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Exploring Malaysian Students' Perception of Homework, Time Spent on Homework and How They Do Their Homework

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ABSTRACT

Background: Several researchers had stressed the importance of homework in enhancing students' academic achievements and improving their self-regulatory learning (Cooper, 2007; Bembenuity, 2011). Debates on the importance of homework in enhancing students' academic achievements are ongoing among researchers, parents and teachers. This paper is based on a descriptive study carried out on 876 Year Five (11 years old) primary school students in Malaysia. The data was collected using questionnaires. **Objective:** The objective of the study is to explore students' perception of homework, investigate the time spent on homework and how students do their homework. **Results:** The findings revealed that majority of Year Five students have positive perception towards homework. The study also revealed that there is a significant difference in students' perception towards homework according to school type and gender. The findings also indicated that 61% of Year Five students spent between one to two hours daily in doing their homework. The results also showed that most of the students did homework on their own (81.2%), 72.5% sought help from teachers and 68.9% sought help from their parents or family members. **Conclusion:** It is hoped that this study can shed some light and provide guidelines for teachers and Malaysian Education Ministry in planning homework for primary school children as a tool in assisting student learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Cooper (2007) defined homework as task assigned to students by school teachers that are meant to be carried out during non-instructional time. Report by National Foundation for Educational Research (2000) showed that there was a high correlation between time spent on homework and students' academic achievements. Students who spend more time in doing homework have better academic achievements as compared to those who spend less time in doing their homework. Ramdas and Zimmerman (2011) found that students could develop self-regulatory skills through homework. Milbourne and Haury (2000) also stressed that homework can help students develop five crucial skills as follows:

- i. Mastery learning skills and enabling students to practice content that they learned in school.
- ii. Self-discipline and effective time management.
- iii. Self-regulatory learning.
- iv. Responsibility for learning.

- v. Positive research skills such as exploring, organizing and summarizing.

Problem statement:

Several researchers had stressed the importance of homework in enhancing students' academic achievements and improving their self-regulatory learning (Cooper, 2007; Bembenuity, 2011; Dettmers, Trautwein, Ludtke, Goetz, Frenzel & Pekrun, 2011). Although homework is a part of school curriculum, issues related to homework are often voiced out by teachers, parents, school administration and students. A Malaysian local newspaper had reported that many Malaysian students described homework as boring (The Star, February 11, 2005). According to Chiam in Hariati Azizan and Gomez (The Star, 2005, p. 4-5), there were cases whereby parents complained to the school administration about teachers not giving enough homework to their children. Similarly, a study by Airil Haimi (2005) indicated that school administration and parents expect teachers to give more homework to school children. On the other

hand, a study by Oosterom (2008) showed that parents were unhappy with homework because they were forced to spend a lot of time guiding their children in doing homework thus, robbing off their quality family time.

The debate about the importance of homework in enhancing students' academic achievements is ongoing among researchers, parents and teachers. Cooper (1991) also highlighted that homework is the major cause of misunderstanding and conflicts among teachers and school administrators. In addition, Fox News (2009) reported about Australian parents who opined that primary school children should be exempted from homework since the positive effect of homework is inconclusive.

In relation to time spent on homework, Carr-Gregg (2014) highlighted that Malaysian students spend more time in doing homework as compared to students from Singapore, Australia, Canada, Russia and Japan. Studies related to homework in Malaysia are very limited, thus this study is focused on students' perception on homework in three different types of public primary schools in Malaysia namely the National Primary Schools, National Type Chinese Primary Schools and National Type Tamil Primary Schools.

Objective of the study:

The objective of the study is to ascertain primary school students' perception of homework according to school type, gender and the location of the schools (urban or rural). This study also explores on time spent by students in doing their homework and how they do their homework.

Research questions:

- i. What are students' perception of homework?
- ii. Is there any significant difference in students' perception of homework according to school type?
- iii. Is there a significant difference in the students' perception of homework according to gender?
- iv. Is there a significant difference in students' perception of homework according to the location of the school?
- v. How much time do students spend in doing homework?
- vi. How students do their homework?

Review Of Literature:

Homework is based on social constructivist theory by Vygotsky (1978). Vygotsky argued that every child will be able to master more advanced skills and concepts if he or she gets scaffoldings from adults or peers. With their help and guidance (scaffolding) students will be able to reach ZPD (zone of proximal learning). In other words, teachers, parents, family members or peers can provide scaffolding for students in doing their homework. A well planned homework reinforces what students had

learnt in the classroom and as a result promotes learning and development. Studies by Voorhees (2011), Cooper, Robinson, and Patal (2006) also indicated positive effects of homework on students' achievements. Marzano and Pickering (2007) highlighted that there is a positive correlation between the amount of homework completed by students and their academic achievements.

