

Views of Students, Parents, and Teachers on Homework in Elementary School

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Abstract

The current study seeks to examine the perception of the three main populations that have a part in the educational and pedagogic domain: teachers, parents, and elementary school students, while comparing between religious and secular schools. The major hypothesis of the study is that teachers, parents, and students do not have congruent views on the aims and effectiveness of homework. Another hypothesis was that differences would be found between parents' views of homework by religiosity. In addition, a negative association will be found between the teacher's years on the job and attitude towards homework assignment—such that the more years of experience the more negative their attitudes towards homework assignment. Finally, differences will be found in the respondents' views on homework assignment by the school's geographic location. The research findings show that the first hypothesis was partially confirmed. Teachers are the most positive about homework, followed by students and finally parents. The confirmation was only partial, as the hypothesis was that students' views would be the least supportive. The second hypothesis was not confirmed, as no significant differences were found between the views of religious and secular parents on homework. The findings concerning the third hypothesis found a significant negative correlation; such that the more experienced the teacher the more negative his or her attitude to homework, confirming the hypothesis. The conclusions of this study indicate that the homework format is in dispute and there is no consensus on this topic. It appears, at times, that it may be customary to act by force of habit in formal education, as in other areas. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct further research on the subject and to explore whether there is a need for change in the educational world, following the many changes that society has undergone over the years.

Keywords: congruent, effectiveness, elementary school, homework

1. Introduction

Homework is an inseparable part of the contemporary educational environment, a common educational activity in many cultures and varied study levels (Xu & Yuan, 2003). In the past, homework was not done during school hours, rather given to students as an assignment to complete at home in their spare time. When a decision was made to extend the school day, homework was officially integrated in the school curriculum. In other words, at present homework is not necessarily completed at home (Rawson, Stahovich, & Mayer, 2017).

Homework is defined as “all study activities, tasks, and assignments that students perform outside the formal setting of the classroom, normally not in the presence of a teacher. These tasks can be performed within the school environment (in the school library, in a study center, or in class), but to begin with these are tasks that students complete at home, in a time and space of their own choice” (Oshrat et al., 2007). According to Butler (1987), a more universal definition of homework describes it as time that students spend outside the classroom in activities allocated for the training, enhancement, and implementation of knowledge, as well as learning new capabilities involved in independent research (Alanne & Macgregor, 2007).

Epstein (2001) developed a typology that explains the reason for assigning homework. Among the major reasons: practicing skills taught in class, ensuring the student's readiness for the next lesson, encouraging active participation in the discipline studied, developing personal responsibility, study capabilities, maintaining a time frame, self-confidence, and personal sense of achievement. In addition, homework encourages collaborative learning, teamwork, developing positive thinking about studies, communication with parents, and their inclusion in the study process. Public relations too are a reason for allocating homework, and signify the strict standards of the school. Its purpose is to reflect the sincerity of the school and to meet the expectations and policy of the

school district. At times, homework is given as a penalty for bad behavior, but it is important to note that assigning homework as a penalty is normally considered improper (Alanne & Macgregor, 2007).

The rationale of homework is divided into three general aims: the first and most central aim reported by teachers is to enhance students' academic achievements by practicing. The second speaks of improving motivation and self-regulation among students, thus imparting to them capabilities such as personal responsibility. The third aim concerns the establishment of a positive relationship between the school and the home, as homework informs parents of the contents taught at school, promotes communication on school-related subjects, and generates standards and expectations (Trautwein, Niggli, Schnyder, & Ludtke, 2009).

Many studies have discussed the advantages and disadvantages of assigning homework. Some say that homework has immediate benefits for students, such as improving their grades, their performance at school, and their approach to their studies. There are also long-term benefits such as time management and problem solving that will assist students not only at school but further on in life. According to other studies, homework provides extra practice and produces time in which students are involved in studying after school hours. Many believe that homework widens one's horizons, as well as preparing students for life and for dealing with the complexities of a competitive world (Davidovitch, Yavich, & Druckman, 2016).

Others may say that this is a solution that enables the system to cope with a dense curriculum, modifying the pressure and letting teachers teach more material while confident that the students are practicing the contents taught in their free time, an asset mainly for teachers (Alanne & Macgregor, 2007). A common argument is that doing homework reinforces one's self-confidence, creates autonomous learning, and provides an opportunity to practice delaying gratification (Cooper, Steenbergen-Hu, & Dent, 2012). According to the self-definition theory and the social-cognitive theory, the mere fact that homework is the student's exclusive responsibility leads to a rise in motivation and in the student's efforts to complete the tasks, due to a sense of commitment and accountability (Trautwein et al., 2009).

Despite the many advantages of assigning homework and of its positive impact on the student, there are disadvantages to this issue as well. Homework has been found to cause, among other things, physical and mental fatigue, a sense of frustration and anxiety, and no time left for leisure and family activities, causing family conflicts and problems (Alanne & Macgregor, 2007). In addition, homework may lead in a certain respect to a deficient teacher-student relationship, when it is used as a penalty or, alternately, "too much" homework that overburdens the student (Cooper et al., 2012). Teachers tend to begin class with a type of "policing", aimed at checking who completed the assignments and who did not, often causing students to look for reasons to avoid school and sometimes even to develop physical symptoms such as nausea and stomach aches as a result of the anxiety related to not having completed their tasks (Fleischer & Ohel, 1974). The pressure to complete the tasks might lead students to cheat and to copy from their peers, and might even cause parents to do their children's homework for them, cancelling out any practice effect that homework may have (Alanne & Macgregor, 2007). Another no less significant disadvantage is widening the academic gap in class, as not all students have the objective means and conditions to do their homework (for example, a computer at home). These students will not manage to meet teachers' requirements and the gap between those students who have more resources and those who encounter difficulties will only worsen (Fleischer & Ohel, 1974, Regueiro, Suárez, Valle, Núñez, & Rosário, 2015).

Hence, the issue of homework is variegated, and for this reason there are different opinions as to the meaning ascribed to it, mainly belonging to three main figures in the educational process: teachers, parents, and students. In light of the information provided above, the current study will deal with how homework is perceived by these three figures. In addition, the study will examine these differences in a secular school located in a kibbutz in southern Israel and in a religious school located in a town in central Israel. Notably, no extensive research literature was found on the differences between the attitudes of parents, teachers, and students on homework in secular and religious schools, and the current study will attempt to answer this question (Fernández-Alonso, Suárez-Álvarez, & Muñiz, 2014).

Previous findings on this issue indicate that students harbor certain concerns with regard to grading homework by teachers, leading to a sense of tension and worry. These students will probably be inclined to cheat and will try to avoid using deep strategies of cognitive processing. Some students do not like to talk about school with their parents and feel tense when doing their homework with them. Nonetheless, it was found that when a teacher provides positive feedback on assignments and encourages students, the student's attitude to the academic assignments improves and motivation to make an effort and do homework rises (Alanne & Macgregor, 2007).

Some students relate that homework helps them better understand the material taught in class and serves for them as a type of review that summarizes that which was learnt previously (Zu & Yuan, 2003). A study that examined differences between students from an urban school and students from a rural school explored whether the student's achievements and the location of the school affected homework management strategies (such as time management, work environment, coping with distractions, regulating motivation, and control of negative feelings). Students from the urban school were found to report higher self-motivation with regard to homework and learning strategies than students from the rural school. The main reason for this, according to the article, is that students who live in a city are more oriented towards higher academic studies than students who live in the country (Xu, 2009).

Furthermore, parents see supervision of preparing homework as their main responsibility with regard to instilling education and seeing that their children study (Fleischer & Ohel, 1974). Moreover, they believe that homework keeps them abreast of the curriculum and increases their involvement in their children's life, as well as reinforcing parent-school communications (Alanne & Macgregor, 2007). Some parents are of the opinion that when a teacher gives his or her students homework consistently, this shows concern for their studies and indicates an effort on the teacher's part (Xu & Yuan, 2003). Then again, sometimes parents feel that they are not secure enough in their knowledge to help their children with homework, and that they need more direction from the teacher in order to help adequately. Some parents think that homework is given mainly to keep the children busy and has no real significance, and a large proportion have doubts as to the quantity of homework their children receive (Alanne & Macgregor, 2007). This leads to the conclusion that homework might generate negative feelings among parents and students due to the heavy load, as well as harming certain aspects of family life.

