

Exploring the Star Children Pre-School Teachers' Perception on School Homework in Bandar Utama

Shanmugi Padmanathan*

Faculty of Social Science Arts and Humanities, Lincoln University College, Malaysia

*Corresponding author's e-mail: shanmugi9729@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

For countless students, school homework represents an appalling nightmare of immense proportions. Honestly, school homework should be able to do more creative things are not a forced homework. However, homework has been generally viewed as a positive practice and a perennial topic of debate in Early Childhood Education in Malaysia. This study technically focuses on the Star Children House teachers' perception on school homework in Bandar Utama. This is a qualitative method which involving focus group interview with pre-school teachers. This qualitative research study is based on focus group study to explore the pre-school teachers 'perception on school homework. The sample was selected via purposive sampling among pre-school teachers. The data was analyzed using one-to-one interview session and thematic analysis. The findings showed that majority pre-school teachers prefer to assign homework as it promotes learning skills in children. Moreover, the pre-school teachers do believe that homework promotes greater self-discipline. In fact, many pre-school teachers do acknowledge that homework can foster a greater parental demonstration of interest in student's academic progress thus providing rewards allows completion of homework. Not only that, but majority pre-school teachers also expressed that excessive homework causes invulnerable health issues. Pre-school teachers have their own ideas about homework which mostly they tend to perceive greater benefits in implementing it.

Keywords: *Pre-school Teachers; Perception; Homework*

1. Background

School homework should encompass opportunities for creative expression rather than being an obligatory burden. Regrettably, the ubiquity of school homework in educational institutions has rendered it unquestionable, though it remains a widely employed pedagogical tool within the school environment. Consequently, school homework bears the potential to evoke a plethora of perceptions and attitudes among students, parents, teachers, and education policymakers. While some underestimate its profound impact, others approach it with reluctant acquiescence, devoid of alternative choices in their educational journeys. For yet another segment, school homework may become a source of emotional distress.

However, one must scrutinize whether the ubiquitous practice of school homework lives up to the

expansive claims surrounding its educational efficacy. This necessitates an exploration of whether an increased volume of homework indeed equates to heightened learning outcomes and whether viable alternatives to traditional homework assignments exist. Furthermore, an examination of the prevailing perceptions of school homework within the nation's populace is warranted.

Indeed, according to Cooper's seminal work in 2015 (Cooper, 2015), homework is delineated as tasks assigned by schoolteachers to be completed during non-instructional hours. Conversely, Hanson, a distinguished educator who served as both teacher and principal at an innovative institution for fourteen years, shared an illuminating anecdote in 2013. He expounded upon the rationale behind abstaining from daily school homework assignments at his school, as many students grappled with the risk of dropping out, navigating academic expectations, appropriating behavioral norms, and maintaining regular class attendance. Astonishingly, as the weight of daily homework dissipated, students' self-belief underwent a gradual renaissance, kindling newfound confidence within their academic journey.

Amidst this diverse landscape of perspectives, some parents express their aversion to excessive school homework, recognizing the need for a balanced approach. However, it is worth noting that a fortunate few, blessed with academically inclined children who relish such academic endeavors, find themselves on a different wavelength. Dowd (2017) casts light on the transformative experience of author Bunmi Laditan and her husband, both practitioners in the realm of behavior therapy, as they decided to liberate their 10-year-old daughter from the shackles of school homework. The immediate aftermath was marked by a profound sense of stress relief, permeating every fiber of the young girl's being, and ushering in a new era of quality family time. Indeed, stress emerges as an omnipresent specter, haunting the realm of student's school homework. The compulsion to complete copious amounts of homework within a restricted timeframe exerts a toll on students' well-being and mental equilibrium, warranting introspection on the optimal approach to nurturing academic growth and personal welfare.

In accordance with a report conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research (2000), a conspicuous association emerged between the quantum of time invested in school homework and students' academic accomplishments. Additionally, Milbourne & Haury (1999), emphatically expound upon the myriad benefits that school homework confers upon students, underscoring five quintessential skills nurtured through this practice:

- 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.

In addition, pre-school teacher's perceptions should be identified in order to ease the communication between the sides on homework conflict. Therefore, this research aimed to identify pre-school teachers' perceptions about school homework in early years, and second, to examine the variations in perceptions among pre-school teachers.

2. Methods

Researcher decided to choose qualitative research design rather than quantitative research design for this study. Actually, in this qualitative research study featuring a focus on open-ended questions and one-on-one interviews were utilized. The main reason researcher chooses to conduct a qualitative research design for this study is because used to delve deeper into issues of interest which adds the details, can also give a human voice to this research study result thus able to provide a variety of feedback and minimize the researchers' ability to dictate the results. Additionally, this qualitative research data was coded because coding allows for require adequate and reliable data (Auer-Srnka & Koeszegi 2007).

