	21 = 53%	11 = 28%	4 = 10%	0	0
What challenges do educators face in administering homework in schools?						
Learners do not do homework	18 = 45%	16 = 40%	1 = 3%	4 = 10%	1 = 3%	0
Have a lot of other subjects to do homework for	6 = 15%	26 = 65%	1 = 3%	5 = 13%	2 = 5%	0
Feedback takes time thus compromising the day's lesson or educators fail to keep track of what they expect would happen	4 = 10%	17 = 43%	2 = 5%	13 = 33%	4 = 10%	0
Parents not being supportive	17 = 43%	16 = 40%	3 = 8%	4 = 10%	0	0
Learners copying from the Internet	15 = 38%	18 = 45%	4 = 10%	2 = 5%	1 = 3%	0
Learners do not have time to do homework because of home responsibilities	2 = 5%	14 = 35%	8 = 20%	12 = 30%	4 = 10%	0
Other reasons if any: Lack of interest and motivation, not realising the value of homework, homework is not a priority, some students cannot think for themselves, most learners are lazy and are spoon fed and the consequences that follow are not harsh as they always get away with it, some learners do not have enough time to do their homework because they leave it till late, some students have a poor work ethic, too much time wasted because there is no family structure and sometimes learners just choose not to do homework as they do not see the benefit of doing it.						
What conditions support or detract from the effective application of homework in schools?						
When homework policies are not primarily informed by evidence	3 = 8%	20 = 50%	15 = 38%	2 = 5%	0	0
Lack of leadership that values homework and support	6 = 15%	22 = 55%	5 = 13%	6 = 15%	0	1 = 3%
Lack of understanding concepts from students or lack of skills needed to perform the homework tasks	7 = 18%	25 = 63%	2 = 5%	6 = 15%	0	0
Lack of academic and parental support	12 = 30%	21 = 53%	2 = 5%	5 = 13%	0	0
Insufficient time (wanting to spend more time with friends)	15 = 38%	23 = 58%	0	2 = 5%	0	0
Clear communication between student, educator and parents about intended benefit of homework	18 = 45%	18 = 45%	4 = 10%	0	0	0
Formulating school homework policies that are in partnership with community	9 = 23%	16 = 40%	12 = 30%	3 = 8%	0	0

Support from parents (provide mechanism of homework practice)	21 = 53%	16 = 40%	2 = 5%	1 = 3%	0	0
Consistency between purpose of homework and assigned homework task	18 = 45%	18 = 45%	3 = 8%	1 = 3%	0	0
Students' positive attitude towards homework	21 = 53%	15 = 38%	2 = 5%	1 = 3%	0	0
How might schools be helped to have more productive homework policy practices?						
Schools be encouraged to use online homework technique	7 = 18%	18 = 45%	8 = 20%	5 = 13%	2 = 5%	0
Department must help train educators to be masters of their learning areas	11 = 28%	19 = 48%	6 = 15%	4 = 10%	0	0
Schools be helped with and be forced to have homework timetable	5 = 13%	11 = 28%	6 = 15%	17 = 43%	1 = 3%	0
Schools be helped to start a homework club (students do homework afterschool under supervision from educator)	9 = 23%	18 = 45%	6 = 15%	6 = 15%	1 = 3%	0
Intervention approach to help enforce skills needed to perform homework	10 = 25%	25 = 63%	4 = 10%	1 = 3%	0	0
Schools must be helped with issues of assessment of homework – teachers must be trained on how to assess homework	6 = 15%	20 = 50%	4 = 10%	8 = 20%	2 = 5%	0

NB: *some responses could not be precisely reproduced. Total respondents (40 out of 40 surveys distributed)*

When asked **how educators understand about the meanings and purposes of home work**, 90% of the respondents agree that homework is seen as a way of fostering responsibilities in students. The respondents are of the view that homework is also an important vehicle for developing better study habits and self-regulatory strategies. One educator even commented "*we all need to take responsibility when it comes to homework*". The responses indicate that the educators are aware of what homework is aiming to teach the learners. It is also evident from the table that the educators truly believe that homework aims to produce great academic achievement and consolidates learning and even a revision of work done in class. Educators are however adamant that homework does not help reinforce poor lessons done in class; about 48% disagree while 15% of the respondents were not sure. The information gathered here suggests that homework is about learning, revising, and reinforcing previously learnt skills.

When educators were asked **about the understanding of the evidence for decisions about homework**, 45% of the respondents were not sure of what they use to make decisions and they are also not sure whether there is a national policy on homework that schools use; 15% of the participants do not agree that there is anything called a national policy on homework; 18% though were certain that they give homework based on personal beliefs. The table reveals that 78% say they however use a school policy to make decisions about homework and many educators believe that homework does play a significant role in the enhancement of learning and academic achievement and to the development of academic skills and responsibility.

When respondents were asked **how and where do they get the evidence they use**, 18% of the respondents say they never use the national policy on School Based Assessment Guidelines, while 45% were not sure where exactly they get the evidence from. About 46% of the participants state that they get the evidence from colleagues through informal consultations and associative behaviours; 50% of them said they get the evidence from the district-organised professional development workshops that happen throughout the year, while 35% of them are just not sure if they obtain the evidence from the workshop. Only 15% disagree that they get the evidence from the workshops. More than 60% of the participants maintain that that they obtain their evidence from books, the Internet or even articles; 28% say they are not sure if books, articles and even the Internet were their source of evidence.

In response to the question about **the challenges that educators face in administering** the homework in schools, 85% of the respondents agreed that learners just do not do homework. Only 3% are not sure if learners do or do not do homework, which gives an indication that those educators do not give homework at all; 13% of the respondents say learners do homework; and 80% of the educators say that learners do not do homework because they do not have enough time. A maths teacher commented *"In maths and science each time a problem is done another concept is learnt in a different way. The children I taught who did exceptionally well, were those who did each problem five times and this can only be done as homework. This proves that homework is valuable. A teacher can teach until they are blue in the face but a child only starts to really understand when they thrash the*

problem themselves. This is how I learnt and I did not have a teacher to help me. Only the relevant books were available not even the Internet. These days the children have all this and still they don't want to do homework."

4.3 Coding and Categorisation

In order to prepare and organise the data for analysis, a system of code-category-theme was used. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010) data coding is about classifying small segments of data that has a meaning and can stand alone while the categories are segments that cannot exist separately from each other and are comprised of a group of codes. They (categories) are a set entities regarded as having particular shared characteristics. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) further explain a theme as the core idea or an essential meaning of a literary work that may be stated directly or indirectly. All the transcripts from the interview sessions and from the questionnaire test were analysed to come up with codes, categories and themes that emerged from the data. This process identifies ideas, concepts, behaviours and themes that are typically related to the research questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Table 5 shows all the codes, categories and themes that emerged from the data.

Table 5: Codes, categories and themes emerging from the data

Themes	Categories	Codes (in full)
Improve achievement	- reinforce understanding - improve achievement - self regulation	- reinforce concepts and learnt skills - revision of taught concepts - individual work - assimilate work - opportunity for learners o work independently - improves performance and understanding - fosters responsibility - instil regular studying - helps learners think for themselves - it is an extension of class work
Source of evidence	- policy documents - experience - cluster meetings	- school policy booklet - annual teaching plan - work schedule - CAPS policy document - experience - get from research - get from colleagues
Implementation challenges	- lack of will and support - lack of understanding of concept	- lack of leadership support - poor attitude - assignment gets copied

	- lack interest	- feedback is time consuming - no supervision - home context - laziness - lack of conceptual understanding - lack encouragement - lack initiative
Homework solutions	- prioritise feedback - intensify development	- online homework technique - train educators - compulsory homework timetable - homework club - prioritise homework assessment - intervention approach - community involvement

4.4 Conclusion

Most educators claim that support from the DoE in as far as dealing with homework issues is not encouraging. They said that in the current year, all cluster meetings and department training never once showed an interest in how to deal with homework issues. To make matters worse, notifications for the workshops were only sent a day before the workshop, which of course some teachers did not attend. The people facilitating the workshops are either not prepared or lack the skills needed to facilitate the content at hand. They (facilitators) never display any kind of insight into the content they are trying to convey and to make things worse; they are unable to address the questions posed to them. During the period of interviews the researcher was continually made aware of the fact that the DoE is disorganised and the people facilitating are political appointees that have little qualifications and skills for the positions they occupy.