Other findings show that teachers, students, and parents all perceive homework as a much more significant tool than merely an assignment given the students by the educational staff, to be carried out after school. Homework is perceived as one of the main indicators attesting to the student's success at school. Students and parents perceive homework as a measure of the quality of the school and teachers, i.e., the more the teacher is persistent about homework, the better the school and the teaching staff. Homework is described by parents and students as a positive activity that helps them stay out of trouble after school. In an interview, a teacher said that in his opinion homework causes students to determine the course of their studies on their own and to manage their time and energy as they see fit (Xu & Yuan, 2003). Elementary school teachers perceive homework as a valuable tool that teaches children self-regulation and time management (Trautwein et al., 2009). From a wide perspective, homework can be said to be a burden for the figures involved in the educational process. The tasks also require the students to invest much time and energy. They sometimes cause failures and arguments, generating a cloud that may overhang the parent-child relationship. Moreover, homework is a burden for the teacher and requires time to prepare and check (Trautwein, Lüdtke, Schnyder, & Niggli, 2006). On the other hand, more positive aspects that contribute to the student both on the personal level and on the academic level are also described above. Among the parents as well, despite the sense of difficulty that frequently emerges, in the long term they usually see that home assignments are to the benefit of the children. Teachers believe that homework has clear consequences that have personal and educational value for the students.

Parents have a not inconsiderable part in the coping and challenges experienced by students at school, and more specifically in the process of preparing homework. Cheung and Pomerantz (2012) demonstrate how when children receive parental direction and guidance they benefit from a "motivation boost" on the academic level. One of the explanations for this contention is that the mere fact that the parents are involved in their children's learning process gives the children high motivation at school, in an attempt to prove to their parents that they are responsible and thus obtain their approval. In fact, it may be said that the children's commitment increases and thus enhances their achievements. In addition, significance is ascribed to the parent's centrality in the child's life. The child's relationship with his or her parents is usually the most basic relationship in life. Therefore, this type of motivation might give the child a feeling of having a meaningful goal and that he or she is contributing to realizing the goals of the major figures in his or her life (the parents). As part of the socialization process, children internalize the parents' goals and begin to see them as a personal value in their independent life, and this transforms the motivation generated by the parent, designated "controlled motivation", to more autonomous motivation controlled by the child and his or her own values (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012).

However, parent involvement in the learning process is a two-edged sword. Yitzhak Friedman, in his article "The school-parents relationship in Israel" (2011) presents the "closed door" approach, which reflects the attitude of principals and teachers to parent involvement in the learning process. This approach claims that teachers and parents have separate roles. Many Israeli teachers report that the damage incurred by parent involvement is

greater than the benefits. The educational staff feels constantly criticized by the parents on professional issues, and sometimes their involvement might cause the teachers to feel that they are losing some of their authority. Fleisher and Ohel (1974) explain that sometimes when preparing homework the parent criticizes the teacher and harms the teacher's authority as perceived by the child. In fact, sometimes parents do not know how to help with the educational process; they did not receive professional training in the study disciplines and are not sufficiently objective towards their children due to personal feelings. As a result, they might damage their children's educational process.

In contrast, the "open door" approach is a complete opposite and claims that many of the basic educational processes occur outside the school (among the family, peers, and neighborhood). The family is a source of motivation, and this fact requires very close contact between the school and the community and family. Notably, the motivation provided by the parent is less significant for elementary school students than for high school students, since elementary school students have motivation and interest in their studies, versus early teens who often lose interest in their studies in favor of other area of their life (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012).

Some findings show that parent involvement reduces pressure on the teachers, provides emotional and mental support, and diminishes their burnout process. A good relationship with the parents raises teachers' self-efficacy. Including the parents in the educational process leads to setting shared goals and modifying the alienation between educational institutions and society (Friedman, 2011). In conclusion, there are two dimensions on this matter – parent involvement arouses heated discussion with regard to the educational process undergone by school children.

As noted here, coping within the school encompasses complicated challenges for all those involved in the learning process. In Israel, one innovative technique devised to handle the educational procedure and increase its efficacy is the New Horizon reform. In 2007, assimilation of this reform began in the schools. Its main focus is changing the employment terms of Israel's teachers, including among other things expanding teachers' work hours and teaching in small groups. Following this change, the teachers receive a significant pay rise. The purpose of teaching in small groups is to strengthen both weaker and stronger students, to encourage the integration of new immigrants, to add enrichment studies, and more. In this way, the teacher can follow the child's progress on a more personal level, establish a personal and compelling relationship with the student, and realize his or her educational initiatives. Furthermore, direct individual teaching can lead to excessive exposure of the teacher versus the student and can be perceived by the teacher as threatening his or her authority and abilities, after previously become accustomed to teaching in a certain manner. This type of teaching requires a great deal of work that might overburden the teacher (Cohen, 2011). Thus, it is possible to conclude that this type of reform affects all those involved in the learning process, by creating motivation and the wish to succeed in a cyclic and reciprocal manner.

Nonetheless, the fact that today, in the era of computerization and media, technology occupies a considerable place in the school and environment and with regard to preparing homework, cannot be disregarded. Sarah Gruper, author of "Technology in the service of pedagogy" (2010), posits that technology does not create a new educational discipline rather enhances the study experience and effectiveness of studies. The internet affords an approach to endless information sources that assist learning and teaching. Visual aids such as presentations and short films facilitate the student's understanding and clearly demonstrate processes that are hard to grasp theoretically. The internet environment increases interest and varies learning for students, as well as helping teachers with technical aspects such as saving and distributing lesson plans, and varying the traditional teaching methods.

An article that explored students' views on use of the internet found that they perceive its use for preparing homework as simple, convenient, and interesting, as well as sharing the student's work burden. When asked about using books and encyclopedias, the students described these as boring and awkward. Nonetheless, when learning for tests and writing papers, students utilize mainly books because they are considered more "serious" than internet sources. In this context, teachers were found to be slightly reserved about preparing homework using the internet, but normally they do not actively object (Kolikant, 2010).

The amazing innovative product called the internet also encompasses difficulties and disadvantages in the form of technical problems in class or at home, dependency on means such as computers, electricity, and internet, the need to become familiar with a new system, etc. For teachers, for instance, the transition from traditional educational methods to innovative education in the form of technology is not always easy. One of the major factors that affect the assimilation of technology at school is the teacher. Studies indicate that the teacher's views, perceptions, abilities, and beliefs concerning the digital environment and the teacher's role in teaching within

this environment, are crucial factors that affect the integration of technology in the school environment. Harris and Hofer (2009, in Peled & Magen-Nagar, 2012) indicate that teachers with positive views have the best command of the digital environment. The better the teacher's command the lower his or her concerns of change (Peled & Magen-Nagar, 2012).

A study that compared novice and experienced teachers in using telecommunications in teaching found that the two groups of teachers expressed interest in using telecommunications, defined it as an intriguing and innovative tool, and were of the opinion that using it enables professional development and raising students' motivation. However, teachers from both groups did not see the added value of peer learning, since it is not possible to know what each of the students contributed and learned (Shamir-Inbal & Kelly, 2007). Hence, it is evident that the teachers' manner of thinking, observation, openness, and practice with regard to teaching methods and in particular to homework are definitely related to the student's increasing effort to succeed and to feel more comfortable when working on assignments, as indicated by the research (Trautwein, Niggli, Schnyder & Ludtke, 2007).

In conclusion, the research literature indicates that the homework domain consists of many varied aspects, including parent involvement in the learning process, technological innovativeness, and the varied opinions of all those who participate in it. For this reason, the current study strives to examine the difference between the views of major figures in the educational process (teachers, parents, and students) with regard to homework in elementary school. In addition, the study shall explore these differences while comparing between a secular and a religious school. In the current study, the main hypothesis is that parents, teachers, and students will have different perceptions of the aims and effectiveness of homework. The study posits that the students will feel that homework is more of a burden than an asset, teachers will perceive homework as a major manner of applying the material studied and as most effective, and parents will express an ambivalent view, i.e., will see both positive and less positive dimensions of homework.

