THE IMPACT OF HOMEWORK ON A CHILD'S MOTIVATION TO LEARN IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Homework assignments are part of a child's daily routine; however, homework is becoming a subject much debated by teachers, parents and children. This study examined homework solely from the perspective of the child, in order to determine the impact it has on their motivation to learn. This is an original piece of research. The researcher's goal was to increase the effectiveness of homework activities within the class, using the experiences and suggestions of the children as inspiration to do so. The subjects for this research project were primary school children in rural Ireland, at fourth-class level, aged 9-10 years. This is a predominantly qualitative study. The researcher adopted a case study approach with the use of a focus group interview and an open-ended survey to collect data. Thematic analysis was used to gain a thorough insight into the different experiences with homework, based on responses from a focus group and survey. The children identified many benefits associated with homework: improved academic achievement, communication with parents and the development of concentration, organization and time-management skills. The challenges children face in relation to time, quantity, difficulty, interest levels, emotions, family support and relationships were also highlighted. This research further examined a child's motivation for homework completion and established a range of suggestions from the children for homework improvement. This topic of homework is under-researched, particularly from a child's perspective in Ireland. As a result, this research is both important and relevant. Overall, findings for this study indicate that although the majority of children dislike having to do homework, they value it as a tool to enhance their learning and personal development. The children have made constructive suggestions for homework improvement, including fewer activities each night and more frequent use of project work to provide choice in their learning. This dissertation highlights that in order to make effective change with homework, the perspective of the children is invaluable.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Topic selection

The topic of this dissertation is homework. Homework is defined as any activity, assigned by teachers, undertaken by children outside of normal school hours (Cooper 1989). The objective is to gain a deeper insight into the experiences the children in my class have with homework activities. The research subjects are 31, 9-10 year old children at fourth class level in primary education in rural Ireland. The aim is to identify what impact homework has on a child's motivation to learn and highlight any influencing factors associated with this impact. This is new research; the impact of homework on a child's motivation to learn, in the education system in Ireland, is not addressed in the literature. Additionally, Hutchison (2011) confirms that the perspective of the child is under-represented in the literature.

1.2 Rationale

Homework is a heavily debated topic. According to Bennett and Kalish (2006) homework assignments can lead to stress and arguments among families. Kohn (2007) adds that frustration and exhaustion are increased for children as a result of homework and there is limited time for extra-curricular activities. Conversely, Marzano and Pickering (2007) highlight that homework continues learning beyond the school day and promotes parental involvement. Additionally, it can be argued that homework teaches the skills of self-discipline, organisation and time-management (Sorrentino 2017). The researcher had certain concerns regarding the effectiveness of homework; many children appeared to lack motivation and homework completion was inconsistent. These concerns encouraged the researcher to undertake this study, which addresses their experiences, motivations and opinions on homework improvement.

1.3 Research approach

The philosophical approach to this dissertation is constructionist and epistemologically interpretivist. A qualitative methodology is employed using a case study. As a result, this research is inductive: the data was gathered, then analysed and finally the research questions were answered. The priority is to gather information based on experiences with homework by using a qualitative questionnaire and focus group interview. The main focus is on the words of the children, their explanations, suggestions and descriptions (Creswell 2014).

1.4 Purpose

The purpose of this research study is to corroborate findings within my own class context and identify how homework can be most effective in a child's learning. The questions affirming this research are:

1. What benefits do children associate with homework?
2. What factors contribute to a negative experience with homework?
3. In what way could homework increase a child's motivation to learn?
4. What are the best practice principles for improving a child's engagement with homework?

By carrying out this research, the perspective of the child is valued. Research indicates that the experiences and suggestions of the learners themselves should be investigated (Kohn 2007).

1.5 Structure

This dissertation is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1, Introduction, outlines the topic for research, the rationale behind the topic selection, the research approach and the purpose of this study. Chapter 2, Literature Review, contains a detailed critique of the current literature surrounding the topic of homework. The researcher explains the theory and analyses it in relation to the research study in question. Chapter 3, Methodology, outlines the methodology chosen by the researcher, discusses the research philosophy, explains the research design, methods used and approach to

analysis for this dissertation. Chapter 4, Results, Analysis and Recommendations, presents the findings based on responses from the focus group interview and the survey. The researcher uses thematic analysis to answer each of the 4 research questions. Recommendations in relation to this research project and prospective future studies conclude this chapter.

This research project was carried out with ethical approval. The data collection started in February, 2018 and ceased in March, 2018.

1.6 Dissemination

This is a relatively small-scale study; however, it can be proposed that the findings may have a positive impact on learning, learning experiences and teaching pedagogy within the classroom. It is expected other teachers will be encouraged to reflect on homework practices within their own classrooms, and parents will be interested in the findings. Furthermore, findings will be brought to the attention of school policy makers, and there will be an opportunity for the educational management to carry out a larger scale research on homework in our school, as a continuation of my class-based research. The researcher recommends that research on this topic area be carried out in primary schools nationally, in order to increase homework effectiveness for the children presently in our Irish education system.

Chapter 2
Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Assigning homework activities is common practice in modern education (Xu and Yuan 2003). Homework activities concern teachers, students and their parents (Dettmers *et al* 2010, Patall *et al* 2010). According to Cooper *et al* (2006), the factors influencing the effectiveness of homework are very complex. Cooper (1989) analysed homework effectiveness using quantitative techniques. Contrastingly, gaining an understanding of these complexities from the children's viewpoint, in order to increase the effectiveness of homework, is the main priority for the researcher in this study. The researcher has found a gap in the literature, with no research on homework evident in primary schools in Ireland. Therefore, a small-scale practitioner-led case study was conducted seeking to explore this gap.

2.2 An overview of the research

Homework has been the focus of many international studies over a number of decades (Cooper 1989, Corno and Xu 2004, Katz *et al* 2009, Hutchison 2011, Bȧs *et al* 2017). Cooper *et al* (2006) explain that public opinion in the United States, for example, has experienced an on-going shift in the debate for and against homework; the 1950s saw a demand for homework to improve learning, opinion reversed in the 1960s when homework was viewed as an additional pressure on children, with the shift changing again in support of homework in the 1980s; parental concerns about homework became increasingly involved in the discussion from the turn of the century. Their findings in the research on homework are conflicting and inconclusive, resulting in homework remaining a continuous debate.

Hutchison (2011) writes that much of the research on homework is quantitative and on a large scale, not reflective of the child's individual experience or perspective. This highlights the relevance of this particular research, a predominantly qualitative study focusing on the perspective of the child.

Teachers assign homework for different purposes (Warton 2001). Marzano and Pickering (2007) outline that homework should be planned by teachers to serve a distinct purpose at an appropriate level; earlier class levels should foster positive attitudes towards learning and this should be developed towards academic achievement in more senior classes. They indicate that when meaningful for the child, homework can have positive effects on achievement. From the researcher's experience enthusiasm and engagement is heightened when the activity is of interest to the child. Baş *et al* (2017) explain that homework can be assigned for instructional purposes: practicing, reviewing, reinforcing, applying, researching and interacting with new material. They state homework can also be given for non-instructional purposes: improving relationships with parents, communicating what is being learned at school, developing skills of responsibility, confidence and self-discipline. This account emphasises that homework activities can serve many different purposes.

According to Cooper *et al* (2006) there is little correlation between quantity of homework completed and academic achievement at primary school level. They argue that it is difficult to determine the impact homework has on achievement when it is not consistently assigned by all teachers and not equally engaged with by all children. They suggest that there is no easy solution to the homework debate, as each child does not have the same experience.

Baş *et al* (2017) carried out a quantitative meta-analysis study in Turkey to determine the effect of homework on achievement levels. They found that, in primary education, homework has little effect.

In general, there are many arguments for (Carr 2013, Bembenutty 2011, Van Voorhis 2011, Dettmers *et al* 2009, Protheroe 2009) and against (Vatterott 2009, Kellett 2009, Kohn 2006, Bennett and Kalish 2006) homework in the literature. Overall findings are inconclusive and homework effectiveness has long been a topic for debate for educators, pupils and parents alike (Cooper 2007). However, the researcher has identified a significant gap in the literature regarding student perspectives and motivations in relation to homework in primary schools in Ireland.

2.3 Benefits associated with homework

Homework is a widely used learning tool, which the majority of teachers consider to be effective and benefit pupil learning and development (Cooper 2006, Trautwein *et al* 2006a). Xu (2005) states that parents tend to support the assigning of homework, suggesting that they view homework as beneficial. Two strong proponents of homework, Corno and Xu (2004), carried out a series of empirical studies in the USA using video records of children doing their homework, interviewing the children and their parents and conducting surveys. They found that if children view homework as 'the job of the student' (p.227), it greatly assists the development of skills and attitudes necessary for academic progress and life-long success. They suggest that setting targets, following instructions, organising resources, managing time and planning activities are skills, which will remain with children as they progress through life. However, they also suggest that the awareness of the importance of homework only becomes relevant, as the children get older. Similarly, homework assignments can greatly assist in the development of positive study habits and foster positive attitudes towards learning at school (Xu 2006, Coutts 2004, Bryan & Burstein 2004, Hong *et al* 2004). In addition, Bempechat (2004) suggests that homework aids the development of a child's motivation towards academic achievement. Carr (2013) and Schuetze (2004) agree that homework has an important role in reinforcing learning that takes place in the classroom, leading to increased academic success (Van Voorhis 2011). The repetition of material previously covered in class heightens understanding and confidence to reapply methods and skills learned to new situations (Pytel 2007). Additionally, subjects such as mathematics encourage problem-solving, further enriching their skills development (Gültekin 2005, O'Neill and McMahon 2005).

According to Van Voorhis (2004) homework is common practice in schools and quantity, purpose and effective communication between home and school are key to overall success. Coutts (2004) argues that what is deemed important for teachers or parents, is not often a priority for the children in primary education. This can lead to difficulties when determining what constitutes as motivational for all. However, it can be stated that the positive and reciprocated engagement of parents in the homework activities is favourable for academic and social development (Harris and Goodall 2007). Homework also enhances communication between parents and their children and

reinforces the importance of learning in their everyday life outside of school (Epstein and Van Voorhis 2001, Cooper *et al* 2006). The researcher concurs that homework offers parents an opportunity to converse with their children and gain an insight into their learning and development. Completing homework tasks helps children develop a positive work ethic that will remain with them into the future.

Bembenutty (2011) points out that homework can help with the development of the following key skills: self-efficacy, self-regulation, time management, setting goals, concentration and organisation. Furthermore, children who possess these skills show high levels of perseverance and are very disciplined (Hoover-Dempsey *et al* 2001, DiBenedetto and Zimmerman 2010). The researcher agrees that self-efficacious children with high levels of self-regulation, will naturally be more independent when completing their homework, they will set targets, have the ability to maintain their motivation and complete homework assignments effectively. Findings from experimental research show that with repeated practice and reinforcement, self-regluation can be developed through homework based activities (Zimmerman 2008, Ramdass and Zimmerman 2011, Schmitz and Perels 2011). Coutts (2004) agrees with the importance of self-regulation, adding that intrinsic motivations such as enjoyment, interest and a clear purpose increase a child's engagement with homework. It can also be stated that a child's well-being and self-confidence are also positively influenced (Epstein and Van Voorhis 2001, Corno 2000). The researcher's practice and classroom routine with homework encourages the development of the various skills mentioned and echoes advice from Hampshire *et al* (2014), who state that discussing homework tasks at school, checking for resources before going home and presenting the assignments in school upon completion are all good practice. Successful homework completion requires good levels of self-regulation (Kitsantas and Zimmerman 2009) in order to manage the homework environment, sustain motivation and reflect upon completion (Cleary and Zimmerman 2004). The researcher feels that this can only be achieved if teachers and parents expect a certain degree of self-regulation from the children.

Although limited, there is Irish literature concerned with the topic of homework. One of the key aims of the primary curriculum in Ireland is preparing each child for further education and ultimately life-long learning. Our education system at present recognises

that homework plays an important role in a child's learning and development. Additionally, the Department of Education outlines that there is no fixed format for homework policy nationally (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 1999). Furthermore, Jackson and Harbison (2014) carried out small-scale research in County Dublin, Ireland, to examine current practices with homework to gain an insight into homework effectiveness. They found that having homework is not the issue, rather the type of activity given. Their findings suggest that negativity is created when homework that takes too long, is too difficult and is of no interest. However, this research involved reviewing only 3 school policies on homework and gathering the perspectives of 90 parents using a questionnaire. Subsequently, the researcher feels that homework in primary education lacks documentation at a national level and requires further research to inform policy makers.

2.4 Arguments against homework

Opponents of homework have the general belief that it is ineffective, a cumbersome task, often resulting in reduced motivation levels towards learning (Kohn 2006, Kellett 2009, Vatterott 2009). Bluestein (2006a) highlights the after-school commitments and responsibilities already present in the lives of young children and questions whether homework is adding any value to their already busy schedules. In an Irish context, the Irish Primary Principals' Network (2010) questions whether homework is diminishing quality time between parents and their children. Furthermore, Xu (2013) points out that children have five significant challenges with homework: the homework environment, sufficient time, managing distractions, maintaining motivation and coping with their emotions while completing homework.

Cooper and Valentine (2001) states that homework is less effective at primary level as most children have not yet developed the cognitive skills necessary to study and generally have poorer attention skills. Kralovec (2007) argues that at primary level homework is ineffective when compared with the value of activities carried out in class. However, within primary education, it has been noted that the effectiveness of homework on academic achievement is greater in the senior classes as the necessary skills of: self-learning, problem-solving, responsibility, self-awareness and critical thinking are further developed (Cooper *et al* 2006, Baş *et al* 2017). The researcher

believes that by engaging with suitable homework activities from a young age, the development of the necessary skills is positively influenced and will benefit children academically as they get older.

Children tend to find homework activities a repetition of work already covered in class, and therefore view them as worthless (Simplicio 2005). Similarly, children often view homework as being boring, unnecessary and time consuming (Letterman 2013, Xu 2013, Götz *et al* 2012). According to Trautwein *et al* (2006a) many arguments against homework suggest that any potential benefits are out-weighed by the sacrifices children make regarding playtime and family life. Kohn (2006a) states that children have limited time for exercising, socialising, and other childhood freedoms due to homework commitments. Children have less time to take part in their preferred activities and have reduced opportunities to play an active social role in their local community (Cooper *et al* 2006, Coutts 2004). The researcher's data analysis supports these afore-mentioned findings that homework can be boring and time consuming from a child's perspective. Furthermore, Kohn (2006b) adds that homework may not offer any opportunity for skills development to children who do not already possess a certain level of the skill required to undertake the assignment. He also states that children who are already sufficiently adept in the skills required make no further gains by completing the task. Additionally, it is suggested that homework provides the teacher with minimal information on the students' actual ability, as it is not carried out in the teacher's presence (Kravolec and Buell 2001) and the extent of parental support is unknown (Patall *et al* 2008). The researcher somewhat disagrees with this, as homework activities are not assigned with the intention of establishing the ability of the children.

Homework can also negatively affect family life by being a burden on parents, adding unnecessary pressure on children, subsequently creating conflicts for families (Katz *et al* 2014, Saam and Jeong 2013, Clemmitt 2007). Parental involvement itself can also be counterproductive, often adding stress to the situation, confusing the child in an attempt to explain unfamiliar material, and helping too much just to get the activity completed (Friedman 2011, Hallett 2010, Cooper 2007). Contrary to this, Carr (2013) finds that the supporting role of parents is crucial to overall success with homework. An increase in parental involvement is linked to an increase in academic achievement (Bennett-Conroy 2012). Conversely, if children feel they have too much homework or

lack interest in the activities, any potential academic benefits may be hindered by the negative mindset of frustration and fatigue experienced (Katz *et al* 2014). The researcher can understand this point, as come children appear to reduce their efforts with tasks that they find boring or uninteresting. From the researcher's experience children are very open with their opinions on homework tasks assigned, therefore the researcher can usually anticipate which activities will be more or less favourable.

Kohn (2006a) and Bennett and Kalish (2006) make a strong argument against homework, claiming many children find completing homework a challenge due to their home environments. Additionally, teachers are often obliged to adhere to school policy and fulfill the requirements for daily and weekly amounts of homework expected at the corresponding class level (Cooper *et al* 2006). It is also suggested that many teachers are not skilled in assigning effective homework, and reform must be initiated at a school level (Bennett and Kalish 2006). According to Kohn (2006a), there should not be policy requirements on time and quantity of homework; rather teachers should only assign quality activities that will be highly beneficial to all children. Homework should not be given routinely if it has a negative impact on opportunities for children to engage with other enriching activities after school (Marzano and Pickering 2007, Cooper and Valentine 2001). In addition, Kellett (2009), from her research in primary schools in the UK, found that poverty impacts severely on a child's capacity to complete homework. As a result, there is often a lack of adequate support from an adult and an inappropriate environment for doing homework. Equally, Hutchison (2011), in her multi-site ethnographic study, found that there were remarkable educational inequalities with regard to the physical home environment in which homework was completed. Teachers need to be mindful of such inequalities when assigning homework, as not all children have an equal availability of resources or support (Carr 2013, Reach and Cooper 2004). The researcher fully agrees that homework should not be assigned without specific benefit in mind and that as teachers we do need to be more conscious of the home environments of all children in our class.

Conclusively, there is no consensus on the appropriateness of homework. There are numerous arguments for (Carr 2013, Van Voorhis 2011, Bembenutty 2011, Protheroe 2009) and against (Vatterott 2009, Kellett 2009, Kohn 2006a, Bennett and Kalish

2006). It is evident that there is little Irish research on the topic area and, as a result, the researcher's findings will add to this gap in the literature.

2.5 Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

Intrinsic refers to completing something for enjoyment, whereas, extrinsic refers to doing something because there are distinct outcomes involved (Deci and Ryan, 2008a, 2008b).

Baş *et al* (2017) consider intrinsic and extrinsic motivation instrumental in a child's interaction with homework. They explain intrinsic motivational factors to be are a child's own ability, self-confidence, interest levels and support received; extrinsic motivation involves the child's physical homework environment, the purpose of the activities, any associated reward and feedback. Additionally, Trautwein *et al* (2006b) question whether such motivations influence time spent on homework and academic achievement. They suggest that motivational levels will determine the quality of interaction with homework tasks. Both Trautwein *et al* (2006a) and Xu (2004) identify that as children get older, intrinsic motivation levels towards homework completion decrease. Katz *et al* (2010) interestingly outline the conflicting effects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.   Extrinsic motivation is associated with a reduction in achievement, a negative impact on learning and low levels of persistence with activities, whereas, high intrinsic motivation proves to have a positive relationship with achievement, persistence and general interest levels in learning and school. Coutts (2004) reports that children are more extrinsically motivated, doing homework to get better results or to avoid punishment. It is suggested that this can lead to increased anxiety, poor self-regulation and low achievement (Diseth and Kobbeltvedt 2010, Trautwein *et al* 2009). It is advised that intrinsic motivations levels be enhanced in order for children to reap the benefits of homework (Coutts 2004). From experience the researcher agrees that homework activities, which appeal to children, heighten their intrinsic motivation, as they have more confidence with and interest in the activity (Warton 2001, Xu 2011).

Protheroe (2009) states that children learn more from homework when feedback is given and tasks are discussed in class. The researcher promotes daily discussion on

homework and ensures that one-to-one, group or whole class feedback is given, depending on suitability for the activities assigned. In addition, Vatterott (2010) outlines five main characteristics of effective homework: meaningful, time-efficient, provide choice or be personalised, increase competence and independence, and appear doable and appealing for each child. Conversely, ndividualising homework and providing choice for children can be very time consuming and difficult to manage (Carr 2013). The researcher recognises the benefits of individualising homework and employs this strategy where possible; however, there is a challenge in differentiating homework in order to assign appropriately challenging and interesting activities for all children, particularly in large classes of over 30 children. Providing valuable feedback and effectively monitoring each child's progress with individualised homework can be almost impossible within the school day.