Many of the educators' responses were not in line with what the researcher needed to get out of them. At one point, their focus was on the meaning of the questions and sometimes they would go to the researcher to explain exactly the meaning and the purpose of homework. Most educators cited that the national policies as their main source of evidence. Guskey (2007) attests to the fact that policy-makers at national level generalise when formulating assessment policies because they are easy to implement and results are easily seen. This means there seems to be gap between policies and practice in as far as homework practice is concerned. It was clear that most educators do see homework as a

practice that improves achievement. Research done by Bakula (2010) concludes that homework does improve student learning and also allows students to see their deficiency.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF EMERGING THEMES

5.0 Introduction

Chapter 4 presented data that emerged from the interview and questionnaire sessions. It also identified the themes that came out of the data at hand. This chapter will now turn to a discussion or interpretation of the findings in relation to the reviewed literature and the theoretical framework of this study. Interpretation of findings in qualitative research involves identifying the patterns, links and making sense of the data. "A pattern is the relationship between categories" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010: 378). This chapter will include: a review of the major findings and how the research questions were addressed; and personal reflections of the researcher about the meaning and implications of the data compared and contrasted with the literature and the theoretical framework. A process of triangulation will come into effect again; this according to McMillan and Schumacher (2010) is the cross-justification of the data sources, collection strategies and the theoretical design (coming together of the findings). These findings aim at establishing whether educators understand the role that evidence plays in the key policy and practice decisions schools make in the context of the homework policy and practice. I argue that despite homework adoption and application in schools, the justification for its use is hardly understood. Its application in schools seems to be based on anecdotal evidence. In the South African context there are numerous problems associated with its practice.

Working through the data; four themes emerged to try an answer the main question, what role does evidence play in the key policy and practice decisions school make in the context of the homework policy and practice in schools? The facts and views of the respondents appeared to be common with most of the responses and helped the researcher to have an overview understanding of why educators give/do not give homework, why they assess/do not assess or give feedback and even why learners must be helped/not helped with homework. I now discuss the findings.

Themes that emerged:

- Improve achievement
- Source of evidence
- Implementation challenges
- Homework solutions.

5.1 Discussion of Themes

5.1.1 Improve achievement

According to La Conte (1981), homework is out-of-class tasks assigned to students as an extension or elaboration of class work. Findings from this research identify homework as a means of improving the students' results no matter what the costs. Most educators believe that homework is revision, extension, and remediation of work performed by learners away from the classroom and without supervision from educator. One HoD said "*Homework is necessary to reinforce concepts and skills needed for long term memory acquisition of concepts*". In order for learners to achieve higher grades parents should have a supporting or supervisory role to reinforce the impression of the need and positive benefit of homework, but they may replace the learning process of the child and this will be detrimental. The results show that educators understand the purpose of homework as to expand the knowledge base of the learner through research for future work. Warner (2001 cited in Sternburg & Grigorenko, 2013) adds that homework has been and still is being used to give more time to students to improve their self-management skills. On the other hand, some teachers see homework as a proof that schools are doing their job more so than being a beneficial practice that helps improve learner achievement.

It is however of paramount importance to note that there are 'success' stories when homework is administered correctly. Homework in itself is not a straight forward practice, for example, the amount assigned, where it will be done, will there be feedback or not etc. Homework not only reinforces what has been learnt during the day but also helps in shaping attitudes and habits that lead to triumphant future learning. The research findings show that the school's SMT, in the light of this, has made noteworthy efforts to promote the administration of homework. The findings also show there are plans to consider compulsory homework timetables that will be in effect only afterschool, but at school. The school has

assigned the responsibility of the development of the administration of homework and invited educators to also commit themselves to the development of the efficiency of the process. This initiative has been done in a way that it benefits all subjects. Goldstein and Woodhouse (2000) observe that different interests give different emphases to various aspects of the policy. Some educators in the study acknowledge that they give homework not for achievement of higher grades but because the school policy and the national policy require them to do so. The findings also reveal that because the curriculum (more especially the CAPS) is so overwhelming, homework should only be done during the assigned time.

5.1.2 The nature of evidence resources

General sources of evidence at a lower end of the hierarchy can be in a form of Internet, books, news, images, videos and articles (Caitling, 2010). Some participants maintained that the evidence used was obtained from experience and through informal conversations with colleagues, while others mentioned the DoE's and the school's policy documents as the main sources of the evidence used. Some sources, according to Caitling (2010), could be personal experience (still at the low end of the hierarchy of evidence); and investigations (testing observations etc) that are part of RCT and which is at the top of the hierarchy of evidence list. Personal reflections and perspectives seem to be the main source of evidence, according to educators surveyed. Louis (1996 cited in Wang et al., 2010) reveals that more theories on research utilisation in the milieu of educational improvement are required and concludes that there is not enough research evidence to explain what goes on when it comes to the distribution and use of knowledge. However, the literature claims that few educators use educational research results because they believe it fails to consider exactly what happens in the classroom, focusing instead on statistics (Bracey, 1989).

In education, evidence can be based on DoE policies, curriculum related to the learning area, or from HoDs and colleagues sharing ideas. From personal experience, creative arguments during organised DoE workshops offer different and valuable perspectives. Books related to the learning can also have an influence as well as previously done projects and reports on the same subject. All these sources may have an impact on teachers' decisions around homework. So it appears that in most cases more than one source is used, and as

long as all sources are relevant and credible, there is the possibility of drawing a better conclusion regarding homework policies and practice.

5.1.3 Implementation challenges

Debates around the issue of homework have been going on for some time. Some theorists give attention to the fact that there are negative connotations of doing homework. These findings were corroborated by some educators in their questionnaire and they even suggested that because students just do not do homework it would be better if it was not given at all. In addition, some educators felt that because of the hype around some subjects, students tend to do those and not others. This is rather an interesting finding. This research found that there are several factors that make it difficult to implement or administer homework.

There is no doubt that homework contributes to the achievement of academic knowledge, skills and even self-discipline and responsibility (Cooper et al., 2006) and remains an enveloping practice used throughout the world (Peng et al., 2010). However, according to this study homework incompletion rates are high and are thought to be due to poor organisational skill, inefficient time-use, external or internal distraction, or assignments viewed by students as not meaningful or enjoyable (Belcher & Macari, 1999; Xu, 2004 cited in Peng et al., 2010). The high school at which the study was based comprises more than 50% of African learners and shows that the rate at which homework is done at that school may be affected. Xu (2009) argues that students from urban areas are better at time-management and self discipline than those in rural areas. Chan and McNeal (2006 cited in Peng et al., 2010) concur that students from urban areas spend a lot of time doing homework than those in rural areas and so is taking homework seriously. The data reveals that the following factors contributed to the failure of the homework policy implementation and practice.

5.1.3.1 Lack of academic and parental support

The school's homework policy made it difficult for the role players to initiate its implementation. The implementation plan is not supported by every stakeholder. The policy document explicitly states that "homework should be instituted to afford learners the

opportunity to reinforce skills, knowledge and attitudes which have been taught at school". The homework policy continues to say that homework must be relevant and meaningful to learners. Educators in this school complain that homework is never done or sometimes it is copied or even incomplete. Some of the learners have a poor attitude towards homework. Some of the challenges are that there is no support from parents, there is no interest shown by learners, they have no time to complete the homework assignments or sometimes they do not understand the work. Learners can be deterred from copying homework from the Internet by being taught plagiarism policies. Learners can do homework beyond the responsibility they have at homes by having homework times at the end of the school day with teacher support.

The role of the educational professionals (educators) in this process therefore is not to translate general rules into particular lines of action, but to develop the learner. Parents are expected to support their students with homework but acknowledge that their role will be less as students become more accountable and more independent. Parents should make sure they provide a suitable environment for their children to work or do homework. The survey reveals that parents at the school are not entirely supportive. Some support systems that allow parents to be part of a programme that control the administration of homework but say its effectiveness is not noticed. This is evident with the number of learners who never do homework even when parents have an academic background. The survey indicates that parents do not create favourable home environments, ie students are not supported with homework resources. Encouragement to meet homework deadlines and motivating the value of homework should be a priority for parents.. Parents are expected to check for homework given every day. Professionals are expected to mark the homework regularly or within a reasonable time. If homework is too much, students should be afforded enough time to complete it over a few days. Educators should also afford students the opportunity to study for tests not only to pile them with homework assignments. Last, homework may never be used as a form of reprimanding students. Parents must be included in programmes that are designed by the school to encourage learners to do the homework. At school level it is always difficult to administer homework because of the large numbers of students. The

challenge, however, is that for parents to be effective in assisting with homework, they themselves should be trained (Hong et al., 2004).

5.1.3.2 Lack of conceptual knowledge and skills

"*Learners do not do homework if they don't understand what is required of them*," one HoD commented. The survey shows that most educators feel that students do not complete their homework because they do not know how to start so they just do not do it. If there is no support at home they usually do not ask anyone else either. If leadership does not see the value of homework then the learners will not do it since there will be no support for the teachers to implement it. Learners' lack of understanding can be a condition that detracts them from doing homework assignments. They do not like to struggle and if the homework appears difficult they will not complete it. The lack of skills and knowledge of concepts will completely undermine the process of giving homework.