Beyond this general hypothesis, there are three secondary hypotheses that will also be explored: First, differences will be found between the religious and secular population of parents with regard to their attitudes to homework. Second, differences will be found in the views of respondents to homework assignment by school and geographic location. And finally, the teacher's number of years on the job will affect his or her opinion on homework assignments – teachers with more years on the job will display a more negative attitude towards homework assignment.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The research population consisted of three groups: elementary school students (grades 5-6), the students' parents, and the students' teachers. The study was conducted in two different schools, religious and secular, in two different habitats – a town in central Israel and a kibbutz in southern Israel.

The sample included a total of 181 respondents. These included 110 students (55 from the religious school, 55 from the secular school), constituting 60.8% of the total sample, 36 parents (18 from a religious town, 18 from a secular kibbutz) constituting 19.9% of the total sample, and 35 teachers (18 from the religious school, 17 from the secular school), constituting 19.3% of the total sample. Among the teachers, 54.3% were homeroom teachers, 17.1% subject teachers, and 28.6% both. The teachers' number of years on the job ranged from one to 36 years ($M=13.7$, $SD=10.57$).

Age range: 5th-6th grade students (aged 10-12), parents and teachers with an age range of 25-65. An attempt was made to create a balance between respondents from the two populations (the religious school and the secular school).

2.2 Tools

A closed and structured questionnaire was used with the students, parents, and teachers, a different questionnaire for each population. The questionnaire included one closed part with structured questions and a second part with open-ended questions. An informed consent form was employed in the questionnaires distributed to the teachers and parents. An informed consent form of parents/guardians was employed for minors participating in the study.

Since the study included both a closed questionnaire and an open-ended questionnaire, an in-depth analysis was carried out, which resulted in two types of results: quantitative and qualitative.

2.2.1 Quantitative Questionnaires:

- The students' questionnaire comprised 26 statements, with an internal consistency of $\alpha=0.81$.

- The parents' questionnaire comprised 18 statements, with an internal consistency of $\alpha=0.78$.
- The teachers' questionnaire comprised 19 statements, with an internal consistency of $\alpha=0.72$.

2.2.2 Qualitative Research

In this subchapter, various content worlds were constructed based on the respondents' answers to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire.

Among the students, the content worlds formed were: negative feelings about homework, positive feelings about homework, encroachment on free time and vacations, sense of burden and difficulties, and homework as a form of punishment.

Among the parents, the content worlds formed were: helping the child with homework, motivating the child to prepare homework, the parent's degree of involvement, and general comments.

Among the teachers, the content worlds were based on the main ideas in the open-ended questions: how homework is assigned, main subjects in which homework is assigned, coping with not preparing homework, effectiveness of homework, effect of technology, parent involvement, involvement and role of the teacher, reforms in education, and the efficacy of homework.

2.3 Procedure

At first, the researchers visited the elementary schools in each residential area in person. After the students had completed the questionnaire, all copies were collected. Then, in the teachers' lounge, the researchers interviewed mainly the homeroom teachers and subject teachers of the same classes. Interviews with the parents were conducted by telephone or in a personal encounter. The researchers managed to obtain 181 participants who cooperated and completed the questionnaire, however problems were encountered with finding respondents in the parent and teacher population, as explained in the discussion chapter. The research procedure took approximately 3 months.

For data processing, SPSS software was used to analyze statistical data. The initial research hypothesis was examined based on the findings of the qualitative part, the second hypothesis was examined by a t-test for independent samples, the third hypothesis was examined with Pearson's correlation, and the fourth and last hypothesis was examined with a series of t-tests for independent samples.

3. Results

3.1 Quantitative Analysis

For descriptive data of the research variables see Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the research variables (N=181)

Variables	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Original scale
Teachers' attitudes towards homework (n=35)					
General measure	3.39	0.45	2.47	4.58	1-5
Technology measure	2.84	0.33	1	5	1-5
Measure of aims and benefits of homework	3.50	0.14	2.40	4.60	1-5
Measure of disadvantages of homework	3.50	0.29	1	5	1-5
Students' attitudes towards homework (n=11)					
General measure	2.59	0.38	1.68	3.52	1-4
Measure of aims and benefits of homework	2.40	0.15	1.14	3.86	1-4
Parents' attitudes towards homework (n=36)					
General measure	2.34	0.44	1.61	3.39	1-4
Measure of aims and benefits of homework	2.50	0.22	1.25	3.75	1-4
Measure of parent involvement	2.25	0.18	1.50	3.33	1-4

This table shows that, with regard to the general measures, the parents' score was the lowest ($M=2.34$), followed by the mean among the students ($M=2.59$), and the mean among the teachers was the highest ($M=3.39$). It is evident that a homogeneous data distribution was received for the three groups ($SD=0.38-0.45$), namely, the rankings were similar within each group. With regard to the specific measures, it is evident that means located slightly above the relevant scales were received for all the subgroups (parents, teachers, and students), with homogeneous data distributions.

3.1.1 Findings for the Research Hypotheses

The first research hypothesis posited that differences would be found in the perceptions of teachers, parents, and students with regard to homework. Due to the research design, it was not possible to examine the significance of the differences, but Table 1 shows the following trend: teachers’ attitudes were the most positive (M=3.39), followed by students’ attitudes (M=2.59), and finally parents’ (M=2.34). Therefore, the research hypothesis was only partially confirmed – as it was posited that students’ attitudes would be the lowest of all subgroups. Notably, the findings of these hypotheses were analyzed mainly from a qualitative perspective and therefore they can be found in the qualitative results subchapter below.

The second research hypothesis posited that differences would be found between parents in attitudes towards homework by religiosity of the respondents (religious/secular). For this purpose, a t-test for independent samples was held. The findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations of attitudes towards assigning homework by religiosity, among the parents (N=36)

	Religious		Secular		t ₍₃₄₎	p	Cohen’s d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Parents’ attitudes towards homework assignment	2.26	0.34	2.43	0.52	-1.15	n.s	

This table shows that no significant differences were found in attitudes towards homework between religious and secular parents (t₍₃₄₎=-1.15, n.s). Therefore, the second research hypothesis was not confirmed.

The third research hypothesis posited that a negative correlation would be found between the teachers’ number of years on the job and their attitude towards homework assignment – such that the more years on the job, the more negative would be the attitude reported. In order to examine this hypothesis, a Pearson’s correlation was held. Compatible with the hypothesis, the findings showed a significant negative correlation with medium power (r=-.381, p<.05), such that the more years on the job the more negative the teacher’s attitude towards homework (see Figure 1).

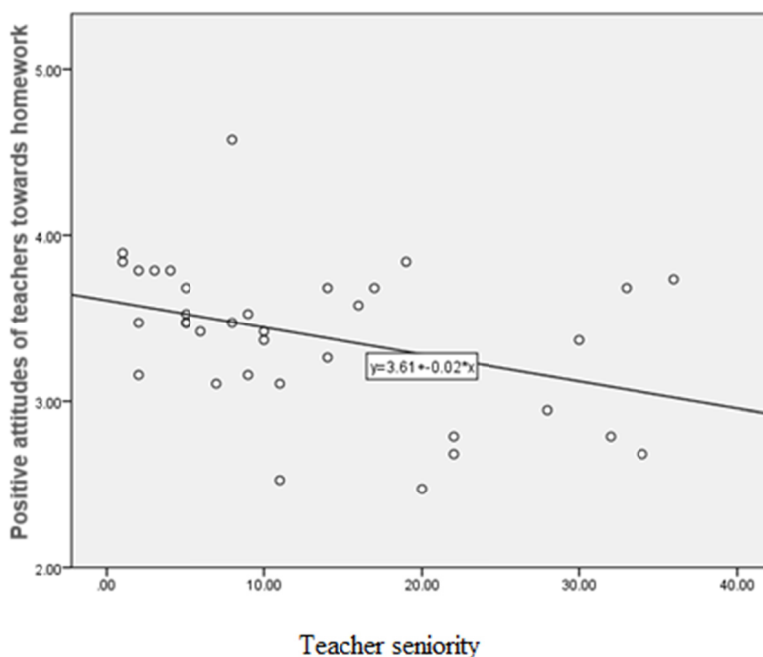


Figure 1. Linear correlation between the teacher’s number of years on the job and attitude towards assigning homework

The fourth research hypothesis posited that differences would be found in respondents’ attitudes to homework assignment, by the school’s geographic location. In order to examine this hypothesis, a series of t-tests for

independent samples was held. For the findings see Table 3.