Parental involvement is another important factor when considering increasing motivations levels, academic achievement and homework completion rates (Pino-Pasternak 2014, Cheung and Pomerantz 2012, Bailey *et al* 2006). The effect on a child's motivation will be determined by the attitude the parents have towards homework (Bempechat 2004). Parents who are not in favour of homework or have low expectations will relay this lack of interest and value on to their children, negatively influencing their attitude (Madjar *et al* 2016). Contrastingly, Xu (2005) states that extrinsic motivation from parents can be positive, as they assist children in applying themselves and engaging with homework activities. The provision of a peaceful setting with good lighting, sufficient resources and accessible support when required is ideal to ensure optimum engagement with homework activities (Bempechat 2004). In Ireland, the Department of Education recognises that parents do play an important role in their child's learning and have a positive impact on their child's achievement (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 1999; 2011). The researcher has corroborated the importance of the physical environment and parental support in the findings.

Trautwein and Lüdtke (2009) found that there is an insignificant correlation between parental involvement and effort children put into completing their homework. They suggest that students' motivation levels vary with the support of parents and the child's own cognitive ability and family background are other factors when considering

motivation. Conversely, it can be stated that the nature of the activities assigned and the general homework routine set by the teacher can positively influence motivation (Trautwein *et al* 2006b). If meaningful homework is given, the children will benefit from their efforts and feel that their work serves a purpose for their learning (Epstein and Van Voorhis 2001). Additionally, in order to ensure the children feel their homework is worthwhile, it is advised that teachers: explain activities in advance offering children the opportunity to ask questions, provide adequate time for completion, view/mark or assess their work, and provide feedback (Heitzmann 2007). Students with a higher level of self-efficacy with their homework have higher levels of intrinsic motivation, with those who are unsure of the tasks subsequently lacking in motivation to complete their homework (Bembenutty and Karabenick 2004, Zimmerman and Kitsantas 2005). According to Xu (2011), if children are made aware of the purpose and associated academic benefits of homework tasks, homework will become more effective. The researcher firmly believes in the importance of informing the children about homework activities and allowing sufficient time for children to ask questions for clarification.

The researcher concludes that the children's needs, interests and means for doing homework should all be considered in order to heighten intrinsic motivation for all.

2.6 Effective homework practices to increase motivation to learn

Baş *et al* (2017) suggest that the following be taken into consideration when analysing the effectiveness of homework: role of the teacher, amount of homework, suitability for the child, and the role of the parents and child. In addition, Van Voorhis (2004) informs us that teachers are in a position to alter homework in order to increase motivation and reduce potential stresses. The researcher feels the key to achieving meaningful change is reflecting on current practice and gathering the thoughts of the children, as they are central to the homework process. Vatterott (2009) reinforces this by suggesting we need to challenge traditional beliefs about homework by evaluating current best practices that provide stimulus and motivation for children today. Similarly, Bembenutty (2011) highlights that there is a need for teachers to assign meaningful homework tasks, which children will find intrinsically rewarding. Furthermore, Carr (2013) reminds us that in order to instill belief among children and

parents that homework is beneficial, we must inform parents and motivate the children by assigning interesting and engaging activities.

According to Helle *et al* (2007), project-based homework activities heighten intrinsic motivation levels. This research-orientated approach increases collaboration with peers and encourages family interactions and purposeful conversations, reflecting the socialisation benefit of homework identified by Bempechat (2004). The researcher agrees with the idea that homework has social qualities in creating conversations and fostering the development of life skills such as: communication, questioning, problem solving, persistence and collaboration. Bailey *et al* (2006) also support interactive homework tasks (e.g interviews, group project work, design and make activities) as they promote positive parental involvement an increase the engagement levels of the children with the activity. Corno (2000) adds that opportunities for communication and collaborative learning are increasing due to the availability of modern technologies. Intrinsic motivation must be maximised in order to increase homework effectiveness (Coutts 2004) and project-based learning is an effective way of achieving higher intrinsic motivation; project activities provide choice for children within their learning in terms of the topic they wish to research, how they want to present their work and managing the level of difficulty to suit their own ability (Helle *et al* 2007). The researcher believes project-based activities are inclusive: they promote interaction, celebrate individual differences and accommodate all learning styles. From experience, children are positive and enthusiastic when engaging with such activities for homework.

In terms of the physical homework environment, Hong *et al* (2004) suggest that all learners are unique and parents play a role in understanding how their children learn best and ensuring their children carry out homework in a location that offers their preferred conditions (e.g. lighting, desk, support, level of quiet). They suggest that this will heighten engagement and achievement. From their observations of video recordings of children doing their homework, Corno and Xu (2004) found that children sought a peaceful place to do homework, often moving away from distractions and asking siblings to be quiet. Additionally, Ramdass and Zimmerman (2011) suggest that children utilise their skills of self-regluation in order to choose their preferred location. However, Xu (2004) found that not all children have the ability to make the best

decisions with regard to managing the homework environment and in order to increase homework effectiveness they require parental support, encouragement and guidance in order to maximise concentration levels, improve time-management and maintain motivation. This is evident from the researcher's findings as many children reported that they prefer a desk, a peaceful space and a parent nearby during homework completion. For best practice with homework, it is strongly recommended that a quiet environment, free of unnecessary distractions, in which the child is supported and praised accordingly, be provided (Department of Education and Skills 2017). The researcher agrees with this general recommendation, nevertheless noting that it is not necessarily best practice for all learners, and this is where parents play an important role in supporting their children's individual needs for successful homework completion.

Homework tasks should require thinking, however they should not take too long (Cooper *et al* 2006). Tasks with a moderate level of challenge are found to be most effective; when too easy, boredom can be caused and when too difficult, children can become frustrated (Dettmers *et al* 2010). In addition, children should leave the classroom knowing what they have for homework, why they have it and how they are expected to do it (Xu 2011, Protheroe 2009). Reflective of the findings from this research study, Vatterott (2017) addresses the need to provide children with choice in their homework in order to increase confidence and intrinsic motivation levels. This approach to assigning homework involves the teacher as a guide, parents as facilitators and the children taking ownership of their learning. Additionally, Sidhu *et al* (2010) conducted a mixed methods study of student perspectives on homework in Malaysia. The data collection included a quantitative questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Their findings highlighted project work as the preferred homework task, a finding that the researcher also identified. The researcher agrees that project work allows for choice within learning, generates excitement and provides a level of individualisation for activities.

2.7 Conclusion

Although there is much research on the general topic of homework, the majority are quantitative studies (Baş *et al* 2017, Katz 2010, Cooper *et al* 2006). The main exception is Hutchison's (2011), who carried out an ethnographic study on homework in primary schools in Australia, Denmark and England, using online surveys, interviews and focus group discussions, along with video diaries. An emphasis was put on the perspectives of the children. Similarly, this dissertation focuses on the child's voice by carrying out an open-ended survey and a focus group interview. The researcher's contribution to this field is in the form of a case study research involving children aged 9-10 years, in primary school in rural Ireland. The aim is to highlight their experiences with homework, assimilate their opinions an suggestions, and ultimately consider if homework can be adapted in order to positively impact their learning and development. This is original research as it was not influenced by, and does not seek to emulate, any other research previously conducted on the topic area of homework.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Homework: An ontological question

Schools and homework exist in societies. According to Bryman (2012) social ontology analyses social entities. There are two ontologies: objectivism and constructivism. What is homework is an ontological question, which must be answered from a constructionist viewpoint, as its definition is open to interpretation. This approach places emphasis on how people e.g. children, interpret the value of homework (Robson 2011). Accordingly, each participant may have a different definition and view on schoolwork.

3.2 Homework within the interpretivist framework

Epistemology refers to the researcher's interpretation of the social world (Bryman 2012). Objectivism, which is unsuitable for this dissertation, and interpretivism are the main epistemologies. Interpretivism suggests that only humans can understand the meaning of homework (Robson 2011). Accordingly, this topic cannot be investigated by using natural science methods (Creswell 2012). Cohen *et al* (2011) highlight that reality is open to interpretation by those being researched (children); they, and the researcher, can evaluate experiences with homework. Consequently, the researcher, who analyses words and opinions, has employed an interpretivist viewpoint for this project.

3.3 Research design

According to Yin (2009), a case study is most suitable as a research methodology, where an in-depth understanding of a topic is sought, although, case study research is often criticized for a lack of rigor and the potential influences bias has on findings. Bryman (2012) agrees that case studies offer an opportunity for the researcher to understand and capture the experiences of participants. Carrying out a case study offers a unique opportunity to connect the topic of homework to the theory that surrounds it (Cohen et al 2011).

3.3.1   Participants

Accordingly, this dissertation involves the use of a case study in the researcher's fourth-class. All children were invited to complete the survey, and an 'opportunity sample' (Cohen *et al* 2007, p113) of 24 participated, as they were available and willing. A 'purposive sample' (Cohen *et al* 2007, p114) of 6 focus group participants was selected from the responses to the questionnaire: 2 that like homework, 2 neutral, and 2 who dislike homework. The aim for the focus group was to generate discussion from participants with varying opinions on and experiences with homework.

3.3.2   Ethical considerations

Ethics refers to 'general principles of what a researcher should do when conducting research' (Robson 2011, p194). Four main ethical principles must be considered when planning a social research project: 'harm to participants', 'informed consent', 'invasion of privacy', and 'deception' (Bryman 2012, p135). Additionally, when carrying out research involving people, a key principle of ethics is to treat the participants with care, consideration, and sensitivity (Robson 2011). All participants were treated accordingly; this study did not cause any physical or psychological harm to anyone. The name of the school was anonymised and consent was granted by the school's principal. In order to protect identities, total anonymity was given to participants' names by allocating a number. Their name, or any other information that may identify them (nationality, origin, hair colour etc.) was not included. The wording of questions was age-appropriate, technical words or complex terminology were not used. Each participant received their own information sheet (see Appendix A), the content of which was read out and explained by a colleague to provide absolute clarity. The participants were also given opportunities to ask questions. Parents/Guardians were provided with an information sheet (see Appendix B) and asked to give consent for their child (see Appendix C). When consent was given, the participants were then asked for their own consent (see Appendix D). The children were reminded that the research was not linked to the school in any way. It had been considered that children may feel pressure to take part; therefore, it was stated clearly on the parent/guardian information sheet and on the participant information sheet that participation was completely voluntary for each child. It was also made clear that there would be no reward for participation or repercussion

for non-participation. Everyone involved in the research was reassured that answers would be strictly confidential and to increase participant privacy, the researcher took field notes during the focus group and transcribed all of the information (see Appendix E).

According to Potter (2002), carrying out research in the workplace is challenging. The subjects for the project were the pupils of the researcher, which meant sufficient time needed to be allocated within school hours to administer the questionnaire and the focus group. The researcher was in a position of authority, therefore a colleague of the researcher's was required to: distribute and read through information sheets and participant consent forms, administer the questionnaire and be present for the duration of the focus group. In addition, any children who did not take part in the research, were supervised and accomodated with separate activities.

Colleges generally have their own ethics committees and guidelines, which assist the evaluation of research proposals (Cohen *et al* 2013). There was a detailed process to be followed in completing the ethical application at Letterkenny Institute of Technology. In the weeks prior to submission, I worked in accordance with the LYIT Guidelines and liaised regularly with my supervisor. Gaining ethical approval consisted of emailing the following documents to the Assistant Staff Officer, Department of Business Studies, for the attention of the Ethical Committee: the main application form (see Appendix F), a list of indicative questions for the proposed survey and focus group, an information and consent sheet for parents/guardians, and for the participants (children). Following feedback from the Ethics Committee, the researcher made amendments to the application and ethical approval was granted for this research project in December 2017.

The aforementioned ethical considerations have been highlighted and addressed in accordance with the publication by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2012) and the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA 2011).

The main objective of this case study was to gain a deeper insight into the experiences the participants have with homework. Case studies generate authentic findings, which

the researcher can then connect to theory, resulting in a greater understanding of the homework experience (Cohen *et al* 2011).

3.4 Research methods

According to Silverman (2010) the type of research will determine the appropriateness of the methods. The researcher must select research method(s) according to what works best to answer the research questions (Bryman 2012). Accordingly, the researcher will outline the methods adopted for this dissertation.

3.4.1   Qualitative questionnaire

Questionnaires are commonly associated with quantitative research (Bryman 2012, Cohen et al 2011, Creswell 2014). Accordingly, Bryman (2012) outlines the benefits of including open questions that give respondents the freedom to answer in their own way. Creswell (2012) acknowledges that 'survey research' (p9) is mainly associated with quantitative studies. However, open-ended questions can encourage participants to engage and share their thoughts on a topic. The researcher believes these questions can clearly compliment a qualitative study, by seeking to evaluate opinion and experiences on a topic. For the purpose of this study, a self-completion questionnaire (see Appendix G), comprising of both closed and open-ended questions, was given to each participant.

By using a questionnaire as the initial research tool in qualitative research, gathering feedback on homework from the participants was facilitated. The information collected from conducting this survey informed the second proposed research tool, the focus group. Similarly, Sidhu *et al* (2010) explored student perspectives using a questionnaire to gather basic statistics, which informed their subsequent semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Additionally, Saam and Jeong (2013), qualitative researchers who analyzed parents' and students' perspectives, utilised a questionnaire as their initial data collection method. They referred to the questionnaire as a 'descriptive survey' (p120), which provided them with significant insight for qualitative analysis.

3.4.2 Focus group

A focus group is a form of group interview widely used by researchers (George 2012). Bryman (2012) describes how focus groups offer opportunities to explore topics in great depth. It is further described that participants' views on a topic are best constructed during discussions (Creswell 2014). However, the limitations of focus groups must be taken into consideration. Bryman (2012) outlines challenges facing the researcher: reduced control over the direction of the interview, large amounts of data analysis, selecting participants, time-consuming recordings and transcriptions and managing the focus group (p517). A focus group is a 'carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non- threatening environment' (Krueger and Casey 2009, p2). For this dissertation, a focus group was carried out following the completion of the qualitative survey.

3.4.3 Sampling

'Purposive sampling' (Bryman 2012, p418) is not random in nature; the participants are strategically chosen in order to provide variety, relevant to the research questions; it is advised to use a minimum of four participants. For this research study, the results of the questionnaire informed the selection of six participants for the focus group.

3.4.4 Organisation of the focus group

The focus group took the form of a semi-structured interview. The researcher had a list of topic-specific questions, referred to as an 'interview guide' (Bryman 2012, p471). This approach to interviewing provides an outline for discussion and gives the participants ample scope to reply openly to questions. Throughout the focus group the researcher took field notes as a record. Such notes were brief and instantaneous when taken, then transcribed in full after the focus group ceased.

3.4.5   Triangulation

Traditionally associated with quantitative research, triangulation can often be a useful strategy in qualitative research to gain a deeper understanding of concepts and findings (Bryman 2012). Creswell (2014) explains how triangulating two or more different sources of data within qualitative research can help to establish and justify theses, while adding to the validity of the project. By combining the questionnaire and focus group methods, the research findings proved to be more trustworthy and credible (Cohen *et al* 2011).

3.4.6   Trustworthiness and relevance

Research must have validity in order to be meaningful (Cohen *et al* 2011). The methods used by the researcher were fit for the purpose of this study. Guba and Lincoln (1994), cited in Cohen *et al* 2007, outline the essential terminology more suitable for qualitative as opposed to quantitative research (see Table 1). The criteria must be fulfilled in order to ascertain trustworthiness (Shenton 2004). Credibility was ensured by adopting relevant research methods (and triangulation), and by examining the literature. Transferablility was achieved through highlighting the background to the data and describing the context of the research. Dependability was heightened by checking the accuracy of findings and transcriptions with the participants (Cohen *et al* 2011), and by seeking an outside review of the project (Creswell 2014). To ensure confirmability, the researcher was transparent and consistent in the approach, choosing suitable participants in an appropriate setting, thoroughly describing the findings, using triangulation to reduce bias (Howell-Major and Savin-Baden 2010), highlighting both positive and negative outcomes and recognising limitations (Shenton 2004).

Although this study does not seek to generalise findings to others, they may be of relevance to other primary schools in Ireland (Yin 2009). Providing a basis for future research further increases the dependability of this study (Shenton 2004).

Table 1: Terminology

Qualitative criteria *(Trustworthiness)*	Quantitative criteria
Credibility	Internal Validity
Transferability	External Validity
Dependability	Reliability
Confirmability	Objectivity

3.5 Methodological paradigm

Creswell (2014) suggests that there are two conflicting methodological paradigms: qualitative and quantitative methodologies. According to Bryman (2012) a qualitative methodological paradigm underpins this research study on homework; it seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the impact homework has on a child's learning by analysing their words; qualitative research is inductive (generates theory), compared with quantitative research, which is deductive (tests existing theory with data); an inductive approach involves carrying out the research prior to analysing the theory surrounding the topic; and although qualitative research is often criticised for being too subjective, the researcher's role as teacher is beneficial in order to improve homework activities for the participants.

For this study, the researcher initially posed the topic and questions, sought to find broad themes, analysed data to form more specific themes, asked open questions, took field notes, and gathered all information prior to conducting a thorough review of the literature on homework (Creswell 2014). This research seeks to understand and learn from the children's experiences with homework, rather than deductively seek a logical answer to solve the homework debate. Therefore, the researcher followed a sequence of steps (see Table 2) in order to carry out a qualitative research study.

Table 2: Sequence of steps taken by the researcher

1.	**Design:** Selection of qualitative research using questionnaire and focus group
2.	**Ethical Approval**
3.	**Recruitment and selection of participants:** opportunity and purposive sampling
4.	**Qualitative data collection:** questionnaire
5.	**Analysis of, and familiarisation with the qualitative data:** questionnaire
6.	**Further qualitative data collection:** focus group interview
7.	**Transcription of the qualitative data:** from the focus group
8.	**Qualitative data analysis:** focus group
9.	**Findings:** answering the research questions, referring to the literature and synopsis.

3.6 Thematic analysis

In order to best answer the research questions, the researcher decided to focus on identifying themes in the data from the participants' perspectives. Thematic analysis is one of the most commonly used approaches to qualitative data analysis (Bryman 2012). Individual experiences and opinions are central to this research, which seeks to highlight the benefits, challenges, motivations and best practice principles that the participants associate with homework. According to Willig (2008) such experiences are open to interpretation, however these experiences are real for the participants and will therefore best address the research questions.

Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) state that thematic analysis is imperative in order to describe a phenomenon (homework). Joffe (2011) suggests that thematic analysis can be used as a flexible strategy for categorising qualitative data. Thematic analysis focuses on areas such as experience and perception; it is useful to identify themes and analyse patterns in qualitative data, and answer research questions 'about people's experiences or understandings' (Clarke and Braun 2013, p4).

The researcher adopted an analytical approach by: interpreting the data, establishing characterising traits and forming categories (Sparkes and Smith 2009, Lapadat 2010). Consequently, to ensure rigour, the researcher opted to follow Braun and Clarke's

(2006) six phases of thematic analysis (see Appendix H) as a framework for qualitatively analysing the data for this dissertation.

