

PUPILS' PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES IN PERFORMING HOMEWORK IN SCHOOLS OF MALDIVES

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ABSTRACT

Development of schools', teachers' and parents' understanding of pupils' perceptions and practices in performing homework is crucial for helping pupils improve homework management, thereby improving school achievement. This study adapts the Model of Achievement-related Choices by Eccles, Barber, Updegraff, and O'Brien, as a conceptual framework to investigate the difference in pupils' perceptions and practices – by gender, grade level and academic level of the parents – and its relationship to academic achievement. The quantitative study uses a survey questionnaire to collect data from a sample of 137 Grade Four and 188 Grade Eight students in one particular atoll in Maldives. The findings reveal that significant differences in perceptions and practices do exist by gender and grade level of students. The relationship between pupils' homework practices and achievement is significant. While the relationship between pupils' perceptions and achievement is significant for the fourth grade students, it is not significant for the eighth graders. It is proposed that future researches in this domain should engage qualitative approaches as well, in order to understand the phenomena better. Based on the findings of this study, it is suggested that schools should formulate their homework policies accommodating for the differences that are evident between various age groups and gender.

Keywords: *homework, pupils' perception, homework practice, academic achievement*

INTRODUCTION

The discourse on homework, in the United States, can be dated back to as early as 1850 (Gill & Schlossman, 2004). However, homework was initially not given much importance as a topic of research potential (Cooper, 1981; Vail, 2001). Researchers of the past and present have held opposing views on the impact of homework on students (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006; Corno, 2000; Eren & Henderson, 2006; Neilson, 2005; Rayburn & Rayburn, 1999; Wildman, 1968; Solomon, Warin, & Lewis, 2002).

Majority of the existing researches focus on the effect of homework on students' achievement (Chiew-Kieok, 1993; Cooper et al., 2006; Eren & Henderson, 2006;

Neilson, 2005; Rayburn & Rayburn, 1999). There are few more studies which have also reported that students' perception and practices of learning activities such as homework could have an impact on their academic performance (Kuhn & Rundle-Thiele, 2009; Link & Ratledge, 1979; Lan & Li, 2006 ; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2005). There is a need for more empirical studies to support the various findings by the growing research on the topic. Thus, homework remains a potential area of research.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this research is to study pupils' perceptions and practices in doing their homework and also relating it to their academic achievement. The following objectives are set out in order to fulfill the purpose of the study.

1. To study pupils' perceptions and practices in performing homework with respect to their gender and grade level.
2. To examine if there exists any relationship between the amount of homework and academic achievement.
3. To investigate the relationship between pupils' perceptions and practices and their academic achievement.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following five research questions have been developed in order to achieve the objectives of the study:

1. Do pupils' perceptions towards homework differ by (a) gender, and (b) grade level?
2. Is there any relationship between pupils' homework practices and (a) gender, and (b) grade level?
3. Is there any relationship between the amount of homework and students' achievement?
4. Is there any relationship between pupils' perceptions towards homework and their academic achievement?
5. Is there any difference in pupils' academic achievement by their homework practices?

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) for this research is based on the 'model of achievement related choices' by Eccles et al. (1998) and the framework of 'selected variables that impact on pupils' homework behaviour' by Warton (2001).

Pupil's background characteristics are studied on the basis of gender, grade level, and level of education attained by parents. Similarly, pupils' perceptions are examined using five the variables (1) purpose, (2) type of homework, (3) amount of

homework, (4) support for doing homework, and (5) monitoring and feedback. Besides these, students' practices are explored using four aspects (1) the place where homework is done, (2) the time of homework completion, (3) the difficulties encountered while doing homework, and (4) their preferences in completing homework. Finally, pupils' academic achievement is measured by test scores. It is worth noting that all the variables in the model are not reported in this paper

