

*Full Length Research Paper*

# A comparison of Zimbabwe's rural and urban primary school pupils' views about homework: A case of Masvingo District

**Felix Petros Mapako\*, Rugare Mareva and Winnet Chindedza**

Faculty of Education, Department of Curriculum Studies, Great Zimbabwe University  
P. O. Box 1235, Masvingo, Zimbabwe.

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The study sought to establish and compare the views of rural and urban primary school pupils on homework in Zimbabwe, using six purposively sampled Masvingo rural and urban primary schools. The inquiry employed a qualitative methodology in which data were gathered through semi-structured personal interviews and document analysis. A sample of thirty rural and thirty urban Grade Five pupils were interviewed. Forty-five homework exercise books were analyzed. The investigation established that while in both rural and urban schools, there are some pupils who like homework while others dislike it for various reasons; there are more pupils in urban areas who view homework in a positive light than those in rural schools. The paper unearthed home and school factors as the causes of rural and urban pupils' different views on homework. The paper makes several recommendations. Firstly, the government should endeavour to narrow the gap between the socio-economic statuses of the rural and urban populace in Zimbabwe as it is a major contributor to pupils' different views on homework. The paper further recommends that rural schools be improved in terms of the quality of teachers and teaching-learning resources. Also, parents in both settings need to be encouraged to take an interest in their children's homework. Moreover, teachers from both rural and urban schools need to take homework more seriously as their attitudes to homework influence pupils' views on it.

**Key words:** Academic achievement, homework, Zimbabwe, rural, urban, education.

## INTRODUCTION

The paper investigated the comparative views of Zimbabwe's rural and urban primary school pupils towards homework.

Homework has become one of the most controversial issues in modern education (Blum, 1998). The controversy surrounding homework, a "topic on which opinions differ widely" (Balassi, 1968), seems to centre on whether homework is beneficial or not to pupils. For example, while Freeman (1992) asserts that children who are set homework, complete it and have it marked, perform better at school than pupils who do none. Balassi says it cannot be argued that homework positively results in increased achievement for all students, nor can it be

argued, on the basis of research, that homework is of no value.

There have been calls from various sectors of the global society to 'ditch homework'. The US author and parenting expert, Alfie Kohn, has stressed that homework for primary school pupils is unnecessary, debilitating and puts a child off learning for good (Govender, 2010). Professor Jansen, a leading education expert and vice-chancellor of the University of Free State concurs that, ". . . homework is unnecessary. Schools seldom coordinate homework tasks across the subject areas – with the result that young people are stressed with too much to do in a grade" (Govender, 2010).

It is against this backdrop of controversy surrounding the issue of homework that this study focused on the views of both rural and urban school pupils on homework in Zimbabwe. Pupils are the ones who are directly involved in homework, as the doers. The study assumed a comparative form since the circumstances of rural and urban pupils in Zimbabwe differ markedly in terms of their socio-economic background, and the apparent differences between rural and urban schools in terms of human (staff) and teaching-learning resources.

## Objectives

The study intended to:

- (a) compare Zimbabwe's rural and urban primary school pupils' views on homework;
- (b) establish/investigate the causes of such views;
- (c) suggest the way forward in light of the findings.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews literature related to the research.

### Homework

Homework may be defined as a piece of work that a teacher gives students to do out of class (Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners, 2002). In other words, it is schoolwork to be done outside the classroom (English Dictionary: Concise Edition, 1999). Petty (1993) says it is work a student does alone as private study. It entails tasks assigned to students by their teachers to be completed mostly out of class, and derives its name from the fact that most students do the majority of such work at home (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homework>). Put differently, homework is the transfer of learning activities to the pupils' own learning environment.

Blum (1998), a proponent of homework, observes that it offers an important opportunity to aid and extend learning by setting it into a completely different context whereby conversations with adults and other children may spark ideas and debate in a different way from school learning. Blum goes on to postulate that work that is done at home offers another dimension because it contributes to a parent's understanding of the child and the school, thereby fulfilling very common wishes of parents with regard to feedback on their children's education. Also, Sutton in Shah (2001) looks at homework as the main medium through which pupils' work can be regularly seen by parents and carers.

According to Arends (1998), "Homework is considered necessary because so many educators and parents believe it is an effective means to extend learning time and thereby increase academic achievement." Arends also argues that homework provides an opportunity for students to perform newly acquired skills without the

assistance of the teacher, so it should be viewed as a continuation of practice.