The initial stage involved the familiarisation of responses and the transcription of the focus group interview. The researcher identified initial ideas at this stage, highlighting parts of the text that generated similar ideas. The researcher then generated broad codes, categorising significant findings in the data and connecting them back to the research questions (Fielden *et al* 2011). Stage 3 involved the generation of over-arching themes suitable for the categories of data collated. For stage 4 the researcher, ensuring suitability of the themes in answering the research questions, reviewed the themes. The aim of the next step was to review and refine the themes, assigning a name to each one. The final stage consisted of finding compelling examples and extracts from the data, linking them back to the research questions and relating them to literature. The researcher carried out this thematic analysis in alignment with the ontological and epistemological viewpoints underpinning this research project (Clarke and Braun 2013).

3.7 Conclusion

The researcher's approach to analysis is descriptive; things are explained as they are. Qualitative research celebrates the uniqueness of the individual(s) being studied, the changing nature of the world and the people who interact with it (Cohen *et al* 2007). Hutchison (2011) highly recommends employing research tools that give the children a sense of control over the data. However, Cohen *et al* (2007) explain that there are 'limitations to research involving people's experiences' (p5), as there is often no simple truth or answer to an issue.

Conclusively, homework cannot be analysed from a positivist viewpoint. The ontological (constructivist) and epistemological (interpretivist) positions outlined in this chapter have determined that the methodology most suitable for this dissertation is qualitative. For that reason, the researcher selected qualitative methods (focus group and survey) in order to analyse words. The researcher conducted interpretive thematic analysis of the data in order to gain a detailed insight into the perspectives of the participants (Clarke and Braun 2013). An inductive thematic analysis approach was

employed in this case, as no previous research has been conducted on the phenomenon of homework motivation from a student's perspective in Ireland (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). According to Vaismoradi *et al* (2013) thematic analysis is seen as a descriptive and reliable approach for qualitative researchers.

The findings obtained from the data are analysed in chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Results, Analysis and Recommendations

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter the findings and conclusions are described and analysed within the theoretical framework outlined in chapter 3. The findings from the focus group highlight that although the majority of participants dislike homework, they all recognised its importance and they feel ceasing homework would have adverse effects on their learning and development. Findings in the questionnaire corroborate this, indicating that although most of the respondents dislike doing homework, they nonetheless acknowledge its importance in their education.

The investigative process applied to the transcripts of the focus group produced fundamental themes that were evident in the data. The data was analysed using the six phases of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2013). Subsequently, the selected categories, concepts, and themes that emerged from the data were viewed as essential in determining the understandings of all the participants (Fielden *et al* 2011). The first six phases of thematic analysis were carried out manually.

The themes that emerged were defined in order to identify and label the categories (see Table 3). The analysis of the participants' responses included in each category were used to answer the corresponding research questions. In reviewing the data, all 6 participants from the focus group addressed each research question, with information from the questionnaire used to provide triangulation in order to corroborate the findings form participant responses.

The following number of participants in the questionnaire addressed each research question:

- Research question 1: 18 participants.
- Research question 2: 19 participants.
- Research question 3: 26 participants.
- Research question 4: 24 participants.

Table 3: Outline of themes and categories

Research Question	Category	Themes
Research Question 1: What benefits do children associate with homework?	**Category 1:** A positive outlook on the benefits identified with homework	**Themes 1:** 1. Improvement in academic achievements and test results 2. Reinforcement of learning through practice and revision 3. Personal skills development
Research Question 2: What factors contribute to a negative experience with homework?	**Category 2:** The negativity associated with homework and the impression of freedom when it is completed	**Themes 2:** 1. Time consuming and restricting free time for other activities 2. Negative feelings stimulated by homework 3. The physical homework environment
Research Question 3: In what way could homework increase a child's motivation to learn?	**Category 3:** The motivations involved in a child's personal approach to doing their homework	**Themes 3:** 1. Parental involvement and support 2. Extrinsic motivation: the mindset of having to do it and potential punishments associated with not doing it 3. Intrinsic motivation: confidence with the homework tasks and the importance for oneself
Research Question 4: What are the best practice principles for improving a child's engagement with homework?	**Category 4:** Strategies suggested in order to improve homework effectiveness	**Themes 4:** 1. Incorporating more child-centered and active learning activities 2. The value placed on learning activities 3. Providing an element of choice to increase suitability for individual family routines

4.2 Category One: A positive outlook on the benefits identified with homework

This category was identified once the following themes were reviewed and defined:

1. Improvement in academic achievements and test results
2. Reinforcement of learning through practice and revision
3. Personal skills development

This category is demarcated by the ability of the participants to recall and report their positive associations with homework. According to Baş *et al* (2017), homework serves many beneficial purposes in a child's educational and personal development. Homework as an aid to a child's development is an important learning tool (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 1999). The analysis of the participants' responses corroborates both aforementioned points. Accordingly, the analysis of the focus group transcripts and the results of the questionnaire were used to corroborate findings in order to answer research question one:

What benefits do children associate with homework?

4.3 Themes for Category One

4.3.1 Improvement in academic achievements and test results

Marzano and Pickering (2007) state that, in a more senior class, when homework activities serve a clear purpose for the children they link it to academic achievement. The analyses of the responses from focus group question 1: In what way is homework good for you? suggests that by doing homework they feel they achieve better results in tests. They believe that without homework, their results would suffer. See Appendix I for additional quotations.

> *'Helps get an education and good marks in my tests on Friday.'* (Participant 1)

> *'You learn more and I get better test results too.'* (Participant 3)

When asked to elaborate by question 2 of the focus group: How exactly does homework help you get better results in your tests? the children explained that by learning spellings and tables for homework they remember them and can reproduce the material correctly as a result. Participants put an emphasis on mathematics and English.

> *'If I spend time learning off my tables and someone asking me my spellings I am confident in my Friday test.'* (Participant 3)

> *'Learning tables and spellings…doesn't just help with our Friday tests…you will always remember the things you learn for any test.'* (Participant 6)

When asked in question 3 of the focus group: What would happen if you didn't get homework? there were very similar responses from all participants, highlighting the negative outcomes that would occur as a result of having no homework. See Appendix I for further evidence.

> *'I would not be as smart and I would have no new words.'* (Participant 1)

> *'It would make me stupid only learning at school'* (Participant 2)

Participants made a strong connection between their results, intelligence and education. Such responses in the focus group echo a key aim of our primary curriculum, to help prepare children for further education and equip them for life-long learning and development (Ireland, Department of Education and Science 1999).

The analysis of the quantitative data from the questionnaire further corroborates this. As a result of the responses for the statement in question 3: Homework is important, it can be suggested that 16 of the participants (2 strongly agree, 10 agree and 4 neutral) view homework as playing an important role in their learning (see Graph 1). Explanations from the participants representative of these sections included the importance of homework for learning, getting smarter, exam results, helping to understand material, and benefitting them in secondary school and in future life.

Graph 1: Homework is important

Strongly agree
2
(8%)

Strongly disagree
8
(31%)

Disagree
2
(8%)

Agree
10
(38%)

Neutral
4
(15%)

Total respondents = 26
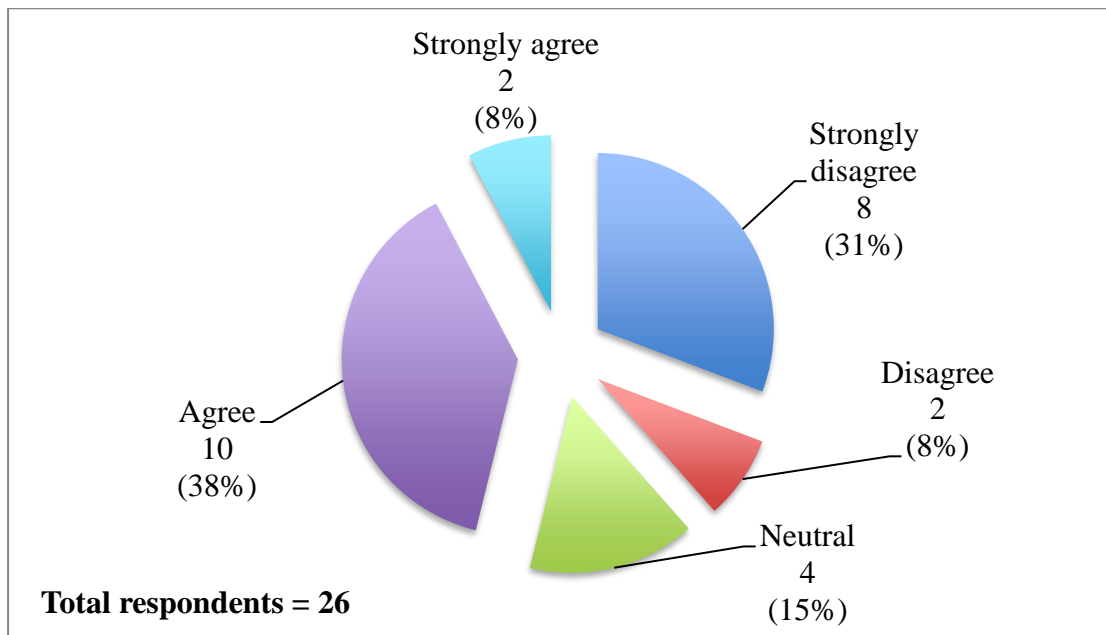
For question 6 on the questionnaire the children were given a statement: By doing homework, I learn more; therefore I get better results, (see Graph 2). 7 participants strongly agreed with this statement, with a further 4 agreeing. While 7 others were neutral, 6 of them responded positively with comments suggesting homework does help with results, revision and learning new material and spellings.

Graph 2: By doing homework, I learn more; therefore I get better results

Questionnaire Q.6

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
No. of responses (N=26)	4	4	7	4	7 / 0
	15.4%	15.4%	26.9%	15.4%	26.9%
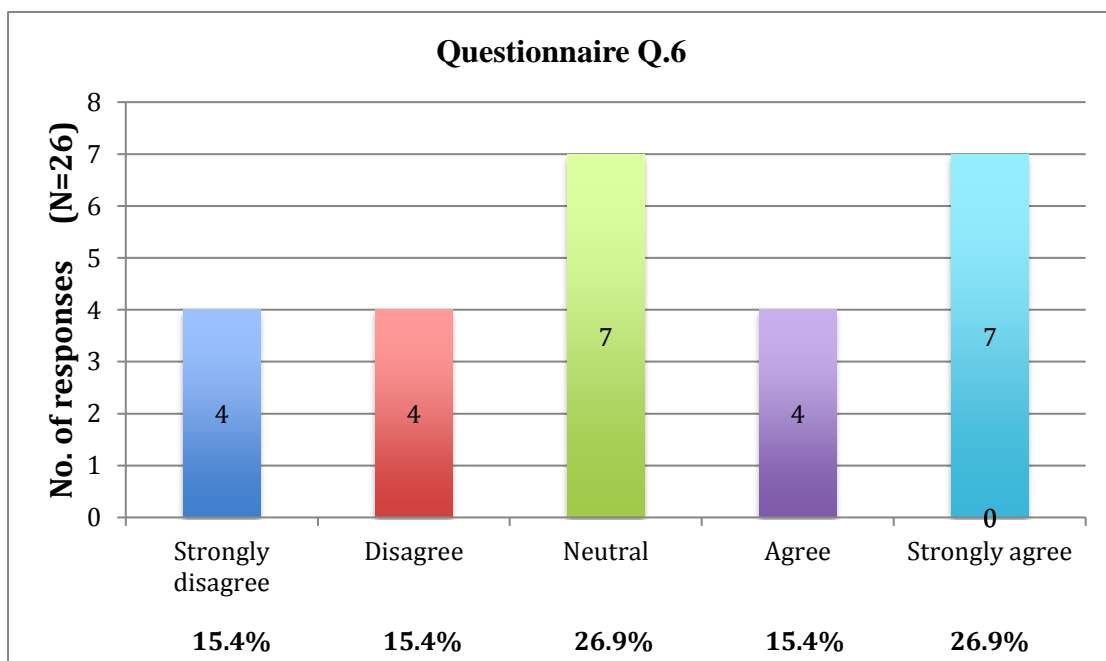
It can be stated that a significant number of participants believe that doing homework is positive for their learning and development (Van Voorhis 2011, Marzano and Pickering 2007).

4.3.2   Reinforcement of learning through practice and revision

Carr (2013) recognises the importance of homework as a means to reinforce work covered at school. During the focus group when asked by question 3: What would happen if you didn't get homework? 3 of the 6 participants (50%) suggested that they feel there would be a lack of opportunity to revise or practice their schoolwork if they did not have homework. Therefore, it can be argued that the participants place an importance on revising.

> *'I couldn't revise or develop skills I need to learn.'* (Participant 4)

> *'I wouldn't know how to revise things…'* (Participant 5)

> *'I would have no practice, wouldn't remember things…I would be slower at my work.''* (Participant 6)

Bempechat (2004) similarly links practice to a child's motivation towards increased academic achievement, by suggesting that as children observe improvements, they are encouraged to continue to achieve. All participants in the focus group commented on improvement in their work as a result of homework when asked question 5: How does homework have a positive effect on your schoolwork? The responses suggest that the participants place a general emphasis on handwriting, material for memorising, literacy (spellings for English and Irish) and numeracy (tables). There is an importance placed on the reinforcement (Carr 2013, Schuetze 2004), and the repetition of material for homework (Pytel 2007, Cooper *et al* 2006), which in turn increases self-efficacy (Ramdass and Zimmerman 2011, Schmitz and Perels 2011). See Appendix I for further evidence.

> *'By repeating the work from school you get better with writing and remembering tables and spellings.'* (Participant 1)

The participants were further probed by question 6: What specific subjects or activities do you think help the most? Responses identified that English and mathematics are most valued by participants, with problem-solving highlighted as a benefit of mathematics homework (Cooper *et al* 2006, Gültekin 2005, O'Neill and McMahon 2005). See Appendix I for further evidence.

'*English for writing and maths for solving hard problems.*' (Participant 2)

Homework is linked to intrinsic motivation (Coutts 2004), as it provides opportunities for reinforcing material (Bas *et al* 2007).

When asked in question 6 on the questionnaire if they learned more by getting homework, the most common responses suggested the children value homework as a learning tool (see Graph 3). 18 of the participants (69%) responded with positive comments such as the following listed in order of significance:

1. getting better results
2. learning more
3. remembering more
4. revising new things
5. learning from mistakes
6. improves my work

Graph 3: Responses to learning more from doing homework
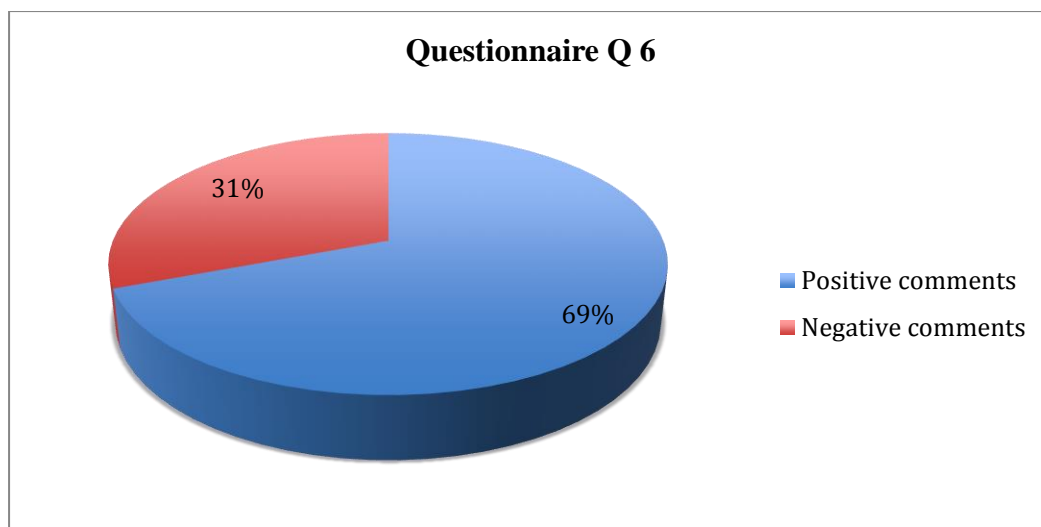
Respondents N=26; Positive comments n=18 (69%), Negative comments n=8 (31%).

4.3.3 Personal skills development

Research demonstrates the importance of carrying out homework activities. which affect positively self efficacy, self regulation and time management (Bembenutty 2011).

The positive influence of homework on the development of a variety of skills was expressed in the focus group when question 7: Do you think homework helps to develop any personal skills for you?   Participants emphasised the development of their concentration skills, along with time-management, organisation, responsibility and memory. See Appendix I for further evidence.

> *'When I do my homework it helps me concentrate and it helps me check my time...'* (Participant 2)

Furthermore, in the focus group one participant very precisely summed up the positive effect of homework for them when answering question 5: How does homework have a positive effect on your schoolwork?

> *'It is self-learning in all subjects so it makes you better in yourself.'*
> (Participant 5)

This quote encapsulates Bembenutty's (2011) preposition that with the development of the aforementioned key skills, academic performance is heightened and intrinsic motivation is increased, resulting in more positive engagement with homework activities in general.

As a result of the analysis of the participants' responses in the questionnaire to the open-ended statement for question 7: Homework improves my, it can be stated that concentration, memory, responsibility and time-management are the most important skills developed (Bembenutty 2011, Baş *et al* 2017) (see Graph 4). For this question, participants were invited to tick any options that apply. A majority of 12 participants selected concentration, highlighting the importance of focusing and not getting distracted in order to concentrate and learn. The development of their memory was

next highest among the participants, with 10 choosing this option in the survey. 7 participants selected responsibility, making it the third highest skill, which they feel homework improves for them. It is noteworthy that 6 participants opted to tick the 'other' box, listing the following as other considerations:

- Learning Irish (improvement in Irish)
- Intelligence (getting smarter)
- Improvement in their work in general
- One participant explained they felt it had no improvement on anything

Graph 4: Homework skills development

Questionnaire Q.7
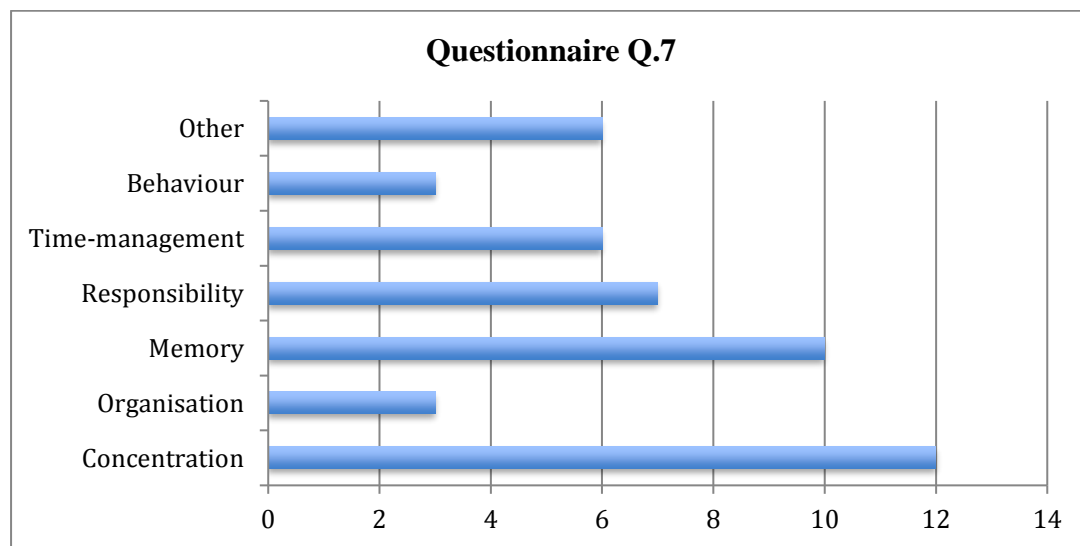
4.3.4 Research Question One: Justification

Homework plays a vital role in reinforcing a child's learning, providing them with the opportunity to engage meaningfully with their work, achieve academically and develop many essential skills for life-long learning; concentration, time management, self-regulation, responsibility practicing and applying material and growing in confidence with their learning (Ramdass and Zimmerman 2011, Schmitz and Perels 2011).