Table 3. Means and standards deviations of attitudes towards assigning homework by place of residence/school (N=35)

	Religious school (N=18)		Secular school (n=17)		t	p	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	M	SD	M	SD			
Parents' attitudes towards homework assignment	2.26	0.35	2.43	0.52	1.15 ¹	n.s	-0.39
Teachers' attitudes towards homework assignment	3.58	0.39	3.19	0.43	-2.76 ²	<.001	0.95
Students' attitudes towards homework assignment	2.51	0.38	2.67	0.36	2.26 ³	<.05	-0.43

¹df=34; ²df=32.17; ³df=107.6

This table shows that significant differences were found in teachers' attitudes towards homework ($t_{(32.17)}=-2.76$, $p<.001$), such that those teaching at the religious school ($M=3.58$, $SD=0.39$) were found to have more positive attitudes towards homework than those teaching at the secular school ($M=3.19$, $SD=0.43$). This finding has a strong effect size (Cohen's $d=0.95$). Moreover, significant differences were found in attitudes towards homework among students ($t_{(107.6)}=2.26$, $p<.05$), such that those studying at the religious school ($M=2.51$, $SD=0.38$) were found to have more negative attitudes towards homework than students at the secular school ($M=2.67$, $SD=0.36$). This finding has a medium effect size (Cohen's $d=0.43$). No significant differences were found between parents' attitudes towards homework assignment ($t_{(34)}=1.15$, n.s). Hence, in light of all the above, it is possible to see that the fourth research hypothesis was partially confirmed (see Figure 2).

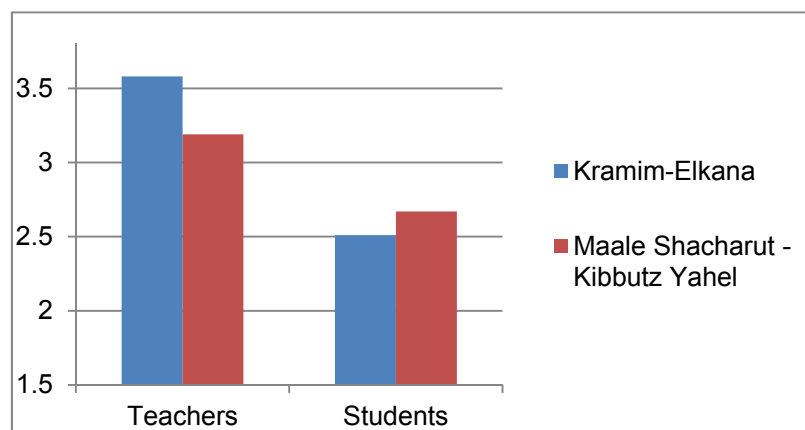


Figure 2. Differences in positive attitudes towards homework assignment, by school

3.2 Results—Qualitative Analysis

The purpose of the open-ended part of the questionnaires was to expand understanding of the research topic by turning attention to the experiential-subjective perceptions of the respondents. The questions posed to the interviewees were intended to examine their personal perceptions of the significance and aims of homework, in various different contexts to be presented below. Three different questionnaires were administered to three different populations: parents, teachers, and students, divided by two area of residence: a religious school in the town of Elkana and a secular school in Kibbutz Yahel, in order to form a comparison between a secular school and a religious school. Due to the fact that the research design included an independent variable on three levels – i.e., the type of population: parents, teachers, and students - content analysis of the interviews generated a large number of themes.

Analysis of the qualitative findings included collecting the respondents' answers to the open-ended questions, followed by categorization and classification of those answers that had similar general content and that served to focus the findings. Finally, frequencies were calculated for each population and its findings.

3.2.1 Population of Students

The open-ended part of the students' questionnaire was presented at the end of the closed questionnaire as a

rubric in which they could share their opinions on homework. In the first stage, the main issues that arose in the responses were identified and categorized and in the second stage the frequencies of the students' responses were checked. Table 4 presents the categories raised by the students in the open-ended part – "I have something else to say about homework".

Table 4. The categories raised by the students in the open-ended part of the questionnaire

Category	Quotes from students at the religious school	Quotes from students at the secular school
<i>Negative feelings about homework</i>	<p>"There is no need for that annoying thing – homework." (Respondent 103)</p> <p>"Boring and unnecessary" (Respondent 94)</p>	<p>"I hate homework, and would prefer that there was none!!!" (Respondent 25)</p> <p>"I think that it's unnecessary and there is no need for homework" (Respondent 53)</p>
<i>Positive feelings about homework</i>		<p>"I really like homework" (Respondent 12)</p> <p>"Homework is always something good" (Respondent 9)</p> <p>"Homework teaches a lot" (Respondent 1)</p>
<i>Encroachment on free time and vacations</i>	<p>"(HW) is worth nothing and comes at the expense of the time we have to enjoy ourselves" (Respondent 101)</p> <p>"It's extremely annoying, simply a waste of time at home after school..." (Respondent 88)</p> <p>"In my opinion the teachers shouldn't burden us with homework on vacations, because then we spend all our time on homework" (Respondent 65)</p>	<p>"I think that it is preferable to add school hours (long days) instead of homework. I think that when we're at home we can afford to forget about school for the moment and separate home from school" (Respondent 34)</p> <p>"I don't like to do homework, because it takes lots of my free time and time for playing at home" (Respondent 6)</p>
<i>Sense of burden and difficulties</i>	<p>"Sometimes HW is excessive, when they assign worksheets they're very long in math and bible" (Respondent 73)</p> <p>"We're given too much homework" (Respondent 105)</p>	<p>"Homework are an important part of my learning process, but there is often no balance and then there are periods when no homework is assigned and others in which we are overburdened with lots of homework" (Respondent 38)</p> <p>"We are constantly given homework" (Respondent 41)</p>
<i>Homework as a form of punishment</i>	<p>"Sometimes there are students in class who don't do their homework and then the entire class is punished" (Respondent 59)</p>	<p>"Sometimes certain students get more homework because they were disorderly, and it's not fair" (Respondent 49)</p>

Figure 3, below, is comprised of two parts. Each part represents a different school and residential area. In the secular school, 29 students (52.7%) answered the open-ended part of the questionnaire, and in the religious school 33 students answered the open-ended part of the questionnaire (60%). The figure indicates the frequencies of notable categories presented in Table 4. The proportions reflect the number of times each category was mentioned.