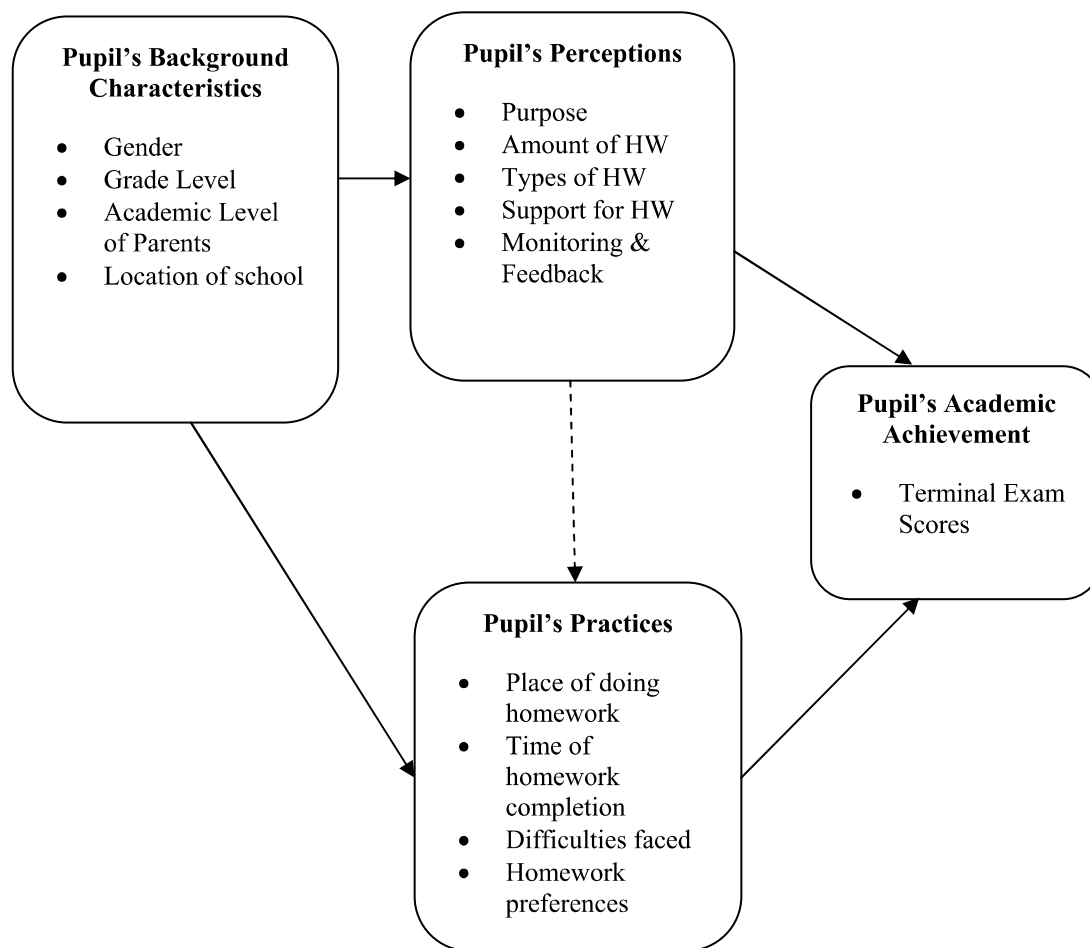


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the study

LITERATURE REVIEW

In education literature, several terms are used interchangeably, to refer to homework. These include “self-directed learning”, “independent learning”, and “unsupervised study” (Mohammed Sani Ibrahim, 2001). Cooper (1989a) defines homework as work assignments to students by their teachers that are supposed to be done outside the normal curriculum (timetabled) hours. This definition, however, excludes in-school guided study, independent learning, and extra-curricular activities like sports (Cooper, 1994).

Pupil's Perceptions

Existing research shows that there are differences between adults and children (pupils) in their perceptions of homework. For instance, while adults view that the purpose of doing homework is to enhance understanding of the lessons and to develop self-directed behaviour in managing learning, students feel that the purpose is to win approval from teachers and parents (Xu & Corno, 1998; Xu & Yuan, 2003). On the other hand, studies that are exclusively focused on secondary and high schools show that as students grow older they tend to change their perception of the purpose of homework to something similar to what is being expressed by adults (Xu & Corno, 1998; Xu & Yuan, 2003; Xu, 2005; Xu, 2010).

Homework and Pupils' Academic Achievement

The amount of homework and its impact on student achievement is a topic in debate. While many researchers conclude that homework has a positive impact on pupils' achievement, still some say that there are various negative outcomes resulting from it. Although in the primary grades, there seem to be no relationship between the amount of homework and pupils' achievement, the impact on the secondary students is prominently positive. The study concluded that the correlation between the amount of homework and academic achievement becomes stronger for students in higher grades as compared to those in the lower grades (Cooper et al., 2006).

Despite the generally positive relationship between the time spent on homework and student achievement reported by most of the studies, some studies report that the time spent on homework does not significantly correlate with student achievement (Yeo Kee & Arbayah, 2010). There is an optimum amount of homework or optimum time spent on homework (a break-even point) by which student achievement becomes best. Homework amounting to figures higher or lower than this break-even point, both in time and/or amount, does not necessarily produce significant improvement in pupils' academic achievement (Cooper, 1994, 2001; Sharp, Keys, & Benefield, 2001).