Additionally, the positive influence homework has on memory development had been highlighted by 3 participants in the focus group (50%) and 10 participants in the questionnaire (39%). Such a finding indicates that reviewing, reinforcing, practicing and applying new material is a beneficial routine for children. The aforementioned

benefits to a child's learning and development have been corroborated in the findings from the focus group and the questionnaire. Subsequently, it can be proposed that these are the main benefits, both instructional and non-instructional in nature (Baş *et al* 2017), which children associate with homework:

- Academic achievement
- Practicing and revising new material
- Personal skills development (concentration, memory, responsibility etc.)

4.4 Category Two: The negativity associated with homework and the impression of freedom when it is completed

This category was identified once the following themes were reviewed and defined:

1. Time consuming and restricting free time for other activities
2. Negative feelings stimulated by homework
3. The physical homework environment

This category is differentiated by the ability of the participants to give an overview of how the completion of homework interacts with their daily life, provide an account of the physical environment in which they complete homework, and to describe the emotional connections they experience with homework. For many primary school children there are negative associations with homework, such as the time it takes to complete activities (Kohn 2006a), the inadequacy of the physical space for doing homework (Hutchison 2011), the feeling of boredom (Coutts 2004), and the potential frustration and aggravation for children and their families (Cooper *et al* 2006). The analysis of the participants' responses in the data corroborates these issues. Accordingly, the analysis of the focus group transcripts and the results of the questionnaire were used to support findings in order to answer research question two:

What factors contribute to a negative experience with homework?

4.5 Themes for Category Two

4.5.1 Time consuming and restricting free time for other activities

According to Coutts (2004) children view homework as a very time consuming exercise that restricts their free time. The analyses of the responses from the focus group for question 12: Is there anything particularly difficult about homework? Can you explain for me? highlight that there is an issue with time consumption for all participants. See Appendix I for further evidence.

> **'***It is just annoying. It takes forever to do it and I can't just do what I want...'*
> (Participant 1)

Kohn (2006a) concurs with this, adding that homework has a negative impact on the time children would otherwise have to interact with family and friends and engage with other activities of their choice. The findings from the responses for question 13: What would you do if you got less homework? in the focus group identify that participants would rather spend their time playing (Trautwein *et al* 2006a, Kohn 2006a, Cooper *et al* 2006, Coutts 2004). See Appendix I for further evidence.

> **'***Take up a new hobby…spend more time playing golf…'* (Participant 5)

The analysis of the quantitative data from the questionnaire further corroborates the finding that homework is time consuming. It can be concluded from the results of question 8 in the questionnaire: The amount of homework I get is too much, that half of the participants (50%) feel that they get too much homework (see Graph 5).

Graph 5: I get too much homework

Strongly agree
3
(12%)

Strongly
disagree
4
(15%)

Disagree
3
(12%)

Agree
10
(38%)

Neutral
6
(23%)

Total respondents = 26
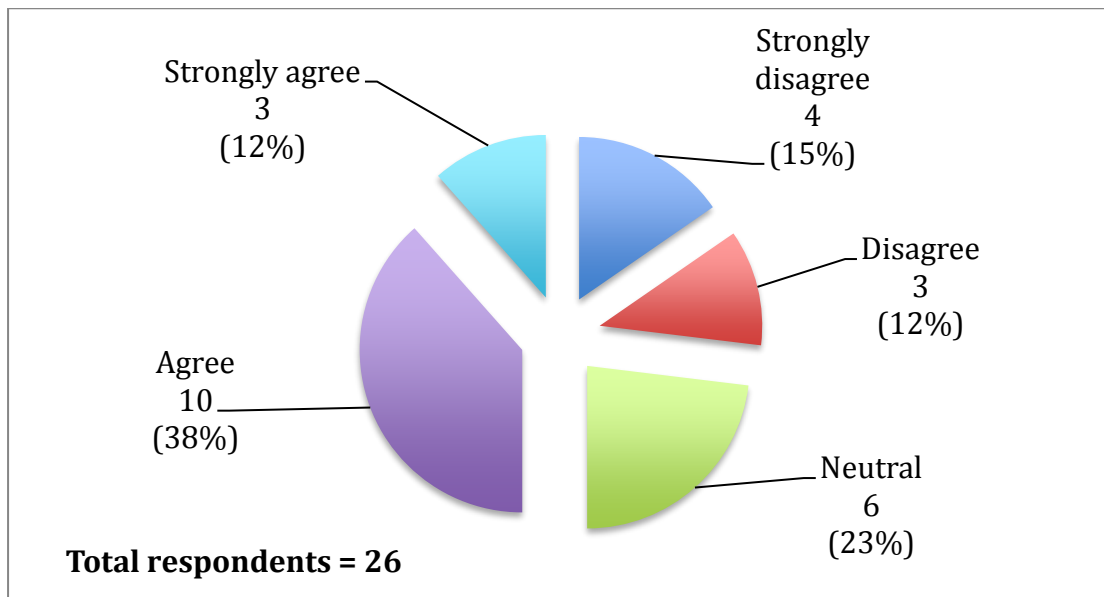
Further analyses of the responses from the questionnaire for question 11: Does homework get in the way of other things after school? explain in greater detail the extent to which homework is an inconvenience for many. 15 (58%) of the 26 participants answered yes, with 11 (42%) answering no (see Graph 6).

Graph 6: Homework consumes free time

	Yes	No
Respondents	15	11
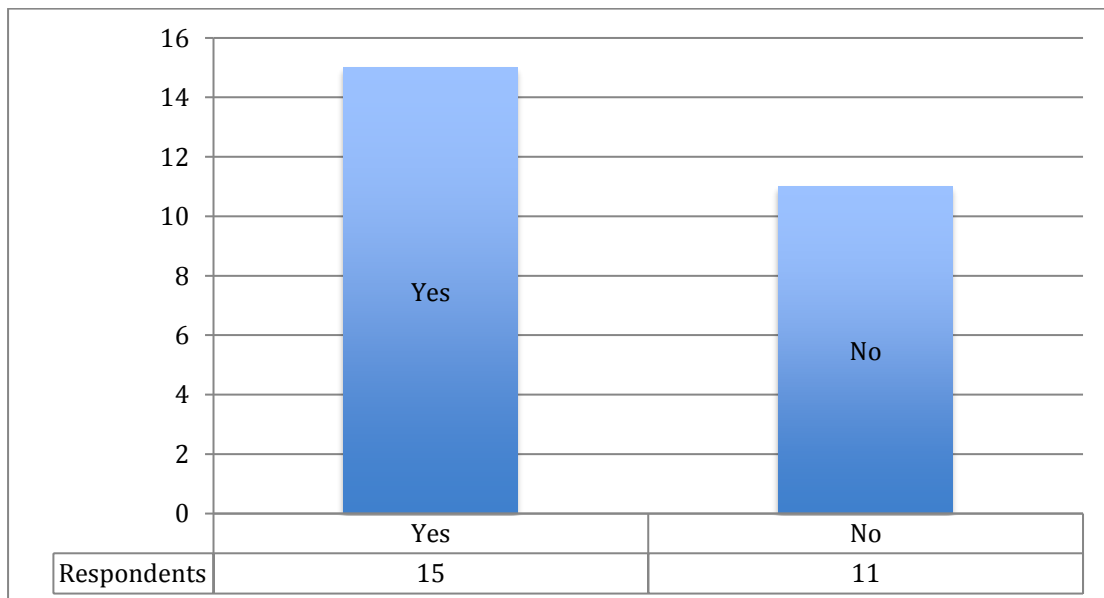
Total respondents N=26, Yes respondents n=15 (58%), No respondents n=11 (42%).

The participants who feel that homework does get in the way of other activities gave the following examples:

1. Football
2. Playing (with friends/outside/with family/the Xbox or PlayStation)
3. Gaelic
4. Communicating / Talking with others
5. Athletics
6. Other sports: Dancing, Running, Hurling, Golf, Swimming
7. Other hobbies: Music, watching TV, using phone
8. Other: relaxing, eating

The 11 participants (42%) who responded that homework does not get in the way of other things gave the following explanations the following explanations (see Table 4):

Table 4: Reasons why homework does not get in the way

Reason:	Number of participants
They feel they still have time to play afterwards	4
They get it done before anything else	4
They go to an after school homework club	2
They don't have many other things to do	1

Although 11 participants responded 'No' to homework getting in the way, 8 of those allude to the fact that they must get homework done in order to engage with their free time for play and hobbies. This finding is reflective of the literature, which suggests that homework limits time for childhood freedoms (Kohn 2006a, Trautwein *et al* 2006a, Cooper *et al* 2006, Coutts 2004).

4.5.2 Negative feelings stimulated by homework

Children find homework boring (Coutts 2004), as it can be linked to a feeling of frustration, which can lead to conflict (Saam and Jeong 2013). The analyses of the focus group responses for question 11: When you are actually doing your homework, how do

you feel? What emotions or feelings do you experience? highlight the emotional negativity and boredom experienced from doing homework (Friedman 2011, Hallett 2010, Simplicio 2005). See Appendix I for further evidence.

> *'I feel upset because I have to stop playing to do it. And angry too because it takes too long and nobody helps me.'* (Participant 2)

Additionally, focus group question 14: How would that make you feel, having less homework and more time to spend on those things you mentioned? reveals the joy at the thought of getting less homework (happy, excited, delighted), while highlighting the impact homework has on relationships within the family (Marzano and Pickering 2007, Cooper and Valentine 2001). See Appendix I for further evidence.

> *'Am excited I guess, wondering what I could do with the extra time and no one nagging me about doing lots of homework would be so great.'* (Participant 2)

> *'I would probably feel good and mum wouldn't have to waste time waiting on me to finish it before we could go and do something.'* (Participant 4)

Findings from question 1 (Do you like homework?) in the questionnaire highlight that most participants (73%) dislike homework (see Graph 7).

Graph 7: Do you like homework?
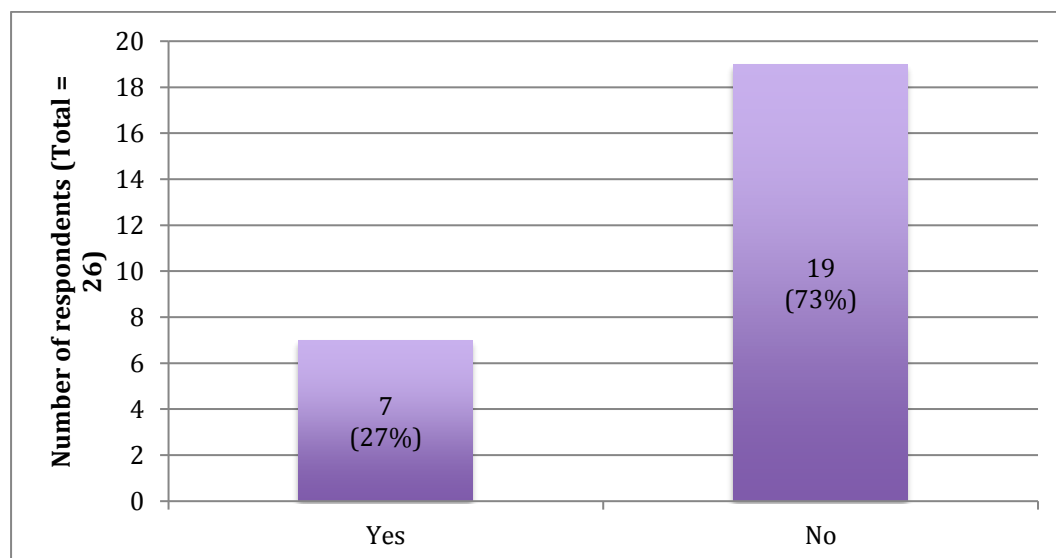
The following table (Table 5) highlights the main reasons given by the participants as to why they dislike homework. The results corroborate with previous findings from the data on time consumption (Kohn 2006a).

Table 5: Reasons for disliking homework

Reason:	Number of participants
Takes up time	10
It is boring	6
It is hard	3

When given the statement: Doing homework makes me feel good, for question 13 in the questionnaire, 13 (50%) of participants selected 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree', with the 8 'neutral' responses also providing negative reasons (see Graph 8).

Graph 8: Doing homework makes me feel good.
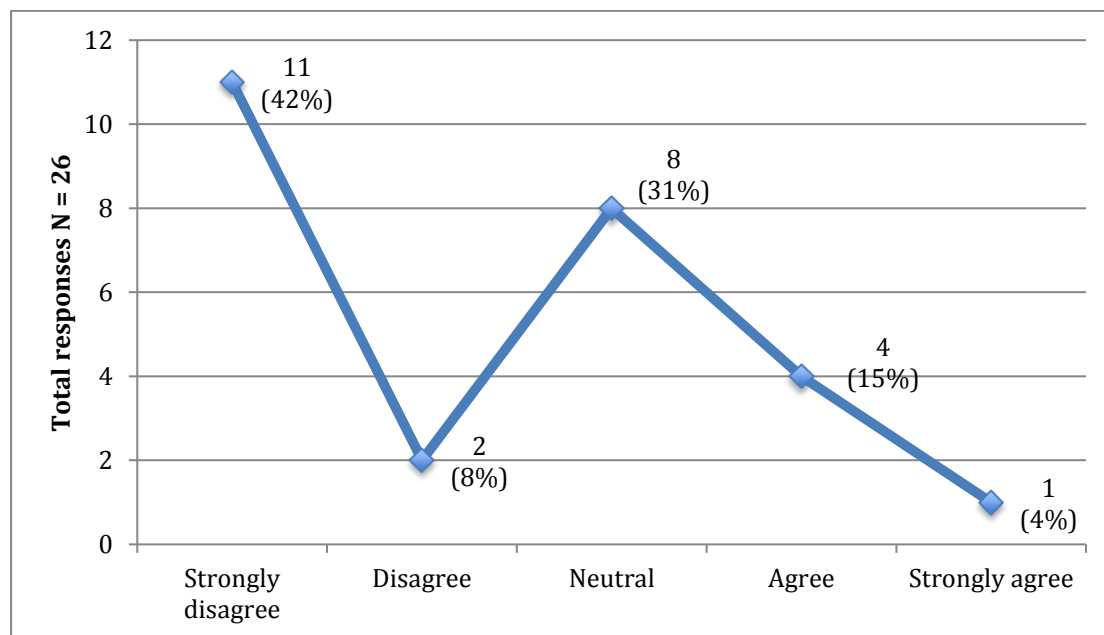
In order of significance, the negative explanations from the 21 participants who selected strongly disagree, disagree and neutral highlight that they find homework; annoying, hate it, boring, gets in the way, waste of time, makes them feel sad, bad and distressed.

Furthermore, the analyses of the responses for question 5: How would you describe homework? in the questionnaire emphasise the negative feelings aroused by homework (see Graph 9).

Graph 9: Describing homework
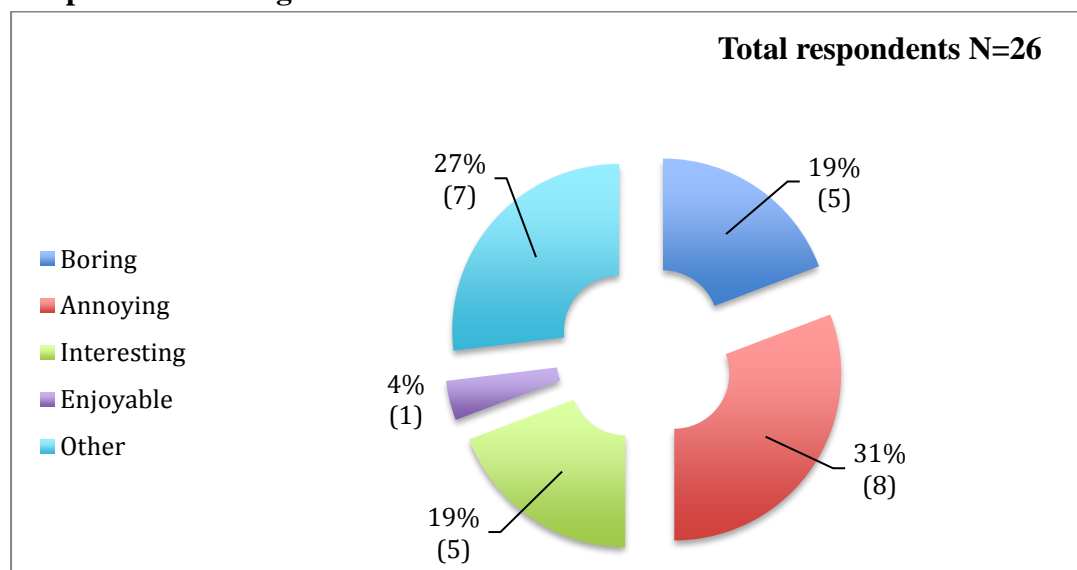
Findings from this question result in 13 (50%) participants opting for the negative options (boring or annoying), only 6 (23%) of the participants ticked a positive option (interesting or enjoyable), with 7 (27%) selecting the 'other' option. Suggestions given by the participants who opted for the 'other' option include, okay (4), fun (1), don't like it (1) and sucks (1). Table 6 outlines the explanations given by the participants, who selected a negative option, justifying their choice of boring or annoying when describing homework. Such results further emphasise the researcher's previous finding that homework takes up time participants would otherwise spend playing (Kohn 2006a, Trautwein *et al* 2006a, Cooper *et al* 2006).

Table 6: Why homework is boring / annoying

Reason	Number of participants
It wastes time I could have on the XBox / Playstation	5
I don't have much time to play	5
Takes too long	1
I would rather get fresh air	1
I don't like writing	1

Additionally 3 of the participants who ticked the 'other' box gave negative comments:

- Sometimes annoying
- Takes up too much time

- [Homework is] stupid, no point

Conclusively, it can be stated that children experience negative emotions as a result of having homework. They find homework boring and unnecessary, at times a burden on other family members, with the potential to cause conflict within the family home (Saam and Jeong 2013, Clemmitt 2007, Cooper *et al* 2006, Bennett and Kalish 2006).

4.5.3 The physical homework environment

The physical environment where children do their homework can cause educational inequalities (Hutchison 2011).

The findings from the focus group question 8: If you could describe a place for doing homework, what would it be like, and why? identify the participants' preferred homework environments. Notably all of the participants referred to their desire for quietness and a desk or table. See Appendix I for further evidence.

> '*Sort of like a kitchen, a quiet one though with a big table...*' (Participant 2)

> '*A bedroom type room with desk, lots of space, quiet too...*' (Participant 3)

The responses for focus group question 10: As you all do your homework at home and some of you mentioned earlier how important concentration is, can you think is there anything that helps you to concentrate and get your work done well? highlight the preference for support or help from a family member (Carr 2013, Bennett-Conroy 2012, Hoover-Dempsey *et al* 2001). See Appendix I for further evidence.

> '*Quiet mostly and at a table too. If an adult or mum is there to help it keeps me going too.*' (Participant 6)

The analyses of the responses for questionnaire question 10: Where do you usually do your homework? identify the kitchen and bedroom as the most common places within the home for doing homework (see Graph 10). The results for this question corroborate

with the findings from question 8 in the focus group, 4 participants identified the kitchen while 2 identified the bedroom as the ideal place for doing their homework.