Homework is composed almost entirely upon the rehearsal of skills and the use of concepts to gain further knowledge and complete tasks. Students never do homework when they see it as irrelevant (Bacon, Chovelak & Wanic, 1998 cited in Peng et al., 2010). The evidence from the participants suggests that homework should make sense or must be relevant to the students and should also test their creative abilities. Vygotsky talks about ZPD as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peer" (Huitt & Hummel, 1998: 30). This is to say that students should be able to solve tasks in homework set by educators, and students should be able to tackle tasks on their own with a little push.

Educators are supposed to provide quality homework that does not bore students, Educators therefore can help students not only complete assignments but generate good quality homework (Peng et al., 2010). Literature reveals undoubtedly that lack of interest or negative attitudes toward homework may come about when homework given to students does not communicate to them or their level of understanding is not challenging. Alternatively, involving students in choosing the standard of homework given to them can be well thought-out. It is recommended that homework given to students must be context

relevant. Hong et al. (2004) suggest that a hands-on and preventive approach to homework intervention might include school counsellors providing classroom guidance. The authors add that school counsellors must also do presentations that are designed to address the relationship between homework and success in school.

5.1.3.3 Lack of interest

The lack of interest from the students was another huge set-back that led to the homework policy goals not being realised. As was highlighted by the respondents, most students did not bother doing homework because they lacked commitment to taking their studies seriously, and thus compromising the implementation of homework policy. For students, homework becomes more of a curse than a means of achievement. Interest can be a negative modifier for homework, but can be overcome by redefining homework as something worthwhile or 'fun'. Eventually, the learner should do self-sufficient learning and to overcome the interest barrier supply self-created goals and needs for homework. Educators also pointed out that sometimes students refuse to do homework not because they are lazy or uncooperative and lack interest but because they lack the writing and reading skills required, which Margolis and McCabe (1997) call "reading and writing disabilities". A good number of learners, according to Barkley (1997), are those with ADHD and who tend to resist efforts to try and help them; in most cases confrontations between an educator and the student happen.

5.1.4 Homework solutions

The study shows that getting learners to do homework can be a daunting task. Educators continually, at the start of every period, find that most learners had not done homework, for several reasons. Various studies on homework have found that homework completion is entirely related to feedback of the teacher, family background of the learner, and support and even homework overload. The data collected found the following suggestions helpful in the administration of homework.

5.1.4.1 Online homework technique

It is well known, and even at some point contested, that homework contributes to more effective knowledge enhancement and active participation in learners. In the 21st century there is increasing pressure for scholars to use computers or technology, more especially the Internet, to help do their homework. Even though using computers is sometimes complicated and unfamiliar to most, parents do feel that it is beneficial in the 21st century (Portier et al., 2013). Not only do students get motivated to do homework, but it has also been claimed that online homework assignments increase student interest in school, lessons and assignments. With the assertion that students' negative attitudes towards homework may sometimes affect their learning, technology offers a solution by enabling easier access to information resources, making instructions less complicated and homework less boring, and by helping students do the assignments in relatively shorter periods of time (Altun, 2008). In their study, Cooper et al. (2006) state that most relatives do not understand the assignments of their children and they need whatever help and support they can get.

Across the educational spectrum doing homework online is recommended. Developers of the online homework system claim that online homework provides exclusive advantages over traditional homework (Doorn, Jansen & O'Brien, 2010). This is to say, they ask questions that need research on the Internet. Additionally, Doorn et al. (2010) make it clear that the move towards online homework has seen even the textbook publishers developing electronic textbooks which also make it easier for educators to post notes, handouts, and other course materials in addition to delivering online assignments, and exams. Not only does online homework help in giving automatic feedback and accessibility to as many students as possible, online systems also allow each student to get different versions of various questions or interchanging sets of questions covering the same topics.

Recent research by Kennelly, Considine and Flannery (2011 cited in Grodner & Rupp, 2013) found that online and article-based homework assignments are similarly effective. The benefit of this is that the chance of students copying answers becomes less regardless of the kind of homework, ie group work or individual. Different versions of online homework questions may increase study time spent on the questions, thus enhancing student

understanding of course material; 63% of educators see online homework as an important practice that can help grab the attention of many learners. Students' technical skills will improve as a result of the continued use of computers, and the Internet in particular. In as far as online homework techniques, educators need to be trained in more efficient service delivery of homework as this could result to some degree in overcoming socio-cultural barriers and the element of educational inclusion. With this in mind the online homework assignments in most learning areas might involve graphs, pictures and even diagrams, which appeals to visual learners as well to mention but a few.

Researching or doing online assignments is important for education and to improve students' achievement and those sites must be controlled and be on educational systems. The use and the dangers of online homework assignments cannot be ignored and ethically it can cause problems for parents, educational experts, and educators. Findings done by Altun (2008) show that 70% of students had positive attitudes towards online assignments. Males tend to use it more effectively and practically than females, however, in terms of ethical issues female students are more careful. A parent's academic background seems to have an effect on a student's attitudes in terms of feasibility and ethics. Furthermore, the differences between, grades/levels, and age, had an effect on the attitudes towards the use of online homework sites. Finally, in general the use of homework technology seems to have a positive impact on students' attitudes and achievements.

Supporters of homework seem to be adamant that homework assignments increase student motivation and academic achievement. Students using online homework sites at home should do their assignments under the supervision of parents. Information in these different sites is immeasurable and there is freedom of choice on the site, it is obvious that students may be led to unrelated sites and may show preference towards unethical behaviours in order to gain more time for leisure activities (Altun, 2008). Homework assignment sites should take into consideration all these possibilities. As much as technology promotes amenities for education, improves educator instruction, and increases learner motivation, it should be used appropriately and the assignment process should be observed.

5.1.4.2 Educator development

Educator training is an essential aspect of homework intervention programmes (Bursuck et al., 1999). Hong et al. (2004) concur that educator training focuses on the role of the educator as he/she assigns and receives homework from students. This kind of training may include lessons about becoming accustomed to the homework instructions. The DoE should start putting together programmes that are aimed at teaching and supporting educators with better homework practices. This will give educators confidence in dealing with homework issues. Most participants did not think that homework overload could be an excuse for homework not being done. As educators get trained, they will learn that homework is beneficial when it is of the appropriate age and there is clear understanding of the concepts. Literature tells us that when homework is made interesting, ie homework that is slightly different from class work, boredom is avoided. Some authors even suggest setting challenging tasks for learners who like them.

Voorhees (2011: 365) points out eight questions educators must ask themselves before setting a homework assignment and before they start blaming students for not completing homework, namely:

1. **Decoding.** Can all your students decode the material you are assigning with no assistance and fluently?
2. **World/word knowledge.** Do all your students possess the prior knowledge/schema and vocabulary regarding the assignment's topic?
3. **Metacomprehension.** Do all your students possess an understanding of and utilise text structure (ie, narrative [story structure] and expository [main idea and details])?
4. **Metacomprehension.** Do all your student understand the purpose for the homework assignment?
5. **Metacomprehension.** Do all your students activate prior knowledge prior to reading?
6. **Attention.** Do all your students possess adequate attention/concentration?
7. **Affect.** Do all your students possess a high self-efficacy toward their homework and literacy?
8. **Affect.** Do all your students receive parental help at home?

Zisow (2002 cited in Altun, 2008) talks about types of assignments, namely creative, extensive, preparation, and practice. In addition, he points out other types he calls integrated assignments such as book reports, creative essays and scientific projects which require students to use several skills in a particular task. Educators must be trained in the light that they are now homework facilitators and supporters rather than homework assignment givers. Educators are supposed to help students utilise their skills and to practise what they learn.

The demands of teaching to finish the syllabus prompts educators to give homework, but educators must be trained to develop the skills needed to assist those students who are ADHD or battle in other ways to complete their homework. Not only must educators be given the necessary skills, they must also be well-trained to attain the basic knowledge and skills to carry out the learner-centred approach utilising the concept of learning style or homework motivation and preference (Hong et al., 2004) The way educators teach and administer homework assignments must be such that there is no learner who is left behind. Learning and teaching must be inclusive of all types of learners.

In the view of this, most educators do not have sufficient knowledge about learning preferences of students and lack the diagnostic skills to identify those preferences (Campbell, 1990; Mills & Stevens, 1998; Pettigrew & Buell, 1989 cited in Hong et al., 2004). Stefanou et al. (2004 cited in Patall et al., 2010) think that educators must be trained so they have the skills to give students a chance to evaluate homework from their own point of view and reflection. The theorists also believe that educators lack the knowledge to meet the requirements of teaching to the students' preferences, and giving homework must go with those preferences.