However, some researchers argue that homework is harmful and has no effect on students' academic achievements (Bennet & Kalish, 2006; Kohn, 2006). A study among fourth graders in US also indicated that those who did an hour of homework every night got exactly the same score as those who were not assigned homework by their teachers (U.S.Department of Education, 2005, p.50). The study concludes that the effect of homework on academic achievements is not significant.

Parker (2014) based on Standford research also argues that too much homework can cause stress, physical health problems, lack of balance and even alienation from society. She also elaborates that due to homework, students are likely to drop activities, do not see friends or family members and do not pursue their hobbies. However, these findings are not conclusive because other researchers have reported the positive effects of homework on students and parents.

Marzano and Pickering (2007) stressed that the amount of homework that students completed had a significant effect on their academic achievements. A study carried out in Queensland (Queensland the Smart State, 2004) reveals that students who complete homework generally outperform the students who do not on some areas of academic achievements. Redding (2000) also opined that well planned homework had three times greater effect on learning compared to the students' socioeconomic status. In fact, parents' involvement in homework improves academic performance of elementary school children (Patal, Cooper & Robinson, 2008).

A study by the National Foundation for Educational Research (2000) discovers that there is a high correlation between time spent on homework and students' academic achievements. The study also revealed that female students spent more time in doing homework as compared to males. Besides that, Asian-American students spent more time doing homework in a productive manner.

Several other studies also indicates that female students have more positive attitude towards homework as compared to male students (Hong & Milgram, 1999; Harris, Nixon & Rudduck, 1993). Similarly, a study by Xu and Como (2006) highlighted that female students have more initiatives and are better at management strategies in doing their homework as compared to male students. Hong, Wan and Peng (2011) also argued that female students have better homework behavior than the male students.

Oostrerom (2008) carried out a study in Canada and revealed that the average time spend by students (kindergarten to Gred 6) every night in doing homework is 33 minutes. A similar study by Cameron and Bartel (2008) also indicated that the average time students in Ontario spent on homework is 39.8 minutes while students in Canada spent 37.6 minutes. A study by Parmjit, Sidhu and Chan (2013) indicated that 63.2% of primary students spent between 1-2 hours daily on homework.

Methodology:

This is a descriptive study using questionnaires to gauge students' perception on homework. The sample consists of 876 year five students from 20 public primary schools in Penang, Malaysia. The researcher used purposive random sampling in choosing the schools and the sample. Purposive sampling was used in choosing the schools and random sampling was used in choosing the samples (Year Five students, 11 years old). The figures in Table 1 clearly shows the types of schools and the number of students involved in this study.

A set of questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The questionnaire consists of 16 items. Item 1 to 14 was used to gauge students' perception of homework (using four Likert scales). For positive items, four marks were awarded for strongly agree,

three marks for agree, two marks for disagree and one mark for strongly disagree, and the scores were reverse for the negative items. The score for the 14 items were totaled up to obtain students' scores for their perception towards homework. Item 15 was used to gauge how much time students spent on doing their daily homework and item 16 was to gauge how students did their homework. The questionnaires were distributed to the students with the help of their class teachers. The researcher obtained permission from the Malaysian Ministry of Education and the respective school principals to carry out the study.

Prior to the actual study a pilot test was conducted with similar samples (43 students) to obtain the reliability of the questionnaire. The Cronbach Alpha for the questionnaire was 0.80, which indicated high reliability. The data of the study was analyzed using SPSS Program for Windows version 22, One Way ANOVA and Independent samples t-test was used to compare significant difference between the groups.

Findings And Discussion:

- i. What are students' perception of homework

Table 1: Sample of the study according to school type and location.

Type of school	Location	No. of School	No. Of students	Total –Sch. Type	Total
National Primary School	Urban	3	152	307	876
	Rural	3	155		
Chinese Primary School	Urban	3	145	293	
	Rural	3	148		
Tamil Primary School	Urban	4	131	276	
	Rural	4	145		

Table 2: Students' perception on homework .