Graph 10: Homework environments
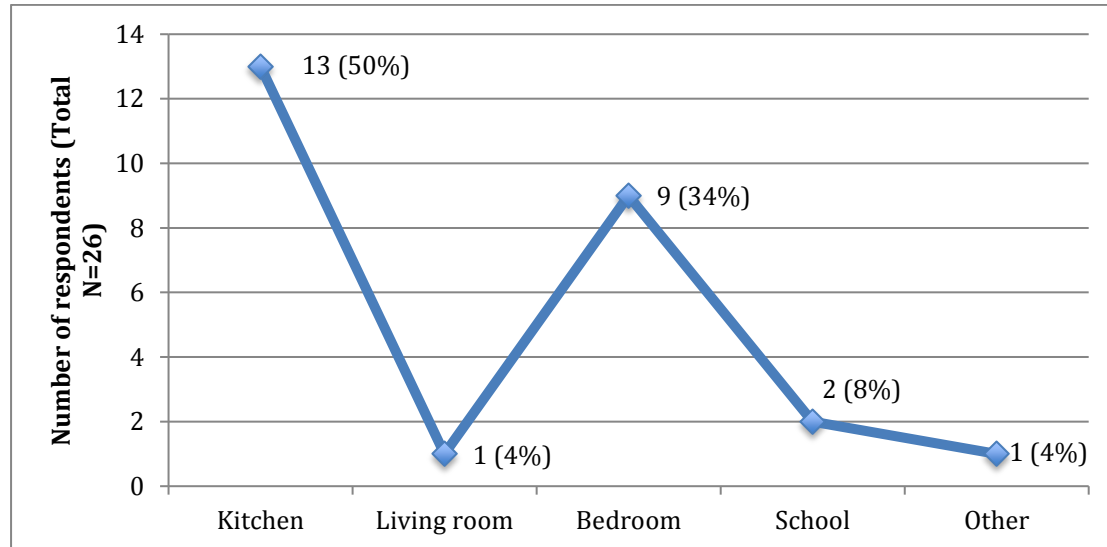
The explanations for doing homework in the kitchen include the desire for support from a parent, a table, no distractions and quietness to concentrate. Justifications for doing homework in the bedroom include the peacefulness, a desk, that it is nice and warm and ability to concentrate easier. The 2 participants who selected 'school' attend a homework club facility after school, the 1 participant who selected the 'living room' explained that mum and dad are there to help and the 1 participant who opted for 'other' named the dining room as their location for doing homework because of the big table. The researcher has analysed that participants are linking the resources, atmosphere and support within their home environments to increased concentration and success with homework (Carr 2013, Reach and Cooper 2004).

4.5.4 Research Question Two: Justification

Homework is a time-consuming activity, which evokes negative emotions among children (Kohn 2006a, Trautwein *et al* 2006, Coutts 2004). All participants in the focus group highlighted the time homework takes up, and 58% of the participants in the survey said 'Yes' that homework consumes their free time, while 50% of the participants selected a negative option (boring or annoying) when asked to describe homework. Children have varying reasons for their choice of location for homework

completion. However, the concerning educational inequalities facing children regarding their physical homework environment, which Hutchison (2011) reports, are not apparent in this particular case study. Evidently, all participants have access to an environment, which provides the resources they feel they need to carry out their homework. That stated, the locations of such environments differ mainly from kitchens, to bedrooms and according to Kellett (2009) cited in Hutchison (2011) children's actual homework environment can be inadequate in terms of support and physically inappropriate. An environment a child may determine suitable, as they are accustomed to it, may in fact be an adverse learning environment.

It can be therefore stated that the main factors that contribute to a negative experience with homework are: time consumption, the negative feelings experienced and the suitability of the home environment.

4.6 Category Three: The motivations involved in a child's personal approach to doing their homework

This category was identified once the following themes were reviewed and defined:
1. Parental involvement and support
2. Extrinsic motivation: the mindset of having to do it and potential punishments associated with not doing it
3. Intrinsic motivation: confidence with the homework tasks and the importance for oneself

This category is demarcated by the ability of the participants to identify and explain the various motivations (extrinsic and intrinsic) they associate with homework completion, and highlight any role parental or family involvement plays in their homework completion. Motivation (Bas *et al* 2007), and increased parental support (Carr 2013) are positively influential in a child's engagement with homework.

The analysis of the participants' responses in the data substantiates the findings in the literature. Accordingly, the analysis of the focus group transcripts and the results of the questionnaire were used to corroborate findings in order to answer research question three:

In what way could homework increase a child's motivation to learn?

4.7 Themes for Category Three

4.7.1 Parental involvement and support

According to Carr (3013) and Bennett-Conroy (2012) the support of parents for homework activities is instrumental for a child's academic progress. The analyses of the responses for question 16: Who usually helps you with your homework and why that person? in the focus group identify that a parent or an older sibling as provide the support, help and advice during homework activities. See Appendix I for further evidence.

> '*My dad, cause he is smart.*' (Participant 1)

> '*My brother or mum cause they are older and can help me.*' (Participant 2)

According to Baş *et al* (2017), homework is a useful tool for improving relationships between parents and children and communicating new learning between school and home. 4 of the 6 focus group responses for question 17: Do you think getting help with homework is important? suggest that the children feel it is important for parents to be informed about their learning and progress (See Appendix I for further evidence).

> '*I don't always need help but it gives me a chance to talk with my parents... they know I have learned things and I'm doing good...*' (Participant 4)

> '*I think it's very important my parents talk with me about what I am learning...*' (Participant 5)

Conversely, parental involvement can have adverse effects on relationships, often causing conflict and stressful situations for both parents and children (Kohn 2006, Cooper *et al* 2006). The responses from 2 participants in the focus group to question 17: Do you think getting help with homework is important? undoubtedly capture these

findings, as participants use very negative words (annoying, argue, frustrated, upset) when giving their opinion.

'It is annoying sometimes we just argue in my house…' (Participant 1)

'Well sometimes mum is busy…and people get frustrated and angry with me then I get upset...' (Participant 2)

The analysis of the quantitative data for questionnaire question 17: Does someone at home usually check that you have completed all of your homework? Why?) further indicates that although there is a high level of parental involvement during homework activities, this is not true for all participants (see Graph 11).

Graph 11: Parental involvement with homework
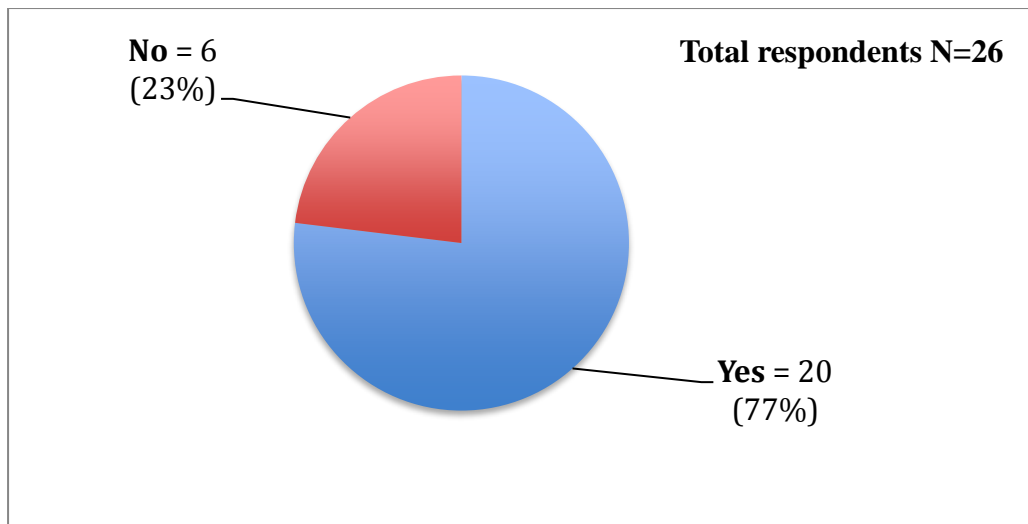
There were 2 main reasons given by the 20 participants that responded 'Yes' for parental involvement in checking homework (see Table 7). This reflects findings by Patall *et al* (2008) on the types of parental involvement in homework: to monitor activities and provide direct assistance.

Table 7: Reasons parents check homework

Reason	Number of participants
To make sure it is all done	12
To make sure everything is correct	8

The following are the explanations given by the 6 respondents for parents not checking homework:

- They don't have time
- They don't do it
- I tell them to go away
- I want to do it myself
- They know I will do it
- They know I will get it all right

It can be therefore proposed that children have varying levels of support from parents, with a lack of support or involvement seemingly associated with negativity towards homework (Carr 2013, Bennett-Conroy 2012).

4.7.2 Extrinsic motivation: the mindset of having to do it and potential punishments associated with not doing it

Extrinsic motivation is concerned with the homework environment, the purpose of the homework and whether there are associated benefits, outcomes and feedback (Baş *et al* 2017, Deci and Ryan 2008a). The analyses of the responses for question 15: Why do you do your homework? in the focus group identifies 2 participants referring to extrinsic motivation factors which contribute to their homework completion. Both participants highlight the importance of getting good results in tests (Coutts 2004).

> *'I do better in my test on Friday.' (Participant 1)*

> *'Well…if I didn't learn my homework I wouldn't know my words for the test.' (Participant 2)*

Furthermore the responses for focus group question 18: What happens if you don't do your homework? suggest that extrinsic motivation factors play a big role in why the children choose to do their homework. See Appendix I for further evidence.

'I would just get shouted at by dad, or get my name in the homework tracker...' (Participant 1)

There is an overwhelming sense that, by doing homework, children wish to avoid repercussions from parents and their teacher and also evade punishments of limited free time or additional work (Katz *et al* 2010, Coutts 2004).

The findings from the analysis of the questionnaire corroborate this. The results from the responses for question 2: Why do you think you get homework? give further insight into how children are extrinsically motivated to complete their homework. Responses included:

- Mum and dad can see what I am doing
- Parents can see how well I am doing
- It helps with tests
- It prepares us for secondary school
- Teacher wants us to do it

Additionally the responses for question 16: Do you always finish your homework? highlight the negativity which is associated with homework completion and the opinion that it should be done for teacher or a parents approval (see Graph 12).

Graph 12: Homework completion
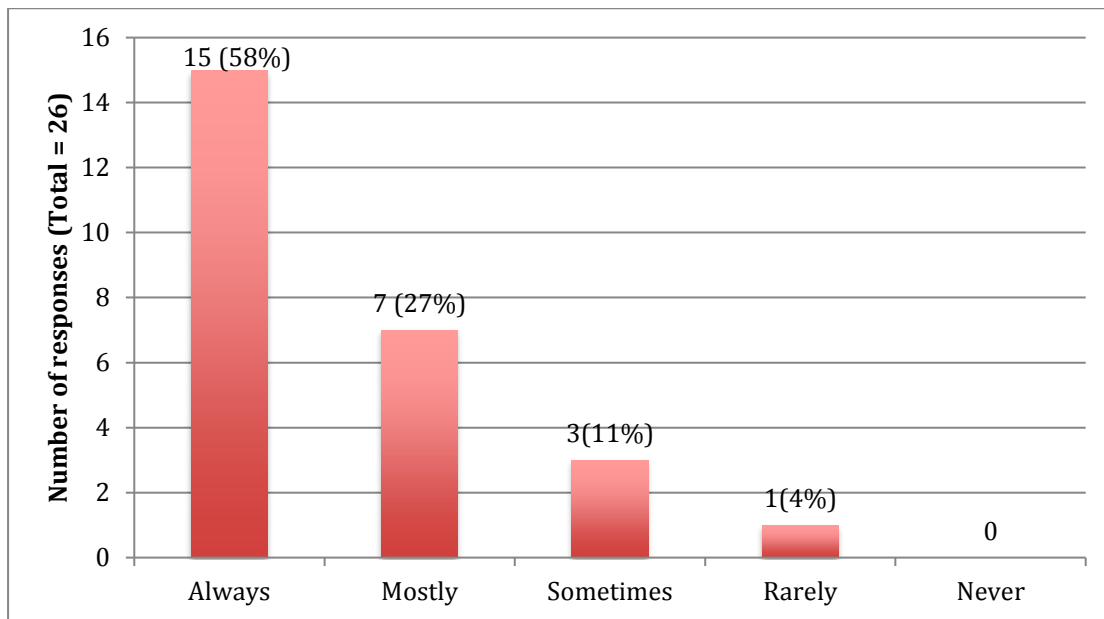
The 15 participants who responded that they always finish their homework gave the most negative explanations for doing so, including the following:

- Teacher tells me to do it
- Don't want to get in trouble
- Don't want to go in the homework tracker
- Mum makes me
- Mum scolds me if I don't
- Not allowed to leave the table until it is done

4.7.3 Intrinsic motivation: confidence with the homework tasks and the importance for oneself

In the analyses of responses for question 15: Why do you do your homework? in the focus group, 4 participants imply that their motivation is intrinsic in nature. Their motivation stems from a personal desire to perform well and improve in their learning (Xu 2011, Coutts 2004, Warton 2001). See Appendix I for further evidence.

> '*Yeah it helps me revise and practice and I get better at my work then and find it easier.*' (Participant 5)

Additionally, all responses for focus group question 19: Are there any particular activities you like getting that make homework more worthwhile? highlight self-confidence in their own ability with the activities increases their intrinsic motivation for homework completion (Xu 2011, Vatterott 2010). Additionally, all participants identified that project work is most interesting and meaningful for homework (Helle *et al* 2007, Bailey *et al* 2006, Gültekin 2005). See Appendix I for further evidence.

> **'***Projects cause I can research on the computer and find out things. Also maths cause well I'm already good at it...'* (Participant 1)

The quantitative data further substantiates the findings from the focus group. When asked by question 4: Do you do your homework by yourself? Why?, in the questionnaire, the majority of the participants (73%) responded 'Yes' (see Graph 13).

Graph 13: Independent homework completion
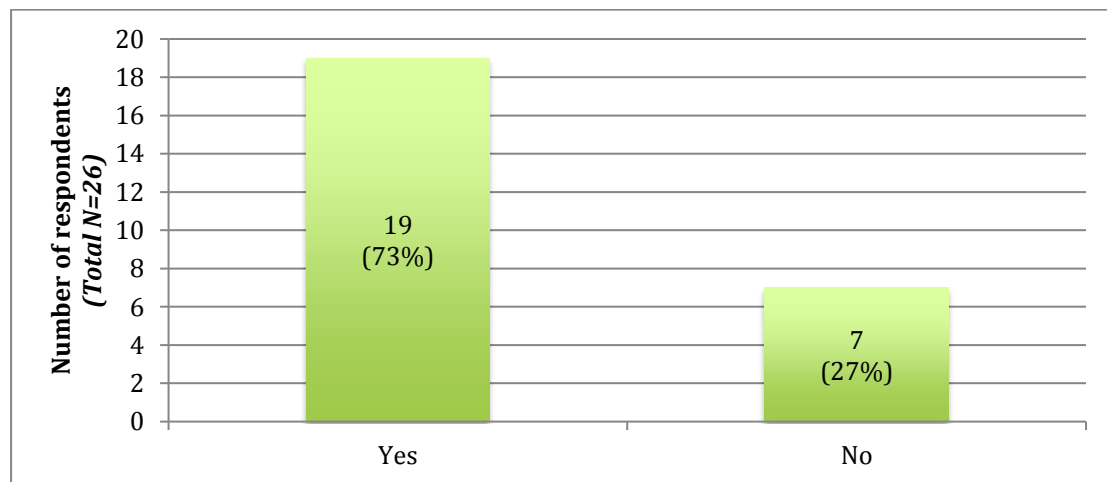
In addition, the participants who selected 'Yes' gave explanations, which refer to their intrinsic motivations in terms of their ability and self-confidence with the activities and the knowledge that someone is there to support them where necessary:

- I understand it myself
- Someone is there to help if I need it
- It is for myself not my parents
- I need to learn for myself
- It is easy

4.7.4 Research Question Three: Justification

The outcomes of this particular case study show that parental involvement appears to be helpful and desirable for most, correlating with Carr (2013) and Bennett-Conroy (2012) who both highlight the positivity as a result of this support with homework. However, some children associate parental involvement with a negative situation, which corresponds with the findings of Kohn (2006a) and Cooper *et al* (2006), who address the potential for creating conflict and increasing stress due to parental involvement. Katz *et al* (2010) found that extrinsic motivation is often linked with negativity, low levels of interest and engagement with activities and a reduction in achievement. Contrary to this, they suggest that intrinsic motivation is associated with a positive outlook on learning, high interest levels and better overall engagement with homework activities (Vatterott 2017). These suggestions in relation to a child's motivations for completing homework have been corroborated in the findings from the focus group and the questionnaire.

In what way could homework increase a child's motivation to learn? Accordingly, it can be stated that assigning homework activities that are suitably challenging (Dettmers *et al* 2010), purposeful and interesting (e.g. research and projects) (Sidhu *et al* 2010), that engage parents in an actively supportive manner (Bailey *et al* 2006) will heighten a child's motivation to learn.

4.8 Category Four: Strategies suggested in order to improve homework effectiveness

This category was identified once the following themes were reviewed and defined:
1. Incorporating more child-centered and active learning activities.
2. The value placed on learning activities.
3. Providing an element of choice to increase suitability for individual family routines.

This category is differentiated by the ability of the participants to give an overview of the activities they enjoy getting for homework, the activities they deem to be important, and suggest ways they would alter homework assignments to increase their motivations

to do their homework and ultimately increase homework effectiveness. According to Vatterott (2010) the following must be considered in order to assign effective homework: the purpose of the task, the time required, an element of choice given, provide an opportunity to heighten competence and the task should appear interesting for the child. The analysis of the participants' responses in the data addresses the relevance of the aforementioned considerations for the participants in this case study. Accordingly, the analysis of the focus group transcripts and the results of the questionnaire were used to corroborate findings in order to answer research question four:

What are the best practice principles for improving a child's engagement with homework?

4.9 Themes for Category Four

4.9.1 Incorporating more child-centered and active learning activities

Trautwein *et al* (2006) suggest that a child's level of motivation will determine their level of engagement with homework tasks. Similarly, Carr (2013) states that we must set interesting homework activities if we want to motivate children. The analysis of the responses of the focus group question 22: If you were teacher, what homework would you set for the week? identifies that all participants feel project work would be favourable as a homework activity (Helle *et al* 2011, Bailey *et al* 2006). See Appendix I for further evidence.

> '*Tables, spellings…project work too...*' (Participant 5)

> '*Definitely project work but not every week, only when it suited what we were learning.*' (Participant 6)

Furthermore, the analyses of the responses for focus group question 23: Can you explain why you think projects are a good activity for homework? explains that the participants deem projects beneficial as they can work to their strengths and

preferences, heightening their intrinsic motivation (Helle *et al* 2007, Sidhu *et al* 2010). See Appendix I for further evidence.

> **'***Projects help people share the work…we learn from each other…it is interesting and fun.'* (Participant 3)

Protheroe (2009) also states that children gain more from their homework when feedback is given and children engage in discussions. This point is highlighted in the responses of Participants 4 and 6 in the focus group.

> **'***It's so interesting, you can't really make mistakes…we get to present them and talk to teacher and the class...'* (Participant 4)

> **'***Yeah projects are probably a good way for people to not feel bad if they find out only a bit…others can do lots if they can…'* (Participant 6)

This is further corroborated by the analysis of the responses from the questionnaire question 19: List any activities you enjoy getting for homework; the resounding preference lies with project work (see Graph 14). In the graph, multiple participants had listed the options displayed. Other activities mentioned (by only one participant) include, Science, Physical Education, Irish, Dictation, History and Geography.

