

ABSTRACT

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

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

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

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

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

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