

# AN ANALYSIS OF PARENTS' PERCEPTION ON THE IMPORTANCE OF HOMEWORK: A CASE STUDY IN MALAYSIA

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**ABSTRACT:** Homework is often viewed as a crucial part of learning as it enhances children's academic performance. Yet only a few studies to date have focussed specifically on the perceptions of parents regarding the importance of homework. Thus, this paper discusses the results of a study that sought to investigate a group of parents' perceptions on the importance of homework within the Malaysian setting. Using a questionnaire survey containing the ways how parents get involved with their children's homework, the parents' perceptions with regard to the importance of homework were inferred. Findings suggest that parents show keen support towards homework, indicated through the responses of parental involvement they offer their children. A high percentage of parents view homework as important in all the three aspects: provision of structure, direct involvement, and autonomy support.

**Keywords:** homework, parents' perception, provision of structure, direct involvement, autonomy support

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Homework started as straightforward and easy memorisation tasks for children to do at home, usually in relation to reading, writing, and arithmetic. Homework is defined as "tasks assigned to students by school teachers that are meant to be carried out during non-school hours" [1]. The body of research on homework illustrates an inquisitive yet familiar depiction of traditional views of education, which relates to many views regarding the advantages and disadvantages of giving homework to students. Among the advantages are increased understanding, better study habits and skills, greater self-discipline; while the disadvantages include physical and emotional fatigue, denial of access to leisure time, parental interference and copying from other students [1].

Despite the debates among researchers, parents and also students, numerous small-scale and also larger ones, have indicated that homework have positive effects on learning [2]. And because of this, parents' involvement comes into the picture, whereby the success of children at school is closely associated with parental involvement in the children's schooling [3, 4, 5, 6], in which involvement in homework is one of the components.

Hence, this paper presents the results of a study that sought to investigate a group of parents' perceptions of the importance of homework within the Malaysian setting. The paper proceeds as follows; first, the literature on homework, and also parental involvement in children's homework are reviewed. Second, the study design and context are described. Third, the findings and results are presented, and lastly, several conclusions are drawn.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research suggests that children's academic success relates very closely to the involvement of parents in their schooling [3, 4, 5, 6], and among the involvement shown by parents include giving assistance to children in completing their homework [7]. There are three major reasons of why parents chose to be involved with their children's homework [8]. Firstly, they believe that "they should be involved", secondly, they believe that their "involvement will make a positive

difference", and lastly, they "perceive invitations to involvement". It is found that through "modelling, reinforcement, and instruction", parents' involvement in children's homework provided a positive influence on children's school achievement [8]. In contrast, few studies found small, or even negative effects of parental involvement [9]. Many parents too reported that they were not ready to assist children with homework, and if there was any attempt toward it, it would cause stress. In families of struggling students, homework brought about negative effects such as lessening family time, and lowering the quality of family interactions [10].

## 3. HOMEWORK: THE MALAYSIAN CONTEXT

The issue of homework in Malaysia becomes glaring when it was reported that in comparison to other countries like Singapore, Russia, Australia, Canada and Japan, students in Malaysia spend more time on homework [11]. Following this, a circular was issued by the Ministry of Education Malaysia regarding the general guidelines for assigning homework to students [12]. It featured the objectives and the values of homework, and suggested three aspects of the organisation of homework, namely the planning, implementation and monitoring systems.

Relevant parties should look into more effective mechanisms in the implementation of homework so that optimal results could be gained [11]. It is found that giving feedback, goal-setting of homework, and homework loads contribute significantly to the positive effects of homework [13]. Another study suggests that there is a need to explicitly discuss the policies and practices of homework as there was a misalignment between homework practices and the intended communicative aims of the English language syllabus [14].

It could be seen that many past studies in the Malaysian context explore the issue of homework from the teachers' and students' perspectives [13, 14], and on parental involvement [15, 16], whereas studies that look at parents' perception on the importance of homework are scarce. The dearth of information on parents' perception on the importance of homework in the Malaysian setting points to the need for a rethinking of the school-family relationship, thus making this

study both timely and relevant. This is because only if parents themselves perceive homework as important, will the homework assigned to their children be of real value in enhancing children’s academic performance.

**4. METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to investigate parents’ perceptions on the importance of homework within the Malaysian setting. This study employed the survey research method and pursued the following research questions:

RQ 1: What is the parents’ perception as reflected by their provision of structure in assisting their children’s homework?

RQ2: What is the parents’ perception as reflected by the parents’ direct involvement with their children’s homework?

RQ3: What is the parents’ perception as reflected by the parents’ autonomy support for their children’s homework?

This study focused on the respondents from the population of lecturers who are attached to a public tertiary institution in Malaysia. The purposive sampling technique was employed to select the sample because it is the most appropriate sampling type to focus on specific characteristics of a population that are of interest, in this study being the group of parents who are in the academic line. The respondents were 56 lecturers from one of the departments at the institution, where one of the researchers had access to, hence reducing some bureaucracy formalities. The justification for selecting this group of respondents was to focus on the perceptions of parents who are engaged in the academic field—those who are more involved in their children’s academic achievement, as well as their exposure to the academic nature at work.