Item	S A & A	D & SD
1 I think homework is important	802(91.6%)	74 (8.4%)
2 I like to do homework	634(72.4%)	242(27.6%)
3 Homework is a burden	377(40%)	499(60%)
4 I have too much of homework	293(33.4%)	583(66.6%)
5 Homework is very difficult for me	336 (38.3%)	540(61.6%)
6 I have to spend a lot of time doing homework	469 (53.5%)	407(46.5%)
7 Homework helps me in my studies	780(89%)	96(11%)
8 Teacher always marks my homework	719(82%)	157(18%)
9 Teacher always gives good feedbacks after marking my homework	691(79%)	185(21%)
10 Homework is related to lesson taught in class	784 (89.5%)	92(10.5%)
11 Homework is challenging	680(78%)	196(22%)
12 I feel relief after completing the homework	721(87%)	115(13%)
13 Teacher's comments on homework is encouraging	688(78.5%)	188(21.5%)
14 Teacher always explains if I do mistakes in my homework	734(83.7)	152(17.3%)

ii. SA= Strongly agree, A= Agree,

iii. D= Disagree, SD= Strongly disagree

The findings on Table 2 show that 91.6% of the students think homework is important, 89.5% say that homework is related to their lesson in class. Another 89% say that homework helped them in their studies, 87% feel relieved after doing their homework, 83.7% say that their teachers always explained if they did any mistakes in their homework, 82% say that teachers always mark their homework, 79% of them claim that teachers always

give good feedbacks after marking their homework, 78.5% say that teachers' comments on homework are encouraging, 78% say that homework is challenging and 72.4% say that they like to do homework. However, 53.5% say that they spend a lot of time doing homework, 40% of them think homework is a burden for them, 38.3% say that homework is very difficult and 33.4% said that they had too much homework. Overall, this study concludes that

majority of Year Five students have positive perception of homework. These findings support the study in Queensland which indicated that students who were positive towards homework also had positive attitudes towards school and learning. Students who had negative perception of homework were those who spent much of their time watching television and playing video games (Cameron & Bartel, 2008). However, the current findings do not support the report in the local daily which indicated that Malaysian students had negative perception of homework (The Star, February 11, 2005).

ii. Is there any significant difference in students' perception of homework according to school type?

The findings indicates that the mean perception of students from National Type Tamil Primary Schools is the highest (mean=47.46), followed by National Primary Schools (mean=44.25) and the

lowest being the National Type Chinese Primary Schools (mean=43.84). The results of the One Way ANOVA (Table 3) show that there is a significant difference in the mean score of students perception towards homework according to school type ($F=114.31$, $p=.000$, $df=2$, $N=876$).

The Post Hoc Tukey test reveals that the mean perception of National Type Tamil Primary School students towards homework is significantly higher than National Type Chinese Primary School students (mean difference=7.46, $p=.000$). The mean perception of National Type Tamil Primary School students is also significantly higher compared to National Primary School students (3.21, $p=.000$). However, the mean score of National Primary School students is significantly higher than the National Type Chinese Primary School students (mean difference= 4.25, $p=.000$).

Table 3: Comparing mean score of students' perception towards homework according to school type.

	N	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig
Between Groups (National Primary Schools, Chinese Primary Schools & Tamil Primary Schools)	876	7981	2	3990.85	114.31	0.000

Significant at $*p < 0.05$

iii. Is there a significant difference in the students' perception of homework according to gender?

Table 4: Male and female students' perception towards homework.

Group	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t-value	df	P value
Male	367	43.23	6.68	-1.02	-2.23	874	.026
Female	509	44.24	6.58				

Significant at $*p < 0.05$

Table 4 shows that the mean score of the female students is higher (mean=44.24) than the male students (43.23). The results of the independent samples t-test also show that the female students' perception towards homework is significantly higher than the male students ($t=-2.231$, $df=874$, $p=.026$). The t-test findings indicates that the female students have more positive perception of homework compared to their male counterparts. These findings support earlier findings by Xu and Corno (2006) which indicated that female students were more

positive towards homework compared to their male counterparts. Studies by Cooper *et al.* (1993), Hong and Milgram (1999) also indicated similar findings. Study by Hong *et al.* (2011) also revealed that male students were rated unfavorably by their teachers than their female counterparts of homework behavior.

iv. Is there a significant difference in students' perception of homework according to the location of the schools?

Table 5: Urban and rural students' perception of homework.

