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USE OF SCHOOL HOMEWORK AS A METHOD OF TEACHING
AND PARENTS' DEMANDS IN EARLY YEAR'S EDUCATION**

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TEACHERS' TRAINING, TEACHERS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS USE OF SCHOOL HOMEWORK AS A METHOD OF TEACHING AND PARENTS' DEMANDS IN EARLY YEAR'S EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Pre-primary school teachers give school homework in the early year's education to help children practice what they learn in class. The purpose of this study was to establish parents' and teachers' perspective on use of school homework as a method of teaching-learning in pre-primary schools. The study sought to determine the extent to which teachers are influenced by different factors to give school homework to pre-primary school children. The study was carried out in Ruiru Division, Kiambu County. The design of the study was descriptive research design. The dependant variable was, the use of school homework as a method of teaching-learning in pre-primary schools and the independent variables teachers' attitudes towards pre-primary school homework and parents' demands on school homework. The study population was pre-primary school teachers in Ruiru Division. Simple random sampling was used to select a sample of 45 pre-primary schools from which 153 teachers were selected for the study. The data was collected through questionnaires which were administered to the teachers. The data was then analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods where the information obtained was organized into themes and concepts using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings revealed that Parents' demand was one of the factors that contributed to teachers assigning of school homework. In addition, teachers believed that homework used to prompt improved academic performance. The study recommended that teachers should ensure they adhere to ECDE guidelines for appropriate teaching-learning methods. Parents need to be sensitized that homework is not the only option for academic progress for their children.

Keywords: Teacher Training, Teacher Attitude, Homework

1. INTRODUCTION

A pre-primary school teacher who aims at encouraging free expression without being over concerned with educational progress makes children eager to learn (Wilkins, 1975). This is because they are given time to move and talk, play and do what they are interested in thus making them enjoy going to school. When school homework is introduced to pre-primary school children especially those tasks that they cannot easily understand or is a burden to them, they might start wondering why school work is done at home after school, on weekends and holidays instead of play activities of their choice. School homework might also lead to stress in pre-primary school children when denied enough sleep to rest and relax.

School homework to pre-primary school age children may cause stress to them since they may be too young to handle so much school work in a day. This might be because staying up late to finish school homework assignments will contribute to missing sleep that children need to concentrate in class the next day (Benette and Kalish, 2006). Lack of enough sleep can lead to depression, anxiety and attention disorders which might lead to poor academic performance. Murungi, & Muthee, (2017) argues that children who sit all day in a classroom and then for hours to complete school homework at night face a potential health threat such as physical and emotional fatigue and inability to sustain concentration in class.

Teachers believe that school homework must be monitored and marked if learners are to take it seriously. Marking homework is time consuming and if teachers doubt its value, they will not be motivated to take time to do it. Most teachers do regularly assign, correct and grade school homework (Keys, Harris and Fernandes, 1995). Keys et al. further stresses that teachers vary in the kind of feedback that they give. These authors also emphasize that the attitude teachers have towards school homework may motivate the learners to undertake and complete the assignment.

School homework is not the only circumstance under which after school learning takes place since many leisure activities teach many academic and life skills. Younger children seem to have less effective study habits that diminish the amount of improvement in academic achievement that might be expected from school homework given to them. (Cooper 2006). There was therefore need to establish the amount of school homework given to pre-primary school children. Most of what school homework is doing is driving children away from learning. According to Kohn (2006),

low achievers struggle when doing school homework especially when they don't understand the concepts taught in class. This might make things worse for they might repeat the same mistakes and may feel demoralized and frustrated. On the other hand, when high achievers understand what they are taught in school, they might find it a bother when spending their time at home on what they already know. Kohn (2006) maintains that it is hard for a young child to accept the whole idea of sitting after school to do more school work.

Cooper (2006) agreed with Kohn in the fact that when young children are overburdened with school homework, they become disillusioned with school and lose motivation. The researcher feels that school homework denies children a chance to develop their skills and talents because they spend most of their time in books when being confined in quiet rooms. Pushing academics through school homework at an early age can contribute to some impact on use of school homework as a method of teaching-learning to pre-primary school children. It is not yet clear whether there were some teachers or school characteristics that influence the practice of school homework for pre-primary school children. It was therefore essential to conduct a study on use of school homework as a method of teaching-learning in pre-primary schools.