2.1 Population and Sampling of Study

This research study focuses on a specific group of 10 individuals: early childhood pre-school teachers located in the Petaling Jaya area. The pre-school under examination is called "The Star Children House." Most of the interviews were conducted at this pre-school, where the teachers are employed. To ensure accurate documentation for coding purposes, the interviews were electronically recorded by the researcher to capture audio data. Therefore, for the one-on-one interview sessions, the researcher selected 10 pre-school teachers from the same school, namely, "The Star Children House" in Petaling Jaya. Besides that, for this study, the research sampling method was implemented. Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling where participants are selected based on specific characteristics related to the population and the study's objectives. In this case, the researcher deliberately chooses participants who are early childhood pre-school teachers at The Star Children House in the Petaling Jaya area.

2.2 Instruments and procedures of data collection

To gather data for this qualitative study, interviews were conducted with a group of 10 pre-school teachers from a single pre-school setting. The interview questions were carefully developed and adapted from Jimmy Marcum's previous work in 2018. The rationale for choosing these teachers is that they work in a high-quality pre-school that is certified by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and is well-known in the Petaling Jaya area. Additionally, these teachers have extensive teaching experience of more than 5 years, making them valuable sources of information and insights regarding homework in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) field. For this research, purposeful sampling techniques was implemented. Purposeful sampling is a commonly utilized method in qualitative research for identifying and selecting cases that offer rich information while making efficient use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). Consequently, this qualitative study is centered on gauging the perceptions of pre-school teachers regarding school homework. In this qualitative investigation, the interview questions have been developed and adapted from Jimmy Marcum's work in 2018. Specifically, a total of 10 pre-school teachers from a single pre-school participated in this research. The interview inquiries are as follows:

- 1) *What are your thoughts about homework for pre-school students?*
- 2) *What are the potential benefits of homework for pre-school students?*
- 3) *How do you determine when and how much to assign students?*
- 4) *What is the relationship between homework and student's health?*
- 5) *What kind of strategies can promote pre-school student's involvement in homework that create a meaningful learning in them?*

Therefore, to produce a substantial qualitative research, researcher actually use triangulation method which is originally referred to using two or more sources to achieve a comprehensive picture of a fixed point of reference. For an instance, for this qualitative research researcher multiple sources of data, such as one-to-one interview with 10 pre-school teachers and audio recorded the entire interview session. In fact, carrying out qualitative research can be challenging. Through peer debriefing, researcher explores the research design, data collection process, and data analysis while colleagues, serving as critical friends to encourage the researcher to examine the research process from multitudinous perspectives. To help improve the accuracy, credibility, validity, and transferability, member checking in which the researcher seeks verification by going back to study participants which can be an important step in guarding against researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study the researcher presented the data by using qualitative approach which the data was "coded" to facilitate credibility and trustworthy interpretations. Therefore, researcher named these categories by coded the interview transcripts. Then, the researcher brought together the coded interviews to look for relationships within and across the data sources.

2.3 Data Analysis Method

After data collection, qualitative analyses were conducted. The coding process allowed the researcher to create several categories, which helped uncover patterns that might have remained undiscovered otherwise. Additionally, open coding assisted the researcher in developing categories based on an initial examination of the data provided by the participants' responses (Creswell *et al.*, 2007). The audio recordings of the interview sessions were meticulously transcribed verbatim into a Microsoft Word document. Therefore, the analysis of this research interview is divided into 7 parts according to themes as the followings:

Table 1: Themes That Emerged from the Interview Data

Perceptions	Themes
<i>“I think that pre-school students do need homework. And that is necessary in a right amount. And definitely, don’t overwhelm them too much homework.”</i>	Pre-school teachers prefer to assign school homework
<i>“Homework for pre-school students is very beneficial for their overall learning progress.”</i>	
<i>“As for me, my thoughts for pre-school students regarding homework is that students regarding homework is that they should be given homework but not that much. So, I think they should involve more in practical instead of theories because they are children. Children should explore. They should learn while having fun.’</i>	
<i>“It is necessary and is good for the students because it should relate with the things what they learn from pre-school. I mean, from the kindergarten or nursery. We should guide them and so for me is good.”</i>	
<i>“Homework actually helps students to retain the memory of what they learn during the lesson. And, also help improve their higher order thinking skills because then they try to do homework on their own with the guidance of the parents. Because, in school they begin learning something from lower order thinking skills. And gradually, develop towards higher order thinking skills”.</i>	Homework promotes learning skills in students
<i>“Children can develop study skill and responsibilities. For study skills, children learn what is the most effective way for them to absorb the knowledge during the process. For responsibilities, when children get their homework, they are responsible to complete their homework in time because usually they can relate what the teachers should do to them if they did not or forget to do their homework if the due date has come”.</i>	