	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	t-value	df	P value
Urban	428	43.44	7.09	-.78	-1.74	874	.083
Rural	448	44.22	6.14				

Significant at $*p < 0.05$

The results in Table 5 indicate that the mean score of rural students (mean=44.44) is higher than the mean of the urban students (43.22). The Independent samples t-test findings show that there is no significant difference between the rural students and the urban students in their perception towards

homework. The findings show that the location of schools (rural and urban) has no significant effect on students' perception towards homework ($t=-1.74$, $df=874$, $p=.083$). These findings are similar to findings by Cameron and Bartel (2008) which indicated that students in Ontario and Canada had no

significant difference in their attitudes towards homework. However, results from this study are not consistent with findings by Xu and Corno (2003) which indicated that rural students perceive less utility for doing homework and felt less compelled to do their homework than the urban students. Study by Xu (2009) also concluded that urban students were more self-motivated in doing their homework compared to their rural counterpart.

v. How much time do students spend in doing homework?

Findings in Table 6 show that 37.4% (328) of primary school students spend 2 hours daily in doing homework, 23.5% (206) of them spent one hour, 15% (131) spend less than one hour, 12.5% (109) spent 3 hours and 11.6% (102) spent more than 3 hours daily in doing homework. These findings affirm that 61% of Year Five students spend about one to two hours daily in doing homework. These

findings support findings by Parker (2014) that two hours of homework a night can be counterproductive. Study by Parmjit, Sidhu and Chan also revealed similar findings. The current findings are not parallel with the findings by Brown Center (2003) which concluded that majority of U.S. students (regardless of grade) only spent less than an hour a day in doing homework. As such, this study suggests that Malaysian students spend more time in doing homework compared to U.S. students. Study by Carr-Gregg (2014) also indicated that Malaysian students spent about 3.8 hours daily in doing homework but current study shows that majority of Malaysian students only spend between one to two hours daily in doing homework. Carr-Gregg (2014) highlighted that Malaysian students spend more time in doing homework compared to students from Singapore, Australia, Canada, Russia and Japan.

Table 6: Time spent on doing homework.

	No. of students	Percentage %
Less than one hour	131	15
1 hour	206	23.5
2 hours	328	37.4
3 hours	109	12.5
More than 3 hours	102	11.6
Total	876	100

vi. How do students do their homework?

Findings from Table 7 indicate that 81.2% (711) of the students do homework by themselves without seeking help from others. 72.5% (635) get help from their teachers, 68.9% get help from their parents or family members, 67% get help from their friends, 39.95% get help from their tuition teachers and 18.5% copy from their friends. These findings indicate that most of the students seek help from

teachers and parents or family members in doing homework. As such, there should be some guidelines on the amount of homework for primary students in order to avoid stress for teachers and parents (Parker, 2014). Giving homework at primary level helps parents and family members to be in constant touch with their children's learning progress. However, too much of it can be a burden and have a negative impact on the children.

Table 7: How students do their homework.

How students do their homework	SA & A	D & SD
Do myself	711 (81.2%)	165 (18.8)
Copy from friends	162 (18.5)	714 (81.5)
Help from tuition teachers	350 (39.95)	526 (60.05)
Help from parents or family members	504 (68.9%)	272 (31.1)
Help from friends	587 (67%)	289 (33%)
Help from school teachers	635 (72.5%)	241 (27.5)
Total	876 (100%)	876 (100%)

SA & A = Strongly Agree & Agree

D & SD = Disagree & Strongly Disagree

Conclusion:

This study yields some interesting and important findings. One of the findings is that majority of the students have positive perception towards homework. As such these findings suggest that homework is important and relevant at primary schools. There are also significant differences in students' perception towards homework according to school type and gender. Students from National Type Tamil Primary Schools have significantly higher perception of homework compared to students from National Type Chinese Primary Schools and National Primary Schools. The findings also reveal

that the mean perception of female students is significantly higher than the male students. In relation to location, there is no significant difference between the rural schools and the urban schools on their perception towards homework. Results of this study also indicate that majority of Year Five students spent between one to two hours a day in doing their homework. Most students do homework on their own but quite a high percentage of them had to seek help from teachers, parents or family members in doing their homework. This study has important contribution to teachers, parents and Ministry of Education as it sheds some light on Year

Five students' perception of homework, time spent on doing homework and how students do their homework. In addition, Education Ministry especially the Curriculum Development Centre and the Teacher Education Division should give emphasis on how to design homework, time spent on homework, how to provide written feedback, oral comments and motivation to students. However, more studies should be carried out especially in terms of correlation between homework and students' achievements. Future studies can also explore why male students are less positive towards homework compared to female students and why students from National Primary Schools and National Type Chinese Primary Schools are less positive towards homework compared to students from National Type Tamil Primary Schools.

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