Rinashe (1997) gives another benefit of homework, which is that, if cooperatively carried out, it creates good links between schools and parents, as school books enter the home and parents are able to view their children's work. The role of the home environment is, therefore, greatly appreciated.

Also in support of homework, Kyriacou (1998) states that it is very important in providing information on how well a pupil can perform without aid from the teacher, an observation shared by Freeman (1992). Kyriacou also observes that homework can be used to determine pupils' organizational skills and power of commitment to meet the demands made on them. Homework can also provide stark feedback to the pupil and the teacher on the nature of any difficulties or problems which are less evident in class, where the teacher may be readily available to render assistance. Kyriacou further notes that homework is of value in that it can be used to assess pupils' previous learning in lessons, through consolidation and practice-type tasks, or preparing for a test by revising.

Endersby (2010) sees value in homework in that it extends study beyond school hours, allows students to strengthen their understanding of what was learnt at school, and prepares students to work more independently. Also, Khalid (2011) says from a teacher's perspective, homework enhances students' creative and comprehensive skills and reinforces learning. Furthermore, homework gives teachers the opportunity to monitor students' progress and this helps them (teachers) identify any learning problems. Khalid further contends that from students' point of view, homework provides a means to learn more about the topics covered in the classroom, enabling them to feel confident when examinations come. As for parents, Khalid goes on to say they are of the view that homework provides additional practice, and instills a sense of responsibility in the children. Additionally, homework enables the parents to judge how their child is doing in the classroom.

Still on the importance of homework, The Washington Post Co. (2011) cites a new survey in which teachers say homework is important in the learning process and it can help kids develop study and organizational skills. The teachers further say kids need to practice what they have learnt at school so that the material sticks in the brain. In the survey, some teachers also say they give homework to get parents involved in their children's learning. Kohn (2011) alludes to Timothy Keith who, in the 1980s, looked at survey results of tens of thousands of high school students and concluded that homework had a positive relationship to achievement, at least at high school.

Farrant (1991) sums up the importance of homework by observing that, apart from enabling parents to share in their children's education and providing a conscious and tangible link between home and school, homework also extends the limited school day and provides pupils with useful pursuits at home.

However, Farrant (1991) also gives several demerits of homework, observing that not only can homework be a time-filling exercise which is of little relevance to the child's development, but it can also deprive a child of his/her own interests and hobbies. Apart from that, homework may be so inequitably allocated as to overburden children. Moreover, homework may be given by some teachers as a chore or punishment.

Endersby (2010), despite having given several advantages of homework, also claims that homework has little educational worth; some countries do not bother with homework and their results do not seem to be affected by it. Also, homework is usually done hurriedly when a child is already tired, adding to the child's fatigue, something which will affect his/her learning at school the following day. Endersby also contends that it is hard to check if the homework students produce is really their own or whether copied from other students or done with the help of parents. Endersby further argues that homework produces large amounts of pointless work of little value, marking of which overburdens the teacher. Apart from this, homework takes up a lot of time for students to use to be physically active, explore the environment, do creative things like music and the art and take in community activities. In the same vein, Khalid (2011) observes that most students consider homework a burden which disrupts their routine life because studying for five or six hours at school makes them exhausted, such that by the time they reach home, they feel sleepy and uninterested in studying again. Another argument has also been raised, that many in education today are looking for evidence in support of homework, but are coming out empty-handed ([www.divinecaroline.com/22121/](http://www.divinecaroline.com/22121/)). This web refers to Kohn's book *The Homework Myth*, in which the author claims that no study has ever found a correlation between homework and achievement in elementary school. On the contrary, says Kohn, homework is "all pain and no gain" and may even diminish interest in learning.

For homework to be a worthwhile exercise, Good and Brophy (1991) advise that it must be realistic in length and difficulty, and add: "If homework is to have instructional value for the class as a whole, it is necessary to set up accountability systems to make sure that it is completed on time, to review it the next day, and take corrective action." This is the responsibility of the teacher.

Balassi (1968) notes that homework assignments should be given individually on the basis of each student's needs, and that the teacher should ensure that students understand what is to be done, why it is to be done and how it is to be done. Balassi (1968) further advises: "Devise homework that bears some relationship to what has been going on in class, and vary the kind of homework you give. Take time to look at the homework submitted . . . put thought into planning assignments." This is also the responsibility of the teacher.