Graph 14: Enjoyable homework activities
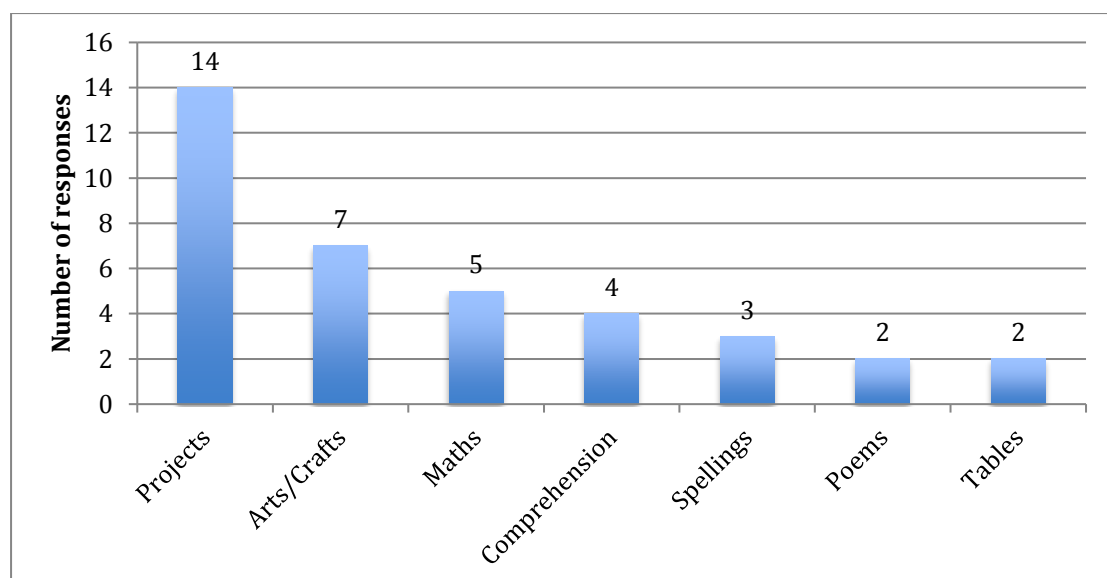
The participants were invited to list any activities they wish for this question. Projects are clearly the most popular, listed by 14 participants, followed next with 7 participants listing Arts or Crafts. This reaffirms that children find projects interesting, which in turn suggests that their level of engagement and motivation would be increased if homework activities were assigned in this manner. Bembenutty (2011) reminds us that assigning meaningful homework activities that increase a child's intrinsic motivation is essential for their learning.

4.9.2 The value placed on learning activities

According to the researcher's experience it is important to assign homework in order to practice and interact with new material, while also communicating with family what is being learned at school (Baş *et al* 2017). The analysis of the responses of the focus group question 20: Do you think you should get homework? reinforces the importance that all participants place on homework as a learning tool, with 3 participants pointing out that it is important for their parents also. See Appendix I for further evidence.

> **'***I know it helps me learn and I have peace to think better at home.'***
> (Participant 1)

> **'***Yes otherwise our learning would suffer and our parents wouldn't really know what we are doing at school...'*** (Participant 4)

Additionally, focus group question 21: If it was changed, what parts of homework do you think are most important to keep? highlights that all participants place most value on learning activities (e.g. spellings, tables). See Appendix I for further evidence.

> *'I think the learning work cause we write lots at school so we don't really need more practice...'* (Participant 4)

The analysis of the quantitative data from the questionnaire further corroborates that children associate homework with learning. As a result of the responses for question 2: Why do you think you get homework? most of the responses (13) refer to learning, followed by parental support (6) and revision purposes (5) (see Graph 15). The

participants were invited to answer this question openly; therefore, the 5 most popular responses were used for the purpose of the graph.

Graph 15: Reasons for homework
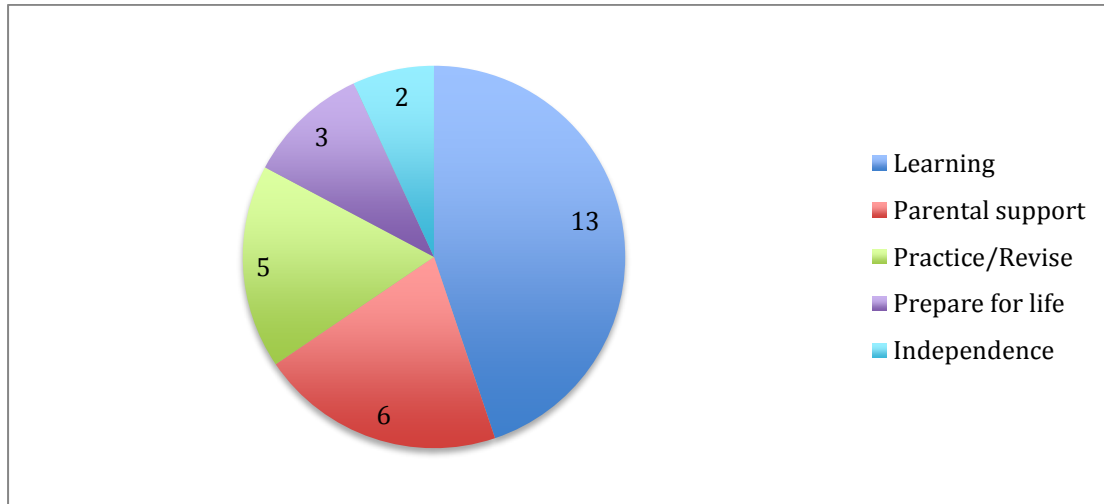
Similarly, for question 21: If you could give yourself homework, what would you give? in the questionnaire, the 5 most common responses include learning activities (see Graph 16). This confirms that children do place an importance on learning activities for homework.

Graph 16: Effective homework activities
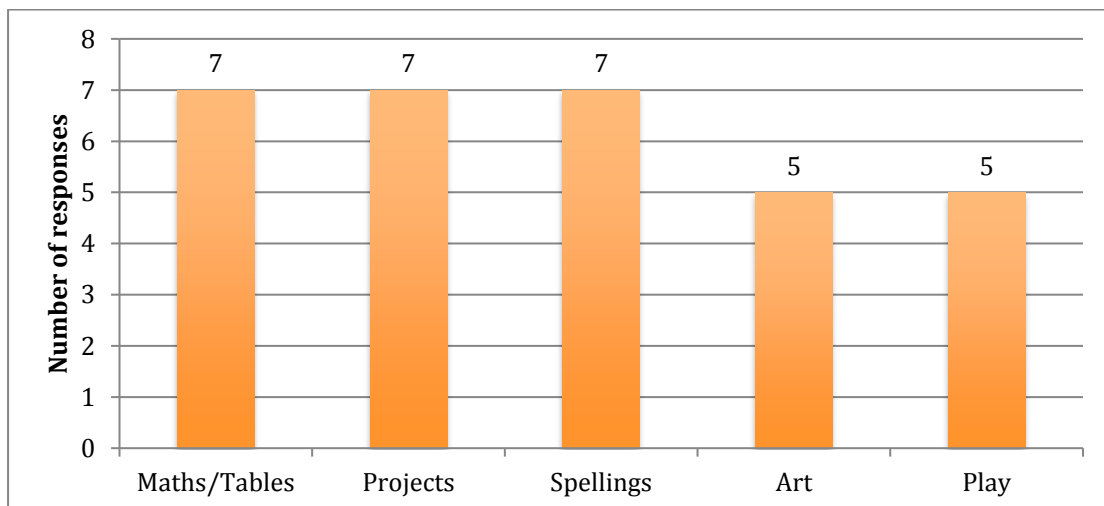
Results from Graph 16 show that an equal number of participants reported maths/tables, projects and spellings among important homework activities that they would assign if given the choice. This outcome highlights that homework does have an important role

in reinforcing learning (Carr 2013), and influencing a child towards improved academic achievement (Bempechat 2004).

4.9.3 Providing an element of choice to increase suitability for individual family routines

According to Carr (2013) attempting to individualise homework tasks and offer an element of choice can be difficult for teachers in terms of time, planning and corrections. However the results from the data analysis highlight that perhaps more frequent project work could provide children with the choice and the opportunity to individualise their input to best suit their competencies and interests.

The analysis of the responses of the focus group question 24: How do you think homework could become a better experience, more positive for everyone? identifies that participants feel a reduction in the quantity of homework each night (Pomerantz *et al* 2007, Trautwein 2007) along with some choice in homework (Vatterott 2017, Helle *et al* 2007) would be preferable and beneficial. See Appendix I for further evidence.

> *'Fewer activities and more fun activities or learning through projects would be interesting…we could pick what to do.'* (Participant 3)

In addition, the responses to focus group question 25: How would you benefit form being able to decide when to do your homework? highlight the benefits to the child, the family routine and the positive affects on relationships in the family home when choice for homework completion is permitted. See Appendix I for further evidence.

> *'I wouldn't get in trouble at home or shouted at to do homework...'* (Participant 1)

> *'Well people wouldn't be under pressure…mums or whoever could help us decide when would be best.'* (Participant 3)

The researcher is in favour of introducing the participants' recommendations on a trial basis, however, from experience, the task of monitoring individualised homework

completion in a large class (over 30 students) and providing valuable and timely feedback on tasks would be very challenging (Carr 2013, Protheroe 2009). It could potentially have negative effects on the daily routine of the classroom and the teaching of the curriculum.

Interestingly, the quantitative data analyses for the responses to the statement in question 20: Everybody should get the same homework, in the questionnaire, reveal that the majority of participants (18) either strongly agree or agree with this statement (see Graph 17).

Graph 17: Everyone should get the same homework
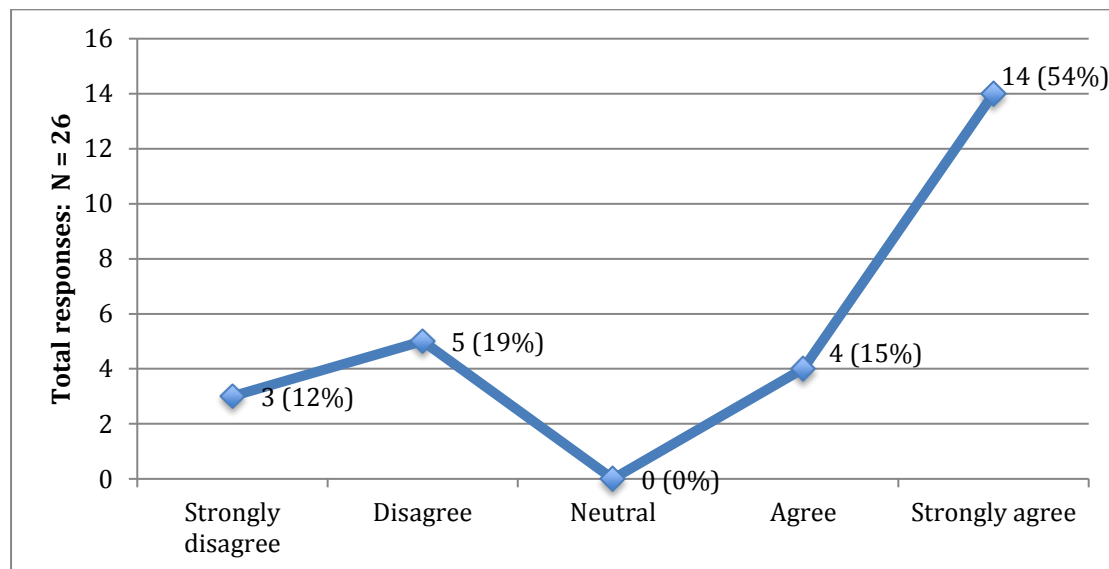
However, the explanations for the responses reveal that, although 18 (69%) of the participants either strongly agree or agree with this statement, they feel that if homework activities were assigned with choice it would be fairer for all. Additionally, the 8 participants (31%) who either strongly disagree or disagree report that children with special educational needs (SEN) should be assigned differentiated homework, and that teacher might not expect some children, that are less able, to do as much. These findings encapsulate the suggestion by Vatterott (2010), that one of the main considerations for assigning effect homework is providing the children with choice or activity personalisation.

4.9.4 Research Question Four: Justification

Baş *et al* (2017) state that the role of the teacher, the quantity of homework, the appropriateness of the activities for the child, the involvement of the parents and the support for the child should all play a role in achieving increased effectiveness with homework. Vatterott (2009) reminds us that we should consider best practice activities for the children we teach today, and not look to the past for inspiration when setting homework assignments. According to Van Voorhis (2004) teachers are in a position to adapt homework to heighten motivation and reduce stressful situations for families. The aforementioned considerations to increase homework effectiveness have been corroborated in the findings from the focus group and the questionnaire. Subsequently, it can be proposed that by gathering the opinions of the children, best practice can be informed (Van Voorhis 2004) and effective change can take place by assigning the following for homework:

- Additional child-centered project based activities.
- Learning activities (spellings, tables, poems).
- Provide choice for homework completion.

From experience, the researcher agrees that project work and essential learning activities (e.g. spellings, tables) are meaningful homework activities. The researcher feels that personalising project deadlines is achievable and believes that this does heighten student confidence and skills development (Vatterott 2017). However, the researcher feels that providing complete choice for homework completion may be unsuitable for children of this age (9-10 years), as they are still learning the skills of responsibility, organisation and time-management. Additionally the researcher feels that a high level of support from parents (which not all children have) would be necessary to ensure success in learning with this approach, as receiving all homework assignments for the week on a Monday may be overwhelming for many children at fourth class level in primary school (Good and Brophy 2003).

4.10 Summary of findings

Following the detailed thematic analysis of the data from the focus group and the qualitative survey, the following key findings have emerged:

- The participants have a generally positive outlook on the benefits associated with homework activities (revision purposes, improved results, personal skills development).
- Many participants express negativity towards homework completion as they feel it is consuming of their time, which most suggest could be otherwise spent playing.
- The majority of participants prefer to complete homework at the table in the kitchen, as a parent is present for support.
- In order to increase motivation levels for homework completion, the participants recommend more child-centered activities and the provision of an element of choice in homework completion.

4.11 Discussion

Children need reassurance that their teacher and parents believe in their ability to learn and develop new skills and they are there to support them in dealing with challenges as they learn and grow (Bempechat 2004). The researcher believes homework provides the ideal opportunity for children to progress as more self-regulated learners without the immediate support of the teacher.

Conclusively, the researcher has found that children acknowledge the importance of homework in their learning and development, however, they also consider homework to be time-consuming (Letterman 2013), at times a source of frustration or stress in the family home (Katz *et al* 2014), and often boring (Götz *et al* 2012) or a burden (Sidhu *et al* 2010).

Homework promotes the responsibility of the student, increases their motivation and determination to complete tasks and gives them a sense of accountability (Trautwein *et al* 2009). Homework prepares children for their future in the education system and as

contributors to society (Davidovitch *et al* 2016). The researcher concurs that as a result of receiving homework, children develop many skills: time-management, problem solving, organisation, and concentration, which will assist children throughout their lives (Baş *et al* 2017, Davidovitch and Yavich 2017).

4.12 Recommendations

The assigning of homework activities has long been established as useful and beneficial in schools around the world (Cooper 2007). However, each child's success with homework is subject to many factors including: their attitude, level of engagement and environment (Trautwein 2007, Dettmers *et al* 2010), and the involvement of their parents (Hoover-Dempsey *et al* 2001, Van Voorhis 2011), which can greatly influence their child's motivation towards homework completion, and ultimately homework effectiveness (Patall *et al* 2008).

Kohn (2006a) urges teachers to involve their students in the decisions over what is suitable and beneficial as a homework activity. Some of the main recommendations regarding the contributing factors for success with homework include to:

- instill positive attitudes towards homework (Altermatt 2010)
- assign homework that is purposeful and meaningful (Baş *et al* 2017)
- discuss tasks at school to heighten confidence (Protheroe 2009)
- stimulate interest through the use of interactive tasks (Van Voorhis 2003)
- use suitably challenging material (Dettmers *et al* 2010, Xu *et al* 2010)
- establish communication between home and school (Pattal *et al* 2008)
- promote collaboration and involve parents (Walker *et al* 2004)
- monitor quantity assigned and time taken for completion (Pomerantz *et al* 2007, Trautwein 2007)
- provide opportunities for different learning styles (projects) (Helle *et al* 2007)
- ensure flexibility in school homework policies (Jackson and Harbison 2014)
- keep monotonous tasks (filling in the gaps, re-writing basic information worksheets) to a minimum (Marzano and Pickering 2007)

- prioritise the use of higher-order, critical thinking and problem-based learning (Gültekin 2005)

Homework is different for every teacher, child and household; therefore, analysing the experiences of the children within a particular context will inform any purposeful change that can take place (Cooper *et al* 2006).

The researcher is confident that the unique, descriptive and informative findings from the in-depth qualitative analysis in this study will be relevant, primarily for other primary school teachers in Ireland. With a limited number of 31 subjects for the purpose of this classroom-based case study, the researcher would advise a similar study to be carried out on a larger scale. This would provide a greater insight into the experiences of the participants. Additionally, with only a purposive sample of 6 participants for the focus group interview, the researcher would suggest extending the data collection to include the perspectives of parents and other teachers. This would generate a holistic overview on the phenomenon of homework for school policy makers. Conclusively, the researcher feels that further research is necessary to explore the experiences of the children in greater depth and to investigate the motivations of teachers and the role of parents in order to facilitate the purposeful assigning of and effective engagement with homework.

Voorhees (2011) suggests that educators should not decide whether or not homework tasks improve learning or achievement, rather, they should ask the child for their perspective on how homework can be made more effective. The researcher agrees that, as long as homework is employed as a learning tool, it is imperative for educators to ensure that activities are as effective for all children as possible. Hutchison (2011) reminds us that student perspectives on homework are under researched. Therefore, the findings in this study provide a unique view of homework from the perceptions of the students: what benefits they associate, the challenges they face, what motivates them and their suggestions for homework improvement.

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Participant Information Sheet

Dear children, I am doing a project on homework in our classroom, as part of my Master of Arts in Learning and Teaching at Letterkenny Institute of Technology.

I would like you to take part in this project; however, before you decide, I would like to explain why I am doing it and what will be involved if you decide to take part.

I would like to find out what you think about the homework you get in 4th class. I want to know if you think homework is helpful for your learning. I would like you to express if you find anything difficult about doing homework. I also hope to gather suggestions for other activities, which you feel could be included in your homework to make it more enjoyable or interesting.

You will be asked to sign a consent form of your own, letting teacher know if you wish to take part in the research. Your parent / guardian will also be asked for their permission in order for you to take part.

If you do wish to participate, you will be asked to take part in a survey by filling out a questionnaire on homework. I expect that the questionnaire will take you 15-20 minutes to complete. You may also be asked to take part in a focus group with some other children, where you will be asked questions to discuss in a group. This will take approximately 30 minutes.

On your consent form you can choose whether you want to take part in the survey only, or in the survey and the focus group.

The indicative title for this research is:

The impact of homework on a child's motivation to learn in primary education .