2. RELEVANT LITERATURE

i. Attendance of Teacher training and use of School homework as a Method of Teaching-learning in Pre-primary Schools

Pre-primary school teachers need to undergo training so that they can get equipped with skills required to cope with the demands of the young children (Munyeki,1987). Munyeki (1987) argues that training of pre-primary school teachers will ensure the provision, expansion and improvement of quality relevant education. The training teachers have and the duration of training, teaching methods and quality of the subject matter determine how the pre-primary school teachers handle the children and the upcoming challenges including pre-primary school homework (Oyagi, 2003).

A teacher training course is very relevant as qualified teachers reported when they were interviewed by (Kivuva, 1997). Those who started teaching as untrained pre-primary school teachers said there is hardly any comparison between their pre and post training skills. They asserted that prior to their training, they could not prepare their lessons adequately; they could not know how to deal with children's problems and could get easily irritated. After training, they were able to handle children better. Jeffrey (1974) claims that what can be done by an educated and trained pre-primary school teacher is quite different from what can be done by a teacher who is educated and not trained. It was therefore the purpose of this study to establish the extent to which teacher training influences use of school homework as a method of teaching-learning to pre-primary school children.

ii. Teachers' Attitude towards use of Pre-primary School homework

A study by Faulker and Blyth (1995) indicated that teacher attitude towards school homework affect learner completion of the school homework assignments. They argued that teachers need to be excited about school homework since they need to collect it, check it and return it to the learners in a timely manner. By doing so, learners will develop a positive attitude towards school homework. Margolis and McCabe (2004) recommended that, teachers should have positive attitude towards school homework and promote self-efficacy to help struggling learners in pre-primary schools.

Elementary school teachers have a positive attitude towards school homework by believing in school homework's value for the purpose of training learners on how to study and use time well. This implies that for elementary level teachers, the content of school homework may be less important than the opportunity it provides to foster long-term time management skills, the effect of which would not be evident in younger children's school grades. (Murungi and Gitonga 2015). Wiesenthal, Greenblatt and Marcus (1997), indicated that teachers' attitudes towards school homework may have an impact on the way they implement and practice school homework in their pre-primary school classrooms. They also found that teachers' attitudes and beliefs about the benefits of school homework influenced their behavior with school homework in their classrooms. This behavior includes frequency of school homework assignments, methods of grading, collecting and returning assignments and the types of school homework assigned. While teachers continue to struggle in managing school homework in classrooms, their attitude and school homework practices are rarely questioned. Because teachers play an essential role in the school homework process, their attitudes towards school homework may potentially impact pre-primary school learners outcomes (Trautwein, Niggli, Schnyder, Ludtke, 2009). In order for learners to reap the benefits from school homework, they must have support from their teachers. Without positive teacher attitude towards school homework, pre-primary school learners may have a negative outlook toward school homework and eventually toward school as a whole (Trautwein et al., 2009).

Cameron and Bartel (2009) conducted a survey and many interviews with 945 teachers with experience ranging from more than twenty five years to less than five years. Both urban and rural schools in Canada were represented. The survey indicated that teachers assigned school homework because they had an attitude that parents wanted it

although some parents were complaining about it. Moreover, teachers tended to underestimate the amount of time children took to complete the school homework. The study also revealed that teachers had a negative attitude towards school homework since it is a burden to them. At least half of the teachers said that creating and assessing school homework increased their workload. Creating meaningful school homework took too much time and effort from teachers. The findings of available literature show that teachers have either positive or negative attitudes towards school homework. There was therefore a need to investigate teachers' attitudes towards use of pre-primary school homework as a method of teaching-learning in Ruiru Division, Kiambu County.

iii. Parents' Demands and use of School homework as a Method of Teaching-learning in Pre-primary Schools

Parents play a significant role in their children's education especially in early years. Teachers may assign school homework to meet parents' demands or for other reasons that do not necessarily benefit the learners (Brock, Flood, Fisher and Keonghec, 2007; Xu, 2005).

In a time when achievement scores and testing are being considered as factors for success most parents today are accepting teachers to assign school homework. Parents have also a direct impact on their children's attitudes towards school and school homework (Cooper, Lindsay, Greathouse and Nye, 1998). While some parents demand teachers assign school homework because they believe it will help their children succeed and progress with their education, others perceive school homework as unnecessary and intruding on quality time spent with family (Brock et al., 2007). Ratneser (1999) studied that some pre-primary school parents believed their children were assigned too much school homework. The study's findings also included excessive family stress and lack of sufficient leisure time. However, some parents had mixed feelings towards pre-primary school homework. On one hand, they favoured excessive amount of school homework because they wanted their children to excel and go to high quality colleges and universities in future. On the other hand, the excessive amounts of pre-primary school homework left little time for extracurricular activities. However, Bempechat (2004) advocated for parental acceptance of pre-primary school homework by stating that many parents do not realize that in advocating little or no school homework, their children will pay the price in the long run by lacking preparedness for the academic demand and obstacles that will eventually come their way.