Monitoring and feedback

One of the vital aspects of homework management is interacting with students and providing supportive feedback (Carlsson, 2009; Turnali, 2009; Young, 2005). Studies reveal that when positive and supportive feedback is given, students show increased interest and improved learning outcomes (Kuhn & Rundle-Thiele, 2009). Irrespective of this, it has been reported that teachers cannot meet the expectations related to monitoring homework assignments and provision of correctives and feedback (Turnali, 2009; Snead & Burriss, 2011). Some studies, however, conclude that the majority of teachers do give appropriate feedback (Murphy & Decker, 1989; Hudson, 2009; Popham, 2010).

Homework practices

Only a few researchers have focused solely on investigating pupils' practices in doing their homework. Warton (1997) found that although there are few differences in homework practices among students of various groups, there is a swing in ideas depending on age. Gajria & Salend (1995) found some interesting patterns of pupils' homework practices which include (a) no planning of the homework, (b) put it to the last minute, (c) complain about homework, (d) not able to follow the homework schedule, (e) find it difficult to get started with the work, and (f) easily get distracted while doing their homework. However, pupils' homework practices may vary from place to place. For instance, Hong and Milgram (1999) reported the following differences in homework preferences between US and Korean students (Table 1):

Table 1: *Differences in homework environment learning style preferences*

US students	Korean students
Work with music or background sound	Work in brightly illuminated home environment
Eat, drink or move around while they work	Sit at chair and a desk
Frequently learn in auditory manner	Learn better with written materials

Studies also reveal that there exists difference in pupils' homework practices based on their gender (Weston, 1999; Worrell, Gabelko, Roth, & Samuels, 1999; Kortemeyer, 2009; Kackar, Shumow, Schmidt, & Grzetich, 2011). Few other studies reveal that there also exist such differences based on grade level of pupils (Worrell et al., 1999; Weston, 1999; Kackar et al., 2011).

METHODOLOGY

The study deployed quantitative approach to collect both qualitative and quantitative data by using a survey questionnaire. A survey design allows trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population to be described in a quantitative form (Creswell, 2003, 2009). Respondents answer by choosing from a rating of 1-5 for some sections and 1-

3 for the others. The ratings given by students for the questionnaire items are in effect a descriptor of the qualitative feelings they have (Coles & McGrath, 2010).

A total of 350 questionnaires (150 for grade 4 and 200 for grade 8) were sent to the participating schools. The overall return rate was 92.86% (91.33% from grade 4 and 94% from grade 8).

Validity and Reliability

The study used a modified questionnaire. Most of the items in the questionnaire are taken from a similar questionnaire which is originally in Malay Language (Putehyan Md Dom, 1992). The rest of the items are taken from the homework report of OFSTED[†] (Weston, 1999). Prior to the actual survey, two pilot tests were carried out in which two different groups of students took part. In order to ensure the validity of the instrument, three measures are taken; (1) an extensive review of literature of the concepts to be measured is carried out, (2) opinion of experts in field are obtained, and (3) face validity is checked by asking the respondents whether the items looks valid to them. Moreover, all the subscales generated good reliability scores of at least 0.7 on Cronbach's alpha, which indicates that all the items can be considered reliable (Nunnally, 1978)

FINDINGS

Respondents' Profile

Table 2: *Demographic profile of respondents*

Demographic Factor	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Boys	169	52.00
Girls	156	48.00
Total	325	100.00
Grade Level		
Grade 4	137	42.20
Grade 8	188	57.80
Total	325	100.00

Table 2 shows the respondents' profile. As seen from the table, 52% of the participants are boys while the remaining 48% are girls. Similarly, 42.20% and 57.80% are from grades four and eight respectively.

Pupils' Perceptions

Pupils' perceptions are measured by the two subscales of 'purpose' and 'feedback', the results of which are shown in Table 3. Based on ~~According to~~ Table 3, boys have a more positive perceptions towards homework (mean = 4.10, SD = 0.32) than girls do (mean = 3.95, SD = 0.38). Moreover, the t-test results indicate that there is a significant difference between boys and girls in their perceptions towards homework, $t(323) = 3.78, p < .05$.

Table 3: *Independent sample t-test for gender differences in perceptions*

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	Sig
Female	169	4.10	0.32	3.78	323	.00*
Male	155	3.95	0.38			

* $p < .01$

Table 4 shows the results for the difference in perception based on grade level. From the table, it can be inferred that students of grade four have a better perception of homework (mean = 4.19, SD = 0.34) as compared to students of grade eight (mean = 3.92, SD = 0.33). Results of *t*-test shows that this difference is statistically significant, $t(323) = 7.10, p < .05$. Hence, there is a significant difference between students of grade four and eight in their perceptions of homework.