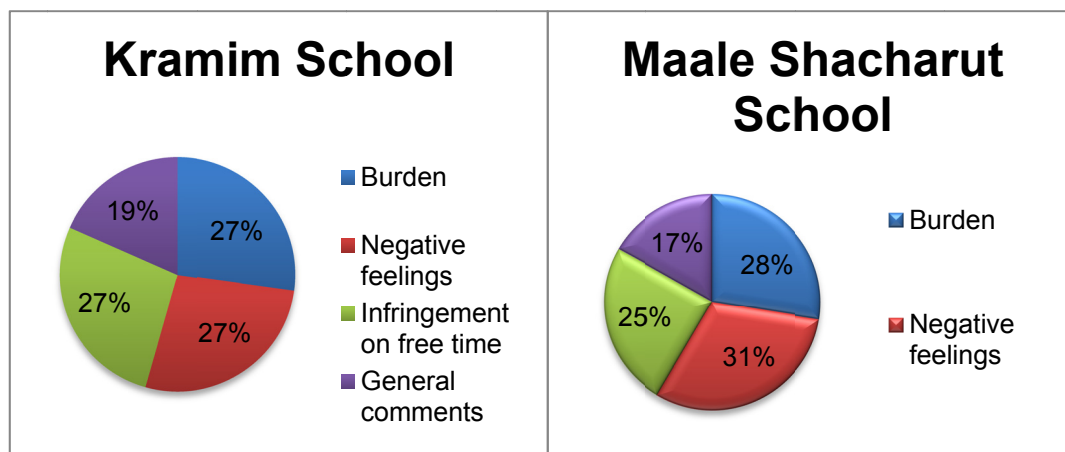


Figure 3. Frequencies of categories raised by student

These data indicate five main categories that reflect the opinions and feelings of students with regard to homework. In both schools there were many negative feelings, such as boredom with homework, nervousness, agreement that homework is unnecessary and unimportant, and more. Homework is often perceived by the students as a burden and a waste of time. Moreover, students in both schools agree that homework encroaches on their free time after school (time for playing with friends, quality time with parents, etc.). In both schools it was evident that homework is also used as a form of punishment. There is a difference between the schools in the category of positive feelings about homework, with students from the religious school expressing no positive feelings at all, while students at the secular school shared perceived benefits of homework.

3.2.2 Population of Parents

For this population, the qualitative analysis was performed as follows: In the first stage, as for all respondents, the answers of respondents who replied to the open-ended questions were gathered. In the second stage, main categories were identified based on the open-ended questions. Finally, the frequencies of the parents' responses were examined. The open-ended part of the questionnaire took the form of a personal interview that included 3 open-ended questions and an option of comments. Table 5 below presents the categories related to the responses of the students' parents:

Table 5. The categories related to the responses of the students' parents

Category	Quotes from parents of students at the religious school	Quotes from parents of students at the secular school
<i>Helping the child with homework</i>	<p>"Very little, I believe that homework is for the student and not for the parents" (Respondent 149)</p> <p>"An hour and a half a day" (Respondent 157)</p> <p>"Fifteen minutes a day" (Respondent 156)</p>	<p>"A few minutes if at all" (Respondent 174)</p> <p>"Twenty to thirty minutes a day" (Respondent 170)</p> <p>"One hour" (Respondent 173)</p>
<i>Motivating the child to do homework</i>	<p>"Yes, homework is mandatory – that's just the way it is" (Respondent 154)</p> <p>"I don't urge my child, he's responsible for it" (Respondent 150)</p> <p>"Encouragement, support, explaining the significance, quality time together, sense of humor" (Respondent 153)</p>	<p>"Definitely urge him. It is important that he not fall behind in the material studied and review the material. I try to sit with him and explain things he does not understand" (Respondent 182)</p> <p>"Apply slight pressure (on the children) that the responsibility is their's and that they will have to cope with the consequences at school if they do not do it (homework)" (Respondent 165)</p> <p>"Ask if there is any (homework), but no more than that" (Respondent 171)</p>
<i>Involvement of the parent, influence and agreement with the material studied</i>	<p>"I am not involved and I don't try to intervene... my daughter is herself critical" (Respondent 152)</p> <p>"I am involved and I agree with the material studied" (Respondent 158)</p>	<p>"We are involved. We receive (information) once every two weeks from the homeroom teacher and the children – they summarize the studied material in school and are very happy" (Respondent 168)</p> <p>"I am only involved when the teacher asks me to be" (Respondent 165)</p>
<i>General comments</i>	<p>"HW is important for expanding knowledge and learning of papers submitted, reviewing the material" (Respondent 155)</p> <p>"In my opinion there is not enough HW and it is a pity and it is certainly necessary in order to develop independent learning beyond that studied in class. And it hardly happens" (Respondent 151)</p>	<p>"In my opinion learning should occur only at school" (Respondent 179)</p> <p>"I don't think that doing HW is essential or necessary at my children's young age. It only applies pressure and makes her feel less valued when she doesn't manage to do it" (Respondent 167)</p>

Figure 4 below is comprised of two parts. Each part represents a different residential area. Ninety five percent of parents at a secular school on a kibbutz and 77.8% of parents at a religious school in a town answered the open-ended part of the questionnaire. The figure indicates the frequencies of notable categories presented in Table 5. The percentages reflect the number of times each category was mentioned.

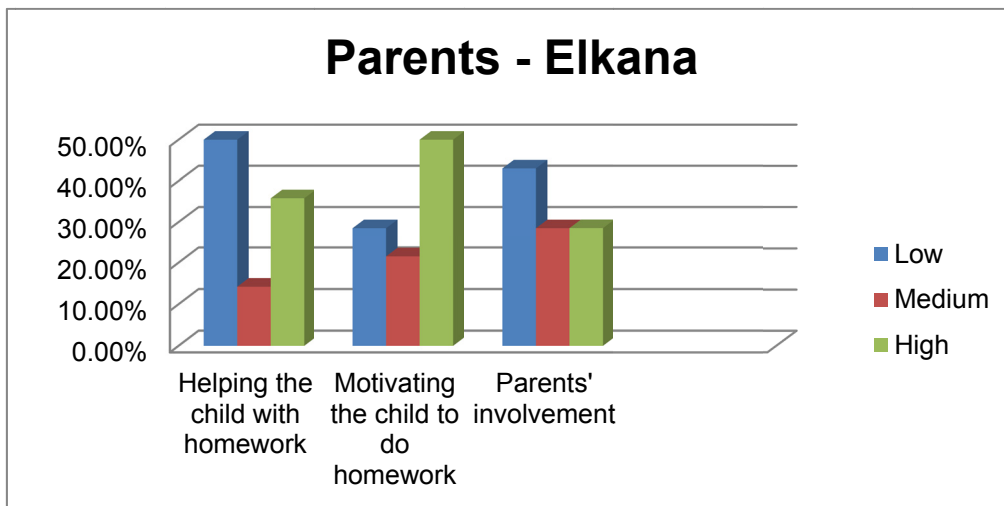


Figure 4. Frequencies of categories generated by responses of students' parents - Elkana

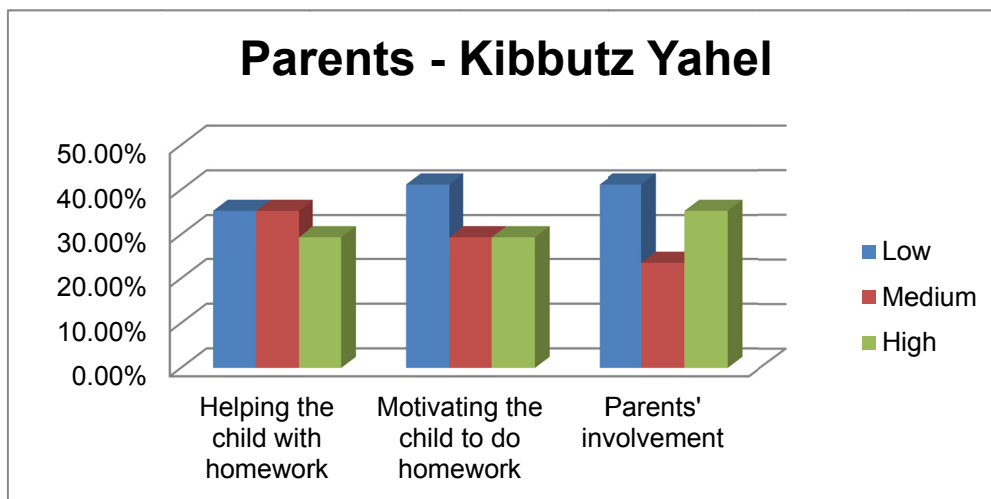


Figure 5. Frequencies of categories generated by responses of students' parents – Kibbutz Yahel

The above data indicate four categories that reflect the parents' opinion on homework. With regard to the time invested in preparing homework with the child, it seems that quite similarly in both residential areas, some parents invest no time at all and give their children the message that it is their own responsibility, while other parents invest a great deal of time in preparing homework with their children and see it as a shared task. In the category of "motivating the child to do homework" as well, there are heterogeneous answers and there is no overarching trend in a certain direction. Some parents urge their children to work hard in various creative ways, while others do not stress this at all. In the third category, it is clear that most parents (in both populations) have no influence and control over the material studied, some are more involved in the contents of the education provided and some less, and most agree with the material studied. The general comments show that parents of students at the religious school perceive homework as an important and essential condition and a substantial part of the learning process. Parents of the students at the secular school, in contrast, feel that homework should be done in school, is not very essential, and even causes at times negative feelings among the students. Furthermore, the figure indicates a general trend showing that the parents at the religious school display more involvement than at the secular school, which is compatible with the findings of the general comments stated above.