Dauber and Epstein (1993) have demonstrated that parents demand to be involved in their children's school homework because their children are still young and need guidance. Other than giving school homework to children, teachers have often invited parents and involved them in their children's schooling. Teachers often seek parental help and they are thus made to understand that their involvement in their children's school homework is expected and needed (Murungi, 2010). Most parents see school homework as contributing to educational progress and feel they have a role to play in supporting their children in doing it (MacBeath and Tuner, 1990).

However, Dudley Marling (2003) noted that parents of struggling elementary school children viewed school homework as a disruption to their lives. He further observed that such parents believed large amounts of school homework contributed to their family's stress and frustration. For these parents, school homework resembled punishment. Dudley Marling does not advocate the suspension of school homework assignments to struggling children but he suggest that parents, teachers and administrators should work together to create school homework that will be beneficial to children. In this view, the researcher sought to find out parents' demands that influence use of school homework as a method of teaching-learning to pre-primary school children.

3. METHODS

The study adopted descriptive research design. Descriptive research design is a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering questionnaires to a sample of individuals (Orodho, 2009). This design was found appropriate since the study involved collecting information through answering questions that were descriptive in nature concerning impact on use of school homework as a method of teaching-learning in pre-primary schools.

The dependent variable for this study was use of school homework as a method of teaching-learning in pre-primary schools from Ruiru Division. This was to be measured in terms of how teachers use school homework as a method of teaching-learning and frequency in use. The independent variables of this study were:

- (i) Teacher demographics that influence pre-school homework.
- (ii) Parents' demands that influence teachers to assign pre-school homework.
- (iii) Teachers' attitude towards pre-school homework.

i. Location of the Study

The study was conducted in Ruiru Division, Kiambu County. The division was purposely selected for the study because it is a densely populated area with many pre-primary school age children from a diversity of ethnic cultures.

Purposive sampling was also used to select Ruiru Division because it borders Nairobi County resulting to teachers using school homework as a teaching-learning method due to high competition of Standard One intake. Ruiru Division is an industrialized area with many public and mushrooming private pre-primary schools. The division comprises Ruiru Zone with no other educational zones.

ii. Target Population

The study targeted a population of 509 pre-primary school teachers in Ruiru Division, Kiambu County. This comprised of 60 teachers from public pre-primary schools and 449 from private pre-primary schools.

Table1 Total number of Pre-primary Schools and Pre-primary School Teachers

Type of pre-primary school	Number of pre-primary school	Number of pre-primary school teachers
Public pre-primary school	30	60
Private pre-primary schools	120	449
Total	150	509

Source; Ruiru District Early Childhood Education Office

iii. Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

To select desired sample size of the study, the following sampling techniques were used as described below.

iv. Sampling Techniques

Ruiru Division was purposely selected and stratified random sampling was used to select the schools where the study was conducted. The criterion used for stratification was type of school. The sampling frame was drawn from a list of all pre-primary schools in the division found at Ruiru District Centre for Early Childhood Education (DICECE) office. The schools were categorized into two strata namely public and private pre-primary schools. Stratified random sampling was appropriate in this case because the sample was selected in such a way as to ensure that the groups were represented in the sample in proportion to their number in the population (Orodho,2009)

v. Sample Size

Simple random sampling was used to select a representative sample of 9 public pre-primary schools and 36 private pre-primary schools representing 30% of the total population of the pre-primary schools in Ruiru Division. The researcher selected 30% of pre-primary school teachers from both private and public schools. According to Orodho, (2009), 30% of the total population is a number within the acceptable representative sample. A total of 153 teachers were sampled out of which 18 of the teachers were from the public pre-primary schools while the remaining 135 teachers were from private pre-primary schools.

Table 2 Number of Pre-primary Schools and Teachers Sampled

Type of school	Total number of schools	No. of schools sampled	No. of teachers sampled
Public pre-primary schools	30	9	18
Private pre-primary schools	120	36	135
Total	150	45	153

vi. Data Analysis

The data obtained from the respondents was recorded in readiness for analysis. The research involved qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative data obtained from open-ended questions was analyzed by coding and organizing into themes and concepts. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for data analysis. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution and percentages. The analyzed data was presented in form of frequency tables, bar graphs and pie charts.

4. FINDINGS

i. Training on use of School homework

The respondents were asked to state if they were trained on use of school homework as a method of teaching-learning in pre-primary schools. Figure 1 gives the results.