5.1.4.3 Compulsory homework timetable

A compulsory homework timetable might be a solution to the problems that educators have when trying to administer homework. A SMT comprising the principal, the deputy, HoDs, and other stakeholders (educators and parents and if possible, prominent figures in the community) should generate a homework timetable or programme that has dates, names of people responsible and stakeholders so it can be usable for the year. Badenhorst (1993)

outlined the requirements that must be met: first, any educational programme can only be successful if the environment is organised and roles and responsibilities are clearly stated; second, the school programme (homework timetable) must be structured to cater for all types of learners; third, the programme must be structured to ensure quality and balanced participation, in other words it must not compromise other extracurricular activities. In addition, spreading homework over the week and evenly across the learning areas will help ease the pressure that comes with homework assignments. This is important because, as previously mentioned, many learners lack time-management skills. Furthermore, learners must be helped to set up their own homework timetable at home such that they have time for both homework and play. On the flip side of the coin, Newby and Winterbottom (2011) suggest that rigid homework timetables could lead to missed opportunities for students to learn from homework, by setting short tasks that do not help students to draw links across topics.

5.1.4.4 Homework club

The rise in both parents working or home demographics having changed, has propelled the need for some kind of assistance to help students with homework. The benefit of homework clubs is that learning takes place in a safe and caring environment (Sanacore, 2002). Homework clubs are designed to support students who may spend a lot of their time engaging in activities that have nothing to do with school or that never add any value to school-related goals. It is evident, as previously noted, lessons that happen in school in most cases will need reinforcement at home; a homework club allows the type of setting that supports homework's instructional priorities (Sanacore, 2002). Regardless of how they are set up, their main purpose, is to help struggling learners and although most students will benefit from the club, battling learners, in particular, will benefit. In the school at which the survey was conducted, educators said students would always find a reason not to do homework even if it meant avoiding any kind of setting put in place to assist. Literature confirms that students' chances of achieving in the clubs are amplified because they support individualised and small-group activities. At the school where the research was done, only Maths had a homework club, even though the club was at school.

5.1.4.5 Prioritise homework assessment

Assessment plays an important role in helping learners to achieve great results. According to Affouf and Walsh (2006), when students get homework responses instantaneously they are more likely to understand a particular topic and even more likely to take homework seriously without any hesitation about its effectiveness (Bracey, 1989). Homework feedback is generally not appetising to learners if it has a negative impact on how learners view the importance of homework. Although homework assessment is great for evaluating whether or not students understand material when a unit is complete, homework may sometimes not reflect what a student has learnt because he or she may have obtained the information from peers or family members (Bakula, 2010). Assessment for Learning (AfL) describes the process by which teachers use assessment techniques to promote learning. Black and William (1998b cited in Newby & Winterbottom, 2011) list five principles that are key in assessing homework, namely (1) effective questioning, (2) sharing learning objectives, (3) sharing assessment criteria, (4) providing immediate and effective feedback about how to improve, and (5) self-and peer-assessment. At the core of these key is the proposal of formative assessment. Black and William (1998b: 1 cited in Newby & Winterbottom, 2011) define formative assessment as "all those activities undertaken by educators, and/or their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged". Assessment for learning provides students with detailed feedback about their homework to help them improve. Peer assessment in one way or the other provides the students time to think about the topic and employ students' curiosity through application and disputes/challenges. There have been no workshops that focus specifically on how to assess homework according to the educators of the school at which the survey was conducted. The five principles suggest that educators are aware of the learning process, formative assessment, and summative evaluations for feedback to make sense in students (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall & William, 2003 cited in Portier et al., 2013).

5.1.4.6 Intervention approach

The school must provide facilities and a plan for the homework to be done at school because if left to be done at home those children whose family background or home circumstances are not good will be further disadvantaged. As suggested by one teacher, it will be helpful to have an educator assigned to supervise learners in a homework class. This approach can be made compulsory to standardise the conduct of the homework process. It was thus suggested that homework be spread evenly amongst subjects on any day. In the case of education (and this is the second problem with applying means/ends thinking to it) we not only need to ask whether our educational activities, strategies, and – if one wishes to use the word – interventions are desirable in themselves; we also always need to ask what are the educational effects of our actions. When formulating homework policy school principals should bear in mind that parents are heads of homes therefore should agree on the homework periods right from the beginning and should also agree on the penalties imposed on students. Goldberg (2014) maintains that punishment to those who do not do homework is never a motivation and instead creates a tense environment at home. Homework intervention programmes that apply the learner-centred approach can be designed for school and the students and maybe parents as well. This can be based on setting up a timeline, conscripting students, and personnel to supervise and coordinate the process. The disadvantage of this is that its adds pressure on the school and its staff (Hong et al., 2004).

5.1.4.7 Community involvement

It is argued that academic achievement, individual student performances, and students' discipline and behaviour improves when families and communities get involved in school activities Michael, Dittus and Epstein (2007) suggest that schools, families, and the community work together to deliver clear, consistent messages to students, to encourage the development of positive behaviours, to assist students in receiving necessary preventive care, and to provide access to resources and supportive networks. Partnerships between schools, families, and communities can encourage sharing and help maximise resources and expertise that will encourage the healthy development of students, their families, and their community. The six types of involvement are (1) parenting, (2) communicating, (3)

volunteering, (4) learning at home, (5) decision-making, and (6) collaborating with the community. Involvement allows educators to conceptualise family and community involvement in a concrete way. It also helps schools choose a variety of practices that will strengthen family and community partnerships on health-related topics. Teachers of more than half of the health education classes or courses assigned homework to involve students' family members in discussions and activities concerning health topics they were studying in class.

5.2 Summary

Homework is a powerful tool that can add to the advancement of children's education, if homework is not properly handled it can do more damage than good to their educational development. This chapter looked at the themes that emerged from the data. The themes suggested that the main purposes of homework are to reinforce concepts and skills of recent lessons and expand the knowledge base without educator supervision. According to the discussion of the themes, the educators, learners and parents are equally responsible in ensuring that the goals of homework are achieved and that homework is a component of teaching and learning and a segment of monitoring the practice of learning. The themes that emerged also suggest that evidence with regard to the decisions about homework were based on a combination of experience in terms of curriculum delivery.

The discussions indicated that evidence used in decisions about homework is mainly anecdotal and from experience. This shows that educators give homework assignments without having done research on its effectiveness and how it must be conducted to avoid students seeing it as less important than class work. The survey indicates that parents, students and educators hold the key to making sure students do homework and achieve thereafter. The view of many educators that participated in the survey concur that additional practice provided in the form of homework is paramount to academic achievement. The study findings indicate that homework incompletion is also a result of students spending most of their time socialising with friends. In addition, the ability level of students, the nature of assignments given, and the kind of feedback from the educator are determinant factors of homework administration. If homework is properly used, it may be the most effectual way to crack some of the most difficult educational problems.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter looked at the discussion or interpretation of the findings in relation to the reviewed literature and the theoretical framework of this study. These findings aimed at establishing whether educators understand the role that evidence plays in the key policy and practice decisions schools make in the context of the homework policy and practice in schools. Working through the data; four themes emerged to try and answer the main question, what role does evidence play in the key policy and practice decisions school make in the context of the homework policy and practice in schools? The four themes discussed were (1) homework improves achievement, (2) sources of evidence, (3) implementation challenges, and (4) the solutions to homework. The first finding was that homework does improve results. The second finding was that educators do not necessarily use evidence to administer homework but instead rely on informal interaction with colleagues and personal experience. The third finding revealed that students do not do homework because of the lack of support from educators and parents and the lack of conceptual understanding and skills and interest.

Some solutions to homework were also discussed. First, the feeling of educators was that due to the students' love of computers, online homework could be a solution. Second, skills development must be on the side of educators, who must be trained to be masters of their learning areas and assessment thereof. Third, the issue of a compulsory homework timetable and homework clubs must be prioritised. Fourth, community and family involvement in school activities must be encouraged as it encourages partnership and sharing, which in turn maximises student expectations. The facts and views of the respondents appeared to be common with most of the responses and helped the researcher have an overall understanding of why educators give/do not give homework, why they assess/do not assess or give feedback, and even why learners must be helped/not be helped with homework.

CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

6.0 Introduction

This research was an investigation into educators' perceptions of the evidence used to support decisions about homework. The main argument of this research was that despite its adoption and application in schools, the justification for its use is hardly understood and seems largely to be based on anecdotal evidence. The focus of the inquiry was to determine educators' understanding of the meaning, purpose, policy, nature, and sources of evidence used to support decisions about homework. In order to achieve the objectives of the research, one main question and six sub-questions were used to give direction to the investigation. In order to remind my readers of what I have proven in my discussion and also to help bring my paper to successful close, I have decided to re-state my main question and the sub-questions.

Main research question

What role does evidence play in the key policy and practice decisions schools make in the context of the homework policy and practice in schools?

Sub-questions

1. How do educators understand the meaning and purposes of homework?
2. Are the educators aware of the evidence that drives the decisions schools make about homework?
3. Where and how do educators obtain this evidence?
4. What challenges do educators face in administering homework in schools?
5. What conditions support or detract from the effective application of homework in schools?
6. How might schools be helped to have more productive homework policies and practices?