Table 4: *Independent sample t-test*

Grade	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	Sig
Grade 4	137	4.19	0.34	7.10	323	.00*
Grade 8	187	3.92	0.33			

* $p < .01$

Pupils' Homework Practices

Four subscales place, time, difficulties and preferences are employed to study this domain. Chi-square test is performed to see if any of the independent variables can be associated with a particular homework habit (or practice). The results indicate that there is no relation between the place of doing homework and gender as well as their home work preferences and gender. Nevertheless, some items from the other two subscales show significant associations. Table 5 shows the corresponding descriptive statistics for those items that have significant associations in relation to gender.

Table 5: *Descriptive statistics that corresponds to the Chi-square results (based on gender)*

Item	Gender	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
C3: I do my homework just before going to bed	Female	115 59.3%	30 36.1%	24 50.0%
	Male	79 40.7%	53 63.9%	24 50.0%
C6: After going home I first finish all my homework	Female	78 49.1%	21 38.2%	70 63.1%
	Male	81 50.9%	34 61.8%	41 36.9%
C14: I cannot concentrate well on my homework	Female	154 56.8%	10 29.4%	5 25.0%
	Male	117 43.2%	24 70.6%	15 75.0%
C18: I find it difficult to do my homework since there is not enough space at my home	Female	136 56.0%	11 31.4%	22 46.8%
	Male	107 44.0%	24 68.6%	25 53.2%
C22: I forget to complete my homework	Female	145 59.7%	17 34.0%	7 21.9%
	Male	98 40.3%	33 66.0%	25 78.1%

Results of item C3 and C6 (on the time sub-scale) indicate that girls complete their home work in time unlike the boys who tend to keep it till the last moment. Similarly, results of items C14, C18 and C22 (on the difficulties sub-scale) reveal that boys pose more careless behaviour in doing their homework.

Results of the grade level differences are obtained using similar procedures which yielded significant associations for items C1, C2 and C7 (on the place sub-scale); C3, C8 and C9 (on the time sub-scale); C13 and C21 (on the difficulties sub-scale); and C20 (on the preferences sub-scale). Table 6 shows the descriptive statistics for the items which showed significant associations with grade level.

As seen from Table 6, majority of students in grade eight do their homework on their own (63.3% of those who said they ‘often’ do it on their own) while majority of grade fours do it with help from others. Among those who said that they often do their home work at tuition centre, 81.2% of them are of grade four. Moreover, 75% of those who reported doing their homework with their classmates are also grade four students. Similarly, 68.8% of those who mention doing the homework at the school (after the session) are also grade four students.

Table 6: Descriptive statistics that corresponds to the Chi-square results (based on grade level)

Item	Grade	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
C1: I do my homework at home, on my own	4	10 76.9%	30 62.5%	97 36.7%
	8	3 23.1%	18 37.5%	167 63.3%
C2: I do my homework at tuition class	4	83 35.3%	28 48.3%	26 81.2%
	8	152 64.7%	30 51.7%	6 18.8%
C3: I do my homework just before going to bed	4	94 48.5%	26 31.3%	17 35.4%
	8	100 51.5%	57 68.7%	31 64.6%
C7: I do my homework at my classmates' house	4	123 42.4%	5 21.7%	9 75.0%
	8	167 57.6%	18 78.3%	3 25.0%
C8: I do my homework at school after the session	4	123 42.7%	3 14.3%	11 68.8%
	8	165 57.3%	18 85.7%	5 31.2%
C9: I copy the homework from friends' book on the submission date	4	131 44.3%	4 18.2%	2 28.6%
	8	165 55.7%	18 81.8%	5 71.4%
C13: I do not understand the assigned homework	4	101 49.0%	23 28.0%	13 35.1%
	8	105 51.0%	59 72.0%	24 64.9%
C20: I first finish the homework given by the most strict teacher	4	94 47.5%	21 36.8%	22 31.4%
	8	104 52.5%	36 63.2%	48 68.6%
C21: I cannot get help in doing my homework	4	101 47.2%	16 31.4%	20 33.3%
	8	113 52.8%	35 68.6%	40 66.7%

The results also suggest that grade eight students face more difficulties in completing the homework. Of those who said that they 'often' do not understand the assigned work, 64.9% are from grade eight. Similarly, 66.7% of those who complained that they 'often' cannot get help in doing their homework are also from grade eight. The result also shows that grade eight students do it in order to avoid some negative consequences. Of those who told that they 'often' complete the homework given by the strictest teacher first, 68.6% are of grade eight. Moreover,

71.4% of those who reported ‘often’ copying homework from a friend’s book are grade eight students too.