1. Your participation is voluntary; only take part if you really want to.
2. Your identity will be kept anonymous; your name, or any other information identifying you, will not be on the questionnaire or written anywhere on teacher's project.
3. Everything that your write on the questionnaire is strictly confidential; no one else in the class will see it.
4. If you choose not to take part in the survey it will not affect your relationship with your teacher or the school.
5. You will not be rewarded if you do take part
6. You will not be penalised if you decide not to take part.
7. On the questionnaire, you do not have to answer all of the questions, only answer the ones you want to answer. There is no right or wrong answer to any question.
8. All information will be kept safe, and only teacher and her supervisor will read it.
9. If you decide not to take part in the research, you will be assigned a separate activity for the duration of the questionnaire.
10. You can access the information from the survey and/or focus group to read it or make changes to it until Friday 23rd of February 2018.
11. You can also decide that you no longer want to take part at any time until Friday 23rd of February 2018. On this date, teacher will start to analyse the information.

If you have any other questions or concerns about the project, please ask me.

If you do want to take part in the research please sign the participant consent form and then you will be given your survey to fill out.

Thanking you.

Yours sincerely,
Kara McNulty.

_____

Parent / Guardian Information Sheet

Dear parent/guardian, as your child's teacher, I am undertaking a research study on homework, as part of a dissertation for my Master of Arts in Learning and Teaching. Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT) has ethically approved this research.

My intention is to gain a deeper insight into the experiences the children in my class have with homework. The aim of my research is to identify what factors motivate and demotivate the children in my class with regard to homework. I wish to establish what value they place on homework, how they feel it is beneficial for their learning and development, and what factors (if any) contribute to a negative experience with homework. I also hope to gather feedback on the homework they receive at present and illicit any suggestions for other potential activities, which they feel could be included in their homework.

My intention is to carry out an in-class survey, using a questionnaire consisting of both closed and open questions. I expect that the questionnaire will take your child 15-20 minutes to complete. I also intend to do a focus group (small group interview) with 5-8 children, lasting approximately 30 minutes.

Your child will also receive an information sheet, presenting the information more simply in order to heighten their understanding of this research. They will also have a consent form of their own to sign. In order for your child to participate, both consent forms (parent and child) must be signed in favour of participation.

The indicative title for this research is:
The impact of homework on a child's motivation to learn in primary education .

1. Your child's participation is voluntary, and their identity will be kept anonymous. At no point on the questionnaire or in the focus group will they be asked to give their name or any other personal information.
2. Everything that your child writes on the questionnaire is strictly confidential. Only my supervisor, and I will have access to it.

3. The participants involved in the focus group will be asked to keep any information shared confidential. I will take field notes to record the information and I will transcribe the information myself.

4. If you choose not to give your child consent to take part in the research, it will not affect their relationship, or your relationship, with the school or myself.

5. Your child will not be rewarded or remunerated if they do take part, nor will they be penalised if they decide not to take part.

6. Your child will be informed to only answer the questions they want to answer, and reassured that there is no right or wrong answer.

7. If your child is not taking part in the research, they will be assigned a separate activity for the duration of the questionnaire.

8. All information will be stored on a password-protected computer, ensuring that only I can gain access to it. Paper documents will be kept in a locked drawer, to which only I will have the key.

9. Your child can access the data, read it, make changes to it or withdraw from the research at any time until Friday 23rd of February 2018. On this date, data analysis will commence.

10. I guarantee total anonymity in my Dissertation. Your child's name or any other personal information will not be included in any document or report.

11. The data collected may be used for the purpose of an academic journal, article or other publication in the future.

12. All data will be stored in my supervisor's office for a minimum of 5 years, after which it will be destroyed in accordance with LYIT Guidelines.

I would ask you to consider the information stated above and sign the accompanying parental consent form. If you wish to ask any questions on the information given, in advance of signing the consent form, please do not hesitate to contact me through the school office (XXXXXXX).

Thanking you in advance.

Yours sincerely,
Kara McNulty.

_____

Appendix C
Parent / Guardian Consent Form

(Please tick each of the following boxes.)

I have read and understood the contents of the parent information sheet. ☐

I understand that I am being asked to give consent for the participation of my child in this research. ☐

I understand that my child's participation is voluntary; he/she will not be rewarded for participation or penalised for not taking part. ☐

I understand that both my consent and the consent of my child his/herself must be given before participation is granted. ☐

I understand that (following consent) my child will be asked to complete a questionnaire, and he/she may also be asked to take part in a focus group. ☐

I understand that the information gathered will be kept strictly confidential and that my child's name (or any other type of information that may identify them) or the name of the school will not be included in any reports. ☐

I understand that the research will be published in the form of a Masters dissertation, and that there may be other uses for the research in the future (e.g. academic journals). ☐

I understand that the data will be stored in Letterkenny Institute of Technology for a minimum of five years and then destroyed in accordance with LYIT Guidelines. ☐

I understand that my child and I are free to withdraw consent at any time until Friday, 23rd of February 2018, as the data analysis will commence on this date. ☐

<u>Do you agree to give your child permission to participate in the research outlined?</u>

Please tick <u>one</u> of the following boxes:

☐ Yes, I **AGREE** to give my child consent to participate in this research.

☐ No, I **DO NOT** AGREE to give my child consent to participate in this research.

If you AGREE to give consent for you child to take part in the research, please tick <u>all</u> of the boxes that apply.

☐ I <u>AGREE</u> that my child can take part **<u>ONLY</u>** in the **survey**.

☐ I <u>AGREE</u> that my child can take part **<u>BOTH</u>** in the **survey** and in the **focus group**.

Researcher's signature: _____   **Date:** _____

Parent / Guardian signature: _____   **Date:**_____

<u>Supervisor details:</u>
Name: Dr. Manuel Catena Fontalba
Position: Lecturer
Department: Law and Humanities, Letterkenny IT, Port Road, F92 FC93
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Appendix D

Participant Consent Form

(Please tick each of the following boxes.)

I have read and understood the participant information sheet. □

I understand that I am being asked to participate in this research. □

I understand that I will be asked to complete a questionnaire on homework. □

I understand that I may also be asked to take part in a focus group. □

I understand that my participation is voluntary; I will only take part if I want to. □

I understand that my name will not be on my questionnaire and I will not be identified in any other way in the research. □

I understand that everything I write on the questionnaire will be confidential, only teacher and her supervisor will read it. □

I understand that if I am asked to take part in the focus group, what I say and what others say will be kept private in the group with teacher. □

I understand that all the information teacher gathers will be locked away in a drawer or password locked laptop, to which only teacher has the key and password. □

I understand that I can access the data to read or change it at any time until Friday, 23rd of February 2018. □

I understand that I can decide not to be part of the research at any time until Friday, 23rd of February 2018. □

Do you agree to give your own consent to participate in the research on homework?

Please tick one of the following boxes:

☐ Yes, I **AGREE** to give my consent to participate in this research.

☐ No, I **DO NOT** AGREE to give my consent to participate in this research.

If you AGREE to give your own consent to take part in the research, please tick <u>one</u> of the following boxes.

☐ I <u>AGREE</u> to take part **<u>ONLY</u>** in the **survey**.

☐ I <u>AGREE</u> to take part **<u>BOTH</u>** in the **survey** and in the **focus group**.

Researcher's signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Participant signature: _____ **Date:**_____

<u>Supervisor details:</u>

Name: Dr. Manuel Catena Fontalba

Position: Lecturer

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Appendix E

Transcription of Focus Group Interview

Q1 - Facilitator: In what way is homework good for you? What are the benefits of doing it?

Participant 1: Helps get an education and good marks in tests.

Participant 2: Yeah my tests would be really bad if I didn't learn stuff at home and well homework is educational for everything in the future.

Participant 3: You learn more and I get better test results too.

Participant 4: It prepares everybody for school work, tests and big school.

Participant 5: It is good practice, people always get tests in things even as you get older.

Participant 6: I agree it prepares for tests and for the future and next year too.

Q2 - Facilitator: How exactly does homework help with test results?

Participant 1: Learning my spellings for English and Irish helps me to know them for my test and get them right.

Participant 2: When you have to learn tables at home you wouldn't have time at school so then you know the answers in the test.

Participant 3: If I spend time learning off my tables and someone asking me my spellings I am confident in my Friday test.

Participant 4: You have to write down the spellings correctly so if you don't learn them at home you might not get them right.

Participant 5: Cause most of the test is spellings and tables help with maths tests.

Participant 6: Learning tables and spellings for homework doesn't just help with our Friday tests in class, you will always remember the things you learn for any test.

Q3 - Facilitator: What would happen if you didn't get homework?

Participant 1: I would not be as smart and I would have no new words

Participant 2: It would make me stupid only learning at school

Participant 3: I wouldn't really know my tables and spellings

Participant 4: Yeah I couldn't revise or develop skills I need to learn

Participant 5: I agree I wouldn't know how to revise things so it wouldn't be that good with no homework

Participant 6: Well I would have no practice, wouldn't remember things and I suppose I would be slower at my work

Q4 - Facilitator: Ok so you thought mainly about the negative, is there anything positive that would happen as a result of not getting homework?

Participant 1: Yes. More time to play.

Participant 2: Yip. More time to play and do what I want.

Participant 3: Play and go outside more with my dogs.

Participant 4: Yeah play more and with my cats and watch TV.

Participant 5: Definitely more time to play.

Participant 6: More time to do other activities and not having to rush with everything.

Q5 - Facilitator: How does homework have a positive effect on your schoolwork?

Participant 1: By repeating the work from school you get better with writing, tables, spellings and remembering.

Participant 2: My handwriting is the main thing that improves from it.

Participant 3: My memory develops because of learning poems, tables and spellings.

Participant 4: It is self-learning in all the different subjects so it makes you better in yourself.

Participant 5: Spellings definitely for me are better.

Participant 6: Homework revises everything, it keeps things on your mind helping memory the most.

Q6 - Facilitator: What specific subjects or activities do you think help most?

Participant 1: Maths – it helps my mind for sure and English work helps writing sentences cause I learn my spellings.

Participant 2: English for writing and maths for solving hard problems.

Participant 3: Maths work and reading in English.

Participant 4: Maths and English but I think learning Irish poems helps a lot and Irish spellings because I find it the hardest.

Participant 5: Mental maths especially the problem page because it is good and challenging. And spellings for sure.

Participant 6: All of the subjects and activities we get really, parts of each subject are good and learning the lines for the play in Irish was good.

Q7 - Facilitator: Do you think homework helps develop any personal skills for you?

Participant 1: Yeah well my focus because I have to concentrate on work to do it.

Participant 2: When I do my homework it helps me concentrate and it helps me check my time to get it done.

Participant 3: I think it helps my memory and makes me mature and responsible. Like mum can rely on me to do it myself.

Participant 4: I get myself organized and really concentrate on my work to remember things I learn.

Participant 5: I suppose lots of things, my concentration and being responsible for myself to remember all of the books that I need.

Participant 6: Well having things on I have to check my time and concentrate to get everything done well. And my memory improves because I'm learning things to use again in the future.

Q8 - Facilitator: If you could describe a place for doing homework, what would it be like, and why?

Participant 1: A bedroom like mine with a desk and it all nice and quiet.

Participant 2: sort of like a kitchen, a quiet one though with a big table and someone like a mum or dad close by to help.

Participant 3: A bedroom type room with desk, lots of space, quiet too and mum to check on me.

Participant 4: Kitchen sort of room with a table and mum cooking cause it would be almost quiet.

Participant 5: Yeah a kitchen table and space for all the resources I need and mainly quiet unless maybe my sister there to help me.

Participant 6: any kind of room (like where I do it sort of a kitchen / diner all open) no siblings, no distractions just one adult near to help. It would need pencils, a table and quiet too.

Q9 - Facilitator: Is there anything that helps or makes you enjoy doing homework more?

Participant 1: Not getting much of it.

Participant 2: Doing sums just.

Participant 3: if I don't get that much some nights that's when I enjoy it most.

Participant 4: Yeah well if I have little to do and then it doesn't take long or work I know how to do.

Participant 5: If I don't get much, maybe when it is learning only.

Participant 6: Yeah when there isn't much to do and it's a relief when it's done then I have freedom to do other things.

Q10 - Facilitator: As you all do your homework at home and some of you mentioned earlier how important concentration is, can you think is there anything that helps you to concentrate and get your work done well?

Participant 1: Having a desk and being away from my PS4. And if my mum can help.

Participant 2: No tv or distraction like that and being at a desk not on my bed.

Participant 3: An adult or brothers to help me keeps me concentrating and well thinking about what I can do after helps me think hard to get it done. Oh and a table.

Participant 4: Definitely a table to lean on and put out all of my stuff. My sister near to help or mum is good too.

Participant 5: Nice and quiet place and no siblings to distract me.

Participant 6: Quiet mostly and at a table too. If an adult or mum is there to help it keeps me going too.

Q11 - Facilitator: When you are actually doing your homework, how do you feel? What emotions or feelings do you experience?

Participant 1: Tired and angry cause I have to do it.

Participant 2: I feel upset because I have to stop playing to do it. And angry too because it takes too long and nobody helps me.

Participant 3: It makes me bored going over a lot of the same things.

Participant 4: I feel fine, its okay.

Participant 5: Sometimes I can be worried about mum's mood she might give me extra work. And bored actually doing it.

Participant 6: Yeah bored sometimes only if it is too easy and I'm not enjoying it. But I feel satisfied too when its done.

Q12 - Facilitator: Is there anything particularly difficult about homework? Can you explain for me?

Participant 1: It is just annoying I hate it. Everything. It takes forever to do it and I can't just do what I want when I get home.

Participant 2: Maths is difficult sometimes. And it just takes a long time to do it.

Participant 3: Well just the time it takes to do it. It isn't actually that hard or anything but it takes up a lot of spare time.

Participant 4: Poems can be hard but the rest is fine. It's just a matter of doing it so I can play or do things with my sister or mum or dad afterwards.

Participant 5: Not really but it just takes time to do homework, but I guess everyone has to do it so it's not like it is unfair for anyone.

Participant 6: Having to do it I suppose, it takes up time, I usually have a lot on after school but I always try to do it first so I don't have to come back to it later.

Q13 - Facilitator: What would you do if you got less homework?

Participant 1: More time on the PS4 and nobody bothering me to get homework done.

Participant 2: Play more xBox and maybe have a friend call over to play.

Participant 3: Go outside for longer even if the weather is bad I love playing outside.

Participant 4: More time to play with my cats and sister.

Participant 5: Take up a new hobby maybe or spend more time playing golf or the guitar.

Participant 6: Play football for longer, or any sport really.

Q14 - Facilitator: How would that make you feel, having less homework and more time to spend on those things you mentioned?

Participant 1: So happy, I could do more of whatever I liked then and I wouldn't get in trouble as often with mum or dad for not doing it cause I could get the little bit done quicker.

Participant 2: Am excited I guess, wondering what I could do with the extra time and no one nagging me about doing lots of homework would be so great.

Participant 3: I'd be a bit relieved that it wouldn't be hanging over me for as long everyday after I come home from school.

Participant 4: I would probably feel good and mum wouldn't have to waste so much time waiting on me to finish it before we could go and do something.

Participant 5: Okay, well if that happened I'd be happy and surprised. It would be a lot less to worry about in a way and less stress on my brother or mum to help out.

Participant 6: I agree, I would be happy in a way about not having to do as much homework as it wouldn't take as long and I would be free for other things I like quicker.

Q15 - Facilitator: Why do you do your homework?

Participant 1: I'm expected to do it and I do better in my test on Friday.

Participant 2: Well I have time to play after I do it and if I didn't learn my homework I wouldn't know my words for the test.

Participant 3: It helps me understand more what I'm doing and I find it good for me to keep learning.

Participant 4: It helps me revise my work and I can talk with my parents about it.

Participant 5: Yeah it helps me revise and practice and I get better at my work then and find it easier.

Participant 6: Well when I can do my homework without much difficulty, I know then that I am doing good and know what I should so it is important to check that at home as well as school.

Q16 - Facilitator: Who usually helps you with your homework and why that person?

Participant 1: My dad, cause he is smart.

Participant 2: My brother because he is older and he can help me.

Participant 3: Mum as she was good at school and can help most.

Participant 4: Mum too because well she is always there, she can help and give me advice.

Participant 5: Of course my brother. He is good at helping me, he has a good way of explaining things so I can understand. Or my mum usually.

Participant 6: Mum for me too, she is good at helping with what I am doing. Dad helps too if he is at home around that time.

Q17 - Facilitator: Do you think getting help with homework is important?

Participant 1: It is annoying sometimes we just argue in my house and I still don't always do it.

Participant 2: Well sometimes I would need help but people get frustrated and angry with me then I get angry and upset. So I would rather just do it myself but sometimes I can't.

Participant 3: It is nice for mum to check my spellings and tables and see how good I know them.

Participant 4: I don't always need help but it gives me a chance to talk with my parents to ask for help and understand even more then. As well they know I have learned things and I'm doing good so I like having mum or someone nearby.

Participant 5: I think it's very important my parents talk with me about what I am learning and I can ask if I'm not sure or anything.

Participant 6: Well yeah it's fine. Like it is very important for me to get better with things I'm maybe uncomfortable with so mum and dad can help that.

Q18 - Facilitator: What happens if you don't do your homework?

Participant 1: I would just get shouted at by dad, or get my name in the homework tracker at school.

Participant 2: Ah I would get grounded and banned from my Xbox and phone.

Participant 3: Well see I always do it so I don't really know, maybe I would just catch up on it and mum wouldn't be happy either.

Participant 4: I never don't do my homework ever. If I didn't mum would not be happy with me and teacher would have to put my name in the homework tracker.

Participant 5: I do it always but I guess it could be homework tracker with teacher or catch up at home and extra work from mum.

Participant 6: I do it all the time but if I didn't I would probably miss football and my parents wouldn't be happy with me either.

Q19 - Facilitator: Are there any particular activities you like getting that make homework more worthwhile?

Participant 1: Projects cause I can research on the computer and find out things. Also maths cause well I'm already good at it so it's normally easy.

Participant 2: Science things, art activities and yeah projects are fun and I can learn interesting things.

Participant 3: Projects for me too cause you decide what you would like to find out or do yourself or with your friends if it is a group project and it is never boring.

Participant 4: I agree too, projects definitely it's a fun way to learn and everyone can do the part they are good at like writing or art.

Participant 5: I like practical tasks, measuring or finding something and project work too is interesting.

Participant 6: Projects. Even though I know it doesn't always suit to get a project on our work, it is enjoyable when we do and we work together mostly which is fun.

Q20 - Facilitator: Do you think you should get homework? Why?

Participant 1: Yes. Well I would rather not have it but I know it helps me learn and I have peace to think better at home.

Participant 2: Yes. Like I would like less writing but it helps my brain for sure and I learn new things I wouldn't have time at school to learn.

Participant 3: Yes we should, otherwise how would we learn anything that well, it wouldn't be enough just at school now when we are getting older. And our mums can helps us too.

Participant 4: Yes otherwise our learning would suffer and our parents wouldn't really know what we are doing at school, or what we find easy or hard.

Participant 5: Yeah we should, we learn so much more by having homework than we just learn at school and we will have to study when we are older an learn new things so it isn't that much but it is good for us.

Participant 6: Yes well teacher can't always helps everyone every day so at home we can all talk with parents or whoever and learn that way too and they know we are doing well. Plus, we wouldn't have time at school to sit learning new spellings so we wouldn't be as good at things like that if we had no homework.

Q21 - Facilitator: If it was changed, what parts of homework do you think are most important to keep?

Participant 1: Spellings for English and Irish I guess.

Participant 2: I would say keep spellings and reading. Oh and tables for maths.

Participant 3: Learning homework like tables, spellings and poems.

Participant 4: I think the learning work cause we write lots at school so we don't really need more practice for that.

Participant 5: Probably keep tables, sums and spellings.

Participant 6: I think it would be important to keep learning the spellings, tables and the odd poem in English and Irish helps memory and learning too.

Q22 - Facilitator: If you were teacher, what homework would you set for the week?