3.2.3 Population of Teachers

For this population, the qualitative analysis was similar to that of the parents' responses. In the first stage, as for all respondents, the answers of respondents who replied to the open-ended questions were gathered. In the second stage, main categories based on the open-ended questions were identified. Finally, the frequencies of the

teachers' responses were examined. The open-ended part of the questionnaire took the form of a personal interview that consisted of 9 open-ended questions and an option for comments. The following is Table 6, which presents the categories and the sample statements, quoting the population of teachers.

Table 6. The categories and the sample statements, quoting the population of teachers

Category	Quotes from teachers at the religious school	Quotes from teachers at the secular school
<i>Way of assigning the homework</i>	<p>“Varied – computer, workbook, notebook. Assigned in person” (Respondent 118)</p> <p>“Different ways, they usually involve a workbook and a notebook. There are also assignments using electronic media” (Respondent 115)</p>	<p>“...I give assignments on the computer or in the textbook. Explanations are given in person” (Respondent 137)</p> <p>“(HW) is given in a workbook and in a notebook, in person” (Respondent 139)</p>
<i>Main area in which homework is assigned</i>	<p>“Core subjects: math, English, language, and Bible” (Respondent 127)</p> <p>“Religious subjects, math, English” (Respondent 111)</p>	<p>“Math, English, written comprehension” (Respondent 132)</p>
<i>Checking and coping with students who did not do their homework</i>	<p>“You check, you inform the parents. Sometimes punishments – detention or copying out a certain chapter” (Respondent 122)</p> <p>“...Usually you check. You give a possibility of completing. If it is repetitive – the parents are involved” (Respondent 117)</p>	<p>“If homework is assigned, you must devote time to checking it. A student who does not fulfill the assignment shall have to complete it by the next lesson” (Respondent 137)</p> <p>“I always check homework, if I would not check I would not assign. Anyone who does not complete the homework remains for extra hours to complete it and the parents are updated” (Respondent 138)</p>
<i>The effectiveness of the homework</i>	<p>“Homework is mainly intended to reinforce learning habits and to review. Some subjects are beneficial and some less” (Respondent 124)</p> <p>“Less beneficial, there are innovative methods, for example research papers” (Respondent 116)</p>	<p>“Homework also helps the children revise, particularly those who struggle. In addition, it gets the parents involved...” (Respondent 129)</p> <p>“Homework has almost no benefits. If there is a project you can give homework but the best learning is performed in class” (Respondent 139)</p>
<i>Effect of technology</i>	<p>“At first the children were enthusiastic about doing homework online, but now it's already less challenging because it's more common” (Respondent 127)</p> <p>“The children like to do it on the computer – progress leads to enjoyment. Less routine...” (Respondent 122)</p>	<p>“...I am adamantly opposed to a class Whatsapp group – I update my students in class and the parents by e-mail” (Respondent 129)</p> <p>“There is an impact, the computer and the Hevruta make the students learn and do more” (Respondent 135)</p>
<i>Parent involvement in academic aspects</i>	<p>“The parents are involved, in my opinion too much” (Respondent 118)</p> <p>“The parents intervene, each case is different. Some are too involved and some should be more involved” (Respondent 124)</p>	<p>“Intervention is necessary. In my class there is intervention if the parent has any difficulty he contacts me by telephone” (Respondent 132)</p> <p>“There is no parent intervention and in my opinion that is as it should be” (Respondent 136)</p>
<i>Involvement and the teacher's role – who is responsible for helping a student who encounters difficulties?</i>	<p>“It is necessary to work together: child, parent, and teacher” (Respondent 127)</p> <p>“It is the parents' responsibility. The teacher can't reach every student with difficulties. Even due to the number of students. It is possible to provide support to several students” (Respondent 122)</p> <p>“It is the teacher's responsibility, but it is also necessary to include the parents and ask for their involvement”</p>	<p>“It is the teacher's responsibility to teach and to help the student overcome the difficulties and provide him with appropriate tools and strategies” (Respondent 132)</p> <p>“It is obviously the teacher's responsibility to explain and to improve the student's achievements” (Respondent 136)</p>

<i>Reform in education – Ofek Hadash</i>	<p>“The program exists and enables students who are interested in doing so to complete their homework” (Respondent 111)</p> <p>“In our school the individual hours are not intended for completing homework” (Respondent 126)</p>	<p>“There is the Ofek Hadash program, its purpose is to close academic gaps, to support, and to nurture. I see no reason to do homework in these hours” (Respondent 137)</p> <p>“We have the Ofek Hadash, and I allow the possibility of completing homework” (Respondent 132)</p>
<i>Aims and efficacy of homework</i>	<p>“Important – promotes review and helps advance” (Respondent 121)</p> <p>“The aims of homework have not changed, homework is important. The child reviews his studies. Not to overload but to assign” (Respondent 122)</p>	<p>“Regretfully, I see no change in the aims of homework. Teachers still use it as a means of completing study material that they did not complete in class” (Respondent 137)</p> <p>“There is definitely a change - for the good. In my opinion children should not always be assigned homework – only in specific cases” (Respondent 139)</p>

Figures 5-10 below present the frequencies of the most notable categories presented in Table 6. The percentages reflect the number of times each category was mentioned. At the secular school 17 teachers participated, of whom 10 answered the open-ended part of the questionnaire (58.8%). At the religious school 18 teachers participated, of whom 14 answered the open-ended part of the questionnaire (77.8%).

Figures 6-11: The frequencies of the most notable categories presented in Table 6.