Amount of Homework and Academic Achievement

Table 7 shows the results of the correlation test for pupils in various subjects.

Table 7: *Pearson's Product Moment Correlation*

Subject	Grade 4			Grade 8		
	N	r	sig (2-tailed)	N	r	sig (2-tailed)
Dhivehi	137	0.02	.82	188	0.04	.60
Islam	137	0.13	.13	188	0.06	.06
English	137	0.02	.84	188	0.27	.00*
Maths	137	0.09	.29	188	0.14	.65

* $p < .01$

As depicted in Table 7, there is no significant relationship between the amount of homework assigned by the teachers and pupils’ academic achievement in grade four. Nevertheless, in the case of grade eight, there is a significant correlation for English, $r(188) = .27$, $p < .05$. The value of R^2 obtained is .072, which means that although there is a significant correlation between the amount of homework and student achievement in English at grade eight level, this accounts only for 7.2% of the variability in student performance.

Pupils’ Perceptions and Academic Achievement

The average score of the subscales measured at scale level (purpose and feedback) is tested for correlation, one by one, and then by the combined average, with the average academic score obtained by the students. The average of the student performance is calculated using the results they obtained in the four subjects that are investigated. The results of the test are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: *Pearson's Correlation between results and perception*

Scale	Grade 4			Grade 8		
	N	r	sig (2-tailed)	N	r	sig (2-tailed)
Purpose	137	0.19	0.02*	188	0.09	0.19
Feedback	137	0.21	0.01**	188	0.02	0.69
Total Scale	137	0.25	0.00**	188	0.10	0.19

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 8 indicates that there is a significant relationship between pupils’ perceived purpose of doing homework and their academic achievement in the case of grade four students, $r(137) = .19$, $p < .05$. Additionally, pupils’ perceptions regarding the feedback given by teachers are also significantly correlated with their academic

achievement, $r(137) = .21, p < .05$. Finally, there is a significant relationship between overall pupil perception towards homework and their academic achievement in the case of fourth graders, $r(137) = .25, p < .05$. On the other hand, the table also indicates that, in the case of grade eight, there is no significant relationship between pupils' perceptions of homework and their academic achievement.

Pupils' Practices and Academic Achievement

As mentioned before, pupils' practices are examined based on four subscales; place, time, difficulties and preferences. One-way analysis of variance is used to study the differences in pupils' academic achievement based on their homework practices. Detailed study of post hoc tests and descriptive statistics reveal that pupils' achievement is affected by their homework practices.

As far as the 'place' of doing homework is concerned, the highest score is shown by the group of students who 'rarely' do their homework in tuition class and/or in classmates' house. For the 'time' of completing the homework, it is found that the highest score is shown by the group who 'rarely' adopt such practices as completing the work in a hurry (after the session), copying the work from others' and finishing the work in the class (just before submission).

Similarly, the results also indicate that students who reported having fewer 'difficulties' consistently achieve better academic scores. All the items, except one, on this sub-scale, showed significant differences in academic achievement. Finally, for the 'preferences' sub-scale, significant differences in academic scores are obtained for all the items except one. Descriptive statistics for the data reveal that the highest score is attained by students who 'rarely' adopt preferences like doing the favourite subject, the work assigned by the favourite teacher or the work given by the strictest teacher first.

DISCUSSION

Pupils' Perceptions

This paper reports findings of two of the domains under pupils' perceptions namely the purpose of doing homework and the feedback on homework. They are studied on the basis of gender and grade level differences. Firstly, with regard to the differences by with regard to gender, it is reported that statistically significant differences do exist between boys and girls in their perceptions towards homework – boys are known to have better perceptions as compared to girls. This is partly in agreement with the previous studies which tell that there exist gender differences in the perception towards homework. Those studies however, ended up with entirely opposite results in which it was found that girls generally hold more positive views than boys whereas in this study it is the boys who are known to have more positive perceptions (Bembenutty, 2011; Cooper et al., 2006). Such differences are not surprising,

however, when the cultural and contextual differences are considered (Hong & Milgram, 1999).

Secondly, with regard to the differences based on grade level, the present study shows that there is a significant difference between students of grade four and eight in their perceptions towards homework. Students of grade four appear to have better perceptions towards homework. Again, this is in partial agreement with the findings of previous researches. Many studies support the notion that grade level has an impact on pupils' perceptions towards homework (Cooper, 1989b; Cooper et al., 2006; Weston, 1999; Worrell, et al., 1999; Xu, 2010). These studies, however, do not state whether it is older or younger pupils who have more positive perceptions – but only report the existence of some differences. For instance, Weston (1999) argues that there is a shift in ideas between younger and older pupils with respect to homework. It is also stated that older students are more likely to demonstrate better self-regulatory behaviour and do homework for learning-oriented and peer-oriented reasons rather than adult-oriented reasons (Xu, 2010).

