HOMEWORK MANAGEMENT AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS: GENDER AND FAMILY HELP

Fauziah Binti Ahmad

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Statement of Originality

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this dissertation entitled "Homework Management among Primary School Pupils: Gender and Family Help" is my own work.

I certify that the intellectual content of this dissertation is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received and sources used in preparing this dissertation have been properly acknowledged.

08/7/15
(Date submitted)

(Fauziah binti Ahmad)
HOMEWORK MANAGEMENT AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS: GENDER AND FAMILY HELP

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The dissertation entitled **Homework Management among Primary School Pupils: Gender and Family Help** was prepared by Fauziah binti Ahmad and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science (Learning Sciences).

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ABSTRACT

HOMEWORK MANAGEMENT AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS:
GENDER AND FAMILY HELP

FAUZIAH BINTI AHMAD

This study investigated homework management as perceived by primary school pupils and also looked at differences between gender and family help. In this study, a cross-sectional survey was used to gather information from 419 pupils at 20 schools in Serian District, Sarawak. A questionnaire was used to collect data and it was divided into six sections (Demographics and five homework management strategies; Arranging Environment, Managing Time, Focusing Attention, Monitoring Motivation and Controlling Emotion). The data obtained was analyzed using descriptive statistics and independent t-tests. The findings showed that the pupils moderately practiced homework management and the most frequently practiced strategy was Focusing Attention. There were significant differences in Arranging Environment, Managing Time, Focusing Attention and Monitoring Motivation between female and male pupils. Female pupils were working more frequently in practicing all of the mentioned strategies compared to their male schoolmates. There were significant differences in Arranging Environment, Managing Time and Controlling Emotion between those who received family help and those who did not. The results in this study provide beneficial information to parents in helping their children to cope with their homework. For teachers, the findings are useful in enhancing their understanding on the needs of the female and male pupils in doing their homework and thus assist in the design of suitable homework tasks and setting up appropriate time for their pupils to hand them in.
ABSTRAK

PENGURUSAN KERJA RUMAH DI KALANGAN MURID SEKOLAH RENDAH: JANTINA DAN BANTUAN KELUARGA

FAUZIAH BINTI AHMAD

This chapter is divided into nine sections. Section 1.1 is about the background of the study. Section 1.2 discusses the problem statement. Section 1.3 provides the research objectives followed by Section 1.4 which presents the research questions. The next section, Section 1.5 discusses the research framework. Section 1.6 discusses the significance of the study while Section 1.7 gives the definition of terms used in this study. The limitations of the study are discussed in Section 1.8 and finally Section 1.9 summarizes the chapter.

1.1 Background of the Study

Homework is seen as a connection between home and school. Ever since the 1800s, debates on homework have been going on with a mixture of negative and positive appraisals from educators (What research says about the value of homework: Research review, 2007).

Studies on managing homework in the literature review were mostly done from the perspectives of teachers, parents and secondary schools students (Makheran Asaron,
Buerah Tunggak, Khalim Zainal & Jainabee Kassim, 2013; Xu & Corno, 2006; Xu & Wu, 2013). In investigating how homework is handled, some of the variables impacting on its management were identified as affective attitudes, students' interest, learning-oriented reasons, tests scores, family help, teachers' feedback and time spent on homework. Parents' managing of their children's homework has also been identified as a key variable in assisting children towards homework completion in addition to guiding them towards understanding the learned materials. Furthermore, other family members could also contribute towards homework completion and provide guidance (Xu & Wu, 2013).

Xu and Corno (2006) also state that in academic competition, boys tend to give the impression that they can do better than other kids but simply choose not to do things well. However, in the case of homework, girls tend to be more responsible and consistent in producing better work compared to boys (Hong, Wan, & Peng, 2011). Thus, the literature indicated the possibility of some degree of differences between boys' and girls' attitudes toward homework and it raises a question of whether gender might have an effect on other homework related behaviours.

In addition, teachers and parents may have differing views on homework. Teachers assigned homework to pupils with the best intentions; they would revise the learned materials and build good study habit. Parents however tend to argue that their children have less family time because of homework (Queensland Government Department of Education and the Arts, 2004)
In the Malaysian context, *Garis Panduan Pemberian Kerja Rumah Kepada Murid Sekolah* (Ministry of Education, 2004) was circulated to schools. The benefits and teachers’ intentions in providing homework were clearly stated in the circular. However, parents’ wish for their children to take part in other activities such as religious classes and tuitions and their need to have family time should be given due consideration. Therefore, the circular also provided guidance for the three phases of homework provision, namely planning, executing and monitoring. These phases were provided for teachers to strategically assigned homework to pupils which should lead to meaningful learning and indirectly avoid conflict with parents (Ministry of Education, 2004).