An instrument that directly measures parents’ perception on the importance of homework is not available to the researchers. Few studies utilised a questionnaire on parental involvement in general [17, 18], while others employ a qualitative approach [19]. Hence, the researchers used a survey instrument adapted from [6], who conducted a study on parental involvement with mathematics homework. The instrument was selected as it provides inferential indexes of parents’ perception on the importance of homework as reflected by their involvement in assisting their children with homework. Parents’ assistance with children’s homework was divided into three categories, namely the autonomy support, direct assistance, and provision of structure [as suggested by 20, 21]. For the purpose of this study, the researchers made some revisions to the items of the original questionnaire. The word “math” was eliminated from several items as the current study was conducted to determine parents’ perceptions on the importance of homework in general, not in any specific school subjects. Two additional items were included—one asking the parents about the frequency of parental assistance with homework, and another asking about the amount of homework their child completes. Overall, there were 14 items, using 5-point-Likert scale (1=never, 2=less than once a week / some of the time, 3=about once a week / about half of the time, 4=more than once a week / most of the time, 5=every night / all the time), which were grouped based on the types of parental assistance as described in the table below:

**Table 1: Questionnaire constructs**

Items 2 – 5	Provision of Structure (4 items)
Items 1, 6 – 9	Direct Involvement (5 items)
Items 10 – 14	Autonomy Support (5 items)

Provision of structure is “the degree to which parents provide clear and consistent guidelines, expectations and rules for child behaviour”, while direct involvement is defined as “the extent that a parent takes an active part in their child’s life” [21]. Subsequently, autonomy support is the extent to which parents “value and use techniques which encourage independent problem solving, choice, and participation in decisions versus externally dictating outcomes, and motivating achievement through punitive disciplinary techniques” [21]. The questionnaires were distributed in the English language as they were given to parents with high academic background (i.e. educators at an international tertiary institution which uses English as the medium of instructions).

To answer the research questions in this study, a set of questionnaire was administered online to the respondents. As stated earlier, the ‘provision of structure’, ‘direct involvement’ and ‘autonomy support’ are the main ways of how parents get involved with their children’s homework, and by examining these constructs, the perceptions of parents with regard to the importance of homework can be inferred.

Analyses for all the research questions were carried out by tabulating the frequencies and percentages of respondents who answered the 5 scales for each item, which are interpreted as follows:

**Table 2: Scoring for Parents’ Perception Index (PPI)**

All the time / Every night	Homework is very important
Most of the time / More than once a week	
About half of the time / About once a week	Homework is somewhat important
Some of the time / Less than once a week	
Never	Homework is not important

**5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

*RQ 1: What is the parents’ perception as reflected by their provision of structure in assisting their children’s homework?*

The findings for structure provision are presented according to the items for this construct in the questionnaire. For the item “How often do you make your child set aside quiet time for doing homework?” more than half (66.1%) of the parents feel that homework is very important. About 34% think homework is somewhat important, whereas none of them think that homework is not important.

For the items on monitoring the amount of television, providing incentives, and making sure their children have suitable place to do homework, there was also a greater percentage of parents who think homework is very important and somewhat important.

**Table 3: Analysis of parents’ perception on the importance of homework: Structure provision**

Perception Index Item	PPI: Homework is very important		PPI: Homework is somewhat important		PPI: Homework is not important	
	f	%	f	%	F	%
2	37	66.1	19	33.9	0	0
3	4	7.1	37	66.1	15	26.8
4	14	25	21	37.5	21	37.5
5	49	87.5	5	9.0	2	3.5

It can be seen that item 5, ‘How often do you make sure your child has a suitable place to do homework?’ has the highest percentage among the structure of provision. This is perhaps due to the fact that providing a suitable place is the most basic necessity.

RQ2: What is the parents’ perception as reflected by the parents’ direct involvement with their children’s homework?

The same pattern is also observed for the constructs of direct involvement, whereby a high percentage of parents believe that homework is very important (between the range of 50% – 60%) and somewhat important (between 37% – 48%).

Conversely, only a very low percentage (less than 5%) of parents think that homework is not important, as shown in

**Table 4: Analysis of parents’ perception on the importance of homework based on direct involvement**

Perception Index Item	PPI: Homework is very important		PPI: Homework is somewhat important		PPI: Homework is not important	
	f	%	f	%	F	%
1	40	71.5	16	28.5	0	0
6	34	60.7	21	37.5	1	1.8
7	28	50.0	27	48.2	1	1.8
8	29	51.8	26	46.5	1	1.8
9	29	51.8	24	42.9	3	5.4

For direct involvement, item 1 ‘How frequently do you assist your child with homework?’ has the highest percentage (71.5% - very important and 28.5% - somewhat important), also indicating that parents view homework as important.

RQ3: What is the parents’ perception as reflected by the parents’ autonomy support for their children’s homework?