Pupils' Practices

It has been emphasized before, this study uses four domains to study pupils' homework practices; place, time, difficulties, and preferences. First of all, with regard to the place where homework is done, only a few items are found to be related to gender. Of the four items used to test this domain, only “doing homework at classmates' house” is related to gender. With 58.3% stating that they often do homework at the friends' house, boys stay well ahead of girls, which is different from the findings of other studies. Previous studies indicate that girls are more likely to look for help from friends as compared to boys at both primary and secondary stages (Weston, 1999). In addition to this, girls reported more relieved than boys when doing homework with peers than alone (Kackar et al., 2011). The difference may be owing to the customs that in some cultures boys are more outgoing and social as compared to girls. The contradictions also imply that better understanding of gender differences in preferred places of doing homework is required in order to suit homework packages to the needs of both genders.

Grade-wise comparisons confirm relationship with more items in this domain. Out of the total respondents, 70.8% of them are of grade four, who are found to be often doing homework at home on their own. It is also found that 81.2% of those who report often doing homework in tuition class are from grade four. Moreover, 75.0% of those who report often doing homework at classmate's house are also fourth graders. Comparison of these percentages reveals that at lower grades, particularly grade fours favour to do homework at places other than home and with other people rather doing it alone. In support of this, previous studies indicate that middle school students reported better experiences when homework was done with friends, outside their home, while older students are more satisfied to do homework alone, at home (Kackar et al., 2011). Additionally, it is also found that while 51% of KS2 and 72% of

KS3 students reported that they usually do the homework at home, which indicates that older students like doing homework at home, on their own (Weston, 1999).

Secondly, with regard to the time of completing the homework, the study shows that boys keep their homework until the last moment. Besides this more girls than boys report that they rarely do homework just before going to bed. Moreover, 63.1% of those who report often doing homework immediately after going home are girls. In addition to this boys were found to be more careless in the sense that many of them (85.7%) copy the work from their friends' just on the day of submission. Previous studies have not investigated gender differences on such practices. However, it is reported that pupils generally demonstrate the habit of keeping their homework for the last moment (Gajria & Salend, 1995). Other studies are more supportive to the findings about girls' practices in the sense that girls exert greater efforts and display more learning-oriented behaviour in performing homework (Bembenuddy, 2011; Cooper et al., 2006; Xu, 2010).

Grade level analysis shows that older students attend to their homework immediately after going home – Of those who report often doing their homework as soon as they reach home, 64.6% are from grade eight. On the other hand, 68.8% of those who report often doing homework at school after the session are fourth graders. In addition, older students who often copy homework from friends are grade eight students (71.4%). Hence, the present study indicates that there are significant differences between younger and older pupils in the time at which they complete their homework. Although there are no previous studies to compare the results with, the findings support the notion that pupils keep the homework to be completed at the last moment, especially as they grow older (Gajria & Salend, 1995).

Thirdly, with respect to the difficulties expressed by students, it is found that 75.0% of those who report often not being able to concentrate on homework are boys. Moreover, 53.2% of those who report often facing difficulties due to lack of space at home are also boys. Additionally, 78.1% of those who report often forgetting to do the homework are boys too. Thus, on average, it is understood that for all the items, boys express significantly greater concerns in terms of difficulties faced. Previous study by Gajria & Salend (1995) support this by listing a number of similar difficulties reported by pupils which include finding it difficult to get started, getting easily distracted, and not being able to follow homework schedules. In addition to this, Weston (1999) reports that some of the common difficulties related by students include not being able to concentrate, and not getting enough time to do the work. These studies, however, do not make any gender-wise comparison. Nevertheless, the findings remind teachers to design homework activities in such a way as to that it pays more attention to boys.

On grade level differences in difficulties expressed by students, the findings of this study reveal that compared to grade four students, those in grade eight express facing more difficulties. It is reported that 64.9% of those who complain often not understanding the work assigned and 66.7% of those who report often not getting

help in doing homework are grade eight students. Previous studies found contrasting results, however. It has been reported by parents that students at lower grades have more problems in completing their homework (Worrell, et al., 1999). Nevertheless, such reports are probably based on difficulties in managing homework rather than with the task itself and are mere perceptions of parents. In contrast, the present study investigates the perception of pupils rather than their parents. Thus, it is argued that proper arrangements must be set up in order to help students overcome the difficulties, especially as they move to higher grades.