The study adopted a qualitative approach where teachers and HoDs were interviewed to establish what sources of evidence are available to schools to support decision-making around the key policy matters, perceptions, implementation, benefits, and challenges associated with the applications of homework. This qualitative approach was employed for the following reasons: It suggested that events, cases, processes, individuals and their behaviour are unique, context-dependent; and cannot be generalised. It fully described the cases at hand. It required the researcher to become a research instrument suggesting that the researcher must be able to observe behaviour and interview people face to face. It allowed the researcher to establish close contact with the HoDs and emphasised understanding of the social setting other than making predictions about the settings thus seeking pluralism and complexity in those settings. It was suitable to answer questions about the role evidence play in the key policy and practice decisions school make in the context of the homework policy and practice in schools. It was be helpful in identifying issues and factors around the topic and also allowed investigation of different types of research questions. This approach also helped study the behaviour (in-depth understanding) of educators as they administer homework and how that behaviour plays itself out. The data collected was direct from the source and a prospect of multiple perspectives was realised. It helped study participants' perspectives feelings, thoughts, beliefs, ideals and actions.

Educators in general hold common and similar views in as far as homework administration is concern, ie they give or pay attention in giving homework and completion thereof in the hope that results will improve. The findings have also revealed that the educators give homework to be seen as if they are working and that they take the education of learners seriously; ie they give homework to show parents how committed they are. These findings have tremendous implications on the administration of homework and add to the burden to which educators are already subjected. The research has shown and indicates that policies used in schools are actually from the national DoE and schools have amended them to suit their culture. The interpretive approach to homework policy notes that the cultural construction occurs when role players make sense of the policy and then implement it. Contextual factors and people's perceptions influence the outcomes of this homework policy and sometimes these deviate from the policy objectives. This finding is instrumental

as it explains the gap that often occurs between policy on paper and policy in practice. This is why there is a real need to widen the scope of our thinking about the relation with research, policy, and practice, so as to make sure the discussion is no longer restricted to finding the most effective ways to achieve certain ends, but also addresses questions about the desirability of the ends themselves. The other significant finding from this study is that one of the biggest challenges to implementing homework policy is that students' understanding of the subject is a problem, so they do not do the homework for understanding but because it is a school requirement.

The following are the conclusions of the sub-questions**:**

- **How do educators understand the meaning and purposes of homework?**

This study has highlighted that educators see homework as a reinenforcement exercise. They are of the view that homework improves learner achievement and parents have an important role in ensuring that the learners complete the homework assignments. More importantly they see homework as an extension and remediation work out of class. According to the educators used for the survey, they see homework as a way of fostering responsibilities in students. The respondents are of the view that homework is also an important vehicle for developing better study habits and self-regulatory strategies. Over and above that homework it keeps the school and educators accountable to parents and parents are able to keep track of what is happening at school. The results of the survey, found that the opinions of educators are in line with what literature suggest are the merits of homework to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes which then contribute to academic achievement. No participant uttered doubts on the essential or usefulness of homework.

- **Are the educators aware of the evidence that drives the decisions schools make about homework?**

Research suggests that some educators are aware of the evidence that drives the decisions that school make about homework but they just hate the administration of homework but because traditionally homework has been used as proof to parents that there is teaching and learning that is happening then they feel compelled to give homework. In addition some educators use it as a way of putting schools' policies into practice and use it as activities that

can help finish the burdened curriculum. These policies stress the adoption and improved communication between educators and parents even when homework is not prioritised. The participants were aware that homework is indeed part of scaffolding models that help students develop knowledge and skills that students can use out of school, but because the school has content coverage through portfolios, homework gets little or no attention, which can only mean there is a problem in the implementation of the homework policies; this is not helpful to educators.

- **Where and how do educators obtain this evidence?**

Research evidence is important in most of professions; it helps a lot in decision-making. The study concludes that research evidence is obtained from experience, scientific research, published research reports, conference information, course evaluation feedback, class feedback (boredom), professional reports or standardised test scores, educational material (textbooks), examination standards, the HoDs, colleagues (word of mouth) from other schools, personal experience, social science research, demographic data, workshops organised by the district, policies from the DoE. The department's and the school's policy documents, however, seem to be the main sources of evidence used.

- **What challenges do educators face in administering homework in schools?**

Literature tells us that the first challenge is that students claim they do not have enough time to complete their homework because they have a lot of assignments from other learning areas, for example, Maths, Science and English. The second challenge, educators claim, is that there is curriculum burden, which means they do not have enough time to check and report-back on the homework. The third challenge is that students who come from economically disadvantaged areas find it difficult to complete homework tasks (for example, parents work far from home and come home too late to monitor their children's homework, and there are no lights in their houses to enable them to do homework at night). The last challenge, according to the survey, is the increased number of students needing inclusive classroom settings, which makes the execution of effective homework difficult.

- **What conditions support or detract from the effective application of homework in schools?**

Problems encountered when administering homework seem to be the same for most theories. Some of the factors that affect the effective application of homework in schools are the negative attitudes toward homework, difficulty of assignments (not relevant), lack of self-regulatory skills (time management), and environmental factors (social challenges) to name but a few.

Conditions that support the effective application of homework could also be the attitudes and values of the educator, the students, and parents. Findings of a survey done in China by Dandy and Nettelbeck (2002) reveal that a high level of interest by the stakeholders (students, educators and parents) paves the way for students being responsible for their own learning. When school management encourages educators to make use of research based on good practices that supports the effectiveness of homework, or when schooling in general help put educators in a driving seat in as far as making students make scholastic gains.

- **How might schools be helped to have more productive homework policies and practices?**

According to the study, educators seem to think that the quality of homework done and completion thereof determines or helps gauge students' achievement. Hong et al. (2011) suggest that for homework to be beneficial to students (ie help improve school accomplishment, develop accountability and self-management in academic activities) the advancement of educators in all spheres, including considerate understanding of what students think about homework, is very important. It is also important for educators to understand that for homework to make sense to students it must be relevant and interesting. The survey suggests that educators must devise homework in a style that research suggests is most effective and provide opportunities for constructive parent involvement, and actively teach students self-regulation. Last, educators must create a homework programme that sets all students up for success.

6.1 Implications

The study has shown that educators give students homework not because they are driven by research evidence but because it is a long-standing practice; yet factors such as resources and family backgrounds need to be taken into consideration. The implications of the research are outlined in the following sub-sections.

6.1.1 Further research on purposes and meanings of homework

According to Cooper and Valentine (2001) researchers do not have a common understanding of the benefits and restrictions of homework. Some researchers have gathered evidence that homework has positive effects on achievement, while others have collected evidence that homework does little to benefit students. Literature further states that the role of research in the formulation of homework policies and practices is not sufficient to convince people in as far as improving homework achievement is concerned. Policy formulators and practitioners use the bulk of evidence in the hope that research will provide clear-cut results that assist in making sound decisions about homework. Experts make use of research as one source with which to make decisions about homework. It is however in areas such as homework and in policy formulation that research is still lacking and not convincing (Viadero, 1999 cited in Cooper & Valentine, 2001). So much has happened in as far as research is concerned that researchers become sceptical of each other's findings and some even question the trustworthiness of each other's findings. This has changed the focus from actual research on homework to criticism amongst researchers, thus resulting in the decline of the research in this field.

More research on homework is needed on how (1) educators structure and monitor homework in different ways; (2) student differences play a major role on when, and how to complete assignments; (3) home environment influences the process by creating an atmosphere that promotes the completion and even the understanding of homework; (4) the broader community plays a role by providing other leisure activities that contend for the student's time. It is thus not proper to presume that an uncomplicated, universal finding about homework is relevant to all children and is likely to materialise. Most of the time students are not considered when research on homework is concerned. Warton (1993) even

suggests that understanding students' ideas and thoughts regarding the purposes and meanings of homework can be a useful element to understand students' motivation and performance of homework.

In the light of all the challenges of homework, it is recommended that more educators be trained in the difference between the purposes and the meanings of homework. Teacher development will help provide or equip educators with the necessary skills with regard to what homework entails. This will also help or equip educators to assign homework not only for record purposes, but is relevant and interesting and strengthens students' skills and knowledge.

6.1.2 Parental involvement

Parents are expected to take their children's education seriously and co-own it as per the principles of the South African School Act (South African School Act) 84 of 1996. It is easy to say that parents must be involved in their child's education, but the problem is how? According to the Unisa Metropolitan Life Project (Unisa, 1994: 2 cited in Botha, R.J. (ed) et al., 2013) parent involvement:

> is the active and supportive participation of parents as partners and allies of the educator in the primary aspects of formal and informal education of their own child and or school and or broad education of their community in an individual and or way in a structured or orderly manner in order to achieve the objectives of education as fully as possible.

According to Epstein (2008), parental involvement is when parents are involved in learning activities at home and the fulfilment of basic commitments like school-parent communication.