Knowing what pupils have to say and how they actually manage their homework such as managing the time and place, control emotions and attention needed for doing homework should be investigated so as to better tackle pupils’ needs and teacher-parents issues. Research on homework management could result in pupils benefiting from doing their homework and realizing that homework is not just synonym with pupils’ life but also as a practice of ‘learning can happen anywhere’.

1.2 **Problem Statement**

Homework is considered as a mean to train pupils on good study habit, time management as well as strengthening their understanding of topics covered in class. Many studies on homework have been done in terms of its effectiveness, stress, management, parental involvements and perceptions of teachers, parents and pupils (Cooper, 1989; Galloway & Pope, 2007; Tsai & Jiang, 2013; Xu & Corno, 2006; Xu & Wu, 2013;). At secondary
school level, homework has been statistically shown to be positively associated with academic achievement while at the primary level the results were trivial (Cooper, 1989).

In Malaysia, there were studies carried out involving parents, teachers and students pertaining to homework perceptions and management (Makheran Asaron et al., 2013; Hazlina, Liza, & Che Noraini, 2014; Sidhu, Chan, & Singh, 2009). However, most of these studies were done in Peninsular Malaysia.

This study aimed to fill the gap in the literature, investigating primary school pupils’ perceptions on homework management. In addition, this study also took place in a Sarawak-based learning environment. Pupils’ homework management was further assessed in terms of gender and family help.

1.3 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study was to find out how primary school pupils managed their homework based on the five features of homework management involving arranging environment, managing time, focusing attention, monitoring motivation and monitoring and controlling emotion.

In addition, this study aimed to determine the effects of gender and family help on homework management.

1.4 Research Questions
The following research questions were derived from the previous research objectives:

Research Question 1:
What were the pupils' perceptions of homework management?

Research Question 2:
What were the effects of gender on overall homework management?

Research Question 3:
What were the effects of family help on homework management?

Research Question 4:
What were the pupils' additional views on homework management?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

The following were the research hypotheses, were based on the Research Questions:

$H_{01}$: There were no significant differences in pupils’ perceptions on homework management based on gender

$H_{01a}$: There were no significant differences in pupils’ perceptions on arranging environment based on gender

$H_{01b}$: There were no significant differences in pupils’ perceptions on managing time based on gender

$H_{01c}$: There were no significant differences in pupils’ perceptions on focusing attention based on gender
H₀₁₀: There were no significant differences in pupils' perceptions on monitoring motivation based on gender

H₀₁₁: There were no significant differences in pupils' perceptions on controlling emotion based on gender

H₀₂₀: There were no significant differences in pupils' perceptions on homework management based on family help

H₀₂₁: There were no significant differences in pupils' perceptions on arranging environment based on family help

H₀₂₂: There were no significant differences in pupils' perceptions on managing time based on family help

H₀₂₃: There were no significant differences in pupils' perceptions on focusing attention based on family help

H₀₂₄: There were no significant differences in pupils' perceptions on monitoring motivation based on family help

H₀₂₅: There were no significant differences in pupils' perceptions on controlling emotion based on family help

1.6 Research Framework

This study was a quantitative study to gain an in-depth understanding of pupils' perceptions on homework management and also to compare primary pupils' homework management based on gender and family help. The main variables of the study are shown in Figure 1.
1.7 Significance of the Study

Homework management is an important issue since through homework, pupils at a tender age are exposed to good study habits and foster them to tackle external distractions which may hinder them from completing their homework.

Gender gap seems to be a major issue in academic world (Kessels & Steinmayr, 2013) and this include how male and female pupils may differ in how they manage their homework. There is a need to link gender to homework management since gender differences could be affected by situational demands, although through sociological perspective, girls had been reported to be better in organizing and putting more effort in completing their homework (Harris, Nixon & Rudduck, 1993; Xu & Corno, 2006). However, a study done by Emsen, Kilic, and Soran (2011) showed that there was no significant difference in secondary school students’ attitudes toward homework based on gender. This shows that in different settings, inconsistencies on gender differences exist for homework management. Thus, findings from this study might reveal if there exist gender differences in homework management for Sarawak learning settings especially among primary school pupils.
Through this study, parents or family members could know which features of homework management needs improvement and more monitoring in helping their children to complete their homework. Findings from this study could also help teachers to understand what hinder pupils from completing their homework, and hence help teachers in designing appropriate tasks for their pupils and specify appropriate time to hand-in their homework.