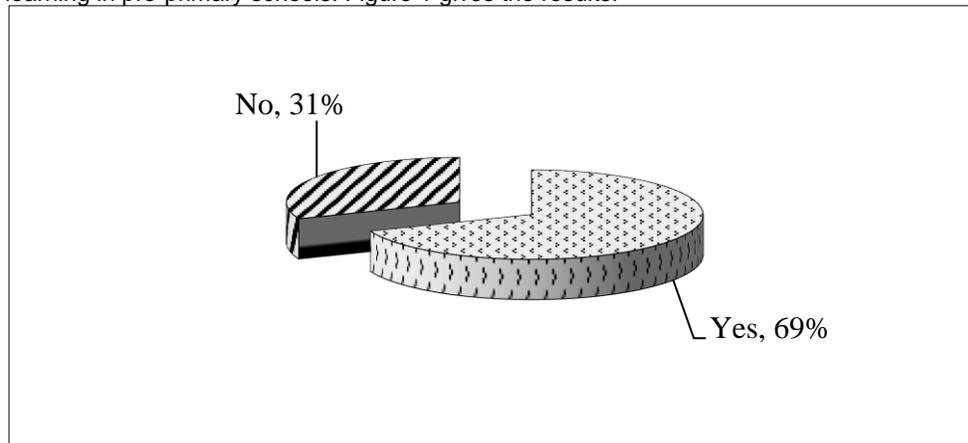


Figure 1: Training on use of School homework as a Method of Teaching Children

Majority of the respondents 69% reported that they were trained on how to use school homework as a method of teaching children whereas 31% of them said that they were not trained. This clearly implies that majority of pre-primary school teachers used school homework as a method of teaching-learning to pre-primary school children.

The Chi-Square Test for the Relationship between Teacher Training Attended and Use of School homework

To find out whether or not there was a significant relationship between teachers training attended and use of school homework, a chi-square test was administered. The results are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Chi-Square Test on Teacher Training Attended and Use of School homework

	Value	df	P-value (2-tailed)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.148	2	.563
Likelihood Ratio	.891	2	.641
Linear-by-Linear Association	.569	1	.451
N of Valid Cases	117		

Table 1 shows the results from the Pearson Chi-square test. The Chi-square statistic (1.148), degrees of freedom (2) and associated P-value 0.563 are given. The P-value from the test is 0.563 which means that the test statistic was greater than the level of significance (0.05). This indicates that there was no statistically significant difference between the type of teacher training and assigning of school homework. The findings of the study showed that pre-primary school teachers and use of school homework was not influenced by type of teacher training. This is consistent with findings of a study conducted by Munyeki (1987) who claimed that pre-primary school teachers need to undergo training so that they can get equipped with skills required to cope with the demands of the young children. Oyagi (2003) also asserts that the training teachers have and the duration of training, teaching methods and quality of the subject matter determine how the pre-primary school teachers handle the children and the upcoming challenges including pre-primary school homework.

ii. Parents' Demands and use of School Homework as a Method of Teaching-learning in Pre-primary Schools

The study sought to establish the parents' demands on use of school homework as a method of teaching-learning in pre-primary schools. Teachers were asked to rate their perceptions on parents' demands for daily school homework in a 5-point Likert Scale. Some statements were presented to the respondents where Strongly Agree (SA) and Agree (A) were deemed positive while Not Sure (NS), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) were deemed negative. The results are presented in table 2.

Table 2: Parents' Demands on use of School Homework

Statements	N	Mean	SA	A	NS	D	SD	Perception
Parents demand for daily school homework	118	3.82	47(40%)	40(34%)	6(5%)	13(11%)	12(10%)	Positive
Parents like being involved in their children's school homework	119	3.56	28(24%)	49(41%)	11(9%)	24(20%)	7(6%)	Positive

NB: SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree NS = Not Sure

It was observed that the respondents had a positive perception towards all the positively stated statements as indicated above with mean greater than 3. Majority of the respondents (47) strongly agreed that parents demand that their children should be assigned with school homework while (12) strongly disagreed with the statement. The results indicate that majority of the parents demanded for school homework. This is in agreement with findings of Brock, Flood, Fisher and Keonghec (2007) who reported that parents demand assignment of school homework because they believe it will help their children succeed and progress with their education. Similar findings were found by Ratneser (1999) who indicated that some parents favoured excessive amount of school homework because they wanted their children to excel and go to high quality colleges and universities.