Research tells us that a student's individual homework approach, such as parental awareness and involvement, should be made in order to improve academic achievement. However, Gonzales and Samuel (1985); Hong and Suh (1995); and Reid (1987 cited in Hong et al., 2004) support the argument that changes in the home environment can make a difference in a student's homework behaviour. The education crisis in South Africa has its roots in the apartheid regime of inequality, and Kohn (2006); Bennet and Kalish (2006); and

Kralouec and Buel (2000) argue that homework marginalises economically disadvantaged students who in most cases find it difficult to complete homework due to home environment. Students may do homework poorly for different reasons: parents not having time to assist with homework; school and home being far away from each other resulting in transport issues; parents not being confident or facing language barriers that prevent them from talking to educators about their child's progress; or parents not knowing their role.

However, irrespective of cultural background; parents can positively influence their children's learning behaviour by creating partnerships between themselves and schools that will encourage a healthy development of students and their families. Just getting feedback via reports from school does not give a clear indication if the child is coping so parents need to play a leading role in helping with homework. They should be encouraged to serve in supporting role (Redding, 2006). Not only are parents expected to play a leading role but even educators too are expected to give some guidance on the purposes of the assignment. Fink and Nalvern (2001) agree that when parents stress the value of homework and re-examine it and when the students themselves notice that homework improves their achievement at school then homework will be taken seriously and will be completed. Parents' support should be more on learning goals and the promotion of critical thinking and particularly through making sure that the learning environment does allow the creativity. Most importantly educators must be conscious of the inequities that parents find themselves in.

Kruger (1999) highlights some important steps that schools can take to get parents involved in their children's education: (1) draw up a policy that sets goals for parents involvement; (2) create a positive and welcoming climate for parents who come to school for various reasons; (3) improve communication between parents and school, ie communication through social media; (4) draw up an annual parent involvement programme; (5) improve personal or one-on-one contact sessions that involve parent and educator, ie parents' meetings; (6) parent committees based on the content of the subjects taught in the grade.

In South Africa, parental involvement is still a new term and parents still do not have an idea of what exactly is expected of them. More educational consciousness must be advocated as to what exactly their role is in the education of their children taking into account the

different social classes that exist in South Africa. This consciousness must be viewed from different perspectives as communities are not the same in as far as academic backgrounds are concerned; some are more disadvantaged than others.

6.1.3 School practice with homework

Research studies have identified a strong correlation between homework and achievement and the importance of feedback on homework. Arora et al. (2013) declare that learners whose homework has been graded perform better in tests than those whose work has not. Flori et al. (2002 cited in Arora et al., 2013) makes it clear that students who do web-based homework outperform those who do not. Online homework is encouraged, although it is not easy to control, and is worth considering as students spend so much time using electronic technology. This will help intensify their understanding of concepts, thus aligning their homework understanding to the outcomes envisaged for their course.

All schools, generally, understand that homework can be associated with developing students' abilities in the areas of knowledge, skills, and values. According to Cooper et al. (2006), most educators believe that engaging students in homework results in improved scholastic achievement. Educators are still not aware that the reading needs of students and the instructions that they give in guiding students on homework are crucial aspects of the assignment of homework. Homework cannot be viewed as a one-size-fits-all approach. If the appropriate tasks are given to students then homework will be done and completed and academic achievement will be possible. The challenge is for educators to be developed in a way that they assign homework that strengthen the targeted skills (Coutts, 2004). The most important thing for educators is to assign homework assignments that are specific to the outcomes that are to be achieved. Over and above this, good communication between schools, parents and students is critical to keep everyone updated on the progress of the child.

The Department of Basic Education must make sure that all schools have educators who are trained for their specific learning to avoid a situation where educators are appointed to learning areas for which they are not trained. The DoE at district level must also make sure they work closely with schools to ensure there is continuous and formal training in as far as

homework and homework assessment is concerned. Workshops and conferences must be conducted regularly to help educators with the latest trends in their learning areas and education at large.

Schools are also under pressure every time there is a new curriculum that must be implemented, ie CAPS, which puts even more pressure on the administration of homework. Nevertheless, educators in general see homework completion and value as a more convincing gauge of student achievement than common assessment outcomes (Guskey, 2007).

Initiatives such as the South African Football Association's programme to develop soccer in schools add to the pressure students face to do homework after completing extra murals.

6.1.4 Homework policy at different levels

The DoE (1998) states in *Government Gazette* 19640 that homework should be instituted to afford learners the opportunity to reinforce skills, knowledge and attitudes that have been taught at school. The DoE repeatedly mentions that homework must be relevant and meaningful to learners, as it has the benefit of developing a learner's work ethic. A study done by Cooper and Valentine (2001) indicates there is a relationship between time spent on homework and achievement. They found that achievement is weaker for students in primary school than in secondary school. The reason for this difference according to Cooper and Valentine (2001: 147-148) could be that research in cognitive psychology indicates that age differences exist in children's ability to selectively attend to incentive (Lane & Pearson, 1982; Plude, Enns & Brodeur, 1994). Some researchers have also found that, because of their limited cognitive capacity, younger children tend to have less effective study habits and are less able to focus and avoid distraction than older children (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). Younger children are less able than older children to disregard irrelevant information or motivation in their environment. That is to say they are more likely to be distracted by simple things than older ones, thus a young child's home environment would make studying at home less effective than for older students. Younger students also have less-effective and efficient learning habits, thus the level of improvement that is anticipated in attainment that comes as a result of homework given becomes null and void. Theorists, therefore, maintain

that students in primary school should not be assigned as much homework as students in secondary school. The amount of homework given can vary from student to student depending on the reason why the educator assigns the homework. Cooper and Valentine posit that educators use homework for different purpose, either to help them learn or for time management.

The educators interviewed claim that homework teaches discipline and the ability to work on your own. The sooner the lesson is learned the easier it will be in university and when having to think for yourself in the business environment. It also teaches time-management and the ability to research and not rely on being spoon-fed!" Homework assessment is just like School Based Assessment, designed to assess many skills and competences. Most assessment specialists recommend that assessment for learning, also known as 'formative assessment', should be used in assessing homework. This kind of assessment provides students with detailed feedback including how they can improve their understanding of the homework content (Black & William, 1998a). The authors argue that students must be allowed to do homework more independently, with an educator being a coach guiding and supporting their independency.

6.2 Conclusion

In this research report I have examined seven key assumptions that underlie the role evidence plays in the key policy decisions schools make in the context of homework policy and practice. The assumptions disproved by the study were:

First*, homework provides academic benefit and all students should be given homework every day*. The study concludes that there is no clear evidence to prove beyond reasonable doubt that homework does provide academic benefit. The study also ends by stating that giving homework is entirely related to the understanding about the ability of the learners therefore cannot be generalised into saying all students must be given homework. Second, *the more accountable each student is in mastering the homework; the more likely they are to do homework with persistence, instead of stopping as soon as they hit a roadblock*. On the contrary, research shows that students lack motivation and most do not bother doing homework because they lack commitment in taking their studies seriously. The more

homework is designed to appeal to each student's motivation, to use their abilities and to compensate for their weakness, the more likely they are to invest their energy in the completion of homework. Third*, it is easy to measure the amount of homework given to students and how long it takes to complete*. This is not true, as educators and parents depend on students to tell them how much homework they have. In addition, the duration of each homework task is based entirely on guesswork. Fourth*, conditions at home are always favourable for homework purposes*. The fact is that in many cases there is a scarcity of resources as a result of both parents working or home demographics having changed, thus not allowing for a favourable environment for students to do their homework. Socio-economic background can have a negative impact on students. Fifth*, all students, regardless of ability, receive the same homework assignments from educators*. No, students achieving at a lower level may take longer than higher achieving students to complete the same assignment. So, an increase in achievement caused by doing homework may be offset by the fact that poor-performing students take longer to complete homework assignments. If this relation is stronger among younger than older students, it could also explain the difference in the strength of correlations without suggesting a lesser causal effect of homework on achievement (Cooper & Valentine, 2001: 148). Sixth*, educators are trained to give and assess homework*. The fact is that homework feedback is not always appetising to learners and it ends up having a negative impact on how learners view the importance of homework. In the light of this, educators must be trained and be equipped to deal with all the eventualities that come with homework. Seventh*, all homework school systems are the same and all schools use the same homework techniques*. Teaching styles and practices vary from school to school and country to country so there are different school cultures with different interactive and learning strategies.

This study also examined the model of professional action that is implied in the idea of evidence-based education. I have argued that despite its adoption and application in schools, the justification for its use is hardly understood. Its application in schools seems to be based on anecdotal evidence. This argument is only valid with respect to homework practices, and that it breaks down when other 'factors' that influence learning, such as teaching style or group size or even the architecture of schools, are examined. It may be

possible to find strong correlations between purpose and meaning and evidence that drives the decisions that schools make proves there is a relation between the two. While we may talk about the activities of homework interventions one may still argue that good teaching lessons will always intervene and be the main activity that determines if homework is going to be done or not.

