

## Effects of Interactive Homework Assignments on Parental Involvement in Homework and Public Primary Schools' English Learning in Tanzania

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### ABSTRACT

*The factors associated with students' success in learning may have been addressed but the impact of parental involvement continues to be a significant issue. Some schools in Tanzania post poor learning achievement amid claims that the traditional homework used in Public Primary Schools limit parental involvement and thus parents become not supportive to their children's' learning. This paper aimed at evaluating the effects of weekly Interactive English homework on parental involvement in homework and pupils' English learning. Standard five pupils (N = 100) with their parents and 02 teachers participated in the 08-week study. 02 classes completed IHA (Interactive Homework Assignments) with directions for family and parent involvement. Two classes completed Non-Interactive Homework (no family involvement directions). Parents in Interactive homework group reported significantly higher levels of involvement than did Non-Interactive Parents. Pupils in IHA who more regularly involved parents significantly improved their behavior and skills needed for successful learning than Non-IHA pupils. The findings of this study support the hypothesis that IHA enhances parental involvement in homework and pupils learning in English than did the Non-IHA.*

**Key Words:** *Parental involvement, Interactive Homework, Learning, Traditional Homework*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Homework has, for years been a common educational strategy used to enhance learners' progress and success in various education systems and subjects (Xu, 2013). Homework entails out-of-class tasks assigned to learners as an extension or means to elaboration of classroom lessons and work (Cooper, 2001). Literature on assessment of learning indicates a number of roles that homework plays including promoting mastery of specific subject skills and enhancement of learner achievement (Van Voorhis, 2010). Also, homework is believed to improve learner's self-regulatory attributes and acumen such as time management skills, improved self-discipline and good study habits all of which are necessary enhancers of learning in relation to academic progress and achievement (Corno, 2000; Katz, Kaplan, & Gueta, 2010; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2005). As much as Homework is an important learning tool, it also promotes family -student interaction and understanding which creates and enables an environment where learners are helped in their homework completion, actualized social functioning and social cohesion in the overall learning process (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007).

Despite its usefulness, homework can only be of educational value if it is of high quality with regard to its befitting management (Carr, 2013; Dettmers, Trautwein, Lüdtke, Kunter, & Baumert, 2010). Since homework entails task assigned at school to be done out of school hours and especially at home, Nyoni (2012) recommends proper management of it both at school and at home. In so doing therefore, teachers, parents and the learners need to work together and actively involved in actualizing homework as an effective learning task (Markow, Kim, & Liebman, 2007). It is recognized in one hand that parental involvement in homework is critical for learners' success in response to homework engagement, completion and academic achievement (Trautwein, Lüdtke, Schnyder, & Niggli, 2009). In the other hand, parental poor involvement and inability to effectively help with homework increases the hurdles and challenges of learning in several ways (Ogoye-Ndegwa, Saisi Mengich & Abidha, 2007). It is unfortunately as of today that most parents do not know exactly what they are supposed to do in helping with homework. Studies document on how parental incompetence and negative attitudes affect their involvement in homework (Bandura, 1997; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Friedel, Hruda, & Midgley, 2001). The low knowledge and skills bases of many parents and their possible negative standpoints about education and child care in

general altogether hinder them from effectively helping and guiding pupils with their homework and learning in general (Murray, Woolgar, Martins, Christaki, Hipwell, & Cooper, 2006). The negative and lax attitudes of parents greatly contribute to their low and or ineffective involvement to pupils in the latter's homework. Such poor attitudes of parents to pupil's homework result in pupils having low regard to the school assignments and discourage pupils from engaging and valuing homework (Assor, Kaplan, & Roth; 2002). These observations indicate that parental involvement in enhancing pupil's homework is questionable and remains a challenge. Instead of parents providing support in quantitative terms, many of them are prone to providing qualitative support. Educationally, this is not helpful in enhancing and sustaining learners' progress and achievement in the learning.

It is noteworthy that the importance of involving the community and specifically the parents in education is recognized worldwide. Several educational conferences and policies that have been organized recognize the role of parental involvement. For example, the Jomtien conference on Education for All (EFA, 1990) the Salamanca Conference on Special Education held in Spain 1994, the World Education Forum Conference of 2000 held in Dakar-Senegal all discussed the role of the government in enhancing partnership with all education stakeholders including parents (UNESCO, 2000). Individual countries in the world have also witnessed the need for parental involvement in education and have set various policies to guide this. For instance, South Africa the Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) directs all schools to elect the governing Board which will include parents to be among other members of the board (Dubbeldan, 2000). Also in Kenya, the Basic Education Act of 2013 have recognized the need for parental involvement in among other things the improvement of the learning environment which is crucial for students' success (Echaunu, Ndiku & Sang, 2015). In Tanzania, Education and Training Policy (ETP) (1995 & 2014) both recognize the importance of involving parents in education through policy like Decentralization Policy in which parents are involved in education process by financing education through cost sharing and put emphases on providing education through partnership with community (URT 1995). Furthermore, the ETP (2014) have insisted on the need to expand the scope and strengthen successful participation of different educational stakeholders including parents. In recognizing the need for parental involvement in education, studies from a global perspective have recognized