Majority (49) of the respondents agreed that parents like being involved in their children's homework while 28 strongly agreed with the same. Only 7 strongly disagreed with the statement. The findings show that majority of the respondents perceived parents liked parental involvement in their children's homework. This is in agreement with the findings of Ogoye-Ndegwa, Mengich and Abidha (2007) who found out that there is need to involve parents in their children's school homework because the children are still young and need concerted guidance. Macbeath and Tuner (1990) supported the same when they indicated that most parents see school homework as contributing to educational progress and feel they have a role to play in supporting their children in doing it.

iii. Teachers' Attitudes towards use of School Homework as a Method of Teaching-learning in Pre-primary Schools

The study sought to establish teachers' attitude towards use of school homework in pre-primary schools. Teachers were asked to rate how they perceived homework as a method of teaching-learning on a Five Likert Scale. Five statements were presented to the respondents where Strongly Agree (SA) and Agree (A) were deemed positive while Not Sure (NS), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) were deemed negative. The results are presented in table 3.

Table 3: Teachers' Attitudes Towards School homework

Statements	N	Mean	SA	A	NS	D	SD	Perception
School homework is important to pre-primary school children	119	4.48	74(62%)	38(32%)	-	4(3%)	3(3%)	Positive
School homework improves academic performance	119	4.44	64(54%)	49(41%)	2(2%)	2(2%)	2(2%)	Positive
School homework trains learners how to study and use time well	119	3.88	37(31%)	54(45%)	8(7%)	17(14%)	3(3%)	Positive
School homework is an effective method of teaching-Learning	118	3.87	35(30%)	56(48%)	8(7%)	15(13%)	4(3%)	Positive
Much school	118	3.85	23(20%)	73(62%)	7(6%)	11(9%)	4(3%)	Positive

homework is appreciated by school administrators								
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NB: SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree and NS = Not Sure

It was observed that the respondents had a positive perception towards all the positively stated statements stated above with mean greater than 3. From the data presented above, respondents had different responses on given statements. Majority of the respondents (62%) strongly agreed that school homework was important to pre-primary school children while 3% strongly disagreed with the same. This is in line with the findings of Margolis and McCabe (2004) who recommended that teachers should have positive attitude towards school homework and promote self-efficacy to help struggling learners in schools.

Majority (54%) of the respondents strongly agreed that school homework improved academic performance whereas 2% strongly disagreed with the same statement. Kralovec and Buell (2000) claimed that many educators and parents continue to support the use of school homework because they believe it will lead to academic achievement. Majority (45%) of the respondents agreed that school homework trained learners how to study and use time well whereas 7% were not sure of the same statement.

Some (48%) of the respondents agreed with the statement that school homework is an effective method of teaching-learning whereas 3% strongly disagreed with the statement. The findings of the study are in line with the findings of Petall, Cooper and Wynn (2010) who claimed that effectiveness of school homework is enhanced by providing learners with choices among school work tasks resulting in higher motivational and performance outcomes.

Slightly more than three quarters of the respondents claimed that much school homework was highly appreciated by school administrators with only 4% who strongly disagreed with the same statement. The findings show that school administrators encouraged teachers to assign school homework. This is in line with Cooper (1989) who claimed that the majority of educators support homework for its character building and academic benefits.

5. SUMMARY

The study also established that majority of the parents demanded for school homework for their children. Some of the respondents perceived that there were those parents who never liked parental involvement in their children's homework thus failing to take that responsibility.

The results of teachers' attitudes towards school homework showed that, school homework was important to pre-primary school children and that it improved academic performance. Some of the respondents did not agree with the fact that homework trained children how to study and use time well. Majority of the respondents perceived that, homework was an effective method of teaching-learning method whereas some school administrators were said to appreciate school homework.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Most parents demanded for school homework for their children in both public and private schools. It was evident that some of the parents did not want to be involved in their children's homework. Teachers' attitudes towards school homework were perceived differently with the majority of the teachers indicating that school homework was important to pre-primary school children which was believed to prompt improved academic performance. The study established that not all teachers perceived school homework as a method of training learners on how to study and use time well probably because pre-primary school children are still young.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

i. For Teachers

The study revealed that most teachers in both private and public pre-primary schools used school homework as a method of teaching-learning. It is therefore necessary for pre-primary school teachers who constantly tend to use school homework as a method of teaching-learning to ensure that they adhere to ECDE guidelines in order to use appropriate teaching-learning methods.

ii. For Parents

The findings revealed that most parents demanded for daily school homework for their children. There is need for parents to be sensitized by the school administrators on ECDE teaching guidelines required for pre-primary school

children. They should also be advised that use of school homework is not the only option for academic progress for their children.

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