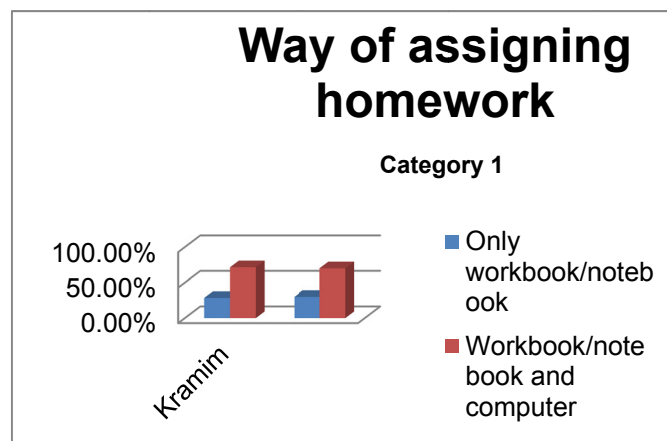


Figure 6. Frequencies of categories–main subjects

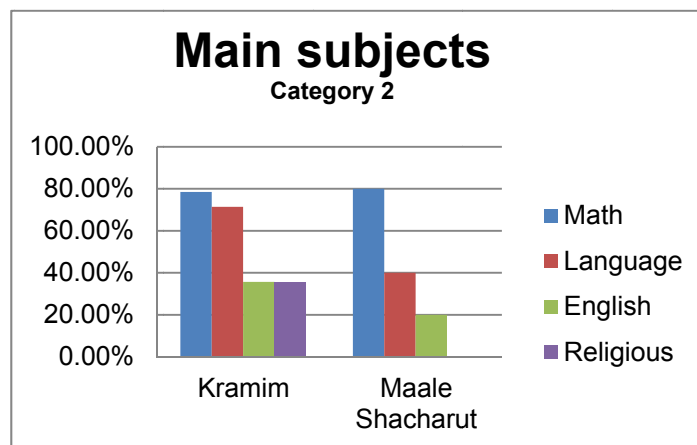


Figure 7. Frequencies of categories–way of assigning homework

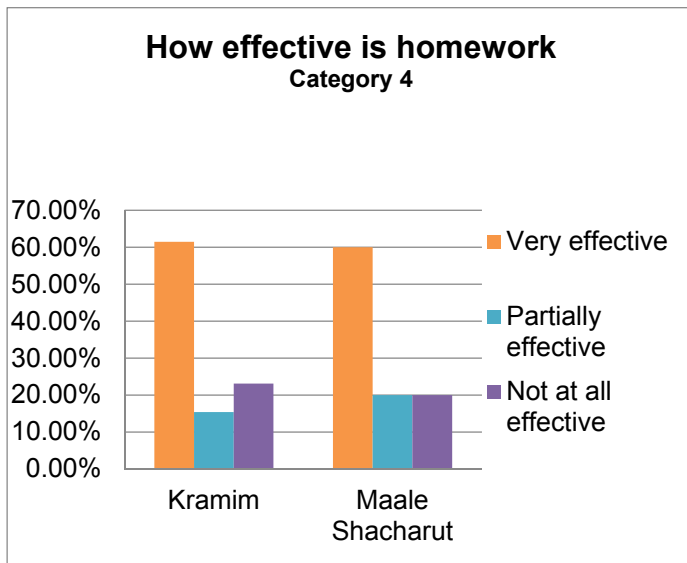


Figure 8. Frequencies of categories–homework preparing

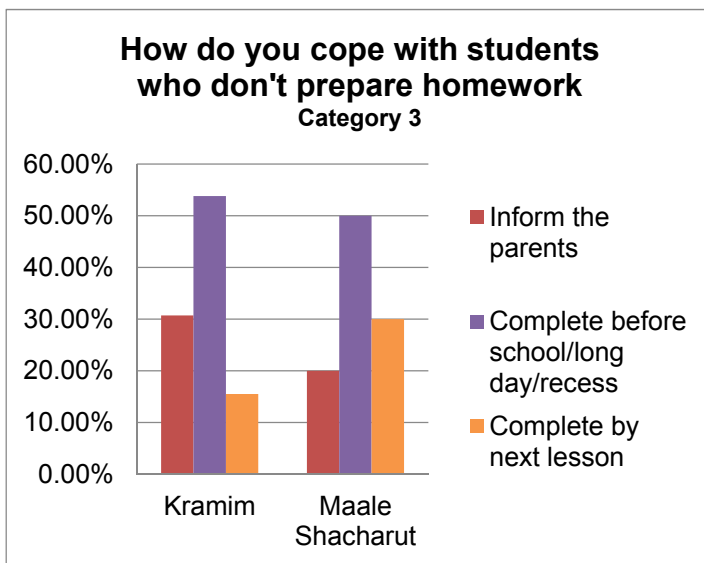


Figure 9. Frequencies of categories–homework effectiveness

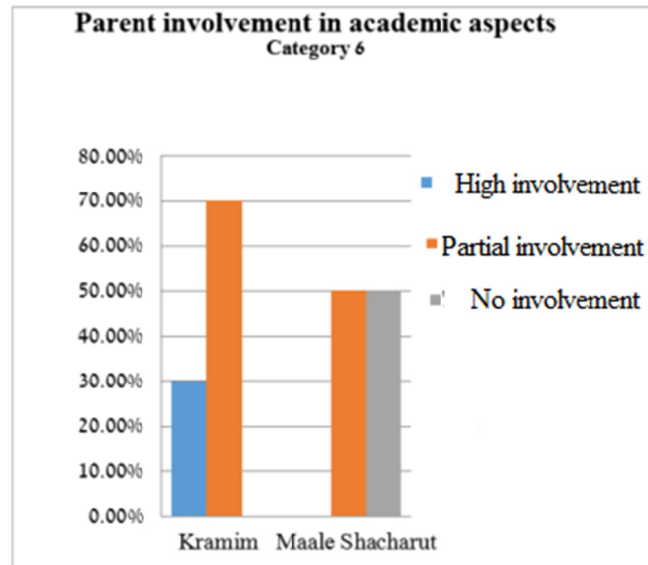


Figure 10. Parent's involvement

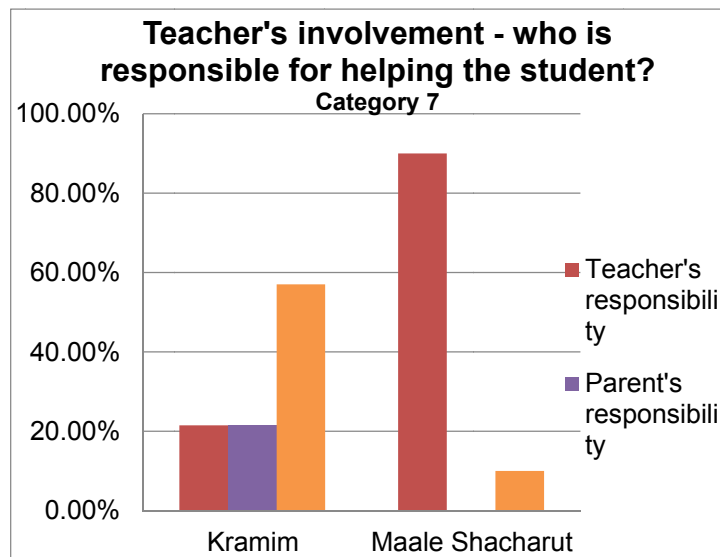


Figure 11. Teacher's involvement

The data cited above generated nine categories (in Table 6), from which it is possible to learn about the feelings of the teachers, while comparing between the schools.

In the first category, where they were asked about how homework is given, there is a great similarity between the schools. According to the reports, homework is usually assigned in varied ways, using a workbook, a notebook, and assignments on the computer.

In the second category, which presents the main areas in which homework is assigned, there is a similarity between the groups. Most of the homework is in the subjects of: math, language (or Hebrew), and English. A difference between the schools in this category was assigning homework in Bible (or religious studies) at the religious school, reinforcing its characterization as a religious school.

The third category presents the teachers' reports on checking homework and dealing with students who do not do their homework. Most of the teachers, in both schools, indeed check whether the students have completed their assignments. With regard to dealing with non-compliance, various penalties are usually employed – including a conversation with the parents, detention after school, a reprimand, etc.

The fourth category examined the effectiveness of homework as perceived by the teachers and, in general, it appears that the teachers perceive homework as an important aspect, both with regard to reviewing and learning the material and with regard to supporting the student and including the parents in the study process after school. The fifth category referred to the query whether technology influences the academic process – Most of the teachers at the religious school were in favor of technology, claiming that doing homework on the computer is enjoyable and increases the students' motivation. In contrast, in the secular school the responses were more diverse, some of the teachers felt that technology has no contribution and others felt that there is more compliance with preparing homework when the assignment employs electronic means.

The sixth category examined the topic of parent involvement in the academic aspect. It appears that at the religious school the feelings were uniform – there is a certain involvement of the parents and there is an emphasis on the need for involvement, but there must also be a certain balance, namely the involvement should not be too extreme. At the secular school the reports were not uniform – some claimed that parent involvement is important, and others that it is completely unnecessary and the parents are responsible for the educational aspect alone. In this category an interesting finding manifested in the figures was that in the religious school the teachers encourage and think that parent involvement is necessary while at the secular school the large majority of teachers do not think that there is an essential need for parent involvement in the academic field.

The seventh category, which refers to opinions on the teacher's responsibility for students who need extra support, shows that in the secular school there was a relatively firm opinion concerning the fact that the teacher is the student's main conspicuous aide, unlike in the religious school, where a division was evident between the teacher, the parent, and the cooperation between them.

The eighth category refers to the Ofek Hadash reform and indicated that the program operates in both schools and in both the main aim is not to do homework rather to provide students with extra and individual teaching.

The ninth and final category speaks of the aims and efficacy of homework in a more general way, and indicates that in both schools similarly there are those who think that homework is very beneficial and it promotes review and learning, and of course also those who think that homework is only a way for the teacher to complete material that he did not reach in class.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

In the professional literature, homework and its aims have been studied extensively from many different perspectives. The purpose of the current study was to examine the main idea of homework and how it is perceived by 3 main populations: parents, teachers, and students, when these populations come from two different schools: a religious school and a secular school. The findings concerning the main hypothesis of our study are manifested particularly in the qualitative results part, to which several more specific hypotheses are added and their findings presented in the quantitative results part.