Finally, as far as pupils' homework preference (how they prioritise homework) is concerned, it is revealed that there is no significant relationship between gender and homework preferences. Conversely, grade-wise analysis reveals a significant relationship between homework preference and pupils' grade level. It is reported that 68.6% of those who admit often finishing the homework given by the strictest teacher first are eighth graders. This is a reflection of how teachers at higher levels react when pupils are unable to comply with the due dates.

The Amount of Homework and Academic Achievement

There is divided opinion with regard to amount of homework and student achievement. The effect of it on primary (younger) and the secondary (older) students vary. In order to bridge the gap, this study investigates the relationship in both the categories. First of all, it is found that there is no significant relationship between the amount of homework and pupils' achievement in tests that concerns grade four students. Among the four subjects in which the investigation is done, the strongest correlation was found for Islam with $r(137) = .13$, $p > .05$. Many of the previous studies consistently find that, in general, there is no relationship between achievement and amount of homework assigned to students (De Jong, Westerhof, & Creemers, 2000). Similarly, Yeo Kee & Arbayah (2010) conclude that, in primary, there is no significant relationship between engaged time on homework and pupils' academic achievement. Moreover, Cooper (1989b) argues that homework does not bring in any better results as compared to class work in the case of elementary students. This calls for reviews of homework management in schools at primary level. Since the results are in line with studies done in other countries, it may be beneficial to review how homework is managed in those countries when formulating new policies at national level.

In the case of secondary students, specifically Grade Eight, it is found that most of the subjects do not show any significant relationship between the amount of homework and student achievement. However, the study reveals that there is a significant relationship between the amount of homework and student achievement in English, $r(188) = .27$, $p < .05$. Other studies conclude that, for secondary, the relationship between amount of homework and student achievement is positive and grows stronger as pupils move to higher grades (Cooper et al., 2006). Nevertheless, studies that investigated the relationship on specific subjects report that extra homework in Science, English and History show little or no impact on their

corresponding test scores (Eren & Henderson, 2009, 2010). In contrary, some studies report that there is a weak relationship between mathematics and science scores and the amount of time students spend on homework (Zammit, Routitsky, & Greenwood, 2002).

Pupils' Perceptions, Practices and Achievement

One of the gaps which the present study intends to fill is the study of the relationship between pupils' perceptions towards homework and their academic achievement. In this regard, the findings of the study indicate that there is a significant relationship between pupils' perceived purpose of doing homework and their academic achievement in the case of grade four students, $r(137) = .19, p < .05$. Additionally, pupils' perceptions regarding the feedback given by teachers are also significantly correlated with their academic achievement, $r(137) = .21, p < .05$. Finally, there is a significant relationship between the overall pupils' perception of homework and their academic achievement in case of fourth graders, $r(137) = .25, p < .05$. There is no relationship in the case of grade eight students, however.

Since there are no empirical studies done in this line of research, it is not possible to compare the present findings. Therefore, it is sensible to reflect back at the conceptual frame of the study. According to the framework, there are a number of theories that suggest a positive relationship between pupils' perceptions and their achievement (Baek & Choi, 2002; Cano, 2007; Cooper et al., 2006; Lan & Li, 2006; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2005). The findings of this study indicate some amount of empirical support for these theories and also the conceptual framework that is formulated. However, more empirical studies are required to validate the findings and to apply it to other contexts. Therefore, more studies should be carried out in order to confirm the missing link.

It is conceptualised that homework practices have some impact on academic achievement. The findings of this study present a number of empirical evidences to support the model. Indeed, a number of items on pupils' practices cause differences in achievement. On the domain of place, the findings reveal that those who report doing homework in tuition class do not score well in exams. The same is with the case "doing homework in classmates" house. This holds true for both ~~the~~ groups of students. Thus, parents and teachers must be vigilant about where students do their homework in order to ensure the best results from doing homework.

The findings also reveal that significant differences in exam scores are evident by the time at which pupils finish their homework. Students who achieve the best scores are known to be rarely waiting after the school session to do homework. They are also known to rarely copying it from friends'. Analysis of data from grade eight indicates supportive evidence to this. Since the findings consistently reveal that the time at which pupils complete their homework has a considerable impact on their academic performance, teachers as well as parents need to consider this and take necessary

measures in managing pupils' homework. Perhaps, helping pupils to manage and organise their homework tasks could prove beneficial.

