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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

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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.