According to the findings of the qualitative part, the first and main hypothesis that teachers, parents, and students will not have congruent views of the aims of homework was confirmed. In other words, they have different perceptions of homework and all its various aspects.

- A. The hypothesis was that teachers would perceive homework as a major way of implementing the study material and as very effective. This secondary hypothesis was partially confirmed. Some teachers perceived homework as a way of reviewing, studying, and revising the material and in their opinion this is an essential part of the learning process. In contrast, other teachers thought that today there are more innovative ways of learning and reviewing the material and homework does not have to be the major and only way of learning. These two opinions represent the difference between teachers from the different schools: Teachers from the religious school strongly believe in assigning homework and in its significance, versus teachers from the school school who believe that there are many different ways of learning aside from assigning homework, and that learning should take place in the classroom and not during students' leisure time. This finding is not compatible with the research literature, as in most of the studies in the literature review the teachers mostly displayed positive attitudes towards homework (Xu & Yuan, 2003), and if there were any "complaints" these referred to the burden created by the need to check homework rather than to criticism of ways of learning and review of the material.
- B. The study hypothesized that parents would be ambivalent on the issue of homework, i.e., would see both positive and less positive aspects of this topic. Accordingly, it may be seen that some parents invest time and urge their child to prepare their homework, but say that in their opinion homework is not a significant

need. Similarly but contrarily, it is evident that some parents invest time and do not urge their child, but think that homework is meaningful and should be emphasized. Compatible with the research literature, it seems that on one hand parents believe that homework indicates the student's success at school and this is the reason for its great significance (Xu & Yuan, 2003), but at the same time many parents feel that homework is given mainly to keep the children busy with no real significance, and a large proportion have queries as to the quantity of homework assigned to their children (Alanne & Macgregor, 2007). A conspicuous difference observed between the various residential areas is that in the religious school in the town of Elkana homework is perceived by the parents as a meaningful part of their children's learning process, while in the secular school in Kibbutz Yahel homework is perceived as more marginal.

- C. The study hypothesized that the students would feel that homework is more of a burden than an asset, and accordingly, in both schools, feelings of burden, nervousness, and encroachment on one's spare time, were described. These results are compatible with a study from 2007, which found that homework causes students feelings of frustration and anxiety, physical and mental fatigue, and taking time from leisure and family activities (Alanne & Macgregor, 2007). When comparing students from the two schools, students from the religious school expressed no positive feelings at all towards homework, while students from the secular school shared perceived advantages of homework. This leads to the conclusion that these students manage to see the full picture and maybe have a slightly more mature view, and so simultaneously grasp both the advantages and disadvantages of homework. This finding is compatible with the findings of Xu and Yan (2003), which present students' positive attitudes towards homework, claiming that these help them better understand the study material and serve as another summarizing review of the material.

This hypothesis can also be explained in statistical terms that appeared in the quantitative part. The findings show that the teachers' attitude is the most positive, followed by the students' attitude, and finally the parents' attitudes. Thus, it is possible to see that there are indeed differences between the groups but the research hypothesis was nonetheless only partially confirmed, as it posited that the students' attitudes would be the lowest of all the subgroups.

Hence, there is an essential difference between the perceptions of parents, teachers, and students on homework. Each group relates to the topic from its own personal perspective, leading to the differences. One possible explanation is that teachers see homework assignment from a professional point of view, while students and parents report their feelings from a more personal point of view. The differences between the age and period of life of each group of respondents also explain the difference: Students are at the beginning of adolescence, when the peer group is at the center of their attention and they are naturally less interested in homework and studies and therefore often perceive school as more oppressive than constructive. The parents express an ambivalent attitude because on the one hand they want to share and be close to their children's feelings, but on the other they see the educational and academic process from a mature and experienced point of view and understand its significance. The teachers' perspective derives from a more professional place and therefore they are often in favor of assigning homework but also offer alternatives for improving the study process. Another conspicuous explanation is the residential area and religiosity of each group, which can certainly explain the difference between the groups. Education and the academic atmosphere may be said to affect the perceptions of each group of respondents by virtue of their differences, and this is further explained below under the secondary hypothesis in the quantitative part.

4.1 Findings of the Quantitative Research

The second hypothesis posited that differences would be found in the respondents' attitudes by school and residential area with regard to assigning homework, such that at the secular school the attitude towards homework would be more negative than at the religious school.

- A. Among the teachers: Teachers at the religious school were found to have more positive attitudes towards homework than teachers at the secular school. This finding confirms the research hypothesis.
- B. Among the students: Students at the religious school have more negative attitudes towards homework than students at the secular school. This finding contradicts the research hypothesis.

This shows that the above research hypothesis was partially confirmed. A study conducted with students on this topic shows that students from an urban school reported higher self-motivation in all aspects related to learning strategies and homework than students from a rural school. The main reason, according to the study, is that students raised in the city are more oriented towards higher education in academia than students raised in the country (Xu, 2009). In the current study, unlike the previous findings, it was the students who live in a town in central Israel, with a spirit more closely affiliated with urban conduct than in the kibbutz, who expressed more

negative attitudes. A possible explanation is that the typical atmosphere in an Israeli kibbutz is usually more free and open, leading to the conclusion that the atmosphere at school and at home is the same, and therefore there is less sense of pressure than a place with an urban atmosphere. Furthermore, the findings of the qualitative research showed that parent involvement in the secular school is very low compared to the religious school, and as a result students in the secular school may feel less pressure from their parents and feel that the attitude to homework is less restrictive and up to them.

4.2 Additional findings

The third hypothesis posited that the teacher's number of years on the job would affect his or her opinion on assigning homework. The research hypothesis was that teachers with more years on the job would have a more negative attitude to assigning homework, and this hypothesis was confirmed. This hypothesis is considered a general hypothesis, since no research literature was found to refer to the comparison between teachers with more years on the job and novice teachers with regard to assigning homework. The answer to this finding may be located in teachers' perceived burnout. Namely, due to the fact that teachers feel fatigue and a heavy burden that accumulate over the years, and homework takes time and energy, therefore they ascribe mainly negative feelings to these assignments.

4.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This study uncovered several limitations that might affect its results. First, the manner in which the questionnaires administered to the respondents were worded precluded varied statistical analysis and limited the researchers' ability to examine differences between the groups. As a result, an in-depth qualitative analysis was conducted, but this is nonetheless a limitation that constitutes a disadvantage of this study, and in the future it would be advisable to use more suitable questionnaires for conducting comparisons and checking inter-group differences.

Second, cooperation with the respondents was also a limitation. The population of teachers and parents was not sufficiently accessible, and when cooperation was formed there was a feeling that insufficient efforts were put into answering the questions. This fact might detract from the quality of the study and responses to the questionnaires.

Another limitation was encountered is the wording of the research hypothesis. This is because the research literature is very sparse with regard to studies on homework that compare different sectors (religious-secular) and different residential areas (kibbutz – urban town). The fact that the teacher and parent population was not equally divided gender-wise in responses to the questionnaires, and that it was very hard to locate male teachers, might also be detrimental to the research results. In further studies it would be advisable to try and form a balance between the sexes in order to avoid gender bias and to cancel this factor as an intervening factor.

The researchers recommend that a further study be conducted on this topic, taking into account the research limitations, as it is a fundamental central topic in the educational process of the children and in the development of the future generation. It would be interesting to examine homework from a perspective of "then and now" and to understand how the educational process can be improved and made more efficient, as well as whether the homework method is still constructive and efficient or should new methods be devised. Another suggestion is to conduct a comparative study between the familiar homework method and more innovative methods developed. In addition, the differences between the efficacy of homework in elementary school, junior high school, and high school can be examined – to understand whether there are ages in which it is more or less effective. Furthermore, there are dozens of suggestions for this type of research and it is important to continue studying such a central topic in our life.

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