Freeman (1992) notes that for homework to be effective, it should be built into the original lesson

planning, the aim being to make children use the skills they have learnt in class by understanding a small individual piece of writing.

Arends (1998) warns that "homework should not be given carelessly or frivolously. If the teacher does not value it, the students will not." Therefore, the teacher should make tasks more meaningful, clear and challenging, but not too easy or too difficult. In addition, the nature of the assignment should be varied and interesting, not routine and monotonous. Furthermore, the teacher should monitor students' progress by checking their work each time and returning their assignments with feedback.

Tavares (1998) also offers several pieces of advice to teachers. She advises classroom practitioners to make sure the students understand the homework, create a correction habit, assign just enough homework, plan more than one type of homework to give students a choice, accept late homework, link homework with classroom activities, and, finally, to desist from using homework as punishment or reward.

### **The influence of children's background on education**

There are apparently vast differences in the home and school situations/contexts of rural and urban pupils in the country. These differences include parents' socio-economic statuses which affect their ability to provide educational resources, parents' levels of education, parents' attitudes to education, the quality and availability of financial and learning resources at schools, the quality of teachers and the attitudes of the teachers, among other differences.

Much has been researched on and written about the effects of a pupil's background on educational achievement or attainment and it cannot be doubted that pupils' attitudes towards homework, which is a very important aspect of a child's learning (Blum, 1998; Sutton in Shah, 2001; Kyriacou, 1998; Freeman, 1992; Farrant, 1991), contribute towards educational achievement.

Ezewu (1983) contends that the socio-economic position of a family in society will affect its values, goals, attitudes and behaviour, and determines how the family perceives education (of which homework is an integral part). While children from a high socio-economic stratum usually receive more educational encouragement and support from their more enlightened families, those from lower class families are disadvantaged, as other activities like farming are valued more than education. Schonell and Goodacre (1975) see home background as including attitudes towards reading and writing, the amount of reading done in the home, and the availability of reading material of varying levels of difficulty.

Bourdieu, cited in Giddens (1989), observes that children from a high socio-economic status are equipped with 'cultural capital', which enables them to perform better in school. On the contrary, instead of concentrating on their studies, children from low socio-economic

backgrounds focus on their home inadequacies at the expense of their education. It is against this backdrop that the researchers sought to compare the views of rural and urban Grade Five primary school pupils towards homework, given the fact that rural and urban pupils' backgrounds in Zimbabwe are qualitatively different.

According to the cultural deprivation theory (Trudgill, 1986), children from groups which are educationally less successful than others may be bright enough but lack the type of upbringing that is conducive to success in school. Children from such homes are usually not provided with the cultural experiences (good conversation, constructive forms of play, access to books and newspapers and travel) which underpin the capacity to learn (Giddens, 1989). This cultural deprivation obviously has a bearing on a child's attitude towards homework, since cultural stimulation in the home, parents' education, availability of books, parents' co-operation with the school and aspirations of the child contribute to educational achievement (Vernon, 1976).

Upper class parents who are able to devote time and attention to guiding their children and giving those opportunities aimed at helping them to learn can bring real benefits to their children (Howe, 1999). This is a view shared by Conrad and Fishman (1971) who observe that parents who are willing to go to enormous lengths to help their children, supervise homework and happily attend to their problems enable their children to achieve the best of their abilities. In the same vein, Fontana (1988) states that parents who have ready access to printed words pass on a reading culture to their children. In contrast, uneducated parents do not provide much of an example. This could greatly impact on rural and urban pupils' views on homework.

Material, infrastructural and financial resources at rural and urban schools in Zimbabwe differ markedly, with those in urban areas invariably better, which results in urban areas attracting better qualified teachers who are obviously more motivated to work harder. In terms of financial incentives to teachers, for example, NewsDay (January 27, 2011) reports that the incomes of teachers who are in the same grade are determined by the type and location of the schools they work for, with a teacher at a former Group A school getting a handsome school-based incentive package of at least US\$250 a month, while someone at a remote rural school gets either nothing or as little as US\$20 a term.