homework to be a significant activity that predicts parental involvement in students' learning achievement (Epstein, 2016; Van Voorhis, Maier, Epstein, & Lloyd, 2013). In developed countries, Van Voorhis (2000) conducted a study to measure the correlation between homework and students' achievement using homework that are done with the help and support from parents (Interactive Homework Assignments) (IHA). The study involved 253 students from ten classes of sixth and eighth grade and lasted 18 weeks during the 1999-2000 school years. Results indicated a high achievement in science grades to learners who were assigned IHA than learners who were assigned to Non-IHA. The study found also that there was an increase in family involvement in the IHA than in non-IHA by 8<sup>th</sup> rise up (Van Voorhis, 2000). Cooper and Jackson (2001) conducted a study to determine how IHA influence students' engagement in the homework performance in Tennessee. A sample of 429 students from rural, urban and suburban schools in grade two and four were used. The study found that positive parental attitudes had greater influence on their facilitation which in turn raised the children's attitudes towards homework and in so doing the performance becomes good as well.

Another study by Dettmers et al., (2010) done in the United States of America explored the relationship between two homework qualities (Homework selection and homework challenge) on homework completion and achievement. To them, homework selection entails the selection of appropriate questions in relation to the students' level of understanding, curriculum, and the environment. They also add that Interactive Assignments allow teachers to be in a position of assigning tasks which has an appropriate level of difficulty (not too easy or too difficult or too ambiguous) so that it does not create boredom to the learners. Through the survey of 3483 ninth and tenth-grade students, the study revealed that when there is appropriate homework selection, the completion and achievement rate becomes higher than when there is inappropriate selection of questions (Dettmers et al., 2010). Again, a 2-year longitudinal study of mathematics achievement done in the United States of America by Van Voorhis (2011) to explore the effects of Interactive Mathematics programme on family involvement, emotion and attitudes to Mathematics homework concluded that including parents in the homework completion is beneficial and useful for students' success in learning. The study revealed that through Interactive Mathematics homework, a favourable home learning environment is created and by so doing the learners' positive emotion and

attitudes to the homework is increased. In some developing countries various researches have failed to establish the relationship between parental involvement and students' academic performance since there is evidence of low or lack of parental involvement especially in homework. For instance, in Ghana, Osei-Akoto., Chowa, and Ansong (2012) did a study to investigate the role of parental involvement in academic performance. Through a randomized cluster sampling of 100 schools, results indicated that about 83% of parents hardly insisted their children with homework, leaving their children alone, struggling for homework completion. A quantitative study in Namibia by Guolang (2010) measured the extent of parental involvement on students' academic performance to high achieving students failed to establish the relationship of the two variables due to small sample size used. In Kenya a study by Ndegwa, *et al.*, (2007) to determine parental participation in pupils' homework revealed that low parental help had negative impacts to learners' homework performance since majority of students could not complete the assigned homework due to lack of support from their parents. In Tanzania, level of parental involvement in homework is low. Over 70% of pupils in PPS receive little or no help at all from their parents (Hungu, 2011). This makes them struggle in completing the homework alone and in so doing they neither complete the homework nor doing them accurately.

In considering the value of homework in learners' academic achievement, Epstein, Salinas, and Van Voorhis (2001) and Hunnel, (2017) recommend the use of Interactive Homework Assignments (IHA) that encourage teachers and parents working together in helping individual learners in completing assigned homework and making homework more effective in promoting learning and improved achievement with little or no hurdles as is the case under the traditional homework management (Bailey, 2006; Van Voorhis, 2016). It is believed that with IHA, awareness on the roles of every educational stakeholder involved is created and a social, psychological and physical environment for doing homework is enhanced (Cooper, Robinson & Patall, 2006). Likewise, Carr (2013) suggests a need to establish clear school-home communication systems to promote effective management of homework and make such homework a more valuable learning tool appreciated by learners and their parents, guardians and teachers. There is little evidence based on studies done to establish how best to improve parental involvement in homework especially in PPS in Tanzania. This calls for the need to revamp the continued use of traditional homework and

replace it with Interactive Homework Assignments (IHA) which stands and has the prospects of encouraging more involvement of parents as important actors in pupil's learning. Studies have shown that for a homework to yield the expected impact on learners, the latter must be trained, guided and monitored by their parents to use effective Homework Management Strategies (HMS) such as time management and environmental management skills to ensure that such homework is always completed in time in a quiet, well-lit and conducive learning environment which has no or minimal distractions (Bempechat, 2004; Cooper, 2007). This paper aimed at evaluating the impact of Interactive Homework Assignments (IHA) as an alternative intervention mechanism to improve parental involvement and pupils' learning in English. The paper was guided by two specific objectives and hypotheses:

- i. To examine the differential impact between IHA against Noh-IHA on parental involvement in Homework
- ii. To measure the differences in English learning achievement between pupils who participated in IHA and pupils who participated in Non-IHA for a period of 8 weeks

### **Research Hypotheses**

- i. There is no statistically significant differential impact between IHA against Noh-IHA on parental involvement in Homework
- ii. There is no statistically significant difference in English learning achievement for pupils who participated in IHA as compared to pupils who participated in Non- IHA for a period of 8 weeks.

### **Methodology**

The study was conducted in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The population comprised of 100 standard five pupils selected from 2 schools in Ubungo Municipal, 100 parents and 2 English teachers. The study employed a quantitative approach with Quasi-experimental design. The design was selected because it allowed for manipulation of Independent Variable (IV) Homework conditions, before measuring its impact to Dependent Variables (DV), The parental involvement and pupils' learning. Likewise, the design provided opportunity for studying the relationship between the IV and DV and whether there has been any impact on the DV after an intervention (Babbie, 2010).

### **Instrumentation**

Pre-Post questionnaires for Parental Homework Involvement Strategies (PHIS), Homework assignments assigned for 8 weeks consecutively and standardized English test provided before and after intervention were used as data collection tools. Parents were given a pre-post PHIS questionnaire to measure their involvement strategies in their children's homework. Standardized tests were given before and after the intervention to measure the pupils' performance rate in English. Also, numbers of completed homework tasks were counted to measure pupils' homework completion rate before and after an intervention.

### **Data Analysis**

SPSS Statistics software version 23.0 IBM (2015) was used to analyse the data. At first, inter-correlation between study variables was computed in order to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the study variables. Furthermore, independent t-test was used to measure the differences in level of the parental involvement between the groups assigned to IHA and groups assigned to Non- IHA before and after the intervention. Also, the same test was used to measure the performance and completion rate of pupils to determine the differences in performance and completion rate between pupils assigned to IHA and those assigned to Non-IHA while controlling for the intervening variables (pupils' Age, gender and Parents' Social-economic status).

### **Results and Discussions**

#### ***Parental involvement in homework between IHA and Non-IHA groups***

The first objective under this study examined the differential impact of IHA against Non-IHA on parental involvement in their children's homework. It was assumed that parents in IHA would effectively improve their involvement strategies in homework than the Non-IHA parents. The assumption was that through the training provided to parents in IHA and now and then follow-ups to remind them on their roles and involvement made parents in IHA to be aware of the strategies they have to develop in order to help their children with homework unlike parents in Non-IHA who never got any training or reminded about their roles in homework. The respondents were asked to rate their involvement strategies through the five PHIS they use. As predicted earlier, parents in IHA improved their involvement in homework than parents in Non-IHA. An independent t-test was used to analyse the changes over time on parental involvement activities between the groups (IHA and Non-IHA) using the Homework Involvement Strategies Scale for parents (PHIS). The average

number of parents’ strategies in homework was the DV and the homework conditions i.e. IHA or Non-IHA were the Independent Variables. A *t*- test that does not assume equal variances was used. The results indicated a significant difference in parental involvement with homework between the groups (IHA and Non-IHA). IHA reported to be significant effective in improving parental involvement in homework than Non-IHA with the following results. (Env: *t* = 5.66, *p*= .000; T.Mgt: *t* =6.04, *p* =.000; Motivate: *t* = 7.51, *p* = .000; Dist: *t* = 9.04, *p* = .000 and Emt *t* = 9.04, *p* =.000. See table 1.

**Table 1: Differences in Parental Involvement in Homework between IHA and Non-IHA**

Parental Strategies	Treatment	t	df	p-value	M	SD	95%(Lower	Upper)
P_Env	IHA			.000	99	1.222	0.458	1.045
	Non-IHA	5.66	189.2	.000	2.24	0.643	0.49	1.013
P_T.Mgt	IHA				3.11	1.298	0.535	1.156
	Non-IHA	6.04	187.44	.000	2.26	0.665	0.569	1.121
P_Motivate	IHA				2.58	1.19	0.662	1.226
	Non-IHA	7.51	182.04	.000	1.64	0.567	0.696	1.192
P_Dist	IHA				2.7	1.341	0.885	1.498
	Non-IHA	9.04	154.07	.000	1.5	0.437	0.931	1.452
P_Emt	IHA				2.7	1.341	0.885	1.498
	Non-IHA	9.04	154.07	.000	1.5	0.437	0.931	1.452