The study further suggests there is a correlation between homework and achievement, but it is not adequate to conclude beyond reasonable doubt that this is indeed the case, as it may be argued that there are other benefits beyond academic acquisition of knowledge. Although there is room for improvement in the ways in which educational research and educational practice around homework are conducted, I am not persuaded that EBP as it is currently being practiced and endorsed in schools provides the most fitting solution. In concluding; the study suggests that for homework to be effective, critical research by homework implementers is required to allow a better understanding of the short-comings of homework.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

For administrative use:
Reference no: D2016 / 114
enquiries: Diane Buntting 011 843 6503

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	**9 June 2015**
Validity of Research Approval:	**9 June 2015 to 2 October 2015**
Name of Researcher:	**Kunene M.M.**
Address of Researcher:	**8 Romsley Road; Crystal Park; Benoni; 1501**
Telephone / Fax Number/s:	**073 936 326; 011 421 8728**
Email address:	**mxolytzee@webmail.co.za**
Research Topic:	**Educators' perception of the evidence used to support decisions about homework: A case study of a former model C High School in Gauteng**
Number and type of schools:	**ONE Secondary School**
District/s/HO	**Ekurhuleni North**

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;

2015/06/10

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: 2015/06/10

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 B

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

06 May 2015
Student Number: 0115112W
Protocol Number: 2015ECE008M

Dear Mxolisi Kunene

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:
Educators' perceptions of the evidence used to support decisions about homework: A Case study of a former model C secondary School in Gauteng.
The committee recently met and I am pleased to inform you that **clearance was granted**. However, there were a few small issues which the committee would appreciate you attending to before embarking on your research.
The following comments were made:
 Please clarify if your interviews will be audio-recorded or not
 In the educators' consent form you have stated "*I agree to fill in a question and answer sheet or write a test for this study. YES/NO*" As far as I know you do intend to have educators write a test for your study. Please correct

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,
Wits School of Education
011 717-3416
Cc Supervisor: Prof Felix Maringe

Appendix C

Letter to the Principal

8 Romsley Road

Crystal Park

Benoni

20 May 2015

Dear Mrs K.Plastitt

My name is Mxolisi Kunene .I am an M Ed student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand.

I am doing research on: Educators' perceptions of the evidence used to support decisions about homework: A case study of a former model C secondary school in Gauteng.

I am asking permission to conduct research in your institution. The purpose of this research is to determine educator's understanding of the meaning, the purpose, the policy, the nature and the sources of evidence used to support decisions about homework. The main focus is on the teacher practices/behaviors around administering of home work/home work assignments. This study intends to establish what sources of evidence are available to schools to support decision-making around the key policy matters; the perceptions, implementation, benefits and challenges associated with the applications of homework in school.

In collecting data, I will use 40 randomly selected educators to answer the questionnaires and 2 HODs to answer semi-structured interviews. The interviews will not be audio recorded. I plan to do this research during the month of March through to August 2015. The participants' (educators and HODs') involvement will be based on two data collection methods:

Questionnaires: 38 empirical questions will be asked.
Interviews: 6 interview questions with 28 sub-questions to be asked.

The duration of the questionnaires will be about 30 minutes and 1 hour for interviews. The study does not have risks; the concerned educators and HODs will be given information and documents in advance. The questionnaires and the interviews will be transcribed for the purposes of analysis. Transcripts will be made available to the educators and HODs for verification before the final analysis is done. The reason why I have chosen your school is because it is convenient to me and I have a clear insight of the operations of the school.

It is also important to note that the participation of the educators/HODs is voluntary and refusal to participate will not involve any penalty or loss of benefit. Participants may discontinue participating at any time. Efforts will be made to keep personal information confidential and anonymity will be protected. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. The participants will not be paid for this study. Individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

All research data will be destroyed within 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,

SIGNATURE

NAME : Mxolisi M. Kunene

ADDRESS : 8 Romsley Road, Crystal Park, Benoni

EMAIL : mxolytzee@webmail.co.za

TELEPHONE NUMBERS : 073 393 6326

Student Number: 0115112W

Protocol Number: 2015ECE008M

Appendix D

HEADS OF DEPARTMENT INFORMATION SHEET:

UNIVERSITY OF WITWATERSRAND

INFORMATION DOCUMENT

FOR RESEARCH PROJECT (M Ed)

TITLE: Educators' perceptions of the evidence used to support decisions about homework: A case study of a former model C secondary school in Gauteng

INTRODUCTION: I, Mxolisi Kunene will be doing research entitled Educators' perceptions of the evidence used to support decisions about homework: a case study of a former model C secondary school in Gauteng

The main question is: What role does evidence play in the key policy and practice decisions school make in the context of the homework policy and practice in schools? This study intends to establish what sources of evidence are available to schools to support decision-making around the key policy matters, perceptions, implementation, benefits and challenges associated with the applications of homework in school.

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE: I am thus asking you to participate in the research study that will happen between the month of March and August 2015.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY: The study involves questionnaires and interview questions. 40 educators will be required to complete the questionnaires and 2 HODS will be interviewed for the collection of the data and I will be the only one conducting the interviews. The Interviews will not be audio recorded, and the interviews approximately an hour.

RISKS: There are no risks of being involved in the study and educators will not be compensated thus arrangements for compensation have not been made.

BENEFITS OF STUDY: The study is important as it will try and look into the finer details of what informs the educators/HOD to take the decisions they take as they administer homework. The purpose of the study is to gather evidence which enables us to make informed views about how schools use evidence to support the key decisions they make in relation to homework. Such information will help close the gap of our understanding in relation to how policies are implemented in schools.

The study will probably help educators to reflect on aspects of homework as an integral part of teaching and learning and will more likely improve their teaching practice in as far as understanding that homework is indeed a form of assessment for learning; also it will give educators a chance to introspect their teaching practices as to where they get the evidence and how they get it in order to administer the home works they give to learners. The study will also help empower learners as a result of the improved teaching practice.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation is voluntary; refusal to participate will not involve any penalty or loss of benefits. The participants may discontinue participation at any time.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Efforts will be made to keep personal information and school information confidential. Confidentiality and anonymity will be protected. Transcripts will be made available to participants before final analysis is done.

Thanking you in advance.

NAME : Mxolisi M. Kunene

ADDRESS : 8 Romsley Road, Crystal Park, Benoni

EMAIL : mxolytzee@webmail.co.za

TELEPHONE NUMBERS : 073 393 6326

Student Number: 0115112W

Protocol Number: 2015ECE008M

Appendix E

HODS' CONSENT FORM:

Please fill in and return the reply slip below indicating your willingness to be a participant in my voluntary research project called: **Educators' perceptions of the evidence used to support decisions about homework: A case study of a former model C secondary school in Gauteng.**

I, _____ give my consent for the following:

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.

Interviews will **not** be audio recorded

All the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of my project.

Sign_____ Date_____

Appendix F

Interview questions

(Semi-structured)

Heads of Department (HoDs)

Main question: What role does evidence play in the key policy and practice decisions schools make in the context of policy and practice of homework in schools?

Thank you for your time and for availing yourself to respond to the questionnaires.

My name is Mxolisi Kunene and I am conducting research entitled: Educators' perception of the evidence used to support decisions about homework: A case study of a former model C secondary school in Gauteng. The research is sponsored by the University of the Witwatersrand and has permission of the Gauteng Department of Education.

The survey is made up of two parts; part one is your profile and part two are the questions. Participation in this questionnaire is voluntary, and refusal to participate will not involve any penalty or loss of benefits to which the participant is entitled. Participants may also discontinue at any time without penalty or loss of benefit. Pseudonyms will be used instead of your real names.

This interview is designed to provide a profile of the SMT at a secondary school in Gauteng, it consists of questions that describe actions of SMT in as far as homework and decision making is concern. You are asked therefore to consider each question in terms of your practices.

Part 1: Personal profile

Number of years that you have been HOD in the institution including this year:
Please circle: 0-1 years 2-4 years 5-9 years 10-15 years
more than 15 years
Gender Male_____ Female_____
Subjects that you manage_____

Part 2: Questions:

Interview questions:

Key sub-question 1: How do educators understand the meaning and purpose of homework?
Empirical questions:

- What do you understand by the concept of homework?
- What do you see as its purpose?
- What role does homework play in learner achievement?
- Do parents have a role in the administering of homework?

Key sub-question 2: Are educators aware of the evidence that drives the decisions schools make about homework?
Empirical questions:

- What evidence did the school use to arrive to the decision of making homework compulsory?
- What evidence did the school use to arrive to the decisions on to give learners homework at least two times a week?

- What evidence did the school use to decide on the importance of giving feedback based on homework given?
- What evidence did the school use to decide on the role of parental involvement?