The disparities in terms of resources at rural and urban schools could have a bearing on teachers' attitudes towards homework, which could in turn influence the views of pupils themselves towards homework. Ezewu (1983) contends that the major issue causing differences in performance between Grade Five rural and urban pupils is greatly attributed to resources and geographical location of the school. Such performance obviously includes attitudes towards, and performance in homework. Nyagura, in Chivore (1994), shares the same view by stating that well-resourced schools, with good educational facilities, provide pupils with enriched skills to

achieve their scholarly endeavours. In Zimbabwe, most of these 'well-resourced' happen to be urban.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was principally qualitative in nature, with semi-structured interviews with pupils and document analysis being instruments used to collect data. The population for the study was all Grade 5 pupils in Zimbabwe. Six (6) - three rural and three urban - primary schools in Masvingo District which were nearest to the researcher's workplace (Great Zimbabwe University) provided the required sample of rural and urban school environments. Generally, while schools in urban areas are better resourced in terms of infrastructure and quality of teachers, those in rural areas face serious challenges in this regard, as previously stated in the literature review. Each of the six day schools comprised three Grade 5 classes each.

The respondents involved in semi-structured interviews were sixty (60) pupils (30 rural and 30 urban). Ten were randomly sampled from each school with the view to finding their views on homework and why they view it thus. Random sampling would ensure that pupils of different socio-economic status had an equal chance of being selected. Semi-structured interviews enabled researchers to change the sequence of questioning as needs arose. It also allowed for probing for information and seeking clarification where it was necessary. During the interviews, notes were taken down by the researchers and in some instances, respondents were quoted verbatim. The researchers intended to establish the Grade 5 pupils' views on homework.

Documents reviewed were homework exercise books for Grade 5 pupils. Initially, the researchers had intended to analyze thirty (30) homework exercise books from urban and thirty (30) from rural Grade 5 pupils who had taken part in the interviews. However, whereas the researchers managed to access the targeted thirty from pupils in urban schools, they managed to get only fifteen (15) - 50% - from their rural counterparts. The researchers' aim in administering this instrument was to find out whether pupils' views on homework can be validated or dismissed, by considering the number and nature of exercises given to pupils by teachers. In addition, the researchers also intended to establish whether teachers assigned homework to pupils consistently and systematically across schools and the subjects offered in the primary school curriculum.

## FINDINGS

The findings of the study have been discussed and presented according to data obtained from interviews and document analysis.

### Results from interviews with pupils

The personal interviews conducted with sixty (60) Grade Five (G5) pupils revealed very interesting trends about this very crucial aspect, homework, in education. In this discussion of results, quotations of some significant portions of the responses obtained were used in order to directly depict the G5 respondents' views on homework.

There is a general awareness in both the rural and urban settings of the crucial role of homework in education. Twelve (12) (40%) rural and twenty-four (24) (80%) urban interviewees found homework valuable,

especially in situations where they tended to manage the exercises. As seen in the above statistics, there was a high appreciation of the value of homework by urban pupils, some of whose views were captured thus:

"I do my homework because my parents often help me."  
 "I take my homework seriously because the teacher marks it."  
 "I like my homework because I have extra textbooks at home."  
 "I do my homework even when there is no ZESA (electricity) because candles are always available."

From the responses given above, it is clear that these urban interviewees found homework a worthwhile endeavour as their parents and teachers were supportive. These preferences could be attributed to the fact that most urban parents buy textbooks, pay school fees in time and assist their children in doing their homework tasks. In relation to this, Blum (1998) asserts that work that is done at home offers another dimension because it contributes to a parent's understanding of the child and the school, thereby fulfilling very common wishes of parents with regards to feedback on their children's education.

However, there were also some responses from interviewees from the three urban schools which indicated dislike of homework. Some of these were:

"I dislike homework because it prevents me from watching T.V. and playing games."  
 "I often don't do my homework because ZESA (electricity) will be gone."  
 "The teacher gives us homework once every week but usually doesn't ask for it."  
 "The homework tasks are too difficult for me. So, I hate homework."  
 "Homework is boring because the teacher always gives us exercises in Maths and English only but my favourite subjects are Shona and Content."

It is evident from these responses that there are pockets of pupils in urban schools who find homework uninteresting and a wastage of time for reasons to do with either their school or the home environment.

The statistics discussed above, twelve (12) (40%) of rural, and twenty-four (24) (80%) of urban pupils who find homework crucial, indicate serious lack of appreciation of homework in both rural and urban settings. In the researchers' opinion, these statistics are far too low to be very meaningful in learning, especially at a level as low as G5. These pupils need a high level of supervision and ought to learn to be responsible by working on their own. We understand the attendant challenges associated with the ability by pupils to do such work as discussed elsewhere in this paper.