**N=100; P=Parents; T. Mgt=Time management; Dist= Avoid Distractions; Emt=Control Emotions**

The results indicate that the parent’s ability to involve in their children’s’ homework have significantly increased. This can be attributed to the provided to parents before the intervention. Through the training parents were made aware of the DOS and DONTs of the homework. Again, the training helps the parents to be aware on the what, how and when of the homework. Kigobe, (2019) comments that majority of parents lack instructional expertise to effectively help their pupil with homework; she recommends a need for parents’ training as a way to enhance their knowledge and expertise required for effectively involvement. It is in this regard that training parents becomes an important way of teaching parents techniques and strategies to help their pupil with homework (Cooper & Nye, 1994). Also, trainings direct parents on how to create a homework reward system, how to go through a daily homework schedule and check for homework completion (Miller & Kelley, 1994). Likewise,

parents in IHA played significant roles in assisting learners to create conducive learning environment free from distractions. So instead of being stressful a child becomes comfortable and overcome the stresses confidently through the parent's help and support. This is in line with Dawson (2008) who found that IHA creates a distraction-free area for homework.

### **Differences in English Learning Achievement between Pupils who Participated in IHA and Pupils who Participated in Non- IHA**

An independent t-test was used to investigate the changes seen in pupils' behaviours in the learning process while participating in the homework as measured by the five subscales of Homework Management Strategies (HMS) over time (Pre and Post intervention). At first, when the average number of pupil's homework management were the Dependent Variables and the pupils attending either IHA or Non-IHA were Independent grouping variables; pre-test results on the mean differences between pupils in IHA and pupils in Non-IHA with a *t*- test indicated no significant differences between them in their ability to use the five HMS. After analysis of the pre intervention data that reported the level of pupils' ability to use HMS in both groups to be almost the same, it appeared necessary to measure whether the intervention had resulted in any significant change in pupils' ability to use HMS, a *t*-test to measure post intervention mean differences between groups was computed. The results indicated significant differences on pupils' abilities to use all the five HMS between groups (IHA and Non-IHA) See Table 2.0.

**Table 2: Post Intervention Mean differences on Pupils’ use of HMS between groups**

Variables	HWC	t	df	M	SD	SE	p-value	95% Confidence	
								Lower	Upper
PpEnv	Non-IHA	-13.477	98	2.6	.62	.113	.000	-1.751	-1.302
	IHA			4.1	.58				
Pp_T.Mgt	Non-IHA	-9.686	98	2.4	.66	.146	.000	-1.707	-1.126
	IHA			3.9	.75				
Pp_Motivate	Non-IHA	-17.340	98	2.3	.45	.100	.000	-1.929	-1.533
	IHA			4.1	.51				
Pp_Dist	Non-IHA	17.323	98	4.1	.39	.112	.000	1.874	2.359
	IHA			1.9	.70				
Pp_Emt	Non-IHA	-38.119	98	1.7	.35	.073	.000	-2.915	-2.627
	IHA			4.4	.36				

**Note: Pp= Pupils; M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation; N=100 (Non-IHA-80, IHA-120), p< .001, HWC=Homework Conditions**

In view of the study findings, it is noticed that when pupils do the homework with help from their parents and the teachers, they develop various positive behaviours like positive attitudes, motivation and interest to the task assigned. Likewise, through Interactive Homework Activities, learners become active players in the process by making sure that they take the homework home and inform parents about the task assigned. It is noticed that sometimes due to their age, young learners lack skills and knowledge to handle various disruptive behaviors and in this scenario parents become helpful to them by being supportive during homework time and help their pupil develop positive attitudes to the homework and to the subject in general. Kenney-Benson and Pomerantz (2005) opines that parental encouragement helps learners to develop their motivational aspects, improve morale and attitudes towards learning and effective engagement in the learning process and successful achieve better results. Likewise, it is believed that when parents are made proactive with their children’s school work, the behavior and social adjustment of their children tend to improve significantly (Cordry & Wilson, 2004).

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of this study provide evidence of the significant role of parents in assisting learners in the learning process. It is evidenced also that through active involvement of the parents, learners are helped physically, morally and psychologically to manage homework effectively and make homework enjoyable, motivating and interesting tool for successful learning. Furthermore, this study notes gains in pupils' behaviors and skills necessary for the learning of English especially the increase use of the five traits measured by the five HMS with respect to parental involvement, therefore confirms the significance of involving parents in educational processes. Based on the findings and conclusions thereof, it is recommended that; parents who are not involved in homework of their children should be sensitized to do so while those who are involved should be encouraged to continue doing so since their involvement facilitate the learning process in general; this can be effectively done through the use of IHA.

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