1.8 Definition of Terms

The terms used in this study were defined based on conceptual and operational definitions as follows.

1.8.1 Arranging environment

Conceptual Definition

Xu and Corno (2006, p. 5) define arranging environment as “students’ effort to arrange their work environment”. Olympia, Sheridan, and Jenson (1994) refer to homework environment issues such as the time and place for students to do their homework. Hence, arranging environment can also be explained as pupils’ effort to arrange where and when it is most comfortable for them to do homework.

Operational Definition

For the purpose of this study, arranging environment was defined as how pupils kept their environment comfortable to complete their homework or their effort to search for a place where they could do homework without distractions.
1.8.2 Controlling emotion

Conceptual Definition

Controlling emotion refers to students’ effort to redirect their emotional response while doing homework (Xu & Corno, 2006). Deslandes and Rousseau (2008) refer to controlling emotion as students’ effort in avoiding negative emotions and managing frustrations while doing their homework.

Operational Definition

In this study, it was defined as students’ effort to keep themselves content, resilient and how much they were willing to seek help from others if the homework was difficult.

1.8.3 Focusing attention

Conditional Definition

Xu and Corno (2006) defined focusing attention as how students differentiate homework-relevant materials from others. According to the Queensland Government Department of Education and the Arts (2004), pupils’ attention in doing homework is the likelihood to focus on reading, writing, revising, investigating and doing project as part of their homework tasks.

Operational Definition

In this study, focusing attention was defined as students’ effort to concentrate on their homework and be able to keep distractions from interfering with the homework process.

1.8.4 Homework

Conditional Definition

Cooper (1989) define homework as students’ assigned tasks by teachers which they have to complete after school hours. According to Hong, Milgram, and Rowell (2004), homework is schoolwork done without teachers’ presence or direct guidance. Pupils have choices of time, place and effort to invest in doing the task.
Operational Definition
For the purpose of this study, homework was defined as schoolwork which pupils have to complete after school hours, related to what they have learned in class.

1.8.5 Managing time

Conditional Definition
According to Xu and Corno (2006, p. 5), managing time means “students’ effort to budget time to meet deadlines”. On the other hand, according to Kackar, Lee, Schmidt, and Grzetich (2011), time management is how long students spend time to do their homework.

Operational Definition
In this study, managing time referred to how pupils prioritise on which homework to be completed first, kept track of their homework and determined appropriate time to complete homework.

1.8.6 Monitoring motivation

Conditional Definition
It is defined as students’ effort to keep their intentions to finish homework (Xu & Wu, 2013). Hong et al. (2004) look at motivation as a unique profile of what influences pupils to comply with teachers’ instructions and eventually get the homework completed.

Operational Definition
For the purpose of this study, it was defined at students’ willingness to complete their homework and how they reassure themselves to be able to complete it even if they find the homework to be very hard.
1.9 Limitations of the Study

Homework management in this study was investigated without specifying a particular subject. Pupils might have different homework management strategies for different subjects as different subjects could have been carried out with different instructional strategies, level of difficulties, task designs and learning objectives.

Parents' levels of education were also not considered in this study. Homework management might be influenced by parents' academic background in terms of motivation, moral support and content knowledge to guide their children in doing homework.

This study was quantitative in nature with an unstructured interview used to investigate further on pupils' perception of homework management. With this technique, it was possible to get off track from getting the desired information from the pupils. There was also the possibility that some questions might not be consistently asked and some information might not be obtained to enable the researcher to answer the research questions.

1.10 Summary

This chapter provided a description of the study which covered the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, research framework, significance of the study and the definition of terms used in this study. It concluded with
the limitations of the study. The following chapter discusses the literature review relevant to research.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter begins with Section 2.1 which provides several definitions of homework, Section 2.2 elaborates the elaboration on homework management and its components, Section 2.3 discusses the importance of homework management while Section 2.4 discusses the perceptions on homework management by pupils'/students', parents and teachers. Section 2.5 highlights gender differences in pupils'/students' perceptions on homework management. Section 2.6 discusses family help and pupils'/students' perceptions of homework management and Section 2.7 gives a summary of the literature review and how it relates to the study.

2.1 Definition of Homework

As part of student life, homework is considered as a mean to measure student progress (Tsai & Jiang, 2013). Cooper (1989) refers to homework as work that should be done after school hours and excludes co-curricular activities from his interpretation of homework. Hong, Peng and Rowell (2009) also supported Cooper's idea and believe homework should be primarily done at home. They further argue that any learning