However, pupils from the two different settings revealed very interesting contrasts in their views on homework. Such a scenario showed that the demerits of homework

tended to outweigh what they perceived as its benefits, particularly in the rural setting. For instance, it is quite evident that the issue of homework is indeed controversial. This is true where homework is often assigned as punishment for correctional purposes, said 40% of the respondents. They said teachers may give homework so that pupils refrain from making noise. Therefore, homework is viewed, in this case, as a worthless exercise because of its lack of bearing on pupils' quest for academic excellence.

While twenty-four (24) (80%) of respondents from the three urban schools alone found homework useful because, "It reinforces what we would have learnt at school" and "gives us more practice alone," a mere twelve (12) (40%) of pupils from rural schools appreciated its worth. The remainder, six (6) 20% from urban and eighteen (18) (60%) from rural schools viewed homework as a wastage of their valuable time for various reasons as previously stated in this section of the study. From the findings from document analysis presented later in this study, the three schools targeted revealed that teachers give homework "but most pupils do not have homework exercise books" and "homework in rural schools is not at all systematically given".

The negative views on homework are further compounded by teachers who sometimes do not mark pupils' homework or when they mark, they gloss over pupils' mistakes. As indicated under document analysis, there is a serious lack of follow-up by teachers. This observation is also made by Tavares (1998) who stresses the negative effects of not marking pupils' homework as this makes pupils "think that the teacher is not responding to their effort." It is clear, therefore, that the teacher remains a central player in all exercises, including those s/he assigns pupils to do alone at home.

The researchers attribute the apparent 'negligence' of duty by teachers (in the situation discussed in the paragraph above) to lack of motivation. This results from the widely accepted poor remuneration and unfavourable working conditions for civil servants. The primary school teacher is already 'overburdened' by teaching ten subjects to very large classes averaging fifty (50) pupils. The same teacher has to plan for and evaluate lessons, mark all sit-in exercises given in addition to organizing and supervising co-curricular activities. Where incentives are given, teachers have often complained in the press and in ordinary, informal conversations that the amount offered is very low (NewsDay, January 27, 2011). The situation is worse in rural schools where teachers come to school when they feel like doing so! Interviews with pupils from rural schools indicated that at the three rural schools visited, teachers have since adopted a 'sit-in' approach and pupils are told to 'keep quiet and read' all day, because there are no incentives. At one school, it was discovered (through informal conversations with teachers) that some teachers get US\$10 per term as incentives! From the researchers' perspective, teachers are aware of the merits of homework but these factors militate against their commitment to duty. The recent

(January, 2011) civil servants' salary increment of 24% was rejected (NewsDay, January 27, 2011). "They (civil servants) rejected the increment and gave the government a seven-day ultimatum to come up with new figures, which they have rejected again" (NewsDay, January 27, 2011). The offer was dismissed by their respective representative organizations as an unsympathetic gesture to their plight. Because of lack of motivation, homework is thus viewed as 'burdensome' and is given to fulfill administrative requirements with few/no pedagogical gains drawn from such.

From the interviews carried out with thirty (30) rural school pupils, it is clear that there are mixed feelings about homework and captured below are some of their responses:

"I like homework but I don't have the homework exercise book because my parents didn't buy."

"I don't have time for homework because I go to the fields after school."

"I hate homework because I don't have exercise books and text books to use at home."

"I dislike homework because if I ask my parents to help me, they say they don't know."

"I can't do homework because there are no candles or paraffin for lighting."

"After school, I go herding cattle to relieve my parents or help in the fields/house."

"I like homework but the exercises are difficult."

The above sentiments show that pupils disliked homework and where they liked it, their ability to do it was adversely affected by, *inter alia*, lack of resources and the inability by their parents to help them.

In this section of the study, the researchers discovered that a higher number of pupils from urban schools (80%) and a very low number of their rural counterparts (40%) viewed homework as valuable. The liking or dislike of homework has been attributed to a number of factors which include resource availability, parental/teacher guidance and the necessary partnership between parents and the school. Unfortunately, such conditions do not favour the rural-school pupil who has to toil in the house/field after school. In the evening, this pupil suffers a double blow of lack of resources (such as lighting) and fatigue due to overworking.

Results discussed under document analysis augment the stifling conditions to which the rural-school pupil is subjected. The presentation now discusses findings from document analysis.