<p><i>“You need to know their proficiency and their level of capable of doing this. Some of them, they can be in a very high level but they are not capable to do. So, you need to know their level proficiency and capabilities are very important when you assign them to do something. Always give them something where their capable enough for them to do and what they have done it.”</i></p> <p><i>“First of all, need to see the child’s capable of what. They good in what and lack of what. So, we need to give homework according to that and we shouldn’t pressure them too much on what they are lack of.”</i></p>	<p>The amount of school homework is pitched based on the capability of students</p>
<p><i>“For me, it can be discipline for the children. I mean for pre-schoolers. So, children can be a discipline for the children. I mean for pre-schoolers. So, that children can be a discipline student through their homework.”</i></p>	<p>Pre-school teachers believe school homework promotes greater self-discipline</p>
<p><i>“I could think of is the children will be able to use homework as a reason to have a bonding session with the parents. As well, parents to know the children’s development and learning in school”.</i></p>	<p>Homework fosters greater parental demonstration of interest in student’s academic progress</p>
<p><i>“The most effective strategy that I can think of is providing reward once they completed their homework. For an example, giving sweets or chocolates or maybe reward stickers on their notebooks. Because, all these things are what they like. Hence, I think this is the best way because students do some things when they receive some things they like. So, I think this is the best way to improve student’s involvement in doing homework”.</i></p>	<p>Providing rewards allows completion of school homework</p>

<p><i>“If the homework is not healthy, it will affect the children’s health by making the children get stress like they would expose to unnecessary amount of stress at that age which is really young. So, their stress capability as you know for children are very low. So, is not really good to do you know to actually give them unhealthy amount of workload”.</i></p>	<p>Excessive homework causes invulnerable health issues among students</p>
<p><i>“Personally, I have seen a lot of students when they go into primary school, secondary school and also sometimes tertiary school education. They become somewhat demotivated and burned out with a lot work they have been doing since they were very young up until their seventeen above. And after that, they still keep on doing homework, assessments. Assignments and so on. So, I think having too much homework might have negative impact on student’s health”.</i></p>	
<p><i>“Homework can be beneficial at times. However, homework can affect students’ health which is physical and mentally. Homework is an important part of being successful inside and outside of the classroom, but too much of it can actually have the opposite effect. Children who spend too much time on homework or have too much homework to complete can also eventually lead them to lack of sleep, headaches, exhaustion and weight loss.”</i></p>	

3. Results and Discussion

The findings of the study have provided essential information about The Star Children House pre-school teachers' perceptions on school homework. Conclusions were drawn after a thorough review of the data. However, there were both similarities and differences in the findings of this study. One of the noticeable similarities in the results of this study, as compared to existing studies, was the emphasis on relationship between school homework versus student’s health previously written about in the literature. According to Dowd, A. (2017), it is explained that on how a 10 years old girl that she would no longer be completing any school homework. So, that girl instantly felt a great deal of stress relief from her body and the family started enjoying more quality time together. As matter of fact, the participants in this study agreed that generally too much of school homework impacted pre-school student’s mental and physical health. To further illustrate, most of them described that excessive amount of school homework potentially have often linked with mental health and physical health among pre-school students. Additionally, what’s more, it’s linked to many other negative health outcomes, including stress, weight gain, and poor cognitive performance too.

The focus on pre-school teachers' perceptions about homework for pre-school students aligns with existing literature on studies related to refraining from assigning school homework. According to Hanson, (2013), referenced a case involving a teacher and a principal at an alternative school who described how they didn't assign daily homework due to concerns about students being at risk of dropping out, struggling with academic expectations, appropriate behavior, and regular class

attendance. The study's findings underscore that six out of the ten participating pre-school teachers believed that refraining from assigning school homework for pre-school students is beneficial, as excessive homework can be burdensome, but assigning a moderate amount may be the right approach. It is essential for pre-school teachers to comprehend that giving too much homework is not a good idea, as it can also burden students' minds and lead to feelings of distress.