Participant 1: Some play, learn spellings and tables and work on a project.

Participant 2: Spellings, sums, play activity and project work.

Participant 3: I would set one subject each night and also have a project to be working on, like researching work.

Participant 4: I would tell people to play or exercise for homework it would be healthy for everyone and project work if we each work on something at home for the group project, that's good. And I think playing with pets and friends too.

Participant 5: Tables, spellings and I like project work too so I would give that.

Participant 6: I think more bringing items in from home to talk about. And yeah definitely project work but not every week, only when it suited what we were learning.

Q23 - Facilitator: Can you explain why you think projects are a good activity for homework?

Participant 1: People can work together and decide what they can do for the group, like sort of what they are good at.

Participant 2: Well they are interesting and I can do the thing that I'm good at.

Participant 3: Projects help people share the work and then when it is all put together we learn from each other and look at others work so it is interesting and fun.

Participant 4: Its so interesting, you can't really make mistakes in it. Also we get to present them and talk to teacher and the class about what we found out and things.

Participant 5: Well they are really interesting and people can do more on it if they are interested or just a smaller bit if they aren't able to do as much. Like projects can be in groups or we can do our own one.

Participant 6: Yeah projects are probably a good way for people to not feel bad if they find out only a bit or just do something small and others can do lots if they can. We just all talk about them then and everyone learns from it even if they didn't have much time to do as much.

Q24 - Facilitator: How do you think homework could become a better experience, more positive for everyone?

Participant 1: Well if we didn't have so many bits each night and if we decided more ourselves we would be happier.

Participant 2: Yeah like well it would free you up if you just didn't have 6 things every night, it wouldn't be so bad then if it was fun too like a project we can spread out.

Participant 3: Fewer activities and more fun activities or learning through projects would be interesting I think cause we could pick what to do.

Participant 4: A bit less things each night cause we have too many different books to take and everyone can learn different things in projects so it is fair on everyone to do a bit or people who want to do more difficult things.

Participant 5: Well I think homework should be set at the beginning of the week for the entire week and then if we are busy or have a free night we can choose when to do it, not have separate work to do each night. Also I think having whatever homework on a Monday for the week would allow everyone to space it out to suit them and maybe then they would be happier having the choice.

Participant 6: I think some written work each night but only one subject so we don't have lots of different small bits from different books. I think teacher should try out setting homework for the week on a Monday and see how it goes

Q25 - Facilitator: How would you benefit form being able to decide when to do your homework?

Participant 1: I wouldn't get in trouble at home or shouted at to do homework and then I would just be able to do it when it suited me.

Participant 2: If I always go to Granny's on a Tuesday or to my cousins, nobody will be telling me do your homework cause I can just catch up another day.

Participant 3: Well people wouldn't be under pressure each evening then, mums or whoever could help us decide when would be best.

Participant 4: We can decide with our mum and dad when to do it incase we have things on then we wouldn't have to worry about not getting it done.

Participant 5: Well I suppose not everyone has time every evening to do the same amount of homework. Sometimes people are busy with football or piano or visiting . So if we can choose we know maybe we have more time on Tuesday and Thursday to do more.

Participant 6: Yeah I kinda agree cause then everyone could do homework whenever it suits their own family routine and it would be easier for the family too cause homework wouldn't be in the way then.

Q26 - Facilitator: Is there anything else you would like to add that you think we haven't covered, or anything you would like to comment further on to finish?

Participant 1: I don't really like Irish and find it really hard to learn.

Participant 2: I find too much writing takes too long, so I don't like getting writing activities.

Participant 3: I don't like poems, well I like poems but not having to learn them, it's difficult but maybe trying is good for my memory.
Participant 4: I'm the same with poems but we will have to learn things like that when we are bigger too so it is good practice.

Participant 5: Homework is normal, it is part of school so I don't think there is much more to say, not everyone will always like what they get.

Participant 6: Homework is fine, it has to be done. It prepares us for school and keeps people at home in touch with what we are doing so it's important.

Facilitator: Okay, that's it everyone. Thank you all so much for taking part in this focus group.

All participants: Thank you

Appendix F

Application Form for Ethical Approval

Sample Questionnaire

Homework Questionnaire

1. (a) Do you like doing homework?

YES	
NO	

(b) Please explain **why? / why not?**

_____

_____

2. Why do you think you get homework? *(Explain with examples)*

_____

_____

3. Homework is important.

Strongly Disagree		Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	

Explain:_____

_____

4. (a) Do you do your homework by yourself?

YES	
NO	

(b) If you answered **YES,** can you explain why?

_____

_____

(c) If you answered **<u>NO</u>,** who helps you, and why?

_____

_____

5. How would you describe homework?

  (select **one** option)

Boring		
Annoying		
Interesting		
Enjoyable		
Other	_____	

Explain:_____

_____

6. By doing homework, I learn more; therefore I get better results.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Explain:_____

_____

7. Homework improves my:

(*tick **any** that apply*)

Concentration	
Organisation	
Memory	
Responsibility	
Time-management	
Behaviour	
Other	

Other: _____

Explain:_____
_____
_____

8. The amount of homework I get is too much.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Explain:_____
_____

9. My homework is too difficult.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Explain:_____
_____
_____

10. Where do you usually do your homework?

Kitchen	Living room	Bedroom	School	Other

Explain why there:_____

_____

_____

11. Does homework get in the way of other things after school?

YES	
NO	

Explain and give examples:_____

_____

_____

12. Instead of doing homework I would rather:

_____

_____

_____

13. Doing homework makes me feel good.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
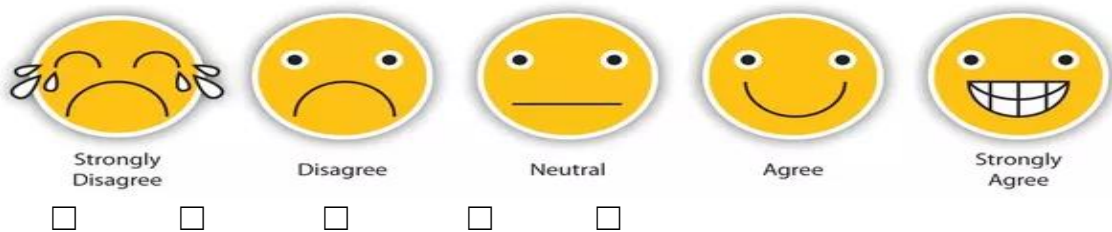
Explain:_____

_____

_____

14. (a) Does someone ever have to remind you to do your homework?

YES	
NO	

(b) If you answered **YES:**

   Who? _____

   Why? _____

  _____

(c) If you answered **NO,** why not**?**_____

  _____

15. (a) In general, how long do you spend on homework?

0 – 30 min	31 – 60 min	> 60 min

(b) Do you think that is

Too much time	
About right	
Too little time	

16. Do you always finish your homework?

Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never

(b) Please explain **why? / why not?**

_____

_____

17. Does someone at home usually check that you have completed all of your homework?

YES	
NO	

(a) If you answered **Yes,** who checks it? _____

Why does someone check it? _____
_____

(b) If you answered **No,** why not? _____
_____

18. List any activities you dislike getting for homework.

_____
_____
_____

19. List any activities you enjoy getting for homework.

_____
_____
_____

20. Everybody should get the same homework.

Strongly Disagree		Disagree	Neutral	Agree		Strongly Agree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐		

Explain why / why not:_____

_____

_____

_____

21. If you could give yourself homework, what would you give?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Explain why?

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Appendix H

Six Steps of Thematic Analysis

Outlined below are the six steps to thematic analysis that the researcher followed for this research project:

1.	**Familiarisation with the data**	Becoming familiar with the data, transcribing data, reading and re-reading the data, noting initial ideas.
2.	**Generating codes**	Generating labels for interesting or important features, relevant to the research questions. This is an analytical process, capturing both semantic and conceptual reading of the data.
3.	**Searching for themes**	This phase involves collating codes into potential themes. A theme is a meaningful pattern in the data relevant to the research question, which is constructed from the analysis.
4.	**Reviewing themes**	The researcher must check that the themes are suitable for the coded extracts and the entire data set.
5.	**Defining and naming themes**	The researcher carries out a detailed analysis, refining and generating specific definitions and names for each theme.
6.	**Writing up**	The researcher links the analysis back to the research questions and makes connections with the literature. The information is then written up, encapsulating the analysis of the entire data.

Source: Braun and Clarke (2006).

Appendix I

Further Evidence to Support Chapter 4 Findings

<u>**Section:**</u> **4.3 Themes for Category One**

4.3.1 Improvement in academic achievements and test results

Question 1: In what way is homework good for you?

'Yeah my tests would be really bad if I didn't learn stuff at home…homework is educational for everything in the future.' (Participant 2)

'It [homework] prepares everybody for school work, tests and for big school.' (Participant 4)

'It [homework] is good practice, people always get tests in things even as you get older.' (Participant 5)

' It [homework] prepares for tests and for the future and next year too.' (Participant 6)

Question 3: What would happen if you didn't get homework?

'I wouldn't really know my tables and spellings.' (Participant 3)

'Yeah I couldn't revise or develop skills I need to learn.' (Participant 4)

'I agree I wouldn't know how to revise things so it wouldn't be that good with no homework.' (Participant 5)

'Well I would have no practice, wouldn't remember things and I suppose I would be slower at my work.' (Participant 6)

Question 5: How does homework have a positive affect on your schoolwork?

'My handwriting is the main thing that improves from it [homework]' (Participant 2)

'Memory develops because of learning poems, tables and spellings.' (Participant 3)

'It [homework] is self-learning in all the subjects...' (Participant 4)

'Spellings definitely for me are better.' (Participant 5)

'Homework revises everything…helping memory the most.' (Participant 6)

Question 6: What specific subjects or activities do you think help the most?

'Maths, it helps my mind for sure and English work helps writing sentences cause I learn my spellings.' (Participant 1)

'Maths and English…learning Irish poems helps a lot and Irish spellings because I find it the hardest.' (Participant 4)

'Mental maths… it is good and challenging. And spellings...' (Participant 5)

4.3.5 Personal skills development

Question 7: Do you think homework helps to develop any personal skills for you?

'My focus because I have to concentrate on work.' (Participant 1)

'I get myself organized and really concentrate on my work to remember things I learn.' (Participant 4)

'Lots of things, my concentration and being responsible for myself…'
(Participant 5)

'I have to check my time and concentrate…my memory improves because I'm learning things to use again in the future.' (Participant 6)

Section: 4.5 Themes for Category Two

4.5.1 Time consuming and restricting free time for other activities

Question 12: Is there anything particularly difficult about homework? Can you explain for me?

'*Maths is difficult sometimes. It [homework] just takes a long time to do it.'*
(Participant 2)

'*Well just the time it takes to do it. It isn't actually that hard or anything but it takes up a lot of spare time.'* (Participant 3)

'*It's just a matter of doing it [homework] so I can play or do things with my sister or mum or dad afterwards.'* (Participant 4)

'*Not really but it [homework] just takes time to do homework, but I guess everyone has to do it so it's not like it is unfair for anyone.'* (Participant 5)

'*Having to do it [homework] I suppose, it takes up time, I usually have a lot on after school but I always try to do it first so I don't have to come back to it later.'*
(Participant 6)

Question 13: What would you do if you got less homework?

'*More time on the PS4 and nobody bothering me to get homework done.'*
(Participant 1)

'Play more xBox and maybe have a friend call over to play.' (Participant 2)

'Go outside for longer even if the weather is bad I love playing outside.' (Participant 3)

'More time to play with my cats and sister.' (Participant 4)

'Play football for longer, or any sport really.' (Participant 6)

Question 11: When you are actually doing your homework, how do you feel? What emotions or feelings do you experience?

'Tired and angry cause I have to do it.' (Participant 1)

'It makes me bored going over a lot of the same things.' (Participant 3)

'Sometimes I can be worried about mum's mood she might give me extra work. And bored actually doing it.' (Participant 5)

'Yeah bored sometimes only if it is too easy and I'm not enjoying it.' (Participant 6)

Question 14: How would that make you feel, having less homework and more time to spend on those things you mentioned?

'So happy, I could do more of whatever I liked then and I wouldn't get in trouble as often with mum or dad for not doing it [homework] cause I could get the little bit done quicker.' (Participant 1)

'I'd be a bit relieved that it wouldn't be hanging over me for as long everyday after I come home from school and mum would be delighted too.' (Participant 3)

'I'd be happy and surprised. It would be a lot less to worry about in a way and less stress on my brother or mum to help out.' (Participant 5)

'I would be happy in a way about not having to do as much homework as it wouldn't take as long and I would be free for other things...' (Participant 6)

4.5.3 The physical homework environment

Question 8: If you could describe a place for doing homework, what would it be like, and why?

'A bedroom like mine with a desk and it all nice and quiet.' (Participant 1)

'Kitchen sort of room with a table and mum cooking cause it would be almost quiet.' (Participant 4)

'Yeah a kitchen table and space for all the resources I need and mainly quiet unless maybe my sister there to help me.' (Participant 5)

'Any kind of room (like where I do it sort of a kitchen / diner all open) no siblings, no distractions just one adult near to help. It would need pencils, a table and quiet too.' (Participant 6)

Question 10: As you all do your homework at home and some of you mentioned earlier how important concentration is, can you think is there anything that helps you to concentrate and get your work done well?

'Having a desk and being away from my PS4. And if my mum can help.'
(Participant 1)

'An adult or brothers to help me keeps me concentrating and well thinking about what I can do after helps me think hard to get it done...'
(Participant 3)

'Definitely a table to lean on and put out all of my stuff. My sister near to help or mum is good too.' (Participant 4)

4.7.1 Parental involvement and support

Question 16: Who usually helps you with your homework and why that person?

> *'Of course my brother. He is good at helping me, he has a good way of explaining things so I can understand. Or my mum usually.'* (Participant 5)

> *'Mum for me too, she is good at helping with what I am doing. Dad helps too if he is at home around that time.'* (Participant 6)

Question 17: Do you think getting help with homework is important?

> *'It is nice for mum to check my spellings and tables and see how good I know them.'* (Participant 3)

> *'Well yeah it's fine. Like it is very important for me to get better with things I'm maybe uncomfortable with so mum and dad can help that.'* (Participant 6)

4.7.2 Extrinsic motivation: the mindset of having to do it and potential punishments associated with not doing it

Question 15: Why do you do your homework?

> *'I never don't do my homework ever. If I didn't mum would not be happy with me and teacher would have to put my name in the homework tracker.'* (Participant 4)

> *'I do it always, everyone has to but I guess it could be homework tracker with teacher or catch up at home and extra work from mum.'* (Participant 5)

'I do it all the time, its just part of school but if I didn't I would probably miss football and my parents wouldn't be happy with me either.' (Participant 6)

Question 18: What happens if you don't do your homework?

'Ah I would get grounded and banned from my Xbox and phone.' (Participant 2)

'Well see I always do it so I don't really know, maybe I would just catch up on it and mum wouldn't be happy either.' (Participant 3)

'I never don't do my homework ever. If I didn't mum would not be happy with me and teacher would have to put my name in the homework tracker.' (Participant 4)

'I do it always but I guess it could be homework tracker with teacher or catch up at home and extra work from mum.' (Participant 5)

'I do it all the time but if I didn't I would probably miss football and my parents wouldn't be happy with me either.' (Participant 6)

4.7.3 Intrinsic motivation: confidence with the homework tasks and the importance for oneself

Question 15: Why do you do your homework?

'It helps me understand more what I'm doing and I find it good for me to keep learning.' (Participant 3)

'Well when I can do my homework without much difficulty, I know then that I am doing good and know what I should so it is important to check that at home as well as school.' (Participant 6)

Question 19: Are there any particular activities you like getting that make homework more worthwhile?

'Art activities I'm very good at and yeah projects are fun and I can learn interesting things.' (Participant 2)

'Projects for me too cause you decide what you would like to find out or do yourself or with your friends if it is a group project and it is never boring.' (Participant 3)

'I agree too, projects definitely it's a fun way to learn and everyone can do the part they are good at like writing or art.' (Participant 4)

'I like practical tasks, measuring or finding something and project work too is interesting.' (Participant 5)

'Projects. Even though I know it doesn't always suit to get a project on our work, it is enjoyable when we do and we work together mostly which is fun.' (Participant 6)

Section: 4.9 Themes for Category Four

4.9.1 Incorporating more child-centered and active learning activities

Question 22: If you were teacher, what homework would you set for the week?

'Some play, learn spellings and tables and work on a project.' (Participant 1)

'I would set one subject each night and also have a project to be working on, like researching work.' (Participant 3)

*'I would tell people to play or exercise for homework it would be healthy for everyone and project work if we each work on something at home for the group

project, that's good. And I think playing with pets and friends too.' (Participant 4)

Question 23: Can you explain why you think projects are a good activity for homework?

'People can work together and decide what they can do for the group, like sort of what they are good at.' (Participant 1)

'Well they are interesting and I can do the thing that I'm good at.' (Participant 2)

'Well they are really interesting and people can do more on it if they are interested or just a smaller bit if they aren't able to do as much. Like projects can be in groups or we can do our own one.' (Participant 5)

Question 20: Do you think you should get homework?

'It helps my brain for sure and I learn new things I wouldn't have time at school to learn.' (Participant 2)

'Yes we should, otherwise how would we learn anything that well, it wouldn't be enough just at school now when we are getting older. And our mums can helps us too and see what we are learning.' (Participant 3)

'We learn so much more by having homework than we just learn at school and we will have to study when we are older an learn new things…it is good for us.' (Participant 5)

'At home we can all talk with parents or whoever and learn…we wouldn't have time at school to sit learning new spellings so we wouldn't be as good at things like that if we had no homework.' (Participant 6)

Question 21: If it was changed, what parts of homework do you think are most important to keep?

'Spellings for English and Irish I guess.' (Participant 1)

'I would say keep spellings and reading…and tables.' (Participant 2)

'Learning homework like tables, spellings and poems.' (Participant 3)

'Probably keep tables, sums and spellings.' (Participant 5)

'I think it would be important to keep learning the spellings, tables and the odd poem in English and Irish helps memory and learning too.' (Participant 6)

4.9.3 Providing an element of choice to increase suitability for individual family routines

Question 24: How do you think homework could become a better experience, more positive for everyone?

'Well if we didn't have so many bits each night and if we decided more ourselves we would be happier.' (Participant 1)

'Yeah like well it would free you up if you just didn't have 6 things every night, it wouldn't be so bad then if it was fun too like a project…' (Participant 2)

'A bit less things each night cause we have too many different books to take and everyone can learn different things in projects so it is fair on everyone to do a bit or people who want to do more difficult things.' (Participant 4)

'Well I think homework should be set at the beginning of the week for the entire week and then if we are busy or have a free night we can choose when to do it, not have separate work to do each night.' (Participant 5)

'I think teacher should try out setting homework for the week on a Monday and see how it goes.' (Participant 6)

Question 25: How would you benefit form being able to decide when to do your homework?

'If I always go to Granny's on a Tuesday or to my cousins, nobody will be telling me do your homework cause I can just catch up another day.' (Participant 2)

'We can decide with our mum and dad when to do it incase we have things on then we wouldn't have to worry about not getting it done.' (Participant 4)

'Well I suppose not everyone has time every evening to do the same amount of homework. Sometimes people are busy with football or piano or visiting. So if we can choose we know maybe we have more time on Tuesday and Thursday to do more.' (Participant 5)

'Yeah I kinda agree cause then everyone could do homework whenever it suits their own family routine and it would be easier for the family too cause homework wouldn't be in the way then.' (Participant 6)