## Results from document analysis

The document analysis which constituted the second research instrument also used to gather data had targeted sixty (60) G5 pupils' homework exercise books (30 from urban and 30 from rural schools). The sixty interviewed pupils were targeted to avail their homework

exercise books. However, due to limitations to do with resource unavailability and a negative view on homework by most rural pupils, this could not materialize.

It has been found out from interviews with G5 pupils that 40% of rural and 80% of urban respondents found homework a worthwhile endeavour. There is no doubt, from these statistics, that G5 pupils in both settings like homework. However, while the targeted thirty (30) homework exercise books from urban schools were available, the researchers found it extremely difficult to access the so-called homework exercise books from the three rural schools. Instead of the targeted thirty (30) exercise books, the researchers managed to access just fifteen (15).

From the three urban schools selected (A, B and C) of three classes each, thirty exercise books were analyzed. The trend which emerged is that pupils are given homework every day of the week in the four major subjects – English Language, Shona, Content and Mathematics. Although homework is given daily to pupils in all the three schools, evidence from document analysis revealed different trends and this could have serious implications on their view on homework.

The ten exercise books analyzed at school A indicate that homework is given to occupy pupils after school. In their English homework exercise books, pupils were given various exercises, prominent among them being lexical items to be worked out using dictionaries. These were given out of context. An interesting scenario was where most of the work in comprehension was left unmarked.

The twenty (20) exercise books from schools B and C show that some comprehensive homework is given. Contrary to the practice in School A, exercises in language items such as verbs and adjectives, showed that work given is written in sentences so that pupils get to understand the meaning of the words through use in contexts. In their homework exercise books, there is space for parents to sign every day to show that they participate in the children's education. This, therefore, shows that teachers and parents alike take homework seriously and appreciate its educational value. This is the necessary link between the school and the home which Farrant (1991) encourages. These exercise books are marked on the following day by pupils with the teacher's guidance. Pupils exchange their books and mark, as work is revised in class. Corrections are done before the next homework is given. In these schools B and C, homework has become an extension of the work done at school, a practice hailed by researchers such as Balassi (1998) and Sutton, cited in Shah (2001).

In relation to this, Good and Brophy (1991) observe that: "If homework is to have instructional value for the class as a whole, it is necessary to set up accountability systems to make sure that it is completed on time, to review it the next day and take corrective action."

Mathematics homework exercises analyzed indicate that both pupils and teachers are serious with their homework exercises. A minimum of ten (10) problem is

given to pupils every time. The same method of marking as discussed above is used. The same obtains in Shona exercises where a variety of items like 'tsumo' (proverbs) and 'madimikira' (idioms) are given. There was no evidence of parents' involvement probably because the Shona subject is undermined for its being the children's first language (L1) in most cases.

However, a few composition and comprehension exercises were given at school A. While some comprehension exercises were marked, composition exercises were not, probably because teachers found them laborious. This situation is different at schools B and C where parents take part even in Shona composition (Rondedzero) writing. In some instances, pupils chose a proverb (tsumo) and wrote a composition based on it. The parent's signature at the bottom of the work reveals that parents/guardians are involved and concerned about their children's education and that they found homework fruitful.

The trend for homework in Content is similar in the three schools. It might be because the subject draws topics from the Bible, Science, Geography, Agriculture, etc. Pupils were asked to fill in blank spaces, to read and make notes though some notes did not make sense, perhaps because pupils lack guidance from the teacher. The researchers suspect that these are some of the pupils who found homework uninteresting in the interviews discussed earlier on in this study. Whilst the notes were not at all marked by the teacher, the simpler blank-space exercises were marked under the teacher's supervision.

The researchers observed that although pupils are given homework and sometimes it is marked under the teacher's supervision, a lot of incorrect sentences were marked correct. Such a phenomenon included sentences like:

"A birds live in a nest."

"A farmer looks are crops."

"A dog lives in a kraal."

This could signify that the teachers do not take the homework exercises as seriously as they do day work (In-class exercises). It is even worse when one considers that these pupils will carry such errors to the next stage because this, in itself, is (negative) reinforcement. This could explain why some pupils do not take homework seriously.