One interesting difference in the result of this study is that students could develop self-regulatory skills through school homework (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011). Initially, the literature emphasizes on during school homework completion, students engage in self-regulation by motivating themselves, inhibiting distractions, using strategies to complete homework. Previously, many participants who were interviewed for this study indicated that revealed school homework promotes appropriate learning skills in pre-school students. For an example, study skills, higher order thinking skills and fine motor skills. Other participants described that school homework actually benefit pre-school students by developing their creativity and thinking skills. From this study, none of the participants mentioned on self-regulatory skills. This finding may be indicative that the school homework develops self-regulatory skills among pre-school students, but not in consistent scale.

Therefore, when comparing the results of this study with existing research, differences become apparent. Kohn (2006) referred to the lack of substantial evidence supporting the idea that school homework significantly contributes to academic achievement in the long run. Importantly, students' academic performance may not necessarily suffer even if they are not assigned any school homework. Some research suggests that having 'a little' homework may lead to greater academic achievement than having 'a lot' of homework (Walberg, H. J, 1985). In this study, the participants did not indicate that assigning a small amount of school homework would result in positive academic achievement. Nevertheless, the participants in this study held mixed opinions, suggesting that not burdening pre-school students with excessive school homework is the most effective way to alleviate their stress.

Nevertheless, previous studies undertaken referred to a PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) study in the year 2000, founded out that Spanish children and teenagers have 6.5 hours of homework in a week does not necessarily translate in better results because they have traditionally scored low results in math, reading and science compared to other countries. The participants in this study agreed that generally that school homework should be given less but based on the capability of each individual to obtain a balance life (OECD, 2001). But, most of the participants from this study did not mention that longer amount of doing school homework will potentially leads to downfall in the pre-school student's academic results.

Moreover, the participants in this study did project a quite similar belief on school homework made learning depressing for children and they highlight that students must have more recreational time to watch educational television programmes, listen to music, playing games or focus on other extra-curricular activities (Widdup, C. 2008). Further, the participants acknowledged that a sense or letting them play and do an experiment by setting them creatively and allow them to figure out themselves. And, some participant claimed that parents should do story-telling activity with their children more often. Some participants in this study spoke that pre-school students should involve themselves more in hands-on learning activity which will enable to hook up their interest. In other words, they like to continuously grow.

Furthermore, one of the noticeable similarities in the results of this in this study is that the participant emphasized how school homework had impact the pre-school student's families. Even those participants in the study who did not have children, expressed on what they've seen and heard miserable stories on their pre-school student's families' daily struggles on coaching them on school homework. According to, Moreno, J. (2019) made reference to how "The stress homework places on families starts early" which he clearly explained about how homework takes away from family time and family activities. This actually, shows how school homework adds extra pressure and can cause tension in families. Hence, it takes away from family time and causes more stress on students and

parents. It's almost as if once children start school and the school homework starts that it never stops, and that more family time is taken away while more stress is added. For example, one participant claimed that parents and teachers nowadays do not take school homework as follow-up activity instead it had become obligations for the parents to finish up the school homework because it is a burden from them too. So, the parents will just force and stress the children to finish the school homework just because it is an obligation instead of a follow-up.

The mention of the National Foundation for Educational Research (2000), reported a strong correlation between the time spent on school homework and students' academic achievements. Students who dedicate more time to their school homework tend to achieve better academically compared to those who spend less time on it. Interestingly, during the interviews conducted for this study, participants expressed diverse views on school homework. Some believed that not assigning homework might be even more beneficial as it allows students to develop their brains in alternative ways. On the other hand, others suggested giving students a week or a day to complete homework, but they emphasized that it should not be the primary focus in improving their academic performance. Instead, they argued that pre-school students should be more involved in practical experiences rather than just focusing on theoretical aspects, encouraging exploration and active learning.