Like the other two constructs (provision of structure and direct involvement), the parents also perceive homework as important in terms of giving autonomy support to their children, as shown in the five items below (Tables 5-9). It can be observed that a high percentage of parents see homework as very important (between 44% - 62%), and somewhat important (between 35% - 50%). Only about 2% - 9% perceive homework as not important.

**Table 5: Findings on breaking homework problems into smaller parts**

Item 10	All the time		Most of the time		About half of the time		Some of the time		Never	
	f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Break into smaller parts	7	12.5	18	32.1	9	16.1	19	33.9	3	5.4
PPI	Very Important				Somewhat Important				Not Important	
n = 56										

**Table 6: Findings on discussing problem-solving strategies to use for different homework**

Item 11	Every night		More than once a week		About once a week		Less than once a week		Never	
	f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Teach problem solving strategies	3	5.4	23	41.1	13	23.2	13	23.2	4	7.1
PPI	Very Important				Somewhat Important				Not Important	
n = 56										

**Table 7: Findings on teaching and encouraging child to regulate emotional responses**

Item 12	Every night		More than once a week		About once a week		Less than once a week		Never	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Regulate emotional responses	7	12.5	22	39.3	10	17.9	12	21.4	5	8.9
PPI	Very Important				Somewhat Important				Not Important	
n = 56										

**Table 8: Findings on teaching and encouraging child to monitor own understanding**

Item 13	Every night		More than once a week		About once a week		Less than once a week		Never	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Monitor own understanding	10	17.9	25	44.6	13	23.2	7	12.5	1	1.8
PPI	Very Important				Somewhat Important				Not Important	
n = 56										

**Table 9: Findings on the amount of homework completed**

Item 14	All of it		Most of it		Half of it		Some of it		None of it	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Homework completed	31	55.4	24	42.9	1	1.8	0	0	0	0
PPI	Very Important				Somewhat Important				Not Important	
n = 56										

**Table 10: Analysis of Parents’ perception on the importance of homework based on autonomy support**

Perception Index Item	PPI: Homework is very important		PPI: Homework is somewhat important		PPI: Homework is not important	
	f	%	f	%	F	%
10	25	44.6	28	50	3	5.4
11	26	46.5	26	46.5	4	7.0
12	29	51.8	22	39.3	5	8.9
13	35	62.5	20	35.7	1	1.8
14	55	98.2	1	1.8	0	0

Item 14, ‘On average, how much homework does your child actually finish?’ records the highest percentage for the construct of autonomy support, with nearly 100% parents think it is very important.

Taken as a whole, the parents showed keen support toward homework, indicated through the responses of the parental

involvement they offer, with high percentages showing the importance of homework to their children. Looking into the details, the parents view homework as important as inferred by the findings in all the three aspects—provision of structure, direct involvement and autonomy support. The findings show that all items are above 92%, with three items—one from each construct, scored 100% (refer to Table 11). The results are consistent with previous studies showing the positive value of homework in the eyes of parents, and positive parental involvement in homework [6, 8, 15].

**Table 11: Overall findings of parents’ perceptions on the importance of homework (Very important + Somewhat important)**

Provision of structure		Direct involvement		Autonomy support	
Item 2	Set aside quiet time (100%)	Item 1	Frequency of assisting with homework (100%)	Item 10	Break into smaller parts (94.6%)
Item 3	Television on/off (92.9%)	Item 6	You / other people involved (98.2%)	Item 11	Teach problem solving strategies (92.9%)
Item 4	Provide incentives (62.5%)	Item 7	Help study for tests/quizzes (98.2%)	Item 12	Regulate emotional responses (91.1%)
Item 5	Provide suitable place (96.5%)	Item 8	Explain/ reword to ensure understanding (98.3%)	Item 13	Monitor own level of understanding (98.2%)
		Item 9	Correct before submitting to teachers (94.7%)	Item 14	Homework completed (100%)

Parents in this study perceive homework as important, as reflected in their frequent involvement in their children’s homework in the aspects of provision of structure, direct involvement, and also autonomy support. This is a good sign, as parental involvement is a strong factor in determining students’ academic achievement [4]. Knowing that parents perceive homework as important, is indeed a positive indication towards having better partnerships with the school, whereby there will be a continuation, extension and follow-ups between what happens at school and the home. With this, both parents and teachers can monitor students’ progress, and even arrange for greater academic plans to optimise their potential.

**6. CONCLUSIONS**

The school and parents need to establish some kind of relationship, whereby both parties can embrace each other’s roles and contributions in children’s education. Providing assistance with homework is a remarkably powerful form of involvement that can steer to positive outcomes for children’s academic achievement. Thus, a positive perception regarding the importance of homework will enable parents to visualise and put in efforts in assisting their children, and also understand the nature and importance of homework. Parents, in playing their role in homework should be voluntary, respectful and individualised. Acknowledging that many studies have proven homework to improve students’ academic achievement, parents will do a great part by supporting children in their homework, and through the three

aspects (provision of structure, direct involvement, and also autonomy support), children can benefit from a more peaceful and tension-free home environment doing their homework.

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