As was found from the interviews, rural and urban schools show some serious discrepancies in their implementation of homework. In the three rural schools observed, pupils are given homework but most pupils do not have homework exercise books contrary to the situation in urban schools where homework exercise books are viewed just as important as the daily work exercise books. Of the targeted thirty (30) homework exercise books, the researchers managed to access only fifteen (15) (50% of the target). Sometimes, pupils wrote on loose paper (material which can be discarded at any

given time), which could leave them without any reference in future. Pupils are not afforded the opportunity to revise work done, an exercise which is indispensable wherever meaningful learning would take place. In one extreme case, one pupil used a piece of cardboard box paper to write homework on! Asked by the researchers why she had written on such, she simply said, "The teacher never asks for it." This serves to confirm that pupils and their parents in the rural areas find homework valueless. It was the researchers' suspicion that such work was given to fulfill administrative requirements. There is no meaningful learning that can take place without the teacher providing the necessary feedback where constructive comments given after marking are as indispensable to the learner as an alpenstock is to a mountain climber. The type of homework given in these schools is meaningless for it does not benefit the child in any way. It is, therefore, viewed as a fruitless exercise

From the fifteen (15) exercise books accessed and analyzed, homework in rural schools is not at all systematically given and where it is, it takes the form of a list of words, say, ten items. Pupils are asked to find their meanings, from nobody knows where. In Shona, they are asked to write 'tsumo' but once a week or sometimes a fortnight. This was not marked thoroughly as there was a big tick at the bottom of the work to show that the teacher had 'seen' the work. However, those who would not have 'done' the work are punished. While the researchers condone 'punishing' pupils if it results in improved performance, it is the educational value of such work which they found questionable. Shoddy work by teachers in rural schools has been attributed to poor remuneration and lower incentives obtaining thereof. This could explain why teachers in rural schools are less concerned about homework, resulting in their pupils finding it of lesser value than their urban counterparts, as discussed under results from interviews with pupils. Apparent similarities can be drawn on implementation of homework between rural and urban primary school in Zimbabwe. Forty percent of rural pupils and eighty percent of urban pupils found homework crucial and an indispensable endeavour in their learning. However, such statistics, in the researchers' view, are far too low to be meaningful at a crucial stage like Grade Five. There is evidence that some attempt in both contexts is made to give homework exercises although most of these exercises were found to be less challenging. There is also evidence that pupils in both situations liked homework and appreciated its worth. Whilst there are challenges for both urban and rural school pupils, the latter, by far, face more challenges like the issue of poorly motivated teachers who get paltry incentives in addition to equally paltry remuneration and an equally unsupportive parentage parenthood which does not provide the requisite resources (material and financial) for their children. In some cases, particularly in urban areas, where pupils were keen on completing set tasks, they met with an indifferent teacher whose marking was either partial or completely unattended to. The

researchers felt that, where constructive feedback is not provided, through meaningful marking, homework exercises were an exercise in futility. The interviews and document analysis were quite revealing in this regard.

In this section (findings of the research) an attempt has been made to discuss and analyze the findings of this study. The overall picture that has emerged indicates that there are diverse views by all the sixty (60) respondents towards homework at Grade 5 level in the six (6) rural and urban schools involved. The reasons for such diversity have also been discussed. Although the majority of all respondents liked homework, there were some who unreservedly revealed their dislike of it.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has revealed that Grade Five pupils' views on homework range from high appreciation of its worth, grudging/mild approval and total rejection. Reasons for their views which can be greatly attributed to resources and the geographical location of the school were as varied as their social statuses could be deduced. The lack of supportive home or school environment among other factors was found by the researchers to have the greatest contribution to pupils' liking and disliking of homework.

In this study, it is clear that demerits of homework outweigh the merits hence the following recommendations. Both parents from rural and urban settings, but more so, those from rural areas, need to be conscientised on the need to be supportive of their children in homework endeavours. They should be actively involved in the learning activities of their children, and develop this practice into a culture. For example, they should provide homework exercise books, and facilitate the completion of the homework task by their children and actually assist them in doing their homework. Parents should also show interest by providing for their children, an enabling environment conducive to doing homework.

The issue of teachers' incentives needs to be harmonized country-wide, as teachers from urban schools were better incentivized than their rural counterparts and showed a more positive attitude towards homework than those from rural areas which in turn influenced their pupils to have a positive attitude towards homework. The government could help by, perhaps, providing a substantive rural allowance to cushion the less motivated rural teacher who has a low, if any, incentive.

Teachers from both urban and rural areas need to take homework seriously by making a follow up to see if it is being done by marking it and giving immediate feedback to pupils before embarking on new content. Teachers should desist from using homework as punishment as this might impact negatively on the pupils.

If such recommendations are implemented, it is the researchers' contention that stakeholders in education would find homework a worthwhile classroom practice.

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