When the data is analysed for the subscale of difficulties in performing homework, some items indicate significant differences in achievements. Descriptive statistics of the data reveal that the highest score is shown by the group who report that they rarely "do not understand the work assigned". On the basis of the responses given by students, it is also understood that pupils who complain about time constraints to do homework, perform poorly in exams. This implies that teachers and parents must make sure that they appropriately cater to the difficulties students face in performing homework.

The findings of the study also indicate that there exist significant differences in pupils' achievement and their homework preferences. The findings draw attention to many aspects which is ignored by teachers as well as students. It is found that pupils tend to give preference to their favourite subject in performing homework. However, the findings reveal that pupils, who often practice this, got the lowest marks as compared to those who practice this rarely. The same is found in students who prioritise homework based on the tasks assigned by their favourite teacher. Therefore, it requires awareness on the side of teachers as well as students that such kind of practices may in fact deteriorate pupils' achievement rather than helping them to do well.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Knowledge of pupils' perceptions and practices would be indisputably useful for formulating and managing homework policies and programmes. The following practical implications are derived from what is learned about pupils' perceptions and practices and its relation to their academic achievement. It would definitely be beneficial for school administrators, teachers, parents and students in managing their homework programmes.

With regards to the demographic variables that are investigated, it is indicated that there are significant differences in pupils' perceptions and practices in performing homework. There is a mismatch in the types of homework that teachers usually assign and what students prefer to do as homework in different subjects. If schools can find a better match to suit the needs and interests of the pupils or create motivation in doing the types of homework that are proved the most profitable, the outcome would be much better than it is now. There is also some indication, especially in the case of older students, that they do not prefer homework to be assigned other than to continue doing the tasks that they are unable to finish in the class. This implies schools to reflect on how much work is assigned to be done at home and to adjust their policies accordingly.

The fact that many practices of students are found to be influencing their academic achievement is of particular interest. The finding that older students have

negative perceptions towards homework is practically demonstrated by their behaviour like keeping the work until the last moment. Teachers can play a vital role in motivating pupils to change their perceptions towards homework, which would ultimately result in increased rate of homework completion.

Although the results suggest that there is no strong relationship between homework and students achievement, this should not be interpreted as homework being useless or creating nothing more than tension in students. Rather, it is argued that there are many other factors which are equally important in influencing student achievement, particularly as measured by test scores. Perhaps, there are many changes that could be brought to homework policies in schools in order to put in place the best practices so as to bring the best results. Many of the findings of this study could provide guiding principles in this regard. Hence, schools are required to formulate their homework policies accomodating the differences that are evident between various age groups and gender.

Since this study does not intend to generalise the findings to the whole country, it is argued that, in order to enable pupils to enjoy the maximum benefits of doing homework, teachers and educators need to explore pupils' preferences and perceptions in their given contexts. Findings of homework research in other places, especially from different contexts, should never be taken for granted since there is mounting evidence from existing literature that such differences do matter in the way in which pupils deal with their homework.

This study is based on a quantitative survey method in order to collect data regarding pupils' perceptions and practices in performing homework. While many of the findings proved useful, it is more meaningful if there are some means for triangulating the data by using some qualitative methods such as direct observations, document review or open ended interviews with pupils. This could help in broadening the understanding of the various phenomena. Moreover, qualitative data based on multiple perspectives from students, parents, and teachers over and over, would be informative in deepening researchers' understanding in this area.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Future researches on this area could adopt mixed mode designs, if possible, more of qualitative approaches such as direct observations, interviews, document review and even experimental designs. Participants for this study are only from one atoll of Maldives, hence limited in number and location. Future studies can be conducted in more locations, and in different contexts, in order to validate and apply the findings to those places. The location of the school, as described by rural and urban, and other grade levels are obvious varieties of contexts in this regard.

There is also scope and need to examine how students with different ability levels (e.g., gifted students, low achieving or students with learning disabilities) perceive and practice homework and what is its impact on their learning and results.

Longitudinal studies that follow cohorts of students to examine how they perceive and practice homework over the time and its impact on their academic achievement could also prove beneficial. Since most of the researches are consistently focused on the academic benefits of homework, future studies can also be focused on investigating the non academic benefits of homework.

CONCLUSIONS

Homework is an integral part of teaching and learning. It is an everyday task of a child. Understanding pupils' perceptions and practices in performing homework and how it influences student achievement is very necessary for parents, teachers and educators. From the findings of this study, it is revealed that pupils' perceptions and practices differ by their gender and grade level. In spite of the contrary findings with regard to the amount of homework and pupils' achievement, this study takes a step further to investigate the relationship between pupils' perceptions, practice and student achievement. It has been established that pupils' academic achievement is influenced by both perceptions and practices.

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