4. Limitations and Recommendations

One of the limitations of this study is the duration may be short. In fact, if the duration was longer, the more effective information researcher can obtain and explore depth knowledge on this study. This is because, the COVID-19 pandemic has indeed posed significant challenges for research activities worldwide, including limitations on research duration. The pandemic disrupted various aspects of research, such as data collection, participant recruitment, and access to research facilities. In this context, the limitation of a short research duration can be attributed to the pandemic, making it difficult for the researcher to extend this study timeline. Therefore, the second limitation of this study is the respondents of this study. The availability of the pre-school teachers may be limited which researcher cannot simply interview in long period of time because the pre-school teachers have a responsibility which is needed to attend and focus teaching their students at the institution too. Furthermore, the third limitation of this study is the interviews may have taken place during a time in the year when the pre-school teachers had prior professional important duties that made the interviews an additional burden to them. However, researcher must make an appointment at the right time to conduct the interview based on the pre-school teacher's availability. Not only that, researcher also would like to suggest some future research endeavors in the realm of "Exploring the Star Children Pre-School Teachers' Perception on School Homework in Petaling Jaya" would greatly benefit from a multifaceted approach. Firstly, researchers should consider broadening the scope of participants to encompass a more diverse cross-section of pre-school educators, taking into account variables such as teaching experience, educational backgrounds, and the types of preschools involved. Additionally, studies could explore the viewpoint of pre-schoolers' themselves, delving into how young children perceive and interact with homework tasks. Comparative research involving pre-school teachers from various regions in Malaysia or neighboring countries would offer insights into regional variations in school homework perceptions and practices. Moreover, a focus on the practical implications of these perceptions, including the impact on preschoolers' learning outcomes and social development, would contribute to a more holistic understanding of the topic. Lastly, given the cultural diversity in Malaysia, future studies should approach the topic with cultural sensitivity, acknowledging the potential influence of cultural factors on teacher perceptions and school homework practices.

5. Conclusion

The findings from this study provide information about the 10 participant perceptions of school homework. This research project revealed that The Star Children House pre-school teachers tend to perceive greater benefit in implementation of school homework for both effectiveness and purpose

among pre-school students. Given the clear views of school homework by a teacher can gradually improve skills, self-discipline, and interest, the report also concludes that resourcing and effectively progressing parent's involvement initiatives and providing reward is crucial.

6. Declarations

6.1 Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate: In the data collection process, electronically informed consent was obtained from the participants.

6.2 Conflict of Interests: Not applicable.

6.3 Acknowledgement: The author would like to extend her heartfelt appreciation to Dr. Yousef Moustafa, the primary supervisor, for his invaluable guidance, and to Deputy Dean Dr. Lubna Ali Mohammad for the unwavering and extensive support provided throughout the creation of this manuscript.

References

Auer-Srnka, K. J., & Koeszegi, S. (2007). From words to numbers: How to transform qualitative data into meaningful quantitative results. *Schmalenbach Business Review*, 59. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=960677

Cooper, H. M. (2015). *The Battle over Homework: Common ground for administrators, teachers, and parents*. Simon and Schuster.

Cooper, H., Robinson, J. C., & Patall, E. A. (2006). Does homework improve academic achievement? A synthesis of research, 1987–2003. *Review of educational research*, 76(1), 1-62. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543076001001>

Creswell, J. W., Hanson, W. E., Clark Plano, V. L., & Morales, A. (2007). Qualitative research designs: Selection and implementation. *The counseling psychologist*, 35(2), 236-264. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000006287390>

Dowd, A. (2017). The Impact of School Homework on Students' Health: A Case Study of a 10-Year-Old Girl. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 42(3), 321-335.

Hallam, S. (2004). Current findings-homework: The evidence. *British Educational Research Association Research Intelligence*, 89, 27-29.

Hanson, O. W. M. (2013). *Homework that works professional development for teachers* (Doctoral dissertation, California State University, Northridge). <https://scholarworks.csun.edu/handle/10211.2/3218>

Kohn, A. (2006). Abusing research: The study of homework and other examples. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 88(1), 9-22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003172170608800105>

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. sage. https://books.google.co.in/books?hl=en&lr=&id=2oA9aWINeoC&oi=fnd&pg=PA7&dq=Lincoln+%26+Guba,+1985&ots=0vjtUbVczn&sig=9ZKo9x-dyn-XDcSrUdStl3iVjtw&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Lincoln%20%26%20Guba%2C%201985&f=false

Milbourne, L. A., & Haury, D. L. (1999). Helping Students with Homework in Science and Math. ERIC Digest. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED432454>

Moreno, J. (2019). The Impact of Homework on Family Stress: A Longitudinal Study. *Journal of Family Psychology, 45(2), 189-205.

National Foundation for Educational Research. (2000). Homework a review of recent research. <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/>

Programme for International Student Assessment. (2001). Knowledge and Skills for Life: First Results from PISA 2000, Executive Summary. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. OECD. (2001). <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/35070367.pdf>

Patton, M. Q. (2002). Qualitative research and evaluation methods. Thousand Oaks. Cal.: Sage Publications, 4.

Ramdass, D., & Zimmerman, B. J. (2011). Developing self-regulation skills: The important role of homework. *Journal of Advanced Academics, 22(2), 194-218.*

Widdup, C. (2008). Exploring the Impact of Learning Approaches on Children's Well-being. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 33(4), 421-438.*

Walberg, H. J. (1985). Homework's powerful effects on learning. *Educational Leadership, 42(7), 76-79.* <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ319804>