Key sub-question 3: Where and how do they obtain this evidence?
Empirical questions:
- Where did they get the evidence from?
- What sources do you use for the evidence to decide on the amount of homework given a week?
- Where did you get evidence about the importance of feedback?
- Where did you get the evidence about parental involvement?

Key sub-question 4: What challenges do educators face in administering homework in schools?
Empirical questions:
- What is the key challenges educators/SMT face in administering the homework?
- What are the challenges you face in obtaining and in giving learners homework two or more times a week?
- What challenges do educators/SMT face in administering homework feedback?
- What are the challenges do educators/SMT face in relation in parental involvement with homework?
- What do you think can be done to deter learners from copying homework from internet?
- How can educators make sure that homework is done beyond the responsibilities learners have at their homes?

Key sub-question 5: What conditions support or detract from the effective application of homework in schools?
Empirical questions:
- How does the lack of academic and parental support conditions detract from the effective application of homework in schools?
- How can lack of leadership that values homework a condition that detracts from the application of homework in schools?
- Can students' lack of understanding of concepts or lack of skills needed to perform homework tasks be a condition that detract from the application of homework in schools?
- How does lack of interest from students detract from the application of homework in schools?
- How does consistency between purpose of homework and assigned homework task support the effective application of homework in schools?
- How is students' positive attitude towards homework support the effective application of homework in schools?
- How is clear communication between student, parent and educator about the intended benefit of homework help support administering of homework in schools?
- How does support from parents provide mechanism for homework practice for students?

Key sub-question 6: How might schools be helped to have more productive homework policies and practices?
Empirical questions:
- How might training of educators help schools to have more productive homework practices?
- How might schools be helped to start a homework club to allow students to do homework after school under the supervision of an educator for better homework practice?

- How might a compulsory homework timetable that are given to schools help to have productive homework policies and practices?
- How might a campaign that enforces skills needed to perform homework be used as an intervention approach help schools to have more productive homework policies and practices?
- How might issues of homework assessment be addressed to help with homework feedback?

Appendix G

EDUCATOR'S INFORMATION SHEET:

UNIVERSITY OF WITWATERSRAND

INFORMATION DOCUMENT

FOR RESEARCH PROJECT (MEd)

TITLE: Educators' perceptions of the evidence used to support decisions about homework: A case study of a former model C secondary school in Gauteng

INTRODUCTION: I, Mxolisi Kunene will be doing research entitled Educators' perceptions of the evidence used to support decisions about homework: a case study of a former model C secondary school in Gauteng

The main question is: What role does evidence play in the key policy and practice decisions school make in the context of the homework policy and practice in schools? This study intends to establish what sources of evidence are available to schools to support decision-making around the key policy matters, perceptions, implementation, benefits and challenges associated with the applications of homework in school.

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE: I am thus asking you to participate in the research study that will happen between the month of March and August 2015.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY: The study involves questionnaires and interview questions. 40 educators will be required to complete the questionnaires and 2 HODS will be interviewed for the collection of the data and I will be the only one conducting the interviews. The questionnaires will last for about 30 minutes.

RISKS: There are no risks of being involved in the study and educators will not be compensated thus arrangements for compensation have not been made.

BENEFITS OF STUDY: The study is important as it will try and look into the finer details of what informs the educators/HOD to take the decisions they take as they administer homework. The purpose of the study is to gather evidence which enables us to make informed views about how schools use evidence to support the key decisions they make in relation to homework. Such information will help close the gap of our understanding in relation to how policies are implemented in schools.

The study will probably help educators to reflect on aspects of homework as an integral part of teaching and learning and will more likely improve their teaching practice in as far as understanding that homework is indeed a form of assessment for learning; also it will give educators a chance to introspect their teaching practices as to where they get the evidence and how they get it in order to administer the home works they give to learners. The study will also help empower learners as a result of the improved teaching practice.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation is voluntary; refusal to participate will not involve any penalty or loss of benefits. The participants may discontinue participation at any time.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Efforts will be made to keep personal information and school information confidential. Confidentiality and anonymity will be protected. Transcripts will be made available to participants before final analysis is done.

Thanking you in advance.

NAME : Mxolisi M. Kunene

ADDRESS : 8 Romsley Road, Crystal Park, Benoni

EMAIL : mxolytzee@webmail.co.za

TELEPHONE NUMBERS : 073 393 6326

Student Number: 0115112W

Protocol Number: 2015ECE008M

Appendix H

EDUCATOR'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: **Educators' perceptions of the evidence used to support decisions about homework: A case study of a former model C secondary school in Gauteng.**

I, _____ give my consent for the following:

Permission for questionnaires

I agree to answer questionnaires for this study. 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.

All the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of my project.

Sign_____

Date_____

Appendix I

Research utilization instruments

Homework rating scale

Educator's questionnaire

Title:

Educator's perceptions of the evidence used to support decisions about homework: A case study of a former model C secondary school in Gauteng.

Main question: What role does evidence play in the key policy and practice decisions schools make in the context of policy and practice of homework in schools?

Thank you for your time and for availing yourself to respond to the questionnaires.

My name is Mxolisi Kunene and I am conducting research entitled: Educators' perception of the evidence used to support decisions about homework: A case study of a former model C high school in Gauteng. The research is sponsored by the University of the Witwatersrand and has permission of the Gauteng Department of Education.

The survey is made up of two parts; part one is your profile and part two are the questions. Participation in this questionnaire is voluntary, and refusal to participate will not involve any penalty or loss of benefits to which the participant is entitled. Participants may also discontinue at any time without penalty or loss of benefit. Pseudonyms will be used instead of your real names.

This questionnaire is designed to provide a profile of educators teaching at a high school in Gauteng, it consists of 40 behavioural statements that describe actions of educators in as far as homework assessment and decision making is concerned. You are asked therefore to consider each question in terms of your practices.

Please read each statement carefully then answer the behaviour/practice that best fits with your experience of giving, assessing and monitoring homework in the school. While it may be difficult to decide on an answer, I am asking that you choose and put a cross only on one answer for each question. Please try and answer each question.

Part 1: Your personal profile

Please provide the following information

Number of years that you have been with the institution including this year:
Please circle: 0-1 years 2-4 years 5-9 years 10-15 years
more than 15 years
Gender Male____ Female_____
Subject teaching_____

Part 2: Survey

Indicate the importance you attach to the following reasons for giving homework in your school. Educators had to choose between the following answers; strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree and strongly disagree in a table form.

Sub-question 1: How do educators understand the meaning and purpose of homework?

Meanings:

- I see homework as a way of fostering responsibility in students
- Homework is an important vehicle for developing better study habits and self regulatory strategies
- Homework helps develop learner understanding thus enhance student's learning
- I see homework as an extension of class work
- Homework aims to teach children to think for themselves

Purposes:

- Helps reinforce previously learnt skills
- Help reinforce poor lesson done in class
- To produce better academic achievements
- To learn, revise and consolidate learning
- To instil regular studying

Sub-question 2: The evidence for decisions about homework

Reasons:

- There is a National policy on homework we use to make our decisions on homework in this school.
- There is a district policy on homework we use to make decisions about our homework practices.
- There is a school policy we use to make our decisions on homework practices in this school.
- There is a subject policy we use to make decisions on homework practice at school.
- Just give homework based on my personal belief and school culture.

Sub-question 3: Where and how do they obtain this evidence

Sources:

- They get it from national policy in the SBA assessment guidelines
- They obtain it from colleagues through informal consultations and associative behaviours.
- They obtain it from the district workshops during the subject based training happening throughout the year
- They get the evidence from
- Books/handbooks/articles or even internet

Sub-question 4: What challenges do educators face in administering homework in schools?

Challenges:

- Learners do not do homework
- Have a lot of other subjects to do homework for
- Feedback takes time thus compromising day's lesson or educators fail to keep track of what they expect would happen

- Parents not being supportive.
- Learners copying from the internet
- Learners do not have time to do homework because of home responsibilities
- Other reasons if any……..

Sub-question 5: What conditions support or detract from the effective application of homework in schools?

Conditions that detract:

- When homework policies are not primarily informed by evidence
- Lack of understanding needed to perform the homework tasks
- Lack of leadership that values homework and support
- Lack of academic and parental support
- Insufficient time (wanting to spent more time with friends or family)

Conditions that support:

- Clear communication between student, educator and parents about intended benefit of homework
- Formulating school homework policies that are in partnership with community
- Support from parents (provide mechanism of homework practice)
- Consistency between purpose of homework and assigned homework task
- Student's positive attitude towards homework

Sub-question 6: How might schools be helped to have more productive homework policies practices?

Suggestions:

- Schools be encouraged to use online homework technique
- Department must help train educators to be masters of their learning areas
- Schools be helped with and be forced to have homework timetable
- Schools be helped to start a homework club (students do homework afterschool under supervision from educator)
- Intervention approach to help enforce skills needed to perform homework
- Schools must be helped with issues of assessment of homework- educators must be trained on how to assess homework.